

**Speech by HRH the Grand Duke on the occasion of the commemoration of the
75th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge at the American Military Cemetery in
Hamm**

16th of December, 2019

Only the spoken word prevails

Your Majesties,

Mr. President of the Republic of Poland,

Madam Speaker,

Mr. Secretary of Defense,

Dear veterans,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with **deep emotion** that I address you today **as we are gathered here** to commemorate the 75th anniversary of one of the greatest military battles of the Second World War.

As exceptional as the presence of the veterans **is**, **as prestigious as** our distinguished guests **are**, it is the **solemnity of this cemetery** that affects us most. We are humbled by this place of contemplation, silence, remembrance, and prayer.

The Hamm American Military Cemetery, entrusted to the care of the United States Government, **will forever remain a sanctuary** for my country. It symbolises the fight for our independence as a free nation and is therefore part of our identity.

The brave soldiers who found their last resting place here, next to **"their"** general, General Patton, the liberator of Luxembourg, sacrificed their lives **not just for their homeland, but for the freedom of our countries**, for democracy and the rule of law.

We are indebted and eternally grateful to them. They embody what President Franklin Roosevelt described as fighters for "all humanity, **not for one generation, but for all generations**".

75 years ago, when Nazi troops launched a **terrible offensive** in an attempt to get to Antwerp and divide the Allied troops, a wave of destruction struck the Belgian and the Luxembourg Ardennes.

The battle gave rise to **exceptional** bravery:

- the heroic resistance of the 28th American Infantry Division in Luxembourg, which **decisively** delayed the advance of the enemy during the first few days;
- the **endurance and grit** of the soldiers under extreme weather conditions as cold as Siberia;
- the **leadership** of General Patton, who with his third army saved Bastogne thanks to his previous knowledge of the terrain from World War I.

What a **terrible price was paid by all!** Tens of thousands casualties were counted on both the Allied and German sides, more than **600 civilians** died on Luxembourg territory and more than 50% of our villages and towns were destroyed. The human and material damage was enormous.

The Battle of the Bulge was a **decisive moment** before the total collapse of the Nazi regime. It was "**the greatest American battle of the Second World War**", as Winston Churchill called it, but it remains first and foremost a **tragedy**...

To you, dear veterans who have made a long journey to be here today, I would like to express on behalf of the people of Luxembourg **my greatest respect, my sincere admiration and my deep gratitude.**

In the course of your life, you will certainly have experienced **many happy** and less happy events, but the memory of those months spent with your comrades defending, **ultimately, a certain idea of humanity** will stay with you forever.

You mourn your brothers in arms as you think back to those dreadful moments.

Your outstanding service has been a source of inspiration for generations of men and women. We **commend** you for your bravery and loyalty, which have made you the **best ambassadors of an America fighting for freedom and human rights.**

Today, it is **up to all of us** to make sure that those who have given their lives for a higher cause will never be forgotten. It is up to our generation, who have enjoyed freedoms and peace, to pass on the torch of remembrance to the next generation. It is our **responsibility not** to fail in this duty.

If so many countries are represented here today, it is also to celebrate a story of reconciliation.

In addition to the decisive role of the United States of America, we salute the allied countries in this conflict: the United Kingdom, France, Poland, Canada, the Netherlands and Belgium.

We spare a **special** thought for the great sacrifices made by the Russian people.

Above all, we are deeply moved that Germany, the enemy of yesterday, has become the close friend of today.

Are human beings capable of learning from their mistakes? **I would say yes under certain conditions-** if we are able to keep the memory alive and find it in our hearts to forgive.

I believe this is what the cemetery in Hamm invites us to do and what makes this place so unique.

Thank you.