Ambassador of the United States of America the honorable Ms. Elizabeth Richard, force commander Unifil major general Stefano del Col, Unifil representative lieutenant colonel Chand, honored guests,

My name is Bart Hetebrij. I am the chaplain of this group of veterans and I would like to extend my thanks to you ambassador for accepting and hosting the Dutch UNIFIL veterans in April last year. The opportunity to honor and commemorate our fallen US marines comrades on the premises of the United States Embassy was truly impressive. On behalf of this year’s group of veterans I want to say that we again are pleasantly surprised with this welcome reception and the effort you put in.

For us, The Netherlands, 2019 is a special year. It marks the start of the contribution of our soldiers to UNIFIL 40 years ago. And for our UNIFIL veterans, who served in Lebanon between 1979 and 1985 it is a privilege to stand here and honor the US soldiers, our brothers, who gave their life in the service of peace. Ambassador thank you for making this possible.

We The Dutch have a long standing relation with the Americans.

Most of us remember the stories our fathers told us about the young American soldiers who were enlisted to liberate the Netherlands in 1944 and 1945.

Sometimes our fathers took us to a US war cemetery in the Netherlands, Belgium, or France and taught us never to forget the sacrifices made by these young men and their families back home.

Our fathers inspired us with their stories about brave young American servicemen, as we try to do with our children today.

Our fathers did not hesitate when we asked them, at the age of 18, to grant us permission to join the Dutch army as conscripts and to voluntary go on mission to Lebanon.

Now Nathaly and her cousin Chaden will read a poem in English and Dutch.

1983 Was a disaster year,

There was the attack on the American embassy in Beirut that took place on April the eighteenth, 1983 at 1 pm. When a truck with more than nine hundred kilos of explosives exploded just before the embassy building. More than sixty people were killed, mostly staff members of the embassy and American marines.

On October twenty-three, 1983 there was the attack on the American barracks in Beirut. Two trucks loaded with explosives drove into barracks where American and French soldiers of the international peacekeeping force were stationed.

Corporal Jan Holwerda, one of our group members present here today, was also present that day in the headquarters of the International Military Police. Although the distance was ten kilometers he heard the explosion. Soon he got the news that an building of the American marines was hit and later another message arrived that the French were also hit by the terrorist attack. The American building was in the vicinity of the airport.

He arrived there within the hour. Rescue workers were already busy trying to save people. Unfortunately very few people came out of the rubble alive. Many torn bodies were salvaged.

A hangar was soon set up as a mortuary. Human remains were put in body bags. A hospital ship off the coast was dealing with the wounded who were evacuated by helicopter. It was a well-organized operation within a very chaotic situation. The rescuers spent more than two weeks trying to recover the last bodies.

I asked him if this has impacted his life. He responded “Yes, very much so because I was a marine myself and even trained with my American comrades a long time ago in Porto Rico. I feel connected to their fate and remember them every year on the 23rd of October”.

When I look at the faces of our veterans the words of our fathers appear in my mind again, “never to forget the sacrifices made by these young men and their families back home.”

241 American military personnel and 58 French paratroopers, lost their lives in this horrible attack. Let us remember and commemorate these soldiers and the sacrifice they made now with one minute of silence.

National anthems

Placing the wreath

Ambassador Richard, general Stefano del Col, lieutenant colonel Chand, honored guests, your presence here today and the words spoken are making this ceremony truly meaningful to us. Thank you all.

Finally, I would again like to express my gratitude for an unforgettable commemoration ceremony on behalf of our foundation and the Dutch UNIFIL Veterans.

Please know that all our brothers will not be forgotten for “They came in Peace”.