

Dear relatives of the deceased crew members,

Dear ambassador of Australia,

Dear Defense attaché of Belgium and the Netherlands,

Dear deputy ambassador of the United Kingdom,

Dear deputy commander of the Air Force,

Dear Commander of Leeuwarden Air Base,

Dear King's Commissioner

Dear Dike count,

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

Today marks an extraordinary day. A day of profound significance for you, the relatives, as the aircraft once carrying your loved ones will be recovered after more than 81 years. This event removes the last physical vestige in our soil of the immense sacrifice made by them and your families.

It is also a significant day for the official representatives of the United Kingdom and Australia, with the retrieval of an aircraft from your military forces. It stands as solid evidence of the vast efforts and the steep price paid for victory, and consequently, our shared freedom.

For us Dutch, it is a notable day as well. Contrary to our instincts, we breached our main sea wall, and today, the purpose behind this action is revealed. We aim to provide a dignified final resting place for the men who brought the ultimate sacrifice for our liberty.

Moreover, it is an important day for the people of Holwert. The local committee has honoured the deceased crew members with profound respect every May the 4th, our national remembrance day, for years. The last ceremony, attended by hundreds of local people, demonstrated that even after 81 years, there is still immense respect, appreciation, and gratitude among our 'ordinary' citizens.

Remarkably, during this last commemoration, five geese flew past the monument in a subtle tribute, as if representing the five crew members who perished. It was a very moving moment.

Salvaging a bomber and its crew is a formidable challenge. It becomes particularly complex when the aircraft lies 10 to 15 meters deep in dense marine clay, even more so beneath a sea dike, a crucial flood defence. This results in a technically demanding operation and an administratively intricate process involving laws, regulations, permits, subsidies, and time constraints. Safety is paramount, and the dike must be restored before the storm season. A hell of a job. While it's impossible to acknowledge everyone involved, special gratitude is owed to the Fryslân Water Board. Their singular mission is our protection from the sea, and their positive actions were indispensable. My heartfelt thanks go out to them.

The National Program Aircraft Recovery of the Dutch government is a program to recover missing aircraft and airman. Those recoveries are very expensive, without the help of this program those recoveries like here in Holwert wouldn't be possible at all.

Regardless of the impetus for the bomber's retrieval, the most significant aspect for all concerned is the dignified interment of the crew at long last. The breach in the dike is also somehow emblematic of the void in the lives of the bereaved families present here today, those unable to attend or those who died in the time between the crash and today.

Hence, it is my sincere hope and desire that today, and with the recovery of the Lancaster and its crew, the profound gap in your lives and memories may somehow and somewhat begin to heal.

Thank you.