

## **"The Real Marines"**

November 6, 2010

### **Remarks of Ambassador Howard Gutman**

#### **Marine Corps Ball**

Ambassador Daalder, Ambassador Kennard, General Gaskin, Members of the Marine Security Detachment, Colleagues and Friends:

It is a total thrill for me to welcome all of you tonight.

By tradition, the bilateral ambassador is known as the Honored Guest at The Marine Ball. But, in truth, in supporting our dedicated Marines, you are indeed the Honored Guests tonight.

I will shortly introduce the Guest Speaker, General Gaskin. But I'd like to start by introducing two of the critical members of the Obama foreign policy team. First, the United States has had many terrific ambassadors to NATO. But perhaps none has served at such a critical time. A time when NATO is figuring out its direction for tomorrow. A time when leaders step forward. Ambassador Ivo Daalder has been a true leader for NATO in helping set its course for the future and therefore a true leader for our country. Welcome Ivo and Elisa.

And we have all felt how warmly Europe has greeted President Obama. But European leadership and legislators have at times remained somewhat skeptical of our policies, as distinct from our President. The challenge created by being the face of America to a somewhat skeptical European Union has required the utmost in diplomacy. And that challenge has been met by the pre-eminent diplomat, Ambassador William Kennard. Welcome Bill and Deborah.

But in truth, tonight is not about all of you, or about Ambassador Daalder or Ambassador Kennard and certainly not about me. And, for me, tonight is not even about the Marine Corps.

Corporal Lamson said that the record of the Corps speaks for itself, and indeed, none would disagree. The Marine Corps is indeed the finest brand in history.

The Corps had John Wayne in Flying Leathernecks back in 1951. Clint Eastwood in Heartbreak Ridge and Flags of our Father. What could be bigger than Tom Cruise, Jack Nicholson, Demi Moore and Kevin Bacon in A Few Good Men. The Corps shines brightly in Hollywood.

The Corps has a great motto, "Semper Fi," and a top-notch slogan – "The few, the proud, the Marines."

Great commercials – knights mounted on horses, clashing on chess boards; Carl Orff's Carmina Burana.

The Corps is already and has long been a rock star.

And thus for me, this Ball is not about the organization, even the finest organization in the world – but instead about its members. It is not about the brand, but about the people. For it is so easy to praise

the brand, so easy to love the glamour that has come to attach to it, that the words may start from the wrong place – from the mouth, from the lips, instead of from the heart.

Tonight is about you who have served. It is about you who are serving.

It is not about Hollywood, but about Helmand Province. It is not about steeds clashing with lightning bolts, but about jeeps creeping ahead amidst sand storms combing for land mines.

Tonight is about every one of you who have served. And tonight is about Tri-Mission Brussel's finest citizens. I want to thank them for where they have been. I want to thank them for what they have done. And I want to thank them most for whom they are.

Every one of our Marines today understood when they joined or when they re-upped that the road would be rough. They knew that this was not about steeds nor about sunny days in North Carolina, but about life and death. They knew that for every moment of thrill, there could be months of fear.

But they knew that the rest of us needed them. They knew our citizens and indeed our freedom had been the victims of terror and remained under threat. They knew we needed someone to help, to respond, to protect. And they said, "I will."

We have balls once a year. But we owe them every day.

And the level of our own respect for them is matched by the respect for them from our partners and allies in these missions. I went to Afghanistan a few weeks ago to visit troops in Kunduz, Kabul and Kandahar. In each area, the Belgian troops told me about their missions – training Afghanis in the North, providing security in Kabul, flying air support missions in the South. While proud of their own service, in each area, the local troops showered me with stories about the U.S. troops – they were honored just to be able to assist.

As I walked along paths long cleared of mines into installations long cleared of local threats, I paused to think about the first Americans to walk those paths or to clear such areas. Those folks may be in this room. So I want to thank them for every foot of road they drove – whether in Baghdad, in Kandahar, in Al Anbar and in Salah Ad Din wondering whether to look down for improvised explosive devices or look up for rocket propelled grenades. I want to thank them for every teen they met in Iraq or Pakistan or Afghanistan and wondered whether they were carrying a piece of fruit or a grenade.

I want to thank their parents for every time they looked at a phone in Waukegan Illinois or Chule Vista California and prayed that it would not ring. And I want never to forget to thank those parents and children for whom the phone did ring.

In the State Department we call assignments such as Kabul or Baghdad or Al Anbar "hardship" posts. In the Marines, they call them "another day at the office."

Tri-Mission Brussels best citizens are indeed part of the "best warrior class our nation has to offer."

But do not be confused. Their mission did not end and our gratitude did not abate when the dust of

the battlefield at dawn was replaced by the plexiglass of a watchful post amidst the dark hours of the night.

I get calls today from worried parents in the U.S. whose children are due to spend a semester studying abroad in Europe, at Leuven or the Sorbonne, asking whether they should let their children come given the threats of terror that exist. I laugh a bit to myself, thinking that indeed we live here. So we together thank the tri-Missions finest citizens for every moment we chat on the phone in our offices without even thinking who might mean us harm.

And Michelle and I thank them for every night Chase sleeps comfortably in his bed on Rue Zinner without worrying whether his father's decision proudly to restore two American flags on his home might have been a mistake.

And I thank them for last Christmas Eve, when together we went to the Queen Fabiola Hospital for Children as part of the Toys for Tots program. Each would well have been justified wishing to be with their own loved ones on Christmas Eve. But each understood the true reward in those smiles on the faces of kids unwrapping presents with one arm and a huge grin, while an IV remained pinched into the other.

Every smile on the face of a child, every handshake from a parent, every community lifted through the civic service of a Marine is an investment in a safer and more prosperous future for us all.

Yes, Tri-Mission Brussels finest citizens have not just helped to win the last war; they work daily to prevent the next one.

You know, Ambassadors come into a room and people stand. We enter a ballroom in a fancy tux and all applaud. Can you imagine? A room full of heroes and all stand and applaud for the guy from Washington.

So later tonight, when the individual Marines are introduced on this 235th birthday of The Marines, we will have our chance to express our gratitude not for their Corps, not for their tradition or even for their legacy, but for their individual service, their real courage, and all that they have done. For their individual service and courage will always be far more inspirational than John Wayne.

But before we meet them, we have the honor of hearing from Lieutenant General Walter Gaskin, the Deputy Chairman of the NATO Military Committee. The General has a record of combat and leadership service that would take the whole night to recount. Indeed he had simultaneous commands in Camp Lejeune and Al Albar Iraq, has been the Vice Director of the Joint Staff, and led a variety of forces and assignments throughout Italy, Africa, Egypt and Jordan and much more. And having had the privilege to participate in other events with General Gaskins, I can tell you that he is a heck of a nice guy and there is no one prouder of young Marines.

So it my pleasure to introduce Lieutenant General Walter Gaskin.

Thanks and all the best to each of you.