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United Jewish Appeal Annual National Conference speech. 11
December 1965.

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UJA ANNUAL CONFERENCE - 11 DECEMBER 1965

At midnight on the 8th of May, twenty years ago, the war in Europe ceased. General Jodl signed the surrender papers; General Eisenhower said to him "you will, officially and personally, be held responsible if the terms of this surrender are violated," and then, in the words of his memoirs, he wrote, "we had no local victory celebrations of any kind, then or later. When Jodl signed we merely went to bed for some much-needed rest, to get up the next day and tackle the multitude of tasks that followed upon the cessation of hostilities."

Very early that same morning, in Washington, Harry Truman, who had been president only four weeks, and who had moved into the White House only one night before, rose to celebrate his birthday. His first act of the day was to write to his mother and sister.

8 May 1945
The White House

"Dear Mana and Mary:

I am sixty one this morning and I slept in the President's room in the White House last night. They have finished the painting and have some

of the furniture in place. I'm hoping it will all be ready for you by Friday.

This will be a historical day. At 9:00 O'clock this morning I must make a broadcast to the country: announcing the German surrender. The papers were signed yesterday morning and the hostilities will cease on all fronts at midnight tonight. Isn't that some birthday present?

Lots and lots of love to you both,

Harry "

When the final end came in Tokyo Bay a few months later, the shaken and weary world looked back over the past six years of fighting and counted 40 million dead, plus 17 million wounded, both civilians and military. It was the most shocking and ghastly explosion in all the five and a half thousands years of recorded human history. Not only quantitatively was this the largest and most destructive war ever fought, but it was absolutely different in quality as well. This war had been fought not only for the usual reasons of increasing the power or territory or wealth of one particular nation or group of nations over others. This had been a war whose fundamental purpose was to attack and destroy the civilized concepts of organized society as man had struggled to evolve through centuries of growth and groping.

Hitler announced his intentions, early and clearly. Basically and fundamentally he wished to annihilate moral codes, religion, liberalism, concern for the poor and weak, democracy -- all the forms and patterns of what we call civilization. He wanted to suppress the spirit of free enquiry, alter the value system of what was to be considered good and evil, remove from the individual all opportunity to think independently. He sought to control men's souls and minds not only their bodies. No one had ever attempted this before.

This voice was loud and clear. Quote one: "In the long run, National Socialism and religion will no longer be able to exist together."

Quote two: "The heaviest blow that ever struck humanity was the coming of Christianity. Bolshevism is Christianity's illegitimate child. Both are inventions of the Jew."

Quote three: "The Christian religion is nothing but a Jewish sect. We fight against Christian ideas. they constitute the real poison in our blood. After the destruction of Judaism, the extinction of Christian slave morals must follow logically. Honor thy father and mother? No! Every boy revolts and hates his father and must do so to start his own life.

It's an immortal law of nature. Thou shalt not steal? Wrong! All life is theft. Against the so-called ten commandments, against them we are fighting."

And so it was clear - the attack was to be first against the Jews because they had given birth to a civilizing religious idea, and then against the daughter faith. By terror and force the rule of the strong was to be substituted for the rule of ethics and law and love. To have been chosen again as the first and principal victim of this barbaric lust was the badge of honor we wore a quarter century ago, just as we have proudly worn it through all the centuries.

Hitler's plan was defeated, for civilized men everywhere finally came to understand the monstrous nature of his real purpose. He could have been stopped earlier - but wasn't. When at last the great resistance mounted and the free nations of this earth mobilized, a vast collection of armies moved across all the continents and restless fleets crossed all the seas and the new ships of the air crossed all the skies in search of targets. Fragile flesh was torn in an agony of blood and pain, vast treasures of guildings were exploded into mountains of rubble, and the earth itself was devastated as its raw materials were frantically consumed in the furnace of war.

When it was all over, we Jews found that although many peoples and nations had been grievously wounded, we were hurt perhaps most of all, because more than a third of our entire global number had been wiped out. Left alive, wondering and homeless, were those individuals and families, who searching in the rubble of the cities of Central and Eastern Europe for loved ones, and finding none, migrated westward toward the soil of Germany and Austria seeking help where the flags of the allies flew. Gradually they accumulated in camps and holding points, huddling for warmth and comfort. This population of displaced persons grew to be a quarter million, gathered into 64 camps. Ben Gurion visited them and said: "I bring you no certificates- only hope. Hold on and wait."

General Day, whom I had the honor of escorting to a Yiskor service in the camp in Berlin on the last day of Pesach 1946, maintained a warm friendly and compassionate attitude. He praised his advisers on Jewish Affairs, five of whom are here with us tonight. "All were able sincere men who saw the problems of both the displaced persons and the Army"

He was proud of the Army's role in the care and protection of these people, and in accepting small tokens of books and pictures from the DPs

he said modestly "I realize this was not a personal tribute to me, but a tribute to the American Army from a group of courageous unfortunates who saw ahead a new home and a new future." He believed that resettlement was their only solution and complimented the newly established government of Israel for providing a home in spite of difficult economic and military problems.

The three men who sit quietly here with us tonight, and the one who is absent in hospital the Chief of them all, are symbols of the millions who fought. These three are honored here tonight because of their courage, skill and genius in their posts of command. We are awed at the abilities they displayed and we say a humble prayer of thanks for the fact that they came forward to lead us. But they would be the first to say that the medals should be shared with every simple soldier of every country who took up arms in humanity's defense.

Why do we make this commemoration 20 years later? To look back at a time of glory and share old soldier's tales? To congratulate ourselves at having escaped the fate Hitler planned for us? - to indulge in self-adulation? No - none of these is the reason for this remembrance. Rather

is it to state the lessons we learned, to find the guide lines for future conduct, and to inspire ourselves for further struggle along the road of what must be man's continuous improvement.

We learned the appalling lesson that a modern and intelligent nation of many millions, as the Germans were, can be taken over by a small gang who plan carefully. Bureaucracy was used to stifle rebellion, crude power created raw fear so that protest was silenced, and good citizens turned their eyes away so as not to see a horror which they made believe didn't exist. Edmund Burke told us this same truth at the time of the American Revolution -- "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil he said is for good men to do nothing." Silence, acquiescence, inactivity, side-line-ism, will always result in a victory for evil. What you value, you must fight for. The rebirth of the Jewish people out of the fires of Auschwitz would not have occurred without this powerful urge. Israel was fought for, and was won ultimately not on the prayer house or the council chamber but on the battlefield. Blow after blow may rain on your head -- but only if you keep on fighting do you have a chance.

DeGualle said it in 1940 -- "France has lost a battle. But France has not lost the war." Churchill said it at the same time -- "We would rather see London laid in ruins and ashes than that it should be tamely and abjectly enslaved."

You must take your destiny into your own hands, pursue a goal with absolute single-mindedness and permit neither delay nor setback nor temporary defeat to deter your hope or your conviction. These generals performed just that way, as did the armies and nations they led.

We are here tonight as men and as Jews. As men we seek that world free from war, persecution, hunger and chaos, that world of law and peace and plenty which was envisioned in the sixth article of the Atlantic Charter as Roosevelt and Churchill wrote it: "After the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny, we hope to see established a peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries and which will afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want."

As Jews we seek the safety and security of the household of Israel -- primarily in the land of Israel but also throughout the planet. Our labor and effort, our fervor and funds are directed to the saving of

Jewish life, the education of Jewish children, the building of the Jewish state. From these goals we will not be diverted -- not by fatigue nor impatience nor any premature sense of success. Much work still lies ahead before we will finally be able to say that every Jew in the world is living safely and that the land of Israel is secure from every economic, political or military danger.

With all our hearts and souls we give thanks for the victory of 20 years ago which so many fought so hard to win and we pledge unceasing allegiance to the ideals of freedom, no matter what strenuous exertions will be required in years ahead to bring these ideals ever more fruitfully into reality.