

Memorial Day 2022, Amerikaans Kerkhof Margraten 29 mei 2022

Excellencies,

Generals

Veterans and Families

Ladies and Gentlemen

For me, this is the first time
that I stand here as governor of Limburg.

How impressive it feels, to be surrounded by ten
thousand names
eight thousand of those on the graves in front of me,
the remaining two thousand on the walls of the
missing, right behind me...

Ten thousand names, **so** gratefully and thankfully
adopted by the people of Limburg,
that they were given a face,
a story,
and a soul.

Names and stories,
which belong to my father's generation...

My father – Chris Roemer, born in Rotterdam,
was twenty-two years old in May of nineteen forty
when he had to defend our country
as a conscripted soldier,
against an overwhelmingly aggressive force and
therefore against all odds.

It was a time of total chaos,
in which he disappeared,
His parents, his three brothers and three sisters
feared for his life...

But he returned
only to find the city of Rotterdam
in a state of total destruction,
and he submerged himself in the resistance.

Things went well for a while,
until they took a turn for the worse,
when the aggressor captured him in October nineteen
forty-four
and questioned him under terrible circumstances.
But ... he told them ***nothing***,
and was therefore sentenced to death by the bullet.

But he got lucky.
Right before he was about to be shot,
the resistance was able to free him
in spectacular fashion,
just like in the movies.

George Andrako,
on the other hand,
did ***not*** have that luck.

Born in New York,
this construction worker
found himself - in that same October month -
as a tank gunner near Meijel, in Limburg;

a deserted village
that had been occupied and then liberated
on and off for weeks.

Until, by the end of that month,
all hell broke loose,
and the aggressor,
in an overwhelming display of power,
completely overran his army unit.

It really **was** hell,
because no remnants of George were ever found...

For his parents, brother and three sisters,
all that remained was his name
here, on the walls of the missing.

He – George – was born in nineteen eighteen,
just like my old man,
but unlike him, George was **never** able
to marry the love of his life,
to become father of four sons and a daughter,
and to build up a meaningful future.

Instead,
George made the greatest sacrifice:
giving **his** life for **our** peace and freedom.

Peace and freedom,
which we must **never, ever**
take for granted.

Since less than 100 days ago,
we have been seeing how,
not far from here, in Ukraine
the likes of Chris and George
– in resistance and in battle –
once again rise up to an aggressor .

Once again risk or even give their lives
for peace, freedom and democracy...

Again cities are being destroyed,
again people flee their homes and homeland;
and **yet again** many casualties lead to sorrow and
grief...

And with that terrible realization,
I can only say,
at this very moment,
to George and all his comrades:
“your sacrifice, after all those years, still means the
world to us.”