

REMARKS OF ARTHUR CHOTIN
MAY 24, 2014

Major General Van der Louw, Prime Minister Rutte, Commissioner Bovens, General Breedlove, Ambassador Broas, Congresswoman Morella, members of the American WWII Orphans Network (AWON), Ladies and Gentlemen, *Dames en Heren*.

In 1962 President John F. Kennedy, in response to a question from a reporter about the inequities of military service, famously told Americans "life isn't fair." But my family, and the families of the 10,022 men and women buried or remembered here, already knew. For my mother, that harsh statement became personal on November 3, 1945, months after the war in Europe had ended, when my father, delivering the paperwork that would begin the process of sending men in his unit, including him, back home, was killed when the jeep he was in collided with a truck.

Life isn't fair. And as my 60 new brothers and sisters from AWON who are here today know all too well, the effects of that unfairness impacts those of us left behind for our entire lives.

I never knew my father. He was sent overseas when I was ten weeks old and killed a month before my first birthday. For my entire life, my mother couldn't talk about him without crying. I didn't want to make her cry, so I didn't ask. But, even though I didn't know him I think of him almost every day; what he missed and what my mother and I missed. So here I am, 70 years old, more than twice the age of the father I never played catch with, never argued with, never even hugged, and the single thought in my mind today is that I hope he would be proud of me. Oh the power these dead have over those they left behind.

But for my family, and the families of the other soldiers buried and remembered here, there was a comfort because we learned about the incredible efforts made by the people of the Netherlands to adopt these graves. First the *BurgerComité Margraten* and more recently the *Stichting Adoptie Graven*, The Foundation for Adopting Graves.

What would cause a nation recovering from losses and trauma of their own to adopt the sons and daughters of another nation? And what would keep that commitment alive for all of these years, when the memory of that war has begun to fade? It speaks to the character of the Netherlands and its people that every single grave in this cemetery and virtually every single name on that wall has been adopted. It is a unique occurrence in the history of civilization. And it is deserving of recognition, and of thanks.

Yet I imagine that for many of the adopters, there is the question of why more families of these dead never visited the graves of their sons, their brothers, their husbands, their fathers. Traveling to Europe from the United States was very expensive in those days. Surviving widows suddenly found themselves single-parents, raising their fatherless children in many cases with the main bread winner no longer alive. Parents

were getting older and didn't travel and sisters and brothers were too young to come here on their own. But for my mother, although she never told me this directly, somewhere deep inside she held out the hope that one day there would be a knock at the door and she would learn that ... it had all been a big mistake. Coming here and seeing my father's grave would make it real and would destroy that dream.

She never came. She never remarried. She mourned him until the day she died. But in her sadness she always had a special place in her heart for the people of the Netherlands and for those who had adopted graves. She would have been so honored to meet members of the Adoption Committee, and Petra, Boy and Pim Naaijken who have adopted five graves here, including my fathers'. When she met Dutch people traveling in the United States she made a point of speaking with them and thanking them. And when I traveled here for the first time in 1974 she devoured the letters I wrote and the pictures I took.

So where does this lead? It leads to the fact that I, and the hundreds of thousands of natural born descendants of these 10,022 want you, their adopted descendants, to know how appreciated you are and how grateful we are to each and every one of you. You have made a positive difference in the lives of those these dead have left behind.

And so, *namens mijn vader*, on behalf of my father, S/Sgt Max Chotin, United States Army, serial number 32193094; *namens zijn vrouw*, on behalf of his wife, my mother, Sylvia Chotin, who if any part of life is fair is with my father today looking down on all of us; *namens zijn dochter in wet*, on behalf of his daughter-in-law, my wife, Betsy, who has joined me in mourning and missing my father since the day of our marriage; *namens zijn oudste kleinzoon*, on behalf of his eldest grandson, Matthew, who is named for my father; *namens Matthew's vrouw*, on behalf of Matthew's wife Sharon who this fall will give birth to his great grandchild; *namens zijn jongste kleinzoon*, on behalf of his youngest grandson, David, who, when he visited here for the first time, left a letter he had written to his grandfather telling him how thankful he was for his sacrifice and the sacrifice of the others buried here so that David and his generation could be free; *namens de leden van AWON*, on behalf of the members of AWON, many of whom, the Margraten Kids, have parents buried here; on all of their behalf I stand here today:

Door het maken van deze dode deel van uw familie, by making these dead part of your family, you have become part of our family. You have created a bond between us that will never be broken. So, from this day forward, from now until the end of time, *hartelijk bedank*, a heartfelt thank you. May the kindness and compassion you have shown them, and us, be returned to you many times over. We thank you, we salute you, we are forever grateful. *Bedankt*.