

Speech of Wilfred Burie, President of "The Belgians Remember Them"
4/05/2023

Today is a great day!

In a few minutes, the mythical plane behind the destruction of a large part of the Nazi weapons manufacturing facilities will fly over these places.

79 years ago, the same aircraft crashed here, resulting in the death of 5 young airmen. While the other two crew members survived the accident, one of them was taken prisoner and taken to Germany from where he was released in May 1945.

We are obviously not the only ones to enjoy the passage of the Lancaster today. 12 localities located in Holland and 9 other in Belgium will have this privilege. But Rebecq is the only one located in the French-speaking region.

Thanks to the intervention of the Captain John Dickson Group, British Military Attaché and his services, we are the happy beneficiaries of this measure which is a recognition by the British authorities of the work of Remembrance carried out day after day by our association in order to preserve the memory of those who sacrificed their lives so that we would regain our fundamental freedoms and our independence confiscated and violated by the terrorist regime that was Nazism.

4 days before the commemoration of the Allied Victory of May 1945, it made sense that the ceremony of this day finds its place.

But who says Victory also says the struggle to access it.

While in 1940, the threatening clouds heralding war were gathering on the horizon, France and England sent their expeditionary forces to Belgium to counter a possible advance of Hitler's troops.

But the rapid surge of the Wehrmacht defeated the efforts of the French and British armies, which had to retreat.

The capitulation of our army completes the first act of a tragedy that will last five long years and will result in the death of 60 million soldiers and civilians throughout Europe and throughout the world.

When on May 10, 1940, our homeland was invaded and its population was placed under the terrible yoke of the occupier, it was Great Britain that first came to our rescue.

It will take a year for the United States to become directly involved in the fight against Germany and the Axis countries.

Then begins the time when every evening squadrons of hundreds of bombers take off from England and fly over our country towards Germany where thousands of tons of bombs carry out their work of annihilating the Nazi war effort.

It is also the time of the Flak, the German air defense that awaits Allied planes from the coast of the continent and tries to shoot them down.

It is that of night fighters who take off from Luftwaffe bases located in Belgium and chase bombers both on the way to and from their mission.

This is the time of the Royal Air Force aircraft which, hit by the bursts of enemy bullets have become uncontrollable and plunge inexorably towards the ground.

It is a time of horror for crew members who see their destiny come to an end when they are only 20 years old.

This will be the one where their mother receives the yellow telegram telling her that her son will probably never come home.

Between May 1940 and May 1945, 79,000 RAF airmen died aboard the 12,000 bombers and 10,000 fighters destroyed.

In Belgium, 760 planes crashed during this period and more than 6,400 airmen were involved in this massacre.

As British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said at the time, "Never before have so many people owed so much to so little."

"Never has so much been due to so little"

This leads me to wonder about the news of the moment.

As you all know, two states are engaged in a merciless struggle at the gates of Europe. For more than a year, the world has been living under the constant threat of a new cataclysm.

I am challenged by a strange phenomenon:

- The countries that one would expect in the search for ways to promote pacification between the two belligerents are busy spending gigantic sums to modernize their armies and military equipment while their hospitals and schools are in major crisis for lack of financial means.

- On the other hand, states known for their desire to appropriate independent territories or to flagrantly attack the fundamental freedoms of their peoples propose to act as intermediaries for peace in this conflict.

Isn't the world upside down? Is this the end of our peacekeeping missions? Are we busy witnessing the end of the 80 years of peace that reigned in our so-called democratic countries?

It is to those who were killed on board the planes of the Royal Air Force that we owe this relative peace that we have known.

This peace that still allows the children who joined us today to play, go to school, learn a trade later and grow and evolve in a society of progress and respect for individuals.

We may have to choose between the speeches of the many warmongers we hear today and the call of the young heroes whose memory the monument before you is trying to preserve.

Through their death they warn us that they will not be able to die a second time for us.

My choice is therefore made: with the association "The Belgians Remember Them", I will continue to remind those who want to hear that 80 years ago, we were not alone.

They fought for us, and they died for us.

Let us ensure that this has not been done in vain!

Thank you for your attention.

Wilfred Burie,
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