

## **Neuville-en-Condroz Memorial Day**

May 29, 2010

65th Anniversary of the End of World War II

Ardennes American Cemetery

Ambassador Howard Gutman:

- Your Royal Highness, Princess Astrid,
- General Shinseki,
- Admiral Gallagher,
- Ambassador Daalder,
- Vice-Prime Minister Reynders,
- Governor Foret,
- Mayor Cortis,
- Mr. Payne,
- Mr. Begg, Excellencies, Veterans and Service Members, Family Members and Friends, Fellow Countrymen and Fellow Lovers of Belgium:

Most days are solely about what we are doing.  
Such days are meant to be lived in the present.

A busy day at work . . . picking up the kids at school . . .

A Princess championing the cause of malaria; a cabinet secretary thinking about his next meeting with the President;

On most days, our days are filled with thoughts of what we have to do.

But Memorial Day is different

It is not about what we are doing . . .

Rather, it's about who we are . . . and about what kind of planet we live on.

It is meant to be lived not simply in the present, but in the past and even more so in the future.

We live Memorial Day in the past, as it is about memories and honor.

We remember and honor men and women of many titles.

To some they were sergeant or colonel or general;

To others they were mom or dad,

Uncle or aunt . . .

Son or daughter.

To us, they are all heroes.

We honor them all.

And we honor their parents who lost children.

We honor their children who lost parents.

As a head of one of our two American Battlefield cemeteries once told me:

For those buried in his cemetery

They remain each day on active duty. . .

And on each day that we fail to remember them . . . that we fail to honor them . . . they have served a day without a mission.

Every soldier is entitled to his mission.

We -- Belgians and Americans, parents and children -- we are that mission.

Can you hear them -- each and every one of the 5323 buried here and the tens of thousands buried elsewhere . . .

Can you hear them?

If not, it is because you are listening with your ears.

But on Memorial Day, we listen not with our ears, but instead with our hearts.

And with our hearts we can hear them loudly and clearly.

They tell us that they lived in a country that believed in freedom and understood right from wrong.

And they tell us that they believed in service, in duty, in the mission of creating a better world.

And because of our hearts, because of their voices, because they shall never have died in vain,

Memorial Day is also lived in the future.

For while Memorial Day is indeed about the past.

It is even moreso about the future.

You see, memorial ceremonies are one way that men and women remember history . . . and that history in turn remembers heroes;

But history remembers such heroes and we hold memorial ceremonies not simply to honor the past.

Rather, by reminding us from where we have come, they remind us who we are and where we need to be going. By honoring the past, we pledge to continue to champion freedom and replicate righteousness and act together as one to build a better future.

It is about not simply about the planet that we live on,

But about the one we want to leave to our children.

And that is why we are here. In Belgium, at this spot, on this day.

To build that better planet together as partners.

That is what we are doing at Embassy Belgium.

That is what you are doing in the military service.

That is why as a family member you travelled so far to be here.

That is why as Belgian citizens you adopt the graves of fallen U.S. soldiers.

And why as a Belgian citizen you have come today to pay your respect.

When you are asked what you do for a career.

Don't say that you work in a consular section, or in buildings and maintenance or in an economic section of the Embassy.

When asked what you did this weekend, don't say you attended a Memorial Day service.  
Tell them instead that you worked to prevent the next world war.  
That you worked to eliminate a future Battle Field cemetery.  
That you worked to make the planet safer for our children.

Because that is our mission daily. That is our duty.

Those who are buried here deserve nothing less.

Thanks you and all the best.

I have two more additions.

First, I would dearly like to thank Princess Astrid for being here today. The partnership between Belgium and the United States is sealed in the blood that was spilled on these battlefields and remains as strong and powerful today. The Princess's attendance today is a testament to the strength of that partnership. From her work fighting malaria and land mines, to her devotion and tenderness as a mother, Princess Astrid is a source of charity, grace and charm – and we are deeply honored that she has shared such gifts with us today.

Second, it is my honor to welcome our Presidential delegation and to introduce our next speaker. It is not difficult for an American Ambassador to attend a ceremony in Belgium. But for the President of the United States to send an official delegation is a true reflection of the importance of the event to our country. He has sent a delegation of President Obama's great uncle, Mr. Charles Payne, who is a distinguished WWII veteran and of our next speaker General Eric Shinseki. General Shinseki is the Secretary of the United States Department of Veteran's Affairs, a member of President Obama's cabinet. A winner of the Bronze Star and Purple Heart, General Shinseki was formerly Chief of Staff of the Army. We so appreciate General Shinseki flying across the Atlantic to be with us today.