

Mayor of Westkapelle, excellencies, official representatives of our allied nations, veterans, ladies and gentlemen. Your presence here today is highly appreciated and means a lot to us. Today we commemorate the sacrifices of the men of number Two Dutch troop and their British, Belgian, French and Norwegian comrades from number 4 Commando during operation Infatuate, the amphibious assault on Walcheren, here at Westkapelle.

In August 1944, the Allies from Normandy managed to advance northwards. The speed of the Allied advance was so great that the supplies could not keep up. The advance stopped at the beginning of September. The Allied forces urgently needed a supply port. Antwerp was the most logical choice.

Crucial to the success of the Allied advance into Germany was the need to shorten the ever stretching supply lines, which, with the Germans still holding onto the Channel ports, were still dependent on the Normandy ports. Antwerp was of even greater use than Channel ports, because of its very much larger capacity.

The big problem was that this port could not be used because the Germans controlled the Scheldt mouth to the port. The Germans were aware of the importance of Antwerp and had strongly strengthened their positions around the Westerschelde. This situation led to what became known as the Battle of the Scheldt.

Walcheren was heavily defended by elements of the German 15th Army, garrisoned by approximately 10,000 troops. Most of these troops occupied an impressive array of fixed concrete defences, part of the so called Atlantic Wall, protected along the shoreline by extensive minefields and beach obstacles intended to defeat an amphibious landing. The coastal batteries, which dominated the approaches to the island, were equipped with a formidable array of anti-aircraft and large-caliber (150 mm or greater) coastal defence guns, located on a rim of high sand dunes and massive dykes surrounding Walcheren.

The highly amphibious plan for Operation Infatuate consisted of an opposed amphibious landing by three Commandos, reinforced by No.4 troop, No.5 troop and No.10 Interallied Commando. No.41 Commando landed on RED BEACH and would clear Westkapelle and then move northwards along the dyke, rolling up the German defences, while No.47 Commando and No.48 Commando landed on WHITE and GREEN BEACH and advanced southwards to Flushing (or in Dutch – VLISSINGEN), clearing coastal forts built in the belt of high dunes.

Simultaneously No.4 Commando, commanded by LtCol Dawson, would cross by landing craft from Breskens and launch an assault on Flushing from the southern side of the island, with 155th Infantry Brigade following in support.

25 Dutch commandos belonging to No.2 Dutch Troop and split into two detachments were part of Operation Infatuate. 11 Dutch

commandos under the command of First Lieutenant de Ruiter landed at UNCLE BEACH. 14 Dutch commandos led by Captain Linzel were deployed at Westkapelle. A total of 7 Dutch commandos were wounded in these operations. Their courage, dedication, and sacrifice are characteristic for these men.

This courage and sacrifice are witnessed from eyewitness accounts. Captain Linzel recorded: There we were, in the suite of a house occupied by us. The remainders of Number Two Dutch Troop that had just returned from the heavy fighting in the context of Operation Market Garden. During these battles, commandos were wounded or were still missing and one of our comrades was killed at Oosterbeek. Through a heavy mist of cigarette smoke, tired eyes looked out of their faces. Well men, the choice is yours. You have a right to rest, just as much as the people of the airborne troops. Or you can participate in a new and this time a real commando operation on the coast of our country. For a few moments there is a deep silence. The Dutch commandos look thoughtfully ahead. Until one of them took a deep breath and spoke the words: we always can rest... The men of number Two Dutch Troop unanimously decided to participate voluntarily in this dangerous operation.

Intensive training was undertaken near Ostend during October, using German gun emplacements, fortifications and blockhouses in the area similar to those on Walcheren, to prepare the troops and to instruct them in how to overcome German coastal

fortifications.

A succession of attacks by RAF bomber Command, meanwhile, softened up the defences of Walcheren by breaching the dykes that ringed the island at Westkappelle, Veere and on the either side of Flushing, and flooded the low-lying central area. This had the effect of turning the central area into a large lagoon and thereby limiting Germans' freedom of manoeuvre to areas above water level, and denying them use of some defensive positions.

Let me address an eyewitness quote:

The advance had been hard. The weather had broken up from the third day, with a blowing wind. The ground was covered with mines and progress had been slow, and deadly.....

After a short time, we had left the island, and on our arrival at Ostend, we presented the classic sight of soldiers returning from the front. Our clothes stiffened by dry mud which was glued to them, we bent under the load of our rucksacks filled with many memories....

Our eyelids were reddened through lack of sleep. In spite of our tiredness, we had the feeling of having accomplished something.

Imagine yourself Soldiers who were killed were buried on the side of the road and on fields. Each grave was marked with a wooden cross, helmet and nametag.... Imagine.... How would that be ??? Your father, brother, sister, lover is far from home ... sacrifices himself to contribute to peace, he or she is killed ... You can imagine that the grief of the relatives is enormous,

especially if your relation is committed to bring peace that is not immediately tangible for yourself ... after all, the war was far from home for most of these people

The end of operation Infatuate came with the surrender of the remainder of the German garrison. Although ultimately successful, it had been a stern test to the Commandos. The opposed amphibious assault, the strengths of the German fixed defences and the close nature of the ensuing fighting along the rim of the island were heavy. By the end of the fighting No.4 Commando Brigade had lost 103 killed, 325 wounded and 68 missing during 8 days of intensive fighting. By the end of the month, after the Scheldt and port facilities had been swept of mines, the port of Antwerp opened for traffic, supporting operations throughout North-West Europe.

Let me conclude this speech.

But before I do so, I want you to remind that today peace and freedom cannot be taken for granted.

Every day, soldiers and policemen are committed to contribute to peace and freedom, something that is very valuable to all of us, something that we must protect at all times. The people who do that deserve our respect and gratitude! They are our heroes, they make day to day life possible to be normal...

We do that today..... they did it 75 years ago!