

The Bombing of Mortsel: A Shared Tragedy

April 5, 2010

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Most days in Mortsel are meant to be lived in the present. They are about what you are doing: shopping at Statielei, or picking the children up from Sint-Lutgardis.

But in Mortsel, April 5 is different. It is meant to be lived not simply in the present, but partly in the past, and even more so in the future. It is lived in the past as it is about memories and honor.

Remembering and honoring all those who died that day.

And because you have always remembered and honored; because you have refused to forget; because you have taught the young and they in turn now know to teach others, April 5 has become also about the future. It is not about what you are doing . . . but about who you are . . . and about what kind of planet you will leave to your children and to their children.

And, in Mortsel, April 5 has also always been solitary. A town annually united, but a town onto itself and by itself, standing alone in the sorrow of the loss of so many loved ones.

Yet Belgians have long stood with Americans at Ieper to mark the end of World War I – to remember and honor those who died so that all could be free. Belgians have long stood with Americans in the cold December of Bastogne, hearing the echoes of the Battle of the Bulge, to honor both soldiers who got back to their homes in the States and those destined forever to rest in the battlefield cemeteries of the Ardennes.

And for nearly a decade, Belgians have stood annually with Americans each September 11 to honor with us those who died either in a tower of trade or a pentagon of protection, both a tribute to our dear and unbreakable friendship and a recognition that to hurt one of us is to threaten us all.

And thus, with this April 5th, Mortsel stands alone no longer. We join you in remembering parents who lost their children. We join you in honoring children who lost their parents. People who only wanted to go about their daily lives at work and at school in the idyllic town of Mortsel, overrun by evil and oppression, amidst Allied attempts to restore liberty. Belgians who asked for nothing more than the right to live in peace. We join you in honoring your loss.

And we know you join us in honoring all troops who tried to liberate Europe during the Second World War. On that terrible April 5th day, U.S. airmen ventured out in daylight specifically to avoid civilian casualties, only to become more vulnerable to attacks from the enemy. Some perished. Amidst that chaos, hundreds of innocents found their death in the rubble that was Mortsel.

On April 5, we grieve together. On April 5, our partnership melds into one.

And thus on April 5, we join you in building that better future. In transmitting the lesson that none that day died in vain. That each final resting place is a pillar of the future that we are building

together. dedicated to a lasting peace, fostered through ensuring our mutual security, and inviting all who seek peace to join in.

All the best.