



NIEUWS NEWS

STICHTING ADOPTIE GRAVEN
AMERIKAANSE BEGRAAFPLAATS
MARGRATEN
v/h Burgercomité Margraten
sinds 1945

FOUNDATION FOR ADOPTING
GRAVES AT THE AMERICAN
CEMETERY IN MARGRATEN
formerly Civilian Committee of Margraten
since 1945



Newsletter Year 20 – April 2026

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Boardmembers of our Foundation:

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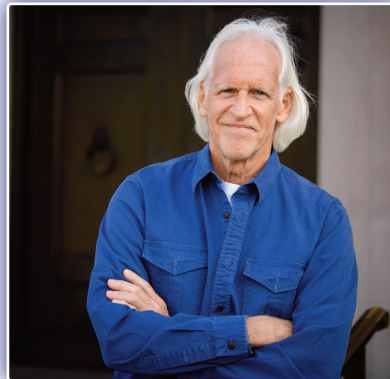
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Begraafplaats Margraten
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Cemetery Margraten)
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*This newsletter from the Foundation for
Adopting Graves American Cemetery
Margraten informs all of the adopting
families about the events and develop-
ments within the adoption organization
and at the American Cemetery.*



FOREWORD BY ROBERT EDSSEL



Nine years ago, I began researching the Netherlands American Cemetery at Margraten, unsure where it would lead. I'd visited the cemetery several times during research for my 2009 book, *The Monuments Men*. Captain Walter Huchthausen, the lone American Monuments officer killed in action, is buried there. But the spark for this new effort occurred in 2016, when an elderly Dutch woman I had befriended mentioned to me in passing the "grave adoption program." She assumed I knew about it. I did not.

What I learned changed the trajectory of my life. As an outsider, I was able to dispassionately study the grave adoption program and all that the Dutch of Limburg had achieved in creating and sustaining the program for 81 years. Objectively evaluating tens of thousands of pages of documents and reports enabled me to present the first comprehensive history of the adoption program and correct the historical record about some of the key figures responsible for its success. More than anything, my work provided an opportunity to express my gratitude as an American to the Dutch people, especially those in Limburg, for their fidelity to the 10,000 American men and four women whose memories they continue to hold so dear.

No nation has more consistently demonstrated gratitude to the United States for all that it did to liberate their country from Nazi occupation than the Netherlands. The people of Limburg housed American troops during combat. They cooked their food and washed their clothes. In March 1945, when the volume of deaths overwhelmed the Quartermaster troops, local citizens helped dig graves. Two months later, 40,000 Dutchmen and women walked for hours in their Sunday best to attend the first post-war Memorial Day ceremony. By May 1946, every one of the 17,800 Americans buried at Margraten had a Dutch adopter.

When American officials refused to provide next of kin information to the adopters, it was a Dutch mother of eleven who boarded an airplane bound for the United States to hand-gather that contact information and raise awareness of the grave adoption program. To the families, mothers, and young widows alike, her message was the same: "Leave your boys with us. We will watch over them like our own, forever." Eighty-one years later, the Dutch adopters continue to honor that "forever promise." That is what makes Margraten unique not just to all other military cemeteries, but all other cemeteries period.

My new book, *Remember Us* (in the Netherlands, *Herdenk Ons*), isn't the end of my work, it's just the beginning. Through the Forever Promise Project, a joint venture between the Monuments Men and Women Foundation and the Stichting Adoptie Graven Amerikaanse Begraafplaats Margraten, we have already connected nearly 400 American family members to the Dutch adopters of their loved ones. We are proud of our collaboration with Ton Hermes, Frans Roebroeks, and their team in Margraten. Together, we remain focused on our shared goal: locate and connect a family member of each American buried or memorialized at Margraten to their respective Dutch adopter.

Robert Edsel (Writer *Monuments Men* and *Remember Us*)



Memorial Day 2026

Program: Friday May 22

19.30 am Adoption Concert
Orchestra Da Capo 2000

Program: Saturday May 23

10.30 am Gratitude and Peace Ceremony in the town hall of Margraten by WWII veterans.

Program: Sunday May 24

10.00 am Holy Mass organized by the "Stichting Culturele Muziekmanifestaties Margraten". The Choir Musica Vincit from Landgraaf with tenor Ben Heijnen will perform during the Holy Mass. Monseigneur Everard de Jong will lead the Mass.

3 pm The Memorial Service will include speeches and the laying of the wreaths.



Access

The morning and the afternoon ceremonies are free and accessible. During the Holy Mass there are always sufficient seats available. For the afternoon ceremony there are special reserved seats and separate places for those who have received an invitation. Other visitors will be seated in the non-reserved seats, and behind the fences that are around the ceremony area.

Route and parking

When coming to the Memorial Ceremony at Margraten, visitors who arrive from Maastricht (WEST) or Gulpen (EAST) can reach the cemetery using N278. Parking will be available at the Cemetery, and you will be directed for parking by the Marechaussee (Dutch Military Police). Usually there is plenty of parking available, however, we do advise that visitors arrive early, because heavy traffic is expected. Handicap parking will also be provided.

Information

For any questions regarding the Memorial Day Ceremony, please contact: The ABMC Staff: American Cemetery. Address: American Cemetery 1, 6269 NA, Margraten, The Netherlands Telephone: 043 458 1208 (local) or +31 43 458 1208 (from the U.S.) Email: Netherlands@abmc.gov

Adoption concert by Da Capo 2000 Friday May 22nd in Margraten

On Friday 22 May 2026, the Foundation will hold its annual adoption concert in community center Oos Heim in Margraten. The Orchestra "Da Capo 2000" has agreed to host this concert. The orchestra is a group of enthusiastic musicians from Limburg and even Belgium with a solid musical background.

The name Da Capo, Italian for 'from the beginning', together with 2000, refers to the year the orchestra was founded. The ensemble is led by Ger Chappin. He has extensive experience as a conductor and artistic director and leads the orchestra in an inspiring and committed manner. Chappin was a cellist with the Orchestre Philharmonique Royal de Liège for many years from 1987 onwards. Now retired, his commitment to music and his active role as conductor and artistic director remain undiminished.

The Slovenian-Dutch soprano Kristina Bitenc (1986) will perform as soloist. She studied singing with Barbara Pearson at the Conservatory in The Hague. She was selected to continue her studies at the

Dutch National Opera Academy. Praised for her warm and ethereal voice, Kristina is a promising soprano with a broad repertoire, both in opera and oratorio.



The adoption concert is intended for all American family members and relatives who have come to Margraten especially for Memorial Day. The adopters are of course also very welcome. If you know of any American relatives visiting Margraten for the Memorial Day celebrations, please notify the cemetery management in good time and also inform us. We will then be able to invite them to this special adoption concert. The hall will open at 7 p.m. that evening, and the concert will start at 7:30 p.m.

Registration for this concert is only possible by email: please send your name, address, and number of seats before May 15 to concert@adoptiegraven-margraten.nl.

65 years Netherlands American Cemetery Margraten

On July 7, 1960, the current American cemetery in Margraten was officially and solemnly inaugurated. You can read about how this cemetery of honor came into being in this article.



The cemetery in 1947

On March 30, 1946, the last body from cleared cemeteries in Germany was buried in Margraten. Margraten, the temporary cemetery of the US Ninth Army, was at that time the largest military cemetery on the European mainland.

Here lay 17,742 American soldiers, along with 1,026 other Allied soldiers—including 691 Soviet soldiers—and 3,075 German soldiers. Between 1946 and 1948, all non-American casualties were transferred to national cemeteries. German soldiers were given a new resting place in Ysselsteyn, Soviet soldiers at the Russian Field of Honor near Camp Amersfoort.

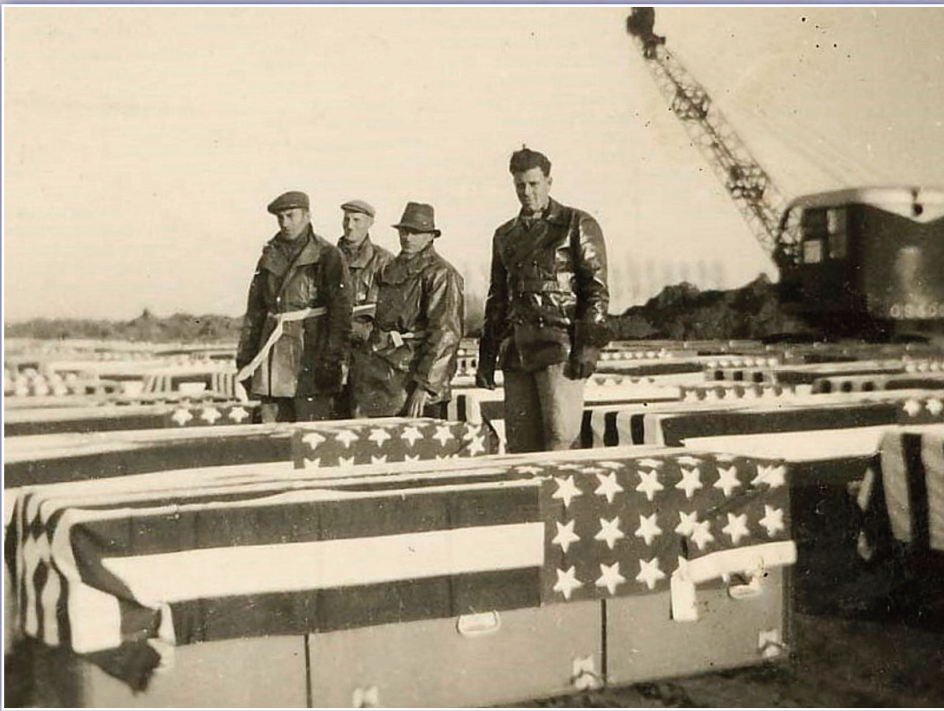
On April 22, 1947, the US Secretary of War decided to establish ten – later twelve – permanent cemeteries in Europe. These included Margraten and Henri-Chapelle, the cemetery of the First Army. A year later, the relatives were given the choice of having their loved ones buried in a permanent cemetery or repatriating them to the United States. The families of some 10,000 soldiers buried in Margraten chose the latter option.

Civilians in service

After Memorial Day 1948, the cemetery was closed to visitors and an extensive and carefully planned operation began: the exhumation of all remains. Civilians were recruited to carry out the heavy digging work and were employed by the US government. They opened the graves until they reached the bodies. The remains were then removed from the graves by US military personnel.



The coffin for the buried soldiers in Margraten



The remains were transported in wooden crates to special tents and barracks on the site. There they were treated with a so-called hardening compound, a substance that (temporarily) preserved the body. The remains were then wrapped in sheets and blankets and placed in a bronze-colored steel coffin. To prevent damage during transport, each coffin was placed in a wooden outer casket. Their rectangular shape also made these coffins easier to stack. A separate shed was set up for unidentified casualties, where specialized teams made every effort to establish their identities.



After the removal of the US flags the coffins are covered with a layer of soil

Repatriation and final burial

At the request of the relatives, the remains of approximately ten thousand Americans were repatriated from Margraten. They were transported by truck to Liège and from there by barge to Antwerp. At this port, the coffins were loaded onto ships bound for the United States. The coffins of the more than 8,000 soldiers who were to remain in Margraten, including approximately 450 war dead who had been buried in temporary airborne cemeteries in Son and Molenhoek, were temporarily stored on the grounds of the former German cemetery. There they awaited their final burial.

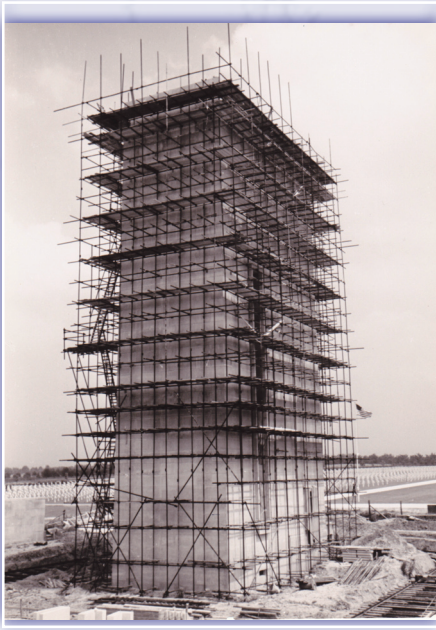
Those funerals could only take place after the new, permanent cemetery had taken its final shape. The plans for this were drawn up by the architectural firm Coolidge, Shepley, Bulfinch and Abbott from Boston, in collaboration with the landscape architects Clarke, Rapuano and Halleran from New York. They designed an impressive complex: in addition to the burial ground, there was also a Square of Honor surrounded by the Wall of the Missing and a tower with a chapel.

After the new burial ground had been marked out, the leveling of the ground began on September 6, 1948. On December 1 of that year, the final burials began.

Excavators dug long, wide trenches in which the gravestones, together with the wooden outer coffins, were placed in the characteristic fan shape. This was done with great precision. The exact location of each coffin was recorded so that the wooden cross could be placed exactly in the center of the grave site. These crosses would later be replaced by marble ones. Each coffin was covered with an American flag, which was only removed just before the funeral. The Stars and Stripes were then sent to the families of the fallen. During these mass burials, a memorial service was held every evening.



Working at the walls of the missing, the pond and the office building



The tower under construction

By the spring of 1949, all of the Margraten boys and girls had found their final resting place. On August 1, the cemetery was reopened to visitors. Four months later, on December 15, the US Army handed over the cemetery to the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC), the organization that manages all US military cemeteries abroad.

The construction work

The implementation of the construction plans was entrusted to Limburg contractors. Maastricht architect Alphons Boosten was appointed to supervise and monitor the project. D.C. van Schaik from Scharn-Heer acted as consulting engineer. In August 1950, the Knols concrete company from Maastricht began pouring concrete bands between the various sections. This effectively enclosed the plots and prevented subsidence/shifting

of the soil. In 1952, construction began on the homes for the superintendent and his assistant. Roads and paths were laid, provided with a foundation of flint nodules and then asphalted.

On April 20, 1953, the first marble crosses arrived in Margraten. They were manufactured by Lasa Marmo, a company that still operates a marble quarry in the Laaser Tal in South Tyrol, and transported by train from Italy. Lasa Marmo had already been selected by the American Battle Monuments Commission for a major contract in 1949. The first order for 25,000 gravestones followed in the same year. By 1962, the company had produced a total of 90,156 gravestones – crosses and Stars of David – for fifteen American military cemeteries in Europe, North Africa, and Asia. On April 1, 1955, all the graves in Margraten had been provided with a marble gravestone.



The rejected statue with helmet

Despite the fact that work was still in full swing, around 3,000 to 4,000 people visited the cemetery every day during the summer months.

While the burial ground was taking shape, work was also underway on the Square of Honor, the Walls of the Missing, and the striking tower with chapel. English Portland Roach stone was chosen as the building material. The intention was for the tower to be completed in the summer of 1955, but strikes in England—where the 1,800 tons of building material had to come from—and a harsh winter caused considerable delays: the tower was not completed until May 1956.

In the fall of 1956, when the construction work was largely complete, around twenty gardeners were working on site every day. They laid out gardens and planted shrubs and trees. The lawn was also plowed and tilled, so that the ground was ready for the final turf to be laid in the spring of 1957.

During this period, the flag stand was also installed, which would hold the 20-meter-high flagpole with the Stars and Stripes. The stand, made of solid

cast bronze, had a diameter of one meter and was manufactured by Metaalgieterij Van Gilst in Kerkrade.

Another major task remained: chiseling the names into the Walls of the Missing. This time-consuming task was carried out in 1959 and 1960 by stonemasons Jacques Wanders from Banholt and his English colleague B. Wickley from London.

As a finishing touch, the symbol of the cemetery was installed in 1959: the bronze statue *The Mourning Woman*. The statue was designed by American sculptor Joseph Kiselewski. He made his name primarily as a designer of medals, plaques, and badges. During and after World War II, he designed various decorations for the US Army and Navy, including the American Defense Service Medal and the Good Conduct Medal. Kiselewski incorporated several symbolic elements representing war and peace into his design. The grieving woman represents the deep and lasting sorrow caused by war. Three doves of peace accompany her. Next to the statue is the stump of a tree destroyed by the violence of war. From this seemingly dead wood, a new shoot is growing, symbolizing new life after a period of destruction.

In his initial design, Kiselewski had placed an American soldier's helmet against the tree stump, but this element was rejected by the ABMC review committee. In November 1958, the committee approved a modified version and the statue was cast at the Battaglia foundries in Milan. The statue was then transported to Margraten and placed on a pedestal bearing the inscription:

“New life from war's destruction proclaims man's immortality and hope for peace.”

On July 7, 1960, twelve years after the temporary cemetery was closed, the Netherlands American Cemetery was officially dedicated in the presence of Queen Juliana.

What once began as a temporary resting place during wartime grew into an impressive and lasting monument, a place of remembrance and gratitude.

Frans Roebroeks



7 July 1960 Arrival of Queen Juliana at the cemetery

A special story from Brunssum

On March 14, 1945, a baby boy was born to the Peeters family at Poststraat 5 in Brunssum. Six months earlier, Brunssum had been liberated by the 2nd Armored Division, also known as "Hell on Wheels." Many soldiers were billeted with residents after the liberation. The four Americans who were staying with the Peeters family in March 1945 and belonged to a medical unit came to congratulate the parents. One of them was known by name: Jozef Slijter. Of a second, only the first name was known: William Ray. When the son was born, father Peeters stood with William Ray bent over the cradle. William began to cry softly. It turned out that he and his wife had already had two still-born children in America and he became emotional at the sight of a healthy boy. Mr. Peeters then decided to name his son William Ray and asked him if he would like to be his godfather. William was very honored by this request and immediately agreed.

The civil servant at the municipality of Brunssum saw no problem with this, and so the little boy was officially given the name William Ray Peeters, nicknamed Wiel. A problem did arise when the parents wanted to have the child baptized. The pastor of St. Gregory's Church did not want to perform the baptism because the soldier was not Catholic and therefore, in his view, could not act as godfather. However, the young father stood his ground and the priest eventually relented. Shortly afterwards, the medical unit was ordered to move to Germany to assist in the crossing of the Ruhr and Rhine rivers. The four soldiers, including William Ray, said their goodbyes and left.

When Wiel Peeters grew older, he asked his parents why he wasn't named after his grandfather or grandmother, but had English baptismal names instead. They told him the above story about William Ray, whose surname they unfortunately did not know. Years later, with the help of his son-in-law and military expert Gerard Dicks, Peeters began the search for his godfather. Among all the 'Williams' in the medical unit attached to the 9th Infantry Division who had been killed in action, there was only one with the middle name Ray: William Ray Hutchison.

The investigation made it possible to reconstruct William Ray's final days. On March 7, 1945, the Americans captured the Ludendorff Bridge over the Rhine in Remagen, allowing heavy vehicles and troops to reach the eastern bank of the Rhine and establish a bridgehead there. When the bridge collapsed on March 17, it was not a great loss: the crossing had already been secured by the construction of pontoon bridges. William also crossed the Rhine with his unit in Remagen. On April 2, 1945, he was killed in action at the age



Wiel ('William Ray') Peeters

of 28 near Erpel-Unkel, a few kilometers north of Remagen. He was transferred to Margraten. Because Wiel wanted to know where his godfather was buried, contact was made with the Margraten Graves Adoption Foundation.

The foundation still manages the card index dating from 1945, which contains all the details of fallen and repatriated soldiers and their adoptive families. This revealed that William had been buried in section PP and that his grave had been adopted by a family from Brunssum. In 1948, all surviving relatives received a letter asking whether they wanted their loved one to be repatriated or buried in Margraten at what was then a permanent American cemetery. William's parents chose to have him returned to Texas, where he found his final resting place at Peebles Cemetery in Livingston.

By superimposing the map of the old and new cemeteries, Wiel was able to locate William Ray's grave with considerable accuracy. Wiel had not been this close to his godfather in eighty years.



William Ray Hutchison near the collapsed bridge of Remagen

In early 2025, Wiel visited Remagen with his son-in-law and grandson. The beautiful visitor center tells the story of the capture of the railway bridge and the crossing of the Rhine through photographs. One photo caught the group's attention in particular. A "familiar" face stared back at them.

When he got home, Wiel showed the picture to his older brother. And he confirmed their suspicion: it was indeed William Ray!

Wiel Peeters

Change of Address and Other Contact Information Changes

It is of utmost importance that you inform us about the changes concerning both your home and email addresses. We would also appreciate being notified about any other changes that can be of importance to the adoption register. If you are no longer able to regularly visit the grave or support the name of your adopted soldier, you are requested to inform us at: info@adoptiegraven-margraten.nl or by contacting:
Ton Hermes at +31 43 458 3050 (from the U.S.).

Colofon

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Introducing our new board member, Jori Videc

My name is Jori Videc (Heerlen, 1992). In my daily life, I work as a history teacher in a secondary school. In addition, I have been a guide at the former Eyewitness War Museum in Beek for many years. For the past eight years, I have been providing guided tours at the American Cemetery as an independent guide. I do this under the banner of my own initiative, Soldiers' Stories Margraten.

In addition to my involvement with the Grave Adoption Foundation, I am also active as a volunteer (administrator) with a number of other foundations, including The Citadel Memorial Europe Foundation, the Fields of Honor Foundation, and Mission Margraten Plus. The Fields of Honor Foundation is known for the event "The Faces of Margraten" and the book of the same name that I wrote together with Sebastiaan Vonk and



Arie-Jan van Hees. I have been involved in the activities of the Graves Adoption Foundation before and have contributed to the educational program 'Beleef de Vrijheid' (www.beleefdevrijheid.eu). Now, as a new board member, my focus will continue to be primarily on education.

Gratitude for Donations and Contributions:

The Foundation is most grateful for the donations and contributions that we receive each year from adopters and other benefactors. We thank you all for your generous support! Please be aware, that there are times when we, as a Foundation, have experienced donations being transferred to the wrong bank account number. Your support is very important to us, and we want you to be able to make your donations and contributions with confidence. To best facilitate this, be sure that when you transfer money to include the name of our foundation,

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Amerikaanse Begraafplaats Margraten
(Foundation for Adopting Graves
American Cemetery Margraten),

your name, address, and this bank account information:
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Please note that a bank transfer from the United States of America to Europe or to the Netherlands is not an easy option for US citizens.
Transfer via PayPal:
transfer your monetary donation via the email account
info@adoptiegraven-margraten.nl.

Sending us a cheque is not a reliable way to transfer monetary donations, because we cannot collect cheques. Also, sending cash is not a recommended solution.

Opening Hours Cemetery Margraten

The American Cemetery in Margraten is open to the public 7 days a week from 9 am till 5 pm. Only on December 25 and January 1 the cemetery is closed.
On May 4th, during the national annual commemoration of the Dutch victims of WWII, the cemetery also closes at 5 pm.