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## 70 Years Since the Liberation of the Netherlands From Memory to Remembrance

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CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM

# 70 Years Since the Liberation of the Netherlands

## From Memory to Remembrance

H. E. CEES KOLE

Introduction by Andrew Burtch, Canadian War Museum.

*On 16 October 2014, the Canadian War Museum partnered with the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to host the first in the Embassy's national series of lectures "From Memory to Remembrance" in the Museum's Barney Danson Theatre. The Embassy launched the series in the fall of 2014, with subsequent events in February and April 2015, with Canadian and Dutch scholars helping the audience to follow the Canadian military campaign from the Battle of the Scheldt to the German capitulation at Wageningen on 5 May 1945. Attended by His Excellency Governor General David Johnston, the Ottawa event featured Terry Copp, Wilfrid Laurier University, who lectured on how the Canadians' major engagements in the Scheldt Battle unfolded, and Ben Schoenmaker of the University of Leiden and Netherlands Institute of Military History, who spoke to the Dutch perspective of the 1944-1945 battles and views of the liberating forces. Dean Oliver, Director of Research at the Canadian Museum of History moderated. On 26 February 2015, the University of Calgary hosted the second instalment of the series, moderated by David Bercuson and featuring Canadian historian Mark Zuehlke and Erwin van Loo, Senior Research Fellow at the Dutch Institute for Military History. The final instalment in the series took place in Fredericton on 1 April 2015, in partnership with the Gregg Centre for the Study of War and Society, and featured the Centre's Deputy Director, Lee Windsor, and Lieutenant-Colonel Wouter Hagemeijer, Assistant Professor at the Netherlands Defence Academy. The event was moderated by Marc Milner, the Gregg Centre's director.*

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*His Excellency Cees Kole, Ambassador of the Netherlands to Canada, opened the first event in the series Ambassador Kole joined the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1984. Before his posting to Ottawa in 2013, he served in diplomatic postings in Warsaw, Brussels, Paris, and as ambassador to Iran. The ambassador's speech opening the From Memory to Remembrance series offers some interesting insights into the interplay between lived experiences, history, and remembrance, as well as highlighting the many connections between Canada and the Netherlands, which the presenters in the series further underlined. The speech is reproduced in full below.*

**Y**OUR EXCELLENCY Governor General [David] Johnston, Ambassadors, Members of Parliament, [Brigadier] General [Kevin] Cotten, representing the Chief of the Defence Staff of Canada, Air Commodore [Ralph] Reefman, representing the Chief of the Defence Staff of the Netherlands, veterans, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, cadets and students:

Today we are in October 2014. We live in peace. Seventy years ago you were also in October, but were at war. The liberation of the Netherlands had started a month earlier when the first Allied troops crossed into our country from Belgium. We remember Operation Market Garden, with Canadian, US, British and Polish soldiers fighting the occupying Nazi forces. Their crossing of the border in September [1944] gave the Dutch tremendous hope. Regretfully, with the tragic setback suffered at the end of that month at Arnhem, this hope fizzled out. A severe winter awaited all of them.

The I Canadian Corps moved north to the port of Antwerp, fighting through difficult circumstances. The liberation of this city did not include the surrounding area, and one of the most important operations of the war was about to begin on this day seventy years ago.

When I just said we and you, I mean us. It is only the passage of time and the circumstances of war and peace that separate us. In our minds and hearts, there is nothing that separates us. We are deeply grateful to our brave liberators. Many of them had to pay the ultimate price for our freedom. We feel truly honoured that some of our veterans could make it here today and be part of this occasion.

From where you sit, not all of you may be able to see him [in the audience], but do know that [Lieutenant-] General Richard Rohmer landed on time this morning. He always landed on time with his Mustang seventy years ago in order to hurry his aerial photographs



Ambassador Cees Kohl. [Image courtesy of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands]

to the processing lab. From the Operations Record Book of 430 Squadron on 18 October: Venlo / visibility 25 miles. General, you saw the Netherlands from many angles. You once shared some of your memories with me. Richard, your Record Book will remain open, as you are presently an advisor to the Canadian participants in the May 2015 celebrations. I bet, General, that this sortie is one you anticipate with pleasure!

The title of our lecture series is *From Memory to Remembrance*. These two concepts can't function without a third, which is history. In a responsible society, we don't want to be cut off from the past. This is especially true if the past is shared. That is why we appreciate our partnerships with the Canadian War Museum.

Generally speaking, it is quite a task to get history right. Soldiers face the fog of war. Historians often face the fog of dust, time, misinterpretations, partial truths and sometimes outright lies. Yet, it is crucial that history be pursued. History stands tall in the middle between memory and remembrance. Memory exists in the first person. It is by definition personal. Unfortunately, all that is personal is finite. When memories fade, remembrance needs the template of history. However, neither history nor the remembrance it supports is a purpose in itself. We must learn from them. We must not look away from the brutality and cruelty of the occupation. We must not become indifferent about the heroism of allied soldiers, led of course



A 'From Memory to Remembrance' Lecture at the Canadian War Museum's Barney Danson Theatre, 2015. [Image courtesy of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands]

by the Canadians. History should educate us on the causes of war and the conditions of peace.

We have the duty to remember and to pass on these experiences and stories to future generations, defying the challenge of complacency and indifference. Our principal tools in this effort are attention and more education. We must now take the time to reflect on our past and make a better future, as peace is always fragile.<sup>1</sup>

Seventy years is a long time, but our gratitude to those courageous Canadian soldiers has lasted and will be renewed with every new generation. Our friendship has evolved and grown stronger over the years. We share the same fundamental values of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Together, we promote free trade and support the creation of sustainable, innovative economies. Inspired by our liberators we have a duty to stay the course.

Your Excellency, Governor General Johnston, it is truly a great honour to present you with the first of our special-edition lapel pins. The pin commemorates the seventieth anniversary of Canada's pivotal

<sup>1</sup> Original text delivered in French: *Nous avons le devoir de nous souvenir et aussi celui de transmettre nos expériences et témoignages aux prochaines générations. Nos principaux adversaires aujourd'hui sont la complaisance ainsi que l'indifférence. Les meilleurs outils pour notre défense sont l'attention et plus encore l'éducation. Nous devons désormais prendre le temps de réfléchir à notre passé et façonner ensemble un meilleur avenir. La paix est toujours fragile.*

role in the liberation of the Netherlands, and as such, this small token has great significance for many people in both our countries. THANK YOU, CANADA!



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**His Excellency Cees Kole** served as Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Canada from 2013 to 2016.