

## Opening Bezoekerscentrum Amerikaanse Begraafplaats Margraten, 11 december 2023

Dear excellencies, members of the American Battle Monuments Commission, dear attendees, ladies and gentlemen,

**Today is a cold day, but a good day**, although it may not directly feel as one.

We find ourselves – on the brink of 2024 – about to wrap up a year of worry.

The images of war reach us every day.

People are leaving their homes and are looking for a safe place, away from those unspeakable horrors.

All of this takes place close to our peaceful province, protected by NATO.

Yet – how peaceful does it feel, when people so close by are fighting for their lives? When you see hurt and wounded families with **nothing left**, bar the strength to somehow keep walking...?

When I drove up here today, I once again realized the sacrifices that were made by all of the Allied forces, all those years ago.

The joint efforts of all those young soldiers still mean the world to us.

And although humanity apparently finds it difficult to learn from its blatant mistakes and misjudgments... I would like to once more call for us **not** to forget the lessons of the past.

The past, so visible here, at the American War Cemetery in Margraten.

We try to grasp some of the courage of all of those brave hearts that surround us here.

As I said... although times are insecure and worrying, **today is a good day**. A day all of us looked forward to. To our special moment here, together. But also a day to look ahead.

Next year will be a special year. In 2024 we remember the liberation of the southernmost part of the province of Limburg, 80 years ago.

On September 12, 1944, around 10 o'clock in the morning, a small village called Mesch was the first Dutch place to be liberated.

American soldiers found their way from Belgium to Mesch, not far from here, through a narrow field road.

School teacher Jef Warnier, flabbergasted, greeted the Americans with a feeble but heartfelt "Welcome to Holland". With that he marked the beginning of the liberation of our country.

I look forward to seeing many of you at one of our commemorative events where we celebrate 80 years of liberation, peace, democracy and freedom.

The act of remembering is, after all, not merely a passive exercise. It is a call to action, an invitation to build bridges that span cultures and generations.

**Today, ladies and gentlemen, is a good day.**

I am very grateful and proud of everyone who – some way or the other – has professionally or voluntarily contributed to the creation of this magnificent new Visitor Center.

Thank you.

It is a great starting point for people wanting to explore our common history, that of Limburg and the United States of America.

A history that has made us humble and resilient, and that must guide us as we navigate the challenges of the present and the future.

Thank you kindly for your attention.