

VAN DE REDACTIE - ÉDITORIAL

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Hoofdredacteurs – Rédacteurs en chef

Met dit tweede nummer van 2016 presenteren we opnieuw een themanummer. Waar het vorige nummer zich toegede op het thema marginaliteit in de Belgische hedendaagse geschiedenis, kunnen we zeggen dat het thema van dit nummer zelf vele decennia lang gemarginaliseerd was. Het gaat om de militaire geschiedenis in België en/of de geschiedenis van het Belgische leger, in dit geval tot 1914.

De militaire geschiedenis lijkt aan een opleving bezig in de Belgische hedendaagse geschiedenis. Dit was ook het signaal dat gegeven werd op de workshop *'The Army in Belgian History : innovative perspectives, contemporary challenges'* van 5 november 2014 in het Belgisch Centrum voor Oorlog en Hedendaagse Maatschappij (CegeSoma), wat de aanleiding vormde voor dit themanummer. Deze opleving wordt wellicht minstens deels veroorzaakt door de vruchtbare onderzoekscontext binnen de herdenkingen rond honderd jaar Eerste Wereldoorlog. In dat opzicht is het de vraag in hoeverre deze

hernieuwde aandacht voor militaire geschiedenis werkelijk een opstap is naar een meer duurzaam Belgisch onderzoeksveld van zogenaamde 'Nieuwe Militaire Geschiedenis'. Een gunstig teken in dat verband is alvast de jonge leeftijd van de gastredacteurs (en de meeste auteurs) van dit themanummer. Het is ook een gunstige ontwikkeling dat het hier om twee vrouwelijke historici gaat : Nel de Mûelenaere (Universiteit van Antwerpen) en Josephine Hoegaerts (*University of Helsinki*). Deze beide gastredacteurs tekenen niet enkel present voor enkele artikelen, maar geven ook een algemene introductie waarin zij dit themanummer positioneren binnen de bredere historiografische ontwikkelingen.

Dit themanummer toont een divers staalkaart aan onderwerpen en invalshoeken. De gastredacteurs willen zeker geen rigide blauwdruk aanleveren voor een toekomstige onderzoeksagenda. Integendeel, met dit nummer tonen ze vooral aan hoeveel verschillende pistes er nog open liggen. Een onderliggende

rode draad van de artikelen is telkens de dynamische verhouding tussen de militaire sfeer en de burgerlijke sfeer, de relatie tussen leger en het natiebegrip, of nog het vervagen van de grenzen tussen het strikt militaire en de samenleving. Dat laatste is één van de basisonderdelen van het zogenaamde 'Total War' prisma, dat sterk verbonden is met de geschiedenis van de beide Wereldoorlogen. Het zal daarom interessant zijn om in de toekomst ook het huidige lopende onderzoek naar Eerste Wereldoorlog in België te koppelen aan de inzichten van dit themanummer. Met dit nummer tonen Nel de Mûelenaere en Josephine Hoegaerts alleszins overtuigend aan dat België ook wat de *New Military History* betreft in internationaal opzicht een relevante casus kan zijn en dus veel meer aandacht verdient.

Le deuxième numéro de l'année 2016 est, de nouveau, un numéro thématique. Si la précédente livraison se concentrait sur la marginalité et les supposés '*subaltern groups*' dans l'histoire contemporaine de la Belgique, nous pouvons dire que le thème de ce numéro lui-même a été marginalisé durant de nombreuses décennies. Il concerne l'histoire militaire en Belgique et/ou l'histoire de l'armée belge, dans ce cas jusqu'en 1914.

L'histoire militaire semble connaître un véritable *revival* dans l'histoire contemporaine belge. Ce fut aussi le signal donné lors du *workshop 'The Army in Belgian History : innovative perspectives, contemporary challenges'*, organisé le 5 novembre 2014 au Centre d'Études et Documentation Guerre et Sociétés contemporaines (CegeSoma), qui donna l'impulsion directe à ce numéro thématique. Peut-être ce *revival* est-il, au moins partiellement, engendré par le fructueux contexte de recherche qui se déploie actuellement autour des commémorations du centenaire de la Première Guerre mondiale. À cet égard, on peut se demander dans quelle mesure cet intérêt renouvelé pour l'histoire militaire ne serait pas réellement le point de départ d'un champ de recherche belge plus durable que l'on pourrait appeler la "Nouvelle Histoire militaire". Le jeune âge des rédactrices en chef invitées (et de la plupart des auteurs) de ce numéro thématique est un premier signe encourageant. Une autre évolution très significative est qu'il s'agit de deux femmes historiennes :

Nel de Mûelenaere (*UAntwerpen*) et Josephine Hoegaerts (*University of Helsinki*). Ces deux rédactrices en chef invitées ne se contentent pas de signer certains articles mais livrent également une introduction générale dans laquelle elles replacent ce numéro thématique au sein d'une historiographie plus large.

Le dossier offre au lecteur un éventail diversifié de sujets et d'angles d'approche. Les rédactrices en chef invitées ne souhaitent nullement dessiner un cadre rigide en vue d'un futur agenda de recherche. Au contraire, avec ce numéro, elles démontrent surtout combien de pistes différentes demeurent encore ouvertes. Un fil rouge sous-jacent à l'ensemble des articles réside tout à la fois dans la relation dynamique entre la sphère militaire et la sphère civile, dans la relation entre armée et conception de la nation ou encore dans l'estompage des frontières entre le domaine strictement militaire et la société dans son ensemble. Ce dernier point est l'une des composantes de base du prisme de la "Guerre totale", qui est puissamment relié à l'histoire des deux guerres mondiales. Il pourrait dès lors s'avérer très intéressant d'associer à l'avenir toute la recherche actuelle autour de la Première Guerre en Belgique aux pistes et points de vue de ce numéro thématique. Grâce à celui-ci, Nel De Mûelenaere et Josephine Hoegaerts prouvent de façon pleinement convaincante que la Belgique peut être, au plan de la *New Military History* comme dans d'autres domaines, un cas pertinent du

point de vue international et qu'elle mérite donc bien plus d'attention encore.

COUNTRY AND ARMY IN THE MAKING

The Belgian military in the long nineteenth century

- Nel de Mûelenaere & Josephine Hoegaerts -

“What is military history?”

It seems like such a naïve, or maybe facetious question. But it lies at the heart of this special issue : what does it mean to write military history, and why would one undertake such an endeavor, especially in the context of a neutral state of little global significance and with only marginal military power ? The answer to this question is, of course, far more complex than its brevity suggests. Stephen Morillo, who called his introductory book for novice students in the field *What is Military History ?*, identified not only four separate conceptual frameworks that could all legitimately be called “military history”, but also included a rich historiography going back to Antiquity in his answer¹. In a 1984 article in *History Today*, the subject was introduced as one “which has strong claims to be regarded as the oldest form of history”². And that is, perhaps, why the question has to be asked again and again. Because although military history could be quite simply defined as “the history

of the armed forces and the conduct of war”, the precise content of that definition and the distinctive qualities and qualifications necessary for conducting such a study have undergone numerous waves of reconsideration and renewal. All the while, the (sub)discipline of military history, with its long pedigree, seems to have retained a reputation for being rather static and old-fashioned. As Michael Howard noted in 1984, “even before 1914 the traditional concept of military history was archaic”.

Its musty reputation is, perhaps, the most enduring element of the field of military history. Although histories of “great” battles and even greater personalities remain popular, both academic historians and their counterparts outside of the academy have consistently rethought and rewritten military history. Jeremy Black’s exercise in *Rethinking Military History* has probably been the most influential one, and his considered answer to the question

1. STEPHEN MORILLO, *What is Military History ?*, 2nd ed., Cambridge, 2012. 2. MICHAEL HOWARD, “What is Military History ?”, in *History Today*, 34-12, December 1984, (www.historytoday.com).

“what is military history ?” therefore bears repeating here³. Most importantly, Black defines the study of military history as a study of “change” rather than “progress”, thereby denying Dennis Showalter’s contention that “military history is arguably the last stronghold of what historiographers call the ‘Whig interpretation’”. These changes, in Black’s perspective, are not so much a question of intra-institutional evolution, but rather a conglomerate of processes of change on the intersection of political goals, strategic thought, economic resources, intellectual debate and technological possibilities. The military and its practices (both in training and in battle) therefore have to be studied within the broad context of not only its material environment, but also that of the strategic culture current in the society within which it operates and that of cultural assumptions about armed violence and political power. (Black points, for example, to the use of the metaphor of a “war on drugs/crime/etc.” to show the pervasiveness of military imagery in society and culture). Black’s “New Military History” focuses firmly on the army and its actions, but never loses sight of the multiple contexts in which these institutions and practices take shape.

New and in Crisis ?

The work that can be (and has been) gathered under the umbrella of ‘new military history’ is highly varied and contains multiple fields of interest. It is also less new than one

might expect. As Robert Citino wrote in a 2007 overview of “Military Histories Old and New” : “Once controversial, and still the occasional subject of grumbling from a traditionalist old guard, the new military history is today an integral, even dominant, part of the parent field from which it emerged. It has been around so long, in fact, and has established itself so firmly, that it seems silly to keep calling it ‘new’”⁴.

We can now distinguish different vintages of “new” military history that have been developed and practiced from roughly the 1960s onward (or more precisely, since the emotional and subsequent intellectual upheaval of the Vietnam war). Its earliest, and perhaps most successful and established incarnation is the war and society school of thought, which grew out of the new social history of the 1960s and 1970s and has since grown into a sizeable field of study with an institutional foothold in numerous universities, a journal founded in 1983 and a rich historiography analyzing the interaction between the military and the social realities surrounding it, the social impact of war and the multiple connections between recruitment and national citizenship (or, for the *Ancien Régime*, between the system of cavalry and feudalism, for example). Later developments in the broader field of history brought new innovations as well : the 1980s saw growing interest in imperial and global military history (both operational and social) and in the 1990s

3. JEREMY BLACK, *Rethinking Military History*, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2004. (As Black notes in his introduction, his reflection followed in the wake of other methodological/historiographical publications reframing the field of military history, such as THOMAS KÜHNE & BENJAMIN ZIEMANN, *Was ist Militärgeschichte ?*, Paderborn, 2000; JEAN CHAGNIOT, *Guerre et société à l’époque moderne*, Paris, 2001 and a number of national military historiographies.) 4. ROBERT CITINO, “Military Histories Old and New : A Reintroduction”, in *American Historical Review*, 2004, p.1071.

issues of social inequality (notably those based on gender and race) within military institutions or articulated in the context of violent conflict were brought to the fore⁵. More recently, military historians have shifted their attention to the interaction between history and memory – albeit sometimes reluctantly. As Citino notes, this overtly cultural approach to the history of violence and battle “also demonstrates the limits to which most military historians feel they can go without breaking faith with their subject. The truth is, as deeply as they probe the culture of war, they will still want to ground themselves in the event itself, as opposed to its later interpretation, its memory, or its instrumentalization”⁶. However, “deconstructionist” cultural history and military history increasingly intersect to produce a space for analyses that include not only memory and discourse, but also non-human actors in battle such as animals, objects and landscapes⁷. Whereas John Lynn, in 2003, was still careful to “apply the basic concerns of the new cultural history without being guilty of its excesses”⁸, the recently

established field of “critical military history” has no such qualms. Its proponents happily focus on the intersection of operational and strategic issues (both current and historical) and theoretical innovations in cultural geography, anthropology, queer studies, and indeed cultural history⁹.

Although the field of Belgian military history is a very modest one, most of the disciplinary innovations outlined above have been adopted and adapted to the context of Belgian history to some extent. Studies of the military school and the theories underpinning its courses have thrown light on the strategic culture of the Belgian army and its position in an international context¹⁰. Histories of recruitment and the army’s language policies have afforded insights into the social make-up of the armed forces and how they were embedded in the community at large¹¹. Recent studies on the memorialization of military history (and notably both world wars) are approaching the “military” history of Belgium in new ways as well¹². And yet,

5. e.g. CYNTHIA ENLOE, *Maneuvers : The International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives*, Berkeley, 2000; JEAN BETHKE ELSTAIN, *Women and War*, Chicago, 1987; JOANNA BOURKE, *Dismembering the Male*, Chicago, 1996. 6. ROBERT CITINO, “Military Histories...”, p.1087. 7. e.g. RACHEL WOODWARD, *Military Geographies*, Malden, MA, 2004; CHRIS PEARSON, “Mobilizing Nature : The Environmental History of War and Militarization”, in *Modern France*, Manchester, 2012. 8. JOHN A. LYNN, *Battle : A History of Combat and Culture*, Boulder, 2003, p. xiv. 9. The editorial in the first issue of the journal *Critical Military Studies* suggests that it wants to approach military power “as a question, rather than taking it for granted”, thereby underlining its deconstructionist perspective. VICTORIA BASCHA, AARON BELKIN & JESS GIFKINS, “What is Critical Military Studies”, in *Critical Military Studies*, nr. 1, 2015. 10. e.g. BRUNO COLSON, “La première traduction française du ‘Vom Kriege’ de Clausewitz et sa diffusion dans les milieux militaires français et belge avant 1914”, in *Revue belge d’histoire militaire*, 26-5, 1986, p. 345-364; ID., “Les lectures militaires de Charles-Joseph de Ligne d’après le Catalogue raisonné de sa bibliothèque”, in *Nouvelles Annales Prince de Ligne*, XIV, 2001, p. 9-78. 11. LUC DE VOS, *Het effectief van de Belgische krijgsmacht en de militiewetgeving 1830-1914*, Brussels, 1985. 12. BRUNO BENVINDO & EVERT PEETERS, *Scherven van een oorlog*, Antwerpen, 2011; CHRISTOPHE BÉCHET, “La révision pacifiste des manuels scolaires. Les enjeux de la mémoire de la guerre 14-18 dans l’enseignement belge de l’Entre-deux-guerres”, in *Cahiers d’Histoire du Temps présent*, 20, 2008, p.49-101; TINE HENS, SAARTJE VANDENBORRE & KAAT WILS, *Oorlog in tijden van vrede. De Eerste Wereldoorlog in de klas*, Turnhout, 2015.

a lot of work remains to be done in the field of Belgian military history, specifically for the period preceding the First World War, which seems to be relatively unknown. This issue may be at least partly due to the lack of transparent overviews of the available literature and sources. The last scholarly conference on the history of the Belgian army dates back no less than 30 years¹³, and apart from a historiographic look at the (now all defunct) military history journals in Belgium the bibliography of military history in Belgium remains very fragmentary¹⁴. With this issue, we hope to provide a starting point to solve some of those issues. In addition to the research articles containing innovative approaches to the institutions and practices of the Belgian army (each showcasing the continued relevance of military history within a very broad context), this number also contains a debate section that points to the relevance of military history in the public sphere and education, and therefore indirectly highlights the continued need for systematically researched and carefully analyzed accounts of the military past to make sense of the (national) present.

This volume is therefore a call to action, a pointer to available resources, a hopeful sign of methodological and empirical rigor, and

also a contribution to a field that may have been flying under the radar for a while, but which certainly has not stopped evolving.

Back from the margins

As in most European countries, Belgian military history as a discipline was born in military institutions during the nineteenth century. It was not a very productive branch of history; peacetime does not make for thrilling military adventures. Save for a few studies on the Belgian campaigns in Mexico and Congo, the limited historiographical production of the army consisted mainly of memoirs of generals, histories of the military institution and nationalistic accounts of legendary medieval battles¹⁵. That comfortable peace, however, did not last. The German invasion in August 1914 brought mobilization, retreat and four years of trench warfare. The First World War gave rise to a steady flow of historical work. Belgium stood at the centre of fierce political debates on the *Kriegsschuldfrage* (war guilt question) and the atrocities committed by the German army. Many reputable Belgian historians published elaborate accounts on the subject during the war. The Belgian government-in-exile created the *Bureau Documentaire Belge* (1915-1920) that published, as Benvindo, Majerus and Vrints (2014) pointed out, the *de facto* first history of Belgium in the Great War, which

13. *Actes du colloque d'histoire militaire Belge (1830-1980) Bruxelles, 26-28 Mars 1980. Akten van het colloquium over de Belgische krijgsgeschiedenis, Brussel, 26-28 maart 1980*, Brussels, 1981. 14. JOOST VAESSEN, "De sa tour d'ivoire vers la cité ? De Belgische hedendaagse militaire historiografie sinds 1970", in GUY VANTHEMSCHÉ, MACHTELD DE METSENAERE & JEAN-CLAUDE BURGELMAN, *De tuin van heden. Dertig jaar wetenschappelijk onderzoek over de hedendaagse Belgische samenleving*, Brussels, 2007, p. 457-498. 15. *La Belgique militaire, par quelques officiers de l'armée*, Brussels, 1835; LOUIS DE RYCKEL, *Historique de l'établissement militaire de la Belgique*, vol. 2, Ghent, 1907; BRUNO RENARD, *Histoire politique et militaire de la Belgique*, Brussels, 1848; GÉNÉRAL CHARLES ROUEN, *L'armée Belge. Exposé historique de son organisation, de ses costumes et uniformes, de son armement et de sa tactique depuis les temps primitifs jusqu'à nos jours*, Brussels, 1896; EMILE VERSTRATE, *Histoire militaire du territoire actuel de la Belgique*, Brussels, 1866.

was, of course, very much a military history¹⁶. Proudly employing rigorous historiographical methods, the documentation centre produced highly regarded accounts of the war that were as difficult to read as they were detailed, and therefore not suited for a broader public. Along with other belligerent countries, the Belgian army published an official history of the war in the 1920s, and many regiments recorded the war experiences of their unit¹⁷. In addition to the official histories, the war generated an avalanche of memoirs by officers and soldiers.

The 1920s and 1930s were the short-lived heyday of Belgian military history. The Second World War that erupted shortly thereafter did not inspire a similar body of work. This was no coincidence; the war experience of most Belgians was one of occupation, resistance and oppression rather than military campaigns. Consequently, the Belgian historiography of the Second World War tends to focus on the German occupation, civil resistance and collaboration. In the second half of the twentieth century, military history became

one of the least popular academic fields in Belgium. Joost Vaesen counted a mere three PhD dissertations on the military at Belgian universities between 1945 and 2001¹⁸. While the production was low, that does not mean that the field came to a complete standstill. Since 1967 onwards, the *Centre for Research and Studies on the History of the Second World War*, later the *Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society* (1997), has collected primary and secondary and published extensively on the history of the Second World War. With the launch of the documentation centre of the Royal Military Museum in 1976, military history got its structural foothold. In its first years, the institute published a series of invaluable thematic guides to the archives of the Royal Army Museum¹⁹. The aforementioned 1980 colloquium on Belgian military history, organized by the Royal Army Museum, showcased a collection of work on Belgian military history – with no fewer than thirty short lectures on a wide range of topics including for example the Congo-Arab

16. BRUNO BENVINDO, BENOÎT MAJERUS & ANTOON VRINTS, “La Grande Guerre des historiens belges”, in *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, nr. 2-3, 2014, p. 172. **17.** THIJS GOESSENS, *Belgische regimentsgeschiedenissen over infanterie tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog*, Master’s thesis, Universiteit Gent, 2007-2008. **18.** JOOST VAESEN, “De sa tour d’ivoire vers la cité?...”, p. 463. **19.** RICHARD BOIJEN, *Inventaris van het fonds ‘Belgische militaire aanwezigheid in het buitenland’ 1826-1955*, Brussels, 1979; ID., *Inventaris van het archiefonds ‘Belgische Marine’, 1809-1945/1946*, Brussels, 1987; ID., *Inventaris van het archiefonds ‘1914-1918 – Personalía’*, Brussels, 1982; ID., *Inventaris van het archiefonds ‘1914-1918 – I’*, Brussels, 1984; RICHARD BOIJEN & LUC VANDEWEYER, *(Voorlopige) Inventaris van het archiefonds ‘1e Legerdivisie (1914-1919)’*, Brussels, 2005; RICHARD BOIJEN, *Inventaris van het archiefonds ‘Officierendossiers 1-5000’*, 5 volumes, Brussels, 1985-1987; JEAN-MARIE DUVOSQUEL, *Inventaris van het archiefonds ‘Duitse krijgsgevangenen in België, 1945-1948’*, Brussels, 1981; MARIE-ANNE PARIDAENS, *Inventaire du fonds d’archives ‘1870-1871’*, Brussels, 1979; ID., *Inventaire du fonds d’archives ‘Risquons-tout, 1848’*, Brussels, 1981; ID., *Inventaire du Fonds d’archives ‘Union des Fraternelles de l’Armée de campagne 1914-1918’*, Brussels, 1984; ID., *Inventaire du fonds d’archives ‘Habillage, équipement et harnachement’*, Brussels, 1987; JAN VANDENABEELE, *Inventaris van het archiefonds ‘Bewapening’*, Brussels, 1990; MICHEL VILAIN, *Inventaire du fonds d’archives ‘Service de santé et Croix-Rouge, 1831-1914’*, Brussels, 1981; PIET VELDEMAN, *Fonds Burgerwacht : voorlopige inventaris van het archief van het hoofdkwartier van de burgerwacht voor de provincies Antwerpen en Brabant, 1897-1920*, Brussels, 2003.

War (1892-1894) or officers' psychology at the beginning of the Second World War²⁰. Half of the colloquium was devoted to the period between 1830 and 1914 and the event set the tone for research in the two decades that ensued. Notable studies from that period primarily looked into political topics such as the relationship between the Belgian monarchy and the armed forces²¹, nationalism and the language question²² and military justice²³. Research from that time therefore put a certain weight on the societal context in which the army functioned. Hence, it would be wrong to categorize these studies as "traditional" military histories as opposed to the "new" military history that was on the rise internationally. Belgian military historians had been paying attention to military culture, the political context, material culture in the army and the social aspects of army life for a few decades now²⁴. But the exchange over

disciplinary boundaries between military history and its social, cultural and political counterparts has been far more harmonious abroad. Belgian military historians mainly produced narrative histories that were unhindered by conceptual or theoretical reflections. This has been both the result of and a cause for the rather marginal place of military history at Belgian universities, with very little room for the history of warfare in curricula and no academic chairs in military history.

The post-war period of moderate production and slow adaptation came to an end in the second half of the 1990s. With the centenary of the Great War in sight, and the opening of the *In Flanders Fields museum* (1996), public and academic interest in the First World War was on the rise²⁵. Sophie De Schaepdrijver weaved military history through her history of Belgium in the Great War (1997)²⁶. An

20. *Actes du colloque d'histoire militaire belge (1830-1980) Bruxelles, 26-28 mars 1980. Akten van het colloquium over de Belgische krijgsgeschiedenis, Brussel, 26-28 maart 1980*, Brussels, 1981. 21. NADINE LUBELSKI-BERNARD, "Leopold II et la défense nationale", in *Actes du Colloque d'Histoire militaire belge (1830-1980) Bruxelles, 26-28 mars 1980*, Brussels, 1981, p. 217-227; MARIE-ROSE THIELEMANS (dir.), *Albert Ier. Carnets et correspondance de guerre 1914-1918*, Paris/Louvain-la-Neuve, 1991; LAURENCE VAN YPERSELE, *Le roi Albert: histoire d'un mythe*, Ottignies, 1995; CARLOS WYFFELS (dir.), *Actes du colloque Roi Albert*, Brussels, 1976. 22. RICHARD BOIJEN, *De taalwetgeving in het Belgische leger (1830-1940)*, Brussels, 1992; Id., "Het leger als smeltkroes van de natie?", in *Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis*, nr. 3, 1997, p. 55-77; LUC DE VOS, "De smeltkroes. De Belgische krijgsmacht als natievormende factor, 1830-1885", in *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, nr. 3-4, 1984, p. 421-460; HARRY VAN VELTHOVEN, "Het Belgisch leger en het nationaliteitsvraagstuk, 1830-1914", in PIET DE GRUYSE & PATRICK LEFFEVRE, *Van Brialmont tot de Westeuropese Unie*, Brussels, 1988. 23. JOHN GILISSEN, "La juridiction militaire belge de 1830 à nos jours", in *Actes du colloque d'histoire militaire belge...*, p. 467-490. 24. RIA CHRISTENS, KOEN DECLERCQ & LUC DE VOS, *Frontleven 14/18 : het dagelijks leven van de Belgische soldaat aan de IJzer*, Tielt, 1987; LUC DE VOS, "Het dagelijks leven van de Belgische soldaat (1830-1848)", in *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Militaire Geschiedenis*, Deel I, nr. 5, 1982, p. 465-494, Deel II, nr. 6, 1982, p. 529-558; FERNAND LEHOUCQ, *Het antimilitarisme in België, 1830-1914*, Antwerp, 1958; ÉMILE WANTY, *Le milieu militaire en Belgique de 1830 à 1914*, Brussels, 1957. 25. MICHAËL AMARA, SERGE JAUMAIN, BENOÎT MAJERUS & ANTOON VRINTS (dir.), *Une "guerre totale" ? La Belgique dans la Première Guerre mondiale : nouvelles tendances de la recherche historique*, Brussels, 2005; BRUNO BENVINDO, *Des hommes en guerre. Les soldats belges entre ténacité et désillusion, 1914-1918*, Brussels, 2005. 26. SOPHIE DE SCHAEPDRIJVER, *De groote oorlog. Het koninkrijk België tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog*, Antwerp/Amsterdam, 1997.

additional catalyst was the return of the lost Moscow military archives in 2002, taken by the German occupier in 1940²⁷. The centennial was hailed as a window of opportunity for the study of the First World War²⁸. But in the case of Belgium, “history of war” does not necessarily equal “military history”. Occupation, repression and civil resistance have rightly gotten a good deal of scholarly attention. This also means that the recognition of the impact of the world wars on Belgian history has not necessarily led to a recognition of the importance of military history in the academic sphere. Nonetheless, army history slowly found its way back to academia²⁹. And along with that came a change in the typical

profile of a military historian, often affiliated with the army³⁰. The centennial paved the way for a more diverse profile of historians who took new approaches to the history of the army and warfare: the disciplining of soldiers, emotions and shell shock, for example, or subaltern experience and the presence of colonial troops at the Western front³¹. Familiar themes were revisited as well. With the large-scale Belspo research project *Justice and Populations: The Belgian Experience in International Perspective*, and the publication of a range of guides to the military archives³² the study of military justice became one of the most rapidly expanding areas of military history³³. Likewise, the Royal Army Museum’s

27. For an overview of military archives: Joost Vaesen, “Het Ministerie van Defensie en de krijgsmacht”, in PATRICIA VAN DEN ECKHOUT, GUY VANTHEMSCHE, *Bronnen voor de studie van het hedendaagse België, 19^e-20^e eeuw*, Brussels, 2009. For an overview of Belgian archives of the First World War: PIERRE-ALAIN TALLIER & RICHARD BOIJEN (dir.), *La Belgique et la Première Guerre mondiale. État des sources. État de la recherche*, Brussels, 2002. 28. JAN NAERT, KARLA VANRAEPENBUSCH & FLORENT VERFAILLIE, “The Belgian ‘14-18 centenary generation’ of doctoral researchers”, working paper, War and Fatherland Conference, Brussels, 14-15 October 2015. 29. TOM SIMOENS, LUC DE VOS, DAVE WARNIER & FRANKY BOSTYN, *14-18, Oorlog in België*, Leuven, 2014; BENOÎT AMEZ, *Vie et survie dans les tranchées belges. Témoignages inédits*, Brussels, 2013. 30. JOOST VAESSEN, “De sa tour d’ivoire vers la cité ? (...)”, p. 463. 31. BENOÎT AMEZ, *Vie et survie dans les tranchées belges...*; DOMINIEK DENDOOVEN, “Living apart together: Belgian civilians and non-white troops and workers in wartime Flanders”, in SANTANU DAS, *Race, empire and First World War writing*, Cambridge, 2011, p. 143-157; TOM SIMOENS, *Het gezag onder vuur. Over de conflicten tussen soldaten en hun oversten tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog*, Bruges, 2010; ROSE SPIJKERMAN, Research project: *Notions of honour and shame among Belgian military during the First World War*, PhD research funded by the BRAIN-be project of Belspo: MEMEX WWI Recognition and resentment: experiences and memories of the Great War in Belgium (2014-2018). Promotors: prof. dr. Antoon Vrints (UGent) and prof. dr. Olivier Luminet (UCL). 32. ROLANDE DEPOORTERE, *La juridiction militaire en Belgique, 1796-1998: compétences et organisation, production et conservation des archives*, Algemeen Rijksarchief en Rijksarchief in de Provinciën, vol. 115, Brussels, 1999, p. 355; PAUL DROSSSENS, CHRISTOPHE MARTENS & DELPHINE PICRON, *Archiefgids van het militair gerecht*, Brussels, 2015. 33. JEAN-MARC BERLIÈRE, JONAS CAMPION, LUIGI LACCHÉ & XAVIER ROUSSEAU, *Justices militaires et Guerres mondiales (1914-1950)/ Military justice and world wars (Europe, 1914-1950)*, Louvain-la-Neuve, p. 319-335; MÉLANIE BOST, PAUL DROSSSENS & STANISLAS HORVAT, *Ressources et usages des archives de la justice militaire/Bronnen en onderzoeksperspectieven i.v.m. het militair gerecht*, Brussels, 2016 (in press); MÉLANIE BOST, XAVIER ROUSSEAU & STANISLAS HORVAT, “Les espions civils au service de l’ennemi, au prisme de la justice militaire belge. L’autre versant de la guerre de l’ombre (1914-1920)”, in *Journal of Belgian History*, nr. 2-3, 2014, p. 10-49; MARC COOLS, PATRICK LERY, ROBIN LIBERT & AL., *1915-2015: Het verhaal van de Belgische militaire inlichtingen- en veiligheidsdienst/1915-2015: L’histoire du service de renseignement militaire et de sécurité belge*, Antwerpen, 2015; MARGO DE KOSTER, HÉRVÉ LEUWERS, DIRK LUYTEN & XAVIER ROUSSEAU, *Jus-*

recently announced revival of the *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Militaire Geschiedenis/Revue Belge d'Histoire Militaire*, which had been discontinued in 1996, is a promising sign of the renewed interest in military history.

The nineteenth-century army revisited

The centennial has rightly been identified as a trigger for the modest revival of military history, but army history has recently sneaked its way back to academia in a far less conspicuous way as well. Belgian historians have notably rediscovered the nineteenth century as a vital period for understanding the events of 1914-1918. Christophe Bêchet, for example, thoroughly studied the material aspects of pre-war planning from a long-term perspective³⁴. An even more remarkable evolution that paved the way for this journal issue is the emergence of army history in other sub-disciplines. Historians with no previous interest in military history turned to the army to deepen their understanding of Belgian society. These works trace military presences in Belgian landscapes, science, communities and masculinities, slowly reclaiming army history from the margins in the process. Interestingly enough, most of these scholars that look at the intersections between army and society are historians of the nineteenth century. Earlier work on the Belgian military before 1914 did not ignore the societal impact on the history of the army. However, many of these works

were led by the premise that the army and society were completely separate entities that demanded separate studies. Belgian civilian-military relations have not been studied as a reciprocal process of exchange between the army and society at large. At the same time, historians of the nineteenth century have not considered the Belgian army as a historical force to be reckoned with. This blind spot for the historical role of the army stems in part from the peculiar position of the Belgian army in the prolonged period of peace between 1839 and 1914. Belgium's neutral status, the political unwillingness to increase military capacity and establish personal and general conscription and the bad reputation of the army have all contributed to the pertinacious historical self-image of Belgium as a non-military nation³⁵. The persistent idea of a non-militarized society is reflected the past hesitance to include the military in national historical accounts. The rather meagre historiography of the Belgian military before 1914 flows from the long-maintained premise that compared to the surrounding countries, which were entwined in a fervent arms race, the Belgian military had a marginal place in society. We strongly disagree with that premise, and follow John R. Gillis's plea to look at the ever-changing dynamics of military culture and civil-military relations in their specific national and historical context³⁶. From this, a different picture of nineteenth-century

tice in wartime and revolutions : Europe 1795-1950, Brussels, 2012, p. 135-161; STANISLAS HORVAT, *De vervolging van militairerechtelijke delicten tijdens Wereldoorlog I. De werking van het Belgisch krijgsgerecht*, Brussels, 2009; JOS MONBALLYU, *De jacht op de flaminganten : de strafrechterlijke repressie van de Vlaamsgezinde militairen aan het IJzerfront*, Bruges, 2010.

34. CHRISTOPHE BÊCHET, *Traverser la Belgique ? De l'indépendance au Plan Schlieffen (1839-1905)*, Doctoral dissertation, Université de Liège, 2012. 35. NEL DE MÛELENAERE, *Belgen, zijt gij ten strijde gereed ? Militarisering in een neutrale natie, 1890-1914*, Doctoral dissertation, Antwerp University, 2014, p. 13-17. 36. JOHN GILLIS, *The militarization of the Western World*, New Brunswick/London, 1989, p. 5-6.

Belgium emerges. Between 1830 and 1914 the country maintained an army of 45,000 soldiers that were spread among 35 garrison cities. Belgium built forts, produced weapons and organized colourful military festivities. The army can be regarded as one of the largest employers in the country, and a pedagogical institute for the lower classes.

Leaving the presumption of a non-militarized nation behind also demands attention to what Tanja Thomas and Fabian Virchow fittingly named “banal militarism”: the creeping of military customs, ideals, norms and behaviour in daily life³⁷. Nel de Mûelenaere explicitly drew attention to this artificial separation in her work on militarization processes in Belgium, following the thread of several historical studies that remind us that military practices were not limited to the army³⁸. Josephine Hoegaerts looked at the military as one of the authors of a masculine

lexicon in nineteenth-century Belgium³⁹. Pascale Delheye and Hans Vangrunderbeek described the army as the birthplace of physical education and the empirical method in studying the benefits of physical exercise⁴⁰. The typical Belgian military modesty that accompanied the struggle with the country’s neutral status has demanded attention from historians specialized in diplomatic culture, such as Marie-Thérèse Bitsch (2006) and Michael Auwers (2014)⁴¹. These studies act as a powerful reminder that the army did in fact impact a range of societal phenomena that did not carry “military” in their name. Youth organizations, for example, or prostitution (female and male), landscapes, medical science, city nightlife and treatment of venereal diseases⁴². Many aspects of daily life in nineteenth-century Belgium can in fact never be fully grasped without taking the social, political, economic and cultural presence of the army into account.

37. TANJA THOMAS & FABIAN VIRCHOW, *Banal Militarism : Zur Veralltäglicung Des Militärischen Im Zivilen*, Bielefeld, 2006. 38. NEL DE MÛELENAERE, *Belgen, zijt gij ten strijde gereed ?...* 39. JOSEPHINE HOEGAERTS, *Masculinity and nationhood, 1830-1910: constructions of identity and citizenship in Belgium*, Basingstoke, 2014. 40. PASCAL DELHEYE, “La Patrie Régénérée ? Clément Lefébure, l’École normale de gymnastique et d’escrime de l’armée et la percée de la gymnastique suédoise en Belgique, 1885-1908”, in *L’empreinte De Joinville. 150 ans de sport 1852-2002*, Paris, 2003, p. 335-357; HANS VANGRUNDERBEEK, “Interchanging Scandinavian models? ‘Science-based’ interaction between military and civil institutes for physical education in Belgium (1921-1947)”, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, nr. 2, 2013, p. 109-130. 41. MICHAEL AUWERS, *The island and the storm : a social-cultural history of the Belgian diplomatic corps in times of democratization, 1885-1935*, Doctoral dissertation, Antwerp University, 2014; MARIE-THÉRÈSE BITSCH, “La Belgique entre la France et l’Allemagne”, in NICOLE SAVY & MARC QUAGHEBEUR (dir.), *France-Belgique 1848-1914. Affinités-ambiguïtés. Actes du colloque des 7,8 et 9 mai 1996*, Brussels, 1996, p. 143-49; MARIE-THÉRÈSE BITSCH, *La Belgique entre la France et l’Allemagne, 1905-1914*, Paris, 1994. 42. NICOLAS CHARTIER, “De onderbuik van Brussel. De mannelijke homoseksuele subcultuur in Brussel tijdens de negentiende eeuw”, in *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, nr. 3-4, 2008, p. 407-435; NEL DE MÛELENAERE, *Belgen, zijt gij ten strijde gereed ?...*; JOSEPHINE HOEGAERTS, “Manoeuvring men : masculinity as spatially defined readability at the grandes manoeuvres of the Belgian army, 1882-1883”, in *Gender, Place and Culture : A Journal of Feminist Geography*, nr. 2, 2010, p. 249-268; LIESBET NYS, “De grote school van de natie. Legerartsen over drankmisbruik en geslachtsziekten in het leger, 1850-1950”, in GEERT VANPAEMEL, KAAT WILS & JO TOLLEBEEK, *Degeneratie in België*, Leuven, 2003, p. 78-118; JORIS VANDENDRIESSCHE, *Arbiters of Science. Medical Societies and Scientific Culture in Nineteenth-Century Belgium*, Doctoral dissertation, Leuven University, 2014.

Outline

The different contributions to this issue reflect on the relevance and impact of the Belgian army on the nation *and vice versa*, looking at the socio-cultural and political context of neutrality and militarization, to the ways the military was implicated in medical and political practices, but also to the activities and discourses of the nineteenth-century army itself.

In the first article, **Bram Dierckx** and **Josephine Hoegaerts** examine how the yearly practice of the *grandes manœuvres* forged bridges between the military and civilian worlds by appealing to the “national” character of both. Rather than demonstrating any belligerence or an isolated military culture, Dierckx and Hoegaerts argue, the maneuvers contributed to the cultivation of the image of Belgium as a neutral state. The forced interaction between soldiers and the local population of the maneuvering regions played an important part in the particularly “Belgian” process of militarization that took place before the Great War.

Joris Vandendriessche likewise points to the many ways in which the borders between the military and civilian sphere were frequently crossed in the (early) nineteenth century. Zooming in on the spread of “military ophthalmia” (an inflammation of the eye) in the 1830s and 40s, his article shows that not only did the disease ignore all borders – the epidemic spread among both the army and the general population – military doctors did so as well. Public and scientific debates on ophthalmia bore witness to the creation of an open community consisting of (military)

doctors who moved easily between the army and civilian society.

Very different borders are at stake in **Christophe Bêchet**’s contribution on the Battle of Sedan and the role of the Belgian troops deployed to guard the French border. By focusing squarely on the army and its members, and meticulously reconstructing the movements of soldiers around the Franco-Belgian border, Bêchet uncovers the story of the first breach of Belgium’s neutrality, long before the First World War. This seemingly minor event proves to be a fruitful starting point not only for reconsidering the discourse surrounding the battle of Sedan, but also for analyzing the political, legal and psychological implications of the “neutrality” of a border in the age of nationalism.

The difficult question of neutrality and its importance to political and military discussions at the end of the nineteenth century is central to **Michael Auwers**’ contribution as well. Investigating the attitude of the Belgian diplomatic world toward the army, Auwers argues that the existing narrative on near-unanimous unwillingness to expand the army at the end of the nineteenth century is in need of revision. Rather than a monolithic *corps*, Auwers paints a picture of individual officials, some of whom felt compelled by a particular brand of patriotism and a wish to educate the masses to take active part in the propaganda for personal conscription. Encouraging the militarization of the masses would, according to Auwers’ analysis of these diplomats’ discourses, play into a wider attempt to halt the politicization of the lower classes whilst connecting them more closely to the nation.

Nel de Mûelenaere's article, finally, focuses on the day-to-day practices and behaviours that constituted the cultivation of the nation and militarization on a more personal level. The creation of the patriotic citizen-soldier was approached somewhat optimistically by young ambitious officers. It proved to be an arduous task, however, for those involved, oscillating between top-down discipline and appeals to soldiers' intrinsic motivation and self-control. In order to turn a recruit into an enthusiastic soldier and citizen, de Mûelenaere's reading of behavior manuals shows, not only did his body have to be molded into shape, one had to "win" his heart as well.

The different contributions to this issue show that military history is a flourishing field of scholarship, in which innovative and interdisciplinary methodologies are increasingly embraced. Too often, however, the exciting proposals and corrective (or even revisionist) conclusions of historians remain the object of merely "academic" debate. In the debate section of this issue, three authors give pointers to open up research in (new) military history to a wider audience. Specialized in the military history of three small (and throughout the nineteenth century often precariously independent) nations, **Bruno Colson, Wim Klinkert** and **Tuomas Tepora** sketch their experiences in translating the military histories of Belgium, the Netherlands and Finland to students and enthusiasts. Their reflections not only show that it is possible to connect innovations in research to current social and cultural interests regarding the army and the nation, but above all that the

interest in military history is alive and well outside the academy as well, and that it goes far beyond *histoire bataille*.

