

Monsieur le Consul Général de France,
Monsieur le Député Maire,
Monsieur et Madame les Conseillers à l'Assemblée
des Français de l'Etranger,
Fellow Legionnaires,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Guy Wildenstein and I'm the President of the American Society of the French Legion of Honor which was founded in 1922 to unite all the Legionnaires living in the United States and strengthen the ties between two countries who indeed share the same values.

French by descent and American by birth, I have dedicated most of my life to strengthening the ties between America and France.

From the plains of Yorktown to the Argonne forests, from the beaches of Normandy to the mountains of Afghanistan, our two Nations have always been allies and have fought side by side every time that Freedom, Independence and Democracy were at stake.

As you all know today marks the 92nd anniversary of the end of World War I.

As President SARKOZY reminded representatives of all concerned countries two years ago, the casualties were enormous.

The President was speaking at Douaumont, the ossuary memorial containing the remains of soldiers who died at the Battle of Verdun.

The numbers he evoked sent chills among all the assistance: 8 and a half million dead; 21 million wounded; 4 million widows; 8 million orphans.

Such is the bottom line of what has been called The Great War, the war to end all wars!

And yet, as we are reminded every 8th of May, there was another war with even more casualties on all sides.

And again France's closest allies came to its rescue.

During his first State visit to the United-States 3 years ago, the President of France, Mr. Nicolas SARKOZY, decorated a number of veterans in Washington DC.

The ceremony was very much like the one you are about to witness.

Let me read to you, if I may a few lines from the French President's very moving remarks:

“In my country there are thousands upon thousands of white headstones to remember those men who didn't know France, and yet who came to die on French soil. And I want to tell you that whenever an American soldier dies anywhere in the world, I think of what the American army and Americans have done for us.”

Twice a year, we assemble at the invitation of the Consul General of France to commemorate and to remember.

On November 11 and on May 8 we celebrate the end of two World Wars but most importantly, on both these occasions we celebrate something very precious, we celebrate French American friendship.

Monsieur le Consul Général, dear Philippe LALLIOT, thank you for carrying on the tradition and bringing us together today as we remember and we honor!

We remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice and lie in cemeteries on French shores in Normandy, the South of France and indeed everywhere Liberty was at stake; those who may not even have found a grave.

May they rest in peace, they deserve our never-ending gratitude.

Today we honor those who survived and who fought so gallantly against the Nazi occupation.

We honor men such as:

Paul	Argiriou
William	Blake
Albert	Burstein
Andrew	Chmiel
Benjamin	Cohen
Anthony	Cosentino
Nicholas	De Gaeta
William	Engel
Charles	Eustis
Irving	Goldstein
Maurice	Meyers
Walter	Morton
Vincent	Minecci
Salvatore	Pedalino
Sam	Resnick
John	Rossick
Harry	Swanson
Arthur	Wenzel
Robert	Jackson

Gentlemen you exemplify the very reason why Napoleon Bonaparte founded the Legion of Honor.

He did so in 1802 in order to recognize, and I quote, the men and women deserving France's highest recognition for their civilian or military accomplishments.

Gentlemen, you are all heroes, I salute you, I thank you and our Society is proud to add you to its roster.

To this day the Legion of Honor has remained the premier distinction of France and it is that same magnificent medal hanging from its red moiré ribbon which you are about to receive that Emperor Napoleon distributed personally to each recipient.

This red ribbon that you will, I hope, wear proudly from now on is there to remind you of France's eternal gratitude for the important part you took in its liberation.

France will indeed never forget.

God Bless America!

Vive la France!