

FLANDERS FIELD AMERICAN CEMETERY—Final

Sunday, 29 May 2011 @ 1500

- **Thank you Jerry (Dr. Jerome Sheridan).**
- **The King’s Representative, Ambassador Gutman, Minister DE CLERCK, Minister of Defense de Crem, Governor Breyne, Senator Leahy, Col Theys, Mayor Kurt Vanryckeghem, President of the American Overseas Memorial Day Association— Dr./Mrs. Jerome Sheridan, Superintendent of the Flanders Field American Cemetery— Mr. Lou Aske, distinguished guests, Mesdames et Messieurs, Ladies and Gentlemen.**
- **Thank you for the invitation to speak today—it is truly an honor to be part of today’s program.**
- **Special thanks to everyone who was involved in putting on this event, including the volunteer color guard, the many US Service Men and Women you see here today, the Belgian military band, and especially to the school children of Waregem, who will sing both of our national anthems in a few minutes. Thank you for your contributions to this event.**
- **I would also like to acknowledge all veterans in the audience, and the family members who have come to pay tribute to their relatives buried here.**
- **And finally, a special thanks to the community of Waregem, and the Belgian families who have adopted graves at the Flanders Field American Cemetery—thank you for your tremendous support.**
- **I have a confession to make: many people in the United States know about Memorial Day—they know it is a 3-day weekend that marks the beginning of summer and acknowledges the service and sacrifice of our military, but I wish that more of my countrymen could come here, to the beautiful Flanders Field American Cemetery and the two other US cemeteries in Belgium, to remind them of the true meaning of Memorial Day: a day in which we pay tribute to those who have made the “ultimate sacrifice” to defend freedom.**

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- **The recent revolutionary wave in the Middle East and North Africa should serve as a reminder that freedom is not universal. Citizens in those countries are risking their lives to rebel against tyranny, and to fight for their fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of speech, and the right to freely elect their own leaders.**
- **We pay tribute to the 368 service members buried here at the Flanders Field American Cemetery, who died defending freedom in the machine gun-infested woods known as “Spitaals Bosschen.” Thanks in part to their valiant efforts, WW I ended less than 2 weeks later. Their heroism should be remembered not just by their family members here today, but by everyone who is able to live & work in a free society b/c of their sacrifice.**
- **I would like to briefly mention 2 U.S. Marines who were awarded the Medal of Honor for their actions in an airplane over Belgium in WW I. 2LT Ralph Talbot was flying his Sopwith Camel, with GySgt Robert Robinson as his observer/gunner. They were conducting an air raid over Pittham, Belgium on October 14, 1918 when they were attacked by 12 enemy aircraft. GySgt Robinson shot down 1 of the enemy planes before he was shot in the elbow and his gun jammed. 2LT Talbot maneuvered the plane, while GySgt Robinson cleared the jam with the other hand, and they returned to the fight. They continued to engage the enemy planes, until GySgt Robinson received 2 more bullet wounds. 2LT Talbot then shot down another enemy plane with his front guns. With his observer unconscious, and his motor failing, 2LT Talbot dove his plane to 50 feet over the enemy trenches, and landed at the nearest hospital. GySgt Robinson recovered from his wounds, but 2LT Talbot later died. Both men received the Congressional Medal of Honor.**
- **President John F. Kennedy said that “A nation reveals itself not only by the men it produces but also by the men it honors, the men it remembers.”**
- **Today we remember the 368 Americans who paid the ultimate price for freedom, including 2LT Ralph Talbot—we shall never forget you, and we shall always remember that the price of freedom is not free.**
- **Thank you for being here today to help celebrate the lives and legacies of those we have lost; lost but never forgotten; and always, always revered.**
- **Thank you.**