

REMARKS OF ARTHUR CHOTIN  
Memorial Day Ceremony at the Netherlands American Cemetery  
Margraten, Netherlands  
May 26, 2024

Honored guests especially our World War II veterans, *Dames en Heren*.

D-Day: Thousands died on the beaches. Survivors fought their way through France and Belgium; but many did not survive those battles. And many of them rest here.

Cemeteries serve two purposes: to give the dead a place to rest and to honor and remember them. But beautiful cemeteries like this, cared for by the staff of the American Battle Monuments Commission; places where the dead are buried far from home and those who loved them, have additional impact: they reveal the consequences of war.

When I visited here the first time I wrote to my mother "before the old men who send young men into battle are given the power to make those decisions, they should be required to visit a place like this." Because these dead are the consequences of those decisions; with unintended consequences changing the lives of those left behind.

On November 3, 1945, the war was over. But my father, delivering paperwork to begin sending men in his unit home, was killed when a truck collided with his jeep. He is buried here. His grave has been adopted by Boy, Petra and Pim Naaijken, a remarkable family I am honored to call my friends. Thanks to the *Stichting Adoptie*, the Adoption Foundation, every grave and name here has been adopted; On behalf of these soldiers, their families and the American people, I say to the Foundation and to the Dutch people, thank you so very much!

I never knew my father. He was killed a month before my first birthday. Even though I didn't know him, I think of him every day. But how I think of him has changed.

First, the pain was mine. When the kids in class made Father's Day cards, I was the one without a father. I cried for myself.

Later I realized it was not all about me. My mother had only been married for three years. She never came here. She never remarried. Deep inside she believed that one day there would be a knock at the door. There wasn't. So I cried for her.

Now I realize that the saddest loss wasn't ours. It was his. He would have been proud to have served his country but he too had dreams: he was a CPA. He had parents who relied on him, a wife and a baby who was supposed to be the first, not the

only. His whole future was ahead of him. Until the day his future stopped and he became *fixed in time* with no chance to achieve his dreams. I cry for him.

Today, I am almost 50 years older than that father I never knew. He is always 30, and, together with the 10,000 other servicemen and women here deprived of the chance to live out their future, they are *fixed in time* and I cry for them.

We all cry watching military funerals and their folded flags. But the impact on those left behind just begins when that flag is folded. Spouses find themselves single-parents raising children whose lives have been shattered. Parents have the pain of living longer than their child.

And while some can take pride that their loved one was a hero, almost half of those we remember on Memorial Day did not die in battle. My father was just a soldier who got into a Jeep at the wrong time on the wrong day. But these dead were related to heroes.

The wife who kept the memory of her husband alive for her children, when even talking about him brought back the horror of the uniforms and chaplain at her door. The husband explaining to his children why their mother will never be able to come to their school play. The grandparents who want desperately to make their dead child more than just a story for their grandchildren. People struggling to find words, who fought through the sorrow, the anger, the grief, just to get to the next day.

They are heroes. When lesser people would crawl into bed and never take off the covers, they stood up and lived. They kept alive the memories of their dead. Their dead who, *fixed in time*, will be *forever young*, always the age we see in their photographs; photographs which, thanks to the Faces of Margraten project, are seen here at the Cemetery's incredible Visitor's Center.

When he came here at 15, my son David brought a letter to my father. He wrote:

I wanted to say thanks. What you did, what all the soldiers did, was make this world a place where people could live, and flourish, and make their own choices instead of having someone like Hitler make the choices for them. [He concluded]...I just want you to know...I remember and appreciate what you and all the[se] soldiers did to keep humanity free [from] tyranny.

My wife, my older son and I remember as well. In 2015 when I spoke here, I said of my father "I hope he would be proud of me." I have never once said until today, "Dad, I am so proud of you." So today we join to remember and honor all of them, including my father, S/Sgt Max Chotin; and their loved ones, including my mother,

Sylvia Chotin, who I pray is with my father today. And all the parents and all the children left behind. The heroes who kept their memories alive.

To these dead I say, you are:

*Voor altijd geliefd:* Forever loved

*Voor altijd herinnerd:* Forever remembered

*Voor altijd gewaardeerd:* Forever honored

as you remain, like your photos,

*Voor altijd jong:* Forever young.

*Bedankt.*