

# THE WIPERS TIMES

BRUSSELS BRANCH (BR3416)

Local Patron : H.E. The British Ambassador  
President: Brigadier A. Fisher

[www.britishlegion.be](http://www.britishlegion.be)

NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2015

## New Year's Greetings



On behalf of all the members who contributed to this January issue of the RBL Brussels Branch Newsletter, may I wish you health, peace and happiness in 2015.

Michael Whitburn  
Newsletter Coordinator

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## Looking back at 2014

2014 was an eventful year for the Brussels Branch - a year largely dominated by the many events organized to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the beginning of WWI.

RBL members represented the branch at the following events:

### HOTTON Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> May

This annual event continues to grow in stature and 2014 saw a great increase in attendees. The 2015 event is to be conducted by the Mayor of Hotton and will take on a slightly different format. More news on this as we receive it.

### EVERE Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> June

The ceremonies at the Waterloo Memorial and Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery were followed by a lunch at Les Brasseries Rustiques.

There was good attendance at the ceremonies. Deputy British Ambassador Katrina Johnson gave a Reflection, Mr. Freddy Roiseux and Mr. Jean-Pierre Blanckaert acted as standard bearers. Miss Rosie Hingsamer was our bugler and gave an excellent performance.

### COMMEMORATION SERVICE AT SAINT SYMPHORIEN CEMETERY Monday 4<sup>th</sup> August

Freddy Roiseux represented the branch as Standard Bearer at this very impressive ceremony.

**FAREWELL TO HIS EXCELLENCY JONATHAN BRENTON** whose last function was at the 4<sup>th</sup> August ceremonies at Mons and **WELCOME TO THE NEW BRITISH AMBASSADOR ALISON ROSE.**

**70<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIBERATION OF BRUSSELS** Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> September

Mrs Octavie Bove, widow of Joe Bove, a veteran of the Welsh Guards Infantry Battalion, attended the commemoration organized by the local authorities of Molenbeek St Jean.

**BELGIAN MEMORIAL DAY** Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> September

Brigadier Fisher, Ron Aston, Beryl and Peter Barlow, all of them members of the RBL Brussels Branch, read out the names of several hundred British servicemen killed between 4<sup>th</sup> August and 31<sup>st</sup> December 1914, during the German invasion.

**COMMONWEALTH-BELGIAN TORCH OF REMEMBRANCE ANNUAL CEREMONY** Friday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2014



BS students lay a wreath in the presence of Min. Steven Vandeput, Sir Joe French and HE Alison Rose

This annual ceremony at the Colonne du Congrès in Brussels on behalf of the Commonwealth-Belgian Joint Committee and organized by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission was held on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2014.

The commemoration paid tribute to more than half a million soldiers of the 53 Commonwealth countries - including Canada, India, the United Kingdom and Australia - who lost their lives during World War I. Many of them are buried in Belgium and the CWGC carefully attends to their graves.

This year the British Ambassador, H.E. Alison Rose, Air Chief Marshall, Sir Joe French KCB CBE, and the Belgian Minister of Defence, Mr Steven Vandeput, laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on behalf of the Committee.

A wreath was also laid by the children of the British School and a BS student read out the moving poem "In Flanders Fields".

Sir Joe French then read the Exhortation and H.E. Alison Rose lit the Flame. This was followed by "The Last Post", a minute of Silence and the "Réveille". To conclude this ceremony the military band played the National Anthems of Belgium and the UK.

At the reception hosted afterwards by H.E. Alison Rose at the Residence Ducale, Air Chief Marshall Sir Joe French, Vice-Chairman of the CWGC and Mr. Ian Hussein, CWGC Director Western Europe Area, said a few words and presented a gift to Ambassador Alison Rose, who re-iterated the commitment of all present to support the aims of the CWGC to promote equality, non-discrimination and democracy in the 53 countries of the Commonwealth.



Many distinguished guests were present at the reception including HE Denise Bauer, US Ambassador, HE Paula Wilson, New-Zealand Ambassador, Dr. Mark Higgie, Australian Ambassador, the German and South African Defence Attachés, Lt Colonel Alfred Vancaster, President of the Committee of the Flame, Captain Cdt. Benoît Sibille, Chief of Protocol of the Belgian Minister of Defence and Ms. Katrina Johnson, Deputy Head of Mission at the British Embassy.

The RBL Brussels Branch was represented by Alan Puplett, Fernand Delcour (RBL member, now aged 94) and myself.

*Andrée Ferrant*

**REMEMBRANCE SERVICE** Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> November 2014

The service was conducted by The Right Reverend Dr. Robert Innes, Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe, by The Reverend Canon John Wilkinson, Canon Pastor and Associate Chaplain, and by our very own Rev. Ann Babb, Chaplain to The Royal British Legion Brussels Branch.

The Readings were conducted by HE Alison Rose, British Ambassador to Belgium, Vice Admiral Ian Corder, UK Military Representative to NATO and the European Union, Brigadier Andrew Fisher, President of the Brussels Branch RBL, and Samuel Cofner, of the Griffin Scouts. The RBL reflection for 2014 was given by Colin Puplett, Welfare Chairman of the RBL. The organist was Paul de Lusignan, and the trumpeter Alain Van Zandycke.

In her address **Rev. Ann Babb** began by recounting the story of one of the most famous of WWI poems with its haunting opening lines:

*In Flanders Fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

“It was at Ieper in Belgian Flanders that John McCrae, a Canadian army doctor, wrote the poem at the beginning of May, 1915. It was the day after he had presided over the funeral and burial of his friend, Lieutenant Alex Helmer, who had been killed during the Second Battle of Ieper. McCrae gazed over the makeshift graves and noted the blood red corn poppies that had sprung up between them. The scene played on his mind and glancing occasionally at his friend Helmer’s grave, he immortalized the poppy in verse.

The poem and the poppies that inspired it were fused into one, a symbol used to raise money for the war effort, and later for post-war campaigns to honour the dead and help those injured by the war. Over the last century the flower has become an international symbol inseparable from the countless conflicts around the world. It is forever entangled with people as they endure the chaos of war and then struggle to find some way to rebuild their lives once the war has ended.

Today we recall the millions of servicemen and women who gave their lives in both World Wars so that we might enjoy peace today. And we also need to remember that there have been other conflicts since then, the Korean War, the Falklands War, the two Gulf Wars, and the 13-year campaign in Afghanistan where 453 British military personnel lost their lives.

There are 3 thoughts for us all to carry in our hearts on Remembrance Sunday:

That we should be thankful for the sacrifice of others

That we should be dedicated to work for peace and justice in the world

That we should be sorry for human sin and evil

But most of all, that we REMEMBER, and by doing so, our memories will LIVE ON.”

The Remembrance Service was well attended, despite it coinciding with numerous 11th November events, which almost inevitably meant less serving service personnel present. There was an excellent representation from NATO and from the various youth organizations. After the service there were social drinks and canapés in the church hall, attended by a majority of the congregation.

In Summary, then, 2014 was a very busy year for the branch, with a much enhanced programme of events. As with all our events, continued improvements are being noted for future ceremonies, which run more smoothly year by year. Organization remains ongoing for the upcoming events in 2015.

*Ian Youd, RBL Brussels Branch Events coordinator*

## 70th ANNIVERSARY OF THE LOCKHEED HUDSON BOMBER CRASH

*Jacqueline Daugnaix-Whitfield*

On November 27th, I attended the remembrance commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the crash of the Lockheed Hudson at Brisys, near Gouvy, in Belgium.



The RAF 161 Squadron plane took off from Tempsford aerodrome in Bedfordshire on November 26<sup>th</sup> 1944. Their mission was to parachute the secret agent Paul Penczock behind enemy lines, and the drop zone was close to the town of Arnstadt in Germany.

On board were 4 members of crew, Squadron Leader Reginald Wilkinson as pilot, Flying Officer John Weddell as navigator, Flight Lieutenant Fred Champion as wireless operator/gunner, Flight Lieutenant George Ash as Gunner, as well as the intelligence agent Paul Penczock. The plane crashed on its journey home in a meadow 1 km to the south of Brisys, on the south-east border of Belgium and Luxembourg. All four crew members were killed. The bodies were later buried in the Commonwealth War Graves commission section of the cemetery of Evere (graves X-26-47, X-26-51, X-26-49 and X-26-50).

The commemoration was organized by the Wilkinson and Champion families, the local authorities of Gouvy, Mr Lucien and Didier Petit, and Mr Paul Remy (ArdennesAvions 45 Group).

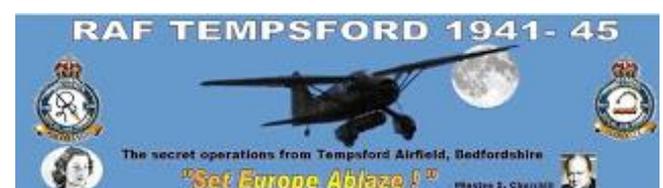
After the speeches, the 40 members of the two families, Gouvy's mayor and the organizers, RAF Wing Commander Donald Turnbull, and Jacqueline Daugnaix of the RBL Brussels branch committee laid wreaths at the monument.

The commemoration was followed by a presentation of the mission in the village church and a drink was offered in the old school.

To end the commemoration a piece of the undercarriage of the plane was offered to Mr. Frank Wilkinson, the pilot's youngest brother. The family has decided to donate this piece to the Tempsford Museum where it will be put on permanent display.

Mr. Wilkinson concluded this Memorial Day saying: to a mother each son is a hero.

We shall not forget them.



<http://www.tempsford.20m.com/home.html>

**MICKEY STADDON**

Born 16-02-1915 died 10-10-2014

Mickey was christened Doris Myrtle but when she first went to school there was already a Doris in her class so she was called "Mickey" and the name stuck. Some never knew her real name. But her biggest secret was her age. When she came to live in Belgium around 1946 her date of birth was misread as 1919 and thus "officially" in Belgium her age was calculated from 1919. However her records in England gave the correct date and as she would be 100 in February next year she got worried that the Queen would send her an official telegram and this would get her into trouble with the Belgian authorities. She asked friends to write to the Queen and tell her not to send the telegram.

Our first contact with Mickey came in April 2007 following information received from the Belgian Branch of the Royal Air Forces Association. They had been asked to contact Mickey following enquiries made by Mickey's relatives in the UK to the RAFA headquarters in England. Thus Brenda and I travelled to Gent to visit Mickey in order to assess how the charities that we represent could help her.

Over the years of our visits, we gradually built up a close friendship. It was clear from the start that Mickey had a very strong

character. On some subjects we had to be very careful of what we suggested to her. It was evident that she had a very strong love for children. We have three grandchildren and she always wanted to know how they were doing. She very often would have gifts for them, which was always a subject of some discussion between us as we were trying to provide help for her. It was very characteristic of her that she wanted to give things to others. She would repeatedly tell us "there are many others worse off than me". However that was her character and it was not possible to change her.

During our visits she very gradually told us about herself and how she came to live in Belgium. However the information was always in bits and pieces and rarely in any great depth.

She had trained as a nurse and at the time of the threat of a Second World War in 1938 she joined a nursing service attached to the Royal Air Force. She spent most of the war years in England and during this time she became friendly with a young man. Bob was a member of a flight crew in the Royal Air Force. Thus he was one of the many young men who regularly risked their lives flying over enemy territory. Over time the relationship blossomed and eventually they became engaged. Many people postponed getting married until after the war had ended. However a wedding was not to be as shortly before the end of the war Bob was reported missing in action and he never came back.

The shock of Bob's death was evidently quite profound and she looked for ways of diverting her attention onto other things so she volunteered to move to the continent. Naturally as the war progressed the Royal Air Force operated from France and Belgium and her first move was to France evidently caring for wounded Airmen. During the final stages of the Second World War and in the period immediately after it she then transferred to Germany for a short time and finally to Belgium where in 1946 she left the Queen Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service. It was here in Belgium that she

decided to stay and remained here for the rest of her life..

Mickey became a live-in nanny to a Belgian family living in Ghent. Her first children were two girls whom she looked after until their teens and with whom she maintained very close contact until she died. She continued to look after children until she was well into her 70s

To arrive at the age of 99, as Mickey did, you need a combination of good health, good luck and good friends and she certainly had all three. When you saw all the photos in her front room of "Her Children", you could understand just how much she had given to them and how much she had cared for them. Giving was an essential part of her. I can remember the advice we got before we first visited Mickey. Be careful what you give her as she is likely to give it away to others she considers in greater need than herself.

*Colin Puplett*

#### IT WAS 70 YEARS AGO IN DECEMBER ...

***"The Battle of the Ardennes was definitely one of the most difficult in which I have been able to participate and the stakes were considerable."*** (Field-Marshal B. Montgomery commanding the 21st Army Group)

As Winston Churchill himself conceded, the involvement of the British Forces in the Battle of the Ardennes never reached the same importance as that of the American Army, which bore the brunt of the German offensive. Nevertheless, and though less important both in terms of troops and duration of involvement, the British participation, stamped by the determination of its Commander-in-Chief, the Victor of El Alamein, was very efficient and should certainly not be underestimated.

In September 1944, after four years of occupation, our regions acclaimed their liberators and began to enjoy their new-found freedom.

Mons, Namur, Liège and the Ardennes were liberated by American Divisions; Tournai, Brussels and Antwerp by British troops.

Only a few months later, however, the rejoicing was brutally interrupted by a major offensive launched by the German High Command. The objective was to reverse the tide of the war by striking through the Ardennes, crossing the River Meuse, re-taking the port of Antwerp, isolating the British from the American Army, and achieving a separate peace on the Western Front in order, subsequently, to confront the advance of the Russian Army on the Eastern Front.

On 16th December, at 5.30 a.m., on a cold and foggy morning, from Monschau to Echternach, began the Battle of the Ardennes, also known as the Battle of the Bulge or the von Rundstedt offensive .

On 19th December, General Eisenhower decided, with the agreement of Prime Minister Winston Churchill, to temporarily redistribute command responsibilities within his ground forces. The units deployed north of Givet would be placed under the command of Field-Marshal Montgomery, Commander of the 21st Army Group, and the units in the south by General Bradley, Commander of the 12th US Army Group. The very next day, Field-Marshal Montgomery ordered the British XXX Corps, commanded by General Horrocks, to leave Holland, swing towards the combat zone, occupy defensive positions between Givet and Maastricht, and prevent the Germans from crossing the River Meuse.

On 22nd December, the 51st Highland Division, the 53rd Welsh Division, the 29th and 33rd Armoured Brigades took-up their respective positions, with the 43rd Wessex Division being held in reserve. Due to bad weather, which did not permit the drop of the 6th Airborne Division, British paratroopers were rushed by boat and truck to the Ardennes, and were ordered to take up defensive positions between Dinant and Marche-en-Famenne, at the tip of the German offensive.

On 24th December, early in the morning and not far from Dinant, the 3rd Royal Tank Regiment, supported by US tanks and the Royal Air Force, crossed the River Meuse and stopped an armoured column of the 2nd Panzer. It was the first encounter between British and German troops in the Battle of the Ardennes. The German Army would never cross the River Meuse and the tactical objective would no longer be Antwerp and its port, but Bastogne.

It was Christmas 1944, but on all fronts fighting continued with the same relentless fury.

At dawn, on 3rd January 1945, in the bitter cold, and on ice-bound roads, began the general counter-attack decided by the Allied High Command.

Battalions of the 6th Airborne Division, supported by tanks of the Fife and Forfar Yeomanry Regiment and the 23rd Hussars, were the first to become involved in the counter-offensive. After three days and three nights of heavy fighting and great losses, the men of the 13th Para Regiment liberated the village of Bure. The 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion occupied Rochefort and was later to discover the horror of the bodies of 34 civilians murdered by the Germans on Christmas Eve in Bande near Nassogne.

It was on 4th January that the 53rd Welsh Division, supported by tanks of the 1st Northamptonshire Yeomanry Regiment and the 144th R.A.C. Regiment, launched its attack between Marche-en-Famenne and Hotton, but its advance was slowed by the rough terrain, the forest, snow and ice.

On 8th January, in a snow-storm and bitter cold weather conditions, the 51st Highland Division, with the support of tanks of the 1st Northamptonshire Yeomanry Regiment, relieved the exhausted Welsh units. On the same day, the German High Command having given up its plan to cross the river Meuse ordered its generals to withdraw from the salient and retreat eastwards.

On 11th January, preceded by armoured reconnaissance vehicles of the 2nd Derbyshire Yeomanry Regiment, and supported by tanks of the 1st Northamptonshire Yeomanry Regiment, the 1st Battalion Black Watch entered the town of La Roche-en-Ardenne devastated by successive allied bombings. The following day, a reconnaissance unit of the 84th US Infantry Division entered the town and linked-up with the Scots.

Despite the snow, the landmines and the roadblocks, despite German rearguard action, the British troops continued their advance and hampered German withdrawal plans to escape the pincer movement of the Allied armies.

On 16th January, Field-Marshal Montgomery decided to withdraw the British XXX Corps and move them to the Netherlands to prepare for the crossing of the River Rhine.

By 28th January, the German Army had been forced to retreat to the positions it occupied on 16 December 44, beyond the Siegfried Line. This marked not only the end of the Battle of the Ardennes but also the end of the occupation of our regions.

Not one of the British servicemen who fought in the Ardennes will ever forget the fierce fighting and the 325 comrades whose bodies forever lie in the Commonwealth War Cemetery at Hotton. The youngest among them were no more than 18 years old when they died.

*Guy Blockmans*

## FRIENDS OF THE FALLEN

As Friends of the Fallen coordinator, I was really impressed by the commitment of some RBL members. The requests for Poppy Crosses varied from one to six, and some members even asked for as many as ten or twenty. This shows determination to maintain the memory of the British and Commonwealth men and women who died for their country during the two world wars.

It can take real dedication to look after lonely graves. In Belgium, some small cemeteries can be hard to locate and the graves not easy to find. Some cemeteries may have been closed and transferred to new locations. The graves will then usually have been left in the old graveyard and can only be visited during a short period, between November 1<sup>st</sup> and Armistice Day. The old cemetery at Berchem Sainte Agathe, for example, opens during that period only. Flowers and a wreath are laid courtesy of the local authorities, and the Union Jack is hoisted.

One of our members left crosses at the two lonely graves and sent me this photo:



We can only hope that in the future even more soldiers and airmen will be remembered in this way.

The Friends of the Fallen are members and supporters of the Brussels Branch of the Royal British Legion. Once a year around Armistice Day, they place Poppy-crosses on lonely graves of British and Commonwealth servicemen and women. Each small cross is proof that we respect their memory and the sacrifice made for their country, their loved ones and ... for you.

Should you wish to place a Poppy-cross on a lonely grave, please contact Jacqueline Daugnaix-Whitfield by phone 071/633 686 or 0478/662 344 or by e-mail: jachrida49@gmail.com.

*Jacqueline Daugnaix-Whitfield*

Do not stand at my grave and weep;  
I am not there. I do not sleep.  
I am a thousand winds that blow.  
I am the diamond glint on snow.  
I am the sunlight on ripened grain.  
I am the gentle autumn rain.  
When you awaken in the morning's hush  
I am the swift uplifting rush  
Of quiet birds in circled flight.  
I am the soft stars that shine at night.  
Do not stand at my grave and cry;  
I am not there. I did not die.

*Anonymous poem included in The Nation's Favourite Poems, BBC Books, 1996*

#### DONATION TO THE RBL



There was very good news on the financial front with a cheque for **8,000 Euros** presented to the Brussels Branch by HE Alison Rose, British Ambassador to Belgium, at the occasion of a reception held at the "Residence" on 11 December. The sum was donated partly by the Brussels British Community Association and as a result of the money raised by the Duchess of Richmond's Ball held in June and jointly organized by the British Chamber of Commerce and the British Embassy.

#### PROCEEDS OF THE 2014 POPPY APPEAL

More good news with Anne Morley's announcement of the *whopping 15,003.39 Euros* recorded for the 2014 Poppy Appeal.

Congratulations for this excellent result and many thanks to Anne Morley and the Poppy Appeal team. Many thanks also to all the donors for their generous contributions.

### RBL BRUSSELS XMAS LUNCH

Everyone was clearly in the mood for Xmas at the last RBL branch lunch of the year. Conversations were lively and joyous.



Xmas crackers were distributed with their traditional contents of paper hats and silly jokes (*Why did the turkey cross the road? Because it was the chicken's day off!*) and Xmas presents were handed out.



A reminder, then, that lunches are organized not just at Xmas, but all the year round, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of every month, from 12.00, at "Les Brasseries Rustiques", avenue du Cimetière de Bruxelles, 155, 1140 Brussels.

Next lunches on **Mon 12<sup>th</sup> Jan, Mon 9<sup>th</sup> Feb and Mon 9<sup>th</sup> March.**

All branch members are of course more than welcome.



### Best wishes for 2015 to all RBL members

2014 was a year we will remember for many years to come not only because of the amazing scenes at so many of the Centenary memorial events, but because as a small branch in the heart of Belgium and Europe we actually managed to cope. I use the word 'we', though it was in fact Ann Morley, our Poppy Appeal co-coordinator, and her partner David Lees who stepped up to the plate and together with other helpers raised in excess of a staggering 15,000 Euros - and this is on top of donations made directly to the UK by those seeking larger quantities of Poppies.

I dropped off some poppies at Anne and David's when they were in full poppy box madness, and if you think the Tower of London was a pretty sight, Morley Towers was giving it a good run for its poppy money!

So, many thanks to Ann, David and to all those who have assisted in this wonderful and truly appreciated achievement.

I would also like to thank the committees of both the Duchess of Richmond Ball and the Brussels British Community Association who between them made an additional donation of 8,000 Euros.

Lastly, I am delighted to announce that HE Alison Rose has agreed to become the local patron of our branch.

The branch is in robust shape. Centenary memorials will continue over the next few years, and we will then roll seamlessly into the 75th anniversary of the beginning of WWII. Volunteers for representational roles would of course be very welcome. Wishing all our members, also on behalf of the RBL Brussels Committee, a very Happy New Year.

*Ed Read Cutting* (Chairman)

**Hammy birthday wishes** to the 12 branch members who have celebrated their birthdays since the previous issue of the Newsletter: *Richard Josue, Lawrence Kelly, Terry Ann Kemp, Andrew Lysak, Yves Moerman, Anthony More, Peter Ivan Pallett, Victor Rasquin, François Robert-Lintermans, Alfred Roiseux, Léon Rubin, and Michael Serra.*

**MAJOR EVENTS IN 2015** will mark the Anniversaries of the beginning and the end of WWII, 75 and 70 years ago, and the bicentenary of the Battle of Waterloo. Details of these celebrations will be provided in the next issue of the Newsletter.

In the meantime you can **already MAKE A NOTE OF THE FOLLOWING FORTHCOMING EVENTS:**

**Sun 3<sup>rd</sup> May:** Hotton and La Roche Highland Memorial Commemorations of the Battle of the Bulge

**Sat 27<sup>th</sup> June :** British and Commonwealth Memorial Day at the Brussels Cemetery at Evere

*With thanks for their contributions to this January issue to Ann, Andrée, Colin, Ed, Guy, Ian, Jacqueline, and Filomena.*