

Remarks on the occasion of the Commemoration Ceremony
for the crew of Wellington HE346, shot down at Holwert on 26 June 1943
by Dr Greg French, Australian Ambassador to the Kingdom of the Netherlands
Holwert, Noardeast-Fryslan, 29 August 2024

Thank you Mevrouw Didi Boskma,

Dear next of kin of the brave crew of Wellington HE346,

Meneer Commisaris Arno Brok,

Meneer boargemaster Johannes Kramer,

Charge d'Affaires of the UK, Mr Keith Allan,

Mevrouw Dykgraaf van Wetterskip Fryslan, Luzette Kroon

Plaatsvervangend Commandant Luchtstrijdkrachten General-majoor Robert Adang,
Commandant van Vliegbasis Leeuwaarden Commodore Marcel van Egmond

Dear representatives of all those who have contributed to recovering the brave men
of Wellington HE346,

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege to be with you all today – you next of kin, and all who are
contributing to this effort - to commemorate the crew of Wellington HE346.

For our part, I wish to warmly welcome all the next of kin from Australia and
Britain who have come to honour the memory of your family members - these brave
airmen. And I wish to thank from the bottom of our hearts all those here in Fryslan
and the Netherlands who are putting so much effort into respecting and
remembering the sacrifice of our fallen.

It may seem, at first glance, a little unlikely that we Australians, from the other
side of the world, should be coming together with you here today, to commemorate
an event that occurred more than eighty years ago. But I think we can explain it all
in just one word: freedom – vrijheid. We – together with you, our Dutch and our
British friends – are determined to cherish and maintain the precious freedom for
which our ancestors sacrificed so much.

Today, in commemorating the sacrifice of the crew of Wellington HE346:

- Australian Charles Alfred Mattress; and his British comrades-in-arms: Alfred Mortimer; John Peter Priestley; Norman Ronald Parry; and Thomas Ball;
- we are reaffirming our shared gratitude to these five men, and to all who fell for our freedom. And we are reaffirming that they did not lay down their lives in vain – that we still cherish and defend the freedom that they earned for us.

And this shared commitment has been a defining feature of the deep, strong and
diverse relationship between Australia and the Netherlands – a relationship that

goes back more than 400 years, to the first European contact with Australia through the Dutch navigator Willem Janszoon in 1606. This relationship is built on shared values and countless shared lives. These ties were tested and deepened by our shared pain and sacrifice in the Second World War.

Looking from opposite ends of the globe, we Australians and Dutch see the world in very similar terms. And the Dutch were among the first in Europe to articulate an understanding, reflected in the recent Netherlands and EU Indo-Pacific strategies, that the future of Europe, and the future of the Indo-Pacific, are intertwined.

- But in so many ways, this insight was nothing new for Australia or the Netherlands. It's why brave Australians like Charles Mair came from the other side of the world to fight and die here in the Netherlands for our common freedom. And it's why brave Dutch airmen like Lieutenant Colonel Everhardus Te Roller, commander of the Australian-based Royal Netherlands Airforce No. 18 Squadron, fought and died in June 1944 for our common freedom in the struggle against imperial Japan.

For indeed, during the Second World War, while many Australians died *here*, fighting for freedom in Europe, many Dutch in our part of the world died defending *Australia's* freedom, including:

- In the Battle of the Java Sea, in February 1942, when a combined Dutch-Australian-British-United States naval force tried valiantly, but ultimately unsuccessfully, to stop the Japanese invasion of Java.
- And in the brave service of two Royal Netherlands Airforce squadrons based in Australia in the Second World War; no. 18 squadron and no. 120 squadron.

Just as the monument here in Holwert states: "Wij zullen hen niet vergeten" – "Lest we forget", so shall we Australians never forget those brave Dutch men and women who helped defend Australia between 1941 and 1945. And their sacrifice is immortalised in the "Netherlands Australia Memorial" in our national capital, Canberra.

And in recent times the bonds we forged in the Second World War have been renewed and strengthened,

- not least through the shared challenge and sacrifice of serving side-by-side in Afghanistan,
- and in responding together in pursuing truth, justice, and accountability for the cruel downing of flight MH17, in which both our nations lost so many lives, and the tenth anniversary of which we commemorated on 17 July.
 - De ramp van MH17 was een vreselijke ervaring voor ons allemaal, en wij Australiërs hebben 38 mensenlevens verloren, maar wij kunnen ons geen betere partner voorstellen, om onze gemeenschappelijke waarden te ondersteunen en te beschermen, dan Nederland.

To conclude, in Flanders, not so far from here, an Australian grave from the First World War bears the following epitaph:

*Will some kind hand
in that far off land
place on his grave a flower for me?*

Today, our answer to this simple, poignant request is “yes” – we *will* place a flower in their memory. And may our answer always be “yes”.



Holwert, Netherlands



Canberra, Australia