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978-0-521-51482-8 - Liberators: The Allies and Belgian Society, 1944-1945

Peter Schrijvers

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Liberators

In the autumn of 1944, Belgium was liberated at lightning speed. Yet Allied troops continued to dominate much of Belgian society until late 1945. Peter Schrijvers' revisionist account reveals that, during that time, strong currents of discontent began to build beneath the waves of gratitude and admiration. Chronic shortages of food and coal, rampant venereal disease, and deteriorating discipline led the Belgian population to lament "from the liberators, oh Lord, liberate us". Despite all this, however, the countries and cultures that the Anglo-American troops represented still exerted substantial attraction and influence, causing them to have a lingering impact on Belgian society in ways that would set the tone for the remainder of the turbulent twentieth century. Using newly discovered material from the Belgian state security archives as well as testimonies of the liberated, this book vividly reconstructs the largely unknown history of Belgium's liberation era.

Peter Schrijvers is Senior Lecturer at the University of New South Wales in Sydney. He is the author of *The Crash of Ruin: American Combat Soldiers in Europe during World War II* (1998), *The GI War against Japan: American Soldiers in Asia and the Pacific during World War II* (2002) and *The Unknown Dead: Civilians in the Battle of the Bulge* (2005).

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Liberators

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For Elle

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Si je désire une eau d'Europe, c'est la flache
Noire et froide où vers le crépuscule embaumé
Un enfant accroupi plein de tristesse, lâche
Un bateau frêle comme un papillon de mai.

If there is one water in Europe I want, it is the
Black cold pool where into the scented twilight
A child squatting full of sadness, launches
A boat as fragile as a butterfly in May.

Arthur Rimbaud, *Le Bateau ivre*
(English translation by Oliver Bernard)

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xii Acknowledgments

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Note on Belgian place names

Belgian place names have been anglicized throughout the book (for example, Antwerp instead of Antwerpen). However, in instances where anglicizing the names of Flemish places might be misunderstood to mean that they are located in the French-speaking part of the country, the original Dutch-language names have been left unchanged. Thus Leuven is used instead of Louvain and the prefix “Sint” is not translated into “Saint.”

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Abbreviations

AA:	Archival collection CEGESOMA
AB:	Unpublished primary source CEGESOMA
AS:	Armée Secrète
AWOL:	Absent Without Leave
BT:	Smith Simpson, ed. "Belgium in Transition." <i>The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science</i> 247 (September 1946)
CA:	Civil Affairs
CAC:	Conseiller en Affaires Civiles
CEGESOMA:	Centre d'Études et de Documentation Guerre et Sociétés Contemporaines – Studie-en Documentatiecentrum Oorlog en Hedendaagse Maatschappij, Brussels, Belgium
CEPAG:	Commission Belge pour l'Étude des Problèmes d'Après-Guerre
FFI:	Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur
FI:	Front de l'Indépendance
FR:	Fortnightly report
HBVL:	Het Belang van Limburg
JAG/ETO:	Judge Advocate General/European Theater of Operations
MP:	Military Police
MR:	Monthly report
OMA:	Office of Mutual Aid or Office de l'Aide Mutuelle/ Dienst voor Onderlinge Hulpverlening
OWI:	Office of War Information
PA:	Partisans Armés
POW:	Prisoner of War
RAF:	Royal Air Force
SE:	Haut Commissariat à la Sécurité de l'État/Hoog Commissariaat voor 's Lands Veiligheid

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SHAEF:	Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force
SHAEFB:	Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force Mission to Belgium and Luxembourg
UNRRA:	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
USAAF:	United States Army Air Forces
VNV:	Vlaamsch Nationaal Verbond
WR:	Weekly report