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“Warsaw’s lonely fight for liberty echoes today”

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WARSAW

Most Americans know the story of the “[boys of Pointe du Hoc](#),” the brave Army Rangers who scaled the cliffs of Normandy and liberated France from Nazi occupation. But 70 years ago, the city of Warsaw was liberated by *actual* boys and girls — many of them teenagers and children armed with makeshift guns and molotov cocktails — who helped take back the Polish capital from its Nazi occupiers on Aug. 1, 1944, and held it for 63 bloody, courageous days.

My mother was one of those young insurgents. At an age when most kids are going to school and playing dodge ball, she was dodging German sniper fire, running orders across the city as a courier for the Polish Home Army. Today, seven decades on, she and her fellow veterans move more slowly, but at celebrations across this city last week they have been lovingly embraced by the people of a free Poland.

On Aug. 1 at 5 p.m., sirens wailed across Warsaw, and every streetcar, bus and automobile in the city came to a halt, as [people poured into the streets](#) waving flags and lighting off flares to mark the “W” hour — the exact moment when the Warsaw Uprising began. Hundreds of thousands have come to concerts, memorials and open-air Masses to honor those who fought and died for freedom here. Their story is being told in a new feature film, “[Warsaw 44](#),” and lines stretch around the block to enter the [incredible museum](#) documenting their heroic struggle.

The uprising was supposed to last just three days, until the Red Army arrived from the east. But instead of helping the insurgents, the Soviets stopped and waited for the Germans to crush the uprising and destroy the leadership of a free Poland for them.

The Warsaw Poles were abandoned by the West as well. Winston Churchill tried to enlist President Franklin D. Roosevelt in pressing Joseph Stalin to allow Allied planes carrying arms for the insurgents to refuel on Soviet air bases. After Stalin rejected their first appeal, Churchill told Roosevelt that they should try again and send the planes anyway if Stalin refused and “see what happens.” But Roosevelt replied, “I do not consider it advantageous to the long-range general war prospect for me to join you in the proposed message to Uncle Joe.”

Churchill decided to send planes anyway, and an estimated 360 British, Polish and South African airmen died in the skies over Warsaw. Eventually the United States sent one air mission, but it was too little too late.

When the Poles finally surrendered, Hitler ordered Warsaw razed to the ground. As my mother was marched out of Warsaw to be deported to a POW camp in Germany, she looked back and saw the orange glow of her beloved city on fire. By the time it was over, 85 percent of the city was destroyed. Some 200,000 civilians and 16,000 members of the Home Army had been killed by the Germans.

That is almost the equivalent of the death toll of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks . . . every day . . . for 63 days.

A week after the Polish surrender, Churchill traveled to Moscow and brought with him the prime minister of the Polish government-in-exile, who thought he was there to negotiate Poland's postwar boundaries. Instead, he was informed by Soviet Foreign Minister [Vyacheslav Molotov](#) that Churchill and Roosevelt had ceded Poland to Soviet control a year earlier in Tehran. The Western betrayal of Poland was complete.

After the war, the heroic sacrifice of the Polish Home Army was largely forgotten. In Poland, leaders of the uprising were arrested and sent to Moscow for show trials. In the West, few cared to remember the Allies' shameful abandonment of Poland. The Warsaw Poles were not even allowed to march in victory parades after the war, because the Allies had recognized the communist government installed by Stalin.

But the spirit of the uprising lived on in the conspiratorial hearts of the Poles. The underground movement that briefly liberated Poland from Nazi occupation in 1944 paved the way for the Solidarity underground that freed Poland from Soviet domination in 1989.

If the story ended there, it might have been an uplifting conclusion to a terrible saga. But today, 70 years later, the tragedy of Warsaw is repeating itself in other parts of the world. In Syria, when the insurgents of the Free Syrian Army rose up against the brutal Assad regime and asked the United States for help, America did nothing and allowed [some 200,000 people to be massacred](#) — about the same number as were killed in the Warsaw Uprising. In Iraq, when the government pleaded for a year for U.S. drone strikes to prevent the advance of the terrorist army of the Islamic State, those [requests were repeatedly turned down](#); when airstrikes finally came this week amid a full-scale humanitarian and strategic disaster, they were too limited and way too late. In Ukraine, when Kiev appealed to Washington for weapons to fight neo-Soviet aggression, all that the [United States agreed to send were MREs](#) (meals ready to eat).

The lesson of Warsaw is that the fight for liberty is a lonely endeavor. Freedom's enemies are brutal and determined, and freedom's friends are often unreliable. But in the end, it is impossible to extinguish the desire for liberty from the human heart.

Just ask the boys and girls of Warsaw.

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