

Honoring Military Partnership

December 14, 2010

Holiday reception hosted at the Ambassador's residence

Friends-

Michelle, Chase and I are delighted to welcome all of you to our home and to celebrate the holiday season with each of you.

The holiday season is meant to be spent with friends – and we are delighted to share it with each of you. To share the cheer and the laughter of the season. Each of you has been important in our lives of the Embassy and we wish you a happy and healthy holiday season and the very best for the New Year.

And we hope you have a wonderful time tonight. The staff of the Residence and of the Embassy – Paige, Inge, and others – have worked very hard. And we want to thank the Brussels American Community Chorus, and violinist Geertje Podvyn for performing tonight. Enjoy the fun.

But revelry and merriment also imply gratitude – we celebrate because indeed we are truly blessed. The holiday season is a time to say “thank you” to those whom we value daily but often fail to so tell. It is a time to remember those who gave more than their share, so we got more than ours.

Today we have with us eight Belgian airmen who gave more than their share serving recently in Afghanistan so that each of us got more than our share of peace and freedom. We each are better for their service. And so Embassy Brussels wanted to use this opportunity – this chance to reflect on our blessings – to express our true gratitude to them and to their families.

But in honoring them and using this holiday cheer to welcome them home, our voices, our carols, our laughter and our undying gratitude ring more loudly and more widely. For indeed we today honor all 4,273 young Belgian men and women who have served abroad this year, giving far more of their share, and asking for nothing in return. And indeed our cheers and our laughter and our gratitude know no limits at the North Sea or in the Ardennes. Indeed we give thanks to the thousands of U.S. servicemen and women and the tens of thousands of allied military members who stepped up and left home, sleeping restlessly in bunks in deserts, so we and our children could sleep peacefully in our beds in our homes.

You know them – these eight Belgian airmen (DJABA, JOYCE, DONNY, STEF, RON, BIKI), their colleagues in the Belgian military, our American soldiers, and the troops from Allies and partners around the globe. You know them all. They are our sons and daughters, our brothers and sisters, our neighbors and friends. When you are dealing with world partnerships, with efforts by those in the brotherhood of man to foster our joint security, when you are dealing with bombs in downtown Stockholm, in cargo planes in Germany and the UK, in taped threats against France, in explosives in Times Square, all those in harm’s way on behalf of all of us are our sons and daughters, our brothers and our sisters, our neighbors and friends.

I got the chance first and often to see them in Belgium – at domestic military bases or at the Belgian Royal High Institute of Defense or at receptions. At that time, it was all about career, about training, about theory.

But then I also got to see them in Afghanistan: in Kunduz, training Afghani soldiers, in Kabul, protecting the airport; in Kandahar, flying air support for F-16's. At that time, it was no longer about career, or training, or theory. It was about danger and security; about small steps towards peace and about preserving freedom.

And today, they and all who have served have earned our gratitude.

So today we will all feast on the raclette, the oysters, and the waffles. We will hoist cider and more. And each taste, each sip will be a bit sweeter for their help.

To them we say welcome home and thank you.

To all of you, may you all have a wonderful and healthy holiday season and we wish you much joy in the coming year.

All the best.

Howard Gutman