

Guildhall Address, June 12, 1945
Dwight D. Eisenhower

The high sense of distinction I feel in receiving this great honor from the city of London is inescapably mingled with feelings of profound sadness. All of us must always regret that your country and mine were ever faced with the tragic situation that compelled the appointment of an Allied Commander-in-Chief, the capacity in which I have just been so extravagantly commended.

Humility must always be the portion of any man who receives acclaim earned in the blood of his followers and the sacrifices of his friends. Conceivably a commander may have been professionally superior. He may have given everything of his heart and mind to meet the spiritual and physical needs of his comrades. He may have written a chapter that will glow forever in the pages of military history. Still, even such a man, if he existed, would sadly face the fact that his honors cannot hide in his memories the crosses marking the resting places of the dead. They cannot soothe the anguish of the widow or the orphan whose husband or whose father will not return.

The only attitude in which a commander may with satisfaction receive the tributes of his friends is a humble acknowledgement that, no matter how unworthy he may be, his position is a symbol of great human forces that have labored arduously and successfully for a righteous cause. Unless he feels this symbolism and this rightness in what he has tried to do, then he is disregardful of the courage, the fortitude and the devotion of the vast multitudes he has been honored to command. If all the allied men and women that have served with me in this war can only know that it is they this august body is really honoring today, then, indeed, will I be content.

This feeling of humility cannot erase, of course, my great pride in being tendered the freedom of London. I am not a native of this land. I come from the very heart of America. In the superficial aspects by which we ordinarily recognize family relationships the town where I was born and the one where I was reared are far separated from this great city. Abilene, Kansas, and Denison, Texas, would together add in size to possibly one five-hundredth part of greater London. By your standards those towns are young, without your aged traditions that carry the roots of London back into the uncertainties of unrecorded history. To those people I am proud to belong, but I find myself today five thousand miles from that countryside, the honored guest of a city whose name stands for grandeur and size throughout the world. Hardly would it seem possible for the city of London to have gone farther afield to find a man to honor with its priceless gift of token citizenship.

Yet kinship among nations is not determined in such measurements as proximity, size and age. Rather we should turn to those inner things, call them what you will - I mean those intangibles that are the real treasures free men possess. To preserve his freedom of worship, his equality before the law, his liberty to speak and act as he sees fit, subject only to the provision that we trespass not upon similar rights of others - the Londoner will fight! So will the citizen of Abilene! When we consider these things then the valley of the Thames draws closer

to the farms of Kansas and the plains of Texas. To my mind it is clear that when two peoples will face the tragedies of war to defend the same spiritual values, the same treasured rights, then, in deepest sense those two are truly related. So, even as I proclaim my undying Americanism, I am bold enough and exceedingly proud to claim basic kinship to you of London.

And what man who has followed the history of this war could fail to experience inspiration from the example of this city? When the British Empire stood - alone but unconquered, almost naked but unafraid - to defy the Hitler hordes, it was on this devoted city that the first terroristic blows were launched. Five years and eight months of war, much of it on the actual battle line! Blitzes big and little, fly-bombs, V-Bombs; all of them you took in stride. You worked - from your needed efforts you would not be deterred. You carried on, and from your midst arose no cry for mercy, no wail of defeat. The battle of Britain will take its place as another of your deathless traditions. And your faith and endurance have finally been rewarded.

You had more than two years in war when Americans, in numbers, began swarming into your country. Most were mentally unprepared for the realities of war especially as waged by the Nazis. Others believed that tales of British sacrifice had been exaggerated. Still others failed to recognize the difficulties of the task ahead.

All such doubts, questions and complacencies could not endure a single casual tour through your scarred streets and avenues. With awe our men gazed upon empty spaces where once had stood buildings erected by the toil and sweat of peaceful folk. Our eyes rounded as we saw your women serving quietly and efficiently in almost every kind of war effort, even flak batteries. We became accustomed to the warning sirens, which seemed to compel, from the native Londoner, not a single hurried step. Gradually we grew closer together until we became true partners in the war.

In London, my associates and I planned two great expeditions, that to invade the Mediterranean and later that to cross the channel. London's hospitality to Americans, her good humored acceptance of the added inconveniences we brought. Her example of fortitude and quiet confidence in the final outcome - all these helped to make the supreme headquarters of two allied expeditions the smooth-working organizations they became! They were composed of chosen representatives of two proud and independent peoples. Each noted for its initiative and for its satisfaction with its own customs, manners and methods. Many feared that those representatives could never combine together in efficient fashion to solve the complex problems presented by modern war. I hope you believe we proved the doubters wrong! Moreover, I hold that we proved this point not only for war, we proved that it can always be done by our two peoples, provided only both show the same good will, the same forbearance, the same objective attitude that British and Americans so amply demonstrated in nearly three years of bitter campaigning.

No one could, alone, have brought about this result. Had I possessed the military skill of a Marlborough, the wisdom of Solomon, the understanding of Lincoln, I still would have been helpless without the loyalty, the vision, the generosity of thousands upon thousands of British and Americans. Some of them were my companions in the high command, many were enlisted men and junior officers carrying the fierce brunt of the battle, and many others were back in the U.S. and here in Great Britain, in London. Moreover, back of us were always our great national

war leaders and their civil and military staffs that supported and encouraged us through every trial, every test. The whole was one great team. I know that on this special occasion, the three million American men and women serving in the allied expeditionary force would want me to pay the tribute of admiration, respect and affection to their British comrades of this war.

My most cherished hope is that, after Japan joins the Nazi in utter defeat, neither my country nor yours need ever again summon its sons and daughters from their peaceful pursuits to face the tragedies of battle. But - a fact important for both of us to remember - neither London nor Abilene, sisters under the skin, will sell her birthright for physical safety, her liberty for mere existence.

No petty differences in the world of trade, traditions or national pride should ever blind us to identities in priceless values. If we keep our eyes on this guide post then no difficulties along our path of mutual cooperation can ever be insurmountable. Moreover, when this truth has permeated to the remotest hamlet and heart of all peoples, then indeed may we beat our swords into plowshares and all nations can enjoy the fruitfulness of the earth.

My Lord Mayor, I thank you once again for an honor to me and to the American forces that will remain one of the proudest in my memories.