

New articles on the Blog of Belgium WWII

What's new on the Belgium WWII-blog?

A couple of months ago we announced the launch of the Belgium WWII-blog. Since then, new articles have been published online. They deal with current debates on the perception of the Second World War, the challenges with regard to remembrance of the war as well as new forms of interactions with the target audience of historical projects.

This year, we commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Liberation, and several articles directly or indirectly discuss particular aspects of remembrance of the war.

In her article 'Belgisch verzet: een vraagstuk uit ons collectief geheugen' (Belgian resistance: an issue of our collective memory), Babette Weyns, doctoral student at the University of Ghent, addresses the perception of the resistance and the division that unintentionally arose around it in the postwar period. She furthermore deplores the absence of a real reference work about the resistance in Belgium as well as the lack of some form of social consciousness about its heritage.

The question of how the resistance is remembered is also present in the article by Chantal Kesteloot entitled 'Walthère Dewé ou Léon Degrelle ? Où est la mémoire de la Seconde Guerre mondiale?' (Walthère Dewé or Léon Degrelle? Where lies the memory of the Second World War?). The name Walthère Dewé, who was a renowned resistance fighter during both World Wars, has sunk into oblivion, unlike the name Léon Degrelle, which has stayed in people's minds. How did this happen?

This question is also linked to the issue of collaboration, its place in public debate and its memory. The issue is also raised by exploring the controversies caused by an exhibition about the artist Georges Wasterlain in Charleroi, who was a convicted collaborator, and through contributions and debates taken from the symposium of 'Groupe Mémoire' / 'Groep Herinnering' held in Antwerp in March.

There is also literature about the heritage of war, largely discussed in Flanders but only rarely translated into other languages ('Vu de Flandre. La Seconde Guerre mondiale, un débat en héritage ?' (From a Flemish perspective. The Second World War ? a debate about heritage ?)).

Although he takes a different perspective, the article by Nico Wouters ('De herdenkingen aan WO II : meer geschiedenis, minder herinnering' - Memory of WWII: More history, less remembrance) also addresses the challenges related to the Second World War and its historiography. He pleads for more involvement in the comprehension of the past instead of exclusively commemorating it. He also draws our attention to the fact that while there is still an abundance of new books being published about the Second World War, considerable gaps in our historical knowledge about the conflict remain. He calls for an increase in public spending in research and access to archives.

In addition to the historiographical richness of collaboration history, Bart Willems ('Collaboratie tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog: feit of fictie?' (Collaboration during the Second World War: fact or fiction?)) underlines the difficulties in confronting research findings with the personal representations people make of one and the same war history. He emphasises the need to find ways to correct erroneous interpretations of history and to present correct explanations (that take into account complex circumstances and) that are adapted to the larger public.

Mathieu Billa ('Commémorer la « bataille des Ardennes »?' (Commemorating the 'Battle of the Bulge?')) revisits the huge public interest in the Battle of the Bulge. He warns about the danger of nourishing a biased vision of history according to which the entire battle would have taken place in Bastogne. He hopes that historians will set about shedding light on issues that remain in the dark on the occasion of the commemorations of the 75th anniversary.

These commemorations will also present an opportunity to address the past in a different manner. In her article '@BevrijdingvanA Beleef de Bevrijding van Antwerpen op Twitter', (@BevrijdingvanA Experience the Liberation of Antwerp on Twitter), Julie Wynant presents a project initiated by Vredescentrum and the City of Antwerp that aims to recreate the atmosphere of this city 75 years ago via Twitter.

Expositions increasingly become a means for addressing difficult issues of the past. Within the framework of the exhibition currently on display at Mons Memorial Museum, Pierre Muller (curator of the exhibition) writes about the 'Camp de prisonniers allemands de Ghlin-Erbisoeul' (Camp for German prisoners in Ghlin-Erbisoeul). The article of Leen Heyvaert deals with the exposition about the internment camp in Lokeren

('Het kamp van Lokeren 1944-1947. Opgesloten tussen zwart, wit en grijs' (The camp of Lokeren 1944-1947. Imprisoned in black, white and grey)), which is a subject that will be addressed more in detail on the website next autumn.

The article by Jan De Graaf ('Een nieuw perspectief op de stakingen van 1944/45') (A new perspective on the strikes of 1944/1945) concerns the apolitical, spontaneous and often violent strikes that took place in Belgium and in other European countries at the end of the war. The author raises the question of how important the conflict was, in order better understand these movements.

In his 'Kanttekeningen bij de 'oorlogspensioenen', (Notes on the 'war pensions'), Dirk Luyten provides a detailed account about a subject that needs further scientific research and that has caused a stir in recent months: the 'pensions' paid by Germany to a number of soldiers from occupied countries who fought in the ranks of the Nazi regime

Finally, in her article, Margaux Roberti-Lintermans, offers a review of the first editathon organised by CegeSoma and based on its photograph collections about Brussels during the Second World War.

In short, we invite you to discover or rediscover a multitude of interesting articles and research findings gathered in the course of the past months.

New articles will be published in autumn. But the blog cannot be sustained without your contribution?

Feel free to react and comment on the articles published so far? or to send us your own article! Looking forward to reading your contributions via belgiumwwii@arch.be.