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ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIBERATION OF GENDRINGEN, THE NETHERLANDS

Statement by:
The Honourable Bev Busson

Wednesday, March 30, 2022

THE SENATE

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Hon. Bev Busson: Honourable senators, I rise today to mark this date of March 30, the anniversary of the liberation of a small town in the Dutch province of Gelderland called Gendringen. The liberation of the Netherlands is one of the best-known chapters in Canadian military history, and the Canadians' fight to free the Dutch played an integral role in winning the Second World War.

In March 1945, the allies advanced towards Germany through the Netherlands. The 16th Canadian Infantry Brigade was ordered to establish a footing in an advance through Netterden, Wieken, and Gendringen in the Netherlands. These towns were liberated on March 30, 1945, by a number of regiments including the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada. It was a logistically complex and fierce battle that claimed the lives of many innocent Dutch civilians and 25 brave, young Canadians. And as the Canadians proved victorious, the appreciation shown by the townspeople was overwhelming.

The joyful townfolk in the area strung their national flags from balconies, in the streets and on public buildings. They wore the Dutch symbol of freedom — the colour orange. There were orange-coloured rosettes on their lapels and in their hair. They clapped and cheered as the Canadian troops passed by. A major who was a part of the liberation commented:

The civilian population were my worst opposition. They're opposing my advance, stopping my men to kiss them and offer them all kind of souvenirs.

One soldier who was not at this victory parade was Einar Victor Isfeld from Langruth, Manitoba. This 30-year-old soldier, recently married with a very young son, was gravely wounded in action during this battle and passed away on April 6. The war in Europe ended a month later. The Netherlands was under Nazi occupation for five years. On May 6 of this year, in coordination with the National Remembrance Day in the Netherlands, his son, Dennis Victor Isfeld, his grandson Derek and his great-grandson Tyler, along with their families, will be present at a ceremony to unveil a monument to honour the sacrifice of these brave young men on behalf of Canada.

The Canadians and the Dutch have formed an inseparable bond, born by blood, compelled by duty and honour and cemented by boundless appreciation.

As we witness the war in Ukraine, it is now even more important to remember not to take our freedom for granted and to take the time to recognize and celebrate what it means to live in a free society.

March 30, today, is that day for the family of Einar Victor Isfeld, who now live in British Columbia, and for the families from Gendringen. Together, we will remember; together, we will never forget.

Thank you. Meegwetch.
