

Toespraak Memorial Day 2025, 25 mei 2025 Amerikaanse kerkhof Margraten

Dear veterans, your Majesty, excellencies, dear everyone,

Eighty-five years ago,
my father—just drafted into the army—
stood ready to defend his homeland,
posted seventy-five miles north of here,
against an overwhelming invading force.

There,
where he was forced to retreat,
American and British soldiers would,
four and a half years later,
fight the terrible Battle of Overloon
—a place where so many gave their lives for our freedom.

Like

- **James Barres**, twenty-two, from Louisiana;
 - **Francis Bosch**, twenty-six, from Pennsylvania; and
 - **Thomas Jones Jr.**, twenty-seven, from Maryland—
- three young Americans, roughly the same age as my father,
they died there on October 4th, 1944,
their tanks destroyed in flames.

No remains were ever found—
nothing to lay to rest,
no grave to visit;
only their names,
written on the Walls of the Missing.

Their lives ended
in the same month my father,
because of his part in the resistance,
came within a heartbeat of losing his own —
but **he** got lucky.
Moments before his execution,
His underground friends broke him free,

and he survived the war.

Unlike James, Francis, and Thomas,
my father was able to move on with his life.
He met my mother, married her,
and together, built a family—five children born in time of peace.

My mother, ten years his junior,
was a true child of war.
She knew, firsthand,
what it meant to be hungry.

During the occupation,
where there was almost nothing to eat,
she was sent off from the city of Rotterdam
to the countryside to regain her strength—at least four times.

So, years later, at the family dinner table,
Saying “ I don’t like this ”
Was an ex**PLI**cit no-go for me and my brothers and sister

We were raised with the firm belief
that you must always help people in need—
the way America came to Europe’s aid when it truly mattered.

And of course, *gratitude* to the Americans
was something my parents carried with them
for their ent**TI**re lives.

A *gratitude* they shared with their generation—
people who knew what it meant to live in an unsafe, uncertain, unfree world

That same *gratitude* lives on in the people of Limburg —
for whom adopting a grave or a name on the Walls of the Missing -
remains a simple act of decency and respect
passed down from generation to generation.

That is what makes this cemetery not just a burial ground,
but a **living** place of connection—honoring all those
who gave their lives for freedom, peace, and democracy.

And that will always remain so,
even with the world around us changing so rapidly.

Above all,
this place is a monument **to human kindness**—
a monument to those who stood up
for others they never even knew,
simply because help was needed.

James, Francis, and Thomas
—and all the others we honor—
gave their lives
for a deed of **true human kindness**.
They stood up against injustice,
They came into action because things were **not right**.

Please, let us not honor them with words and ceremonies alone,
but above all—with our deeds.
Our **deeds** that, like theirs, show courage, compassion, and **humanity**.
Humanity. Something our world needs so very much, right now.

I does not take much these days, to make us remember,

That freedom isn't free.

And that we should remain worthy of our freedom.