

**Lord Mayor Pistorius: Speech for Freedom of the City on Saturday 19th July
2008, 17:35, Market Square**

- The spoken word counts! -

Ambassador,
Ministerpräsident Wulff,
Herr Landrat,
Generals,
Brigadier Free
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to warmly welcome you to our City of Peace against the backdrop of the historical town hall on the Market Square of Osnabrück.

I give my special welcome to the British soldiers and their families. The soldiers parade on our Market Square today for the last time and the band of the Scots Guards provides music for the traditional anniversary of the "Freedom of the City".

I also welcome my fellow citizens of Osnabrück, who have come again today to enjoy this military and musical event.

Ladies and gentlemen, the illustrious group of guests, which I was just able to welcome is a certain indication that we will witness a special event today. In the course of the next year, the last British soldier will leave our town and an era in the history of our town will once and for all come to an end.

The Fall of the Berlin Wall on 9th November 1989, the subsequent breakdown of the communist Eastern bloc and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, as well as the democratisation of these countries, very quickly led to previously unimaginable changes in the political system of our world. A consequence of this development was a completely new orientation of foreign and defence politics in Europe and beyond. We are also experiencing the tangible effects of this new orientation here in Osnabrück. The British Forces will give up the Osnabrück Garrison in the coming year and leave us. They have duties in other troubled regions to fulfil.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the British Army, along with the other allied forces, freed our country from the terror of the Nazi regime in 1945. Over the years, the occupiers and liberators have become friends.

In line with these changes and for the first time in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany, our town's council awarded the status "Freedom of the City" to a whole British Garrison on 30th May 1980. At that time, Osnabrück was still the world's biggest Garrison town outside of the motherland. In this way, the council joined in an old English tradition: "Freedom of the City" has described the relationship of soldiers stationed within a town to the citizens of the town for centuries.

The original "Charter of Freedom of the City" document of 30th May 1980 therefore literally states:

"The officers and soldiers of the British forces of the Osnabrück Garrison have excelled themselves over many years, through their varied friendly relationships with the citizens of Osnabrück, through cooperativeness and through their disciplined appearance in public.

In order to document this existing friendly relationship and at the same time to make a visible contribution to the strengthening of relationships between the British and German people and therefore serve the aspirations of creating a united Europe, the Council of the City of Osnabrück decided on 22nd April 1980 to award the British garrison the right to "Freedom of the City".

This made it clear how much the friendly relationship had developed between the British soldiers and their families and the citizens of our town.

But now the time has come to say goodbye. I would therefore like to thank all the members of the British garrison and the British generals who are present, on behalf of the citizens of our town. I would like to thank you and your countrymen for helping to establish and promote democratic development in Germany. I would also like to thank you for making the reconstruction of our town possible and continuously supporting the positive development in the decades following the war. In light of this truly historical achievement of the British Army, I bow my sincere thanks to you all, the soldiers, officers and their relatives and wish you all a good, happy and if possible peaceful future. All of us here in Osnabrück, the City of Peace, will remember you fondly.

My dear ladies and gentlemen, I hope you enjoy the parade and tattoo for the next half hour and wish you unforgettable impressions, images and sounds and wish everyone present a pleasant evening.