

Speech by Dennis Straat – 4 May 2021

Dear people of Landsmeer, Den IJp and Purmerland,

Today, the Netherlands will commemorate all the victims of war for the 76th time. And I am standing here, in the Kruispunt, just like last year. A year ago, no one would have thought that we would need to have an online commemoration in 2021 as well. Of course, we had all hoped for a physical gathering. But unfortunately, circumstances still don't allow this. It's not something one can get used to: not having the freedom to come together at moments that are important to you personally, or to all of us as a nation. A freedom which none of us has had this past year. But that freedom we are all anxiously anticipating at the moment probably pales in comparison to the freedom that the people of the Netherlands must have felt on 5 May 1945.

That moment, the German surrender in the Netherlands, which was signed at the hotel De Wereld in Wageningen on 5 May 1945, gave the Netherlands back its freedom. Even though this meant the end of the war, its aftermath would still be felt for a long time. The damage caused by the Germans in the Netherlands during the war had to be repaired. On top of that, it took a long time before the food shortage was solved. One thing that could not be repaired nor solved, however, was the painful loss of family, friends, neighbours and fellow citizens. These war victims and resistance heroes will be remembered and missed by us to this very day. That is why it is so incredibly important that we continue to tell their stories, to honour them for the lives they gave so we might have our freedom today. And so we will never forget them.

In Landsmeer, the war monument in the Calkoenstraat and the Vickers-Wellington monument at the Dorspad are two places we can always go to commemorate. The Vickers-Wellington monument commemorates the six-man crew of a Wellington bomber, who died in 1941 when their aircraft crashed in the Landsmeerderveld on their way back from a bombing raid on Genoa in Northern Italy. Sergeant Ian James Robertson and Sergeant Hugh Mclennan MacDonald, Pilot William Raymond Jones Brown and Sergeant Edward Fieldhouse, Sergeant Joseph Stewart Parry and Sergeant Alfred William Musgrave Chapman were all killed in the crash.

The war memorial in the Calkoenstraat commemorates the people of Landsmeer who lost their lives in the war, who were active in the resistance movement, or who were significant in some other way during the Second World War. During the past year, the municipality has focused its attention on the war monument in the Calkoenstraat. We deliberated whether a plaque bearing the names of war victims or resistance heroes should be added to the monument. This is a difficult choice, because it is never certain whether this will do justice to everyone, or whether it will spark a debate. In the end, we have decided to let their names live on in words. The text on the monument, "To all those who lost their lives in the liberation of our country", and the text on the plinth, "Their death calls for vigilance" articulates what we wished to express.

In order to draw up the most complete list of war victims possible, the municipality commissioned research from such organisations as the Netherlands Institute for War Records and the Waterlands Archives. The former examined the current list of war victims and resistance heroes for its legitimacy and completeness. They added six names of Jewish victims from Landsmeer, including the Kerkmeester family. The Waterlands Archives also researched fourteen names and added three Landsmeer war victims who died in concentration camps: Johannes Marinus Jansen, Wilhelmus Grondman and Johannes Eduard den Boer. It is extremely valuable to have an ever more complete picture of the resistance heroes and war victims who fought and died to give us back our continued freedom.

One of the names on this list is Wim van Acker. He is also the instigator behind the war monument in the Calkoenstraat, together with Dirk Bernard Goede. Wim van Acker was born on 7 July 1921 in Tuindorp-Oostzaan. When war broke out, he was told to report for the Arbeitseinsatz. Instead, with the help of the communist resistance in Den IJp, he went into hiding with Jan Edel and his wife, Griet Stroo. He stayed mainly in their crawlspace. In 1940-1945, Wim van Acker was part of the underground resistance and used his technical skills in the resistance group G.S.A. (Gewestelijke Sabotage Afdeling, the regional department of sabotage). He did so under his cover name, Charlie. As the most knowledgeable explosives expert in this resistance group, he committed various acts of sabotage and also managed to prove himself in the field of cracking safes and vaults. Through his actions, Wim helped many Jewish people and people in hiding to obtain blank identity cards and food stamps. Wim survived the fight against the German occupiers. To thank Jan and Griet for their fantastic care, he bought them a little house in Den IJp. Thus, friendship and freedom became inextricably linked.

To our great sorrow, not everyone lived to see the country liberated. Resistance heroes Jan Korver and Enje Timmer were both arrested for their underground activities and died in camp Neuengamme in Hamburg. Simon Lucas Lucaszn. Goede, a local resistance leader in Landsmeer, met the same fate in camp Neuengamme. And with them, there are many other war victims, such as Jacob de Vries, Hendrik Jacobus Kleen, Hilligje Mastenbroek (Dam victim) and Jan Simonszn. Goede (Dam victim), who should never be forgotten.

For these people, and for all other victims and heroes, I will lay wreaths at the war memorial in the Calkoenstraat and at the Vickers-Wellington monument in the Landsmeerderveld, on behalf of all of you sharing this day with me today. You are welcome to come to these monuments to take a moment to commemorate and pay your respects at any other time. However, I urge you to observe the current Covid measures if you do so. If you would prefer to lay virtual flowers at the two monuments in Landsmeer, you can do so via the website of the National Committee for 4 and 5 May. You can search the website for the monument where you wish to lay flowers. Once you have found the monument, you can select a flower and compose a message to be left at the monument.

I hope that, next year, we can stand here together again to commemorate and to lay flowers.