

Eddy Blondeel (1906-2000), founder of the 1st Belgian SAS paratrooper regiment

by
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Eddy Blondeel (1906-2000) © Pegase Museum, 2008.

Edouard Blondeel was born on 25th January in Gand, Belgium. He began his studies at the Deutsche Schule, then the Oefenschool which was attached to the city's normal school. With a love for fresh air and nature, he joined the scouts.

In 1929, he enlisted as an aspiring officer in the 1st mounted artillery regiment. In 1930, after rising to the rank of “Marshal of Lodgings” (Maréchal des Logis), he returned to civilian life. In 1932 he was enlisted once again and at the rank of adjutant aspirant second lieutenant he left his post. In 1934, second call, but this time at the rank of second lieutenant.

In 1934 he studied medicine, specialising in Dentistry, and after much work earned a diploma from the University of Brussels. Thanks to his new accreditation, he earned a grant which permitted him to travel to the United States of America to pursue an apprenticeship. In 1939, he left for the USA to study at the dental school of North Western University in Chicago, where he obtained his Doctorate of Dental Surgery.

Blondeel joined the Belgian centre of instruction in Canada, convinced along with many other men who went with him that the Belgian people had a role to play in liberating their country, and they wanted to be among the first to do so. In June, 1941, these men left Canada for Scotland where they were incorporated into the Belgian forces of Great Britain, including the 2nd riflemen battalion.

In 1942, King George VI authorized the formation of paratroopers, for which Blondeel and a small group volunteered. Very soon he was qualified “airborne”, and on the 8th May, 1942, the Independent Company of Belgian Paratroopers was formed, in which Blondeel was second in command. After suffering a bad landing, Blondeel's commander was injured and Eddy took over his command. After 20 months of intensive training, in January 1944, the Belgians returned to Scotland to join an SAS brigade that specialized in ambushes. Eddy was the commander in chief of his regiment, the 5th SAS Belgian Squadron.

The Belgian paratroopers were nervous, as they would be deployed on the front lines. By July, the missions were coming thick and fast. On 28th August, 1944, Blondeel parachuted, at his request, into the Gedinne region in the Ardennes forest. There, he joined advanced elements who found themselves in the middle of vast numbers of enemy troops. His leadership qualities, audacity and

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courage helped galvanize his men and those of the Maquis. With a series of ambushes, Eddy and his men harassed the retreating enemy.

From the 20th to 23rd December, 1944, and from the 28th December, 1944, to 14th January, 1945, during the battle at Ardennes, Blondeel executed with great success, at the head of a detachment of armoured jeeps, a series of reconnaissance missions. Contact with the enemy was common, most notably in the region of Marche. With his detachment, he played a decisive role in the Allied advance toward Holland and Germany. Between 1944 and 1945, he became a Major and restructured his unit to become the First SAS Paratrooper regiment. Very soon, 200 men had joined his unit which would capture numerous war criminals, including Von Ribbentrop at Hanover by the Sergeant Jacques Goffiner. The regiment participated equally in the arrest of the Doenitz government at Flensburg. Blondeel's regiment was at Godesholt by the time the German army capitulated. At the end of hostilities, President Eisenhower, faced with the losses endured by the SAS, personally saluted their courage and self-sacrifice.

After the war, Blondeel was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel. The Belgian government wanted to dissolve the regiment, so Eddy engaged himself in a new mission by creating a school for paratroopers - the C.E. Para at Shaffen - which opened in 1947. In 1949, he founded the Para-Commando Regiment, which would become the Para-Commando Brigade.

In 1946, the Colonel Blondeel relinquished his command and offered his services to the Department of Defense. In January 1947, he was decommissioned from the army. He returned to working life as an engineer in the paper industry. He retired in 1981, at the age of 75.

After the war, he founded the Association of Belgian SAS Regiments, for which he was elected president. In 1966, he became one of the two presidents and honorary colonels of the National Association of Comrades and Para-Commandos.

He was made Commander of the Order of Crown, Commander of the Order of Leopold II with palms, Officer of the Order of Leopold with palms, and Officer of the Legion of Honour. He received the Cross of War with palms, the Distinguished Service Order (presented by Montgomery himself), the French Croix de Guerre with palms and the Luxembourg Croix de Guerre.

He died on the 23rd May, 2000, at the age of 94.

Operations of 5th Belgian SAS:

Chaucer (July-August 1944; 22 members of the 5th SAS parachuted into Le Mans with the goal of harassing the retreating German army); Shakespeare (July-August 1944; a small detachment of 5th SAS parachuted into western Paris to harass retreating enemy troops); Trueform (August 1944: 102 SAS members jumped across 12 different points in the north west of Paris with the aim of inflicting maximum damage on enemy troops); Bunyan (August 1944: 20 Belgian SAS commandos infiltrated the region of Chartres to harass German troops); Noah (August to September 1944: 41 Belgian SAS commandos parachuted into the French Ardennes to collect information on the enemy); Benson (28th August to 1st September 1944: 6 Belgian SAS commandos jumped into northern France to collect information concerning the importance, movement and number of German troops); Portia (September 1944 to March 1945: 7 Belgian SAS commandos parachuted into the Drente region of Holland to collect information on the enemy and evaluate the possibility of establishing an SAS base); Bergbang (2nd-12th September 1944: 41 Belgian SAS parachuted into the region of Liege-Maastricht-Aachen to help local resistance efforts and cut enemy communication lines east of Meuse); Brutus (2nd September 1944: 19 Belgian SAS parachuted into eastern Meuse to make contact with the secret army and other Belgians from the 5th SAS); Fabian (September 1944 to March 1945: 5 Belgian SAS were deployed in the Arnhem region to gather information over the course of six months to pinpoint the location of V2 rocket launchers); Regent (December 1944 to January 1945: All of the 5th Belgian SAS joined British troops to hold back the German push at the Battle of Ardennes); Larkswood (April-May 1945: 2 Squadrons from the 5th Belgian SAS conducted reconnaissance for the Second Canadian Corps and the Polish armoured division during their progression into Holland).

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