

Notes from the President

Reflections on Memorial Day from a Global Perspective

05/30/2016

My reflection on Memorial Day this year is emanating from a different perspective, one with a much greater global view than in past years. This past week, Val and I joined the Georgia Tech-Lorraine community and the governmental leadership of Metz and Lorraine in celebration of the 25th anniversary of Georgia Tech-Lorraine (GTL), our campus in Metz. During our visit and the associated celebrations, I thought about the wonderful opportunities thousands of Georgia Tech students have had to gain a global perspective as a result of their time here, and I reflected back on our visit on Memorial Day 2014 when Val and I were in Metz for the inauguration of the Institut Lafayette.

That summer, following our visit to GTL, we had the privilege of visiting General Philip Breedlove, Supreme Allied Commander for Europe, at the NATO Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, (SHAPE). General Breedlove is a 1977 Georgia Tech civil engineering graduate and just this past month retired following a very distinguished military career. As part of our visit, he hosted us and a group of students from the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs, who were participating in a study-abroad experience. General Breedlove arranged for us all to get a “behind-the-scenes tour” of SHAPE, where we heard from members of the general’s staff from four different countries. During our visit General Breedlove mentioned that he was planning to visit Normandy for the 70th anniversary of the D-Day invasion and the Battle of Normandy and asked if our students might want to attend.

To make a long story short, General Breedlove arranged for not only the students visiting with us in Belgium to attend, but also made arrangements for all 239 Georgia Tech students studying that summer at GTL to participate in the special events at Normandy. It was an incredible opportunity for these students to be able to visit a place of such historic significance, and especially to do so on the 70th anniversary of the massive World War II military campaign launched by Allied troops as they began their march across Europe to liberate the continent from German occupation.

Many of the American soldiers who landed on the Normandy beaches that day were the same age as our students, and thousands of them gave their lives for the cause of freedom. The American cemetery in Normandy that overlooks Omaha Beach is one of the principal landing areas during the invasion. Buried there are 9,387 American service men and women, most of whom were killed during the Normandy invasion. A memorial wall nearby contains the names of 1,557 additional American service members who perished in the Normandy campaign but could not be located or identified. It was a truly unforgettable experience and one that would not have been possible if not for General Breedlove and our campus in Metz.

As I reflect back to our previous visit to GTL at which they played the French national anthem, “La Marseillaise,” followed by “The Star Spangled Banner,” I cannot help but think about how grateful I am to the tens of thousands of service members who, over the years, have fought for the freedoms that we all enjoy today and the many opportunities Val and I, and all of our students, alumni, faculty, and staff have because of the sacrifices made by these men and women.

I am enormously grateful to live in our great country and count it as a true privilege to be able to represent Georgia Tech as we engage in so many educational and research partnerships throughout the world — partnerships that offer our students unique and unparalleled opportunities to gain a global perspective and see the world through the eyes of another country.

Happy Memorial Day and God bless America!

G. P. "Bud" Peterson
President, Georgia Tech