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In Flanders fields

100 years ago this week, Belgium was invaded and forced into the First World War



Denzil Walton

More articles by Denzil \ flanderstoday.eu

Monday, 4 August, marked 100 years to the day that the Germans crossed the border into Belgium, dragging the country into the First World War. Three weeks later, Leuven lay in flames. Below is our relaying of the story the way it would have been told by the press in 1914

28 June 1914 Readers of *Flanders Today* who follow international events might be interested in breaking news just in from the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo. The heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, Archduke Franz-Ferdinand, has been assassinated, apparently by a Bosnian student. The Archduke's visit to Sarajevo was aimed at strengthening the relationship between Bosnia and Austria-Hungary.

30 June 1914 Rumours are already spreading that the assassination could escalate to some sort of local conflict in the Balkans. Much depends on the way the Austrians investigate the killing in Sarajevo. There are suggestions that they think Serbia is behind the assassination.

5 July 1914 Kaiser Wilhelm II, emperor of Germany, is promising German support for Austria against Serbia.

23 July 1914 Austria-Hungary has issued an ultimatum to Serbia that the assassins be brought to justice. The small print effectively nullifies Serbia's sovereignty.

28 July 1914 Austria declares war on Serbia! Only one month after the assassination of Archduke Franz-Ferdinand, Austria, unsatisfied with Serbia's response to its ultimatum, today declared war on Serbia. Reports are already coming in that Russia, bound by treaty to Serbia, is mobilising its vast army to Serbia's defence.

1 August 1914 Germany declares war on Russia! Events in Europe are proceeding at breakneck speed as, after its demands for Russia to halt mobilisation against Austria-Hungary met with defiance, Germany (allied to Austria-Hungary by treaty) declared war on Russia. Belgium is neutral, thanks to a treaty between European powers –

Leaders mark anniversary of First World War in Belgium

Prince William and Kate attend ceremony recognising the invasion of 1914



Alan Hope
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King Filip and Queen Mathilde welcomed a gathering of world leaders and royal figures last Monday in Liège to mark the anniversary of the start of the First World War. Monday was the 100th anniversary of the invasion of Belgium by German forces.

The ceremony took place at the Allied Memorial, a monument raised in 1928. The construction was financed by public and private funds from Allied countries and was designed by the Antwerp architect Joseph Smolderen. Each Allied country (France, Greece, Italy, Poland, Romania, Russia, Spain and the United Kingdom) has



Belgium's King Filip and Queen Mathilde (left) welcomed Britain's William and Kate

its own national monument in the crypt of the tower.

The ceremony was attended by representatives of Belgium's federal and regional governments. Also attending were the presidents of Germany, France, Ireland and Austria, and EU Commission president José Manuel Barroso. A delegation representing US president Barack Obama was also present.

Britain's Prince William and Kate, the Duchess of Cambridge, travelled to Belgium for the event, as did the recently crowned King Felipe VI of Spain. Members of the public were not admitted, but the event was broad-

cast on giant TV screens on Place Saint-Lambert in the centre of the city, as well as on Canvas.

The ceremony was the first of three commemorations planned at the federal level; the others are in Ypres and Nieuwpoort on 28 October to mark the First Battle of Ypres, and in Brussels on 11 November 2018 to mark the 100th anniversary of the Armistice.

Following the ceremony in Liège, German president Joachim Gauck travelled to Leuven and visited the university library, which was burned down by invading German forces in 1914.

Jewish Museum shooting suspect extradited to Belgium

Mehdi Nemmouche, the French national accused of the attack on the Jewish Museum in Brussels in May, in which four people died, has been handed over to Belgian custody by French authorities.

Two weeks ago, the French Cassation Court put an end to Nemmouche's attempts to avoid extradition and promised to deliver him to Belgian custody. He arrived last week and is being held in prison in Mons. Nemmouche is refusing to co-operate with the investigation, his lawyer said, out of fear that police officers will leak details to the press.

The case is being handled by two magistrates, one of whom is specialised in terrorism cases. Nemmouche is facing four charges of aggravated murder committed in

the course of a terrorist attack and faces life sentences on each charge.

The 29-year-old Algerian-born French national is accused of shooting four people on 24 May at the Jewish Museum of Belgium in Brussels. Three people, two Israeli tourists and a Frenchwoman who volunteered at the museum, died at the scene. A fourth, 25-year-old Belgian national Alexandre A Lider Strens, who worked at the museum, died later in hospital.

Nemmouche was arrested in a bus station in Marseilles a week after the attack, found in possession of two firearms, a camera and a cap similar to the one seen being worn by the shooter on security footage. He said he stole the guns from a car in Brussels and denied any involvement in the attack. \ AH

Too many drivers using mobiles, says BIVV

\ WWW.BEEPBEEMBOEM.BE

The Belgian Institute for Road Safety (BIVV) has launched a new campaign aimed at publicising the dangers of using a mobile phone while driving. According to the institute, half of all drivers have read or sent text messages while driving, and 45% have called without using a hands-free device in the past year. That means that for every 30 cars on the road, there is one where the driver is calling or texting.

According to research, calling while driving leads to three or four times the chance of having an accident, unless calling hands-free. In the case of texting, the chances are 23 times more.

BIVV has also expressed support for the adoption of a system like the one in force

in the UK, where police can take possession of a driver's mobile phone after any accident for investigation into whether he or she was calling or texting at the time of the accident.

The British system is also supported by motoring organisation Touring. "Campaigns are absolutely necessary, but they're not enough in and of themselves," said spokesperson Danny Smaghe.

The Privacy Commission, however, expressed doubts. "The breach of privacy involved would have to be justified by the gravity of the incident," spokesperson Eva Wiertz said. \ AH

Lukaku and Origi make lucrative deals in post-World Cup football

The impressive performance of the Red Devils at the World Cup in Brazil has already seen big European clubs bidding for Belgian players as the new football season kicks off. English side Everton splashed out a

club record €35 million for Romelu Lukaku from Chelsea, making the 21-year old striker the third most expensive player in Belgian history. Lukaku already spent last season on loan at Everton, scoring 16 times

as they finished fifth in the Premier League.

Fellow Red Devil striker Divock Origi is bound for neighbours and rivals Liverpool: the Anfield club signed him from Lille for €13

million. Origi, 19, played in all five of Belgium's games at the World Cup and scored in the win over Russia.

However, the new season has not begun so brightly for Racing Genk,

which has already fired coach Emilio Ferrera. Ferrera came in to the new season with a two-year contract extension, but did not last beyond an opening 3-1 away loss to KV Mechelen. \ Leo Cendrowicz



7,829

reports of child abuse in Flanders and Brussels in 2013 – an increase of 5% in Flanders and 30% in Brussels. The increase is partly a result of the introduction of a new hotline number 1712

6,829



litres of milk produced daily by Belgian dairy cows, up more than 15% from 2006. The average dairy farm has 50 cows, producing 339,000 litres a year



253,000

hectares of built-up area in Flanders, 18.7% of total hectares, compared to 11.6% in 1985. Six hectares of open space disappear every day in the region, mainly for construction of homes

€40 million



loss to the Flemish pork sector in the last six months because of a Russian ban on imports from the EU after African swine fever was discovered in samples from Lithuania and Poland



384

road accident fatalities in Flanders in 2013, unchanged from 2012 despite a fall in the national figure of 7%, the economy ministry reported

WEEK IN BRIEF

The Flemish branch of the Red Cross has issued an urgent **appeal for blood donors** during the holiday months, in particular those with blood groups A and O, both positive and negative. The summer months are typically a period when blood donations decrease, which, together with low blood stocks at the moment, gave rise to the appeal.

Twenty-five-year-old Nasha Segal from Hemiksem, Antwerp province, has won her second **world title in table football**, taking the female singles and mixed doubles crowns at the World Cup table football in Bonn, Germany. Segal, who started playing at 13 in her local café, has also won a place in the German Bundesliga, seen as the strongest table football league in the world.

Former king Albert and queen Paola have been given permission to **cull the population of rabbits** on their Belvedere estate in Laken. The permit from the Brussels Institute for Environmental Management allows for the hunting of 50 rabbits during a six-month period. Killing rabbits is permitted in Flanders, but not in the Brussels-Capital Region, where the population has exploded.

A shield law intended to exempt journalists from having to reveal the identity of their sources should be extended to criminologists, three University of Leuven researchers have argued. In an article in the profession's journal *Panopticon*, the researchers said that if **criminologists could guarantee anonymity** to sources, the quality of their research would improve.

Public transport users in Antwerp will be able to obtain real-time information using **QR codes, which will be installed at every bus and tram stop** by mid-September. The code, when scanned by a

tablet or smartphone, gives access to a website where information can be found on bus and tram times, including delays and disruptions to the network.

A diver with the Roeselare fire brigade was seriously injured when he was **swept 40 metres into a sewer** during the latest storm to hit the province. The man was trying to clear an obstruction when he was carried away by the flood water. He sustained a concussion and facial injuries.

The fish population in the **North Sea are becoming more exotic**, with the usual species being joined by more warm-water fish such as squid and anchovies, according to the Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research. The warming of the water is also responsible for a shift of the native cod to cooler northern waters. Sea temperatures in the North Sea have risen by 1.5 degrees over the last 60 years, and fish are very sensitive to temperature changes, particularly when it comes to breeding, said the institute.

The gang of Moroccan-Dutch youths thought to be responsible for a **series of armed robberies and murders**, including one in Antwerp, could number in the hundreds, more than previously suspected, police announced last week. The young men carry out crimes in Belgium and the Netherlands and then take refuge in Morocco, where they invest their money in real estate. They are also responsible for at least six executions, including the kidnapping and torture of one man and the murder of another in 2012, in connection with a missing shipment of 200 kilograms of cocaine passing through the port of Antwerp.

A Brussels woman has won her case against the Flemish Agency

for Persons with a Handicap, which **must now provide her with a place** in a care facility. Christiane Jonckheere suffers from an autoimmune disorder that affects her joints and began legal action last month, after spending years waiting for suitable care. She faces eviction this month from the rest home where she lives.

The Institute for Tropical Medicine in Antwerp is remaining alert for reports of the **symptoms of Ebola**, faced with the threat of the disease spreading to Europe by passengers travelling from affected areas in Africa. Doctors and hospitals have been informed of the initial symptoms, which include fever, vomiting and diarrhoea. Ebola can only be confirmed by blood tests, which can now produce results in a matter of hours, said professor Emmanuel Bottieau of the institute. The foreign affairs ministry advised against travelling to affected areas in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia unless absolutely necessary.

Fire services battled for more than 12 hours to tackle a **major blaze in the port of Antwerp**, which started in a warehouse in Moerstraat near the main Noorderlaan road. The fire was contained in the warehouse, but the contents were entirely destroyed. a huge plume of black smoke was said not to present a danger to the public, as the warehouse had not contained any dangerous products. The cause of the fire is being investigated.

A family of seven Belgians was **evacuated from Libya** by a Greek ship sent to pick up Greek nationals and staff of the Greek embassy in Tripoli. Widespread evacuations have been taking place as a result of the security situation in the country. Another Belgian family of three chose to make their own way out via Tunisia, the foreign affairs ministry said.

FACE OF FLANDERS



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Pierre Denier

The news of the sacking of Racing Genk trainer Emilio Ferrara last week came as a shock: Ferrara had been in charge for only one game of the new football season, which Genk lost against Mechelen by three goals to one. The news of his replacement, Pierre Denier, was no surprise, however: Denier is the go-to guy whenever Genk gets into a hole. Denier was born in Kinrooi, Limburg, in 1956. He played 14 seasons with KFC Winterslag, while working as a labourer for a cheese manufacturer in Genk. He ended his career with four seasons for Racing Genk, the new name of the club produced by a merger of Winterslag and Thor Waterschei – an association that has now lasted for nearly 40 years. Following Genk's difficult 1992-93 season, Denier stepped in as a temporary replacement for assistant trainer Pier Janssen, but could not help save the club from relegation. Janssen's successor, Enver Alisic, soon split with the club, and Denier had his second chance to take over the reins on a temporary basis. Genk won the national title

in 1999 and parted company with Aimé Anthuenis, who had trained them first to promotion to the first division, then to the championship. His successor lasted until 2000, then came Johan Boskamp, now more famous as a pundit. Boskamp left in 2001, and Denier took over yet again until the end of the season. Genk's difficulties in keeping hold of its trainers is never ending, and the ever-vigilant Denier stood by to take over whenever needed – eight times since 1993. "I like my place in the shadow," he once said. "They promised me they would always have a place for me in the club. I can make myself useful here, training and scouting. I always try to show the trainer every week that he couldn't do without me. And it's with that same attitude that I come out every week as assistant trainer." As Genk was held to a 1-1 draw against Cercle Brugge at the weekend, the club's board said it would find a permanent replacement for Ferrera as soon as possible. In the meantime, Denier isn't going anywhere. \ Alan Hope

OFFSIDE A bit of a flutter

The fish in the North Sea may be being replaced by more exotic species, while the rabbits living around King Albert's house now live in fear (*see above*). But for pigeons, it's business as usual. A little too much business, if you ask the Royal Belgian Pigeon Association (KBDB), who were getting their feathers all a-flutter over a decision by the Gaming Commission to allow betting for the first time on pigeon racing. According to KBDB, betting will lead to cheating. In addition, KBDB admits its control over pigeon races is not sufficient to guarantee that any betting would be 100% fraud-proof. This is understandable. A pigeon race goes as follows:



© Ingimage

the birds are transported on a truck to a place hundreds of kilometres from home, then let out. First one home is the winner. No set route, no lane markings, nobody to check that one pigeon didn't trip another one up, no guarantees the winner

didn't sneakily hop on a bus for the last 25km. The opportunities for underhand tactics are endless. The first betting on pigeon racing took place on 1 August, organised by Bingoal, which also organises online gambling – everything from the gee-gees to ice hockey. The first race, from Perpignan in the south of France, attracted "several hundred" punters, who invested "several thousand" euros in the result. Three percent of the takings goes back to the pigeon fanciers to boost the sport. Bingoal hopes to be able to attract the attention of the Asian market, where they like a bit of a flutter. \ Alan Hope

FLANDERTODAY Flanders State of the Art

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VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER
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In Flanders fields

The long road from invasion to peace

continued from page 1



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A convoy of Belgian cavalry travel to the Western Front near Ypres, circa 1915. Poison gas was employed for the first time in April 1915 by the German army at the second Battle of Ypres



© Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS

Soldiers of an Allied machine gun company near Passchendaele Ridge after the Battle of Passchendaele. Many First World War soldiers died not by artillery fire but by drowning in the mud created by heavy rains in a devastated landscape



© Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS

Four years after the end of the war, Ypres' cloth hall, like most of the city, was still in ruins

including Britain, France and Germany – in 1839. Therefore the risk of our country becoming involved in this crisis is minimal.

3 August 1914 Russia's ally France today ordered its own general mobilisation, and France and Germany declared war on each other. Worryingly, seven German armies, with an estimated total of 1.5 million soldiers, are being assembled along the Belgian and French frontiers.

4 August 1914 German troops have crossed the Belgian frontier! They have been seen at Gemmerich, 40 kilometres from the fortress city of Liège. Kaiser Wilhelm II had demanded that King Albert grant his troops free passage

through Belgium so that they could attack the French from the rear. The king refused.

5 August 1914 The German army has launched an assault on Liège, violating Belgium's neutrality. This act of aggression against a neutral country has prompted Great Britain to declare war on Germany. King Albert has sent a message to Liège urging his subjects to fight this threat to their neutrality and independence at all costs.

15 August 1914 Liège has fallen! Despite valiant defence led by the city's commander, General Leman, our countrymen had no answer to the massive German howitzers (the "Big Berthas").

16 August 1914 Following the fall of Liège, King Albert has ordered a withdrawal of Belgium's remaining 65,000 troops to Antwerp. Together with 80,000 garrison troops, Antwerp's ring of 48 outer and inner forts will present formidable opposition to the Germany Army.

18 August 1914 Civilians beware! The German army is advancing through our country, and disturbing reports are coming in that civilians, even priests, are being shot. A German chief of staff has been heard to say that: "We are fighting for our lives and all who get in the way must accept the consequences."

25 August 1914 Leuven is in flames! German troops stationed in this historic town have burnt and looted much of it, executing hundreds of civilians. It is estimated that 2,000 houses have been burnt to the ground, together with Leuven's beautiful university library, including its unique collection of incunabula, manuscripts and ancient books.

10 October 1914 Antwerp has fallen! By now, an estimated 1.6 million Belgians have fled their homes. Almost one million of these refugees have crossed the border into the Netherlands, which is clinging firmly to their neutrality. King Albert has withdrawn his badly weakened forces to the river IJzer in the west of Flanders, to take up positions on the west bank, the last natural barrier in Belgium before the French border. The king has asked his soldiers to make a final stand, in a desperate effort to keep this last small piece of Belgian territory from falling into German hands.

18 October 1914 The Germans have reached the IJzer, and heavy fighting has broken out in West Flanders, particularly in the villages of Keiem, Tervaete and Schoorbakke. Belgian and French troops are defending Diksmuide with great determination in the face of continuous bombardment.

22 October 1914 Diksmuide has been captured, but the Germans have been unable to defeat the Allied forces, and their advance through Belgium has been halted. Part of this is due to the flooding of the IJzer plain. Meanwhile, a huge battle is taking place to control the strategically important town of Ypres, which guards the ports of the English Channel and access to the North Sea beyond.

22 November 1914 The Battle of Ypres is over, and it's a critical victory for the Allies! The Germans were prevented from advancing but still hold a ring of high ground overlooking the city. However, terrible losses have been incurred, with more than 130,000 casualties reported on both sides. Let's hope that this war is over by Christmas.

1 December 1914 With winter approaching, both sides are digging in and constructing elaborate trench systems, from the North Sea coast at Nieuwpoort to the Franco-Swiss frontier. Conditions in these trenches are already appalling. Soldiers at the front describe it as a living hell.

22 April 1915 Gas attack! The Germans are making a new attempt to break through at Ypres and have captured Hill 60. Worse, they are unleashing a brand new weapon. Today, between Steenstrate and Langemark, heavy shelling of the mainly French soldiers was followed by waves of acrid chlorine gas wafting across no-man's land and down into the trenches.

Within seconds of inhaling its vapour, the gas destroys the victim's respiratory organs, bringing on choking attacks and then death by asphyxiation. This wind-blown gas threw the soldiers into total panic and decimated two divisions of French and Algerian colonial troops. It affected some 10,000 troops, half of whom died within 10 minutes of the gas reaching them.

Fleeing troops left a six kilometre gap in the Allied line. However, the Germans, perhaps as shocked as the Allies by the devastating effects of the poison gas, are failing to take full advantage.

25 May 1915 The Second Battle of Ypres is over. The Allied lines are still holding, although German forces have secured additional high ground to the east of the town. It seems that a lack of supplies and manpower have obliged the Germans to call off the offensive, although Ypres has largely been reduced to ruins after continual bombardment. Losses during this battle are immense, estimated at 69,000 Allied troops and 35,000 German.

21 December 1915 A stalemate continues between the Allied and the German armies. The Allies are sitting firm in a defensive semi-circular front line running around Ypres. The occupation of the ground east of Ypres has created a bulge – called a "salient" in military terms – into the German front line here.

To the advantage of the Allies, it has forced the Germans into providing extra manpower to hold a longer section of the front line. However, the Germans occupy good defensive positions on slightly higher ground. Regular incursions into no-man's land are resulting in continued loss of life with negligible gains in territory.

6 April, 1917 The United States has entered the war! The US has declared war on Germany. The main reason, President Woodrow Wilson explained, was the unrestricted submarine warfare introduced by the Germans in January: "Even hospital ships and ships carrying relief to the sorely bereaved and stricken people of Belgium ... have been sunk with a reckless lack of compassion or of principle."

7 June 1917 Readers don't need to be told that there was a massive explosion today. Wherever you were in Flanders, you probably heard it – and probably felt the ground shake. It was heard over the English Channel in London, and even as far away as Dublin. The cause was the simultaneous detonation of 19 huge mines, totalling 600 tons of explosives, under the German lines on the Mesen-Wytshaete ridge in West Flanders.



© Photo by Frank Hurley, courtesy of State Library of New South Wales

Wounded waiting for medical attention during the battle of the Menen Road Ridge in 1917, part of the Passchendaele offensive

Casualties are very high, with reports coming in that as many as 10,000 Germans were killed. To accomplish this task 8,000 metres of tunnel were constructed under German lines under the meticulous planning of General Plumer, who remarked to his staff yesterday: "Gentlemen, we may not make history tomorrow, but we shall certainly change the geography." It certainly did, as the familiar crest of the Mesen-Wytschaete ridge simply no longer exists.

8 June 1917 German troops have been counter-attacking in Mesen today but are losing ground as the attacks are being successfully repelled. Most of the Mesen salient is now in Allied hands. The Mesen battle has greatly boosted morale among the Allies.

31 July 1917 Yet another huge battle has commenced in and around Ypres. Whereas the first and second battles of Ypres were launched by the Germans, this time it's the Allies who are taking the offensive. Sources close to General Haig report that he believes the German army is on the verge of collapse. A heavy artillery bombardment of the German line near the Flemish village of Passchendaele, some 10 kilometres from Ypres, has started.

15 October 1917 The Passchendaele offensive is now in its third month, with heavy rains and thickening mud severely hampering the effectiveness of Allied infantry and artillery. In addition, far from collapsing, the German army is reinforcing its position in the region with reserve troops released from the Eastern Front.

5 November 1917 The shells and the rain have reduced the battlefield to a muddy swamp, through which neither attackers nor defenders can move. The Germans have built strong concrete bunkers, defended with nests of machine guns that are almost impregnable. Passchendaele is basically a pool of mud and blood. The British here are calling the village "Passiondale" – the valley of suffering. In addition, the Germans are shelling the Allied lines with

mustard gas. This 'improvement' on chlorine gas not only attacks the victim's airways, but also causes the skin to erupt in painful blisters.

6 November 1917 Passchendaele has finally been captured by the Allies! After months of heavy fighting, Canadian and British troops have taken the village. It's a notable victory, but at a huge cost. In four months the British have seen 400,000 of their soldiers killed, wounded or missing, for the gain of just eight kilometres of territory. In addition, 260,000 Germans lost their lives.

4 April 1918 The Germans are strengthened by more fresh divisions arriving from the Eastern Front, where the October Revolution of 1917 had led to Russia's withdrawal from the war. They have launched new attacks near Ypres and are almost through the Allied line.

17 April 1918 Today, during the Battle of Merkem, near Houthulst, the Belgian Army withstood a brutal attack by the Germans. Fierce hand-to-hand fighting with bayonets and knives forced the Germans back to their original positions by nightfall.

25 April 1918 The strategically important Mount Kemmel near Ypres has been lost to the Germans, and Ypres is on the verge of being captured.

2 September 1918 After further battles and loss of life throughout the summer, reports are coming in that the German army is running out of supplies and reserves. At the same time, American soldiers are starting to arrive in Belgium and France in huge numbers.

28 September 1918 Today the Belgian Army attacked the key German defensive position of Houthulst Forest. This fortress even has its own narrow-gauge railway system, linked to the main railway network behind the lines. Almost every Belgian unit was involved in the attack, which was supported by Brit-

ish and French divisions. By the end of the day, the Belgians had succeeded in capturing the German lines on a front 18 kilometres wide and 6 kilometres deep.

17 October 1918 Good news in today: British, French and American armies are beginning to push the Germans back to the Scheldt river.

29 October 1918 According to reports, Germany is beginning to crumble from within. Amazing news is reaching us that German sailors stationed at Kiel have mutinied and that the city will shortly be in their control.

1 November 1918 The revolution that started in Kiel has spread throughout Germany! Riots are breaking out as a result of food shortages.

9 November 1918 Stop the presses: Kaiser Wilhelm II has abdicated, slipping across the border into the Netherlands and exile. A German Republic has been declared, and the offer of peace is being extended to the Allies.

11 November 1918 The war is over! At 5.00 this morning, an armistice was signed in a railroad car parked in a French forest near the front lines. The terms of the agreement call for the cessation of fighting along the entire Western Front to begin at precisely 11.00 today. After more than four years of bloody conflict, this horrendous war is finally at an end.

28 June 1919 The world war lasted four years and took the lives of nine million soldiers; 21 million more were wounded. Civilian casualties numbered close to seven million. Today's signing of the Versailles Treaty marks the desire of Allied leaders to build a post-war world that would safeguard itself against future conflicts of such devastating scale. The treaty was negotiated among the Allied powers with little participation by Germany. We can only hope that Belgium never has to experience such a war again.

5TH COLUMN



Anja Otte
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Shifting focus

The negotiators for the formation of a new federal government have some tough decisions to make: on the budget, cuts, taxes, flight routes from Brussels Airport... Notice anything missing? Institutional and language matters seem to have disappeared from the agenda.

The contrast with 2010 could not be greater. Four years ago, the insistence of N-VA on a number of institutional measures, such as state reform and the split of the BHV constituency, landed this country in a political crisis that lasted over 500 days. Since then, N-VA has only become more successful, yet the electoral mandate it received at the May elections has not led to a new deadlock. How come?

For one, the issues at stake in 2010 have been resolved. Also, the outgoing federal majority has not voted a number of constitutional articles "revisable", a procedure that was meant to guarantee a minimum of stability.

N-VA reacted strongly to this vote, which it believed paved the way for Di Rupo II. Ironically, though, this decision makes it much easier for N-VA to enter a federal government. It does not have to "give in" on institutional changes, which could lead to an internal conflict, as these changes have been made impossible anyway.

More importantly, N-VA has shifted its focus from institutional to economic and social policy. The government of Flanders agreement bears the hallmark of N-VA, with its insistence on personal responsibility and economic growth. Yet these are not traditional nationalist themes.

No wonder the Flemish People's Movement, the organ that represents the traditional "Flemish movement" is disappointed. In a press statement, the movement celebrates "having the will of the Flemish voter respected". However, "the Flemish have not only voted centre-right, but also Flemish. Precious little of this can be found in the government agreement".

At the federal level, N-VA is following the same course, leaving behind the nationalist rhetoric. Still, a government with N-VA will be radically different from one that includes the French-speaking socialists. N-VA may just prove Didier Reynders (MR) right. In 2007, the French-speaking liberal said: "A [federal] government without PS is a state reform in itself."

Bourgeois defends new government's five-year plan

Government will "set out financial plans in September Declaration"



Derek Blyth
More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.eu

Flanders' new minister-president, Geert Bourgeois, has defended the government's plan in the face of criticism from opposition parties. Björn Rzoska of Groen criticised the coalition's plan for its lack of precise figures, but Bourgeois responded: "This government hasn't drawn up a budget so far. We will set out our financial plans in this parliament in our September Declaration."

The new five-year plan also came under fire from socialist party leader Bart Van Malderen, who argued that the austerity plan will hurt people. "This government makes you pay for everything, whether you want to take the tram,



find a retirement home or send your child to school," he said. "Those who have enough cash

are the lucky ones. Otherwise, it's just too bad." Bourgeois (pictured) replied by saying that his government was a team that was committed to "making courageous and difficult decisions". He added, "We have said how we are going to do that. By imposing budgetary restraints, we will release funds that can be directed to investment."

The government plan was approved in parliament by a comfortable majority, with 89 votes in favour and 29 against. The parliament is now in recess for the summer holiday. Flemish MPs are expected to return to their seats on 22 September.

Royal trade missions cut from four to two a year

Flanders' new minister-president, Geert Bourgeois, has defended his government's decision to cut funding for overseas trade missions led by members of the royal family. The recent decision to cut the budget for the trips from four to two a year was criticised by the employer organisations Unizo and the Federation of Belgian Enterprises (VBO) because they think it could harm Flemish exports.

"The presence of royals can open doors that would otherwise be closed," said a Unizo spokesperson. The trade missions used to be led by Prince (now King) Filip, but are now led by his sister, Princess Astrid.

VBO director Pieter Timmermans noted: "My contacts with other participants tell me they are very positive and enthusiastic about the success of the formula. It brings them important economic contracts."

Bourgeois rejected the idea that the



© courtesy VRT
Princess Astrid during an economic mission to Saudi Arabia in March

presence of royalty helped to generate business in foreign countries. "Our companies get their strength from the quality of their products," he said. "And in any case, we are still participating in two trade missions a year."

He added that the money saved would be invested in other areas of Flemish foreign policy. The government of Flanders already invests heavily in the department Flanders Investment & Trade, which operates 70 offices across the globe. \ DB

Pilot project drivers reject road fee scheme

Some 63% of drivers who took part in a road fee pilot project have said that they are not in favour of the idea. Flanders' former mobility minister Hilde Crevits launched the project in February to test whether a charge per kilometre would work as a way of cutting down on road congestion and pollution.

The project imposed a charge on drivers that varied according to where and when they drove, with city driving and rush hour commuting charged at a higher rate. Some 1,200 drivers took part in the trial, and nearly two-thirds

concluded that they were not in favour of its implementation. When asked if public transport was a good alternative to using their cars, 85% said no.

Crevits (CD&V) said that the results should not be seen as a final report and that further research was needed. But she is no longer in charge of the mobility portfolio, which is now in the hands of Ben Weyts (N-VA). The Christian democrats and Flemish nationalists are both in favour of some form of road fees. \ DB

Government workers protest at office move

The socialist trade union ACOD, which represents Flemish civil servants, has urged its members to take industrial action in protest at a plan to move 2,600 of them to new offices in two buildings on the site of Tour & Taxis in Brussels. The Flemish officials currently work in buildings on Albert II-laan, near Brussels North Station, and are resisting the move to two locations at Tour & Taxis, which are 300 and 700 metres away. The route between the two sites runs alongside a small park, where drugs are sold in the evenings, according to Jan Van Wesemael, general secretary of ACOD. "It can be dark already by 17.00 or 18.00," he said.

If the administration were to follow the example of some private sector employers on the Tour & Taxis site and introduce a shuttle bus between the site and the station, then the union would be prepared to drop its protest. For the time being, the union now plans to mobilise civil servants and support them financially in bringing a legal action in civil court, Van Wesemael said. \ Alan Hope

No decision yet on tax increases, says Peeters

Kris Peeters has denied a claim by a senior Christian-democrats party member that taxes will have to go up under the next federal government. Peeters, who is representing the party in talks to form a new federal government, was responding to a front-page article in last weekend's edition of *De Morgen* in which Benjamin Dalle said that it was inevitable that taxes would have to increase if the government was to achieve savings of €17 billion.

"First of all, we have to look at ways in which government spending can be cut," said Peeters. He is currently working with Charles Michel of the French-speaking liberals MR to form a federal government. The two *formateurs* reported to King Filip over the weekend on their progress.

"We have now established a structural framework for the future government," they said in a joint press statement. "The king has

asked us to carry on with our mission. We will carry out discussions in the same way over the coming days."

The statement mentioned big cuts in the new budget but avoided any mention of tax increases. "We are facing a crucial period with big challenges in terms of the budget, the economy and social issues," they said. "That means that we need a strong and effective government agreement."

The *formateurs* are working to form a federal government composed of the Flemish nationalists N-VA, the Flemish Christian-democrats CD&V, the Flemish liberals Open VLD and the French-speaking liberals MR.

Analysts have warned that the proposed coalition is too heavily weighted towards the Flemish. One solution, it has been suggested, would be to appoint a prime minister from a French-speaking party. \ DB

Judge overturns air routes out of Brussels Airport

Flights out of Brussels Airport must return to pre-Wathelet Plan routes



Alan Hope

More articles by Alan \ flanderstoday.eu

A court in Brussels has overturned two flight routes of planes taking off from Brussels Airport which formed part of the so-called Wathelet Plan by outgoing federal secretary of state for transport, Melchior Wathelet. The case was brought by an association of Brussels residents called Pas Question, who spoke of a "total victory".

The routes are the Canal Route, which passes over Brussels, skirting Evere and Schaarbeek, and flying over Molenbeek and Anderlecht, and the so-called Bend to the Right Route, which overflies Evere and Schaarbeek before swinging to the south-east and flying over Etterbeek, Oudergem, Sint-Pieters-Woluwe and Watermaal-Bosvoorde. The court agreed with the arguments of opponents, including the Brussels-Capital Region, that the incidence of breaches of European rules on aircraft noise had increased greatly with the



introduction of the two new routes.

The judge also said the government had failed to comply with European rules on public consultation by changing the flight routes (in February) without adequate public debate.

The federal government now has 30 days to scrap

the routes or face a fine of €50,000 for each day it fails to comply, up to a maximum of €36 million. Pas Question said the ruling was "an enormous relief and the end to a nightmare in which thousands of people in Brussels have been trapped for 175 days."

Former Brussels environment minister Evelyne Huytebroeck, who was in office when the changes were made, said the case was "an important victory for the people of Brussels, thanks to the steadfastness of organisations, municipalities and regional government".

Wathelet has now been replaced by Catherine Fonck, who said the federal government would not appeal the ruling, although there are few alternatives that can be achieved within the 30-day deadline. Those include the existing routes over the Ring and over the E40, the so-called Ikea Route.

Occupied territories label impracticable, says federation

A label intended to show when products on sale in Belgium were produced in Israel and occupied Palestinian territories is "practically unworkable," according to the retail industry federation Comeos. The label is the idea of outgoing economy and consumer affairs minister Johan Vande Lanotte, who introduced the measure by means of a ministerial circular rather than new legislation. The acting federal government is limited to dealing with on-going matters, and may not take new initiatives.

The label would not be compulsory. However, Comeos managing director Dominique Michel said the system proposed is much too complex. "There would need to be at least three different labels – for products from Israel, Palestinian areas and the occupied territories," he explained. "For supermarkets, this is unwieldy."

Israel's major exports are mostly in machinery and chemicals, but they also export mobile phones and produce, particularly citrus fruits. The information for any special labelling, said Michel, is often difficult to come by. "For every product on the shelves, they would first have to find

out where it originated from, which is not always possible. Then they would have to apply the proper label, which is a time-consuming business."

The label puts the responsibility for imposing sanctions on Israel in the hands of the consumer, Michel said, while the government has sufficient political and diplomatic instruments to send a signal to Israel. The main supermarket chains have made it clear they have no intention of adopting Vande Lanotte's system.

However supermarkets and their suppliers can play an important role in a campaign, according to Bogdan Vanden Berghe, secretary-general of the charity 11.11.11. Their campaign "Made in Illegality" had as one of its aims a system of clearly labelling produce from Israeli-occupied territories and called for a complete economic and trade embargo on Israel. "Suppliers are in a better position to say where products come from, since they're the ones who buy them," said Vanden Berghe. "And supermarkets have the power to demand transparency from suppliers. We hope businesses will be interested enough to make use of the label." \ AH

Thomas Cook to introduce "priority pass" at airport

Travel company Thomas Cook plans to introduce a new "fast track" check-in procedure this winter for its tour passengers, promising them a wait half as long as other passengers.

Business class passengers typically get priority at check-in and boarding, but Thomas Cook intends to offer those advantages to other passengers as well. Passengers who book their entire travel tour through Thomas Cook will get a priority pass for security checks, which is one of the biggest bottlenecks at the airport, as well as one of the most stressful moments, according to company spokesperson Baptiste Van Outryve.

"Taking off your belt, perhaps your shoes, taking out your laptop, checking if you have liquids in your possession – it's all very annoying for a lot of people," he said. "That's why we're offering this extra service."

The new service applies only to travellers booked with the Thomas Cook agency, not passengers of partner service Neckermann or Thomas Cook Airlines alone. It does apply to passengers who book a flight with Thomas Cook but fly on Brussels Airlines. The service will not cost passengers extra. Rival tour operator Jetair said it would not be following Thomas Cook's example. "We will be reserving this advantage for VIP Selection passengers," the airline said. Brussels Airport spokesperson Florence Muls said they were not expecting opposition to the new fast track system.

And if the service becomes so popular that priority lines are as long as normal lines, the airport is ready. "We guarantee that anyone who pays for the fast track has to wait half as long as the others. If it happens that there are a lot of passengers, we'll simply open another security checkpoint," said Muls. \ AH

Test-Aankoop combats ads for crash diets

Belgium's consumer rights organisation Test-Aankoop has launched a campaign to warn consumers about advertisements for crash diets that promise considerable weight loss in a short time and show before-and-after pictures.

Test-Aankoop points out that European Union legislation prohibits

making promises about the speed and extent of weight loss in ads or on packaging of foods, supplements or other products.

According to the organisation, a crash diet is not effective in the long term and causes side-effects, like binge eating, irritability, weakness and headaches. "We are therefore concerned about popu-

lar websites that have, over the last few months, regularly featured ad banners that target people who are overweight and feel vulnerable," said Test-Aankoop in a statement. "The ads often mention an exact amount of weight that can be lost in a short period of time." The consumer organisation has filed a complaint with the Jury for

Ethical Practices and the federal economy ministry. It also sent a letter to the editorial staff of news websites where the ads were found, demanding their removal. Consumers are asked to post any such ads they find to Test-Aankoop's Facebook page. \ Andy

Furniere

WEEK IN BUSINESS

Air \ State aid

The Brussels residents' association Pas Question has filed a complaint with the EU Commission over the €19 million in Belgian state aid given to three airlines using Brussels Airport. Two of the airlines, Thomas Cook and Jetairfly, who share €4 million of the aid, are alleged by the complaint to be the worst offenders in breaching aircraft noise regulations.

Banking \ Fortis

Fortis, now trading as Ageas, misled shareholders and gave them incomplete information in 2008, shortly before the bank's collapse, a court in Amsterdam has ruled. Ageas, which will now have to pay compensation in the billions of euros, said it regretted the ruling and would study it more carefully before responding. A legal action in Belgium involving 1,300 shareholders is expected to start by the end of this year.

Retail \ Comeos

The summer sales, which ended on 31 July, were less successful than last year, according to the retail industry federation Comeos. Shops made 2% less in sales of clothing during the month-long period.

Technology \ Melexis

Ypres-based tech company Melexis has issued an improved profits forecast for the second time this year, after better than expected results for the second quarter. Sales were up to €82 million, 22% more than the same period last year, while net profit was 61% higher.

Telecoms \ Mobistar

Mobile phone operator Mobistar is to outsource a large part of its IT activities, including development and testing of applications, to Tech Mahindra of Mumbai in India. Mobistar said the move would result in no redundancies.

Websales \ Coolblue

Belgian customers of online retailer Coolblue will be able to have their purchases delivered on Sundays starting from 30 August, under an agreement with parcels company PostNL. Customers who order on Saturdays before midnight will have their packages, excluding large items such as TVs and washing machines, delivered at no extra cost by the next day. PostNL, formerly a subsidiary of TNT, operates 500 parcel pick-up points in Belgium.

Depression discovered to be a precursor to dementia

Antwerp researchers link depression to development of Alzheimer's later on



Senne Sterckx

More articles by Senne \ flanderstoday.eu

WWW.BORNBUNGE.BE

A four-year study at the University of Antwerp of people with mild cognitive impairment, or MCI, found that patients with symptoms of depression were far more likely to progress to dementia related to Alzheimer's disease than MCI patients with no signs of depression. The conclusion is clear: depression can be regarded as a predictor of dementia.

The research involved a group of 235 people aged 55 and older with mild cognitive problems, recruited from the Hospital Network Antwerp. MCI is a clinical term that covers many medical complaints. Generally, it identifies subjects who are in an intermediate cognitive state between normal aging and dementia. MCI is therefore a syndrome characterised by an impairment of memory or other cognitive decline, which doesn't affect a person's basic activities in daily life.

Stefan Van der Mussele (pictured), a post-doctoral researcher at the Reference Centre for Biological Markers of Dementia (Biodem) at the University of Antwerp's Born-Bunge Institute, carried out the research. He says it is as yet unclear whether the depressive symptoms are an early manifestation of Alzheimer's, or vice versa – if depression itself increases the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease.

"Follow-up studies are needed to answer this question," he says.

The identification of depression as a predictor for Alzheimer's disease can help to refine and categorise the group of MCI patients, which is now highly heterogeneous. Other tools, beyond cognitive and psychological tests, are being developed to assist in this process. "Currently we have some biological markers at our disposal that can tell us whether a patient is likely to contract Alzheimer's or not," explains Van der Mussele.

“Not all MCI patients progress to dementia. Some recover to a normal condition

Scientists can detect the disease "by measuring certain protein concentrations in the cerebrospinal fluid," he continues, "and neuroimaging of the brain is improving,



which lets us see early manifestation of Alzheimer's disease."

A few weeks ago, British researchers finalised a method to measure the risk of Alzheimer's disease directly in the blood. "This is a good step forward towards better techniques for diagnosis. [Blood samples] measure disease-specific proteins as we do with a lumbar puncture. Obviously it's much easier – and less painful for the patient – to take a blood sample," Van der Mussele says.

The clinical presentation, cause and outcome of MCI are heterogeneous – and therefore almost every MCI patient is unique, with every pathology telling a different

story.

"MCI can be caused by a neurodegenerative – such as in the case of Alzheimer's – a vascular, metabolic, traumatic or psychiatric defect," explains Van der Mussele. MCI can also be divided into two subtypes. "There's an amnesic subtype, with memory deficits, and a non-amnesic one with cognitive decline other than memory."

For patients with amnesic MCI, "we can say that it's likely that they will progress to dementia due to Alzheimer's disease. The outcome of non-amnesic MCI appears to be more heterogeneous, including other types of dementia. However, not all MCI patients progress to dementia. Some even recover to normal condition. Generally, we see that about 69% of the MCI patients develop some sort of dementia."

Research on biological markers of Alzheimer's disease is important, as it aims to facilitate the diagnosis of the very early stages of the disease, hopefully leading to the development of more successful therapies.

The Biodem team and the Born-Bunge Institute welcome donations to aid them in their research on dementia.

WEEK IN INNOVATION

Too much hospitalisation

People with psychiatric problems in Belgium are hospitalised too often and for too long a period, according to the umbrella organisation Onafhankelijke Ziekenfondsen (Independent Mutualities). A stay at the psychiatric department of a general hospital costs the social security system an average of €10,340 per month per patient. For psychiatric hospitals, the cost amounts to €4,720 per month. "In the infrastructure outside the hospital, meant for a long-term stay, the cost is much lower," stated OZ. "A stay in a psychiatric care residence costs the social security on average €3,110 per month per patient, and a stay in sheltered housing €1,670." OZ is requesting more investment in these formulas, which it claims are underutilised.

Leuven students make package-delivering drone

Three students in civil engineering at the University of Leuven (KU Leuven) have created a drone to deliver packages as part of their Master's thesis. Named VertikUL, the drone can pick up a package weighing up to one kilogram and deliver it inside a radius of 30 kilometres. It finds its destination through a GPS signal. It's too soon to use the device, according to PhD student Bart Theys, who assisted the Master's students. "The drone can't yet adapt to weather conditions, for instance," said Theys. A lack of air space legislation related to the use of drones also means they cannot yet be used commercially. The project, however, greatly helps to ascertain technical challenges involved in preparation for future uses of the technology.

InternationalDNA data trade a success

Belgium and the Netherlands have exchanged DNA data, the first countries in Europe to do so on such a large scale, and with immediately positive results. In 576 cases, a DNA trace found at a crime scene could be linked to a DNA profile of someone in one of the countries who was obliged to submit a sample. These DNA matches are expected to lead to breakthroughs in hundreds of criminal cases. The Belgian DNA data will also soon be compared to DNA data in French and German databases. The plan is to exchange data with other countries in the future. \ AF

Doctors test new pain-measuring devices

Until now, the common practice to measure pain consisted of asking patients to say a number between 0 and 10. Of course, that is not a very reliable method, as pain is a highly subjective feeling and can vary drastically between patients. But doctors often need to know how much pain a patient is actually feeling – and whether the pain is bearable or not.

In the last few months, the University Hospital Antwerp (UZA) has been employing two devices that measure pain objectively. Developed by an Israeli firm, UZA's pain clinic is the first in the world to utilise these devices.

One of the devices quantifies acute pain by measuring seven parameters in the autonomic nervous system through a sensor attached to the patient's finger. "These parameters are closely connected to the nervous system, by which the device calculates a number called the pain index," explains Guy Hans, co-ordinator of the pain clinic at UZA. "That number can be measured in real time, even when the patient is under an anaesthetic."

According to Hans, this device proves useful for anaesthetists who want to give patients only a minimal amount of anaesthetic, though enough



© UZA

Antwerp University Hospital is the first in the world to test innovative new pain sensors

so that they no longer feel pain. It is also useful when using anaesthesia on obese persons and people with certain pulmonary membrane disorders. "Thanks to this device, we can deliver the optimal amount of the anaesthetic, and we can even adjust it during the operation," he says. The second device measures chronic pain, which is very different from acute pain. To understand chronic pain, it is important to know the patient's natural pain inhibition system. Therefore, doctors have to first measure the threshold values for the detection of heat, extreme heat, cold and extreme cold.

When they deduct these threshold values from the pain index the device has measured between the nerves of the spinal cord and the brain, they know exactly how much chronic pain the patient is suffering from.

The devices are currently being used in a pilot project on 100 UZA patients. "This is a real breakthrough in pain research," says Hans. "By using the devices with many patients, we can determine certain reference values for different kinds of pain. And I believe that these measurements will be part of a standard treatment in the near future." \ SS

The cultural challenge

Flemish libraries and cultural centres need to change the way they operate



Andy Furniere

More articles by Andy \ flanderstoday.eu

The Flemish public libraries and cultural centres mainly reach people with a high educational background and insufficiently attract lower income persons, people of foreign origin and youngsters. That is one of the main conclusions of a user study carried out by the University of Antwerp (UA) and the bureau of Flemish Local Market Research (LMOV).

Through a survey, the two organisations assembled and interpreted the opinions of some 90,000 people from 153 cities and municipalities. This was the first time that the profiles of library users were laid side-by-side with those of the users of cultural centres. For many organisations, 10 years have passed since the views of their visi-



© LMOV

experiencing an economic crisis." The user study demonstrates that the libraries and cultural centres have not fully succeeded in adapting to these social trends and in reaching all layers of society. A majority of users are highly educated and have high incomes, while people with lower incomes and of foreign origin are under-represented. Youngsters are increasingly less attracted to libraries and cultural centres. 21.5% of the persons who stop going to the library say that the reason is a lack of time.

"One of our recommendations towards the organisations is that they should set up adjusted communication strategies to reach specific target groups," declares Schramme. "To counter the problem of time pressure, organisations should consider more flexible opening hours, such as later in the evenings or during the week-ends."

Apart from a lack of time, most

of the respondents who stopped visiting the library did so because of the availability of information online (22.5%) or because they got internet at home (18.5%). According to the researchers, libraries especially succeed in integrating digital features in the practical provision of services.

Libraries don't offer many e-books, but there also isn't a large demand for them yet. "We recommend that the organisations focus on activities that close the digital divide, which is closely related to the income and origin of users," says Schramme.

In general, the libraries and cultural centres remain very popular as meeting places and their users are very satisfied with the infrastructure, collection and services. "It's also remarkable how happy the users are with the prices they have to pay," says Schramme. "Perhaps the organisations should consider raising their prices, in particular for the part of their collection and

programme that has more of an entertainment purpose and for the additional services, like providing a cafe as meeting place."

When asked about their ideal library in the future, the respondents answered rather conservatively. "While the government has several ambitious plans to turn libraries into, for example, digital centres, the users indicated that they are interested above all in increased comfort," explains Schramme.

Almost half of the respondents want to receive a warning when they have to return the material, one out of three wants to be able to bring back material outside the opening times and almost one out of three wants to have longer loan periods.

While the satisfaction of the users of Flemish libraries is high, statistics from the EU Commission's Eurobarometer show that only about a quarter of the Belgian population visits them. 72% of the inhabitants don't go to libraries, which is a considerably higher figure than the European average of 64%. Only Greece, Portugal and Bulgaria have worse scores. In Scandinavian countries, about 70% of the population pays visits to libraries.

The organisations that co-operated have received an individual report as well as one on Flanders in general, which will help them get an overview of the findings. Together with support organisations for libraries and cultural centres, the UA in November organises a study day to discuss the results of the research.

WEEK IN EDUCATION

Teachers trained in signs of abuse

Teachers in primary and secondary education in Flanders will begin receiving training to better recognise child abuse and neglect. The training will be organised through a collaboration between the pupil support agencies (CLB) and the Vertrouwenscentra Kindersmishandeling, or Confidential Centres for Child Abuse. The Vertrouwenscentra are specialised centres set up by the government of Flanders to inform people about child abuse and provide assistance if necessary. Last year, the Vertrouwenscentra received 7,829 reports of child abuse. \ www.kindersmishandeling.be

Google, Commission dream employers

Most Belgian students are hoping to get a job at a large, foreign company after graduation, according to a survey by employer branding consultancy Universum Global. Their Ideal Employers survey questioned 7,044 students from 17 Belgian universities and colleges. Internet giant Google was the most popular employer among economics, engineering and science students and third most popular over all, while the European Commission was the favourite employer of arts, human sciences and education students. Locally, Flemish media company Mediaaan (previously VMM) came in second with the human sciences group, while dredging company Jan De Nul is the third-best employer according to science students. Brussels Airlines ranks third and fourth among human sciences and science students, respectively.

\ www.tinyurl.com/idealemployer

VUB spotlights social issues

From autumn 2015, students from all faculties at the Free University of Brussels (VUB) will be able to follow a course in which they will learn how to reflect on social issues. The course is titled "Reasonably Headstrong: Reflecting on Humanity and Society". Every year, experts from a variety of disciplines will deal with a socially relevant topic through six lectures and debates with students. Possible topics are privacy and big data, questions on the beginning and end of life, sustainability and genetic modification. The lectures will also be open to the general public. "It's essential that our students become critical citizens who can reflect on important social issues without prejudices and dogmas," said rector Paul De Knop. \ AF

Q&A

For her Master's thesis in informatics at Hasselt University, Eva Geurts developed a prototype of a mobile application that encourages heart patients to start cycling

What is the value of a cycling app for heart patients?

Physical activity through a training programme is important for heart patients, especially to avoid a relapse. Cycling is a popular outdoor sport that people can do wherever and whenever they want. Many heart patients, however, are afraid to cycle outside of the rehabilitation centre, where the medical staff provides assistance when patients cycle on home trainers. Patients often also lack the motivation to get started. The cycling app has to provide the necessary guidance to make sure that the patients can enjoy themselves on a bike.

How will the app put heart patients at ease?

By inserting the specific data of each patient, the app will be able to tell them, for example, when they should slow down because their heart rate is near to the maximum that is allowed by their doctors. If they ride with electric bicycles, the app can warn them to start up the motor to relax more and slow down their heart rate.

Also, an important feature to motivate patients is that the app will help them follow the recreational cycling routes in Limburg, where it is pleasant to ride. Patients only need a heart rate monitor and a smartphone to get going.

Will the app also be to the benefit of hospitals?

Since the number of heart patients will keep on increasing, due to the ageing population, hospitals are looking for ways to assist patients from a distance. The app will enable medical staff to monitor their condition and training programme by sending them all the data of the cycling trip. The medical specialists can then, for example, evaluate whether the training programme is adapted to the patients' needs or should be adjusted.

When will the cycling app be launched on the market?

Experts at the Jessa Hospital in Hasselt, with whom I co-operated for my thesis, are now fine-tuning the prototype of the app. They are carrying out tests on heart patients



in the coming months, and hopefully the app will be available on the market soon after. \ Interview by AF

The background of the entire page is a vibrant red. At the top, the word "THE Bulletin" is written in white, with "THE" in a smaller font. Below the title, a black silhouette of the Brussels skyline is visible, featuring the Atomium structure and various historic buildings. A white curved line with a dashed red border arches over the skyline. On the left side, there are stylized black and red house icons. On the right side, a series of black silhouettes of people in various poses (walking, running, playing tennis) are arranged vertically. At the bottom, there is a black silhouette of a city skyline with a white path leading through it.

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Death becomes them

This weekend, 12,000 people will try to walk 100 kilometres in 24 hours



Toon Lambrechts

More articles by Toon \ flanderstoday.eu

WWW.DODENTOCHT.BE

Would you consider taking part in an event bearing the name “death march”? Personally, I would think twice, but for many hikers and sports enthusiasts, the Dodentocht in Bornem, Antwerp province, is a highlight of their year. The Dodentocht is a deceptively simple idea: a trail of 100 kilometres and 24 hours to finish. Beginning in 1970 with 65 participants, this year’s 45th edition expects some 12,000 walkers to turn out. “The idea originally came from Kadee, the local youth centre in Bornem,” explains Francis Meeus, one of the organisers of the event. “There were a lot of avid hikers in the centre at the time. After participating in the four-day walking tour of Nijmegen in the Netherlands, an idea started brewing to organise something in Bornem.” But they didn’t want to do the same old thing. “There were already a few multiple-day walks,” notes Meeus. “So, the concept of a journey of 100km within 24 hours seemed like a good plan.” And the Dodentocht was born. Today, the Dodentocht is famous – or, rather, infamous – beyond Belgium’s borders. Participants from the Netherlands, France and Great Britain travel to the village each year. The Dodentocht is not a competition, Meeus emphasises. “There is no prize for first one to cross the finish line, and we do not put that person in the spotlight. Rather, it is a recreational trip, more about the atmosphere and the pride when one succeeds in finishing the trail.

Even the ultra-runners [who run distances longer than a marathon] can’t go too fast.” Photos of the Dodentocht show feet full of blisters, walkers carrying multiple pairs of shoes and bleary-eyed participants barely able to take another step. Why choose to suffer through this walk of death? “Participants are very diverse,” says Meeus, “There are experienced hikers, of course, but also sports fans and adventurers who just want to try it.” How much preparation to you need before you show up at the starting line? “About 60% of the participants finish the journey. Some are well prepared, but even among the less-experienced, many finish the route purely from strength of character.” The route of the tour is roughly the same every year, with a few minor changes, explains Meeus. “The large number of participants sets limitations on it. But people come for more than just the trip.” Organisers opened a campground on 4 August, with performances and a party held on 7 and 8 August. “Friday night at 21.00 is the big moment: the journey starts, and everyone has 24 hours to get through the various checkpoints along the trail to the finish line.” “For me, a trip like this is almost an addiction,” says Hugo Bonnyns. He pulls out a book where he writes down all of his walks to see how many editions of the Dodentocht he has completed. “I participated for the first time in the second edition, and I missed one edition



© courtesy Dodentocht

for another walk in Venice. That makes 42 editions.” The Dodentocht is not the only walking event in which Bonnyns takes part. In total, he has more than 618 trips of over 100km to his name and, at the respectable age of 73, has walked more than 211,000km. That’s more than five times around the world. “I do not specifically prepare myself for the Dodentocht,” Bonnyns says, “but I walk a trail almost every weekend. I also did the Four Days of the IJzer and the one in Nijmegen, but Bornem is something special. The atmosphere is different, friendlier. Also, making a trip with such a mass of people is special. There are many of these 100km walks, but no other event is so successful. This is

entirely thanks to the atmosphere in the walk and alongside the road.” But even for a seasoned hiker like Bonnyns, 100 kilometres has its difficult moments. “The most difficult time is the morning, when the lack of sleep sneaks in. Hot, heavy weather is also not nice. Rain, on the other hand, I find less of a problem. But the joy and pride when you cross the finish line is worth a lot. For me, it takes about 18 hours, which is about 6km per hour.” For those who would like to try the trip, Bonnyns offers a piece of advice: “Make you sure you are at least a little prepared before you start. And don’t start too quickly in the beginning – 100km is a very long way.”

BITE Smoutebollen

Literally translate *smoutebollen*, and you’re likely to never try one. “Lard balls” just doesn’t really roll off the tongue. But let’s not forget what they are really: scrumptious balls of deep-fried dough, with a golden crispy crust and gooey centre. Now that sounds better. The precursor to donuts, *smoutebollen* are only called this in Flanders, where they were traditionally fried in *smout*, or animal fat. In the Netherlands,



they refer to them as *oliebollen*, which is more accurate, as these days they are dipped into bubbling hot vegetable oil instead of lard. You’ll notice the bright stand at every festival and fun fair. It’s an eye-catcher, oozing enough retro charm to transport any nostalgic Fleming right back to their childhood. Step right up and order a set of five (or eight, or 10...), then watch as they use two spoons or an ice cream scoop to form imperfect round shapes with

the dough and drop them into the fryer where they bob to the top and bubble until golden brown. Moments later, the *smoutebollen* are tossed into a pointed paper sack and dusted with icing sugar. Eat them with your hands for the full effect. They are so good, you might be tempted to make them at home. This recipe is as simple as they come. Even if you don’t own a deep fryer, a large pot of hot oil will do just fine.

Smoutebollen
Ingredients for 8 balls:
600g flour
Pinch of salt
25cl milk (room temperature)
25cl water
50 g yeast
1 tbsp sugar
4 eggs, separated
2 packets of vanilla sugar
icing sugar

Add the flour and salt to a large bowl and stir in most of the milk and all of the water. Dissolve the yeast and sugar in the remaining milk before adding to the mixture. Beat the egg whites with the vanilla sugar until they form peaks, and then add to the mixture, along with the egg yolks. Mix the batter until smooth. Allow to rest and rise slightly in a warm place for about 30 minutes. Heat the oil to 180°C. Use two spoons to shape the dough into balls (keep the spoons in a cup of warm water to avoid sticking) and let the balls slide into the fryer. Turn the balls continuously while frying to keep their nice round shape. When the balls start to form a crispy, golden crust, remove from the oil, shaking off any excess. Serve with a generous sprinkling of icing sugar. \ Robyn Boyle

WEEK IN ACTIVITIES

Theater on the Markt

This annual street theater festival in the center of Hasselt hosts international circus acts, music, dance and theatre in various indoor and outdoor locations. Most performances are free but some require a ticket purchase (€2-€10). 7-10 August, Hasselt
\ www.theateropdemarkt.be

Night of the Comic Strip

An evening of activities focused on comics and cartoons for both young and old. Guided tours, live music, animated films, storytelling and more. 8 August, 19.00-1.30, Belgian Comic Strip Center, Zandstraat 20, Brussels; free
\ www.stripmuseum.be/

International Folk Festival

Groups from Brazil, Bulgaria, Indonesia, Lithuania, Romania, Taiwan and Belgium will perform traditional folk dances from their respective homelands. Free street performances in Hasselt city center on 9 August. 9-15 August in the festival tent behind the church in Kuringen, Hasselt; €10
\ www.folklorefestivalhasselt.be

Chefs on the Beach

Enjoy a buffet on the beach with gastronomic delights prepared by 16 top Belgian chefs. A ticket gets you an *aperitif*, four plates of your choice and an after-dinner drink. 7-10 August, Knokke-Heist; €34 in advance
\ www.culinariasquare.com/nl/knokke2014

Antiquarian Book Fair

International dealers in antiquarian and used books, prints and drawings, comic strips, postcards and documents will set up stalls in the historic *begijnhof* and surrounding area. Guaranteed browsing pleasure for all book lovers! 10 August, 10.00-18.00, Begijnhof, Tongeren; free
\ www.tongeren.be

Slaghmuylder Brewery Open House

The brewery behind Witkap Pater beer opens its doors to the public. Visit the brewery and brewing museum, taste the beers and learn about the brewing process. On Saturday, there’s a market of beer paraphernalia. 9-10 August, from 13.00, Denderhoutembaan 2, Ninove (East Flanders); free
\ www.witkap.be

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In their footsteps

The most important sites, cemeteries and monuments of the First World War in Flanders



Alan Hope

More articles by Alan \ flanderstoday.eu

WWW.TINYURL.COM/PEACEROUTE

Flanders is home to literally hundreds of sites, cemeteries and monuments commemorating one of the most traumatic events in the region's – and the world's – history: the First World War. Over the next four years, thousands of people will come to Flanders to remember the dead and visit the places where much of the war's destruction took place.

If you're having trouble knowing where to start, here are 10 essential places that will help you understand the total breadth and scope of the war's impact in Flanders – and the world.

Since so much of the history of the war takes place in the part of West Flanders known as the Westhoek – roughly from Nieuwpoort on the coast to the border just north of Armentières – the Ypres tourist office has taken the sensible step of designing the Peace Route, a 45-kilometre cycling route. Most of the sites mentioned here can be found along this route.

1. It would be impossible to design an itinerary of major sites relating to the First World War without starting at **In Flanders Fields Museum** in Ypres. The museum is situated in the old Cloth Hall, once the centre of the thriving textile industry. Destroyed during the war, it was rebuilt in all its former glory, and so a fitting symbol of hardship and renewal.

A fully renovated museum and new permanent exhibition opened in 2012 and tell the story of the war from the invasion of Belgium by Germany, through the terrible years of battle in the region, up to the armistice and the culture of remembrance.

The museum is utilises interactive technologies to enhance visitor experience and is distinctly narrative: The objects form part of a human story, and an international one. As the museum reminds us: "People from five continents and more than 50 countries and cultures took part in the war in Flanders."

That's a fact that will come to our attention again more than once as we pursue our route.

2. **Tyne Cot Commonwealth cemetery** in Passchendaele, where the British lost 300,000 soldiers in the Third Battle of Ypres in 1917, is the last resting place of 11,956 soldiers of the Commonwealth as well as a number of German prisoners-of-war who died in British hands. The back wall is a memorial to 34,957 whose remains were never identified. The ordered ranks of identical headstones, each made of bright white Port-



© www.nzwargraves.org.nz

The Menin Gate in Ypres, where buglers play their nightly ballad

land stone, present a moving vista.

3. The **Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof** in Langemark is the German military cemetery, home to 44,304 of the German dead, almost 25,000 of them in one mass grave. Among their number are more than 3,000 cadets and students who died in fighting in October 1914. The sculpture group of four soldiers is by the late German artist Emil Krieger.

4. **Essex Farm cemetery** in Boezinge is where John McCrae, a Canadian physician who rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, lies.

He was in charge of a field hospital during the Second Battle of Ypres in 1915 when his friend and former student was killed, inspiring McCrae to write the now-famous poem "In Flanders Fields", published anonymously in the legendary British magazine *Punch* in December 1915.

The poem's poignancy and style captured the attention of soldiers and civilians alike and forever enshrined the poppy as a symbol of the war. The cemetery contains 1,199 graves, including that of Rifleman Valentine Joe Strudwick, the youngest fatality of the war at only 15.



© Tourism Ypres

Essex Farm Cemetery, burial place of John McCrae

5. The Peace Route also passes through the **Palingbeek provincial park**, together with **Hill 60**, which, though not a cemetery as such, is still the last resting place of men who died in the underground fighting that took place from April 1915 to June 1917. The pock-marked landscape is still maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

6. The seaside town of Nieuwpoort had a major role to play in the war, when, in 1914, soldiers Karel Cogge and Hendrik Geeraert used the locks system, called the **Ganzenpoot**, or Goose-Foot, to flood the plain where the German invader was camped. The action forced them to withdraw from the town altogether and held a line for the Allies which would remain fixed until the final offensive of 1918. Nieuwpoort also has an impressive monument to the dead of the town, sculpted by local artist Pieter-Jan Braecke, who also made the monument in Ostend further up the coast.

7. The **Memorial Museum Passchendaele** 1917 was opened on Anzac Day in 2004 and last year added three new sections for visitors. The museum in general focuses on the Battle of Passchendaele, otherwise known as the Third Battle of Ypres. It also features an underground dugout kitted out as it would have been during battle and a series of outdoor trenches.

From the museum, it's easy to visit other sites like Tyne Cot, the German trenches at Bayernwald and Polygon Wood.

8. One of the most enduring acts of remembrance anywhere, and one which is guaranteed to bring a lump to the throat, is the daily Last Post under the **Menin Gate** in Ypres. Every day since 1928, with the exception of the period of occupation in the Second World War, the **Last Post** – a British Army bugle call marking the end of the day – is played by two buglers at precisely 20.00.

The Last Post Committee, which organises the event, has a full calendar of groups from all over the world who wish to visit and lay a wreath in the niche in the gate; groups include not only military organisations but also scouts and guides, police, schools and even, on one occasion, a group of leather-clad bikers. Designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield, the gate contains the names, carved in stone, of 54,896 Commonwealth soldiers who died in battle before August 1917 but whose remains were never recovered. The names of the missing from later battles are listed at Tyne Cot.

9. On the other side of the Cloth Hall from the Menin Gate is **St George's Memorial Church**, built by the same Reginald Blomfield to commemorate the more than 500,000 dead of the three battles for the Ypres Salient. It was consecrated in 1929, and since then has been a place of pilgrimage for people visiting the other sites in the Ypres area.

The church is open every day, and its most remarkable feature is the hand-made cushion covers, each commemorating one of the regiments who took part in the fighting. Plaques on the wall also commemorate the dead, among them 300 students from Eton College.

10. Finally, a place not associated with death, but rather a place of respite and relaxation. **Talbot House** is in Poperinge, which in wartime was not occupied. British chaplains Neville Talbot and Philip Clayton (known as "Tubby"), opened a club house in 1915 for soldiers on leave from the front. One steadfast rule: no distinctions of military rank or social status were recognised. The house is now a museum of life away from the killing fields, as well as a small B&B. And you can still get a very decent cup of tea.

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Film pioneer Verhavert dies

Celebrated Flemish film director Roland Verhavert died last week of a heart attack at the age of 87. Verhavert is a pioneer of modern Flemish cinema, instrumental in gaining international attention for the fledgling industry from the 1950s to the 1970s. His films include such classics as *Meeuwen sterven in de haven* (*Seagulls Die in the Harbour*), starring a young Julien Schoenaerts, and *De loteling* (*The Conscript*), starring a young Jan Decleir. "He had a nose for talent and provided many young people – in front of and behind the camera – great opportunities," said Flemish director Stijn Coninx.

Ballet ends contract with Assis Carreiro

The Royal Ballet of Flanders has ended its contract with artistic director Assis Carreiro, the organisation announced. Scheduled performances will continue as programmed. Carreiro was hired in 2012 from Dance East in Ipswich in the UK. She replaced Kathryn Bennetts, who, after transforming it into a world-class ballet company, resigned because of budget cuts and the government's plans to merge the ballet and the opera. Over the last two years, the company has toured far less, giving dancers fewer opportunities. Dancers wrote a letter to the organisation's board late last year, citing 69% of them had voted no confidence in the artistic director. One-third of the company left during the period – 15 dancers out of 45. The ballet will name a successor as quickly as possible, it said.

Africa Film Festival founder dies

Guido Huysmans, the founder and director of Leuven's Africa Film Festival, died last week at the age of 55. The cause of death had not been announced as Flanders Today went to press but was said to be due to natural causes. Huysmans worked in several social agencies and as a communications specialist for Doctors Without Borders until he founded the festival together with journalist Guido Convents in 1996. It is now one of Europe's most successful festivals concentrating on films from Africa, blending its film programme with guest appearances, exhibitions and debates.

War chronicles

Our guide to the best books and websites on the First World War



Tom Peeters

More articles by Tom \ flanderstoday.eu

Commemorating the First World War is big business, including for local publishers. Flanders Today selected the books that give a thorough insider's perspective of what led to the war and how it shaped Flanders' past, present and future



14-18, Oorlog in België (14-18, War in Belgium) By Luc De Vos, et al (*Dauidsfonds, 2014, in Dutch*)

The Flemish professor Luc De Vos (not to be confused with the singer from the rock band Gorki) is a world authority on military history. He and three co-authors explain the military strategies of the Belgian and German forces during the First World War in a monumental publication of 590 pages, nearly 400 little-seen photos and more than 50 detailed maps. The maps summarise and illustrate all battle scenes, from the unexpected attack of the fortified positions of Liège over major bloodshed in Passchendaele to the trench war at the IJzer front, where everything changed. Authors try to give readers a glimpse into the minds of the generals who made the critical decisions. Though the angle is military, the content is far broader, offering a glance into the daily routine at the frontline and depicting not only the weapons the soldiers carried, but also the clothes they wore and the food they ate.

De Groote Oorlog: Het koninkrijk België tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog (The Great War: The Kingdom of Belgium During the First World War) By Sophie De Schaepdrijver (*Houtekiet, 1997/2013, in Dutch*)

First published in 1997, this work about Belgium during *De Groote Oorlog* by the Flemish, US-based historian Sophie De Schaepdrijver is a must-read. In fact, she describes two wars: one battled in the trenches, and one endured in the rest of the country, where the brutal German occupation created excruciating hardship. The Belgian people of 1914 felt as neutral as the Swiss people now, De Schaepdrijver explains, as she illustrates the disbelief of the population when the largest invasion ever attacked their small and unprepared kingdom, which would eventually become the heart of the battlefield. She looks at the war from a bottom-up perspective, telling stories about people ahead of ideologies.

The writer received Flanders' Ark Prize of the Free Word for the work. A lecturer of modern European history at Pennsylvania State University, De Schaepdrijver is curating the exhibition *Bruges at War*, which opens in October.

The Rape of Belgium: The Untold Story of World War I By Larry Zuckerman (*NYU Press, 2004, in English*)

Ten years ago, the Seattle-based author Larry Zuckerman promoted the first edition of the Dutch-language version of this book (*Manteau*) at the Antwerp Boekenbeurs. "I have never felt so rewarded as I did seeing how grateful the Belgians were that I'd recounted an episode in their nation's history that usually gets overlooked," he said. His book describes in depth the random killings, atrocities and psychological terror committed by the German troops and administration, further illustrating how all kind of restrictions and indemnity infected seven million Belgian civilians during wartime. Before the war, Belgium was the world's sixth largest economy, a position the looted country would never equal afterwards.

All of this was largely neglected by the foreign press, which mainly focused on the front, and the atrocities were communicated as exaggeration by the propaganda machine. If only the British and American governments had paid more attention to the hardship of the Belgian people, Zuckerman said, they might have been better able to predict the Nazi regime still to come.

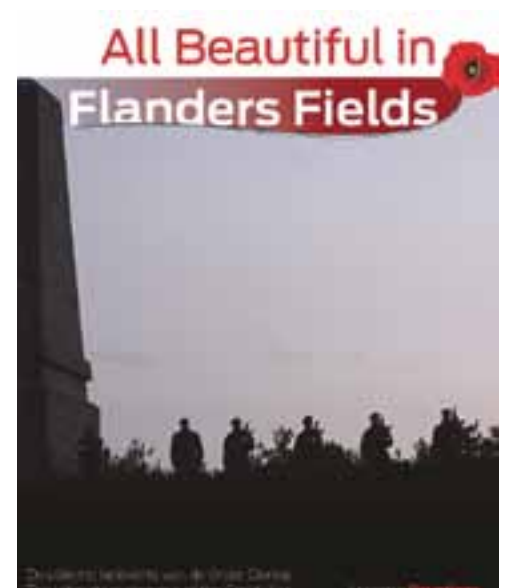
Before My Helpless Sight: Suffering, Dying and Military Medicine on the Western Front / Zacht en eervol: Lijden en sterven in de Grote Oorlog By Leo van Bergen (*Ashgate, 2009, in English / Manteau, 2014, in Dutch /*)

Dutch doctor Leo van Bergen has spent his entire career researching the relationship between war and medicine. No one has ever

described the life of wounded or ill soldiers, from the battle to the grave, better than this medical historian from Free University Medical Centre in Amsterdam. Precise as a surgeon but with the compassion of an army chaplain, Van Bergen covers both the physical and mental anguishes suffered by First World War soldiers. Pointing out that aid was often given for military reasons than for humanitarian purposes ("Getting the men back to the front ... and trying to spare the state as many war pension as possible"), he also answers questions raised by industrialised warfare and large-scale killing, such as "What happened when more people were killed than could possibly be buried properly?" A landmark in the medical historiography of the Great War, *Before My Helpless Sight* is a surprising accessible read.

All beautiful in Flanders Fields By Annemie Reyntjens (*Dauidsfonds, 2014, in Dutch & English*)

A picture paints a thousand words might come to mind as you peruse Flemish photographer Annemie Reyntjens portraits of Flanders Fields. Following the trails of the war and spending 200 days among the cemeteries and memorials, she offers a visual ode to the departed. Her luxurious large-format photo book has additional information in both English and Dutch about the sites and the soldiers. Some of the captured silence, morbid and serene at once, is better illustrated by accompanying poems. "They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old / Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn / At the going down of the sun and in the morning / We will remember them".



THE WAR ONLINE

A few local online resources with information about activities taking place over the next four years not only remind us of what happened between 1914 and 1918 but also helps to organise our personal commemorations of the Great War. The Flemish government's site www.2014-18.be offers news about activities, exhibitions and other notable commemorations in four languages. There are links



to international web pages, and a subject search enables visitors to look for specific information.

The federal website www.be14-18.be offers an agenda in four languages emphasising the big national ceremonies in Liège, Mons (where the first British soldier fell), Ypres, Nieuwpoort, Passchendaele and Brussels, but also mentions exhibitions, publications and activities, such as the nationwide military commemoration programme. The website www.wol.be, in Dutch and English, focuses on activities

in the Westhoek, the West Flanders region of Diksmuide, Ypres and Veurne, where most of the action took place. There's a database with all the local war monuments, battlefields and cemeteries and a summary of the events in the region. You'll also find information on books and museums, and even a GPS page where you can download the data to navigate easily towards all the sites.

Invading the cultural wasteland

Start to Jazz

8 August to 7 September

Warp & Nylonfabriek,
Sint-Niklaas
WWW.WARP-ART.BE

Since 2006, contemporary arts platform Warp (Wase Artistieke Projecten, or Waasland Art Projects) has been trying to put a spark in the local arts scene in Sint-Niklaas. In an area that even curator and driving force behind Warp, Stef Van Bellingen, once called an “unfortunate cultural wasteland between Ghent and Antwerp,” initiatives like this are most welcome.

Changing the tune of a city doesn't come easy, but there have been valiant attempts, particularly Warp's festival Coup de Ville, which has twice put contemporary art into streets and private homes. Famous art maven Jan Hoet even

co-curated the first edition in 2010. This ambition to bridge the gap between artists and their public characterises many of the events Warp holds at the former home of the late local artist Jan Buytaert, who bequeathed his mansion and his personal collection to the organisation on the condition that they would help foster an arts centre.

For an entire month, Warp and the recently renovated industrial site Nylonfabriek will host Start to Jazz, which mixes workshops and live shows with an exhibition of photographs, film and curiosa from the archives of local jazz collector Steve Wante.



The exhibition also includes paintings by Antwerp-based Ethiopian artist Mulugeta Tefesse, photographs from the archive of rock photographer Koen Keppens and other jazz-inspired art.

The jazz fest opens with the duo Françoise Derissen (violin) and Marc Van Garsse (bass) and continues to invite an all-Belgian line-

up clear through to the end. Most bands have a penchant for styles that became popular during the first half of jazz history, such as Nomad Swing from Ghent; the Mechelen conservatory Big Band, led by Brussels Jazz Orchestra member Ben Fleerackers; and piano player Boogie Phil & The Wise Guys (pictured). \ Bjorn Gabriels

MUSIC FESTIVAL

Brussels Summer Festival

8-17 August

Across Brussels
WWW.BSF.BE

While most summer festivals unfold on vast tracts of rural desolation well beyond Brussels city limits, it is indeed possible to enjoy quality entertainment in the open air without ever leaving the capital. Since 2002, the Brussels Summer Festival has hosted some of pop and rock's biggest names on several open-air stages scattered

around central Brussels, most notably the massive main stage in front of the Royal Palace. Among this year's headliners are Patti Smith, Suede (pictured), Texas and Tuxedomoon. Flemish performers like Axelle Red, Arsenal and Ozark Henry are also on board as well as dozens of lesser-known acts from all over Europe. \ Georgio Valentino



MUSIC FESTIVAL

Lokerse Feesten

Until 10 August

Grote Kaai, Lokeren
WWW.LOKERSEFEESTEN.BE

Lokeren's prestigious music festival turns 40 this year. Lokerse Feesten was born in 1975 as a four-day folk and jazz shindig starring Belgian national treasure Toots Thielemans and fuelled by the dubious local speciality, *paardenworst* (horse sausage). The event has since evolved into a sprawling, 10-day blowout featuring more than 100 national and interna-

tional acts. Last year it welcomed 125,000 music lovers and boasted headliners like Alice Cooper and Pitbull. This anniversary edition is bigger and better, but it's a work already in progress. You can still catch rappers 50 Cent and KRS-One, British electro-pop duo Pet Shop Boys and Bob Marley's erstwhile backing band The Wailers. \ GV



CLASSICAL

Classissimo

8-16 August

Bozar, Brussels
WWW.BOZAR.BE

Ever since Woodstock set the bar, rock and pop have monopolised summer festivals the world over. Classissimo hopes to change all that with six nights of chamber music baked into the programme of the Brussels Summer Festival. If your ears are ringing from the rock guitars and throbbing electro synthesizers on BSF's open-air stages, duck into Bozar and unwind to the pure acoustic sound of strings, woodwinds and sopranos. Each event offers something different, be it a cross-section of spiritual compositions or a line-up of Belgium's most celebrated contemporary performers. Saturday's programme, Love in a Tizzy, sees choir soloists Julie



© Raymond Delhaye

Mossay (pictured) and Jodie Devos performing the romantic works of Mozart, Rossini, Ravel, Donizetti and more. \ GV

EVENT

Maypole planting

9 August, 13.00-17.00

Across Brussels
WWW.MEYBOOM.BE



Few traditions in Belgium are as ancient as the annual planting of the Meyboom, or Maypole, at the corner of Zandstraat and Broekstraat in Brussels. The ceremony was born from a customs feud between the people of the city and their neighbours in Leuven. It was ... wait for it ... a beer tax that brought these medieval Belgians

to blows in 1213. The *Leuvenaars* rallied a posse, which was promptly licked by the *Brusselaars*. For 706 years and counting, the latter have planted the Meyboom as if to gloat. The planting is accompanied by a street festival and parade led by a family of giants. Leuven hosts its own festivities simultaneously. \GV

CONCERT

Lo-Reninge
(West Flanders)

Sioen: Performance by the Flemish singer-songwriter, guitarist and pianist featuring both new and old songs. 8 AUG 20.00, Sint-Pieterskerk Lo, Noordstraat 1
\ www.lauka.be

THEATRE

Blankenberge

Komen (vr)Eten (Come and Get It): Satire based on the Flemish TV show *Komen eten* (in Dutch). 8-10 AUG, Floreal Blankenberge, Koning Albert-I-laan 59
\ www.prethuis.be

FAMILY

Wenduine

BAAI! BAAI! Festival: Free pirate-themed festival featuring performances by Kapitein Winokio, Bandits and Urbanus, a kid-friendly beach bar, playground and fireworks. 8-9 AUG at Strand-West, Wenduine

FILM

Zelzate (East Flanders)

Open-Air Cinema: Outdoor film on a big screen, every Thursday in August, featuring *Aanrijding in Moscou* (Moscow, Belgium), *Slumdog Millionaire*, *ET* and *Grease*. 7-28 AUG 21.30 (food from 19.00) at 't Klooster, Kerkstraat 64A
\ www.het-klooster.be

EVENT

Lommel (Limburg)

VAG-Fest: Festival for fans of Volkswagen cars and buses, featuring both old-timers and newer models, from the VW bus and bug to the Jetta, Audi and Porsche, plus a party on Saturday night, a “Best of” competition on Sunday, entertainment, food and drink and a campground. 8-10 AUG, Balendijk Lommel, Gerard Mercatorstraat
\ www.vag-fest.be

FAIR

Wilrijk
(Antwerp province)

Jaarmarkt: Annual town fair featuring cow auctions, concerts and fireworks in a carnival atmosphere with games, food, street entertainment and the traditional friendly cycling competition called *trottinettenkoers*. 10-11 AUG at Bist 1 and Jules Moretuslei
\ www.antwerpen.be

Talking Dutch

In Flanders Fields, the poppies don't grow



Derek Blyth
More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.eu

In Flanders Fields the poppies grow, says the famous war poem. Only they don't. They should now be in full bloom across the whole region, if everything had gone according to plan. But it hasn't. And there is hardly a single poppy to be seen anywhere in Flanders Fields.

Back in April, the Agency for Nature and Woodlands (ANB) planted 48 hectares of poppy seeds across Flanders. *De bedoeling was om met deze bloeiende klaproosvelden de Grote Oorlog te herdenken* – the aim was to commemorate the Great War with fields filled with poppies in full bloom, the agency said in a statement. But, like the war itself, things did not work out according to plan. *De weersomstandigheden en/of de kwaliteit van het zaad zorgen ervoor dat er op vele velden nauwelijks bloemen staan* – due to the weather conditions and/or the quality of the seed, there are scarcely any flowers growing in many of the fields, said the ANB.

The poppy became a symbol of the First World War thanks to a poem written by the Canadian doctor John McCrae in a field hospital near Ypres. *Vandaar dat het Agentschap voor Natuur en Bos een herdenkingsproject wou opzetten, door overal in Vlaanderen grote velden aan te leggen met klaprozen* – that is why the Agency for Nature and Woodlands wanted to create a project to commemorate the war by planting fields of poppies throughout Flanders.

It hasn't been a total flop. *In een aantal gemeenten, zoals Vilvoorde, Deinze, Hoogstraten, Achel en Wuustwezel is dat redelijk goed gelukt, en staan er momenteel mooie rode bloemen op het veld* – the project has been relatively successful in a number of municipalities such as Vilvoorde, Hoogstraten, Achel and Wuust-

wezel, where you can see beautiful red flowers blooming in the fields.

The agency has put a photograph on its website showing a child wandering in a field of blooming poppies somewhere near Deinze. Unfortunately the poppy fields of Deinze and Vilvoorde are a long way from the area of West Flanders known as Flanders Fields where the war was fought.

Het ANB gaat nu op zoek naar de oorzaak – the ANB is now investigating the cause. *Verschillende labo's zijn dit nu aan het bekijken* – several laboratories are looking into it. *Die resultaten zullen gebruikt worden om het project volgend jaar wél in zijn volle glorie te doen slagen* – the results will be used to ensure that the project is realised in its full glory next year.

But the sad truth is that this year, in Flanders Fields, the poppies are stubbornly refusing to grow.



© Tjil Vercaemer/Wikimedia

VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY



Donnie @easygoer132

In #Ypres, #Belgium, a vibrant present stands proudly with the #WWI past <http://www.latimes.com/travel/europe/la-tr-d-ypres-20140727-story.html#navtype=outfit> ...



David Moreno @AtleticoDave

Every day i wake up angry about airplanes thundering above #Brussels- then i switch on TV news, see #Gaza, and my planes become irrelevant



Yvonne Ivanescu @nomadicyvonne

First there was Manneken, then there was Jeanneke and now... Zinneke.. Im hunting for the peeing statues of #Brussels pic. twitter.com/HLEc5B4jqe



Peter Spiegel @SpiegelPeter

I support @BelRedDevils. What more do u want?! MT @flanderstoday: Should integration courses be required in #Belgium? <http://bit.ly/1ABeKaU>



Rob Mitchell the road tax is ok. It's this new VAA that is a pain in the backside for anyone with a vehicle on the company.



Annie Deer Integration courses are here already so why the question ? Ofcourse even the EU citizens should take the courses . Tell me why not .



Rob Mitchell The number of people I still see calling with no hands-free is staggering. Just about every modern car has a connection kit on it. There really is no excuse to at least make the effort. Oddly, most seem to be the non-seatbelt wearers too. Says quite obviously that rules are not for them and they are great drivers so don't need to follow them.

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Poll

The new Flemish government is considering making the integration course obligatory for all foreigners, including EU citizens. What do you think?

a. EU law makes it impossible to refuse residence in Flanders to any EU citizen who fails the course, so what's the point?

46%

b. Understanding the local customs is a basic duty for anyone moving to a new country. Be happy that these courses are available

54%

Integration classes are already required for some immigrants to Flanders, but not for those coming from other EU member states. The government of Flanders is considering making it required for them, too.

Our poll this week is a bit too close to call. Flanders Today readers

are split almost evenly between rejecting the idea of compulsory integration classes for everyone and considering such a thing the duty of the expat. And certainly there are arguments on both sides.

On the one hand, you can't have open borders and then make free

movement dependent on learning a language or picking up a new set of norms and values. On the other hand, you're not really a contributing member of your society unless you can talk to people, understand the news headlines and communicate properly at work.

THE LAST WORD

Kidding around

"Everything else is suddenly unimportant."

Comedian Philippe Geubels and his wife Leen are expecting their first baby in November

Handle with care

"We set the Thermos on the laboratory table, which was no more protected than the average kitchen table. We put absorbent paper on the table, and put on an apron and plastic gloves. That's it."

Guido Van der Groen, one of the two Antwerp scientists who discovered the Ebola virus, described the precautions taken, or rather not taken

Artistic licence

"The culture sector sometimes thinks it's on a higher level than the plebs. I sometimes hear them making statements on society that they might better have thought twice about."

Flanders' new culture minister, Sven Gatz

Growing together

"We understand there's an urgent need for housing in Brussels, but then why not choose areas where the people are not already living in each other's pockets?"

Residents of the Marollen in Brussels are up in arms over an order to demolish a piece of waste ground they've turned into a communal vegetable garden

\ Next week's question:

The Road Safety Institute has called for police to seize the mobile phones of drivers involved in accidents to see if they were calling or texting. What do you think?

Log in to the Flanders Today website and click on VOTE

