

Mrs Van Aalten, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

I just had the honour to pay the respect of the people of the Kingdom of The Netherlands to the sacrifice of American heroes in foreign wars, by placing a wreath before the Tomb.

It is here at Arlington where we are gathered today to remember those who served, those who fought, and those who gave their lives for freedom.

It is here at Arlington that we remember those heroes and pray that no other heroes will ever have to die for us again. Here we dwell for the valor of others, here we honor the brave who rest in this cemetery and throughout the world.

It is here that my thoughts and prayers are foremost with you, Mrs Van Aalten. Here we remember your husband, the brave sergeant Alexander van Aalten, who gave his life in Afghanistan serving his country, striving for peace and helping his Dutch colleagues.

Alex van Aalten was a fine and although just twenty-one, a very experienced soldier. After his tour in Iraq he was deployed in Afghanistan as a sergeant with the 82nd Airborne 1-508 Parachute Infantry Regiment Delta Company. The famous Regiment that played a heroic part in the liberation of my country from World War II.

Van Aalten and his Dutch and British brothers in arms were involved in heavy and fierce fighting in operation Achilles. Their duty around Sangin was successful and coming to an end, when they were overtaken by disaster. Corporal Cor Strik from the Dutch Tiger Company stepped on a mine. The unit was in shock, it was their last day in the field. Van Aalten didn't hesitate and took two men to recover the body of his Dutch comrade. They did so. Just before they reached their unit again Alex also stepped on a mine. Two brave young soldiers – one Dutch and one American with Dutch ancestors – had lay down their lives for their country, for our freedom.

Two young lives taken in a country far away. Van Aalten loved his wife, his parents, his sister, his brother, his colleagues, his country and the Lord. He will be missed deeply. We are greatly indebted by his courage. We owe Alex van Aalten much, but first of all, we owe him a promise: Just as he did not forget his fallen Dutch brother in arms, we must never forget as well.

Here at Arlington we etch those promises in our hearts. We must always remember that peace is fragile, that peace needs constant vigilance. We owe brave soldiers like Alex van Aalten and Cor Strik to look at the world with a steady gaze and, if needed, toughness, knowing that we have challenges and opponents in this world. The only way to meet them and to meet the peace is by staying strong. With our actions we must strive to keep faith with them and with the vision that led them to battle and to final sacrifice.

Mrs Van Aalten, ladies and gentlemen, allow me a prayer.

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
In verdant pastures he gives me repose;
Beside restful waters he leads me;
he refreshes my soul.
He guides me in right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk in the dark valley
I fear no evil; for you are at my side
With your rod and your staff
that give me courage.

You spread the table before me
in the sight of my foes;
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Only goodness and kindness follow me
all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
for years to come.

Thank you, I give the floor to my aide de camp, who will read the order for the military honor.

* *New American Bible*