



DID YOU SAY BELGIAN HEROES?!

EPISODE 2 : 1815, WW1 AND WW2



DID YOU SAY BELGIAN HEROES?!



'The Cockpit of Europe' is how Belgium has often been described - the stage upon which other competing nations have come to fight out their differences. A crossroads and trading hub falling between power blocks, Belgium has been the scene of countless colossal clashes - Ramillies, Oudenarde, Jemappes, Waterloo, Ypres, to name but a few. Ruled successively by the Romans, Franks, French, Holy Roman Empire, Burgundians, Spanish, Austrians and Dutch, the idea of an independent Belgian nation only floated into view in the 18th century.

It is easy to forget that Belgian people have been living in these lands all the while. The name goes back at least 2,000 years, when the Belgae people inspired the name of the Roman province Gallia Belgica. Julius Caesar was in no doubt about their bravery: 'Of all these people [the Gauls],' he wrote, 'the Belgae are the most courageous.' It should be no surprise, therefore, that in the great European conflicts of the last 200 years, when Europe once again clashed over Belgian soil, Belgium once again produced heroes of outstanding courage. The majority of them may not be well known on the international stage, or indeed even in Belgium itself - but

understatement is an inalienable national characteristic, and fame is by no means a reliable measure of bravery.

Here we look at more than 50 such heroes from Brussels and Wallonia, where the Battle of Waterloo took place, and the scene of some of the most bitter fighting in the two World Wars - and of some of Belgium's most heroic acts of resistance.

Waterloo, 1815

The concept of an independent Belgian nation, in the shape that we know it today, had little meaning until the 18th century. However, the high-handed rule of the Austrian Empire provoked a rebellion called the Brabant Revolution in 1789-90, in which independence was proclaimed. It was brutally crushed, and quickly overtaken by events in the wake of the French Revolution of 1789. The Austrians took the royalist side of their own Marie-Antoinette, so the French Revolutionary Army took on the Austrians, and defeated it at the Battle of Fleurus, near Charleroi, in 1794, bringing Austrian rule in Belgium to a close. Many Belgians saw the French as an army of liberation, and a means for achieving their own independence.



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Front cover image: King Albert I of Belgium © WBT Back cover image: Queen Elisabeth of Belgium © WBT

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The French brought many welcome reforms to Belgian life, including the possibility of advancement by merit rather than by birth. Many Belgians eagerly signed up to the French army, and fought for Napoleon throughout his campaigns. But instead of achieving independence, Belgium was absorbed into France. Also, the Belgians did not take kindly to the radical secularisation of the state, and some spectacular acts of anti-Catholic vandalism, such as the destruction or plunder of many abbeys: the Abbaye d'Orval in 1793, Abbaye Notre-Dame de Leffe (Dinant) and the Abbaye de Villers in 1794, and many more.

When France's military fortunes collapsed after its failed invasion of Russia, and Napoleon was forced to abdicate and despatched to Elba, many Belgians realised that France was not the route to independence. So when Napoleon slipped his guard in Elba, reassembled his army and headed towards Brussels, numerous Belgians switched sides and joined the Allies. There are tales of brothers fighting brothers on the field of Waterloo.

After their victory at Waterloo, the Allies did not grant independence to Belgium either; at the Congress of Vienna, Belgium was assigned to the Netherlands. This unpopular period of foreign rule came finally to an end in the relatively bloodless Belgian Revolution of 1830, and Belgium at last won its independence. As part of the international deal that set it up, Belgium was to be neutral - a neutrality that was affirmed at the Treaty of London in 1839, and guaranteed by the signatories, notably Britain, France and the German Confederation led by Prussia.

First World War

1914-18

Nearly a century later, Prussia was part of the new and ambitious state of Germany, a thrusting military power that had shown its muscle by defeating France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. Belgium's neutrality had been affirmed and reaffirmed by treaty,



Free Belgium postcard sent under German occupation of the country

but its government and King Leopold II were aware of its vulnerability. As one of the most successful industrial nations, and with territories abroad, notably the huge Congo Free State, Belgium also had desirability. Keen to shore up their defences should the imperial sabre-rattling of their neighbours turn to war, in the 1880s the Belgians built massive defences around key strategic cities, ringing them with state-of-the-art fortresses: Liège (against the potential threat of Germany), Namur (against France), and Antwerp (against the Netherlands and Britain).

By 1914, international competition and posturing between the leading imperial nations was under such tension that the slightest incident would snap the wires in the complex of international treaties and alliances. That incident was the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in Sarajevo in June 1914. War was imminent. The Germans had a plan - the Schlieffen Plan - to wrong-foot the Triple Entente of Britain, France and Russia: so it could concentrate its attention on Russia, where Napoleon's ambitions had come to grief, it would deal a knockout blow to France, taking Paris before Britain had a chance to come to its aid. To do this, Germany would not attempt to punch through the heavily defended French border with Germany. Instead it would rip through Belgium and cross into France through its much more lightly defended border.



Edith Cavell and Marie Depage Monument
in Brussels by Paul Du Bois

Germany issued an ultimatum to Belgium on 2 August 1914: allow our army to pass, and be rewarded, or oppose us and face the consequences. To their surprise, given the well-known might of the German military machine, the Belgians refused. The Germans had made two miscalculations: they thought that Belgium would be a pushover, and that Britain would not honour its guarantee of Belgian neutrality, famously dismissing the 1839 Treaty of London as a mere 'scrap of paper'.

So on 3 August war was declared, and the following day the German army began pouring over the border, heading for Liège. They witnessed Belgian tenacity at first hand when five gendarmes at Visé stood in the middle of the road and tried to stop the German army. The twelve forts around Liège put up a stubborn defence. The Germans had to fight all the way, but in the end their superior armaments prevailed. One by one the Liège forts were silenced, three of them clobbered by a monstrous new gun called 'Big Bertha'

against which the Belgians had no defence. Gradually the German army made its way across Belgium towards the border with France, taking heavy losses, for which they exacted cruel revenge on the civilian population. In acts of savagery which became known as the 'Rape of Belgium', they wantonly destroyed many historic 'Martyr Towns', used hostages as human shields, and submitted the civilian population to widespread executions and atrocities in which more than 5,000 Belgian civilians were murdered.

Meanwhile, the Belgians' stout defence of their territory had held back the German advance for almost three weeks - long enough for British Expeditionary Force and the French to prepare a defence of the Belgian-French border. On 21 August the British had their very first encounters with the German Army, and their first casualty, near Mons. On 23 August they had their first major clash, and, facing overwhelming odds, had to retreat into France. The Germans now pushed on towards Paris,



Brussels Royal Park © J Jeanmart - WBT

but were defeated in the Battle of the Marne, and forced to retreat to a line that - in October, as each side dug in - became the Western Front.

By this time, the Belgian army, led by their 'Soldier-King' Albert I, had retreated to De Panne in the far northwest of the country. During the fiercely fought Battle of the Yser, in October 1914, the sluice gates on the coast at Nieuwpoort were opened at high tide, flooding the River Yser as far south as Diksmuide, preventing further German advance in that sector. The First Battle of Ypres, involving British, French and Belgian forces, took place in October-November to the south of Diksmuide. Four years of bitter, costly trench warfare ensued, along a 700-km line that stretched through Belgium and France, from Nieuwpoort to the Swiss border.

Apart from the sliver of land the west of the front line, running past Ypres in Flanders and Ploegsteert ('Plugstreet') in Wallonia, Belgium was now under German occupation - a period of great hardship and privation for most of the population. Many Belgians - men, women, young, old - played their part in assisting the Allied war effort. They set up resistance networks that ushered to safety Allied soldiers caught behind the German lines, usually over the border into neutral Netherlands; they collected information on German troop and munitions movements, and passed this on to the Allies through couriers, often with the direct help of British intelligence services; they published underground newspapers, such as *La Libre Belgique clandestine*, to spread news and boost morale; they helped young men to escape into the Netherlands so they could join the Belgian Army at the Front. A large number of resistance workers paid for their patriotism with their lives, notably Edith Cavell and Gabrielle Petit, executed by firing squad.

Peace eventually came in 1918 when Germany, in full retreat before an Allied advance, called for an Armistice from their headquarters in the town of Spa, near Liège.

The Second World War

1939-45

Just 22 years later, on 10 May 1940, Belgium was invaded again by Germany: history seemed to be repeating itself. Again Belgium was a neutral country, having reasserted its neutrality in 1936; again Germany aimed to strike a lightning blow on France by bypassing French defences along the German border - the Maginot Line. Again, the Belgian Army put up stout resistance, providing cover for the retreating Allied forces. But on 28 May, the Battle of Belgium, or '18 Days' Campaign', came to an end as King Leopold III surrendered.

This time many of the lessons of the First World War had been learnt: the Belgian resistance had swung into action even before the first shot was fired, and with links to British



Plaque at the Citadelle of Liège, where many resistants of both wars were murdered

intelligence already in place. The Légion Belge, which later became the Armée Secrète in 1943, was officially recognised and aided by the Allies. Some agents, notably Walthère Dewé in Liège operated in both wars. This time, however, the scenario was somewhat different: this was a more mobile war, without a Western Front to divide the opposing nations. German-occupied territory covered most of Western Europe. Air power was far more significant.

A number of Belgians - most famously Andrée de Jongh and Albert Guérisse - created escape routes for downed Allied airmen, escorting them personally with false papers right across France and over the Pyrenees into neutral Spain, from where they could get a passage back to Britain. Many Belgians were conscripted to work in Germany, but underground groups helped them to hide. Resistance fighters, such as the Groupe G, carried out sabotage campaigns, blowing up bridges and power stations, or just turning around signposts to frustrate the enemy - although there was always a high risk of savage reprisals on civilians for such insubordination. In intelligence gathering, the work of the Belgian resistance was especially appreciated by the Allies, supplying some 80% of information from occupied Europe for much of the war.

The Germans encouraged the civilian population to collaborate with them and denounce anyone suspected of being in the underground. In Liège, postal workers intercepted letters of denunciation and suppressed them, or at least warned their would-be victims to go into hiding. In 1942 the Jewish population of Belgium became the target of Nazi genocidal policy. Many Belgians sheltered Jews, especially children whose parents has been arrested and deported to the death camps.

Many Belgians also fought with the Allies. The Belgian 1st Infantry Brigade, under the

command of Lieutenant-General Piron, took part in the Normandy Campaign and the liberation of the Netherlands. The RAF's 350th Squadron was composed entirely of Belgian pilots, and took part in D-Day, provided bomber escorts and attacked German shipping.

Brussels was liberated on 3 September 1944, with the 'Piron Brigade' joining the celebrations. But the war lingered on, and southern Belgium was the target of the brutal German counterattack called the Ardennes Offensive, or the Battle of the Bulge, during the harsh winter of 1944-45. The maquisards, hiding in remote uplands, continued their sabotage, but reprisals became ever more vengeful. Only Germany's unconditional surrender on 8 May 1945 brought peace at last.

Since the war, the Belgians have been magnanimous in their quest for reconciliation - especially given what they had suffered during the wars of the 20th century. They have been ardent supporters of the European Union and NATO, with headquarters of both on their soil - practical expression of their fervent wish never to see wars like this again. Belgium, as this book shows, can produce war heroes of many kinds, but it would rather it belonged to a world where they are not needed.





Ath, in the Province of Hainaut, is the 'City of Giants' – famous above all for its festivities called the 'Ducasse' during the fourth weekend in August, when giant sculptures – made of papier-mâché, fibreglass, wicker, wood and textiles – are carried and twirled through the streets to the sound of drums and oompah-bands. The stars of the show are Monsieur Gouyasse (Goliath) who marries Madame Gouyasse, and fights David (a child), but the parades also feature a host of other biblical, mythological and folkloric figures. The event has its roots in the consecration of the original church of St Julien in the 15th century. If you are not there in August, you can see the giants in their museum, the Maison des Géants, in the 18th-century Château Cambier.

Ath developed in the 12th century, as its robust Burbant Tower testifies. Its weekly market dates back to the 14th century. A military town, with a strategically important location on the borderland with France, it was

conquered and fortified successively, before industries began to dominate in the late 19th century. Ath was a centre of resistance activities in both world wars.

DON'T MISS...

The 'Ducasse' centring on the fourth weekend of August; the Maison des Géants museum. Nearby are: Mahymobiles at Leuze-en-Hainaut (veteran and vintage cars); two excellent châteaux: Château de Beloeil and Château d'Attre; Pairi Daiza (zoo); and the beautiful historic convent-hospital, the Hôpital Notre-Dame à la Rose, at Lessines.

For more tips about the region, please visit our website:
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Ath Paysage © Photos FTPH - C.Carpentier



Léon Trulin

There is a bronze statue of a young man – a schoolboy almost – in the French city of Lille, beneath which is an inscription that reads, ‘I pardon everyone, friends and enemies. I grant them that favour because it is denied to me.’ It is a quotation from the last letter that Léon Trulin sent to his mother before his execution by firing squad as a spy on 8 November 1915. He was 18 years old. Born in Ath in 1897, he was the seventh of eight children, in a family that had moved to Lille in 1902 after the early death of his father, a roofer. Leaving school aged 12, he worked in a fur factory before suffering an injury to his knee, but continued various studies while convalescing. When war broke out in July 1914 he went to England to try to join the Belgian army, but was refused on the grounds of poor health. Instead he undertook intelligence missions for the British in occupied northern France and Belgium, creating a network called ‘Noël Lurtin’, an anagram of his name. On 3 October 1915 he was arrested by the German police while attempting break through the barbed wire and electric fence (the ‘Wire of Death’) that the Germans had erected along the Belgian-Dutch

border. He was brought to Lille for trial by the German military authorities, along with six others in his network – his friends, all aged between 15 and 18. Léon and two others were condemned to death, the remainder to long prison sentences. Two days later, the death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment with hard labour for all except Léon. His response was simple: ‘I die for my country without regret.’



Ath Monument © WBT - J.L. Flémal

BRUSSELS

This is a capital city five times over: the capital of Belgium, the capital of the Brussels Region, the capital of the Flemish Community of Belgium (although Brussels is 95% French-speaking), the capital of the Wallonia–Brussels Federation (formerly the French-speaking Community of Belgium), and the capital of the European Union.

No surprise, therefore, that it is a vivacious, energising place to be. The outside world may imagine it as a bureaucratic kind of city, thinking of the European Union, but the ‘Quartier Européen’ and European Parliament are tucked away to one side, to the southeast of the centre. The historic heart is the glorious Grand’Place, one of Europe’s great public squares, surrounded by ornate guildhouses, a Gothic town hall and the neo-Gothic Maison du Roi. It is however, not quite what it seems: the Grand’Place is actually a triumph over war, rebuilt after it was virtually flattened by the army of Louis XIV of France in 1695.

Central Brussels is layered with history that goes back to early medieval times. It became a city of great elegance under Austrian rule in the 18th century, and the aristocratic mansions were a suitable setting for the international social elite that gathered for the famous Duchess of Richmond’s ball on the eve of the Battle of Waterloo. With Belgium’s flourishing industrial prosperity in the late 19th century, the newly rich middle-classes elite moved into southern suburbs, and adopted revolutionary design style created by Victor Horta: Art Nouveau.

Being the capital, Brussels suffered particular humiliation under the boot of the occupying forces during both World Wars, and by the same token was the scene of lavish celebrations at the moments of liberation. A number of statues and memorials bear witness to these episodes, but anyone who

really wants to get to grips with the military history of Brussels and Belgium should go to the Parc du Cinquantenaire (near the Quartier Européen) to visit the Musée Royal de l’Armée et d’Histoire Militaire, Belgium’s best military history museum, which includes special sections on the two World Wars and the Belgian resistance.

DON’T MISS...

The Grand’Place; the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts (wonderful collections of late medieval and Renaissance art, Rubens, the Belgian Symbolists, and Magritte); the Musées Royaux d’Art et d’Histoire and Musée Royal de l’Armée et d’Histoire Militaire, at the Parc du Cinquantenaire; the Musée des Sciences Naturelles, in Parc Léopold, behind the massive European Parliament building; the Cathedral of Saint Michael and Saint Gudule; the Galeries St-Hubert (beautiful 19th-century shopping arcades); the Musical Instruments Museum and the Centre de la Bande Dessinée (comic strip museum with Tintin et al.), both also masterpieces of Art Nouveau architecture; the Musée Horta, an Art Nouveau shrine; Maison de la Musique on Place Flagey and the Villa Empain, two of the finest examples of post-First World War Art Deco architecture; the Atomium – and of course the Manneken-Pis.

For more about Brussels, its attractions and events, please visit our website:
www.belgiumtheplaceto.be



The Musical Instruments Museum, Brussels - © Oliver Knight/BTO



King Albert I and Queen Elisabeth

Belgium's stout defence of its independence in 1914 was led from the top by its king, Albert I. 'Belgium is a nation, not a road,' he declared in response to the German ultimatum demanding that Belgium should allow German troops to pass through its neutral territory in order to attack France. Personally taking command of the Belgian army, King Albert then steadfastly led his nation's forces through the war, remaining in command while holding the line at De Panne on the north coast, behind the flooded estuary of the River Yser. For this he became known as the 'Roi-Soldat' (Soldier-King) or 'Roi Chevalier' (Knight-King). His German-born queen, Elisabeth of Bavaria, whom he had married in 1900, remained by his side at De Panne, visiting the front lines and working at a nursing unit that she helped to set up with the Belgian royal surgeon Dr Antoine Depage, dealing personally with many severely wounded soldiers. For this she became affectionately known as the 'Reine-Infirmière' (Nurse-Queen). Albert died in a climbing accident in the Ardennes in 1934,

aged 58. His Queen lived on through the Second World War, during which she stayed in Belgium and used her German background to negotiate with the Nazis. This included protecting hundreds of Jewish children from deportation - for which, in 1965, she was later awarded the title 'Righteous Among the Nations' by the Israeli government. On the liberation of Brussels in 1944 she opened the doors of the Palace of Laeken to British troops of the XXX Corps under General Horrocks and the Piron Brigade (see page 27). She died in 1965, aged 89





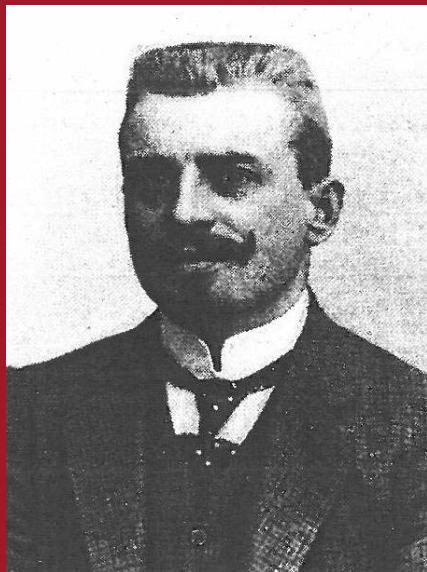
Edith Cavell

A plaque at the Tir National (National Firing Range) at Schaerbeek, eastern Brussels, declares 'Here fell 35 heroes who offered their lives for their country. Shot by the Germans.' Among them is the nurse Edith Cavell, celebrated as a founding figure of the nursing profession in Belgium, but also as the victim of a German firing squad in 1915. She was in fact English, from Norfolk, but at the citation implies, the Belgians have adopted her as one of their own. Born in 1865, she came to Brussels in 1900 to work as a governess, before training as a nurse in London. In 1907 she was invited back to Belgium by Dr Antoine Depage to start a nursing school, which, with the support of Queen Elisabeth, quickly became well established, with connections to three major Brussels hospitals. At the outbreak of the war, Cavell prepared the hospital to receive the wounded. Meanwhile, she secretly began to give assistance to Allied soldiers caught behind the lines. Many of these had found refuge at the estate of the Prince and Princess de Croÿ near Mons, and were now following an escape route to neutral Netherlands. Cavell provided accommodation at the nursing school and a number of safe houses in Brussels. In this way some 200

Allied servicemen regained their freedom before her network was unmasked by a German agent. She was arrested on 3 August 1915, held at the Saint-Gilles prison in Brussels, tried, and sentenced to death. News of the sentence caused an international outcry, but calls – especially from the Americans – for the sentence to be commuted went unheard. She prepared for her death with customary resolution, and said to her English chaplain the famous words: 'I know now that patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred and no bitterness towards anyone.' She was taken at dawn to the shooting range for execution on 12 October, apparently showing heroic dignity. For the Germans this was an international propaganda disaster, which contributed to the decisive entry of the US into the war in 1917. After the war, when Cavell's body was repatriated to Norwich for burial, tens of thousands lined the streets of London to see the funeral cortège. Edith Cavell is widely remembered in Belgium and abroad, and a leading hospital in Brussels still bears her name.

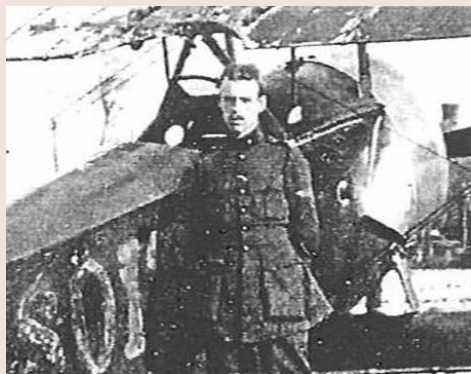


Art Nouveau detail © J Brunton - belgiumthelaceto.be™



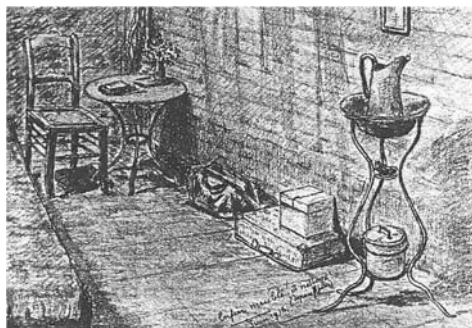
Philippe Baucq

Edith Cavell was not the only resistance worker to die at the Tir National on 12 October 1915. Another member of her network, the 35-year-old Brussels-born architect Philippe Baucq was also condemned to death and, according to some reports, she had to witness his execution by firing squad before she submitted to her own. Arrested five days before Cavell, he was singled out by the German authorities as a key member of the network; five others were tried at the same time, but not condemned to death. A huge memorial to him in the Place de Jamblinne de Meux in Schaerbeek, eastern Brussels, was – like many such memorials to First World War Belgian heroes – destroyed by the Germans during the Second World War. Another striking monument to him by the architect and sculptor Jacques Nisot was erected in Parc Josaphat in Schaerbeek in 1974.



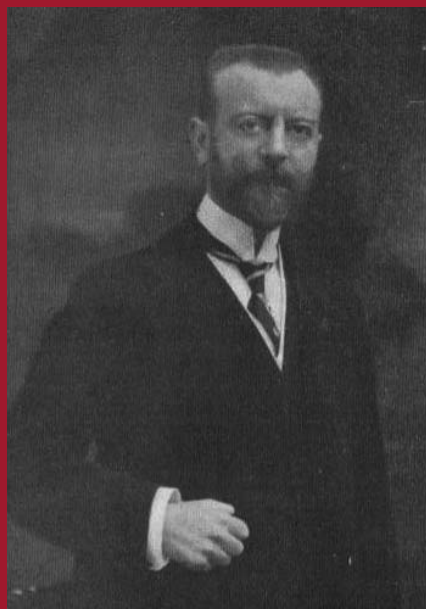
Edmond Thieffry

Belgium produced a number of great flying aces during First World War, and Edmond Thieffry was one of the stars, with ten confirmed victories. Born in the Brussels suburb of Etterbeek, he studied law at the University of Louvain – which later earned him the nicknamed ‘The Flying Judge’. He started the war in the Belgian Army, serving under General Leman (see page 41). He was captured by the Germans, but escaped to the Netherlands on a stolen motorcycle. In 1915, still aged just 23, he joined the Belgian Air Corps, serving at first as an observer for artillery, before being assigned to a single-seat fighter squadron. He scored his ten victories against enemy aircraft along the Western Front between March and October 1917. Then in February 1918 he was shot down by a German two-seater; wounded and forced to land behind German lines, he was captured and remained a prisoner for the rest of the war – apart from 10 days when he escaped and was on the run. After the war he practised as a lawyer, but remained closely linked to aviation. A founder of the Belgian airline Sabena in 1923, he made the first pioneering flight between Brussels and Belgian Congo – and extremely hazardous adventure that took 51 days. He was killed in a flying accident close to Lake Tanganyika in 1929, aged just 36. A metro station in Etterbeek, Brussels, now bears his name.



Laure Tandel

Many Belgian women during the First World War provided vital intelligence services to the British. One of the most effective organisations was La Dame Blanche, founded by Walthère Dewé (see page 44) in 1916 in Liège. La Dame Blanche was organised along military lines, with battalions and platoons, and participants considered themselves to be 'soldiers without uniforms' in the service of their country. The head of its Battalion III, based in Brussels, was Laure Tandel, a schoolmistress in her 40s, who ran a school with her sister Louise, also a key Dame Blanche agent. Laure had a record of defiance: in 1916, before she took over Battalion III, she has been arrested and imprisoned for a year for her work in an underground network called 'Le Mot du Soldat', which provided a communication link between Belgian soldiers at the Front and their families back home. Among the 190 or so operatives in the Battalion, some 60 were women – often mature women, unmarried or widowed, who attracted less attention as they carried out their work as trainwatchers and couriers, or collecting information from agents in the field and taking them to the headquarters in Liège.



Adolphe Max

Boulevard Adolphe Max, the great thoroughfare of central Brussels, is named after its popular and long-serving Bourgmestre (Mayor). Born in Brussels in 1869, he was Bourgmestre from 1909 until his death in 1939. He spent most of the First World War, however, in prison in Germany. After the German army had marched into the city on 20 August 1914, he steadfastly refused to submit his authority to German rule and gave voice to the popular protest against the oppressive measures inflicted by the occupation. When he stood in opposition to the hefty war indemnity, or demand for compensation, that the Germans wanted to impose, on 26 September he was arrested and deported. He became an emblem of civil resistance against the German occupation, and on his return in November 1918 he was greeted as a hero.



Robert Maistriau

During the Second World War there were essentially three forms of resistance activity: intelligence gathering, assisting Allied personnel on the run, and sabotage. Among the groups carrying out sabotage, the most famous and effective was the Groupe General de Sabotage de Belgique, or Groupe G. Founded in January 1942, it recruited mainly from among the staff and former students at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, many of them scientists and engineers. Operating especially in the hilly terrain of Wallonia, it targeted infrastructure: railways, roads, the power supply and communications networks. A famous incident took place on 19 April 1943: a train (called the 'Twentieth Convoy') taking 1,631 Jews from the notorious Caserne Dossin in Mechelen in Flanders to their fate in Auschwitz was stopped by three members of Groupe G armed with just one revolver and a red lamp; 232 of the captives escaped. Among the attackers was Robert Maistriau; born in the Brussels suburb of Ixelles in 1921, he was the son of a general with a distinguished First World War career in the army medical service, and had himself begun a medical training at the Université Libre de Bruxelles by the time war broke out in 1940. He went on to become

the head of recruitment for Groupe G. On 15 January 1944, Groupe G achieved one of its greatest feats, known as 'La Grande Coupure' ('The Great Power Cut'): a co-ordinated attack on all the high-tension electricity lines in Belgium, which caused chaos by bringing factories in Belgium to a standstill and disrupting strategic industries Germany's in Ruhr Valley. Maistriau was captured the following day, but slipped his guard and fled into France. He returned to the Ardennes, but was captured again and incarcerated in the Gestapo prison of Breendonk in Flanders before being transported to Buchenwald then Belsen concentration camps in Germany; but he survived until liberation by the British in April 1945. Groupe G played a vital role behind the lines as the fortunes of war turned: saboteurs assisted the Allied advance by destroying over 100 bridges, 285 trains, 17 rail tunnels, 15 canal locks and over 1,000 vehicles. It is thought to have had over 4,000 members, about 800 of whom died in action or in prison, including the founder, Jean Burgers: he was arrested on 17 March 1944, and hanged at Buchenwald six months later. After the war Maistriau became a cattle rancher and forester in the Belgian Congo. In 1994 he was awarded the title 'Righteous Among the Nations' by the Israeli government. He died in Brussels in 2008, aged 83.



La porteuse d'eau
© jeanmart-opt bxl



Andrée de Jongh

One of the most astonishing escape networks for Allied servicemen trapped behind enemy lines during the Second World War was operated by a young commercial artist and volunteer nurse in her early twenties, born in Schaerbeek, Brussels. She was called Andrée de Jongh, but known as 'Dédée'. At the outbreak of the war, inspired by the story of Edith Cavell and Gabrielle Petit, and working

with her father Frédéric, a headmaster, she set up what became known as the 'Comet Line', because escapees moved so quickly along it; it took Allied servicemen – primarily downed airmen – right across France to neutral Spain, from where they could make their way back to Britain. The route began in safehouses in Brussels. Using aliases and disguises, the servicemen were then escorted by train across occupied France and eventually to the far southwest of France, where they were ushered across the Pyrenees into Spain by Basque guides. The British consulate in Bilbao responded to De Jongh's plea for assistance by contacting M19, British military intelligence, which supplied financial assistance. She herself made 32 trips to Spain with 116 escapees. By the end of 1942, the Comet Line had some 50 agents, but almost all were arrested in January 1943 after a betrayal, and ended up in concentration camps in Germany – Buchenwald, or the Ravensbrück camp for women. Andrée de Jongh was arrested shortly thereafter, at her safehouse in the Pyrenees. She survived the war in concentration camps, but her father was executed in 1943. The Comet Line continued to operate, however, bringing a total of some 800 servicemen to Spain before the end of the war. Andrée de Jongh later worked in leper hospitals in Africa, dying in Brussels aged 90 in 2007.



The Flagey Building © Jeanmart.eu-belgiumtheplaceto.be™



Albert Guérisse

While Andrée de Jongh was running her Comet Line from Brussels to Spain, another Brussels-born Belgian called Albert Guérisse was running the 'Pat Line', named after his alias 'Patrick O'Leary'. A serving army doctor, aged 29, when the Germans invaded Belgium,

he escaped to Britain via Dunkirk, joined the Royal Navy Voluntary Reserve, and performed the highly specialised job of landing agents in France. When off the Mediterranean port of Collioure, in southern France, his boat overturned and he had to swim ashore, where he claimed to the Vichy authorities that he was a Canadian called Pat O'Leary. While in Vichy France, in Marseilles, he met the British agent Ian Garrow who ran an escape line from the Swiss border, across France to Spain and Gibraltar, from where they could return to the UK. When Garrow was arrested in 1941, Guérisse took over the escape line until he was betrayed and arrested in January 1943. Under tortured by the Gestapo, he gave nothing away, and the Pat Line continued to operate, taking some 600 escapees to safety. Still acting under his O'Leary alias, Guérisse spent the rest of the war in various concentration camps, and was under sentence of death at Dachau when it was liberated. He rejoined the Belgian Army and served with distinction in Korea, before being appointed head of the military medical service. In 1946, in recognition of his extraordinary service, he was awarded the George Cross by the British, and later knighted.



© Oliver Knight/BTO



William Ugeux

Born in Brussels in 1909, William Ugeux was a distinguished lawyer and professor of Law at the University of Louvain when the Second World War broke out. In 1941 he founded an intelligence operation called Zero, which he ran until the spring of 1942, while also producing editions of the resistance newspaper *La Libre Belgique*. In spring 1942 he travelled to London, where he was instructed to go to France to integrate the resistance with Belgian networks. Returning to London in 1943 he became director in intelligence and security and secretary general of the Belgian Ministry of Information. He was always a firm advocate of the need of any resistance movement to have good links to a centralised, co-ordinating authority, without which sporadic acts, no matter how courageous, are useless - and close contact with British Intelligence goes a long way to explaining the extraordinary effectiveness of Belgian resistance during the Second World War. After his return to Belgium he wrote a number of memoirs and histories of the resistance. He died in Brussels in 1997, at the age of 88.



The Branders Family

'The Belgian Fighting Family' was the title given to the Branders, from the Brussels suburb of Etterbeek, after the Second World War. The father, Maurice, was serving with the Grenadiers and aged 19 at the start of the First World War; he was badly wounded in action a month before the Armistice. In the Second World War he took part in the defence of Antwerp in 1940, then joined the resistance before escaping to England, where he took command of the 2nd Brigade of the Belgian army in Britain. His sons Henri and Léon Branders crossed France, and were imprisoned in Spain, before they finally reached England to enrol in the RAF. After training in Canada, they returned to fly Spitfires in the 349th (Belgian) Squadron, which saw action over France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. Their younger brother André joined the Brigade Piron (see page 27), and took part in the liberation of Normandy. Their older sister Mimie drove lorries for the RAF, and was later officially accredited as Belgium's first female war veteran. Courageous in peace as in war, in 1955 Léon became the first Belgian to break the sound barrier.

CHARLEROI

In the 19th century Belgium grew rapidly as an industrial nation of world standing, centring on two southern poles in Wallonia: Liège in the east and Charleroi in the west. Connections by river, then canals and railways led further inland and to the North Sea, and shipping lanes to the world. Charleroi was the capital of the Pays Noir (Black Country), rich in coal, but also noted for the tough and gritty connotations that the name suggests.

It was born as Charnoy, but when it developed as a fortified military town to defend the frontiers of the Spanish Netherlands against the predations of Louis XIV in the 17th century, it was renamed after Charles II, king (roi) of Spain. Modernisation in the 1870s - on the back of its iron, steel, coal and glass industries - stripped the city of its old fortifications. Today, the centre is dominated by its elegant neoclassical and Art Deco town hall, which is also home to the Musée des Beaux-Arts; its impressive collection of paintings includes work by Magritte, who grew up in the city.

After the Second World War, the heavy industries of Wallonia fell into critical decline, unable to match foreign competition - much to the bewilderment of the Belgians, who felt

that this was an unjust fate for a country that had been on the winning side. The failing industries of the rust belt, however, have now found new life in industrial heritage, and a greening of the Black Country. In the locality is the mining and industrial museum of Le Bois-du-Cazier (at Marcinelle), which also has an outstanding glass museum, the Musée de Verre. Mont-sur-Marchienne has a first-class photography museum, housed in a former Carmelite monastery.

To the west, at Morlanwelz, is a different product of industrialisation: the Musée Royal de Mariemont houses an excellent decorative arts collection, from all eras of history and the world, created by the heir to a coal-mining fortune called Raoul Warocqué; it is now housed in a modern 1970s building in the midst of his vast family estate.

DON'T MISS...

The Musée des Beaux Arts and Hôtel de Ville in Charleroi; the industrial heritage, mining and glass museums at Le Bois-du-Cazier, at Marcinelle; the Musée de la Photographie at Mont-sur-Marchienne. The Art Nouveau façades of La Maison Dorée at 15 Rue Tumelaire, decorated with a golden mural; La Maison des Médecins at 40 Rue Léon Bernus, with its wrought-iron balconies; and the small, chic house at 34 Rue de Marcinelle. The outstanding decorative arts collection and surrounding park at the Musée Royal de Mariemont at Morlanwelz.

For more tips about Charleroi and its locality, please visit our website:
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Charleroi © jeanmart.eu - belgiumtheplaceto.be™



Louis 'Omer' Lefèvre

At 206 Grand-Rue, Charleroi, there is bronze plaque that tells in brief the story: 'In this house was born, on 26 August 1878, Omer Louis Lefèvre. Executed by firing squad by the Germans on 15 May 1916 at the National Firing Range in Brussels.' Louis Lefèvre, known as Omer, was a telegrapher employed at La Louvière, where he lived and worked and married in 1907. During the war he despatched information to the Allies, and was arrested in November 1915. Refusing to talk so as not to implicate any other members of the resistance, he was shot at the Tir National at Schaerbeek, Brussels, where his name appears among the 35 First World War victims 'who offered their lives for their country'.



Charleroi © jeanmart.eu-belgiumtheplaceto.be



Yvonne Vieslet:

Food supplies were a serious problem for all citizens in occupied Belgium during the First World War, and they were even worse for the prisoners of war held by the Germans. On 12 October 1918, a month from the end of the war, a group of starving French prisoners was being held at Marchienne-au-Pont, now a western suburb of Charleroi. Quite what happened is told in a number of ways, but the gist is that 10-year-old Yvonne Vieslet, walking past with her mother, took pity on the soldiers and threw a couque (pastry) to them through the bars of a gate. A German guard opened fire, hitting Yvonne and wounded three others. Yvonne was carried to a nearby house, then the hospital in Marchienne, where she died the following day. The incident caused widespread indignation, and was, of course a propaganda disaster. In 1919 the French President Raymond Poincaré awarded Yvonne Vieslet a posthumous medal of honour. There is a monument to her memory at the place where she fell at Marchienne-au-Pont, and also at her tomb in Monceau-sur-Sambre, just to the north, and a statue of her holding her couque at her school at Monceau.

COUVIN

Located in the south of the Province of Namur, Couvin is set picturesquely on the River Eau Noire, its higgledy-piggledy houses sheltering beneath their slate roofs. This was an important centre for iron and steel in the early days of industrialisation. But today the town is a centre for walkers and cyclists exploring the woodlands, rivers and rolling countryside of the local Fagne region. Here and there, watercourses have cut through the limestone base to create caves, dripping with stalactites, such as the Grottes de Neptune (visited in boats). The caves of the Caverne de l'Abime were inhabited by Neanderthals in prehistoric times.

A war memorial in the centre of Couvin is a reminder that it had a historic strategic importance, lying just 10 km from the border with France. Near Brûly-de-Pesche, 8km southwest of Couvin, are the bunkers of the Wolfsschlucht (Wolf's Ravine), which served as Hitler's headquarters in June 1940, as he planned his invasion of France. The site

is now an interpretation centre called the Bunker d'Hitler 1940, and includes a museum of the resistance.

DON'T MISS...

The Grottes de Neptune, Caverne de l'Abime and Bunker d'Hitler 1940 (combination tickets available). Nearby at Mariembourg, the Chemin de Fer à Vapeur des Trois Vallées (steam-train museum and rides in historic trains - steam, diesel - through a charmed landscape between Mariembourg and Treignes); at Treignes, a collection of museums, including the Musée du Chemin de Fer à Vapeur (Steam Train Museum).

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Fernand Jacquet

To qualify as a flying ace, you usually have to shoot down five enemy aircraft (five 'victories') in aerial combat. During the First World War Fernand Jacquet achieved two firsts in this pioneering era of military aviation: he was the first Belgian to win a victory, flying a two-seater with a gunner, on 17 April 1917; and the first to become an ace, on 1 February 1917. He was credited with seven victories overall. Born in 1888 at Petite-Chapelle, to the south of Couvin, right by the French border, he joined the Belgian army in 1907, and qualified as a pilot in 1913. At the outbreak of war he flew reconnaissance missions, tracking the German advance. When not doing that, he roamed the land in a racing car with a mounted Lewis machine gun. He began bombing missions in November 1914, and soon won notoriety, fearlessly attacking enemy planes and observation balloons, and strafing ground troops, with a skull painted on the nose of his two-seater Farman. He probably scored a further nine more victories, but they went unconfirmed. He and his gunner were shot down in September 1916, but survived uninjured. In 1917 took King Albert on his first

flight, over the front lines. He was the only Belgian pilot of the First World War to be awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross by the British. After the war he ran a flying school near Charleroi. Aged 50 when the Second World War began, he retired to Leval-Chaudeville in Hainaut, near Beaumont, but joined the resistance, providing intelligence, and helping downed Allied pilots. He was arrested in 1942 and imprisoned at Huy until the end of the war. He died in 1947, and was laid to rest in the cemetery of Leval-Chaudeville.



Couvin © Jeanmart.eu-belgiumtheplaceto.be™



Bunker H, Bruly de Pesche © jeanmart.eu-belgiumthelaceto.be™



© J. Jeanmart

Lieutenant-General Jean-Baptiste Piron

The Belgian 1st Infantry Brigade played a decisive role in the liberation of Western Europe at the end of the Second World War, and was carefully stage-managed to take part in the liberation of Brussels. So dominant was the character of its commander, Jean-Baptiste Piron, that it became known as the 'Brigade Piron'. Born in Couvin in 1896, he had fought in the First World War, and rose to become commander of the 1st Grenadier Regiment in

1936. In 1941 he escaped German-occupied Belgium and crossed France, Spain and Gibraltar to reach Scotland. He joined the Belgian Forces in Britain, which had formed after the evacuation of hundreds of Belgian soldiers in 1940, and was put in command of the 1st Belgian Brigade, which - by appealing to Belgians from all over the world - built up its strength to nearly 5,000 men. Held in reserve for the liberation of Belgium, the 'Brigade Piron' did not take part in D-Day on 6 June 1944; instead it landed in Normandy on 30 July while the Battle of Normandy still raged. The Brigade scored a series of victories along the Normandy coast throughout August. It was preparing for an attack on Le Havre when it was called to Brussels, making a dash at breakneck speed to reach the capital on 4 September, just as the city was liberated. The soldiers were greeted rapturously - but with some surprise, as the very existence of a Belgian Brigade was unknown. It fought on in the Netherlands into 1945. After the war the Brigade Piron became a foundation stone in the reorganisation of the Belgian army, for which Lieutenant-General Piron served as chief of staff until retirement in 1957. He died in Brussels in 1974, aged 78.



Hélène Van Hal and two of her protégées
© Marcel Frydman

Hélène Van Hal

As in every Germany-occupied territory during the Second World War, the Jews of Belgium were the target of Nazi racist policies, which entailed a gradual ratcheting up of oppression: registration, curfews, the wearing of yellow stars, ghettoisation, arrest, imprisonment and deportation to prison camps. After series of raids in September 1942 in Antwerp and Brussels, Jewish resistance organisations decided that children should be separated

from their parents for the own safety, given false names and papers and hidden in institutions. Some ended up near Cul-des-Sarts, to the south of Couvin, and just a few kilometres from Brûly-de-Pesche, where Hitler had made his headquarters in 1940. The children were hidden in the Château Thomas Philippe, a grand if austere residence built by a local tobacco magnate in the early 20th century. During the war it was rented to Hélène Van Hal and her two married daughters for use as school retreat, originally for children from Charleroi in poor health. Under this guise dozens of Jewish children remained hidden from the German authorities at Cul-des-Sarts, with the complicity of all the villagers, at great risk to themselves. They remained there until liberation by the Allies two years later.



Cul-des-Sarts © WBT



Permanent exhibition on
Resistance at Brûly de Pesche
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DINANT

Set on east bank of the River Meuse, beneath the protection of its fortress perched on the rocky escarpment of the Citadelle, Dinant is a famously pretty little town, famed for its hard, sculpted biscuits called couques, and as the original source of Leffe beer, and as the birthplace of Aldophe Saxe, inventor of the saxophone.

As testified by the Citadelle, reinforced by Louis XIV's great military engineer Vauban in the late 17th century - Dinant has always had a vital strategic importance, as a critical crossing point over the Meuse into western Belgium and France. It suffered badly in the early stages of the First World War, one of the 'Martyr Towns' brutalised by the invading German forces, who torched homes and executed 674 people, ostensibly in revenge for attacks by snipers. Towards the end of the Second World War, in the bitter winter of 1944/45, Dinant was the most westerly point reached by the Germans in their counterattack called the Ardennes Offensive or Battle of the Bulge, before being pushed back. A memorial to this fact stands beneath the famous natural landmark by the Meuse called the Rocher Bayard – where in legend the four sons of the Duke Aymon took a giant leap across the river

upon their supernatural steed Bayard to escape the wrath of the Emperor Charlemagne.

There is plenty to see in the vicinity, too, including the beautiful 16th–18th century Château de Freÿr, and fairytale medieval Château de Vêves. Nearby too is the Brasserie du Bocq, where visitors can see beer being brewed and taste the products.

DON'T MISS...

The pretty Collegiate Church of Notre Dame, with its black onion-dome bell tower; the Citadelle with its military museum; the Maison Leffe brewery museum; couques de Dinant (biscuits); boat trips on the River Meuse. Nearby is one of Belgium's best caves, the Grotte la Merveilleuse; also the Château and gardens of Freÿr, Château de Vêves at Celles, and the Brasserie du Bocq (brewery) at Purnode.

For more tips about Dinant and its locality, please visit our website:
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Bayard Rock © Jeanmart.eu/belgiumtheplaceto.be™



Marie van den Steen de Jehay

A large number of Belgian aristocrats devoted themselves to the patriotic cause during the First World War, many of them inspired by the example of Queen Elisabeth (see page 14). Marie de Villegas de Saint Pierre was one of these. Born in Luxembourg in 1870; she was brought up at the Château de Louvignies in

the Province of Hainault. At the age of 21, she married Count Léopold van den Steen de Jehay, and lived at his Château de Chevetogne, set in a rolling rural landscape 15 km (6 miles) to the east of Dinant. Here she began a career as respected novelist, publishing under the penname Quevedo. She also trained as a nurse, and was a passionate advocate of the role of Catholicism in nursing. When the war began in August 1914, she turned the Château de Chevetogne into a military hospital, treating French and German soldiers. At the same time, using this cover, she helped to hide 120 French soldiers trapped behind the lines. She left Belgium in November to work as a nurse at the Front, setting up a hospital in the Château d'Hondt at Poperinge, to the west of Ypres, first to help the civilian population, and then the Belgian military; the hospital was renamed 'Elisabeth' after a visit by the Belgian queen in June 1916. She directed the hospital until the end of the war. Her work was particularly appreciated by the 13th Belgian Field Artillery, which operated in this sector under the direct orders of the British. After the war she maintained close contact with the nursing profession, but also returned to writing, producing a number of memoirs of her war years. She died in Brussels in 1941, aged 70.



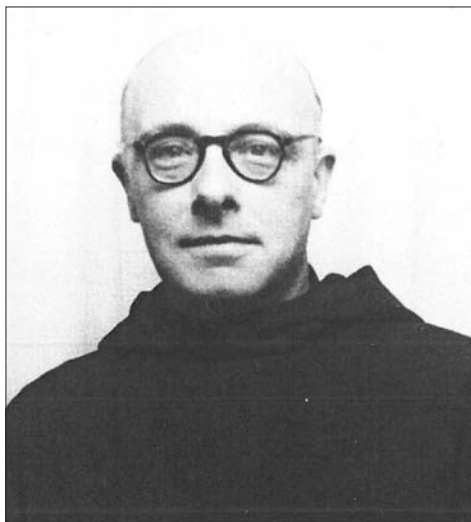
Chevetogne © Christian Genard



The Alardo family

During the Second World War, many Jewish children – separated from their families by circumstances, or by design for their own protection – were lodged with families, who ran the constant risk of denunciation and severe punishment. With his family dispersed and decimated by deportations to concentration camps, in 1942 a nine-year-old Jewish boy called Henri Donner, from Antwerp, was taken into the care of members of the resistance, who found lodging for him with the deputy head of the resistance in Dinant. This was Victor Alardo, who lived on a farm with his wife Ida and six children, two boys and four girls. Originally this was going to be just a temporary measure, but the children persuaded their parents to let Henri stay, and he remained with them for the rest of the war. He changed his name to Henri Peeters, learnt French and Walloon, went to school with Maurice Alardo, and joined the family in church

on Sundays. Henri's mother Sabine was meanwhile in hiding in Houdeng-Goegnies, near Mons; after she contracted cancer, the Alardos – at great risk – took Henri to see her three times before she died in July 1944. The Alardos then lost their farmhouse as the Germans fought against the American advance; they hid in a cave until victory seemed assured. At this point Victor started speaking openly that Henri was in fact Jewish, only to find the Germans returning during the Ardennes Offensive. Fearing denunciation, Victor fled with Henri and his two sons, returning again when the Germans had finally been repulsed. In 1992 Victor and Ida Alardo, and their three oldest children, were recognised by the State of Israel as Righteous Among the Nations.



Father Bruno Reynders

Henri Reynders ('Father Bruno') was a Benedictine monk and theologian who saved 390 Jewish children from the Holocaust. Born in Brussels, for much of his life he was associated with the Abbey of Chevetogne, to the east of Dinant. Visiting Germany in 1938, he was shocked to see the inhuman treatment of the Jews. When the Second World War began, he served as chaplain to a Belgian infantry regiment, was wounded, captured and held as a prisoner of war in Germany. Released in January 1941, he returned to Belgium, where he quickly made contact with the resistance. When the Nazis began to round up Belgian Jews in 1942, he was working at a home for the blind in Hodbomont, near Spa. Here he started to harbour Jewish children and adults at risk of deportation; but the home became too risky and he had to close the operation. Moving back to the Mont-César in Belgium where he had trained as a novice, he set about creating a network that interlinked the Church with the resistance to save Jews – particularly children – by giving them refuge in institutions and in family homes, together with false identities and papers. He often personally accompanied

the refugees to their destination, and helped to maintain contacts between members of dispersed Jewish families in hiding. In 1944 the Gestapo searched the Abbey of Mont-César and Father Bruno had to go into hiding himself, adopting civilian clothes and wearing a beret to hide his tonsure; but he continued his mission through to the end of the war. After the war, he helped to reunite the families. In 1964 he was awarded the title 'Righteous Among the Nations' by the Israeli government. He died in 1981, and was buried at Chevetogne.



Domaine provincial de Chevetogne © DPC JP Gabriel



FLORENVILLE

The market town of Florenville lies on the River Semois, in the south of the Province of Luxembourg, in a region called the Gaume. It serves as a southern gateway to the famously beautiful River Semois, a tributary of the River Meuse, which snakes a path through pasture, woodland, hills and rock escarpments, past the great fortress town of Bouillon and on to Vresse-en-Semois and Monthermé. Along the way there are spectacular view points over extraordinary hairpin loops in the river and famous natural features with names like Chaire à Prêcher (Pulpit) and Tombeau du Géant (Giant's Tomb). It's a celebrated playground for walkers, mountain-cyclists and kayakers.

Lying close to the French border, the strategic importance of this region is signalled not just by Bouillon's mighty medieval fortress, but other castles such as the extensive ruins at Herbeumont. Florenville itself has fortifications that formed part of a line of defences along the Semois built by Louis XIV.

Less than 10 km to the south is the tranquil Cistercian monastery of Notre Dame d'Orval, famed as the producer of one of the great Trappist beers. Ruins of the old 12th and 13th

century monastery can still be seen here, along with a museum and herb garden; the still-active monastery is housed 20th-century buildings.

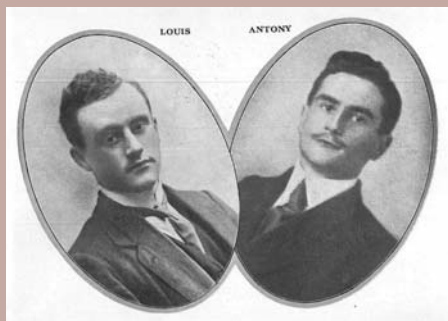


Notre Dame de l'Assomption Church © WBT - J.P. Remy

DON'T MISS...

The Valley of the Semois, for walks and adventure holidays; Bouillon, for its splendid medieval fortress; the ruins of Herbeumont castle; Orval Abbey, home of the famous Trappist beer.

For more tips about the region, and what to see around Bouillon, please visit our website: www.belgiumthelaceto.be



Louis and Antony Collard

Born and raised in Tintigny, to the east of Florenville, the young brothers Louis (aged 21) and Antony (19) Collard travelled to Liège in October 1917 with the intention of crossing the border into the Netherlands and joining the Belgian Army. But they were persuaded instead by Walthère Dewé (see page 44) to join the Dame Blanche resistance organisation and to set up an

intelligence-gathering operation in their home region of the Gaume. After several weeks of training in the clandestine arts at a safehouse called the Villa des Hirondelles in the Liège suburb of Wandre, they returned home and quickly established a highly effective network. In March 1914 they went back in Liège to receive new instructions. This was a period when a series of arrests was devastating the Dame Blanche network. A tip-off led German police to the Villa des Hirondelles, where they found the Collard brothers and four other agents. The discovery of compromising documents led to brutal torture and incarceration for four months; but the Collards gave nothing away. In July they were condemned to death by firing squad at the notorious Chartreuse fortress in Liège. They went to their deaths with stoic heroism, singing hymns and refusing blindfolds: 'We want to see the sky!' they declared.



Marie and Émile Taquet:

The Taquets ran the Queen Elisabeth Home for boys from military families at the Château du Faing, a pretty neo-Gothic castle built in 1880 in Jamoigne, on the River Semois, just to the east of Florenville. The building had been bought by the Sisters of Charity of Besançon, France, in 1906. In 1941, during

the Second World War, it was turned into a children's home; Marie was the headmistress and her husband Émile, a former Belgian army officer, the administrator. There were about 150 boys at the school, and between 1943 and 1945 over half of these were Jewish, living clandestinely under false identities: some 80 of them later declared that they owed their lives to the Taquets. One of them recalled: 'I was four when [my brother and I] left home...We remember it as a good time...My most vivid memory is of Madame Taquet kissing each of us goodnight every night...the good boys and the bad.' Many of them stayed on at the home for a year after the war had ended, waiting for their parents who never returned. In 1987 Marie and Émile Taquet were awarded the title 'Righteous Among the Nations' by the Israeli government. The Château du Faing, recently restored, is now used as administration offices for the nearby town of Chiny.

GRAIDE

The landscape around Graide, in the southern part of Province of Namur, is beguiling: mixed woodland and pasture cloak the undulating hills. Scattered stone farmhouses knit together the quiet roads and lanes. In the early morning, mist hangs in the valleys of the streams and rivers. This is good hiking and cycling country. It was also a landscape in which the maquisard resistance fighters could hide during the Second World War, and several monuments mark where they camped, and record the names of those died.

The history of Graide itself can be traced back to the 9th century; the robust and elegant tower of its Church of St Denis is believed by some to date back to that era. Graide belongs to a collection of 12 similar, like-minded villages of the commune of Bièvre, a name apparently derived from 'beaver' - hence the beaver and rippling water on its crest.

Some 10 km to the northeast, over the border with the Province of Luxembourg, is the village of Redu, the 'Book Village', with some 17 bookshops maintaining a tradition that began in 1984 - and attracting 200,000 visitors a year. And 4km further on is Transinne, home to a museum of space exploration called the Euro Space Center.

DON'T MISS...

Walks and excursions around Graide and the 12 villages of the Commune of Bièvre; the 'Book Village' of Redu; the Euro Space Center at Transinne.

For more tips about the region, please visit our website:
www.belgiumtheplaceto.be

The Heroes of the Maquis de Graide

Maquis usually refers to areas of untamed heath and woodland - the kind of place that members of the resistance in Belgium and France retreated to during the Second World War when the Gestapo made life too difficult in the towns. Hence resistance groups operating out of such areas became known as the Maquis, and the members were referred to as maquisards. Such was the case of the group of 37 known as the Maquis de Graide, holed up in camps in hilly, wooded land to the north of Graide. Their covert operations culminated in a fierce battle with vastly superior German forces - 1,200 men - on 1 September 1944. Early that morning the maquisards were alerted to the arrival of a large detachment of German soldiers sweeping up the valley towards their camp in groups of five or six. The maquisards at

the camp prepared their weapons then slipped away through the woods to reach the protection of another camp. But they had clearly been betrayed: they were surrounded by 'feldgrauen' or 'gris' ('greys', from the colour of their uniforms), and the plan looked ominously like extermination. An immense gun battle ensued - and the maquisards, well armed from parachute drops, put up a ferocious fight. But as grenades and mortars rained down on them, their position began to look hopeless. Yet they refused to surrender: only to die or to vanish into hiding. Finally the battle subsided, and the Germans left, bearing losses of more than 100 men. Of the maquisards, 20 had survived, but 15 had died, among them three brothers; a further two who had been captured were taken by the SS to Bièvre and executed.



Maquis de Graide © Jeanmart.eu-belgiumthelaceto.be™

LIÈGE

Liège is called 'La Cité Ardente' - 'The Hotblooded City'. And the Liégeois are known as 'Les Valeureux' - 'The Valorous' (courageous), after a song from the time of the Liège Revolution of 1789-91. It's a robust, passionate city, clinging to both banks of the broad River Meuse, which - along with rich supplies of coal and steel - transformed it from a prosperous trading city to an industrial powerhouse in the 19th century.

Everything is a bit different in Liège. For centuries it was capital city of the powerful Prince-Bishops of Liège, who ruled a swathe of land that stretched right across modern Belgium. Their towns feature a symbol of their rule: a column called a perron. Liège's perron, crowned with a pine cone and a cross, stands outside its elegant 18th-century town hall. Liège was a deeply religious city, filled with churches and convents, many of which can be seen today. But the autocratic rule of the Prince-Bishops irked their subjects, and they were finally overthrown by the Revolution - which soon also welcomed the arrival of the French Revolutionary Army. Between 1794 and 1827, Liégeois revolutionaries pulled down the huge, Gothic Cathedral of St-Lambert, creating the void, called the Place St-Lambert, in front of the Palace of the Prince Bishops (now used as law courts and government offices).

Liège was also always a military stronghold. The walls of an extensive fortress still crown the hill of the Citadelle, accessible by the 374 stone steps of the Montagne de Bueron - a climb rewarded with fine views over the city. To protect this prosperous industrial hub, 12 new forts were built around it in the 1880s, and further forts in the 1930s, but at the start of both World Wars Liège was the target of German aggression at the very outset of conflict, which even the valorous Liégeois

could not rebuff. Under occupation, many Liégeois turned instead to resistance, and their city became the focal point of a number of resistance networks in both wars.

Today, with its new Guillemins railway station designed by Santiago Calatrava, Liège is more than ever a hub of activity, offering visitors a selection of first rate museums, churches and shopping, including the huge and famous Sunday market on La Batte, by the river.

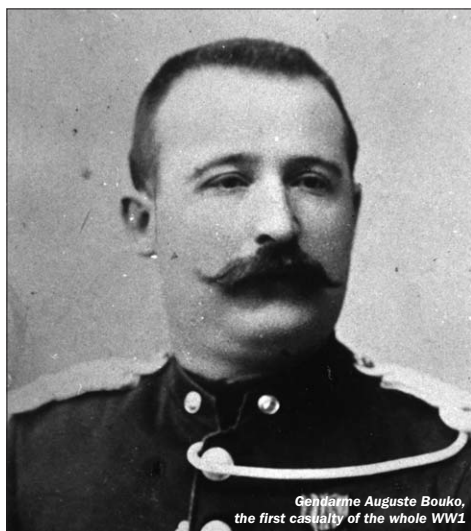
DON'T MISS...

Excellent museums, including the Musée Grand Curtius (decorative arts and weapons), the Musée de la Vie Wallonne (folklore), and the Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain; churches, especially the Église St-Jacques, Saint-Barthélémy; the Fort de Loncin (First World War fort and memorial). Liège also hosts two famous popular and ancient festivals, the 15 August Festival d'Outremeuse, and the Foire d'Octobre.

For more tips about Liège, please visit our website: www.belgiumthelaceto.be



Apple trees of Plateau de Herve © J Jeanmart - WBT



*Gendarme Auguste Bouko,
the first casualty of the whole WW1*

The Gendarmes of Visé

The historic town of Visé, on the River Meuse, lies 17 km (10 miles) northeast of Liège, and 25 km (15 miles) from the current German border. When the German army entered Belgium on 4 August 1914, they struck Visé

first, initiating the Battle of Liège. A group of five Belgian gendarmes, dressed in large bearskin hats, arrived from the garrison town from Gemmenich, closer to the German border, to find themselves facing a German detachment numbering hundreds. They drew their arms and knelt in the street to face them. As they came under heavy fire, Auguste Bouko, Maréchal de Logis (sergeant), aged 50, was killed. A priest rushed out to attend to him, fearless, offering absolution. Sergeant Jean-Pierre Thill, 29, was the next victim, hit in the throat. Three remained, resolutely returning fire and now facing a machine-gun, before finally collapsing with wounds. Two infantry soldiers, Louis Maulus and Prosper Van Gastel, also died that day, defending the bridge of Visé. These were the very first Belgian casualties of the First World War. In the following 'Tragic Two Weeks', the Germans set fire to the church of Visé and destroyed the 17th century town hall, guildhouses and convents, along with 600 other buildings and homes. Visé became the first Martyr Town, and the pattern of German aggression in Belgium was set.



Visé town hall along the River Meuse © Antoine Motte dit Falisse / CC-BY-Sa 3.0 / Wikimedia Commons.



The fort of Loncin - detail © Philippe Marée - WBT

Fort de Loncin

In the 1880s, the city of Liège reinforced its defences with an outlying circle of twelve state-of-the-art fortresses, six large ones and six smaller ones, on either side of the River Meuse. Part subterranean, they bristled with artillery, protected beneath steel domes and concrete bunkers. In August 1914 the Germans had hoped to sweep through Belgium to attack France. But they found themselves blocked for days by valiant and determined defiance at Liège. The attack began on 6 August, and one by one, the fortresses were picked off; the Germans breached the ring and entered Liège on 7 August. By 12 August just three of the Forts remained unconquered. One of these was the Fort de Loncin, to the northwest of the city; one of the larger fortresses, with a garrison of 550 men, it had been selected by the

beleaguered regional commander Lieutenant-General Leman as his headquarters. For three days the Fort de Loncin endured relentless pounding; 15,000 shells rained down on it. And by now the Germans had brought their secret, most powerful weapon into combat for the first time: the Krupp 420mm howitzer, otherwise known as 'Big Bertha', capable of firing shells weighing 800 kg over a distance of 9.5km. Big Bertha's 25th shell scored a direct hit on the Fort's magazine, igniting 12 tonnes of explosives, killing 350 of the defenders at a stroke. When the fort finally fell on 15 August, there were just 85 survivors. The last forts, Flemalle and Hollogne, surrendered the following day. But the German army had been held up for 10 days, and suffered 5,000 casualties. After the war the Fort de Loncin became a military cemetery and memorial to the dead: the 350 or so still buried beneath the rubble, and the 70 later

laid to rest in section of the fortification reassigned as 'The Crypt' - all cited as Belgians who had 'sacrificed themselves for the defence of the freedom and salvation of the world.' One surviving hero, however, was Lieutenant Maurice Modard, the artillery commander who was praised even by the Germans for his fortitude and the exceptional accuracy of his shelling. Although wounded in the explosion of the powder magazine, he was pulled from the rubble, and spent most of the rest of the war in recovery. When the Germans invaded again in 1940, he was the colonel in command of the Regiment of the Forts of Liège. He made his headquarters in the Fort de Flémalle, which fell, with honour, on 15 May. Released for prison in 1941, Modard joined 'Clarence', the resistance network organised by Walthère Dewé (see page xx), until arrested in 1944. After the war, Modard was promoted to general, but died in 1947, aged 62. The Fort de Loncin is open to the public, and the memory of these tragic events and heroic deeds are kept alive today by guided tours and audio guides, and a small museum.



Lieutenant-General Gérard Leman

When the German invaded Belgium on 4 August 1914, Albert I, King of the Belgians, sent a message to his commander in Liège, the famously severe and unsmiling Lieutenant-General Gérard Leman: 'Hold to the end with your division the position which you have been entrusted to defend.' No more could have been asked of him. He rejected an ultimatum to surrender issued by the German commander, General Otto von Emmich, and moved his headquarters to the Fort de Loncin, where he endured the colossal artillery attack to the end. He was found wounded and unconscious among the rubble and taken prisoner - but insisted that his captors recognised that he (and hence the fort) had not surrendered. Born in Liège in 1851, he was 63 at the outbreak of the war. He spent most of the war as a prisoner in Germany. When he died in Liège in 1920, he was honoured with a state funeral in Brussels.



Jules Hentjens and Atlas V

During the First World War, many young Belgian men escaped across the border into the neutral Netherlands in order to join their king and national army on the Western Front in Flanders. The Germans soon reinforced the border with barbed wire and an electric fence called the 'Wire of Death', but the River Meuse, although similarly guarded and reinforced, represented a weak spot. This was successfully breached by a Liège river tug called Anna, with 42 people aboard, in December 1916. One of the organisers was the tugboat captain Jules Hentjens. He now planned a second, more ambitious bid for freedom in another tugboat called Atlas V - an exploit which was to prove more hazardous. On 3 January, a total of 103 passengers, including two women and two children, were secretly alerted, assembled in groups, and then by night were ushered through the city streets of Liège under curfew to the quay where Atlas V was moored, and hidden in its holds. Towards midnight Hentjens and his crew of three then cast off and headed silently downstream in the darkness on the fast-flowing river. Hentjens and his helmsman sat in the wheelhouse, protected by iron plates lifted from the coal hold. Once out of Liège,

and passing through the string of smaller river-port towns, they powered up to full throttle. They were soon spotted by the Germans, and news rapidly passed down the telephone links to armed guards downstream. A fast, armed German motorboat approached: Hentjens could not outrun it, so he slowed down to allow it to come astern, then he powered up, and the motor boat turned turtle in his wake. Shots now began to rain down on the tug, caught in spotlights. It rammed a temporary wooden railway bridge erected by the Germans, taking out the middle section. It knocked out a pontoon mounted with a searchlight and machine guns. Finally it hit, strained against and finally broke chains that stretched across the border. After a nail-biting journey of just over an hour, Atlas V docked at the Dutch river port of Eijssden, whose citizens left their beds to give the passengers and crew a rapturous welcome. News of the successful arrival of Atlas V brought a great boost to morale across occupied Belgium - although Jules Hentjens's wife and sister were arrested and imprisoned for the rest of the war for complicity. A bridge across the River Meuse in Liège has since been named the Pont de l'Atlas, and a plaque on its parapet commemorates the episode. Jules Hentjens died in 1938, aged 55; his son Franz became a leading figure in Liège resistance during the Second World War, before his arrest and imprisonment in 1942.





Amédée Gilkinet

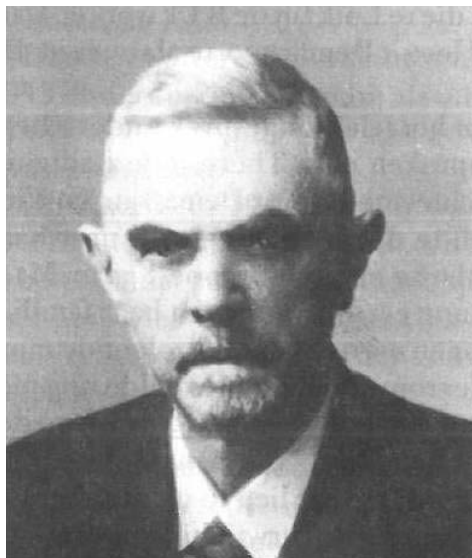
Journalist, teacher, father of four, Amédée Gilkinet was a combative man of ideas and an idealist, with a personal motto 'Credo-Pugno' (I believe - fight). When the First World War erupted, he volunteered and became a stretcher-bearer, and was assigned to the Fort d'Embourg, one of the Liège's ring of fortresses. After a week of bombardment, the Fort d'Embourg fell. Instead of surrendering, Gilkinet hid his wounded charges in the local village, and set up an improvised hospital, but was soon discovered and arrested. Towards the end of 1914, he succeeded in crossing the border into the Netherlands to reach France via England, to join the Belgian Army. While in Le Havre (seat of the Belgian government in exile), he set up a network feeding messages from Belgian troops, especially those from Liège, back to their anxious families. He also began writing and publishing a newsletter for the same purposes – which won him an invitation to return to Liège to work for the resistance. He did so in August 1915, and immediately began to set up an intelligence network of some 60 agents, feeding information to couriers crossing the border into the Netherlands. But on 26 April

1916 he was the victim of betrayal and arrested. Even from prison he continued to send messages to close down the operation and secure compromising documents. Condemned to death, to be executed on 16 June 1916 at the Chartreuse fortress in Liège, he signed his last statement to his friends and love-ones 'Credo - Pugno'.



Mathieu Bodson

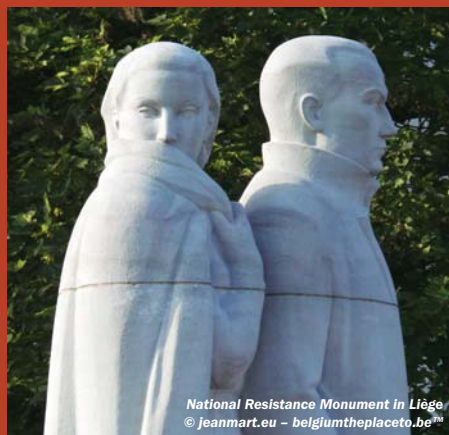
There is a roadside monument to Mathieu Bodson in his hometown of Jupille-sur-Meuse, now a suburb of Liège. Also his name appears close to that of Edith Cavell and Gabrielle Petit and 33 others in the list patriots executed by Germans at the Tir National in Brussels. He was 23. Bodson was a plumber by trade when the war began. He went to work in the Netherlands, and was recruited by British intelligence. He returned to Brussels, where his mother was living, and – under the pseudonym Pitje, reflecting his diminutive stature – set up a network to collect military intelligence, and helped to find passage for Belgians wanting to flee to the Netherlands. For this he was arrested and tortured, but refused to give any names. Condemned to death as a spy, he was shot on 14 September 1916.



Walthère Dewé

When the pioneering intelligence gatherer Dieudonné Lambrecht was executed by the Germans in 1916 in Liège's Chartreuse fortress, his cousin Walthère Dewé was inspired to create a more robust and effective network. He called it La Dame Blanche (The White Lady) after the story that the sight of the ghost of a woman dressed in white would foretell the end of the German Kaiser's Hohenzollern dynasty. Although working in Brussels as a telegraph and telephone engineer, he had been born in Liège, and this is where he made his centre of operations, picking up the network where Lambrecht had left off. La Dame Blanche specialised particularly in observing the movement of troops and armaments on the railways - vital information for the Allies - and Liège was an international railway hub, through which much of the traffic to the front line passed. Agents used ingenious methods to transmit secret information and trains: for instance, hollow broom handles were filled with various kinds of dried beans to record the numbers of soldiers, horses and guns on board. Messages were written on silk paper and stuffed into hollow

buttons, hidden in tins with false bottoms, or inserted in bars of soap. Codes were written and deciphered using common pocket dictionaries and variable numeric keys. Directed and funded by the British War Office in London, La Dame Blanche spread across occupied Belgium, Luxembourg and France, and, with some 1,300 agents - almost half of them women - it ended up supplying three-quarters of all intelligence received by the British in this sector, largely by means of couriers slipping into neutral Holland. Walthère Dewé, who was 34 at the start of the First World War, was 59 at the start of the Second. Already in 1939, following contact with an agent of the British SIS (Secret Intelligence Service), he had begun laying the foundations of a new Dame Blanche, now called Clarence and based in Brussels. Using a network of some 1,500 agents, hundreds of messages were sent to London from parachuted radio transmitters, while packages containing maps, sketches and photos were despatched with couriers travelling through France to neutral Spain. But from 1941 on, Dewé was targeted by the Gestapo, and radio transmissions became increasingly risky. In Brussels in January 1944, after being tipped off about an interception that compromised one of his agents, Thérèse de Radiguès, he went to warn her, and found the Gestapo already at her home. Dewé made a run for it, jumping onto a tram, but encountered a Luftwaffe officer who, suspicious, ordered him to stop. When Dewé tried to flee, the officer opened fire and killed him - for which he was later reprimanded: he had deprived the Germans of the opportunity to interrogate one of the greatest resistance operators who - uniquely - had straddled both the world wars.



National Resistance Monument in Liège
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The Postal Workers of Liège

Denunciation was a terrible hazard of life under occupation. During the Second World War the Gestapo encouraged citizens to denounce spies, members of the resistance and Jews. They were encouraged to put their suspicions in writing and post them. However, the resistance in Liège had agents in the post office. Although the penalties were severe, and there was a high risk of

being caught or coming under suspicion, these postal workers intercepted letters to the police and German authorities and destroyed them, or - if that was too risky - warned the targets of suspicion, so they could go into hiding. They also tried to identify informers. It is estimated that 'Les Postiers de Liège' saved some 20,000 patriots from arrest, and worse. They formed part of a wider, rather shadowy resistance operation called Service D. founded in Liège in 1940 by Joseph Joset. The D indicated a stand against Defeatism and Denunciation, and a policy of Demoralising the enemy through negative propaganda. With more than 1,400 agents, it ran a military intelligence network, helped downed Allied airmen and soldiers, hid workers trying to avoid being drafted to Germany, tracked down informants, and carried out sabotage. From the beginning agents suffered arrest, imprisonment and deportation - 80 members were arrested in raids in spring of 1944 - or, if tipped off, fled into the maquis to continue operations there. So effectively secretive was Service D that it did not receive official recognition until 1961.



Saint-Pholien Church in Liège © Jeanmart - WBT

MARCHE-EN-FAMENNE

The Famenne is a limestone landscape once considered so difficult to farm that famine was a constant threat: or at least that, according to some, is the origin of its name. Today it presents soothingly peaceful landscape of farmland and woods, threaded with rivers that sometimes dive underground to form caves - such as the famous Grottes de Hotton.

Marche-en-Famenne is the unofficial capital of the region. It developed in medieval times as a stronghold on the route that connected Namur to Luxembourg, but its fortifications were demolished on the orders of Louis XIV in the late 17th century. A quiet, pretty and historic town, it is now a hub for walking, cycling and horseriding. Within easy reach are the beautiful pocket-city of Durbuy, dating mainly from the 17th century; and the impressive feudal castle of La Roche-en-Ardenne (with its Museum of the Battle of the Ardennes). Fournieu Saint-Michel, some 20 km to the south was an historic early industrial iron-working centre; it

has a Museum of Iron and also an 'open-air' Museum of Rural Life in Wallonia, presenting 50 rescued and restored buildings to evoke life here in the 19th century.

DON'T MISS...

Rural peace, and opportunities to explore the region on foot, bicycle and horseback. The Grottes de Hotton (stalactite-filled cave system); the Commonwealth war cemetery in Hotton, where British casualties of the Battle of the Bulge were laid to rest; Durbuy, 'the smallest town on Earth'; the castle of La Roche-en-Ardenne; the Museum of Rural Life in Wallonia at Fournieu Saint-Michel.

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Marche-en-Famenne landscape © Jeanmart.eu - BTO UK



Léon Praile

After the liberation of Brussels on 3 September 1944, the Belgians thought they might enjoy their first peaceful Christmas after four years of hardship and occupation. But the death throes of Nazi Germany were slow, cruel and vengeful. The village of Bande, to the southeast of Marche, had earned itself a reputation as a hotbed of resistance. In June 1944 a collaborator had been killed; then telephone lines were cut, and two sawmills

destroyed. In September armed resistants killed three soldiers on a motorbike and sidecar. In reprisal, on 6 September, the Germans torched all the houses on the N4 between Marche and Bastogne - a distance of 42km (26 miles). Two days later the Germans were forced to retreat. But in December they were back as the Ardennes Offensive (Battle of the Bulge) - their last-ditch counterattack - unfurled. On the night of Christmas Eve, a special unit, probably Gestapo, took 33 young men, aged 17-32, to a ruined house on the N4 in Bande; nine were from Bande, the others displaced from all over the Ardennes. One by one, 32 of them were led into the hall, and shot in the neck, then their bodies were thrown into the cellar. One of the 33, however, Léon Praile, aged 21, knocked down his guard with a punch to the face and escaped into the night. For this, the Germans seized two more local men and executed them. The bodies were discovered by Canadian and Belgian troops who re-liberated Bande on 11 January; Léon Praile was able to tell the story. Today the house where the massacre took place is preserved as a memorial, with photographs of the 34 victims lining the cellar walls.



Marche-en-Famenne Monument © Antonio Ponte (CC BY-NC-SA)



© M. Paul Hoeck

Les Chasseurs Ardennais

The Regiment of Chasseurs Ardennais (literally, Hunters from the Ardennes) was formed in 1933 - the year that Hitler came to power in Germany - with the express mission of protecting Belgium from German attack. With a wild boar - symbol of the Ardennes - on their green berets, they were stationed in Arlon, Bastogne and Vielsalm in Belgian Luxembourg; they were partially motorised, with tank units and motorcyclists. From the very first day of the invasion, the Chasseurs Ardennais heroically impeded the German

advance by blowing up bridges along the border, blocking roads, laying mines, and putting up stout resistance against overwhelming numbers. The German general Erwin Rommel, at the head of tank division declared: 'These are not men, they are green wolves!' In Flanders, the Chasseurs took part in the Battle of the (River) Lys, defending a bridge over the Schipdonk Canal to allow straggling British troops and refugees to flee, holding out to the last even as the Belgian King Leopold was surrendering. Today their headquarters is at Marche-en-Famenne.



Marie-Louise Hénin

La Libre Belgique clandestine was a secret newspaper that was published and distributed in both the First and the Second

World War. (It is the forebear of today's *La Libre Belgique*, a leading French-language newspaper.) During the Second World War it appeared almost every fortnight from April 1941; between 10,000 and 30,000 copies were printed of each edition, published first in Brussels, then in the provinces of Namur and Liège. It had a close connection to the intelligence network called Zero, co-founded by William Ugeux (see page 21). It was a much-prized source of news, information and encouragement - but the stakes were high. Marie-Louise Hénin, a dental surgeon born in Marche in 1898, was involved with publication early on, but she was arrested in November 1941, and was executed by guillotine in June 1944, at the Plötzensee prison, Berlin.

MONS

With its winding cobbled streets rising up the hill that gives it its name, Mons, capital of the Province of Hainaut, is a town of immense charm. It centres on its historic Grand-Place, overlooked by its 15th-century town hall. But its proudest possession is its magnificent 17th-century belfry, symbol of the city's civil liberty, that crests the hill above the Grand-Place.

The historic roots of the city are recalled every year in the great festival of Mons, called the Ducasse, or Doudou. The relics of Saint Waudru are taken from the magnificent Collegiate Church that houses them on a splendid cherub-thronged, gilded wagon, to the Grand-Place, where St George battles with a giant puppet dragon in a fight called the Lumeçon. The origins of the Ducasse are said to go back to relief from the plague in 1349.

Mons is on the edge of the Borinage, once a grim coal-mining district. It was here that Vincent van Gogh came as a young man in 1879-80 to try to train as a pastor, staying with a family in their small house at Cuesmes, just outside Mons. The house remains, and is open to the public.

In the First World War Mons was where the British first encountered the advancing German army, in August 1914, and suffered its first casualties. Badly outnumbered, the British retreated, saved - apparently - by a mysterious phenomenon that lit up the night sky called the 'Angels of Mons'. Was it St George leading the angel-archers of Agincourt? Or just the as-yet-unfamiliar effect of heavy artillery? Speculation continues to this day.

Mons was also where the war's very last Commonwealth casualty of the First World War fell, a Canadian, just before the Armistice ceasefire. The 'First and Last' are buried beside German dead in the poignant St-Symphorien cemetery on the outskirts

of Mons, the focus of official international commemoration marking the centenary of the start of the First World War in 2014. The new Mons Memorial Museum, showing a selection of exhibits from the two World Wars, will open in 2015, the year that Mons becomes a European Capital of Culture.

DON'T MISS...

The Collegiate Church of Saint Waudru; the Musée des Arts Décoratifs François Duesberg (fabulous antique clocks); the Maison van Gogh at Cuesmes; the Mons Memorial Museum and the St George Museum (from 2015); the Ducasse de Mons festival (Trinity Sunday, late May to Mid June). Stroke (with your left hand) the head of the brass monkey outside the town hall to make a wish come true.

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Mons © Jeanmart-OPT



© Athenee Royal Marguerite Bervoets

Marguerite Bervoets

A school in Mons is named after Marguerite Bervoets, where she studied for three years, and where her mother was head. Born in 1914 in La Louvière, an industrial town to the east of Mons, she was 26 when the Second World began, and teaching in Tournai. She joined the resistance movement called the Légion Belge, collecting information about troop movements and identifying suitable

parachute-drop sites. In August 1942 she and a fellow member of the resistance, Cécile de Tournay, were out photographing the anti-aircraft guns that had recently been installed at an airfield at Chièvres, to the north of Mons, when they were caught in the act by a guard. They tried to argue that they had been buying food at a nearby farm, and just wanted to use up a half-finished film by taking pictures of the countryside. It didn't wash, and Marguerite's cache of information and arms were discovered back at her home. The young women were deported to Germany for trial. Cécile was given seven years with hard labour. Marguerite was condemned to death, and was executed by guillotine on 7 August 1944, at Wolfenbüttel – a prison where numerous Belgian and French members of the resistance were held and died. She had prefigured her death by writing her 'last wishes' in 1941, in a letter that eloquently expressed her ideals and patriotism: 'Tell them that I died so the Belgian heaven could be more pure, so that those who follow me can live free as I so wished for myself; and that I regret nothing, despite everything.'

The Mons Pocket

By late August 1944, German forces were on the run, and on 2 September US armoured divisions crossed the border from France in to Belgium for the first time. Around Mons, Belgian resistance groups saw that two German tank divisions and scores of infantry were being outrun, and there was an opportunity for entrapment. In close consultation with the fast-advancing US forces of the 12th Army Group, under General Omar Bradley, they cut off bridges, blocked off roads, turned around signposts, picked off stragglers, rounded up deserters and generally impeded the German retreat. When the US army arrived

in force, the Germans were trapped in the 'Mons Pocket', and 25,000 surrendered, including three generals. It was a triumph of the co-ordinated efforts of a number of resistance groups, including the Front de l'Indépendance, the Armée Secrète, the Partisans Armés, the Mouvement Nationale Belge, and the Organisation Militaire Belge de Résistance. But there was a price to pay: of the 1,400 resistance fighters who took part, some 70 died between 2 and 6 September - while laying down this decisive stepping stone to Allied victory.



Fernand Dumont

The surrealist writer and poet Fernand Dumont was born Fernand Demoustier in Mons in 1906 and went to school there before studying law at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. After reading the Surrealist Manifesto in 1931, he entered into correspondence with its writer, the French poet André Breton, and in 1933 he travelled to Paris to meet him and the French poet Paul Éluard. While working as lawyer in Mons, he joined the Walloon surrealist group called 'Rupture', based in La Louvière, east of Mons. 'Rupture' had a strong left-wing agenda, linking surrealism to Marxist revolutionary agitation. Writing under his pen name Fernand Dumont (a reference to his beloved birthplace), he contributed Rupture's sole edition of its journal *Mauvais Temps* (Bad Times) in 1935. In 1937 he produced his best-known work, a collection of poems called *À Ciel Ouvert* ('Open to the Skies'), expressing frustrated love for his muse, Georgette Chamart, who eventually became his second wife in 1939. Around this time he took up photography and discovered jazz, playing trumpet in a band called the Dixie Stompers. As the clouds of war gathered, he became

a co-founder of the Hainaut Surrealist Group, formed in 1939, collaborating with various other Belgian surrealists, including René Magritte. When war broke out, he first fled to France, then returned to Mons and continued his work, to tour with his jazz band, and to publish his writing, including a *Treatise on Fairies*, 1940, dedicated to his new-born daughter. Well known as a militant antifascist, and linked to the resistance through his close friend and surrealist poet Achille Chavée, he was arrested by the Gestapo in the middle of a court session in Mons. Imprisoned first at Mons, where he wrote his poem 'La Liberté' (Freedom), he was moved to Leuven, then Huy, and a series of concentration camps in the Netherlands and Germany, and died at the Bergen-Belsen on 15 March 1945, aged 38. A public garden in Mons has been named after him.



The Bellry, Mons © Jeanmart-OPT

NAMUR

Straddling the confluence of the Rivers Sambre and Meuse, Namur has always had a high strategic value, recognised by the Romans, who built a fort on the Grognon, a raised spit of land between the rivers. This is now the site of the Namur's mighty fortress, the Citadelle, a prominent feature of the city's skyline. Capital of Wallonia, and capital of the province that bears its name, Namur today is a busy university town, with 17th and 18th-century civic buildings and mansions mixed in amongst modern developments, surrounding the pedestrianised medieval heart.

The Citadelle on the Grognon owes it threatening, crouching muscularity to Louis XIV's master military engineer Vauban, but there are signs of fortification from every century between the 16th and the 20th. In 1914, it was thought to be impregnable, but fell to superior German forces in just three days. It saw action again in the First and Second World Wars and was only finally decommissioned in 1977. Winding roads to the top offer commanding views over the city and the river.

Namur's medieval past is strongly evoked by the sculpture, jewellery, glassware and weapons at the Musée Provincial des Arts Anciens du Namurois; it includes the Trésor d'Oignies, an exquisite collection of silver, gold and enamel work, some of dating back to the 13th century, rescued from Priory of Oignies in 1794, before the French Revolutionary Army could get its hands on them. The best church in Namur is the magnificent baroque Église Saint-Loup, now used for concerts.

Namur was the birthplace (in 1833) of the Symbolist printer and printmaker Félicien Rops. An outstanding draughtsman, he produced dreamy work of great power and

complexity - many of which are provocatively sexual and taboo-busting. The Musée Provincial Félicien Rops contains some 3,000 works: the prudish may wish to steer clear.

DON'T MISS...

The Citadelle; the Musée Provincial Félicien Rops; the Trésor d'Oignies; the Musée Groesbeeck de Croix, a fully furnished 18th-century mansion. Boat trips on the River Meuse. The Fêtes de Wallonie (four days of street celebrations in mid-September). Nearby: the water gardens of the Château d'Annevoie; the Abbeys of Floreffe and Maredsous, both known for their beer and cheese.

For more tips about Namur and its locality, please visit our website:
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Namur town centre © Jeanmart.eu-belgiumthelaceto.be™



Gabrielle de Monge

Born in Ohey in 1883, east of Namur, Gabrielle de Monge, Vicomtesse de Franeau, was one of a number of aristocrats involved in the resistance in the First World War. In 1914 she organised an escape line, called the Service de Monge, which cared for wounded French soldiers caught behind German lines, and then ushered them - via a series of grand homes and abbeys - over the border into the Netherlands. Based at the Château de Wallay-Reppe, at Ohey, she personally made 12 trips across the border, acting as guide. On her 13th mission, on 31 December 1915, she was caught by guards as she tried to rush the electric fence that lined the border. She was imprisoned first in Liège, and then in Brussels, where, in August 1916, she was condemned to three years hard labour, and incarcerated - like many female résistantes - in grim conditions in Siegburg prison near Cologne, Germany. She never really recovered from the experience, and died in a convent in Belgium aged 46. A square has been named after her in Ohey.



NIVELLES

Nivelles, in the Province of Walloon Brabant, is a pretty town famed above all for its exceptional Collegiate Church of Saint Gertrude. Built in the early 11th century, its unusual western façade, five storeys high and flanked by two towers, is built in the Ottonian style, named after the 10th-century Holy Roman Emperors called Otto. The interior has a magnificent and austere dignity. The 15th-century wooden cart kept here is used to parade the reliquary of St Gertrude in an annual procession that takes place in late September.

The town owes its origin to the abbey founded by St Gertrude, the first abbess, in AD 650. It was ruled by abbesses of noble birth until closed in the 1790s when Belgium was under the rule of the French Revolutionary Army. Nivelles also suffered considerable damage in the Second World War, when aerial bombing caused a fire that destroyed much of the town.

To the southwest of Nivelles, in the Province of Hainaut, the elegant 18th-century, neoclassical Château de Seneffe contains a supreme collection of gold- and silverware. Its elegance became a burden in the Second World War when the château was selected to be a Nazi

regional headquarters, and the summer residence of the military governor of Belgium.

Nearby is the Château Fort Écaussines-Lalaing, a magnificent medieval fortress built on a rocky spur. In the First World War it served as a German barracks and prison - but has since been restored to reflect its earlier history.

DON'T MISS...

The Collegiate Church of St Gertrude; carnival (mid-March), with a parade attended by jester-like figures called Gilles (similar to those of Binche), and raucous costumed bands and floats. The local Nivelles speciality, tarte al djote, made with local cheese, Swiss chard and plenty of butter. Nearby: the impressive ruins of the Cistercian Abbaye de Villers; the Château de Seneffe and Château Fort Écaussines-Lalaing.

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Nivelles © WBT - J.L. Flémal



Louis-Joseph Seutin

As a young doctor, aged just 21, Louis-Joseph Seutin was present at the Battle of Waterloo. Working in grim conditions at an improvised field station he achieved a gruesome record: the most amputations in a single day - at least 32. Like many Belgians, he had begun his military career on the side of Napoleon, and had seen service in Germany while under the

orders of the great military surgeon, and pioneer of battlefield medicine, Dominique-Jean Larrey. At Waterloo, however, he was on the side of the Dutch-Belgian forces supporting the Allies under the command of the Duke of Wellington. It was, however, his later achievement for which he best remembered: the use of shaped cardboard splints bound with starched bandages, applied wet – an innovation that he first used when shown the broken leg of his neighbour's goat. It led quickly to the plaster of Paris method still used today. Allowing someone to remain mobile with a broken limb had military implications, as the conventional method at the time was bed rest and restricted activity until the bones mended. The new technique was first adopted by the Russian military forces in the 1830s, following a tour by Seutin to demonstrate it. Born in Nivelles in 1793, Seutin's career had taken a stellar path. After the Belgian Revolution he became the personal doctor of King Leopold I and head doctor of the Belgian Army. In 1848 he was the first in Belgium to use chloroform as an anaesthetic. He died in Brussels aged 68, and is buried among many other national dignitaries at Laeken Cemetery in Brussels.



Collégiale - Parc de la Dodaine © WBT - J.L. Fiémal

PLUGSTREET

Comines-Warneton is an outpost of Wallonia, a quiet rural area separated like an island from the main part of the region by Flanders and the border with France. It lies due south of Ypres and Messines, and during the First World War the Western Front ran through it - the only part of the Wallonia crossed by the Yser front line. The nearest bigger Walloon towns are Mouscron and Tournai.

The British arrived in the area in October 1914 and dug in around a place called Ploegsteert, which - with typical jocular irreverence - the Tommies referred to as Plugstreet. In a similar way, they called a busy road junction at Plugstreet 'Hyde Park Corner'. It was near here that hostilities ceased that first Christmas of the war, and British and German troops - tentatively at first - climbed out of their trenches, met, shook hands, talked, exchanged cigarettes and mementoes, and played football. Details of this 'Christmas Truce' remain somewhat taboo, because the British High Command disapproved and wanted to suppress the story.

This section of the Western Front was considered relatively quiet, but nonetheless there are 20 Commonwealth War Grave Cemeteries in the vicinity. Winston Churchill was posted here in January to May 1916, and agitated back home to improve the conditions in the trenches. At Ploegsteert itself, there are 963 graves, many of them of Australians who came to mine 'catacombs' (shelters) in Hill 63 close by, used from 1916 onwards. The round, limestone Ploegsteert Memorial, inaugurated in 1931, records the names of 11,372 Commonwealth soldiers who fell in this area, but whose graves are not known.

Beneath a glass pyramid, the new Plugstreet 14-18 Experience, inaugurated in 2013, is an interpretation centre that tells the story of the

sector through film, photographs and maps. Its underground construction is designed to evoke the catacombs.

DON'T MISS...

The Plugstreet 14-18 Experience; the Ploegsteert Memorial; the Last Post, sounded at the Ploegsteert Memorial at 7pm on the first Friday of every month.; the site of the Christmas Truce football match. Ice Mountain indoor ski slope at Comines. There are also two unusual specialist museums in Comines-Warneton: the Telephone Museum in Warneton; and the Ribbon-Weaving Museum in Comines.

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St-Yves Cross in Plugstreet © Philippe Marée - WBT



© Mass. Eye and Ear/Schepens Eye Research Institute

Dr Charles Schepens

When Dr Charles Schepens died in Massachusetts in 2006, at the age of 94, he was fêted for his work in ophthalmology as a pioneer in retina surgery. But during the Second World War he had risked everything to work in the resistance. Born in Mouscron, 25km east of Ploegsteert, the son of doctor, Schepens was training in medicine when the war broke out. He joined the Belgian underground, but after two arrests by the Gestapo, fled with his young family to France. Here he addressed himself to the problem of how to get Allied fugitives safely across the Pyrenees to neutral Spain, and discovered on a Michelin map what - remarkably - looked like a funicular railway or cable car leading right up the border, at a place called Mendive, near Saint-Jean-Pied-de Port, in the western Pyrenees. It turned out to be a cableway - originally built to transport logs - belonging to a defunct sawmill. Posing as an industrialist called Jacques Perot, sympathetic and useful to the collaborationist Vichy authorities, Schepens and two Belgian colleagues bought the mill and started to restore it. First they needed to procure 40km of cable, which they succeeded in finding in Charleroi and transporting all the way to Mendive. But the project had Vichy approval

and soon the cableway was being used not only to transport logs, but equipment for French and German border guards - as well documents to and from resistance groups, and more than 100 agents and escapees. This splendid act of duplicity worked for 15 months, until July 1943, when the Gestapo got wind of it. Schepens managed to escape arrest and make his way to London, but his wife was imprisoned at Saint-Jean-Pied-de Port, and their children were put out to local families. In London, Schepens resumed his medical career, specialising in eyes, and developing tools for diagnosis. He and his family, when eventually reunited, moved the USA in 1947, where his ground-breaking work at the Harvard Medical School and the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary earned him the title 'the father of modern retinal surgery'.

MOUSCRON

Mouscron is the far northwest of Wallonia; bang against the border with France and the French city of Turcoing (part of the giant Lille-Roubaix-Turcoing conurbation); only the isolated Wallonian territory of Comines-Warneton lies further to the north and west. This frontier position has given the town a long military history, as witnessed in its pretty, turreted, step-gabled Château des Comtes (Castle of the Counts), parts of which date back to the 15th century. Mouscron was French in the 17th century, Austrian in the 18th, French again in the early 19th, and then - under independent Belgium - it became a cotton town, expanding rapidly with industrialisation. A big annual event is the Fête des Hurlus, in the first weekend of October, commemorating - with costumed parades, lanterns, spinning giants, jester-like 'Gilles', majorettes and marching bands - the wild rampages of the Protestant rebels, known here as Hurlus, who were based in Mouscron during the later 16th century.

STAVELOT

St Remaclus founded the pretty town of Stavelot when he set up an abbey here in the 7th century. One of the town's great treasures is his 13th-century reliquary, kept in the Église St-Sébastien. The abbey was rebuilt in the 18th century in neo-classical style in brick and stone, creating striking red façades, set around two cloisters. Secularised in the French Revolution, and recently refurbished, it now contains three museums: the museum of the Spa-Francorchamps Formula One Grand Prix circuit (which lies a little to the northeast), with an excellent collection of historic racing cars; a museum about the Principality of Stavelot-Malmedy, ruled by Benedictine prince-abbots until abolished in 1795 by the French Revolutionary Army; and a museum devoted to the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918), who spent time in Stavelot as a young man and wrote evocatively about the Ardennes.

Stavelot is also famous for its Laetare festival on the fourth Sunday of Lent, attended by Blancs Moussis wearing white hooded cloaks and masks with long red noses, who parade through the streets hitting bystanders with inflated pigs bladders. The Blancs Moussis supposedly mockingly imitate monks who were banned from taking part in the parade in 1499.

Stavelot was the scene of savage fighting during the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944, during which 130 civilians were murdered by the Germans.

DON'T MISS...

The Spa-Francorchamps Belgian Grand Prix (August), or the museum of the Spa-Francorchamps at Stavelot; the Laetare carnival and the Blancs Moussis (fourth Sunday of Lent); the Cwarmê pre-Lenten carnival of nearby Malmedy (weekend up to Shrove Tuesday). Tours along the River Amblève, including the famous waterfall at Coö. Walking in the remote Fagne and Haute Fagnes fenlands.

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Stavelot Abbey © WBT-S.Wittenbol



General Jacques

Born in Stavelot in 1858, Jules Jacques was a career soldier who had gone to the Belgian Congo in 1887, working as an intrepid traveller for the cartographic department, and later the anti-slavery movement; in 1892 he founded the town of Albertville (now Kalemie). He returned to Belgium in 1905 and when the First World War began in August 1914 he was the commander of a regiment. He fought with distinction defending Liège at Sart-Tilman, and then at Antwerp. In October, during the Battle of the Yser, he defended Dixmude (Dixmude in French) as the Belgian army dug in behind the flooded River Yser. Here he resolutely continued to command, despite receiving wounds to a foot and to a leg on consecutive days. His leadership and bravery led to great devotion among his men, and he was lauded as a hero of the Belgian army. He was promoted to three-star general in 1916, was given command of the 3rd Belgian Army Division, and took an active role in driving the Germans back in the final phases of the war in September 1918. After the war he became Baron of Dixmude. He died in Brussels in 1928 at the age of 70. He is remembered in numerous monuments and street names, including the Boulevard Général Jacques in Brussels



Abbé Marcel Stenne

As parish priest at Stoumont, to the west of Stavelot, Marcel Stenne was in charge of a children's summer camp and home. In 1942 he took in nine Jewish boys from Liège, Brussels and Antwerp, and hid them in the home until the end of the war. He also sheltered dozens of other Jewish children awaiting safe accommodation elsewhere. As part of his strategy of protection, he encouraged his Jewish charges to partake fully in the life of the home – and some did so by joining the choir, even travelling to neighbouring churches to sing. In 1988 he was awarded the title 'Righteous Among the Nations' by the Israeli government.



A "Blanc Moussi" © J Jeanmart - WBT

TOURNAI

Tournai exudes a serene and elegant dignity, befitting its long and noble history. The local language is French-based Picard, which it shares - along with much of its history - with neighbouring northern France. This was a Roman city and early hub of Christianity. Clovis, king of the Franks, and a founding figure in the Merovingian dynasty, made it his capital in the 5th century. Set beside the navigable River Escaut (Scheldt) with links to Ghent, Antwerp and the North Sea, it was a powerful, prosperous and influential trading hub, specialising in textile manufacture based on high-quality English wool. The great 15th century painter Robert Campin died at Tournai in 1444, and his pupil Rogier de la Pasture (otherwise known as Roger van de Weyden) was born here in 1399, so one could argue that early 'Flemish' painting should more accurately be called 'Scaldian' (after the River Escaut). Tournai was ruled at various times by the French, but after it was captured by the English in 1513 it remained under rule of Henry VIII for five years. This episode is recalled in the name of the Henry VIII Tower.

Tournai has a very handsome Grand Place, overlooked by the gilded façade of the 17th-century Clothmakers' Hall. But the city's focal point is the glorious Cathedral of Notre Dame, a Gothic masterpiece built in the local 'blue-grey' limestone, and distinguished by its unique five towers.

Tournai is also very proud of its 12th-14th century Belfry, the oldest in Belgium, and symbol of civic liberties and the historic tensions between the Church and the townsfolk. It contains a 43-bell carillon, the regular sound of which is part of the city's fabric.

The city, and especially the Cathedral, was badly damaged by German bombing in 1940.

DON'T MISS...

The Cathedral of Notre Dame, and its treasury, which includes the precious 13th-century reliquary of St Eleutherius, which is paraded in the annual Grande Procession (2nd Sunday in September); the Belfry (256 steps lead to superb views over the city); the Église Saint-Quentin, with its 18th-century silver statue of Notre Dame de la Treille; the Musée des Beaux-Arts, designed by Art-Nouveau supremo Victor Horta, with a fine collection of Belgian and international art; the Tapestry Museum; the Maison Tournaisienne or Folklore Museum; a walk along the River Escaut (Scheldt) to the 13th-century bridge, the Pont des Trous.

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Tournai © Jeanmart-WBT



Gabrielle Petit

There is a handsome statue of Gabrielle Petit in the Place Saint-Jean in central Brussels, her head turned resolutely to the sky. Born in 1893 in Tournai, she was a 21-year-old nurse when the war began and thrust into the resistance when protecting her wounded fiancé, whom she accompanied in his escape to the Netherlands. Here, British Intelligence recruited her to spy on the German army in the sector behind the German front line to the south of Ypres. She also set up a network to bring Allied soldiers to safety, served as a courier for the 'Mot du Soldat' underground mail service, and distributed the underground paper *La Libre Belgique clandestine*. Arrested by the German secret police in 1915, she was released and went underground to continue her work, using the name *Mademoiselle Legrand*. She was arrested again in January 1916 and, when she refused to give details of others in her network, sentenced to death. The Germans - sensitive to the uproar over the execution of Edith Cavell (see page 15) in 1915 - made it clear that, if she appealed, the sentence would probably be commuted. But she refused. The declaration that appears on the pedestal beneath her statue is composed of a series of statements that she made

before her execution: 'I have been condemned to death, I shall be shot tomorrow. Long live the King, long live Belgium... and I shall show them that a Belgian woman knows how to die.' She was shot by a firing squad at the Tir National (National Firing Range) at Schaerbeek, eastern Brussels, on 1 April 1916, and her name appears on the plaque listing the 35 patriots who met the same fate there during the First World War. The Germans managed to keep her death a secret, and her story only emerged after the war; she was given a state funeral in 1919. In Tournai, she is remembered by a statue, and in the name of a square.



Tournai Historical Centre © Jeanmart-WBT

VERVIERS

Belgium's industrial revolution began in Verviers, when the British entrepreneur William Cockerill (1759–1832) set up a steam-powered woollen textile mill here, modernising a local tradition of cloth making. He later moved to Liège to manufacture machines, and where his son founded the immensely powerful iron and steel business called the John Cockerill Company. Meanwhile Verviers developed as wool-town of international standing, a position it held until the 1950s when its mills found themselves unable to compete with foreign competition.

This history is reflected in the Centre Touristique de la Laine et de la Mode (Touristic Centre of Wool and Fashion), housed in an elegant, neo-classical woollen mill. The water of Verviers that played such a vital role in textile manufacture is now the itself focus of a water industry and training school, and also is celebrated in numerous fountains and water features in the city, justifying Verviers' claim to be the 'Water Capital of Wallonia'.

Verviers is a gateway to the wild and open uplands of the Hautes Fagnes (High Fens), an area of boggy moorland of savage beauty now set aside as a nature reserve. At certain points, boardwalk trails lead out over marsh to offer close-up views of this intriguing habitat.

DON'T MISS...

The Centre Touristique de la Laine et de la Mode; the Musée des Beaux-Arts et de la Céramique (fine art and ceramics); the Musée d'Archéologie et du Folklore, presented in a furnished 18th-century townhouse. Tarte au riz (a sweet rice tart), a speciality of Verviers.

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Verviers, Promenade des Récollets © Marc Delforge



Commandant-Captain Abel Devos

In the Second World War, as in the First, the Germans attacked neutral Belgium from the south-east, targeting Liège first of all. A set of new forts had been built in the 1930s to defend the sector – low-lying, half buried, composed of steel and reinforced concrete, and bristling with armaments. Despite being state-of-the-art in design and armaments, the Fort d'Eben-Emael – said to be the largest fort in the world – fell on 10 May 1940, on the first day of the German invasion; the Fort de Battice held out for 12 days before surrendering on 22 May. That left the Fort de Tancremont, near Pepinster, to the south-west of Verviers, and about 15 km south-east of Liège. The first German attack on it took place on 12 May, and was repulsed. With a complement of 500 officers and men under the leadership of Commandant-Captain Abel

Devos, it kept beating off repeated attacks, day and night. On 28 May, King Leopold III of the Belgians ordered his army to surrender. The Germans came to the fort with this news, but Devos could not believe it, and could not obtain confirmation from his headquarters by radio. Eventually he received written confirmation from Lieutenant-General Spang, the German commandant in the sector, and he surrendered a day after Belgium had capitulated. Devos had heroically held out for almost the full length of the Battle of Belgium – the '18 Days' Campaign' – which gave time for the Allies to withdraw and regroup and fight on. Devos, along with the rest of his men, was deported and imprisoned in Silesia. He was released on health grounds in 1942 and joined the resistance. After the war he continued his military career, and served for many years as president of the association of disabled ex-servicemen. He died in 1992, aged 88.



The Fort of Tancremont © jeanmart.eu-belgiumtheplaceto.be™



Fernande Keufgens

Born in Montzen, northeast of Verviers and close to the German border, Fernande Keufgens was the third of eight children in a close-knit family and community. She was 16 when the Second World War threatened. Haunted by his experience in the First World

War and predicting deportations, her father sent her to work for a family friend in Andenne, upstream on the River Meuse. But she was tracked down in 1942 and ordered to join a train to take up work in a German munitions factory. Motivated by a fierce anger towards the German occupation, she determined to join the resistance. So she jumped from the train before it reached the border and walked to Liège where her uncle, a priest, was a member of the resistance organisation called the 'Army of Liberation'. Equipped with a set of false papers, and based in Liège, she acted as a courier and guide, taking Jewish children to safe houses, and delivering false papers to assist Belgians evading deportation; she also carried out acts of sabotage to frustrate the Germans, such as turning road signs the wrong way. Her fluent German and her youth proved a valuable disguise. After the war she trained as a nurse in Brussels, met an American soldier and in 1949 emigrated to the USA to be married. She became a distinguished language professor. In 2008 she published a memoir under her married name Fernande K. Davis called *Girl in the Belgian Resistance*.



Verviers Town Hall © Radar Rondas

WATERLOO

The Battle of Waterloo took place on 18 June 1815 in an area of gently undulating countryside to the south of the pleasant little town of Waterloo, in Walloon Brabant. The Duke of Wellington stayed in the town before the battle and wrote his despatches from here, and so its name was attached to this great battle – the battle that saw the final defeat of Napoleon, and brought peace to Europe after two decades of war.

Wellington and his Allies (British, Dutch and Belgian, Prussians and other German states) had to reorganise quickly to face the French forces advancing on Brussels. Napoleon was riding high in triumph accompanied by his loyal troops after his escape from the island of Elba, and his return to power in France - the 'Hundred Days'. An initial battle on 16 June at a crossroads called Quatre Bras, southeast of Nivelles, was indecisive. Withdrawing to Waterloo in teeming rain, Wellington surveyed

the terrain carefully and chose his ground. On 18 June, with the sun now shining over muddy fields, battle was engaged at 11.35am; it lasted nine hours. The fighting was ferocious - it is said the artillery could be heard across the Channel in England. Wellington had all-but lost when the Prussian cavalry, under 72-year-old Marshal Blücher, entered the battle and tipped the balance in the Allies' favour. 'A damned near thing' is how Wellington described the outcome, 'the nearest run thing you ever saw in your life.' Napoleon fled, finally surrendering in western France a month later, and was exiled to the remote island of St Helena. Some 13,000 soldiers lost their lives on the field of Waterloo; 35,000 were wounded. 'Next to a battle lost,' wrote Wellington later, 'the greatest misery is a battle gained.'

The battlefield of Waterloo became a tourist attraction almost before all the bodies were removed, and museums of mementoes soon occupied the site. Today it has a modern visitor centre, but still has some of the older attractions, themselves of historical interest, such as the giant 360° painting called the Panorama de la Bataille, dating from 1912

DON'T MISS...

The Waterloo Battlefield Visitor Centre; the view over the battlefield from the Butte du Lion (a memorial mound, crested by a statue of a lion); the Panorama de la Bataille (giant painting in-the-round); Napoleon's last Headquarters (at Vieux-Genappe). In the town of Waterloo: the Musée Wellington (in the former inn where Wellington stayed); the Église Saint-Joseph, a 17th-century royal chapel which contains many touching memorials to the British dead.

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Waterloo battlefield © JeanmarLeu-belgiumtheplaceto.be™

Augustin Demulder

There is a monument on the Waterloo battlefield 'To the memory of Lieutenant Augustin Demulder of the 5th Cuirassiers born at Nivelles in Brabant in 1785, Knight of the Legion of Honour, wounded at Eylau in 1807, at Essling 1809, at Hanau 1813. Killed at Waterloo. And in memory of all the cavalry that charged with him on 18 June 1815.' Like many of his countrymen, Demulder, the son of a brewing family, fought with the French from the moment that he joined up in 1807. He followed their campaigns in Prussia, Austria, Russia and Germany as the Napoleon's fortune's waned, but still remained loyal to the end. Knight of the Legion of Honour is France's highest decoration. Quite how many Belgians fought at Waterloo is not known, as the country did not exist, and individuals may have been counted as French or Dutch; but it is estimated that there were 6,000 Belgians on each side. The Monument to the Belgians killed at Waterloo is worded ambiguously to do honour to both sides 'fighting for the defence of the flag and the honour of arms.' Poignantly, it was completed in 1914, just as the First World War began, and never officially inaugurated.



Waterloo battlefield © A Kouprianoff - WBT

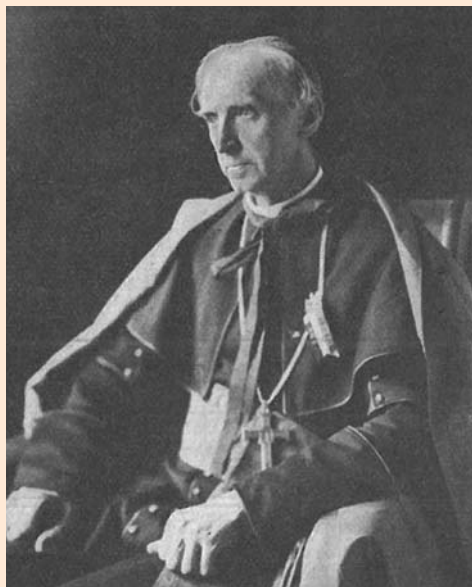


Albert Goblet

Born in Tournai in 1790, Albert Goblet went to a French military school from the age of 12, and joined Napoleon's Grande Armée as an engineer officer in 1811. He saw action in Spain, and served with distinction in the siege of San Sebastián. But in 1815 he was one of many Belgians who joined the Allies. Above all a patriot, he saw this as the best route to Belgian independence. He fought with the Prince of Orange at the Battle of Quatre Bas and at Waterloo. During the Dutch rule of Belgium, he redesigned a series of fortresses. He joined the forces which supported the Belgian Revolution of 1830, and then helped reorganise the defences of independent Belgium. He served as Prime Minister in 1832-34. After a military mission to Portugal in 1838 in support of the accession of Queen Maria II, he was given the title Count of Alviella. He died in Brussels aged 82 in 1873. He is remembered in a monument at Court-Saint-Étienne (to the southeast of Waterloo), where his family had - and still has - a château.



Re-enactment of the battle of Waterloo © Jeanmart.eu - belgiumtheplaceto.be™



Cardinal Desiré Mercier

In Belgium during the First World War, under German occupation, the Church became a focus of patriotism; religious services attracted huge crowds, and hymns took on a profound patriotic significance. This leadership was inspired by an impassioned pastoral letter by Cardinal Mercier at Christmas 1914.

Entitled 'Patriotism and Endurance', it was clandestinely distributed by hand, and read out by priests in churches, and it sustained a mindset of obdurate defiance that carried the people of Belgium through the war. Desiré Mercier was born in 1851 at the Château du Castegier in Braine-l'Alleud, just to the south of Waterloo. He went to seminary school from the age of 10, and formally joined the Church as a priest at the age of 22. Celebrated as an academic theologian, he was appointed Archbishop of Mechelen – the highest Church post in Belgium – in 1906, a position that he held until his death in 1926; he was made a cardinal by Pope Pius X in 1907. As the war began in August 1914, Cardinal Mercier was in Rome to elect a new Pope. He travelled back via Le Havre, where he visited wounded

Belgian troops, and when he returned to Mechelen, he found that numerous Church properties had been damaged, and that the Germans were committing widespread atrocities across Belgium; 13 priests in his own diocese were killed. His pastoral letter did not pull any punches: it was a daring and unequivocal declaration of the brutalities of the occupation. 'Germany has violated its oath [to observe Belgian neutrality],' he declared. 'You owe it neither respect, nor attachment, nor obedience.' Cardinal Mercier was kept under house arrest, but he became a figurehead, used in Allied propaganda, and remained a cherished symbol of Belgian resistance and fortitude.



Odon Godart

A Belgian helped to decide when D-Day should take place – the critical Allied landings in Normandy on 6 June 1944 which began the Allied liberation of France and altered the course of the Second World War. Odon Godart was born at Farciennes, near Charleroi, in 1913, but lived most of his adult life in Bousval near Waterloo. Having trained as a meteorologist and astronomer at the University of Louvain in the 1930s, he went to the USA in 1938 to research cosmic rays at Harvard and MIT. After the German invasion of Belgium in

1940, he made the perilous journey back across the Atlantic to Britain and joined the meteorological service of the Royal Air Force. Serving as navigator in a British bombing raid over Germany in 1943, he was shot down and badly wounded. After that, he applied his meteorological skills to Bomber Command. He formed part of a group that provided weather forecasts for the D-Day landings, and is credited with proposing that 6 June would be feasible when the weather on the chosen date, 5 June, proved unfavourable. After the war he became director of the meteorological service of the Belgian Air Force, and then taught astronomy at his old university. He died at Bousval in 1996, at the age of 83.



Michel ('Mike') Donnet

When he died in Waterloo in July 2013, at the age of 96, Lieutenant-General Baron Michel Donnet was fêted as one of the British RAF's most distinguished fighter pilots of the Second World War. Donnet had been born in 1917 in London, where his father was serving in the Belgian engineer corps. After the end of the First World War the family returned to Brussels, where Donnet was schooled and joined the Belgian Air Force. He flew reconnaissance missions as war broke out and the Germans invaded Belgium, but was captured in June

1940 and held as a prisoner of war for seven months. On release, he and a colleague called Léon Divoy decided to escape to Britain. They found an old, sabotaged biplane in a hangar, fixed it up with the help of two other patriots, then on the night of 4/5 June 1941, under the noses of the Germans guarding the depot, took off for Britain, landing in a field in Essex. Donnet was immediately commissioned in the RAF Voluntary Reserve, and trained to fly Spitfires; he began combat with No. 64 Squadron in November 1941. His friend Divoy followed a similar path but was shot down and captured. Having scored a number of aerial hits and carried out missions to attack German military installations and infrastructure, in 1943 Donnet was given command of No. 64 Squadron, which escorted bombers on raids, and attacked enemy shipping and U-boats. He was then made commander of the all-Belgian 350th Squadron, which provided cover at D-Day, and then followed the German retreat. He led a formation of 12 Spitfires over Brussels to celebrate its liberation. He continued to fly missions right until the end of the war - 375 in all. After the war he served in senior positions in NATO, before finally retiring in 1975. Distinguished Flying Cross, Commander of the Royal Victorian Order, Belgian Croix de Guerre, Knight of the French Legion of Honour - his list of high honours are eloquent testament that Mike Donnet was truly one of the great Belgian heroes.



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