



THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION ANTWERP BRANCH
Tweemaandelijkse newsletter oktober - november 2025

Verantwoordelijke uitgever:
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Dear members

Busy times for the Branch - from September onwards, the Branch can be seen all over the place, as we follow the route of the allied forces as they liberated cities and towns across the province of Antwerp. And then we're straight into Remembrance Sunday and Poppy Appeal territory...

This year, the Poppy Appeal was officially launched at an event at the British Ambassador's Residence. All three Belgian branches came together to start the annual fundraising for veterans and their families. Huge thanks to the Ambassador and the Defence Attaché for hosting this event.

So in the next couple of weeks we hope to see you - be it at the Meir to collect your poppy for the Poppy Appeal, at our AGM and Poppy Lunch, or at the church service on Remembrance Sunday (watch this space for the timing!) or at any of the various upcoming commemorations.

Don't forget to let us know whether you are interested in the trip to the National Arboretum. If you are interested in remembrance, this really is the trip for you. Don't say we didn't tell you! ;-)

Best regards

Inge

Newsletter editor ad interim

RBL OPEN EVENING

Every first Thursday of the month, from 8 pm onwards
 Café Highlander, Stadswaag 21, Antwerp
Join us for a chat and a drink!



RBL Antwerp Branch HELPLINE: 0486 646 941
 (Mary Ann Marinus)

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

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

DATE & TIME	LOCATION	WHAT
Sat 25 October	Meir	Poppy Appeal
Sun 26 October	Basiliek	AGM & Poppy lunch
Thu 6 November	Highlander	NO OPEN EVENING - Highlander closed
Sun 9 November	St Boniface	Remembrance Sunday Church Service (timing tbc)
Tue 11 November	Schoonselhof	Wapenstilstand
Sun 16 November	Highlander	ABCA annual challenge quiz
Sun 26 October	Basiliek	AGM + poppy lunch
Sat 29 November	Antwerp Harbour Hotel	Mission to Seamen Christmas Bazaar
Thu 4 December	Highlander	Open Evening
Sat 13 December	Basiliek	Christmas lunch
Sat 17 & Sun 18 January	MLS Mortsel	BATS panto: Brabo and the Giant - tickets: www.batsantwerp.be

POPPY APPEAL ON THE MEIR

Don't forget to join us on our usual spot at the Meir (Wapper) on Saturday 25 October, from 11 am to 4 pm as we kick off this year's Poppy Appeal.

Stop by for a chat and get your poppy, or stick around for a bit longer and help us 'sell' poppies.

Every poppy shows you care about the Armed Forces community and helps us continue our vital work supporting serving and ex-serving personnel and their families.

As usual we will have the support of the Red Hackle Pipe Band and Highland Dancers.



VOLUNTEERS WANTED FOR HOME AND 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 e-mail: Maryann.marinus@hotmail.com

CHRISTMAS LUNCH

Christmas time is slowly creeping up on us, so high time to make arrangements for RBL Christmas lunch on **Saturday 13 December!**

MENU

Andalusian cream soup

*

Turkey fillet steak 'fine champagne'
salsify - chicory - beans with bacon -
croquettes

*

Christmas ice cream
Coffee and biscuits

Drinks at the table are not included.

Please book your places before 7 December by letting Martje Dequinze know.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

- **Date:** Saturday 13 December, 1 pm
- **Location:** Restaurant De Basiliek, Trooststraat 20-22, Edegem
- **Price:** €42 per person, drinks not included
- **Bookings:** Mail Martje (martjed54@gmail.com) or call 0486 101 484
- **Payment:** Pay into the RBL account before 7 December. Account number: BE53 9730 0871 2553. Please include 'name + number of participants + Christmas lunch'



FESTIVAL OF REMEMBRANCE

Every year, the RBL's Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall honours the service of, and the sacrifices made by the British and Commonwealth Armed Forces community.

In the presence of Their Majesties The King and Queen, personal testimonies, storytelling and wonderful music performances express the nation's gratitude to serving personnel, veterans and their families. The production also marks the sacrifices of those who have defended our freedoms and why it is important to always remember the vital contribution of the Armed Forces community.

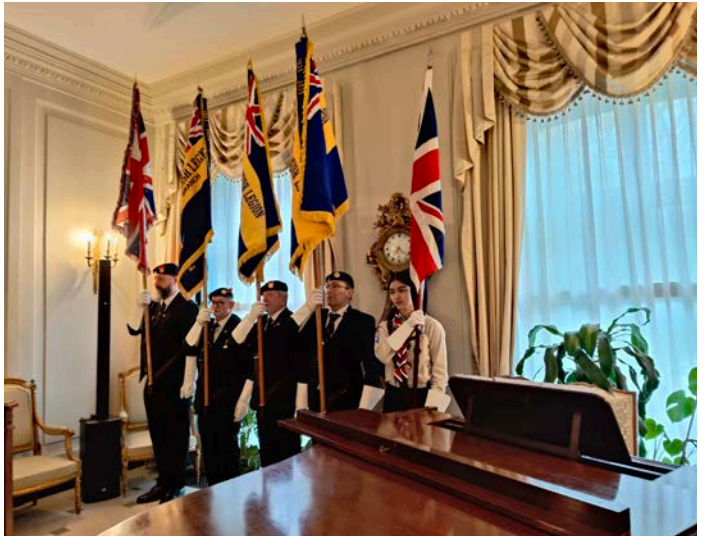
Tune into BBC1 on Saturday 8 November! (and keep your hankies handy ;-) ...)



BELGIAN POPPY APPEAL LAUNCH

On 23 October saw the official launch of the Poppy Appeal in Belgium.

On a windy and rainy 23 October, HE Anne Sherriff and DA John Dickson very graciously hosted the official launch of the annual Poppy Appeal in Belgium - a joint effort of the 3 Belgian branches - Ypres Branch, Brussels Branch and the Antwerp Branch - with the help of the Brussels Shakespeare Society, the Military Wives Choirs Belgium and The Chelsea Pensioners. It was a heartwarming occasion that we hope to repeat next year.



NATIONAL ARBORETUM - BRANCH OUTING

Last chance to let us know if you want to join us for a visit to the National Arboretum in April 2026!

The National Memorial Arboretum is a British site of national remembrance at Alrewas, in Staffordshire. It is designed to help people reflect, celebrate lives lived and commemorate lives lost in service.

A beautiful and inspiring place, the 150 acres of the Arboretum form a living landscape, and is the home to more than 400 memorials nestled amongst lush maturing woodland. Military and civilian associations are represented alongside tributes for individuals. Rich in design and symbolism and sympathetic to the landscape they inhabit the memorials and their stories are waiting to be discovered.

For many it's a wonderful place to stroll and enjoy the trees; for others it's a peaceful and beautiful place to remember loved ones, particularly those who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

Sounds interesting? It is! **That is why the Antwerp Branch would like to organise a trip to the National Arboretum in April of next year.**

However, before we go off renting mini-buses and finding hotels, *we would first like to check with you whether there is a) interest and b) how many people would want to join. Depending on numbers we can decide whether it would be better to take a couple of cars or rent a mini-bus.*

The plan is to go over the weekend of **24-26 April 2026** - i.e. leave on Friday 24 April, spend the day at the National Arboretum on Saturday 25 April (guided tours and buggy tours are available), return journey on Sunday 26 April.

Please let us know by completing this form: <https://forms.gle/fFLFaVZLZrdveTRM6> or mail/call Inge at Antwerp.secretary@rbl.community / 0478 297 687.

More information: <https://www.thenma.org.uk/>

Please note: for this trip you will need a valid passport and an ETA.



MEMORIAL TO HALIFAX NA175 – Q 'QUEENIE'

Earlier this year, Stephen Grist reached out to us about a ceremony in Lommel to remember his father's aircraft which was shot down in February 1945. The crash site is now within the grounds of Teepac in Lommel and the Site Manager, Mr. Bart Peeters generously granted us access to the site.

After an initial delay due to family bereavement the ceremony was rescheduled for 12 September, so the family and a small delegation from the Branch, plus members of the management gathered to remember.

Stephen is a member of the 102 Sqn Association and has written several articles over the years. A brief synopsis taken from articles written by Stephen Grist:

"On the night of 7 February 1945 Q 'Queenie' took off from Pocklington to become part of a force of 460 aircraft directed to bomb Goch on the edge of the Reichswald Forest. The attack was a part of Operation Veritable. The aim was to free up the advance of XXX Corps into Germany.

Given the low cloud base that night the Master Bomber ordered the main force to come below the cloud to an estimated base of 5,000 feet. The Master Bomber stopped the attack after 150 aircraft had dropped their bombs as smoke was causing control of the raid to become impossible.



Crew, from left to right: Johnny Crisp, 'Taffy' Kingdom, 'Mac' Macpherson, Bill Smith, Bill Olerton, B. Peckham, Johnny Grist

As Q 'Queenie' turned away from the attack flames were reported in the starboard wing. The rear gunner spotted gun flashes from the port quarter and recognised the outline of a Ju88. The pilot Bill Smith put the aircraft into a corkscrew manoeuvre and shortly afterward as the flames spread gave the crew the order to abandon the aircraft.

Pilot Officer Smith held Halifax NA175 – Q 'Queenie' the aircraft steady as the crew bailed out. The aircraft crashed close to the Belgian town of Lommel exploding on impact. Bill Smith's body was found some five hundred yards from the aircraft.

The Wireless Operator John Crisp came down through the roof of a local farmhouse owned by the Didden family. As the rest of the crew arrived the family cooked everyone bacon and eggs. The young men of the family then conducted the crew members through the forest to look for a British patrol. Given the flexibility of the front line this was a very dangerous task.

My father John Grist, who was Flight Engineer, came down close to a road and after having been recognised by motor cyclists as an RAF airman rather than a German parachutist was taken to hospital suffering from concussion. After a night in hospital in Eindhoven my father was transported to Eindhoven Airport where he met up with three members of the crew.



Stephen Grist, son of flight engineer John Grist

MEMORIAL TO HALIFAX NA175 – Q ‘QUEENIE’

Unfortunately, the two other members of the crew, Kingdom and Peckham, had parachuted into trees and had suffered injuries which required hospital attention. The four members of the crew were then flown back to Pocklington via Down Ampney in Gloucestershire.

The site of the crash is now marked by a small tree that was planted in 1995 by the remaining members of the crew John Grist and Bill Ollerton. The site lies on land owned by a major plastics company Teepak who have cared for the tree and memorial ever since its inauguration.

Pilot Officer Bill Smith was buried at Leopoldsburg Military Cemetery in 1945. Flowers have been laid on his grave by the Didden family and by Gaston Van Genechten every year since 1995



The story is of course much wider with details of the friendship between the families and local families, and of course the story of the Squadron is much, much broader.

We were honoured to be invited to the ceremony on the grounds of Teepak this year and join the family in honouring the life of the Pilot who sacrificed himself so that the other six members of his crew could escape.

(Report by Ian Newbitt)



Detail of the commemorative plaque placed during the ceremony to plant the tree on the 7th February 1995



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

All members are invited to the Antwerp Branch Annual General Meeting on Sunday 26 October, 11 am.

This is the time the committee will update you, the members, about their activities of the past year, and their plans and hopes for the future. It is also your chance to bring suggestions to the floor, or ask questions about the Branch and its activities.

SUNDAY 26 OCTOBER, 11 AM, BASILIEK (EDEGEM), FOLLOWED BY THE POPPY LUNCH AT 1 PM.

THROWBACK TO THE TANK CEREMONY 2025

With the plethora of commemorations and activities going on from September onwards, our annual Tank Ceremony is already becoming a distant memory, but we would still like to take this opportunity to thank everyone that contributed to another glorious weekend that the Branch can rightfully be proud of. We were lucky enough to have the National President Paul Bennett in attendance and even our Prime Minister Bart De Wever stopped by unannounced! We have heard nothing but the highest praise for our ceremony and this would not be possible without the help of everyone who contributed. Thank you!



THROWBACK TO THE TANK CEREMONY 2025 - CONT'D



LIBERATION GEEL TEN-AARD - 13 SEPTEMBER 2025

On 13 September the Antwerp Branch joined the commemoration in Geel-Ten-Aard where we remembered the Battle for the two bridge heads.

On 14 September 1944, the 15th Scottish Infantry Division managed to cross the Kempen Canal Bocholt-Herentals and form a small bridgehead in the village centre of Ten Aard. But the Germans destroyed every bridge the Scots struck across the canal. The Allied bridgehead only just held. Every advance the Scots made, the Germans beat back. Incessantly there was artillery shelling and hand-to-hand combat. The British commander-in-chief, Field Marshal Montgomery, came to cheer the division on 15 September and hand out medals. The fighting at Ten Aard continued. As the Scots failed to break out of the bridgehead, they were ordered to withdraw. They did so on the night of 20-21 September. But a day later, the Germans were gone too, to take positions further north.

Ten Aard was left devastated. Of the 300 houses, almost 100 were burnt out, destroyed or badly damaged. Losses on both sides were high. The 15th Scottish Division counted 112 killed, 644 wounded and 158 missing. There were 25 civilian casualties.



81ST ANNIVERSARY LIBERATION OF EINDHOVEN

On Thursday 18 September I journeyed to Eindhoven with Donald to take part in the ceremony to mark the 81st Anniversary of the liberation of Eindhoven by the 101st Airborne Division.

Slight change to the previous years with no Torch procession, but a nice ceremony to celebrate the liberation of the town.

The lighting of the eternal flame, amid the speeches and songs, was very good.

The standards entered the arena half way through the ceremony - a colour party from 101 Airborne Div, with four standards from the RBL plus one

flag from the Dutch veterans.

A limited laying of wreaths was followed by the Last Post and national anthems.

Thereafter a huge crowd of scouts entered the arena with fakkels lit by the eternal flame. They were then tasked with carrying the flame to their villages and towns.

Following the ceremony the city hosted the invited guests to a reception in the city hall. Interesting conversations with British and Dutch veterans before returning home before midnight!
(Report by Ian Newbitt)



LIBERATION WUUSTWEZEL - 19 OCTOBER 2025

On 18 October, the commemoration of the Liberation of Wuustwezel was joined by a delegation of the Antwerp Branch.

The liberation of Wuustwezel took place on 21 and 22 October 1944, when the village was liberated by the British 49th (West Riding) Infantry Division, aka the 'Polar Bears'. This liberation was part of the Allied advance through Belgium, with the Polar Bears playing a key role in driving German troops out of the region.

(Pictures courtesy of Raymon Pirlet)



THE LAST CASUALTIES (from: *The First World War - A Miscellany*)

Almost 11,000 soldiers were killed, wounded or recorded as missing on 11 November 1918. The following ones are recorded as being the last of their countrymen to die in battle in the First World War.

Private George Ellison - Britain - 9:30 am

Ellison served throughout the war. His grave at Mons faces that of the first British fatality: Private John Parr, killed in August 1914.

Augustin Trébuchon - France - 10:45 am

Trébuchon was carrying news of when food was to be served following the armistice when he was shot dead.

Private George Price - Canada - 10:58 am

Price was advised by Belgian civilians not to leave the shelter of their house but when he did, he was shot and killed by a sniper.

Private Henry Gunther - USA - 10:59 am

Gunther attacked a German machine-gun position and despite being waved back by German soldiers continued, being shot at the last moment.

Lieutenant Thoma - Germany - after 11 am

The German officer approached American soldiers who, unaware of the end of the war, shot and killed him.

The last Australians to be killed in action of the Western Front were Sappers Charles Barrett and Arthur Johnson and Second Corporal Albert Davey, who had been killed at Sambre-Oise Canal on 4 November.

*"Almost as he fell, the gunfire died away and an appalling silence prevailed."
(US Army 79th Divisional history on Henry Gunther's death)*

LE WAGON DE L'ARMISTICE (from: *The First World War - A Miscellany*)

With no other option, German representatives met their Allied counterparts in railway carriage 2419D in a forest near Compiègnes on 8 November. The location was chosen to ensure secrecy and no one in the German delegation was a senior military figure - the German Army high command were keen to remain distant from the proceedings to preserve their reputations.

There was little in the way of negotiation - the Allies presented the Germans with the terms and if they did not sign, the war would continue. The Germans had three days to decide. On the 11th, 5:20 am, the armistice was signed.

In 1940 Hitler used the same carriage to accept the French surrender.



YOUR COMMITTEE CONTACTS

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<p>Vice Chairman Ian Newbitt iannewbitt@gmail.com</p> 	<p>Poppy Organiser Lynne Marinus Voetboogstraat 12 2180 Ekeren 0495 188 089 (after 18:00h) lynnemarinus@gmail.com</p> 
<p>Hon. Secretary Inge Hödl Van Peborghlei 11 2640 Mortsel 0478 297 687 inge_hodl@yahoo.co.uk</p> 	<p>Chairman Branch Community Support Team Mary Ann Marinus 0486 646 941 maryann.marinus@hotmail.com</p> 
<p>Membership Secretary</p> <p>Joanna Newbitt 0474 038 238</p>  <p>Antwerp.memsecretary@rbl.community</p>	<p>Editor Newsletter</p> <p>Position to be filled. If you are interested, please contact Sid Wilkins</p>
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