

CEGESOMA NEWSLETTER

NO 56 - MAY 2020

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NEW PUBLICATION

'Was Opa een held? Speuren naar mannen en vrouwen in het verzet tijdens WOII' / 'Papy était-un héros ? Sur les traces des hommes et des femmes dans la Résistance pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale'. An indispensable book to discover the history of the resistance in Belgium and to explore the actions and individual fates of the ca. 150.000 Belgian resistance fighters. [\[MORE INFO\]](#)

<https://www.cegesoma.be/en/publication/papy-etait-il-un-heros>

8 MAY

Why was this day never put on equal footing with 11 November in Belgium ? 75 years after the end of WWII, there are voices that say we should turn the 8th of May in a national holiday ; not for the sake of festivities but as a moment of reflection and appreciation for our democracy. [\[MORE INFO\]](#)

<https://www.cegesoma.be/en/8-may-1945-8-may-2020-75-years-vet-silence-reigns>

75 YEARS AGO

What were current events during the Spring of 1945... and what were the forgotten subjects ? Discover these topics in about 20 contributions. [\[MORE INFO\]](#)

<https://www.cegesoma.be/fr/contributions-diverses-sur-lhistoire-des-querres>

PUBLICATION ASSOCIATED RESEARCHER

In his book 'Uit de lus van de strop' Marc Verschooris, associated researcher at CegeSoma, tells how people from the city of Ghent defended the Jewish population during WWII. [\[MORE INFO\]](#)

<https://www.cegesoma.be/en/publication/uit-de-lus-van-de-strop>

PANDEMIC COVID-19

The 'exitplan' of the State Archives in Belgium/CegeSoma from the Corona-closure and the gradual reopening of our reading rooms. [\[MORE INFO\]](#)

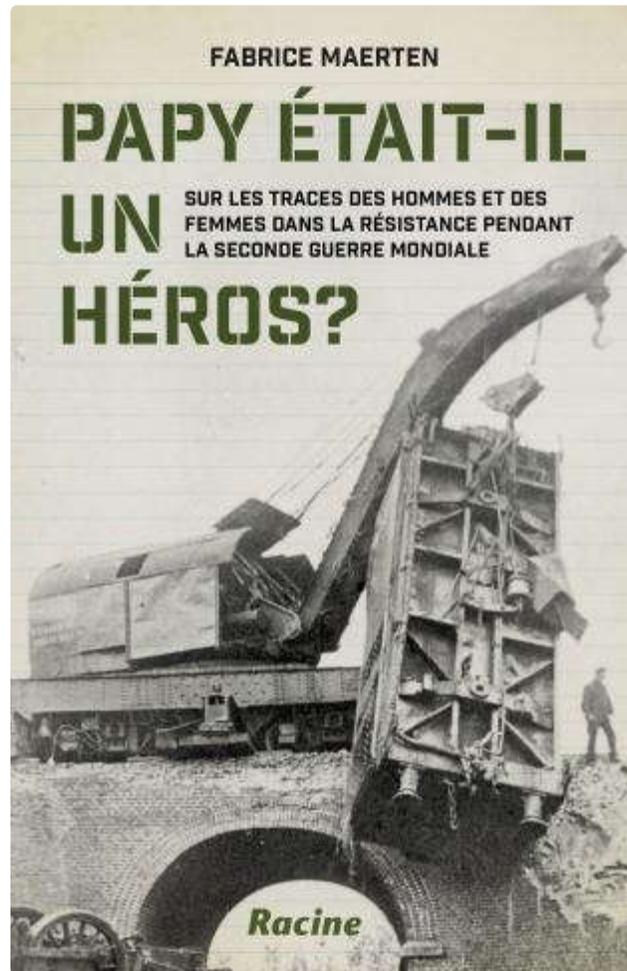
<https://www.cegesoma.be/en/exit-strategy-state-archivescegesoma>

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Papy était-il un héros?

(Was grandpa a hero?) Sur les traces des hommes et des femmes dans la Résistance pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale (Tracing back the stories of men and women of the Resistance during the Second World War)

World War II [Book](#)



Between 100,000 and 150,000 men and women actively took part in the struggle against the Nazi occupant during the Second World War. They sometimes fought with force of arms. Most often though, they edited underground newspapers, gathered intelligence, helped Allied aviators and aided thousands of people who were persecuted by the German authorities. This engagement came at the cost of ca. 40,000 arrests and ca. 15,000 deaths.

Yet, their history is not well known in Belgium. This new guide is the follow-up of the highly successful book ['Papy était-il un nazi?'](#) (Was Grandpa a Nazi?) and addresses many questions raised by descendants of Resistance fighters and those who wish to better understand the movement and why it sunk into oblivion in

Belgium so soon. In the second part of the guide, readers can find practical and detailed information to help them start research about resistance fighters.

The introduction to the book was penned by [Nico Wouters](#), director of CegeSoma.

A link (Youtube) showing the online presentation (in French) of the book (28.5.2020) will be added to this page next week.

The must-have guide to trace back the stories of resistance fighters during the Second World War.

PRODUCT DETAILS

Binding: paperback

Number of pages: 352 p.

Format: 24 x 16 cm

Publishing date: 28 May 2020

EAN/ ISBN: 9789401464260

Editor: Racine, Brussels

AUTHOR(S)

[Fabrice Maerten \(ed.\)](#)

PRICE

27,99 € (postage not included)

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TAGS

[Resistance](#) [Archives](#) [Underground press](#)

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8 May 1945, 8 May 2020 ... 75 years on, yet silence reigns ...

75 years after the end of the Second World War on the European front, commemorations should have taken place. Yet the turn of events has decided otherwise. This is the occasion to have a closer look at the symbolism around the date of 8 May and the importance of remembrance.

8 May: a problematic date?

8 May 1945 is a day of rejoicing in Belgium. People were celebrating in the street, but jubiliations were not as fervent as those that took place upon the Liberation. September 1944 had indeed been marked by German troops hasting away, Allied Forces triumphantly marching in, and people hoping for a new and better world. Eight months later, other events had taken place and dampened the spirits: the return or non-return of prisoners, deportees or victims of racial persecutions, the material conditions were harsh, the question of the return of the King that would cause a lasting rift in Belgian society, the disenchantment of the resistance... But can these multiple factors explain why 8 May never evolved to become the counterpart of 11 November? It has to be noted that it was initially not this date that Belgium chose to commemorate the end of the conflict. Belgium aligned with the date choices of the Allied only in 1922 and 11 November became a public holiday. But what about 8 May?

This date actually never really made it to the rank of public holiday in Belgium. Schools and public administrations are closed on this day, but celebrations remained low-key. In 1974, a law was passed that limited the number of public holidays in Belgium to 10 - and 8 May was not included. In 1983, this commemoration day was simply written off. Both world conflicts were henceforth jointly commemorated on 11 November. Today, only the Brussels-Capital Region has made 8 May its public holiday - a decision that was enacted on 13 March 2003. For the Region, this holiday celebrates the victory of democracy and humanism over "dark forces" of obscurantism and fascism.

While the abolition of 8 May as a holiday was indeed met with protest from patriotic associations, the reality is that this did not really cause a stir among the population, despite the decision of our neighbouring country France to establish 8 May as a public holiday when François Mitterrand took office. It must be noted that the first one to abolish this holiday in France was General de Gaulle in 1959. Here again, the reason was to reduce the number of public holidays. But this was in fact also a political operation: emphasis was more on the liberation of Paris than the victory of the Allied Forces in May 1945, and a reconciliation between France and Germany was pursued. Things were actually not very different in Belgium. For a long time, the tradition of celebrating the liberation was stronger than the celebration of the German surrender, even among resistance communities.

The National Monument to the Resistance: Forgotten monument?

A first turning point was 8 May 1955. On this day, at Avroy park in Liège, the King inaugurated the National Monument to the Resistance which faces King Albert I. bridge. The initial ambition was that this monument should become a landmark to the likes of the Unknown Soldier. But just as the latter, this monument in Liège did not stir enough fervour and symbolic power to enthuse all of the Belgian people. While the Unknown Soldier stood in the shadow of the Yser Tower right from the beginning, the monument built with regard to the Second World War is a late one and pays tribute to the resistance, which was an engagement that did not always have the same broad approval as the commitment of the Belgian soldiers in 1914-1918. Even more so than the memory of the first worldwide conflict, the second deeply divided public opinion, in particular with regard to the perception of the resistance. Today, this monument is widely ignored and abandoned.

8 May and commemorations

In the course of the decades, the heritage of the Second World War has become a matter of very special importance, as democracy seemed to erode. During the 50th anniversary celebrations, Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene tried, with the usual enthusiasm that characterised him, to turn Monday 8 May 1995 into a public holiday. His initiative was not crowned with success however. Since then, several draft laws with the same goal were proposed, none of which was passed however. Yet today, the importance of the Second World War as a structuring issue and a moral framework is clear.

8 May 2020 should have been a day of commemorations everywhere while not being a public holiday. It was intended to round off the cycle that started last summer: from D-Day to V-Day. Yet the turn of events has decided otherwise. The absence of these commemorations leaves a bitter taste, a feeling of incompleteness, a cycle left pending without having been completed. The importance of the Second World War surely goes well beyond symbolic dates. We are aware that the conflict still weighs heavily on our societies.

Today, voices speak up to ask that 8 May becomes a public holiday again, not purely for celebration and spectacle, but as a moment of reflection on and valorisation of our democracy. Holiday or not, let us together make a step. Let us imagine 8 May 2021 as a day that enlightens us with the deeper meaning of democracy, that lets us dwell on our relationship with the past, that would raise and risk the right questions and a critical reflection about the years of war, not only in scientific publications but also in public debate: not to hold up the past as a banner, but to view it as an opening; a public history project for, by and with civil society.

Chantal Kesteloot

Want to know more?

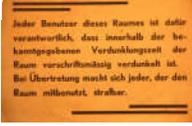
- Cédric Istasse, « Histoire, mémoire et identité : les fêtes nationales, régionales et communautaires en Belgique » in *Courrier hebdomadaire du Crisp*, nos. 2412-2413, Brussels, 2019.
- <https://www.belgiumwwii.be/belgique-en-guerre/evenements/1945-05-08-la-capitulation-de-l-allemande-une-celebration-plus-problematique.html>
- "Waarom wordt einde van WO II niet herdacht" in *De Morgen*, 8/5/2020, p. 16.

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Contributions diverses sur l'histoire des guerres

Sur - cette page, retrouvez sous forme de contributions succinctes, les réflexions d'historiens ou de spécialistes relatives à divers sujets d'actualité en lien avec les thématiques traitées par le CegeSoma.

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|  | <p><u>8 mai 1945 – 8 mai 2020 ...75 ans et pourtant le silence ...</u></p> |

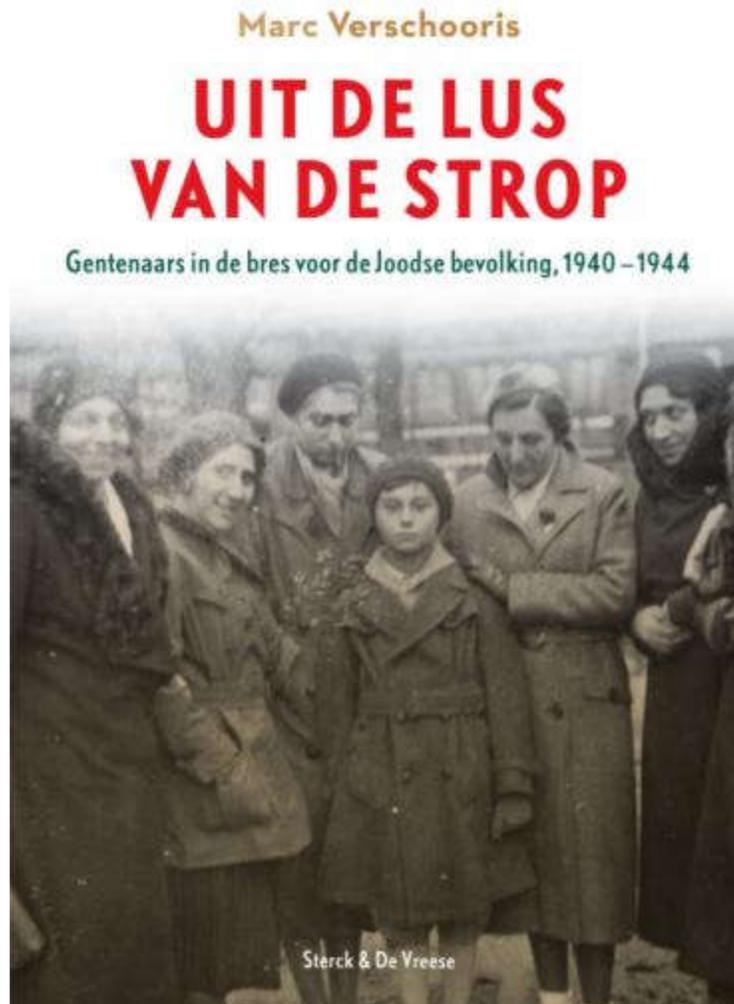
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|  | <p><u>La Résistance en Belgique, histoire partielle ... ou histoire partielle ? Second volet d'un diptyque sur l'historiographie de l'histoire de la Résistance en Belgique</u></p> |
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Uit de lus van de strop

(Neck out of the noose) Gentenaars in de bres voor de Joodse bevolking 1940-1944

World War II [Book](#)



Marc Verschooris is a seasoned researcher (archives) and it's not his first publication either: he already penned the book '*De papegaai is niet dood*' (The parrot is not dead) about the activities of three secret agents. '*Uit de lus van de strop*' focusses on the people of Ghent who helped their fellow Jewish citizens escape the persecutions of the occupant and its henchmen - persecutions that often led to death.

Early years

The story begins in the 1920-30s when many Jews from Eastern Europe came to Ghent, fleeing discrimination and racial persecution. Many of them started studying engineering. They were bright minds who did not all return to their home country after their studies. Their names resonated in various branches of industry established along the canal in Ghent. Many advanced to senior positions such as company director, while others opened their own businesses or took a position in education.

The occupation

How well the Jewish engineers were integrated in Ghent became especially clear during the Second World War, when misery was at its peak. It was this very integration that sparked the assistance to the Jews, as those who had to go into hiding were colleagues and friends. Among them, many were doctors, professors and engineers. People of Ghent from all walks of life, with different convictions but with a lot of courage, leaned up against barbarity and terror.

Based on the combined figures of families that had fled the city and of children placed in foster care by the *Comité de Défense des Juifs* of Ghent, an estimated 270 Jews lived in the Ghent area in late 1942. About one third of them were deported, 95 people did not survive. Only five persons – three men and two women – could be repatriated. The others were able to save their necks. The people of Ghent were clearly not willing to abandon their fellow citizens.

Marc Verschooris has identified all Jewish families from the Ghent region. He traces back the stories of the survivors who miraculously escaped the grip of hate. Despite the fear of antisemitism then and now, there is also gratitude for the heroic deeds of those who stood up and resolutely offered help, respect and solidarity. Many previously unpublished photographs put a face on the key actors in this book.

Puzzles

During his many years of research, Marc Verschooris often found merely fragmentary witness accounts, which were sometimes only declarations made to complement other declarations, but little by little, he was able to piece together the puzzles of their lives. Thus, in his research, the unsuspecting mention of a name in a newspaper for example, could lead him to archive sources in which he found the beginning of a life story that ran through hidden trails of history, culminating several years later in the posthumous recognition of Righteous Among the Nations, the *Yad Vashem* distinction for those who protected their Jewish neighbours.

How people of Ghent came to the aid of their fellow Jewish citizens during the Second World War.

PRODUCT DETAILS

Binding: paperback

Number of pages: 224 p.

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Publishing date: April 2020

EAN/ ISBN: 978 90 5615 624 4

Editor: Sterck & De Vreese, Gorredijk (NL)

(with many previously unpublished illustrations)

AUTHOR(S)

[Marc Verschooris](#)

PRICE

24, 95 € (postage not included)

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TAGS

[Urban history](#) [Migration](#) [Racial persecution](#) [Occupation](#) [Persecution of the Jews](#) [Everyday life](#)

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The exit strategy of the State Archives/CegeSoma

- Under reserve of further guidelines by the National Security Council, the State Archives/CegeSoma re-opens its reading rooms in two phases:
 1. As from **26 May 2020**, **students and Ph.D. students** whose academic activities require the use of archives are granted access to the reading rooms of the State Archives upon appointment and under the condition that they wear a face mask. Reservation of workspace in the reading room must be made by e-mail to the State Archives in question at least 2 workdays before the visit. You can find the contact details of our services [here](#). The maximum amount of visitors per day is limited. You will therefore always receive a confirmation of the date of your visit by e-mail, that also counts as the confirmation of your reservation. Please reserve your documents in advance using our online catalogue PALLAS (<http://pallas.cegesoma.be/pls/opac/plsp.getplsdoc?lan=E&htdoc=general/opac.htm>). Please note that if you order larger volumes from our depot in the Belgrado Street, there might be some delay. Students must produce a valid student ID and Ph.D. students must show proof of their doctoral studies at a scientific research fund, a university or a scientific institution.
 2. Provided that the public health situation in the country allows it, all reading rooms of the State Archives/CegeSoma will re-open as from **Tuesday 16 June 2020** for the **general public**.
 - The State Archives/CegeSoma shall of course take all necessary **precautions** to ensure the security of both visitors and staff. The number of available workspaces in the reading rooms depends on the individual configuration of the premises and shall be limited accordingly.
 - In the meantime, we continue to provide **minimum service** to the maximum extent and to increase our online offer of [archives and finding aids](#).
 - In order to somewhat alleviate the effects of the long closure of our reading rooms, all scheduled **repository inventorying activities** for 2020 are **cancelled**.
 - **All public events**, such as colloquia, group visits, receptions, book presentations, training, etc. organised by the State Archives **until 15 June 2020 included** are cancelled.
 - **Transports and deliveries** will progressively resume on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, provided that security distances can be respected.

During the period in which our reading room is closed, you can still carry out some research online via [our digital reading room](#), for instance:

- The general catalogue of PALLAS can be accessed [here](#).

- The content descriptions for a number of archive holdings and collections can be found [here](#).
- Some digitised documents [can be accessed online](#).
- Thematic help files for research can be accessed via ["How to start a search?"](#)

For urgent requests you can send an e-mail to isabelle.ponteville@arch.be

You can stay informed about further developments via our website and via [Facebook](#).

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