
THE WIPERS TIMES

Newsletter of The Royal British Legion Brussels Branch



May we first wish you all the very best for 2025.

May there be many moments that make you feel happy, cheerful, glad, jolly, merry, bright, sunny, joyful, light-hearted, sparkling, bubbly, exuberant, ebullient, airy, cheery, mirthful, positive, confident, hopeful, contented, carefree, untroubled, satisfied, buoyant, radiant, pleased, and delighted.

And not too many that make you feel sad, joyless, depressed, dejected, gloomy, morose, wretched, sorrowful, glum, forlorn, downcast, despondent, crestfallen, sullen, disconsolate, disheartened, and downright miserable.

This first issue of 2025 includes a report about the Branch's 2024 Service of Commemoration and Reflection at Heverlee CWGC cemetery.

On the initiative and with the help of branch member Gust Vanhove, we pay tribute to six young women, all members of the Auxiliary Territorial Service, who were laid to rest in the war cemetery at Heverlee, and we piece together the circumstances of the tragic accident that led to their death just weeks before the end of the war in Europe.

An article takes us to the Pas-de-Calais to visit the Portuguese Military Cemetery at Richebourg, the Indian Memorial at Neuve Chapelle and the Portuguese Memorial at La Couture. This includes a background on the participation of Portugal and India in WW1.

We highlight the fantastic work achieved by Jackie Farbridge, a schoolteacher at the Lycée de Waha (Liège). For many years, Jackie and her pupils have spared no effort collecting funds for the Poppy Appeal. Our special thanks then to Jackie and her pupils and of course to all the generous contributors.

Sgt Michel Mas and Cpl Charles Lemaire, having escaped to Britain, served in the Belgian SAS during the war. Grandson Paul Mas and nephew François Lemaire both participated in the Bure Pegasus March. They bring us the wartime stories of their relatives.

Alain Brogniez explains how the battle dress of Sgt Jack Chisnall, who fought in Normandy, Belgium and Holland, was added to his extensive collection of uniforms and memorabilia.

Michael Whitburn & Scott Wilson, Newsletter coordinators






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Contributions

If you wish to make a suggestion or propose an article for the next **Wipers Times**, please send an email to Michael Whitburn (michael.whitburn@vub.be) and Scott Wilson (scofranwil@hotmail.com).

Website and social media

-  Bookmark our **website**: <http://branches.britishlegion.org.uk/branches/brussels>
-  Join us on **Facebook** [Royal British Legion Brussels](#)
-  Follow us on **X** [@RoyalBrussels](#)
-  Watch our videos on **YouTube** [@royalbritishlegionbrussels](#)
-  See our photographs on **Instagram** [royalbritishlegion.bxl](#)

Back issues

Back issues of the **Wipers Times** filled with news and stories relevant to our branch can be downloaded from the website.

A word from the Chair



How time flies. We're already well on our way to February and it seems impossible that only a few shortbread biscuits remain from the food mountain I conquered during the festivities. And by the time you read this, these few remaining crumbs of comfort will be long gone.

I'm afraid I've failed once again with my New Year's resolutions. It wasn't difficult – I didn't have any.

I don't have the willpower or, frankly, the desire or disposition to do 'dry January', despite plenty of prodding from Laura, who does her best to awaken my good conscience which has been hibernating for some time now. She has everything it takes to be the perfect personal fitness trainer, except with her stubborn other half.

I've explained till I'm blue in the face that a beer belly is a sign of success. Besides, abstinence is not really in keeping with the spirit of our First Friday of the Month get-together. Mocktails? Come off it.

Talking of which, kudos to the more than dozen members and friends who disregarded the freezing weather to make it a splendid evening on 10 January at the cosy New Inn at Kraainem, our first FFM in this establishment. In fact, it was very cosy indeed as our table soon filled to overflowing. A quick poll before leaving indicated a firm thumbs-up so we'll be back.

Pegasus March

The food and beer was excellent and I certainly felt I'd earned it after braving a wet and windswept 14km Pegasus March the previous weekend with Brussels branch alpha-males Steve Grant and Alain Brogniez.

Created by our much-missed late member Michel Bourland and the 101st Airborne Belgian Friendly group, the March commemorates the hard-won Battle of Bure (3-5 January 1945), one of the fiercest engagements of the Ardennes campaign.

Despite the inclement conditions, the annual remembrance event drew a sizeable crowd of walkers including veterans' families and re-enactors representing 6th Airborne and the Belgian SAS.

It was a particular pleasure to meet the family of Major Jack Watson, commander of A Company of the 13th (Lancashire) Parachute Battalion, who was awarded the MC for his courageous leadership during the brutal three-day battle. You can read his account of it online at https://www.pegasusarchive.org/varsity/jack_watson.htm.

The families of Para veterans Cpl Dennis 'Yorkie' Lister, Sgt Len Cox and Sgt Frederick Eale, were present too over the weekend.

We also met the nephew and British-based grandson of two Belgian SAS fighters involved in the operation. I'm delighted that, in this edition of our newsletter, François Lemaire, nephew of Cpl Charles Lemaire, and Paul Mas, UK-based grandson of Sdt Michel Mas, tell the stories of their relatives' wartime exploits.

I'm pleased to announce that the President of the 101st Airborne Belgian Friendly group, Laurent Olivier, has confirmed that proceeds from this year's Pegasus March will once again go to the RBL.

Cointe campaign

There's positive news following our campaign to ensure the historic Basilica of Cointe in Liège (*right*) remains a place of remembrance. The structure of the now deconsecrated church, built with donations from Allied nations and war widows after WW1, is in poor condition and developers have received planning permission to convert it into an indoor climbing centre and restaurant. However, they have listened to our concerns and committed to protect a unique Polish memorial chapel (*right*) inside the church – as well as to create a new 'Remembrance walkway' outside, connecting the building with the adjacent Mémorial Interallié tower. On 9 January, Belgian historian Bernard Wilkin and I had the opportunity to brief Pia Libicka-Regulska, First Counsellor at the Polish Embassy to Belgium, about the campaign. My thanks to Alain and Steve for their ongoing support.



Calendar

We've already set the dates for our main commemorations of the year: Hotton and La Roche-en-Ardenne (4 May), Evere (21 June), Heverlee (9 November) and Namur (also 9 November). Do please include them in your agendas and let us know about any other events that you feel we should include in our branch calendar.

Branch Survey

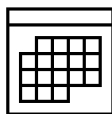
Finally, by the time you read this, you should have received our new branch survey, aimed at gathering your views and suggestions about the activities that we organise. It only takes around five minutes to complete and we greatly appreciate your feedback which will enable us to better serve our growing membership. Thank you to Steve for pulling the survey together.

Access the survey at:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfN1YCFHkXyNMpjPlvnuj0lt1X80JmOPS9Kmd3PyyGR-1lfqQ/viewform?usp=sharing>

Dennis, Brussels.Chair@rbl.community

Dates for the diary



Check the calendar on the website for new and changed events.

<https://branches.britishlegion.org.uk/branches/brussels-branch/calendar/>

February	
7 February	First Friday of the Month
March	
7 March	First Friday of the Month
April	
4 April	First Friday of the Month
May	
4 May	Battle of the Bulge commemoration at Hotton CWGC cemetery, followed by ceremony at the 51 st (Highland) Division memorial in La Roche-en-Ardenne
June	
6 June	First Friday of the Month
21 June	Commemoration at Evere/Brussels CWGC cemetery
November	
9 November	Remembrance Sunday, Heverlee CWGC cemetery
9 November	Remembrance Sunday, Namur Belgrade cemetery

Membership fees

Members who joined before 2015 renew the membership fee in October. Those who joined later renew their subscription in the month that they joined (see your membership card). You can use the details below for your renewal:

- Amount: 30,00 €
- Bank account: BE89 2100 1555 2485 – BIC: GEBABEBB
- Name: RBL Brussels Branch - Brussels
- Communication: Membership number, Last name, First name and renewal of membership fees 2024-2025.

Thank you for your renewed subscription and your loyalty to the RBL.

Remembrance Sunday 2024

Author: Michael Whitburn; Photos: Michael Whitburn

The weather was cloudy but mild for this year's annual Remembrance Sunday at the Heverlee War Cemetery on 10 November.

The Service of Commemoration and Reflection was well attended by people of all ages including many children.





Dennis Abbott (*left*), Chair of the Royal British Legion Brussels Branch, welcomed the participants.

Following a Reflection by H.E. Anne Sherriff (*below*), UK Ambassador to Belgium, the Service was led by Reverend Canon John Wilkinson, Chaplain to the Branch.

The Military Wives Choir (*below*) gave a moving rendition of the hymn Carry Me and Jean-Pierre Pede (*below, right*), Vice-Chair of the Branch, read the names of Branch members and friends of the Branch who passed away in 2024.



The Exhortation was read by Zoe White MBE, President of the Branch, and readings given by Martin Johnson, Head of the Scottish Government Office in Belgium, and members of the Sonian British Explorer Scouts.

After the sounding of the Last Post and a two-minute Silence to remember the Fallen in all conflicts, wreaths were laid at the base of the Cross of Sacrifice by the following: Anne Sherriff and Group Captain John Dickson, UK Ambassador and Defence Attaché; Ingrid Southworth and Lt General Ian Cave, UK Ambassador to NATO and Military Representative;



Ariadne Petridis and Lt General Pierre Gérard, Belgian Ambassador to NATO and Military Representative; Heads of Office Aodhán Connolly (Northern Ireland), Martin Johnson (Scotland), Eleanor Vaughan (Wales), Daniel D'Amato (Gibraltar).



Other VIP representatives paying their respects included: Vice Admiral Shoshana Chatfield (USA), Général Jérôme Goisque (France), Rear Admiral Nick Wheeler (International Military Staff, NATO), Colonel Richard Pamplin (Canada), Timothy Lopez (First Secretary of Defence, Australia), Colonel Mariusz Kasprzyk, LTC Andrzej Opulski and Lt Przemysław Łacny (Polish Military Staff), Ludwig Decamps

(NATO Communications and Information Agency), Dirk Vansina (Alderman, Leuven), Stephen Hanson and Jean-Pierre Blanckaert (RAFA).

Wreaths were also laid by Ron Aston on behalf of the Military Wives Choir and six-year-old scout Jonathan Jethro Wittevrongel. In keeping with tradition, Ethel and Viviane Pede-Moffatt laid a final tribute on behalf of Brussels Branch.



The Kohima Epitaph was read by Zoe White (*below, right*). The Epitaph is engraved on the Memorial of the 2nd British Division in the cemetery of Kohima (North-East India). It reads: *When you go home, Tell them of us and say, For your tomorrow, We gave our today.*

The Act of Commitment and The Blessing by Reverend Canon John Wilkinson were followed by the playing of the National Anthems of the United Kingdom and Belgium.

Participants were then invited to place a poppy at a grave of their choosing for a moment of quiet reflection.



More photographs from Heverlee

are available on the Branch's Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=880915054176180&set=pcb.880916184176067>

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery at Heverlee

The cemetery was designed by Philip Hepworth and started in July 1946. It contains more than 1000 burials. The original site was on the opposite side of the lane and used after the Liberation in September 1944. The 101st British General Hospital, then housed in Heverlee's Girls' School, stood nearby.

There are 977 Commonwealth burials from the Second World War, 37 of them unidentified. Some date to May 1940 when the British Expeditionary Force was covering the withdrawal to Dunkirk.

Allied Forces did not return to Belgium until September 1944. In the intervening period, many air crews were shot down or crashed after carrying out raids on targets in Belgium or returning from missions over Germany. They form the vast majority of the burials at Heverlee.

There are also 29 burials from the First World War. Many deaths are recorded after the war as soldiers succumbed to wounds or illness.



Incidentally, The Girls Were Lovely

Author: Michael Whitburn; Photos: Michael Whitburn

Over thirty years ago, long before he joined the RBL Brussels Branch in 2024, Gust Vanhove was an occasional visitor to Heverlee War Cemetery.

On one occasion he had paused to reflect in front of the graves of six young women.

All of them were in their twenties when they died in 1945 and all of them were members of the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS).



Flowers had recently been placed on one of the graves – the grave of Lance Corporal Marie Rose, ATS, who died on 13 January 1945, aged 24.

Her headstone bears the inscription *Not Good-Bye, Darling, But Au Revoir, For We'll Meet Again On the Golden Shore.*

Gust had been both moved and intrigued and before leaving he consulted the Cemetery Visitors' Book.

He noticed that one of the more recent entries included the name and address of a Mr. William Rose from Paignton in Devon – the same name as the name on the headstone.

Gust decided to write to William Rose to express his sympathy and inquire about the tragic circumstances of the death of Marie Rose and her five unfortunate comrades.

Some weeks later, he received the following reply:

30-05-95

Dear Mr Vanhove,

Your letter received today and appreciated.

I visited the graves of the girls in September after a reunion at Arnhem in Holland as I was taken prisoner there with the Parachute Regiment when I was wounded and taken into Germany.

My sister Marie Rose and the others were very very close friends and served in the 51st Heavy Anti Aircraft Regiment.

They all died in a lorry versus train accident on 13 January 1945, apparently returning from an organised dance.

Being the only survivor of my family I do visit the grave whenever I am in Belgium.

I have a Belgian friend and stay in Brussels, usually at Xmas and New Year, so whenever we are in Belgium next I will contact you.

Ironically, when the battle of Arnhem was over in September 1944, the survivors were taken to the Monastery where the graves are.

As I was in POW camp at that time I cannot enlighten you on the accident, but I feel sure that there will be records in the local paper diaries.

I have a group photo which I will get copied and send to you.

Hoping I have been of some assistance.

Yours faithfully,

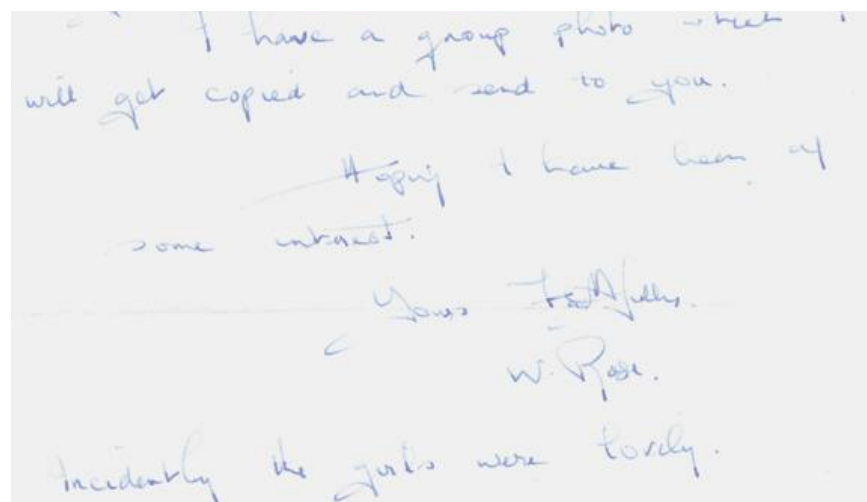
W. Rose

And, as an afterthought, he had added:

Incidentally, the girls were lovely.

Unfortunately, there would be no further exchange of letters with Mr. Rose and no further contact, and so the circumstances of the accident long remained unclear.

Thirty years have passed since William Rose's reply and gathering information about the accident that cost the lives of the six young women in 1945 has now become much easier.



I have a group photo which will get copied and send to you.
Hoping I have been of some interest.
Yours faithfully,
W. Rose.
Incidentally the girls were lovely.

The *Find a Grave* website provides the following information about Marie Rose (<https://fr.findagrave.com/memorial/14039158/marie-rose>, photograph taken from the Find a Grave website).



A Lance Corporal (sn : W/108074), Auxiliary Territorial Service attached to 139 (Mixed) Heavy Anti Aircraft Regiment, Royal Artillery, she was killed returning to Winksele-Delle from a dance when the service lorry she was travelling in was struck by a train at a level crossing in the Haachtstraat of Veltem-Beisem, Belgium.

Casualty of War: Marie lost her life while serving her country. Her remains were buried at the Louvain British Cemetery on 13.1.1945 - and then reburied at the Heverlee War Cemetery on 13.9.1946.

And of course, the more you search the more you find.

There is now even a forum on which internet users exchange and discuss the ATS tragedy:

"On Friday 12 January 1945, the British Army arranged a dance evening for its troops at a location between

Leuven and Tienen. Twenty female troops from the camp were brought there in an army lorry. It was cold and the lorry had a canvas tilt, as did most of the lorries at that time. They took the usual level-crossing in the Haachtstraat in Veltem and certainly enjoyed that evening a welcome break from military life.

Around two O'Clock on the night from Friday to Saturday, they were back at the level-crossing at Veltem but what the driver didn't know was the fact that the crossing was closed at night. It was a crossing barrier on wheels which went back and forth alongside the rail. During the day, it was shut by a crossing-keeper whenever a train approached. During the night, it stayed shut. The crossing-keeper closed it with padlock and chain every night at 22.00 hours and opened it again at 6.00 in the morning which the lorry driver apparently didn't know. He or an assistant took the drastic step of breaking the chain (the chain was found in the grass some days later). They apparently didn't know that the barrier at Veltem station, a kilometer further was operative at night and only shut on the approach of a train. However, when the lorry drove on to the opened crossing, it was smashed by a fast-approaching train against the small signal box and burst into flames. The load area where the girls sat was tightly closed and it seems that it wasn't possible to get everyone out of the burning lorry."

<http://ww2talk.com/index.php?threads/ats-tragedy-belgium-january-1945.36318/>

Gust Vanhove joined the Brussels Branch last year. Since he had been unable to attend Remembrance Sunday at Heverlee on 10 November, he suggested we visit the cemetery at a later date and place one red rose on each of the ATS graves. He also suggested writing a

short poem as a tribute to the six young women who lost their lives shortly before the end of the war in Europe.

It was clearly an offer I could not refuse and two weeks after Remembrance Sunday, we arranged to meet at Heverlee Cemetery with six roses and a poem to honour the memory of Clara Carter, Isabella Goodfellow, Joan Dorothy Liddell, Elsie Kathleen Norris, Eileen May Smith, and, of course, Marie Rose.

Incidentally, the Girls Were Lovely (The poem)

*Men and women / Side by side here In Heverlee
They came to face the enemy / From over the sea and far away
Together in war / Together in peace / Together for evermore
Now names on headstones / Never to fade away
Poppies for the heroes / Roses for Clara, Eileen, Joan, Elsie and Bella / And one for Marie
Rose
Flowers the colour of blood / To honour their memory
Lest we / Who are now free / Forget / Here in Heverlee*

Poem by Gust Vanhove and Michael Whitburn



Portugal and the First World War

Author: Michael Whitburn; Photos: Michael Whitburn

Most people will almost certainly know that between 1914 and 1918 it was the Allied Forces of Belgium, France, Great Britain, the Dominion Forces of the British Empire (Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, Newfoundland and South Africa) and the United States that made a stand against the forces of the Imperial German Army and their occupation of Belgium and north-eastern France.

One country, however, is often overlooked.

Though safely removed from the main European conflict zones, Portugal was nevertheless an active belligerent during WWI and Portuguese forces engaged the enemy on land, at sea, and in the air.

The Portuguese Military Cemetery at Richebourg

A few years ago, my wife Filomena and I visited the Portuguese Military Cemetery at Richebourg, Pas-de-Calais, on our way back from a short stay in the Baie de Somme area.



Richebourg is the only Portuguese war cemetery in France. It is the burial site of 1,831 casualties of the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps in World War I.



The cemetery was built between 1924 and 1928 and a great number of those who lie buried there were killed in the Battle of the Lys in April 1918, also known as the Battle of Estaires in British history accounts.

Portugal and the First World War

Political background

The following has largely been adapted from Portugal and the 1st World War 1914-1916-1918 – a talk delivered on 9 March 2016 at the Cavalry and Guards Club in London by the Portuguese historian Pedro S.F. de Avillez on the day of the centenary of Germany's declaration of war on Portugal (https://www.bhsportugal.org/uploads/fotos_artigos/files/13_PortugalWWI_Avillez.pdf).



Other sources include https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portuguese_Expeditionary_Corps and <https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/warfare-1914-1918>.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Portugal had a stagnant economy, a largely illiterate population and no significant middle class to help create a stable and more developed society. The Portuguese were embroiled in frustrating political and social conflicts, and the political parties in parliamentary deadlock.

In 1908, the King and the Royal Prince were assassinated.

Two years later on 5 October 1910, a Republican revolution took place in Lisbon.

The young King Dom Manuel II went into exile to England and Portugal became the third European republic, after Switzerland and France.

The involvement of the very young and fragile Portuguese Republic in the First World War was a rash and traumatic undertaking.

On the eve of World War I, the objectives of the Portuguese government were:

- To obtain international recognition. Most European countries were reluctant to recognise the new Portuguese republican regime; France did so in August 1911, Britain and most other countries in September of that same year.
- To guarantee Portugal's sovereignty over its colonies.

The Berlin Conference of 1878 carved up Africa among the major European Powers. The more industrialised powers still had their eyes on Portugal's African territories and despite British assurances to the contrary, it was common knowledge that Britain had promised Germany access to Portuguese colonies.

In January 1890, Britain opposed Portugal's occupation of the territories that stretched between Angola and Mozambique – territories Portugal had claimed for three years.

Britain gave Portugal an ultimatum to immediately withdraw its recently established garrisons and administrative posts in those territories and British warships were deployed off the coast of Mozambique and near Gibraltar.

This act of intimidation by Portugal's so-called oldest ally (by virtue of a treaty between the two countries dating back to 1386 and the Hundred Years War) was a humiliation that would never be forgotten.

Even though Germany did not declare war on Portugal before 9 March 1916, the Portuguese territories of Northern Mozambique and of Southern Angola had already been under attack by German raiding forces since 1914.

When WW1 started on 4 August 1914, the Portuguese government argued that Portugal should declare war on Germany in accordance with the long-standing Anglo-Portuguese Alliance.

Almost immediately, the British Government told the Portuguese Ambassador in London that Portugal should emphatically not declare war on Germany but neither should it officially declare its neutrality.

Why not?

Britain was well aware that the majority of the Portuguese people was opposed to the whole idea of participating in a foreign war and Britain did not want to be seen as forcing their traditional ally to fight a war a thousand miles from home.

There had been alarming reports in London about the lack of enthusiasm among Portuguese army officers and poor discipline within the rank and file. Also, there was the daunting prospect of having to re-arm the Portuguese army and provide for its transport to France.

The Portuguese government on the other hand was convinced that the Allies were poised to win the war and that joining the Allies would be very much in the interest of Portugal.

There remained, however, the hostility of the majority of the Portuguese people and the opposition of the army to contend with – not to mention the opposition of Britain.

The Portuguese and French governments were determined to force British approval of Portuguese participation in the war and so it was agreed between them that a Portuguese division of 20,000 men would be sent to France to support the Allied war effort.

Fearing that this rapprochement between Portugal and France could spell the end of the old Anglo-Portuguese Alliance, Britain agreed to Portugal's direct participation in the war, but on condition that only well-trained troops be sent to France. The British were probably convinced that the war would be over well before any Portuguese contingent could be trained for combat in France.

Portugal began to mobilise and the Portuguese Parliament approved military intervention and the dispatch to France of a 20,000-strong division.

Portugal then secretly agreed with Britain and France to stage a serious incident that would force Germany to declare war on Portugal.

In February 1916, at the request of British Prime Minister Asquith, Portugal impounded all German merchant vessels in Lisbon harbour.

As a result, Germany declared war on Portugal on 9 March 1916.

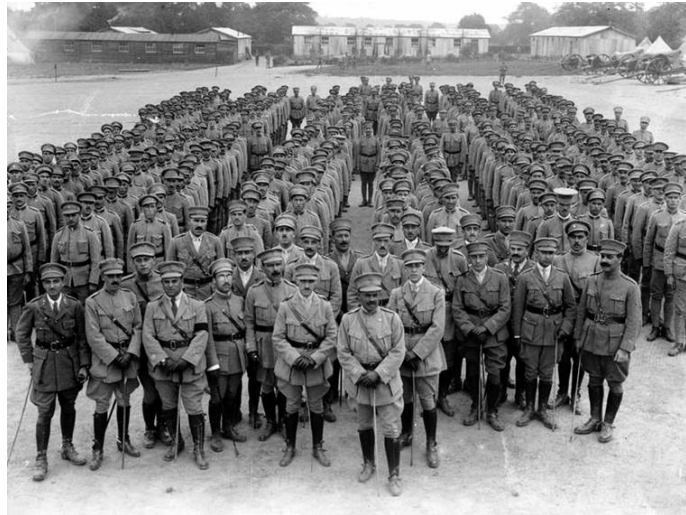
Portugal goes to war

Portugal agreed to send an army corps to France comprising two divisions of 20,000 men each, a heavy artillery corps, and 30 airmen.

The Portuguese Expeditionary Corps (CEP) finally included 55,000 men placed under the direct command of General Sir Douglas Haig.

The first troops left Portugal in February 1917 and by October the CEP had been assembled in France.

The CEP was deployed on the Flanders front, in the area of Armentières defended by the 1st British Army.



Between 1914 and 1918, Portugal mobilised over 150,000 men - an expensive decision for a population of five million, in a country faced with huge financial difficulties, an exhausted economy and a suffering population.

Living conditions in the trenches were appalling and diseases constantly reduced the number of men on the front lines. Unlike their British allies, there were no reserves to plug the gaps, no rotation of troops; just fewer men and longer hours to endure the winter months. Leave was practically unheard of.



9 April 1918

On 9 April 1918, the 2nd Division of the CEP was deployed on the front line, along the River Lys. The 2nd CEP Division had been on the front line for over six months - the longest period for any army unit on the Allied front.

The British High Command knew that a big German attack was imminent and had in fact decided to withdraw the two Portuguese divisions from the front line on 6 and 10 April.

Photo courtesy of <https://thebignote.com/2023/11/25/french-flanders-neuve-chapelle-part-six-richebourg-the-portuguese-military-cemetery/>

On 8 April, the 2nd CEP Division had two British divisions in reserve behind them and three British divisions on either side.

The German High Command knew that the 11 km of CEP front was defended by a single division and a maximum of 20,000 men and decided to concentrate a rapid attack on the CEP front on 9 April.

The bombardments started at 04.15hrs (1,700 German guns on a 17 km front against 88 Portuguese guns on an 11km front). The 2nd CEP Division, who were all set and ready to leave the following day, were taken completely by surprise by the fierce German onslaught.

There was a first wave of four divisions of 50,000 men, followed by two other waves of three divisions each.

The Germans engaged 18 divisions comprising 350,000 troops against seven Allied divisions totalling 90,000 men. The 20,000 Portuguese faced direct attack by 100,000 troops.

In addition to the artillery bombardment, the Germans used phosgene gas and 15,000 mustard gas shells. The German infantry attacked in the morning, with many instances of bayonet combat.

By the end of the day, the 2nd Portuguese Division had suffered huge losses.

The Germans had penetrated 8 km deep along a 23 km front without however managing to pass the Lawe and Lys channels.

Though the German advance had been impressive, especially at first, it rapidly lost momentum and stalled.

There were some remarkable acts of bravery by individual Portuguese soldiers, the most famous by Private Aníbal Milhais.



A despondent looking German prisoner flanked by his Portuguese and Scottish captors

Photo courtesy of

<https://thebignote.com/2023/11/25/french-flanders-neuve-chapelle-part-six-richebourg-the-portuguese-military-cemetery/>

Aníbal Augusto Milhais (1895-1970), nicknamed Soldado Milhões (Soldier Millions, for being worth a million men), was the most decorated Portuguese soldier of WWI and the only Portuguese soldier to be awarded – on the battlefield – the highest national decoration.

Born in 1895 in a small village in the north of Portugal, he was called up in 1917 to join the CEP. He arrived in France that same year and the division to which he belonged was deployed along the front line.

On 9 April 1918 Milhais took part in the Battle of La Lys.

He found himself in the midst of the battle covering the withdrawal of Portuguese and Scottish soldiers. Armed with a Lewis machine gun Milhais resisted fierce assaults by two enemy regiments. He fought on until he ran out of ammunition. The assailants finally decided to outflank his position and for three days Milhais found himself alone behind enemy lines. On the third day, Milhais, still clutching his Lewis gun, rescued a Scottish major from a swamp and the two of them managed to reach Allied lines. The officer reported Milhais's acts of bravery.

A few months later, it was again Milhais who enabled a Belgian unit to retreat safely to a secondary trench.

Milhais was awarded the highest Portuguese distinction, the Order of the Tower and Sword, and the French Légion d'Honneur, on the battlefield, and in the presence of 15,000 Allied soldiers.

In 1924, the Portuguese Parliament renamed Valongo, the village where Milhais was born, Valongo de Milhais. Despite his many decorations and the high public esteem which he enjoyed for the rest of his life, Milhais remained as poor as he had been before the war.

In 1928, he emigrated to Brazil where he was welcomed as a hero.

Funds were gathered by the Portuguese community in Brazil to send Milhais back to Portugal with enough money to provide for his family.

He died on 3 June 1970 in the village that had been named after him.

A 2018 movie and a television series tell the story of the man who wanted nothing more than to live a quiet and peaceful life but became a hero through force of circumstance.

In September 1918, what was left of the CEP was re-organised for combat. The last assault in which the CEP participated was on 11 November 1918, the Day of the Armistice.



The Indian Memorial at Neuve Chapelle

Our next visit was to the adjoining Indian Memorial at Neuve Chapelle.



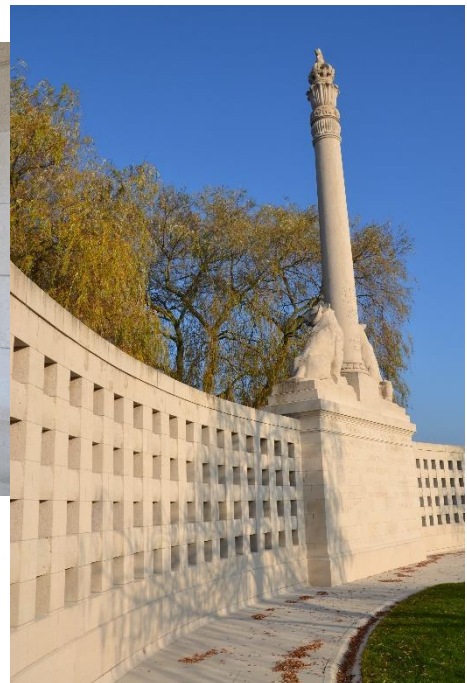
View of the Indian Memorial from the Portuguese Cemetery

The Memorial was built in honour of the army of India who fought in France and in Belgium between 1914 and 1918, and to perpetuate the memory of their dead in unknown graves.

Neuve Chapelle was chosen as the location for the Memorial since it was there that in March 1915 the Indian Corps fought its first major action as a single unit.

The land was purchased in perpetuity by the Imperial War Graves Commission.





Column flanked by two tigers



Apertured wall and dome

The Memorial takes the form of a sanctuary enclosed within a circular wall after the manner of the enclosing railings of early Indian shrines. The column in the foreground of the enclosure is almost 15 feet high. It is surmounted by an imperial lotus, the imperial crown and the Star of India, and is flanked by two tigers guarding the temple of the dead. A wall with cross-hatched ornamental apertures extends in a semi-circle and at each end of the semi-circle, there are two small "Chattri" domes. On the opposite semi-circle are engraved the names of the 4,847 Indian soldiers and labourers who lost their lives on the Western Front during the First World War and have no known graves.

The Memorial was designed by the celebrated British architect Sir Herbert Baker and unveiled on 7 October 1927 by Lord Birkenhead, then Secretary of State for India. The ceremony was attended by the Maharaja of Karputhala, Marshal Ferdinand Foch, Rudyard Kipling, and a large contingent of troops from India to represent the units that fought in France.

Source: <https://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/en/node/2962>

The Indian Expeditionary Force on the Western Front

Background history

The British government declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914.

Just four days later, two infantry divisions and a cavalry brigade of the Indian Army were ordered to mobilise and prepare for overseas service. Units of the Indian Expeditionary Force began arriving in France in September and by late October they were involved in heavy fighting on the Messines Ridge in Belgium.

The Indian Corps, which was composed of the 3rd (Lahore) and 7th (Meerut) divisions, went on to fight in some of the bloodiest battles of the first year of the war.



Artist's impression of Indian troops charging German position at Neuve Chapelle, 1915

<https://www.westernfrontassociation.com/world-war-i-articles/the-battle-of-neuve-chapelle-1915/>

At Neuve Chapelle, Indian soldiers made up half of the attacking force from 10-13 March 1915 and, despite suffering very heavy casualties, they succeeded in capturing important sections of the German line. The officers and men of the Corps further distinguished

themselves at St. Julien in the Ypres Salient in April 1915, at Aubers Ridge and Festubert in May, and at Loos in September before being redeployed to the Middle East in December.

The Indian Cavalry Corps remained on the Western Front until the spring of 1918 and Indian labour companies, which had begun arriving in France in 1917, performed vital and often dangerous logistical work behind the lines until after the Armistice.

Over the course of the war, India sent over 140,000 men to the Western Front – 90,000 serving in the infantry and cavalry, and as many as 50,000 non-combatant labourers.

Of the combatants, over 8,550 were killed and 50,000 were wounded. Almost 5,000 have no known grave and are commemorated at the Menin Gate at Ypres and at Neuve Chapelle.

Sources: <https://www.westernfrontassociation.com/world-war-i-articles/the-battle-of-neuve-chapelle-1915/> and <https://www.cwgc.org/visit-us/find-cemeteries-memorials/cemetery-details/144000/neuve-chapelle-memorial/>

The Portuguese National Memorial

From the Portuguese and Indian cemeteries, it is only a short drive to the small village of La Couture situated behind the battlefields of Richebourg and Neuve Chapelle to view the remarkable Portuguese National Memorial.



La Couture: National Memorial (rear view)



The bronze sculpture was inaugurated in 1928 in the presence of numerous dignitaries from Portugal, Belgium and France, including Maréchal Joseph Joffre. The sculpture is the work of Portuguese artist António Teixeira Lopes and depicts a Portuguese soldier fighting amidst the ruins of a Gothic cathedral. The enemy is death itself wielding its scythe.

Sources: <https://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/en/node/2962> and <https://thebignote.com/2023/11/25/french-flanders-neuve-chapelle-part-six-richebourg-the-portuguese-military-cemetery/>

A balance of the participation of Portugal in the First World War

Portuguese participation was mainly the result of political decisions and pressure exercised by France and Britain.

The majority of the population were against joining the war in Europe – a war regarded by most as simply not their war.

The army was also reluctant, having to contend with lack of motivation and discipline, civil unrest at home, economic and logistical problems, not to mention constant political interference.



Participation in the war did not bring unity and social harmony at home. Portugal continued to live in an intermittent state of civil war until 1928. On 28 May 1926, the Army staged a coup d'état that put an end to the First Republic.

After two years of military dictatorship, António Oliveira Salazar became Prime Minister.

This was the beginning of a very long period of ruthless State repression that would end only 46 years later with the return of democracy after the Carnation Revolution (*Revolução dos Cravos*) on 25 April 1974.

Poppy Appeal Volunteers

Author: Michael Whitburn; Photos: the volunteers

The Brussels Branch remains extremely grateful for the support it received from all the businesses, offices, shops, pubs, churches, associations and clubs during its Annual Poppy Appeal.

Nothing, however, would be possible without the help of all the volunteers who so generously give their time to deliver poppies and poppy collecting tins.

So, many heartfelt thanks to our helpers and many thanks to ALL the supporter locations, to those who delivered and collected boxes and to everyone who purchased a poppy and wore it with pride.



Poppy Appeal and Jackie Farbridge

Author: Michael Whitburn; Photos: Jackie Farbridge

In January 2018 the Newsletter had conveyed the very special thanks of the branch to a schoolteacher at the Lycée de Waha (Liège), Jackie Farbridge, who together with her pupils had done a wonderful job selling poppies in the centre of Liège, explaining the meaning of the Poppy Appeal, and producing drawings and posters that were put on display in the school's main entrance hall.

Since then, Jackie has kept up the good work, tirelessly pursuing her efforts to collect funds for the Poppy Appeal and 2024 has been a very good year, which she was pleased to report to Poppy Appeal Coordinator David Bizley:

I went this morning to the bank and paid into the RBL the sum of 790 euro.

Once again the children did very well. With the school in Chenée, which is a traditional primary school, we went onto the market and they explained why they were participating in the Appeal. People were very attentive and the stall holders very kind, they not only gave to the appeal and the children also received fruit and sweets from them 😊.

With the lycee de Waha (the school I worked in) I went two afternoons into Liege town, once with the 5th graders and then with the 6th graders. Once again people were generous. The children had learnt about the appeal in English and explained so well in French.

The other two schools are not in the centre so they just carried out the appeal in their classes making displays and going into other classes with the poppies and bracelets. Both schools are English immersion schools.

This year my husband met the president of the Fort of Loncin, I asked if I could place a box in the fort musem, on the 11 November we attended the memorial they give to the soldiers who lost their lives at the fort and also to an English airman who crashed near the fort. There is a statue of remembrance for him.

Funds collected at the different collection points:

• Ecole communale Lycée de Waha Primary Immersion	€ 413.50
• Ecole communale Fétinne	€ 152.05
• Ecole communale André Bensberg	€ 24.80
• Ecole communale de Chênée Centre (Parc Sauveur)	€ 95.50
• Fort de Loncin	€ 104.15



So congratulations and many thanks from the RBL Brussels Branch to Jackie and her pupils for their endless motivation and enthusiasm!



A spotlight on Jackie is available on the Branch's website:
<https://branches.britishlegion.org.uk/branches/brussels-branch/members/members-and-friends/jackie-farbridge/>

Michel Mas

How my grandfather forced four enemy soldiers to surrender wielding only a knife

Author: Paul Mas; Additional material: Dennis Abbott

My grandfather Michel Mas (*below, left*) was a very humble man who very rarely spoke of the war.



Grandson Paul Mas and great-great nephew Adam Mundy in Bure

If I asked him about it, he would simply say: “I was just doing my job.”

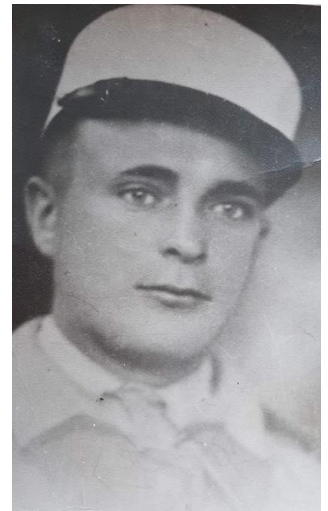
I have learned more about his hair-raising exploits in the Belgian SAS from his old comrades and their families, as well as by attending events such as the Pegasus March in Bure and Tellin.

There are still some gaps in his story but this is what I know.

Michel was born in Montegnée and working in the mines around Liège when he enlisted in the Belgian Army at the outbreak of war in May 1940. He was 23 years old.

He was captured by the Germans but managed to escape into occupied France. He was captured again, escaped again, then joined the French Foreign Legion (*right*).

He managed to get to England where he joined the Belgian SAS. While training at Friz Hill he met Dorothy, who was serving as a VAD (voluntary aid detachment) nurse in nearby Leamington Spa. They married the same year.



Trueform

Corporal Mas’s first mission with the Belgian and British SAS was Operation Trueform. He was dropped by parachute behind enemy lines on the night of 17-18 August 1944, as part of

'Group M' commanded by Captain J. Dulait and second-in-command Lieutenant P. Thonard – one of the oldest members in the squadron at 48.

Several members of the team were injured during the low-altitude drop but Dulait was able to set up a base in woodland near Louviers, around 35km south of Rouen. They identified enemy troops in the area including an SS command post at La Haye-le-Comte. Although his radio set was damaged, Dulait got a message through to London: allied aircraft bombed a German headquarters soon after. The Belgians were withdrawn as American troops took over their positions.

Michel was subsequently involved in Operation Burgbang, part of an 11-man team led by Lieutenant Raymond Van der Heyden. Their plane was attacked, which resulted in overshooting the planned drop zone. Instead, the team landed close to the German town of Monschau on 6 September. After a perilous 22km trek through the enemy-controlled Eifel, the SAS team mounted an ambush on the road between Sart and Francorchamps, killing several Germans. As enemy forces quickly retreated, two fresh SAS units were parachuted in to carry out mopping up operations that resulted in the capture of 20 Germans.

Hände Hoch!

During the Ardennes campaign, Michel's unit was deployed on Operation Regent in the area around Bure and Tellin. He was part of a jeep reconnaissance team named 'Arthur' with Sgt Georges d'Oultrement and Sdt Jacques Oosters.

Receiving orders from Van der Heyden to target the Chapelle Notre-Dame de Haurt, they spotted a Germany sentry outside and quickly took him prisoner.



Michel in his armoured jeep with Avance ou Meure (Advance or Die) painted on the bonnet



Michel (left) with Jacques Oosters and Sgt Georges d'Oultrement

Hearing voices from inside the chapel, Michel dashed in and, amid the excitement of the moment, whipped out his fighting knife, pointed it in front of him and shouted "Hände Hoch!".

Caught by surprise, the four German soldiers inside instantly put up their hands. It was only then that everyone realised Michel was holding them with only a knife. Fortunately, his fully armed comrades rapidly joined him. They had captured the first German prisoners in the area.

After more than three weeks of operations in the Ardennes, the Belgian SAS squadron returned to their barracks in Tervuren.



Michel on a commandeered German Zündapp motorcycle

Belgian SAS in the Ardennes

The unit, by now strengthened with new recruits, continued to support allied operations in the final months of the war in the north-East Netherlands and Germany.

After Michel was demobbed he rejoined Dorothy in Leamington Spa, trained as a brick layer, became self-employed and set up his own building company.

Silicosis

He regularly visited Belgium for holidays and decided to come home in 1972, building a house in Ouffet where his sister Victoire lived. But after seven years, Michel and Dorothy returned to Britain – this time to stay – until he passed away on 29 September 1985, aged 68.

He died of respiratory failure due to silicosis of the lungs, originally contracted when he worked in the mines before the war.

The Royal British Legion organised his funeral at Oakley Woods in Warwickshire. Dorothy scattered half of his ashes at the Belgian SAS Croix Renkin memorial near Bure and half in the English Channel.

My grandfather was small in stature but to those who knew him, he was a very big man indeed and we will always remember him.

Additional material source: A Short History of the Belgian Special Air Service in World War II.

Charles Lemaire

My uncle and his great escape to glory in the SAS

Author: François Lemaire; Translation and additional material: Dennis Abbott

My uncle Charles Lemaire was born in Ovifat, a village in the east of Belgium, on 13 February 1922. After primary school, he worked with his father Joseph as a builder.

No : 2970 Grade : Sergent Nom : LEMAIRE Prénoms : Charles Né à : Ovifat, Malmédj Le : 13 février 1922 Domicile : Ovifat 53 Date d'entrée aux F.B./G.B. : 6.8.42 Campagnes antérieures : Libération de Belgique Prise en force à l'Unité Parachutiste le 27 septembre 1942 Breveté Parachutiste le 5 octobre 1942 En congé sans solde le 14 août 1945	Signature du porteur :   BELGIAN S. A. S. REGIMENT Lt Col. BLONDEEL, D.C.O. C.O. BELGIAN S. A. S. REGT A. B. C. le 18 août 1946	Le titulaire à effectué VINGT Sauts d'Entraînement DEUX Sauts en Opération Il a participé aux Opérations suivantes : Opérations parachutistes derrière les lignes ennemies Namur du 8 au 10 août 1944 et de la 31 août au 13 septembre 1944 Opérations motorisées Ardennes off. Remont du 20 décembre 1944 au 16 janvier 1945 Hollande Allemagne du 5 avril au 8 mai Corrientes - Intelligences Allemagne : 9 mai - 3 juillet 1945
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Identity card signed by Belgian SAS CO Lt Col Eddy Blondeel

Following the invasion in May 1940, much of the east of the country was annexed by Germany. All young men of fighting age were forced to join the Wehrmacht. Charles knew this would mean being sent to the Russian Front, from where many of his compatriots would not return.

He was determined to escape, especially after learning that Belgians who had made it across the Channel after the surrender had established an infantry battalion in Wales. However, the 19-year-old already had his sights on becoming a parachutist.

On 8 October 1941, Charles slipped out of Ovifat during the night and, following instructions from the 'réseau Comète', set off on an epic journey that would last ten months before he finally reached Gibraltar.

His route took him through the Hautes Fagnes, Verviers, Liège, Namur, Dinant and Gedinne (where he would drop by parachute in 1944), before crossing the French frontier and making his way through Nancy, Besançon, Arbois, Lons-Le-Saunier and Lyon. He passed through Narbonne and Toulouse, before heading south towards the Pyrenees.

It seemed his journey was over when he was captured at Caujac and imprisoned. But two months later he seized his chance to escape after overpowering and killing two guards.

He spent several months on the run, initially in hiding in Camparnaud, before moving through Montauban, Carcassonne and Perpignan.

Together with several comrades, he finally crossed the Pyrenees between Argelès and Figueras on 15 April 1942. Abandoned by their guide, all were captured except Charles who made it to Barcelona.

His journey through Spain was fraught with risk. Harsh internment camps awaited anyone caught by the authorities.

Sardines

Travelling via Zaragoza, Valladolid and Ourense, Charles crossed the Portuguese border north of Braga. He made his way from there to Porto and reached Lisbon on 21 May 1942.

His family back in Ovisfat knew he was safe when they received a box of Portuguese sardines and heard a message broadcast on Radio London.

After arriving in Gibraltar and a lengthy verification process to check he wasn't a spy, Charles shipped to London. On 31 July 1942, he enlisted to serve "for the duration of the war".

He was immediately sent to the Parachute Training School at RAF Ringway near Manchester where he gained his 'brevet' and airborne wings. From there he transferred to Friz Hill, base of the Belgian Independent Parachute Company near Stratford-upon-Avon, famed for its association with William Shakespeare.

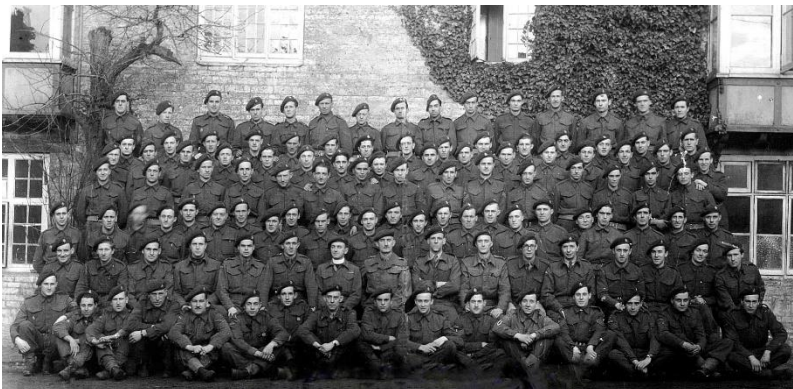
There was no time for plays, however.

My uncle and his comrades were put through two years of intensive training including close quarter combat and survival techniques, wireless and code operation, and long, long marches.

During an exercise in April 1943, my uncle lost his left eye in an accident – it was pierced by a branch when he hit the ground. However, this did not prevent him from continuing his training, which included a stint in December 1943 at the special operations training centre at Inverlochy Castle in the Scottish Highlands.

Codename Lavache

On 5 February 1944, the Belgian Independent Parachute Company was integrated into the British Special Air Service Brigade and renamed the Belgian Special Air Service Squadron, also known as the 5th SAS.



Belgian Parachute Independent Company at Friz Hill. Charles in the centre of the front row, eighth from right

Tea-break at Friz Hill. Charles is in the dark shorts, facing away from the camera



The Belgians hoped to take part in the D-Day landings but their deployment was initially blocked by the government-in-exile which feared their involvement could interfere with operations by the Secret Army in Belgium.

The issue was resolved and Charles, given the codename Lavache, was selected to take part in Operation Chaucer, a joint mission with French forces aimed at preventing enemy forces from escaping the Falaise Pocket, where the 7th Army and Fifth Panzer Army were encircled following the Normandy breakout by the allies.

From 28 July Belgian SAS parachutist teams were dropped at various locations in France, teaming up on the ground with Resistance fighters to carry out sabotage, intelligence gathering and reconnaissance.

Charles dropped by parachute behind enemy lines near Nogent-Le-Rotrou (Perche) on 8 August 1944 as part of a 15-strong unit commanded by Lieutenant Raymond Van der Heyden. Their orders were to block the enemy's retreat and report potential targets for air-force strikes. After around 12 days, Charles's unit was exfiltrated and returned to Britain.

He did not have to wait long for his second mission, Operation Noah (31 August-13 September), supporting Resistance efforts to harass enemy troops near Gedinne, close to the Belgian border with France. It was the first time he had set foot in his homeland since his escape nearly three years earlier.

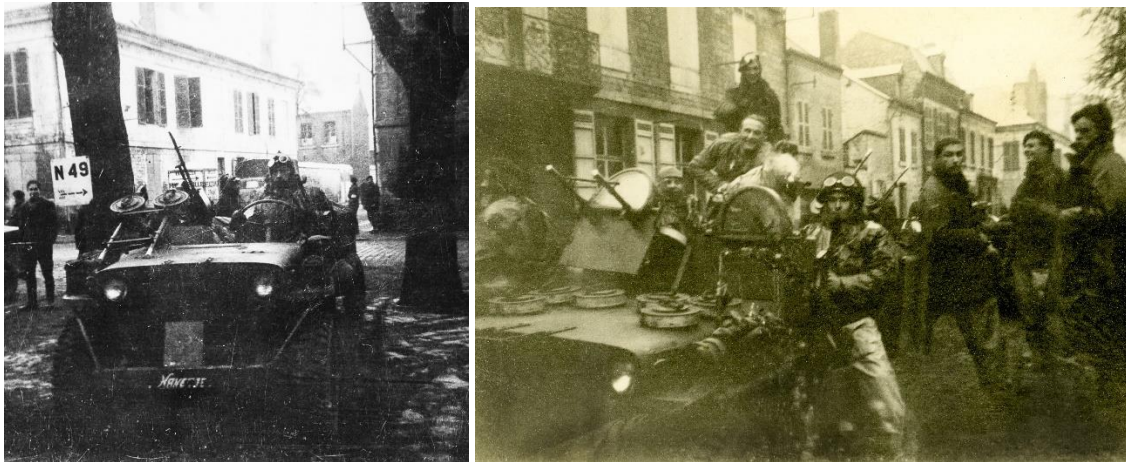
Over the next fortnight Charles was involved in several combat operations, including an ambush at Pelée Virée, a road linking Gedinne and Vonêche. When his comrades were trapped in a firefight, he risked his life by charging into the open ground, letting loose with his bren gun. His actions resulted in the destruction of two vehicles and significant enemy losses.

His team leader, Sgt Jacques Goffinet – who would later capture Reich Foreign Minister Joachim Von Ribbentrop – cited Charles for the Croix de Guerre for his gallantry.

In a last throw of the dice to change the course of the war, Hitler launched a massive attack on 16 December in the Ardennes. The assault caught the allies largely by surprise.

From its base in Tervuren, the Belgian SAS was ordered to deploy all available personnel and armoured jeeps.

Charles was initially sent to Givet, just across the French border, with orders to carry out reconnaissance and prevent German troops from crossing the Meuse river.



At the wheel of his jeep, named 'Nanetje', in Givet; with SAS squad in Givet on 21 December 1944. Charles is on the far right of the group

The Belgians then set up a temporary HQ in Froidfontaine, conducting patrols in support of the British 6th Airborne Division as part of Operation Regent.

On 31 December, two units under Lieutenants Paul Renkin and Van der Heyden supported an attack on Bure by the 13th (Lancashire) Parachute Battalion, with elements from the 2nd Battalion Ox and Bucks, Fife and Forfar Yeomanry and 23rd Hussars.

While the Belgians managed to capture five Germans at the Chapelle Notre-Dame de Haut in nearby woodland (see Paul Mas article), the allied victory at Bure came at a heavy price. The Paras lost 68 killed, while three Belgian SAS, Lt Renkin, Claude de Villermont and Émile Lorphevre, died instantly when an anti-tank shell hit their jeep, exploding jerry cans containing their reserve fuel supply.

Charles survived the Ardennes campaign unscathed and was later part of the SAS teams deployed during the closing stages of the war during the advance through the Netherlands and Germany.

He was demobilised on 14 August 1945 and returned to civilian life.

In 1954, like many Belgians, Charles emigrated to Canada. He worked as a cook on the construction sites of the gigantic dams of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, captured wolves for Montreal Zoo and later opened an art gallery. He lived in Quebec City and Trois-Rivières with his wife Jeannine Brûlé until he passed away in January 2000.

Duty of memory

I never had the opportunity to meet Charles but the information I gathered from my mother, his younger sister Lucie, by letter and telephone, as well through the collections of Jean Temmerman (former president of the national para-commando association) and the Amicale Belgian SAS Vriendenkring, have only strengthened my feelings of respect and admiration for Charles Lemaire.

He was not yet 20 when he left everything behind, his family, his village and his youth to go and fight. I'm proud of his story and of how he lived up to the 'who dares wins' motto of the SAS.

As descendants of these heroes, it is our duty to keep the flame of memory alive and to try, as best we can, to engage with courage and determination in our own actions.

To my uncle Charles Lemaire ... a true Belgian hero. May he rest in peace.



*Charles in later life with his wife
Jeannine in Canada*

Pegasus March, Bure

Photos: François Lemaire, Steve Grant and Dennis Abbott

Some photographs from the Pegasus March that took place in Bure in January 2025.



Earlier aerial shot of Bure

Alain paying his respects at the Croix Renkin Belgian SAS memorial



Dennis with Paul Mas and nephew Adam at the start of the walk



Parachute Regiment re-enactors on parade at Bure church



The Croix Renkin Belgian SAS memorial

Steve with Paul Mas and nephew Adam



Commemorative plaque dedicated to Major Jack Watson



The Battle Dress of Sergeant Jack Chisnall

Reconnaissance Corps, A British Veteran of the Battle of the Bulge

Author: Alain Brogniez



The sleeves of Sgt Jack Chisnall's blouse display the Corps' titles, the Rhine Army Training Centre formation badges (which replaced those of 50th Division worn during the war) and his badges of rank. His medal ribbons are above the left pocket and the Corps' green and yellow lanyard is on the right shoulder.

In the aftermath of the Munich Crisis (September 1938), Leslie Hore-Belisha, UK Secretary of State for War, wished to introduce a limited form of conscription, an unheard-of concept in peacetime. It was thought that calling the conscripts 'Militiamen' would make

this more acceptable, as it would render them distinct from the rest of the Army. Only single men aged 20-22 were to be conscripted, and after six months full-time training would be discharged into the Reserve. The first intake was called up, but the Second World War was declared soon afterwards, on 3 September 1939, and the Militiamen lost their identity in the rapidly expanding Army. 10602508 Sergeant Jack Chisnall was one of them.

We don't know in which regiment Jack was called, but he transferred later to the new Reconnaissance Corps, after it was formed in January 1941, and fought with the 61st Regiment, part of the 50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division, in Normandy, Belgium and Holland.

The 50th (Northumbrian) Division was a Territorial Army formation and its badge represents two capital 'Ts' in red, and when seen at sideways an 'H', so that the initials of the three main rivers which flowed in the region, the Tyne, Tees and Humber, were represented. The 50th fought with the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in May-June 1940, in the Western Desert and North Africa in 1942-43, landed in Sicily in July 1943, and then in Italy, before it returned to England to train for D-Day.



After the Normandy landings on 6 June 1944, casualties mounted in the 50th Division. It lost 488 officers and 6,932 other ranks (ORs) but also assimilated 358 officers and 8,019 ORs. On 29 November 1944 it was relieved and pulled back into Belgium. Earlier that month, Field Marshal Montgomery had made a speech to the Division's officers to the effect that they would return to England as 50th Infantry (Reserve) Division, a training formation. Veterans who had served three and a half years or more overseas would be repatriated to Britain or given generous leave.

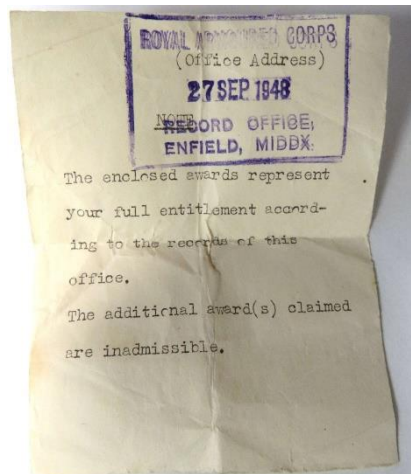
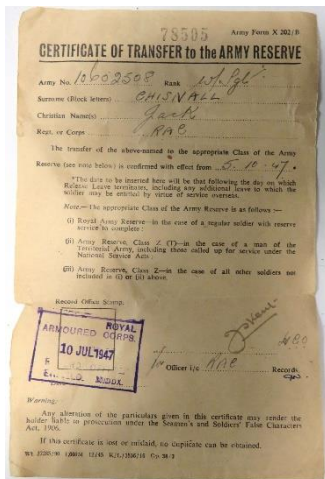
But the 61st Reconnaissance Regt was still in Belgium, based at Iseghem (Izegem) and waiting to learn about its future, when the Germans attacked through the Ardennes on 16 December 1944. To protect the crossings on the Meuse at Givet, Dinant and Namur, Monty ordered XXX Corps to hold the bridges on 19 December, and Lieutenant-Colonel P.H.A. Brownrigg, DSO proposed immediately the services of his Regiment to Lieutenant-General Sir Brian Horrocks who needed 'eyes and ears' to watch the German advance. The 61st held the line in the vicinity of Namur and then sent patrols up to Wavreille (Rochefort) in support of 7th Battalion The Parachute Regt, The 2nd Fife & Forfar Yeomanry and the 5th Belgian Special Air Service Squadron.

At the end of January 1945 the Regiment was back at Iseghem for rest and maintenance, awaiting new postings to other units in North West Europe or UK.

We don't know what happened to Sgt Chisnall after that, only that he transferred to the Rhine Army Training Centre in Germany some time after August 1945, until his demobilisation and transfer to the Reserve on 5 October 1947, after a well-deserved release leave. For his war service, Jack was awarded the 1939-45 Star, France & Germany Star and War Medal 1939-45. For unknown reasons he didn't qualify for the Defence Medal.

We will remember Sergeant Jack Chisnall.

Jack's battle dress blouse was found during a house clearance in Lancashire some years ago with his medals (still in the box!), his certificate of transfer to the Army Reserve, his cap badge and a Recce Corps Old Comrades Association tie-pin. All are now in my collection.



Your Brussels Branch committee

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About The Royal British Legion

Patron: His Majesty King Charles III

National President: Vice Admiral (Rtd) Paul Bennett CB OBE.

The Royal British Legion formed on 15 May 1921 bringing together four organisations of the Armed Forces that had established themselves after the First World War.

By 1921, the tradition of a Two Minute Silence had been established. The first Poppy Appeal was held that year, raising over £106,000 to help WW1 veterans with employment and housing.

The Legion was established to care for those who suffered as a result of service during the First World War. It has been helping the Armed Forces community and their families ever since.