It is July 20, 1942. It's the middle of summer, but a gray veil lies over the Netherlands: our continent and our country are suffering under the occupation and horrors of World War II.

To turn the tide, Lancaster bombers have been deployed since that year. Aircrafts of this type eventually carried out more than one hundred and fifty thousand (156,308) missions and dropped more than six hundred thousand (604,612) tons of bombs. That those missions were all dangerous is evidenced in part by the fact that most Lancasters died before reaching the fifty-five-flight mark. A total of 6,500 (sixty-five hundred) aircrafts of various types were lost above the Netherlands during World War II.

These numbers are hard to grasp. Abstract data, however, there are tangible stories and faces behind these numbers. Of countless brave people who dedicated themselves to the liberation of occupied territory. Among other things, by damaging the enemy during nighttime bombing raids on German cities and industry. In particular, Lancaster bombers were used for this purpose. The planes had seven crew members: a pilot, engineer, bombardier, radio operator, navigator and two gunners.

On the evening of July 20, 1944, a total of 139 (one hundred thirty nine) of these Lancaster bombers took off from various bases in England to attack targets just across the border in Germany. One of these is a plane nicknamed Popeye, in which the befriended crew members departed for their 27th flight.

It is a flight that normally takes a four hours round trip. A flight that is dark, cold and uncomfortable every time. A flight that also causes uncertainty each time.  
\* Uncertainty about the enemy, ready to literally shoot you out of the sky.   
\* Uncertainty about the fate of you and your comrades.  
\* Uncertainty about what that means for your loved ones back home.  
That uncertainty gets a gruesome follow-up this night. The flight is not completed, but ends in Papendrecht.

Thanks to the efforts of all those people who faced such uncertainties, the Netherlands are able to celebrate next year that we were freed from the yoke of occupation eighty years ago. The period of peace that followed seems almost natural to us. But if we look at world history, it turns out to be an exception. Unfortunately, developments in Ukraine also make that crystal clear once again. Because there and in other places in the world - which receive less attention in the media - violence and conflict make victims every day.

Do we accept this? Or do we remain committed to innocent civilians? As difficult as it keeps proving to be, my answer is that we must continue our efforts to learn from history. That we continue to call attention to the plight of all those people who must survive unwillingly in conditions that are filled with violence.

I am proud that after the liberation in 1945, many Papendrechters took it as a matter of course to keep paying attention to the brave crew of the Popeye. That they continue to honor and remember them. That they maintain very respectful and valuable contacts with the families involved and shape other activities.

For example, since 1995 - the year we commemorated 50 years of liberation - an annual floral tribute at the graves of the Popeye crew. Such as involvement in investigations in 2001 and in the salvage in 2002 of the wreckage because of proposed housing development in the Oostpolder. The 2004 unveiling of the monument in Lancaster Square with relatives. The unveiling in 2015 of the information board at the monument with Linda Kennedy (daughter of navigator Edward John Line). In 2023 when Lancaster Square was renovated. And yesterday - Saturday, July 20, 2024 - the unveiling of an information board at the war graves.

Organizing today's commemoration and inviting the relatives was also an initiative of the working group Lancaster Popeye of Foundation Dorpsbehoud Papendrecht. It requires a lot of effort and energy from you on many fronts. We are pleased with this effort. Thanks to these activities you keep the crew members and their contributions to the end of the Second World War alive in our memory. So that, especially at times like today, we can reflect on the situation in the world and in our private environment and the role we ourselves want to play in it. Many thanks for that!

With those thoughts, we salute:

the Australian airmen:

* Flight sergeant Charles Alfred Barlow,  R.A.A.F, 19 years old.
* Flying Officer Colin Mervyn Clarey, R.A.A.F., 30 years old.

And the English airmen:

* Sergeant Douglas Hancock, Wireless Operator, R.A.F., 20 years old.
* Flight Sergeant Samuel Edward Kirkland, Air Bomber, R.A.F., 25 years old.
* Sergeant Edward John Line, Navigator, R.A.F., 21 years old.
* Sergeant Herbert Charles Luton, Flight Engineer, R.A.F., 25 years old.
* Sergeant Arthur Walter Middleton, Air Gunner, R.A.F., 21 years old.

Margreet van Driel,

Mayor of Papendrecht.