



Consulat général de France à New York

Speech by Ambassador of France François Delattre

**on the occasion of the bestowal,
of the Legion of Honor upon 43 American veterans of World War II**

Friday November 11, 2011
Lycée français in New York

- Monsieur le Consul général,
- Monsieur le Président de la “American Society of the French Legion of Honor”,
- (Mesdames et Messieurs les Conseillers à l’AFE),
- Monsieur le Président et Monsieur le Proviseur du Lycée français de New York,
- Dear veterans,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honored to be with you today as we are gathered here at the Lycée français to pay tribute to our veterans.

This is the second year that this ceremony is being held at the *Lycée français* in New York and I believe there is no better venue to symbolize the passing of the torch to the young generations.

I would like to give a warm and special word of thanks to the new principal of the *Lycée*, Sean Lynch, and his entire team, for hosting this ceremony.

On this day that commemorates the end of the First World War, during which France lost nearly 2 million lives, I am sure that the high school freshmen who are taking part in this ceremony are aware of the key dates and figures of this war that you’re studying this year in history. But these figures, however impressive they may be, hardly describe the horrific reality of the war front.

How indeed can we use simple words to describe the physical and emotional suffering, the fear, the anxiety, the deprivation, the waiting? How can we describe the fighting in close formation, the bayonets and the toxic gas, the terror felt by those who were plunged into one of the most deadly wars in history?

So today we also pay tribute to the doughboys and all the soldiers of the First World War, to the unique camaraderie that developed then between the French and American soldiers.

Today we remember that the French-American friendship is bound in blood and that our two countries owe each other their very existence as free nations.

We remember that from Yorktown and Lafayette to the battlefield of World War I and the beaches of Normandy, the United States and France have always stood shoulder to shoulder to defend and promote the values of freedom and democracy that we together gave the world more than 200 years ago.

It is truer than ever today as our two countries fight together in the mountains of Afghanistan and until recently in the skies of Libya, where we put an end to 42 years of a bloody dictatorship.

The United States and France are each other's closest ally in the fight against terrorism. Our two countries are in the forefront of international efforts to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear-weapons state in particular.

A few days ago, in a very moving ceremony that followed the G20 summit in Cannes, President Sarkozy and President Obama reaffirmed this long shared history and paid tribute together to the memory of American soldiers who died for France.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we pay tribute to 43 American veterans who embody this shared history, who illustrate by their courage the friendship and shared values that so profoundly bind our two nations.

We pay tribute to 43 American heroes who 67 years ago risked their young lives for the freedom of France and Europe. If France is what it is today, a free and sovereign country, we will never forget that it is thanks to them, to their bravery and thanks to America.

Our ceremony today is the largest ceremony ever held outside of France to honor American World War II veterans. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to the veterans' families and friends who have come to show their support and admiration.

In 2007, shortly after he became the President of France, President Sarkozy went to Washington and addressed the American Congress. There he paid a special tribute to the American veterans of the Second World War.

I would like to share with you what President Sarkozy said at that time to a packed Assembly and to standing ovations - and I quote: "To these 20 year-old heroes who gave us everything, to the families of those who never returned, to the children who mourned fathers they barely got a chance to know, I want to express France's eternal gratitude" (end quote).

Gentlemen, we the French we will never forget what you did to restore our freedom. And today, we also remember the ultimate sacrifice of so many of your comrades who rest on French soil. They will remain forever in our hearts.

I want to tell you that your example gives us inspiration for the future and that we are trying to prove ourselves worthy of your legacy in defending our shared values.

And in today's troubled times, these values that our two countries share are more than ever our best guide, our best moral compass, to confront together the current challenges that our two countries face.

Gentlemen,

In recognition of your heroic actions and extraordinary accomplishments, the President of the French Republic Nicolas Sarkozy nominated you to the Legion of Honor.

In a few minutes the President of the American Society of the French Legion of Honor and I will bestow upon you this distinction, France's highest honor and one of the most coveted in the world.

Long live the United States of America!

Vive la France!

And long live French-American friendship!./.