

Our remarkable soldiers are not forgotten

I invite you all to close your eyes and direct your minds to April 1945 and the last days of the Second World War. It is Easter morning in the town of Eibergen, in the province of Gelderland, in the country called the Netherlands. This town is located very close to the German border.

The country has been occupied by the Nazi's for 5 long years.

Distinguished family, friends and guest,

That morning was not like previous mornings. No-it was serene and quiet; something very unusual. As soon as my grandmother stepped outside her house, she knew that something was not quite right. After living under the domination of a foreign power for 5 extensive years, you learn to fear even subtle changes in the environment. Your senses are on high alert and you suspect everything in your surroundings. That was the reason why my grandmother had strictly forbidden my 4 uncles to leave the premises. But, as you know, young teenagers do not always listen to what Mama says. So they did not see any

harm in investigating a little further. As they looked around, they too felt that unusual that calmness that surrounded them. Despite the warning, 2 of them decided to go to town, a kilometer away!

As they were approaching, they could hear the people singing and dancing in the streets. That is when they learned, that Holland had been liberated from enemy occupation. Hastily, they returned home eager to announce the good news. But my grand grandmother refused to believe them and she punished the boys for disobeying her instead.

Similarly in 1998, when we experienced the ice storm in Granby, Quebec, we also had a difficult time believing that everything was over. It also took us a couple of hours to realize that power had been restored. Well, that Easter Sunday morning in 1945, it wasn't until early afternoon that the word got around that the "Tommy", in other words, the allies, were parading through town to announce the liberation of Holland. The Dutch were just starting to appreciate the deep meaning of that unusual Sunday morning silence.

That afternoon, every Dutch citizen in the area had gathered to celebrate at the festivities. They were there as the eye witnesses of all the heroic men and women that had given their lives to free their country.

The first soldiers to parade were the Americans. Their hair was freshly cut. Their beards were shaved. Their uniforms were spic and span spotless. Their black boots were as shiny as their guns.

Then came the English. They also had clean haircut, shaved beards, freshly cleaned and crisply ironed uniforms and polished boots.

Then, finally, came our Canadian and our Quebec soldiers. Their hair was long, so were their beards. Their uniforms as full of mud and dirt as their boots were. Showing by their very appearance, just how fierce the fighting had been in the last hours.

That is precisely when the Dutch people came to realize deeply in their soul who really had fought this war on their soil.

To this very day, if you visit Ottawa, many many tulip gardens are the living sign of how grateful Holland was and still is to the Canadian Nation for freeing their homeland. Even the Dutch Royalty was under the protection of Canada as Queen Juliana sheltered here and her daughter that became the next queen was born on Canadian soil. They were safe from the chaos and devastation happening in their homeland.

I invite you to go and visit one of the three Canadian cemeteries in Holland. You will see for yourself how this respect continues to be kept alive. Every tombstone, is the responsibility of a Dutch family. This is for perpetuity. If you should visit, I am confident that you will see a grandfather or a grandmother walking around the grounds and saying to their grandchildren, "I brought you here so that you never forget the ultimate sacrifice that these Canadian soldiers have made for the Dutch Motherland".

I heard this with my own ears when I visited the Cemetery dedicated solely to Canadian and Quebec soldiers, one of the three cemeteries that exist in Holland.

How many Canadian and Quebec soldiers have not come back with a Dutch bride in their arms? The Dutch add substantially to our Canadian mosaic. Just look at me. (Thumbs up)

In 1995, 50 years after the liberation, the Netherlands organized a homecoming for the Canadian and Quebec soldiers who had fought for their freedom. It was a remarkable gathering with emotions flying high and believe me when I say many memories resurfaced. The Dutch remembered those difficult war years and once again thanked their Canadian and Quebec liberators.

What I am describing to you now, has been transmitted to me by my mother who was a teenager at that moment in 1945. That is why I have such a deep and everlasting respect for this country Canada. I am so very thankful to

my parents who have chosen this country, this province, this region to live in.

(Kiss the ground!)

Our freedom my friends has a price. It is our duty that each and every one of us, never forget this. How many men and women still pay the ultimate price for freedom? Indeed Canadians and bQuebecers are known as peacekeepers throughout the world. I believe and I have faith that we will always stand up, have respect and pride in our flag and fight for this cause! FREEDOM!!

Thank you my fellow Canadians and Quebecers! I am forever grateful for your sacrifices.