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THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION ANTWERP BRANCH

Tweemaandelijks Newsletter Februari – Maart 2024

Verantwoordelijke uitgever:

Gordon Wilkins, Van Peborghlei 11, 2640 Mortsel.

Afgiftekantoor 2018 Antwerpen Quellinstraat 8 P701114



Talk to The Hand



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EDITORIAL

Dear Members and Supporters,

As we enter the months of February and March, the Royal British Legion Antwerp Branch stands united in our commitment to honour and remember the sacrifices made by our servicemen and women.

In February, our focus turns to the enduring spirit of camaraderie, symbolized by Valentine's Day. Let us extend our heartfelt gratitude to the veterans and their families, embodying the true meaning of love and sacrifice.

March brings with it a sense of renewal and hope for the future. As we look forward to brighter days, we remember the resilience of those who have served and the bonds that connect us all. Together, we continue our mission to support and uplift one another.

In these months of reflection, let us strengthen our ties within the community, fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose. Attend our events, engage in conversations, and contribute to the collective memory that defines our legion.

As we navigate through February and March, may the spirit of unity and remembrance guide us, ensuring that the sacrifices of the past are never forgotten and the bonds we forge today endure for generations to come.

Thank you for your unwavering support.

Best wishes

Frison Patricia Newsletter Editor

Do you have an e-mail address?

You will receive your Newsletter **quicker** by e-mail and will also receive any last-minute notifications. Send your e-mail to the editor to get this newsletter by e-mail in the future and **save TRBL both paper and postage costs.**

Also, please, if you change your e-mail address, notify Sid at sid-wilkins@hotmail.com

RBL ANTWERP OPEN EVENING

WHEN? Every first Thursday of the month

**WHERE? Café Highlander, Stadswaag 21, Antwerp at
19:30 hrs**

VOLUNTEERS WANTED FOR HOME & HOSPITAL VISITS

We are looking for volunteers who would be happy to visit Branch Members who are not mobile, well, or in hospital, as part of the Branch Community Support Scheme.

No special training is needed just common sense and a sense of humour.

Interested? Please contact Mary Ann:

0486 646 941 (evenings) or

Maryann.marinus@hotmail.com



RBL Antwerp Branch HELP LINE: 0486 646 941

(Mary Ann Marinus.)

If someone is ill, or needs a visit, please **DO** call.



RBL BRANCH DIARY

February

	What	Where	Time	Extra details
29/02/2024	Monthly toast on friendship	Military Commando of the province of Antwerp: Belgiëlei 117 2018 Antwerpen	16-20 hrs	Every last Thursday of the month

March

	What	Where	Time	Extra details
07/03/2024	RBL Open evening	Café Highlander, Stadswaag 21	19:30 hrs	Every first Thursday of the month

April

	What	Where	Time	Extra details
06/04/2024 & 07/04/2024	BATS pantomime Belle	Mark Liebrecht Schouwburg, Mortsel	19:30 hrs 13 hrs 17:30 hrs	www.batsantwerp.be for info and tickets

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

There has been some confusion over renewing membership. Renewing your membership via Paypal, an English cheque or by calling the overseas telephone number is still possible. However, if you have been renewing your membership by paying into the Belgian bank account number of The Royal British Legion Antwerp branch, we want to ask you to not do so anymore and either pay directly via the Membership portal: <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/things-to-do/membership/become-a-member-or-directly> on the English account number:

Payee: Charles Novacraft Direct Ltd re RBL IBAN: GB91NWBK60720170076359
BIC: NWBKGB2L

Make sure to mention these 3 things: 1) your membership number, (which can be found on your membership card, 2) renewal of membership and 3) the Antwerp branch.

There are a couple of ways to renew your membership of The Royal British Legion, Antwerp Branch: You can either renew online at:

<https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/things-to-do/membership/become-a-member>

However, we have seen some issues in the past with overseas bank cards not being accepted for this payment method. If you have a Paypal-account you should not experience problems

OR

Another payment method is directly to London. This is easily done by making a bank transfer ('overschrijving') from your Belgian bank account in Euros using the following details:

Payee: Charles Novacraft Direct Ltd re RBL

IBAN: GB91NWBK60720170076359

BIC: NWBKGB2L

This way there will be no delay in receiving your new membership card.

Current Membership is € 33 per year (this includes the Standard Membership, plus a small Branch Fee).

Please ensure when using this method that the reference contains your [Membership Number](#) and your [full name](#), plus [Antwerp Branch BR3410](#).

Whichever way you choose to renew, please send an email to

Antwerp.memsecretary@rbl.community to confirm that you have joined and you will be added to our mailing list which will keep you up to date on Branch matters and upcoming functions.

NEW MEMBERS If you know someone who would like to join the Legion, they can join in the same ways as per above but add [New Member](#) to your reference.

Alternatively, you can contact our Membership Secretary Zoe for guidance, her details are shown at the end of this newsletter.

IN MEMORIAM

On 26 January we said goodbye to Raf Kloeck. Raf was one of our former Parade Marshalls and he was also the RBL Chairman of Entertainment. A very good friend of the Legion and many of us will remember him for singing his favourite Frank Sinatra songs at our lunches.

The funeral of Raf took place on Saturday 3 February and was well attended. Particularly heart-warming were the fifteen standard bearers from various associations that attended to send Raf on his way. Raf has found his final resting place at the military section of the Schoonselhof cemetery.

We will remember Raf fondly.



Raf Kloeck

Widower of Yvonne Segers (†1990)

*1st sergeant - retired major
1st regiment PARA S.A.S.*

Retired Operations Supervisor Oxy Petrol

Member of the National Para-commando circle of friends

*Committee member and former Parade Marshal and chairman of entertainment of
The Royal British Legion Antwerp branch*

Honored with a various decorations:

Medal of resistance

Medal of war volunteers- Pugnator 44-45

Commemorative medal 1940-1945 with crossed swords

Military decorations 1st and 2nd class

Decorations in the crown order

Veteran's cross of King Leopold III

Born in Antwerp 31st of March 1929

And passed away in Antwerp on the 26th of January 2024

CHRISTMAS LUNCH 16/12/2023

Christmas dinner was well attended, and the Tombola brought in nice bit of money. We even had a visit from Father Christmas himself. We would like to thank the members for attending and the staff of The Basiliek restaurant for delivering us a lovely meal.



OUR CENTENARY CELEBRATION 19/01/2024

On 18 April 1922 the Antwerp Branch of the RBL was formed. And in 2022 we were going to celebrate this anniversary. Unfortunately, events decided otherwise. First postponed because of Covid and then once again postponed because of the death of HM Queen Elizabeth II. But "uitstel is geen afstel" and on Friday 19 January 2024, the city and Mayor of Antwerp hosted a reception for our centenary at the gloriously restored Antwerp City Hall.

We were very happy to see many familiar faces, including representatives from the RBL Ypres and Brussels branches and many other organizations that have supported our work over the years. We kicked off the evening with speeches by Burgemeester Bart De Wever (included below), Ambassador Martin Shearman and our own President Bob Chambers and Chairman Sid Wilkins, followed by plenty of opportunity to chat and catch up with one another. A good time was had by all.

A big thank you to all our members and supporters, past and present. Your service and dedication to the Branch has not gone unnoticed. Here is to the next 100 years!

Commemorative pin

To mark the occasion, we have produced a special commemorative pin which was handed out at the reception.

If you were unable to celebrate with us on 19 January but would still like to receive your commemorative pin, please get in touch with Branch Secretary Inge at antwerp.secretary@rbl.community or call 0478 297 687.





SPEECH BY BART DE WEVER MAYOR OF ANTWERP

Esteemed guests

I once visited a lady in Antwerp on her 100th birthday and I asked her how she felt about being alive for one century. She replied: “Mr Mayor, I guess the first 100 years are the most difficult, and from now on things will be easier.”

I remembered those words when the Royal British Legion asked to celebrate its first centennial here at City Hall. That was in 2021. But unfortunately, the words of the mentioned lady did not come through as the 2 years after your one hundredth birthday proved to be very difficult.

First there was Covid and then most unfortunately the patron of your charity passed away. Personally, I felt great admiration for Queen Elizabeth as she was a person of impeccable dignity, of typical British humour and a sense of duty that - for me - served as an example to us all.

She symbolised the great generation that rebuilt our societies after the Second World War, she was a mother of her nation up to the level that many mourned her as if they had lost a mother or grandmother in their own family.

With all that, the Antwerp branch of the RBL got no ceremony for its centenary anniversary. We stand here at the brink of your 103th anniversary. But in Flemish we have a beautiful saying: uitgesteld is niet verloren / postponed is not lost. And therefore, it is my pleasure and honour to finally welcome you all here at our magnificent City Hall. We used the delay to get the restauration completely done, so postponed is truly not lost.

The work The RBL does is two-fold: firstly, helping ex-service personnel return to civilian life and secondly, remembering those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

The Antwerp Branch, over the years, has made a fine tradition of remembering those who liberated Antwerp at the Cromwell Tank memorial site at the Jan Van Rijswijcklaan. This ceremony has become an integral part of our remembrance ceremonies during the yearly Liberation Weekend. I hereby especially would like to thank those among you who partnered up with the city of Antwerp to accomplish the joint mission of restoring the Cromwell Tank memorial. This ‘lieu de memoire’ is a testimony to the effort and gallantry of all British servicemen and women that liberated our beautiful city.

To celebrate the 75th anniversary of the liberation in 2019 we transformed the weekend into a huge festival of remembrance, in close collaboration with many allied countries. And it was very special to personally meet some of the veterans that we invited to join us on that occasion. Unfortunately, George, Stanley and Geoff are not with us anymore. I am glad that we are still in touch with some of their family members, who generously donated artifacts for the MAS exposition about the war.

One of my very dear memories is that of our own Stanley Williams when I sat with him on the quays of the River Scheldt to watch the Naval parade as the British warship passed by with a piper on it playing a solemn tune and as Spitfires flew by. When Stanley joined the street parade in his wheelchair he

was cheered by tens of thousands of our citizens. I saw elderly ladies waving at him with handkerchiefs and with tears running down their cheeks. Later, when I attended Stanley's funeral his daughter told me that Stanley remembered that day as one of the happiest of his life. I still get emotional remembering that day.

By the way, I kindly invite you all to attend the liberation weekend this year as we will once again organise huge festivities for the 80th anniversary. I also would like to thank those among you who, with relentless effort, help us to make these festivities possible.

Ladies and gentlemen

The tradition of paying tribute must be continued and renewed, to honour all the men and women who contributed to the liberation of the city of Antwerp and its port, through their actions on land, at sea and in the air, regardless under which flag they gave their lives.

Certainly now when war is at our doorstep once again. Certainly now when our basic democratic values, freedom and equality, are in jeopardy. Sir Winston Churchill once said: "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those others that have been tried." Let us take to heart those words, and jointly ward against every form of political or religious extremism. That is our duty, and it is our debt to all those who laid down their lives to grant us the freedom and the prosperity that we should never take for granted.

It is good to know that there are still people and nations that are bound by a craving for peace, freedom and equality. We must never forget that we are each other's allies, that we must stand together in the hour of need, that we are each other's neighbours and friends.

And in the case of the UK we are even more than that. History has forged us together throughout the ages. You might not know this, but in 1338 a British prince was born in the city of Antwerp. Lionel of Antwerp was the younger brother of Edward the Black Prince and son of Edward III (who was also crowned king of France in Gent in 1340).

So I think we can say that we go way back. And in all that time not one British soldier has ever set foot on our soil as an enemy. Not once! On the contrary, you came to us in our darkest hour and delivered us from tyranny and evil. We must not forget that and we shall not forget it. We are more than neighbours and friends, we are family, we are husbands and wives, we are brothers and sisters. Dear friends of the Antwerp branch of the RBL, you are not only here to help us remember of what has been, you are also part of who you helped us become. You are us, and we are you. And as Mayor of this city I humbly thank you for that. Please continue for another century. Congratulations! Thank you very much.

MOVE OF THE V-BOMBS MONUMENT

The work of art *Vrede*, meaning peace, adorned the Wapper for many years. Now, the memorial for the V-bombs in Antwerp during the Second World War, will have a new location on the Rooseveltplaats.

The artwork was created in 1988 by the now deceased sculptor Hilde Van Sumere. This was done on

behalf of the city on the occasion of the 120th anniversary of the founding of the Belgian Red Cross.

The work is an important memorial for the V-bombs that ravaged Antwerp in 1944 and 1945. The greatest human toll was exacted by the bomb that hit the busy Cinema Rex on the De Keyserlei on December 16, 1944. It killed 567 people, including 296 soldiers and 271 civilians.

The initial intention was to place the work of art on the De Keyserlei itself, as close as possible to the bombed cinema. That idea was ultimately dismissed because of the view of Central Station. The statue was therefore placed on the corner of the Frankrijklei and the Teniersplaats. Five years later it was moved to the Wapper, where it wasn't actually that visible.

Because of the limited visibility and the future renovation of the public domain of the Wapper 'Vrede' will be permanently moved to the Rooseveltplaats. There it will be solemnly inaugurated on 28 March, the day that the last V-bomb fell in Greater Antwerp in 1945.

In the artist's words, the triangular shapes that make up the statue symbolize 'faith, hope and love – virtues without which peace is not possible'. Vrede is one of the few purely abstract public works of art in the Art in the City collection.



REMEMBRANCE IN 2024

This year marks the 80th anniversary of various momentous battles and turning points of the Second World War.

At the same time as final preparations for D-Day (the largest seaborne invasion in history that marked the start of the western European liberation), the Italian Campaign was halted at the major German defensive 'Gustav Line'. The ensuing assaults of the Battle of Monte Cassino were the bloodiest of the Italian Campaign in which a multi-country Allied force distinguished themselves. The final breakthrough of 18th May enabled the advance north to liberate Rome on 5th June 1944.

While battle raged across Europe, on the other side of the world Japanese forces invaded India and pushed back the British 14th Army. Outnumbered British and Indian forces withstood weeks of siege and brutal fighting, frequently hand-to-hand, at the Battles of Kohima and Imphal. The defeat of Japanese forces in June (Kohima) and July (Imphal) was a turning point in the war in the east and the springboard for the later Allied liberation of Burma. The 14th Army was a true multinational force, with the majority of its troops from pre-partition India.

In September 1944, Operation Market Garden was a daring attempt to secure key bridges in German-occupied Netherlands in a bid to shorten the war. Some 35,000 paratroopers and glider-borne soldiers landed behind enemy lines to capture towns and key bridges, and were to be supported by a ground force of another 50,000. The courage and tenacity of Market Garden's troops has made this one of the most famous battles of the war.

The Canadian-led Battle of the Scheldt also involved Royal Marines and Scottish Division units in a bitter campaign to open a vital, secure passage to the port of Antwerp, the second largest European port. Victory was achieved in October but at a high cost. However, it meant the Allies could open the sea lanes into The Netherlands and Belgium for vital supplies and help fuel the continent's final liberation.

Each of these battles was a significant turning point in the war, and each was hard-fought and at a significant cost in casualties. Eight decades later we remember the service and sacrifice of the generation that opened the road to freedom.

The Royal British Legion will mark the service and sacrifice of the armed forces involved in these battles through local events organised by its branches.

SUMMARY OF 2024 ANNIVERSARIES

- 18 May 2024: 80th anniversary of the end of the Battle of Monte Cassino
- 6 June 2024: 80th anniversary of D-Day and the start of the Battle of Normandy
- 22 June 2024: 80th anniversary of the end of the Battle of Kohima
- 18 July 2024: 80th anniversary of the end of the Battle of Imphal
- 25 September 2024: 80th anniversary of the end of Operation Market Garden
- 8 November 2024: 80th anniversary of the end of the Battle of the Scheldt

THE LIBERATION OF ANTWERP

The liberation of Antwerp was a significant event during World War II. Antwerp, a major port city in Belgium, was occupied by German forces for four years, from 1940 to 1944. The city played a crucial role in the German occupation as it provided a strategic location for the German war machine.

However, the Allies recognised the importance of Antwerp and its port in their efforts to supply their troops and sustain their advance through Europe. It was crucial for the Allies to regain control of the city and utilise its port facilities to support their logistics.

The liberation of Antwerp began on 4th September 1944, as the British Second Army, led by General Miles Dempsey, launched Operation Switchback. The operation aimed to clear the German forces from the Scheldt Estuary, which was the gateway to Antwerp.

The battle for the Scheldt Estuary was fierce and lasted for several weeks. The German forces put up a strong resistance, using well-fortified positions and heavily defended coastal batteries. The Allied forces faced significant challenges, including difficult terrain, waterlogged fields, and numerous canals.

Despite these challenges, the Allied forces, supported by naval and air power, gradually pushed the German forces back. On 4th November 1944, the city of Antwerp was finally liberated. The German forces were forced to retreat, and the city was once again under Allied control.

The liberation of Antwerp was a major turning point in the war, as it opened the vital supply lines for the Allies. The port of Antwerp played a crucial role in the subsequent Allied advance through Europe. It became a key logistical hub, receiving supplies and reinforcements for the Allied forces.

The liberation of Antwerp also had a significant impact on the local population. The city had suffered greatly under German occupation, with widespread destruction and suffering. The liberation brought hope and relief to the people of Antwerp, who had endured years of hardship.

In conclusion, the liberation of Antwerp marked a major turning point in the war and played a crucial role in the Allied victory. The liberation opened vital supply lines and brought hope to the people of Antwerp and the rest of the world.

DID YOU KNOW?

- [Caribbean steel drums](#)
→ Have you ever heard the distinctive sound of Caribbean steel drums? You can thank World War 2.
- During the war, the US Navy operated anti-submarine patrols from the island of Trinidad. The patrols required fuel, which the navy brought to the island in 55-gallon steel drums. Soon the islanders discovered that the empty fuel drums made great musical drums. Also, by varying the size of the holes cut in the ends, the drums could be “tuned” to different pitches. [Operation Cornflakes](#)

→ The Allies had a creative way of spreading misinformation to German troops. They dropped mailbags filled with fake letters at German train stations. These letters contained anti-Nazi propaganda and were designed to be found by unsuspecting Germans.
- [The Pigeon Parachutist](#)

→ During the war, the British trained pigeons to act as airborne spies. One pigeon named "William of Orange" was awarded the Dickin Medal for delivering crucial information despite being shot and wounded in action.
- [The Ghost Army](#)

→ The Allies had a top-secret unit known as the "Ghost Army" that used deception tactics, inflatable tanks, sound effects, and fake radio transmissions to deceive and confuse the enemy about troop movements and positions.
- [The Chocolate Bomber](#)

→ During the Berlin Airlift (1948-1949), U.S. pilot Gail Halvorsen became known as the "Chocolate Bomber." He dropped candy attached to parachutes for children in Berlin, gaining popularity and boosting morale during the blockade.
- [The Unlikely Allies:](#)

→ When Finland was fighting the Soviet Union, they were briefly allied with Nazi Germany, despite not sharing Nazi ideologies. They later fought against the Germans in Lapland.
- [The Mysterious Pink Spitfire:](#)

→ In 1944, a British RAF officer named Peter James Waiton built a Spitfire aircraft using salvaged parts. Due to a lack of proper paint, he covered the plane with pink paint, making it one of the most unusual-looking Spitfires of the war.

MEET THE COMMITTEE – STEPHEN COOK

When did you join the Legion?

I joined the Legion about 14 years ago.

How did you get in contact with the Legion?

I met Bob, the president of the RBL, at a ceremony of the Snorrenclub from Antwerp and I was invited to join the British Legion.

Why did you pick the Antwerp branch?

I retired at 55 and came to live in Belgium and I have been here for the last 21 years

Have you ever served yourself?

Yes. I was born in a Chelsea hospital because my father was a major in the Royal Artillery stationed in Chelsea. After my father serviced there, he was moved to Colchester where my father served for several years and then my father was posted to Malaysia where the whole family went with him.



My father served in small town called Tampin where there were no schools so my sister and I had to go to a boarding school in Kuala Lumpur. It was called Bourne school where I was for 4 years. When my father came back to the UK, the only life I knew was the military so naturally I followed in my fathers' footsteps and carried on in the military where I joined the junior tradesmen regiment in North Wales.

After I finished my boy service and passed out, I joined the parachute regiment and was posted to Paderborn in Germany where the paratroopers were based. I was on the second regiment and was posted to Gütersloh where I was an instructor teaching people how to get fit. From there I was posted to Palestine in the middle east and spent some time in Aden in Yemen where we would relieve the embassy staff.

After that I was posted to Singapore and to the new territories of Hong Kong doing border patrol and sending the Chinese back over the fence when they were coming over because they weren't allowed in the country. This was near the end of my service.

The last part was in Plymouth where I was in Twenty-two army youth team working with the career office where people came and join the army. Working with all the youngsters of Devon and Cornwall. Plymouth is where I finished my service.

I came back to London and got a job as a train driver with the British rail.