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Senate

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, today I rise to recognize the 85th birthday of Jack van der Geest of Rapid City, South Dakota. A native of the Netherlands and author of *Was God on Vacation?*, Jack's life story is a heroic depiction of courage and the willingness to act against the evils that threaten our world and our freedoms.

Born in the Netherland in 1923, Jack's younger years witnessed the horrifying and devastating effect of Nazi Germany in Europe. Jack endured many trials and tribulations after the Nazis invaded his homeland in 1940; however, none of them would prove to break Jack's spirit of perseverance. After his capture, Jack's resilience served him well as he became 1 of only 8 prisoners to escape from the Buchenwald Concentration Camp.

Following Jack's escape from terror in the heart of Nazi Germany, he further pledged his services to fight the Nazi occupation throughout Europe. Jack joined the French Underground and helped Allied

paratroopers escape capture in Vichy France. Soon after, Jack arrived in England where he became an interpreter for the storied 101st Airborne. Jack eventually immigrated to America and became a United States citizen in 1953.

In 1995, Jack authored the book *Was God on Vacation?*, an autobiography of his life during World War II. This astonishing work gives an in-depth account of Jack's struggles and endeavors from 1940-1947. Jack's testimony truly shines a light on the persecution and challenges many Europeans endured during World War II and how some fought dearly to repel the Nazi aggressors. The story of Jack van der Geest reminds us to never take for granted the freedoms that so many have fought for in our armed services and around the world.

I would like to send my heartfelt congratulations to Jack on his 85th birthday, thank him for telling his story and allowing us all to never forget how fortunate we are to be free.