Goede middag, dames en heren Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen, Mayor Van Driel and other guests.

As many of you know I am the grandson of Flying Officer Colin Clarey and I’m honoured to speak here on behalf of the all the families, friends and relatives of the crew of the Lancaster “Popeye”. I have not seen my UK based cousins since I was last here 20 years ago. I’m here with my mum Heather, my two sisters Trudi and Belinda, her husband Paul and son Tyler all from Australia, as well as my cousins from the UK Anthony, Penny and Peter Simpson and his son Charlie. We are joined by the relatives of Sgt Edward Line, his daughter Linda Kennedy, her daughter Kelly Gledhill and her brother Peter Child who have travelled from Canada, also Sgt Arthur Middletons grandniece Karen Middleton and her Partner James Ricketts also from the United Kingdom. It has been a real pleasure to spend these few days together and come together for this significant commemoration and reunion.

As much as I was named after my grandfather Colin Clarey I was in fact named after both of my grandfathers who each served in world war two. Flying Officer Colin Clarey, who as we know gave his life along with his crew 80 years ago today on his then 27th operational flight during the war. But also my other grandfather, Derek White, my mother’s father who was a Rat of Tobruk and served in the 2/12th Australian infantry regiment. Derek survived the war with the loss of two fingers and shrapnel in his left hip when an enemy hand grenade landed in front of him. He placed his Thompson sub machine gun on the grenade as it exploded, saving his own life. However he also lost many mates. I had a long and rich relationship with him as he lived until he was 88 years old. I never got to meet or know my other grandfather Colin, who lost his life here at the age of 30.

My father Peter who visited his father Colin’s grave here during the 50th anniversary commemoration in 1994 and visited again soon after in 1996 during the May Day silent march. He too became a pilot, served in the Royal Australian Airforce as an instructor, then flew commercially for Qantas for any years. He too also never got to know his father, Colin. This absence, impacted his, mine and all of our lives in various unseen ways. A father without a father can be unsure how to father a child. I was given everything I needed as a child, I was never abused or mistreated, but my father did not have a template of fathering (due to his fathers absence) so sometimes he used his military training as kind of a default model for fathering. It’s not a great model for raising a gentle natured sensitive child. I wished it wasn’t that way sometimes, but I know it was what he had and it has been a small burden compared to the immeasurable lost experienced by the parents, siblings, wife’s, relatives and close friends of the crew. I share this reflection simply to demonstrate how the loss of these seven lives here 80 years ago still touches many of us here on a personal level.

I had the pleasure to be here for the opening of this beautiful memorial with my mum, cousins and their mum Judy, 20 years ago in 2004. That time was special as it marked the culmination of the incredible salvage operation of the aircraft Lancaster “Popeye” by the Dutch Royal Airforce which we had followed with real interest. It is incredibly touching and special for all of us to be here and to be back here now, to rekindle these connections with you all and experience firsthand the incredible ongoing efforts and commitment of the Foundation and you all to keeping the memory of our family members sacrifice alive. During that visit 20 years ago, I had the memorable experience of meeting and talking with Arend Versteeg, who had himself witnessed the bomber Lancaster "Popeye" ablaze just before it crashed, and shared with me how he believed it had steered itself away from the township in its final moments. A final act of heroism, likely by the pilot Colin, amidst its final pludge, trying to return home from what was to be its final operation in Germany. These recollections brought to life the tragic events of that night and deepened my understanding of the sacrifices made by the crew and servicemen in general during that war.

Over the past 80 years there has been much connection and correspondence between members of the early Committee, the Lancaster Popeye Foundation and the families of the crew. Many connections, friendships and moments have been made and shared. More have been made these past three days.

Together, a tapestry of remembrance has been patiently woven that truly honours us, the crew and all involved. This ongoing dialogue has provided solace and a sense of connection to us, the families, friends and the next of kin.

To that, and to you, the people of Papendrecht, all of you here today and all the past and current members of the Lancaster Popeye Committee and Foundation, words cannot adequately express our gratitude for your unwavering commitment to keeping the memory of our loved ones alive. The efforts especially of the Lancaster "Popeye" Foundation have ensured that the heroism and sacrifice of my grandfather and the entire crew have never been forgotten.

A special mention must be made to Peter Jan Van Der Giessen, Margré Van Wijngaarden and Erwin Van Wijngaarden who have put together such a thoughtful and engaging remembrance program and generous camaraderie over the past three days. We have shared many laughs and tears with you all and it’s great to be back here and reconnect properly. The tyranny of distance is in this moment banished, and in its place is kindness, connection and friendship. We are all grateful for that. Also, special thanks to Peter from the cemetery for his tender care of the graves sites. As well as thanks to Mario, Theo and Gert who worked with others to put together the tremendous and touching Lancaster exhibition for everyone to experience at the museum. And a quick mention to Margit and Margré for opening up their homes to us and feeding us a delicious meal the last two evenings.

You all have preserved the crews memory and story with years of effort, dignity and respect. Allowing us and future generations to not only remember them and their sacrifice, but also the profound cost of war and more importantly the enduring value of peace. Your efforts and this place unites us, bridging generations and counties and binding us through shared memories and the enduring spirit and sacrifices of our ancestors.

Papendrecht’s and the Netherland’s gratitude and remembrance over these 80 years remains a testament to the enduring bond between our nations.

So on behalf of my family, Sgt Ted Lines family, Arthur Middletons family and all other present and not present descendants and connections of the crew members, I extend our deepest and sincere thanks to each and every one of you. Your kindness, your remembrance, and your dedication mean more to us than these words can convey. You’re a bloody good bunch of “Ertepellers!”

Wij zullen hen steeds blijven herdenken “We shall always remember them” Thank you.

Colin Clarey (son of Peter, grandson of Colin Clarey).