

Commemorative speech for Kreuzau

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Ladies and gentlemen, Dear guests:

With the inauguration of the memorial plaque on this site, we would like to commemorate the construction of a bridge over the Rur. This bridge has contributed to the fact that a few days later, the Ludendorff Bridge over the Rhine at Remagen was taken almost intact. Thus, the end of the war was brought much earlier than planned.

This bridge was built by pioneer soldiers of the 284th Combat Engineer Battalion. One who was involved in the construction of this bridge at that time is back at this point after almost 73 years. We sincerely welcome Mr. Clarence Bachand. We also want to welcome Mr. Mikel Shilling. Mikel's father was also a member of this unit. Mikel's vision was to erect a monument to commemorate the 284th Combat Engineer Battalion for this unit in the Hürtgenwald area. I offered him my support. After I had detailed from Mikel about the construction of the Bailey Bridge here at the Rur, I suggested to him to erect the plaque at this point. In Mr. Rolf Krudwig I found a reliable partner, who as a resident of the municipality Kreuzau made the contacts to Mayor Esser and other persons. In some personal conversations and local appointments, I was then informed of the decision that the memorial plaque could be erected at the appropriate place.

When I communicated this decision to Mr. Shilling, our proposal to actively assist in the construction of this memorial met with great skepticism from veterans and members of the Veterans' Association of the 284th Combat Engineer Battalion.

One dared and not. One did not want to believe that there are people in Germany who would support such a project. After these people there were presented the first designs for the upcoming monument, the enthusiasm was great.

Within a few days, Mikel Shilling was able to collect enough donations from the veterans and their descendants, thus securing the financing of this project.

Building a bridge means overcoming obstacles. At this point, a bridge was built to overcome the Rur, which played a key role during the battles over the Hürtgenwald.

We stand here today and build a bridge between past and present. In some places, the trenches are still deep today, because it is difficult to deal with the past. While rightly time must call the National Socialist dictatorship the greatest crime of the 20th century, at the same time one should not condemn the people who lived during this period. These are the last surviving participants of the Battle of the Hürtgenwald, who, after more than 70 years, return again and again to the places where they robbed their youth, happiness and health. They meet here with their former opponents.

Our group, the Grenzland working group, organizes an international meeting of the sons, daughters and grandchildren of the German and Allied veterans of the Battle of the Hürtgenwald once a year. Participants this year came from six European countries, the US and India. With our work we want to set a sign, "Against forgetting!"

Rudolf Porsche from Frankfurt, Jack Dauner and Clarence Bachand sit side by side like brothers. They honor and appreciate each other. If such people, like our three veterans here among us, can overcome the ditches of hatred, aversion and hostility, then Ladies and Gentlemen, we must learn that too. These three are a good example of this.

Building a bridge by reaching out to the opponent's hand for reconciliation. With a bridge you create a connection, you create trust and friendship.

This monument is a bridge of friendship and memory. A monument / memorial against the war and for the victims of the people who died here.

The flag, which still flew this monument shrouded fewer days ago on the Captiol in Washington, DC and was given to us especially for today.

I ask Mr. Bachand and Mr. Shilling to raise the flag and reveal the memorial stone.

Many Thanks!