



Consulat général de France à New York

Speech by Ambassador François Delattre

**Declaration on the occasion of the Armistice
and bestowal of the Insignia of the Chevalier of the Order of the Legion of Honor**

Tuesday, May 8, 2012

Lieutenant General David Huntoon,

President of the American Society of the French Legion of Honor, Cher Guy Wildenstein,

Distinguished members of the Society,

Chère Nicole Hirsch, Elected Representative of the French living in the United States,

Consul General Philippe Lalliot,

General Friedling,

Representatives of the Federation of French Veterans, the Souvenir Français, and other French and French-American organizations,

Honored Veterans,

Cadets,

Distinguished guests,

As the Ambassador of France to the United States, I am deeply honored to be here with you today, at the beautiful and historic site of West Point, to celebrate the 67th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe and to pay tribute to 35 American veterans.

I am very grateful to Lieutenant General David H. Huntoon, Jr., Superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy, for inviting us to hold this ceremony here at West Point. That gives it a very special dimension since the bond between West Point and France is full of meaning and symbolism.

We French will never forget what we owe to West Point Military Academy. So many soldiers trained here fought on French soil during the two World Wars. So it should come as no surprise that West Point Academy is one of only two foreign institutions that received the French Legion of Honor. And that in 2002 West Point Cadets marched alongside French troops on the Champs-Élysées in Paris on Bastille Day – they were the first American soldiers to march on the Champs-Élysées since 1945.

67 years ago, Nazi Germany surrendered to the Allied forces after 6 years of war, leaving a Europe that had been bled dry and ravaged by the deadliest conflict in history. Nearly 60 million people lost their lives, including 45 million civilians – the world had never seen such horror.

So today we pay tribute to all the veterans of the Second 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 prevailed together over Kadhafi in Libya, bringing 42 years of a bloody dictatorship to an end.

The United States and France are each other's closest allies 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.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today we pay tribute to America and to 35 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 35 American heroes who nearly 70 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.

We also remember the ultimate sacrifice of so many of your comrades who rest on French soil. They will remain forever in our hearts.

More than half a century has passed since then, and yet the memory of the sacrifice of American soldiers remains more vivid than ever in the villages of France, whose cemeteries bear witness to this shared combat.

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 nominated you to the Legion of Honor.

The Legion of Honor was created by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802 – the same year as West Point Academy – to reward outstanding services rendered to France and extraordinary accomplishments.

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. In so doing, on behalf of the President of France, we will express to you France's eternal gratitude.

Long live the United States of America!

Vive la France!

And long live French-American friendship!./.