

Tenby Memorial Committee (UK)
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His Excellency Bruno van der Pluijm,
Ambassador to the Court of St James for the Kingdom of Belgium,
17, Grosvenor Crescent
LONDON SA1X 7EE

4th October 2023

Sir,

I have the honour to report, in a personal capacity and on behalf of the Tenby Memorial Committee, that the arrangements for the commemoration and remembrance of the Belgian Armed forces in Great Britain have now been completed. We celebrated the Belgian military renaissance at the site of the wartime Headquarters in Tenby, South Wales on 22nd - 24th September 2023. We are more than delighted that your Defence Attaché Colonel Bruno Plaestiers was able to join us. I am sure he has reported to you this last week.

The celebrations were graciously honoured by the presence of His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant for Dyfed, Pembrokeshire, Miss Sara Edwards. She told me that His Majesty was delighted to hear of the Tenby celebrations. It was also with delight that we welcomed the small delegation led by Lt Gen Marc Thys, ADC to the King of the Belgians and until recently Vice Chief of Defence.

The British Ministry of Defence were able to support our endeavours through the presence of the three-Armed Forces Chiefs in Wales: Brigadier Graeme Fraser, Royal Marines, Brigadier Nicholas Thomas, Commander 160 Brigade and Air Commodore Adrian Williams RAF and Brigadier Alan Richmond, Colonel of the Queen's Dragoon Guards. A detachment of the Queens Dragoon Guards, the Cavalry Regiment of Wales, whose Colonel in Chief is His Majesty King Charles III; the Band from the Prince of Wales's Regiment, detachments of The Sea and Army cadets and the standards of twelve Branches of the Royal British Legion in Pembrokeshire were paraded with the Standard of SERVIO at the front. All served to enhance our celebrations.

Together, we had gathered over forty members of Belgian families whose predecessors found a second home in Tenby and the United Kingdom during the war years. Furthermore, you should know we managed to find a dozen Anglo/Belgians in the United Kingdom, successors of some of the intrepid Belgians that managed to escape from occupied Europe to continue the fight against German national socialism. They had married and settled in Great Britain. On Sunday we honoured their memory and to thank them for their sacrifice. I hope you agree their contribution to the Allied war effort was worthy of Remembrance and Commemoration.

The programme included a reception on Friday offered by the Mayor of Tenby; on Saturday a highly interesting visit to Caldey Abbey owned by the Belgian Cistercian order from Scourmont Abbey, Chimay; and the Museum of Tenby accepted a bust of Lieutenant General van

Strydonck de Burkel and various historic photographs to enhance their World War 2 collection, introducing a distinctly Belgian theme to their display, A dinner was offered by Lt Gen Marc Thys to meet the Town dignitaries and in particular to host the families from Belgium and Anglo Belgians families of the successor generations.

The celebrations came to a climax on Sunday with a service of Commemoration in the lovely Norman Church of St Mary's, Tudor Square to replicate that attended by the then Prime Minister Hubert Pierlot in 1941 after the presentation of the new colours to the 1st Battalion of Fusiliers of the Belgian Armed Forces in the United Kingdom. The congregation then witnessed ten moving and emotional testimonies about their predecessors and concluded with the presentation of the Freedom of Tenby by the Mayor. A parade through the streets of Tenby to the War Memorial, festooned with Belgian flags, was witnessed by many hundreds of residents and tourists and where due honours were made through the presentation of twenty-four wreaths. The last by a 13-year-old young lady whose grandfather, Albert Truettens had been a soldier in the Brigade de Piron; a most evocative and moving ceremony.

It has been a really great pleasure to be the UK project and liaison officer for the Tenby Memorial Committee, led with inspiration by Baron Christian Houtart, working closely alongside my brother-in-law, Rudolphe Lancksweert, now Board Member of SERVIO, and others, all of whom have worked ceaselessly, engaged in this important event for Anglo Belgium relations.

My family has close family links with Belgium. My uncle fought with my regiment, the 13th/18th Royal Hussars defending Belgium from the German onslaught in May 1940 before being evacuated from Dunkirk. My father Antony Le Hardy spent three decades in Brussels as Secretary of the Nuclear Planning Group in NATO and subsequently the first Civilian Director of the NATO Communications Management Agency. As a wartime Spitfire Squadron Commander, aged twenty-three, he fought alongside the 4th Belgian Troop of No 10 (Inter Allied) Commando in former Yugoslavia. Christian Lancksweert, uncle of my Belgian brother-in-law was a member of the Armoured Car Squadron within the Piron Brigade. It was my own great pleasure to graduate from the Belgian Higher Defence College (IRSD/KHID) in Brussels in the mid- 1980s. Je suis un-BEM. Subsequently, I had on my United Nations Staff in Tuzla, Bosnia several Belgian officers. After tours as the Defence Attaché in Morocco and the Netherlands, I was the UK National Staff Officer for ABCA Armies, and I had close working contact with the FINABEL military organisation. All these relationships have endeared me to your country so much and I wanted you to know it has been my honour to serve our two countries in this way.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your Humble Servant

Christopher

C.A.Le Hardy
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