

**Background:** Though the Nazis glorified war, they claimed to favor peace. This July 1934 speech by Rudolf Hess claims that because the Nazi leadership had experienced the horrors of trench warfare during World War I, they now favored peace. The speech was delivered to the *Gau* Party Rally in East Prussia, but was intended for an international audience as well.

**The source:** “An die Frontkämpfer der Welt,” in Rudolf Hess, *Reden* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1938), pp. 39-48.

---

## To the Front Fighters of the World

by Rudolf Hess

---

In a few weeks, it will be the twentieth anniversary of the beginning of the great heroic struggle of the German soldiers. It was here in East Prussia that the great soldier Hindenburg rescued your land — the same soldier who today as Reich president is the guarantee of peace.

East Prussia suffered more than any other German province during the war. East Prussia experienced the brutal reality of war. For a long time, some areas bore the impact of the Russian attack. Many of you, my East Prussian party comrades, can still remember the misery of the refugees streaming from the homeland they left behind to escape the Cossacks.

Because you have known war on your own soil, I chose here in East Prussia to speak words I had long wanted to speak to Germany and above to all the world.

Our nation has the good fortune today to be led largely by front soldiers, by front soldiers who carried the virtues of the front to the leadership of the state.

The rebuilding of the Reich was guided by the spirit of the front. It was the spirit of the front that created National Socialism.

In the face of looming death at the front, ideas of social standing and class collapsed. At the front, the sharing of common joys and common sorrows led to a previously unknown camaraderie between citizens. At the front, everyone could see that the common fate towered above the individual fate.

One more thing grew in front fighters, despite the bitter relentlessness of the battle: The sense of a certain inner connection with front fighters across no man's land, who bore the same burdens, stood in the same mud, were threatened by the same death.

This feeling of connectedness remains to this day.

When front fighters meet, though they were once enemies, they now share the same memories and opinions. They talk of the World War, but behind their words they hope for peace. The front fighters are, therefore, called to be a bridge of understanding, helping one nation to understand another when politicians are unable to find the way.

It is no accident that the states which are entirely led by front fighters — Germany and Italy — are working hardest for world peace. And it is no accident that when the front fighters Hitler and Mussolini met, they quickly developed a warm personal relationship.

We have signed a treaty that serves peace with our Polish neighbor, where a soldier — Marshall

Pilsudski — is in charge.

And the strongest support for Hitler's efforts to bring about an understanding with our western neighbor comes from France's front soldiers.

We front soldiers do not want incompetent diplomacy to lead us once again into catastrophe, whose chief victims would once again be front soldiers. We soldiers on all sides feel free of the responsibility for the last war. We want to fight together to prevent a new catastrophe. We want to join in building together what we together destroyed during the war.

It is high time for a true understanding between the nations. It must be an understanding that rests on mutual respect, since only that can last — the kind of respect that characterizes the relations between former front soldiers.

Let there be no doubt: Most large states have piled up more war material than ever before. It is war material that threatens to become obsolete, but still threatens distrustful nations with a terrible powder keg. The slightest cause, like that cursed shot fired in Sarajevo — perhaps from the pistol of a fool — might suffice to bring forth armies of millions, against the will of the affected peoples. Whole regions might be plowed up by tens of thousands of shells of every size and weight, cities and villages might be transformed into seas of flame, all life might perish in clouds of gas.

He who fought in the World War has an inkling of what a modern war with its perfected weapons might mean.

And so I turn to my comrades from the front of the World War, both here and abroad.

Be honest! Once we stood out there, proud to be true men — soldiers, fighters, far from the routine of our former lives. We sometimes may have enjoyed a life that stood in stark contrast to the decadence that modern culture and its excesses bring. We felt superior to those far behind the lines who had nothing to do with life at the front. We felt that we were defending the life of our nation, that we were the bearers of its future.

Sometimes we had glad and cheerful hours. We attempted to live each minute of the life that had been given us with double intensity. None of us wanted to have the time at the front fade from memory.

But be honest again! We sensed the horror of death. We probably saw death more terribly and intensely than any who came before us. We crouched in the trenches, waiting for devastating attacks. We held our breath in fear when we heard the shells rushing toward us, when mines exploded near us. Our hearts almost burst as we vainly sought cover from the zinging of machine guns. We thought we were suffocating behind our gas masks. We staggered through water-filled trenches. We kept watch on frosty nights in the mud of shell holes. We endured days and weeks of horror during the great battles. We froze and starved and sometimes came near to desperation. We heard the cries of the badly wounded, we saw those gasping for breath after gas attacks. We met the blind staggering along, we heard the death rattles of the dying. Our last hopes for life vanished amidst the corpses of our comrades. We saw the misery of refugees behind us. We saw the widows and orphans, the cripples and the suffering, the sick children, the starving women.

Be honest! Did not each of us say: Why is all this happening? Does it have to be? Cannot humanity be spared this in the future?!

Still we held on — on our side and on the other side! We held on as men doing their duty, who displayed discipline and loyalty, men who abhorred cowardice.

Today I raise the same question to all the world — as a front fighter to front fighters, as a leader of one people to the leaders of other peoples: Must it be?! Can we not together through good will spare

humanity from this?!

Someone might ask me: Why do you raise your voice for the first time today? Why were you silent in past years?

This is my answer: Because my voice would have been mixed together in Germany with the voices of traitors to their own people — with the voices of those who once attacked our front soldiers from the rear — with the voices of those who besmeared front soldiers and praised cowards — with the voices of those in Germany who have the Treaty of Versailles on their consciences. I wanted nothing to do with them.

Today I may speak because a man of my people has restored the honor of this people before the world. Today I may speak because this man has silenced the traitors. Today I may speak because the world knows that a National Socialist fighter is no coward. Today I may speak because the leader of my people extends the hand of peace to the world. Today I may speak because Adolf Hitler, the bravest of the brave, keeps me from being misunderstood or confused with cowards.

Today I must speak because I support the man who attempts to save the world at the last moment from catastrophe. Today I raise my voice because I want to warn the world not to confuse the Germany of today, the Germany of peace, with the Germany that was, with the Germany of pacifism!

People must know this: The horrors of the war are always before us, and the postwar generation wants war no more than the old generation. But no one can “stroll through” Germany. Just as the French defended every inch of their soil in the great war with all their might, and would do so again today, so too would we Germans today. The French front soldier above all will understand us when we say to those who play with the idea of another war — which naturally others would have to fight at the front, not they: “Just try to attack us! Just try to march into the new Germany! The world will see the spirit of the new Germany! It would fight for its freedom as no nation before it has ever fought!

The French people know how one defends his own soil. Each [German] woods, each hill, each farm would have to be paid for in blood! Old and young would dig into the soil of the homeland! They would defend themselves with unequalled fanaticism!

And even if the superiority of modern weapons triumphed, the path through the Reich would be a path of grim sacrifice for the invaders as well, for never was a nation so sure of the justice of its cause and of the duty to defend itself to the utmost as our nation is today.

But we do not believe the well-poisoners of international relations who want to suggest to us that some nation wishes to disturb the peace of Germany, and therefore of Europe, if not even the world.

We particularly do not believe this is true of the French people. We know that this people, too, longs for peace. Just as we front fighters felt, so also did the French population behind the lines, which always saw the war as a disaster for them and for the whole world: “Malheur pour nos — malheur pour vos — malheur pour tout le monde!”

We in Germany — and particularly Germany’s front soldiers — have responded with sympathy to the voices in the French veteran’s organizations calling for honest understanding with Germany. This call surely comes both from experience with the true nature of war as well as from the esteem that France’s front soldiers feel for the achievements of German front soldiers.

France’s soldiers know the bravery the Germans displayed against superior forces for four and a half years. And German front soldiers can never deny the French front soldier the honor due his bravery. This bravery finds expression in the fact that France’s army had the highest losses on the Allied side.

Front soldiers want peace.

The peoples want peace.

Germany's government wants peace.

Even if the words of leading representatives of the French government from time to time do not display to us a spirit of understanding, we do not give up hope that despite it all, France's government wants peace. Since the French people surely want peace, we are convinced that France's government does not want war with Germany.

And if leading French spokesmen do not speak the language of the French people or France's front fighters, we may not take their speeches as the thinking of France's leadership. A Frenchman who knows the people and politics of his land well told me: "Take pity on us! We still have a parliamentary government!" He was saying that statesmen in their speeches sometimes are forced to say not what they think, but what parliamentary majorities wish to hear. But we know that parliamentary majorities are not representative of the opinions of the people, but rather of interest groups that often represent forces outside the nation.

History surely will give more laurels to men who in difficult times find the way to bring understanding between peoples, thereby rescuing culture, than to men who believe they can win victories by political and military aggression, or even those who achieve real victories.

The peoples themselves will thank those who secure peace, for unemployment with all its resulting social misery, is primarily the result of too little commerce between the nations. Such trade is always hindered by a lack of confidence.

It is undoubtedly the case that good relations between Germany and France serve not only the two nations as a whole, but also each individual within both peoples. Concretely, each Frenchman and each German in the long term will have higher income or higher pay.

Just as little as war and the continuation of war by other means under the name of "peace" benefit culture and the prosperity of the nations, so a true peace brings advantages for all.

True peace and real confidence between the nations enable a reduction in the armaments that today demand a large part of the wealth of nations as well as that of individual citizens.

Adolf Hitler has said repeatedly that German wishes only equality in all areas, including armaments. Such an understanding between Germany and its neighbors will enable Germany to be satisfied with its limited armaments, which are necessary to guarantee its security and thereby peace.

A defenseless nation is a danger to peace. Its defenseless all too easily invites the "attention" of easy attacks by foreign armies. If one people is defenseless among heavily armed peoples, it is all too easy for honor-hungry men to earn cheap laurels, for governments to divert their own peoples by the foreign adventure of a war.

My party comrades, the veterans among you, one of whom I am proud to be, can testify that veterans wish peace from their deepest convictions.

The world knows that the front fighter Adolf Hitler reveals his true thinking with surprising openness. The front fighters in the German government want honorable peace and understanding. I appeal to the front fighters in other states, and to those of good will in the governments of these states, to support us in this goal.

I direct this appeal from the holy soil of East Prussia to the front soldiers of the world. Here on this German borderland the great world struggle began, with its terrible sacrifices, sacrifices from which the warring nations to this day have yet to recover. May the historic battleground from which I speak add strength to an earnest call for peace. On Germany's eastern border, treaties guarantee peace for the

inhabitants of large neighboring states. May the governments of the peoples on the other borders of our Reich soon come to see that there is greater security for their citizens in peaceful treaties than in piling up war material. That is our hope.

The memory of Germany's dead, many of whom fell for East Prussia, will always make Germany's desire for peace strong and powerful!

The veterans of the front and the young fighters for a free, proud, and peaceful Reich greet the front soldiers and the Führer Adolf Hitler.