

Belgium WWII, a reference website but also a blog!

Since a couple of weeks now, the website 'Belgium WWII' is complemented by a blog. Indeed, it seemed crucial to us to be able to take part in the debates and controversies surrounding the Second World War by adding this option to the encyclopedic function of the website, and to present new projects or archival holdings that may incite new research or shed new light on older issues.

About a dozen articles from historians across the country are already available online. They address some touchy issues, among which the attitude of the Belgian railway company SNCB/NMBS during the occupation for example. The Dutch authorities have recently decided to compensate Dutch victims and their heirs for the participation of the national railway company in the deportation of the Jews. But what about Belgium?

Nico Wouters reminds us that this issue – despite what several media outlets have falsely claimed – has already been addressed through research within the framework of '*La Belgique docile*'/'*Gewillig België*'. He also underlines that this issue must be addressed in a broader perspective, with regard to the attitude of the Belgian authorities and the weakness of our democratic institutions in an authoritarian context.

A key aspect and benefit of this blog is that it allows us to contribute to the considerations about which place the Second World War and its commemoration should take within Belgian society today. Which progress was made with regard to historiography and to symbolism, expressed for example through toponymy? Bruno De Wever looks back on the evolution of historiography in the past 30 years and presents recent research while underlining the necessity to investigate the impact of the war through research at individual and family level. It is obvious that public interest in the war evolves and that the impact of remembrance or the absence thereof must be taken into account in future research.

With regard to toponymy, Marnix Beyen and Chantal Kesteloot remind us how much this aspect can be burdensome, either by being present or by being absent, as this is revelatory of the place that public authorities and municipalities want to allot to our past in the public space. Toponymy goes beyond the context of war actually, as a number of disputes about our colonial history has shown.

The blog also highlights research projects such as the one undertaken by historian Michèle Corthals who is writing a thesis about women in the Resistance.

Delving into new archival holdings or making them more accessible also allows us to shed new light on certain issues and protagonists. In times when the relevance of provinces is questioned, Bart Willems underlines the richness of the provincial archives of Antwerp with regard to the Second World War. They allow us to carry out research on fundamental topics such as mayor and aldermen nominations, public order and supplies, bombings – which were particularly numerous and deadly in this province – and issues related to repression.

On the basis of a reflection about the concept of genocide, and why it is not used by Belgian tribunals both in the judgements of war criminals after 1945 and the 'Rwanda' trial, Ornella Rovetta draws our attention to the rich archives processed within the framework of the 'Jusinbelgium' project that are now accessible via the database 'Legal Tools'. This database makes international penal justice more accessible.

The importance of archives is central to Geertje Elaut's contribution, which fits in perfectly with the previous one. She addresses this question in the broader context of the issue of human rights (*Archief als wapen tegen straffeloosheid*).

In short, the blog is conceived as a space for information and debate about all topics related to the history of the Second World War. Unlike the publications on the rest of the website, articles on the blog are only available in their original language in order to allow for a quicker publication.

Do you want to contribute? Feel free to send us your article.

Do you want to keep informed or to comment on articles? Check our blog regularly and leave comments via: belgiumwwii@arch.be. Get busy!