

DCM Ned Nolan's Remarks
on Margraten Adoption Committee Concert
Monday, May 31, 7 p.m.
Theater aan het Vrijthof, Maastricht

Thank you, Mrs. Opreij for your kind words. Mayor, Aldermen and Councilors of Margraten, Lieutenant Colonel Sumpter, Mr. Stijnen, Superintendent Yasenchack, Adopters, Veterans, families of those who have fallen, ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening. I am honored to be here tonight. And very happy to have had the chance during the reception on Saturday to get to know some of you and hear about your experiences and memories.

Every year on Memorial Day weekend, we gather to remember a common past, a shared struggle. We gather to remember those who sacrificed their lives to fight oppression. We think of the families who lost

their loved ones, and the children who lost their fathers and mothers.

We think of a War so comprehensive and global that every country, people, family and person was affected by it. And we think, with abiding gratitude, of the freedoms we enjoy today because of the sacrifices of that generation, which has been called the greatest generation.

What would our generation do if summoned to the same challenges today? Some show that same spirit, especially those serving in our armed forces today, both American and Dutch. But most of us will never know, will never be required to make such sacrifices. Has any generation been called so profoundly and comprehensively as that generation we honor today?

These brave men and women fought not only for their countries but for their ideals on the war front and the home front. Above all, they fought for freedom, freedom as so eloquently expressed by President Roosevelt in 1941.

Freedom of speech and expression, of religion and worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. In the Netherlands and America these freedoms are part of our everyday existence and we often take them for granted. But we enjoy them today because of the men and women of that great generation.

They grew up enduring the hardships of the Great Depression, fought the two most powerful and ruthless military machines ever assembled, and, eventually, came home to rebuild their lives and forge a new world.

In Europe, they came back to a battered landscape, and day by day, they rebuilt cities and farms, families and communities guided by the certainty that their ideals had prevailed. And they worked with a greater, more universal goal – to ensure that the new world they were constructing would rest firmly on the foundations of freedom, democracy and human dignity.

My father was one of those men fighting with Patton's Third Army in France, Belgium and Germany.

I was one of the lucky ones, because my father made it home to raise my sister and me and build a wonderful life for us, in fact as the U.S. manager for a Dutch textile firm.

But many did not return. They made the ultimate sacrifice in the defense of liberty and now lie buried in the hallowed ground of Margraten.

Between 1941, when the United States entered the War, and 1945 the death of more than 400,000 -- including the 8302 buried at Margraten -- left an estimated 183,000 American children fatherless.

The American WWII Orphans Network locates American WWII orphans, shows them they aren't alone, and helps them honor these men's and women's service and sacrifice. And the Margraten Adoption Committee ensures the dignity of the final resting place of the thousands -- from America, Canada, the United Kingdom and Mexico -- who died in the service of their countries and of free people everywhere. I have also been struck this weekend by how the Adoption Committee adopts not only graves but families, next-of-kin, Orphans and veterans, and has built enduring ties that are renewed year after year.

This is important work. Not just in honoring those to whom we owe so much, but in reaffirming our commitment to the ideals they so bravely defended. And we are called to do our part to pass on those ideals to future generations.

The “Greatest Generation” is slowly passing from the scene and many wonder if their service and their devotion will always be honored. But the work I have seen by the American World War II Orphans Network and the Margraten Adoption Committee reassure us that their sacrifice never will be forgotten.

Thank you for your work.

And thank you all for always remembering.