

UCLan Acceptance Speech

You do me far greater honor than you may suspect, for several reasons. First is this truly impressive setting, and the audience before me. My first honorary degree, given in Korea by a Jesuit University, was conferred upon me in an office, on a Saturday night during Christmas holidays, to be certain that no students were on campus. I was American ambassador to Korea at the time, but I was also known to have been an intelligence officer. I was not a popular figure among students, and the prudent Jesuits did not want a riot to take place.

Second is the fact that you, UCLan, decided to give me this honor. In my previous visit here in October 2014, I was greatly impressed by the quality of your faculty, your students and the general atmosphere of competence and curiosity which pervades this place. We in the U.S. have a tendency to demonize those people we neither like nor understand, such as the North Koreans. UCLan, in contrast, last year opened a new branch of academic inquiry to study all Koreans. In so doing, you put many of our major universities to shame.

Third, is my life-long admiration for the U.K. I was very proud of my family ties to Devon and Scotland. My first boyhood hero was King Arthur, not Buffalo Bill. (I disapproved of his slaughter of the bison.) I had a crush on the late Princess Margaret. The Battle of Britain in 1940 thrilled me and I drew endless pictures of its dogfights, and can still tell a Spitfire from a Hurricane. Churchill's voice is as familiar to my ear as that of Roosevelt. In February 1983, Margaret Thatcher gave a small dinner at 10 Downing Street for Vice President George H.W. Bush in which I participated. I've met one emperor, two kings and countless heads of state. Dinner at "Number 10" tops them all.

Finally, I am particularly honored because I think of myself as an intelligence officer, concerned with cutting behind appearance toward reality, and speaking truth to power, particularly when power does not want to hear the truth. The U.K. has a corner on the market in terms of intelligence work as depicted to the public. James Bond, as far-fetched as he has become, is still applauded in American movie theaters. I'll give him a tip of my hat, but my real hero is George Smiley, as depicted in John Le Carre's "Tinker, Tailor, Soldier Spy" by Alec Guinness. So, I feel that here I've been honored for all that I have done, including my CIA work, not in spite of it.

That means a great deal to me, and I thank you all for this singular honor.

Donald P. Gregg