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Story by Maj. Nicholas Chopp

21st Theater Sustainment Command

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This speech was delivered by Maj. Nicholas M. Chopp, Director of Public Affairs for 21st Theater Sustainment Command at the John R. Towle Ceremony in Oosterhout, Netherlands, part of Operation Market Garden 2026 Commemorations on Sept. 21th, 2026.

Goedenavond, geachte gasten, dames en heren.

Good evening, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Please excuse me for continuing in English, because as you can probably tell I just exhausted all my Dutch, and I must properly honor who we are here today to remember.

We are gathered here tonight, on September twenty-first, because eighty-two years ago a 19-year-old American Soldier fought and died near this place. His name was John Roderick Towle.

Towle grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, entered the Army in 1943, volunteered for the airborne, and served as a bazooka gunner with Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division. By the time he arrived in the Netherlands for Operation Market Garden, he had already fought in North Africa and Italy. The fighting around Nijmegen was especially hard. On September 20, paratroopers of the 504th crossed the Waal River in small canvas assault boats under intense German fire, establishing a bridgehead on the north side of the river and helping seize the bridges at Nijmegen. Securing those bridges did not end the battle – German forces immediately began trying to destroy the bridgehead and stop the Allied advance.

On September 21, German infantry supported by two tanks and a half-track attacked the sector near Oosterhout where Towle's company was fighting.

Towle saw the armored vehicles moving against his unit and left his position with his bazooka. He crossed roughly 200 yards of exposed ground under enemy fire, alone, engaged both tanks, and hit them hard enough to force them to withdraw. He then fired on a house the Germans were using as a strongpoint.

He returned for ammunition and went forward – again, alone – moving another 125 yards to get into position against the half-track. As he knelt with his rocket launcher and prepared to fire, a German mortar round struck and killed him.

John Towle was 19 years old. He would have turned 20 less than a month later.

The Army posthumously awarded him the Medal of Honor for what he did here. The citation credits his actions with halting the German counterattack and protecting the lives of the Soldiers fighting alongside him. His parents received his medal at Fort Knox in March 1945.

Now we know the facts that tell us what John Towle did. But what you, the people of Oosterhout, have done since then is just as important to his story.

Towle returned to the United States after the war and is buried in his hometown of Cleveland, but the people of Oosterhout never allowed his connection to this place to disappear. In 2019, you named this street John R. Towlestraat. You gather here each September to remember him, but then you decided his memory deserved something permanent. You organized, raised support, worked with the municipality, and in 2024 unveiled the monument where we stand tonight.

None of the people who worked to build this monument ever knew John Towle . Many were born decades after the war ended. You had no obligation to preserve his story, yet you chose to make it part of the story of your own community. That decision matters deeply to Americans who come here.

Across the Netherlands, we see people caring for graves, researching the lives of fallen Soldiers, maintaining memorials, teaching this history in schools, and gathering year after year at places where Americans fought and died. Here in Oosterhout, that commitment has given a young Soldier from Cleveland something remarkable: a permanent place in the community he died helping to defend.

The inscription on this monument says that John Towle was “fallen for our freedom.” Those simple words make the connection between his story and yours very clear. He came from another country and fought for people he had never met, but what happened to him here became part of the history of Oosterhout. Eighty-two years later, his name remains on this street because the people who live here decided it should.

You are showing us how memory survives – one generation decides that a story is worth telling to the next. That it is important enough to carry on as part of your history – history that is shared with us.

This year gives that story another layer of meaning. The United States is marking 250 years since our independence, and the relationship between Americans and the Dutch reaches almost all the way back to the beginning of our country.

In 1776, the salute fired from the Dutch fort at St. Eustatius in response to the U.S.S. Andrew Doria marked the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands as the first country to acknowledge the newborn United States of America. Dutch merchants and trade networks helped sustain the American cause during the Revolutionary War, and became an enduring symbol of that early relationship.

In 1944, American and Allied forces came to the Netherlands to end years of Nazi occupation. Men like John Towle fought here, and many never returned home.

Today, Americans and Dutch still stand together – this relationship is not preserved just by governments or militaries, but by communities like Oosterhout, and because people like you continue to take responsibility for stories that began long before they were born.

John Towle gave his life here at 19 years old. The people of Oosterhout made sure his name remained here long after the fighting ended.

For that, and for the care you continue to show for the Americans who fought in the Netherlands, you have our gratitude.

On behalf of the United States Army, thank you for remembering John Roderick Towle , thank you for preserving his story.

In 1776, you stood with us.

In 1944, we stood with you.

And in 2026, we still stand together.

Dank u wel. Mogen wij zijn offer nooit vergeten.

Thank you. May we never forget his sacrifice.

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