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[Home](#) > [About ODPM](#) > [The ministerial team](#) > [The Rt Hon John Prescott MP](#) > [Speeches](#)

 [Advanced Search](#)

60th Anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising, at Warsaw

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- [Building Regulations](#)
- [Devolution](#)
- [Fire](#)
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- [Homelessness](#)
- [Housing](#)
- [Local Government](#)
- [Neighbourhood Renewal Unit](#)
- [Planning](#)
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- [Regional Co-ordination Unit](#)
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- [News releases](#)
- [Speeches](#)
- [What's new](#)

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- [Help](#)
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- [Cymraeg](#)

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Speech by the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott on 1 August 2004.

Mr President, Prime Minister, Mayor, Veterans of the Warsaw Uprising, Chancellor Schroeder, Secretary Powell, distinguished guests:

I am honoured to attend this commemoration of the Warsaw Uprising on behalf of the British people.

Mr President - May I first say, that the British people were delighted with your State Visit to the UK in May, which strengthened the bonds of friendship between our people.

That this commemoration should take place in this very Square, is a due and proper recognition of the heroic struggle of the Warsaw citizens in the greatest act of resistance of any occupied country.

Today we are here to pay tribute to the city of Warsaw and the courage of her defenders who chose to die, as free people, in the streets, the cellars, and the sewers, rather than live under an evil regime.

Yesterday I was proud to meet people who were involved in the Uprising and who are here today with their families. Including British aviator veterans who flew desperate missions to Warsaw alongside Polish, Commonwealth and American airmen. They brought food and ammunition to help continue the heroic struggle.

Even before the Uprising, Warsaw had endured human suffering on a scale few other cities have experienced.

In 1939, Warsaw held out - alone - through 3 weeks of shelling and bombing before the city finally surrendered, out of food, out of bullets and out of medicine - but never out of a supply of courage, or the desire to be free, that sustained the people for 5 long years of occupation.

Even after the horrors of the Jewish Ghetto, the people of Warsaw were still able to gather the strength to rise up once again - and hold out, alone, against tyranny.

The 63 days of the Warsaw Uprising caused unspeakable suffering. A quarter of a million people killed - men, women and children. Hundreds of thousands more were expelled, many of them to die in the camps and the convoys.

We recall those appalling events and the horrors inflicted on the people of Warsaw.

Today, along with everyone else, the United Kingdom honours the courage and sacrifice of the people of Warsaw. My country also honours a profound debt of gratitude to the people of Poland.

Polish scientists saved thousands of British lives by helping to crack the Enigma code - and Polish intelligence remained vitally important to Britain throughout the War.

And when, in 1940, my country faced its gravest peril, thousands of Polish people were forced to flee their country. Many finding their way across Europe to Britain, to continue the fight for freedom and the liberation of Poland.

I have a personal reflection of that horrific war, in which my father, at the very beginning, lost his leg at Dunkirk. How, as a family, we made our home available to one of those thousands of Polish refugees, his name was Paul.

I was only 5 years old but I remember him well. Not only as a friendly personality, but as a man who was so sad and angry that he had been driven out of his own country.

I remember him particularly in the winter of 1943 when he astonished us all by rolling around in the snow, and rubbing his hands and face in it. He said this was the best way to keep warm in the winter at home, where there were heavier and more frequent falls of snow.

My family was grateful for his friendship and his solidarity in those difficult years and Poland remains a fond childhood memory to me. As I remember Paul today.

Today we recall that one in eight fighter pilots in the Battle of Britain was Polish. The Polish pilots were outstanding in the air and they were popular on the ground. In the Battle of Britain, one London suburb raised enough money for a Spitfire and insisted it was flown by a Polish pilot!

Few English people could pronounce their names, but everyone spoke of their bravery.

By the end of the war, over 200,000 Poles were fighting with the Allies. As their motto said - for God, honour and country. They were fighting for **our** freedom, as much as theirs.

Today there are rows of silent graves in 139 cemeteries in the United Kingdom alone, and many more stretching from the crags of Monte Cassino to the deserts of Libya, and the fields of Arnhem. These graves are a constant reminder of the absolute sacrifice made by the Polish people.

Here in Warsaw, the people and their city were crushed, but their spirit remained defiant. The words of the Underground Resistance - in their last bulletin before the Uprising was defeated are so powerful, that I would like to quote them, in the memory of their courage and their patriotism: *"From the blood that has been shed, from the common toil and misery, from the pains of our bodies and souls, a new Poland will arise - free, strong and great."*

And yet when it was all over, the people of Poland still had to wait 45 long years to 1989 to begin to become free, strong and great.

Poland has now regained her rightful place at the heart of a democratic Europe. Poland is a key member of NATO and our American alliance - as well as a European Union of 25 nations, built on mutual respect.

These are the fruits of a united and free Europe - one which those who died in Warsaw, and elsewhere, fought so hard to achieve. So their deaths were **not** in vain - and we remember them.

Today, we live in a Europe in which we settle our differences through dialogue, a Europe in which peace and reconciliation has meant prosperity and renewal, a Europe in which we are so much stronger working together than we are apart.

If anyone doubts why a strong and united Europe matters, let them come to Warsaw. Let them hear what we say today!

This anniversary of a dark and brutal past reminds us of the Europe we have left behind - and the Europe we are building for the future.

In 1949, as the people of Warsaw were rebuilding their shattered city, Winston Churchill said: *"In all the qualities of the Polish nation, there's none which stands out more strongly than this unconquerable quality of always renewing and refreshing the life strength of the nation from generation to generation."*

Today, we honour the remarkable bravery of the citizens of Warsaw and its Polish patriots. Today - in a unified and peaceful Europe - we renew our pledge to freedom and friendship for all the years to come.

For our freedom and yours. We will remember them...

Za nasz• wolno•• i wasz•!

Ends