

Unveiling Wing of Freedom 75 years of Liberation on 4 March in Nieuw-Bergen

Relatives of the fallen,
ladies and gentlemen,

Yesterday we celebrated our liberation exactly seventy-five years ago.

And 'we' are the Province of Limburg, the southernmost province of the Netherlands.

It was a liberation that lasted almost six months,

Six months of often bitter fighting, that took the lives of many of our liberators.

Liberators who came from far away
– from America, from Canada, from the UK –
and who gave us a great gift: our freedom.

Their lives - and therefore, relatives of the fallen, also the lives of your family members – for our freedom.

Now, seventy-five years later, we have also followed the trail of liberation for six months.

To remember again and again that enormous sacrifice that was made for us.
During and before those six months...

They were large or small intimate commemorations;
at large or small monuments;
but I can assure you: they were all very impressive.

Impressive because it still touches us;
and because we are still grateful to those who risked their lives – and lost them – for our freedom.

Also in full awareness that losing their lives
also meant a great sorrow for their 'loved ones, their families and friends'.

The fate and sacrifice of your family members – and you can be sure of this – will always touch us. It is therefore a great honour for me today to unveil with

you the monument in honour of the crew of the plane that crashed here, seven men who have been mourned by your families.

Yesterday – on the day we celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary of the liberation in a magnificent way – I was standing at a completely different kind of monument.

It was also a plane. But a plane that was given to a primary school as playground equipment. A primary school called 'Startbaan' - that's Dutch for runway - named after a 'fake' airfield that had been created there during the war to mislead the enemy.

That's where I got to talk to the children about brotherhood. How important it is to see each other - other persons, other peoples, other countries - as brothers and friends. Because brotherhood is the best weapon - the best medicine - against war.

I told them I liked the idea that they had received a plane. Because it reminded me of a fairy tale written by a French pilot. A French pilot who had written this fairy tale during the war, before his aircraft was also shot out of the sky.

I told them that in this fairy tale, the secret was revealed about how to make friends and stay friends

'by not only looking with your eyes,
but always with your heart.
Because only your heart can really see.'

I also told them that I hoped that every time they looked at that plane or played with it, they would think of that pilot, his fairy tale and that secret.

Ladies and gentlemen, that pilot was Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, and his fairy tale was "The Little Prince", which also offers adults more than enough clues on how to deal with today's world.

Today's world with 'increasing polarization, major upheavals and struggles with true or fake news'.

Challenges that all demand that we, too, continue to see with our hearts.

If only to remain worthy of the freedom given to us seventy-five years ago. By so many who gave their lives for that precious gift, like your family members.

Thank you

Dames en heren,

Zes maanden duurde het voordat héél Limburg - gisteren precies 75 jaar geleden - was bevrijd.

Zes maanden lang hebben we dit ook gevierd,
maar ook zes maanden lang hebben we op alle mogelijke manieren onze bevrijders geëerd.

En vandaag laat óók u hier zien dat u wij ze niet zijn vergeten: die bevrijders die hun leven voor ons waagden en gaven. En daarmee hun eigen geliefden, families en vrienden in diepe rouw dompelen.

Maar chapeau, dames en heren, voor de manier waarop u hier hen die hier sneuvelden herdenkt; én de moeite die u heeft gedaan om hun families op te sporen en hier naartoe te halen.

Zodat zij deze dagen met eigen ogen zien,
dat wij altijd dankbaar zullen blijven,
voor de vrijheid waarvoor 'hun mannen' streden.

Een vrijheid die wij alleen al daarom **altijd waard** moeten zien te blijven.