

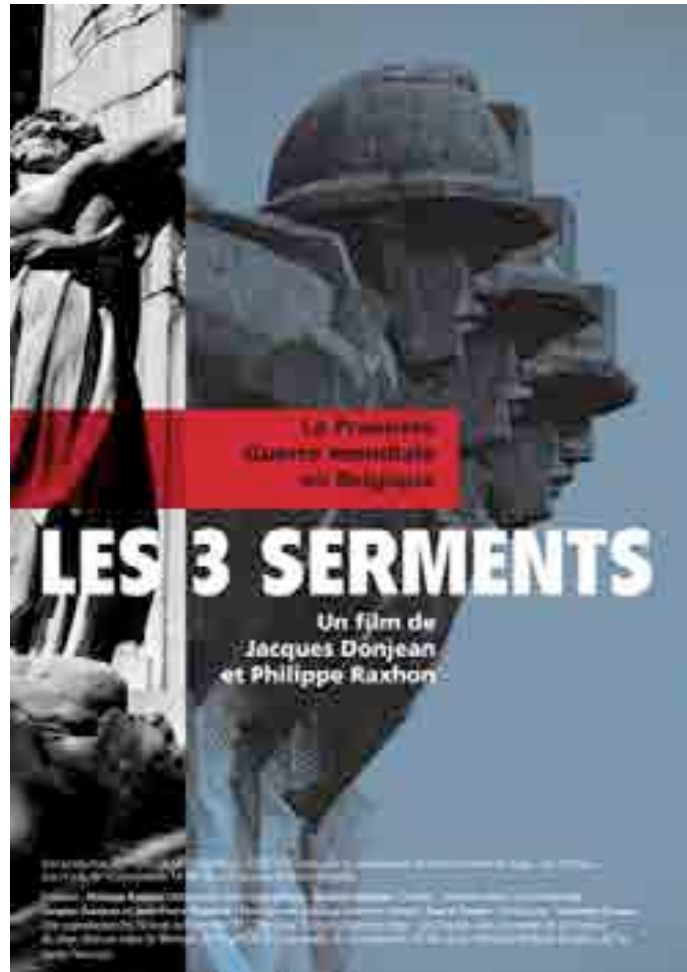
THE 3 PLEDGES

A film by Jacques DONJEAN AND Philippe RAXHON

Produced by LES FILMS DE LA PASSERELLE and RTC TÉLÉ-LIÈGE

On 4 August 1914, Germany invaded Belgium.

The Province of Liège became the “front door” to the First World War



LES FILMS DE LA PASSERELLE

62, rue de Rénory – 4031 Liège - Belgium

Tel: +32 43 42 36 02 – Fax: +32 43 43 07 20

films@passerelle.be - www.passerelle.be

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I. Summary of the film

“The Three Pledges” recounts the significant events of the First World War and the occupation of Belgium by the Germans, through the story of François, a young Belgian soldier who was 22 years old in 1914. Events force him to take three pledges, of duty, of the heart and of remembrance.

This documentary-fiction film plunges its audience into the heart of the fighting and allows it to experience the full force of the four-year-long war. It is illustrated with archive material from the period, by re-enactments of events, with images of remembrance sites today and by interviews with historians from several different countries.

“What is the value of a pledge when you are no longer master of your own destiny, when your small, peaceful, neutral homeland is invaded by the most powerful army in the world, when its population is martyred, occupied, humiliated but not beaten?”

The DVD is in four languages and is extended and complemented by five bonus features which shed light on various aspects of the Great War: “Visé, the Martyr Town”; “The Loncin Fort”; the significance of the commemoration of the First World War for historians and “The Effect of the First World War on Industry” with Professor Robert Halleux.

II. The screenplay of “The Three Pledges”

a) The Pledge of Duty

François, a 22-year-old from Visé, working as a baker in Liège, was called up into the Belgian army on 31 July 1914. On 4 August, neutral Belgium was invaded by 800,000 German soldiers, without a declaration of war. The first casualty of the First World War was killed in the Province of Liège.

François takes part in the defence of Loncin Fort. Assembled in the fort’s courtyard, the garrison of 550 men swear never to surrender. The fighting is terrifying. François manages to escape and tries to rejoin the Belgian army led by King Albert I which is continuing the fight near Antwerp.

b) The Pledge of the Heart

On the road to Antwerp, he meets civilian refugees from the fighting. One of them tells him about the massacre of civilians in Visé, and that all his family has been killed. François swears to fight on for his homeland and his family. Unable to get to Antwerp, he crosses the border into the Netherlands, which is also neutral, from where he hopes to rejoin the Belgian front line on the coast. An English spy persuades him to return to Liège to work there for the British War Office.

c) The Pledge of Remembrance

Daily life in Liège continues under the German occupation. The resistance network set up by Dieudonné Lambrecht is dismantled by the Germans and he is executed. François joins the network organised by Walthère Dewé, who swears to avenge Lambrecht’s death. Dewé’s network, known as the “Dame Blanche”, grows into the biggest First World War resistance network in Europe. Many years later, François takes up the challenge of passing on the story of what he did during the war.



III. Technical details

Director	Jacques Donjean
Screenplay	Philippe Raxhon
Producers	Christine Pireaux (Les Films de la Passerelle) Jean-Louis Radoux (RTC Télé Liège)
Assistant Director	Bernard Garant
Camera	Jean-Pierre Martial
Film Editor	Jean-Pierre Martial
Sound Mixing	Pascal Zander
Document managers	Christine Donjean Allain-Baudouin Simonis
Narrators	French: Oualid Ouahabi & Christian Crahay Dutch: Steffan Sattler & Rudi Klinkenberg English: Richard Wells & Simon Schrimpton Smith German: Hans Jaspers & Roland Ramaekers

Technical Data

Timing:

3X30' and 93'

Languages:

French – English – Dutch - German

Archives :

Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and
Military History (Brussels) - Cinematek -
CriticalPast - Museum of Walloon Life
(Liège) - Audiovisual archives of the
Belgian Ministry of Defence –
Communications Service of the Belgian
Federal Government

IV. Partners

Les Films de la Passerelle



RTC Télé Liège



Province of Liège



Commémorer 14-18



Les Chiroux Cultural Centre



Walloon Region



Royal Museum of the Armed Forces
and Military History



Liège 14-18



V. Context – The “Commémorer 14-18” Programme

This year will see the first commemorations of the centenary of the First World War. This is an opportunity to raise awareness among the general public, both the older and younger generations, both in Belgium and abroad.

Historians of the Great War describe this conflict as setting new heights of violence. Belgium suffered many atrocities during those four years. The massacres of more than 5,000 civilians in August 1914, the entire destruction of several towns, the generalised violence both on and off the battlefield, the exodus of refugees, the rigours of the occupation by the German army, the deportations and the repression of the civilian population all exceeded anything that had gone before, from 1914 right up until 1918.



Allied war memorial at Cointe (Liège) © P Donjean

VI. Statement by Philippe Raxhon (Screenwriter and historian)

a. An exceptional commemorative context: the centenary of the First World War

This documentary-fiction film was made in the exceptional context of the centenary of the First World War, without doubt the most important international, worldwide commemoration of our era, which has mobilised a diverse range of government remembrance resources.

b. What was special about Liège in a world at war?

The Great War began in the Province of Liège. The first casualty of the First World War was killed on its territory. Liège was the scene of the drama, the *brutalisation* of the twentieth century. The people of Liège were hit by the full force of the German assault, which struck both the recently mobilised Belgian soldiers as well as the civilians massacred in cold blood. However, Liège offered unexpected and heroic resistance to what was then the biggest army in the world, some 800,000 troops, who had violated Belgian neutrality without declaring war.

Loncin Fort became a symbol: it was besieged and did not surrender.

In the wider context of the Great War, these events in August 1914 were short and densely packed and traumatised the population more than ever before. They were flashed around the world, which was shocked at what had happened to "*Poor Little Belgium*" and surprised by the fighting spirit of the Belgian army led by King Albert I.

The Liège region, like the other provinces of Belgium, then suffered under a brutal military occupation for four years, when daily life was difficult and the population experienced "total war". The Belgian soldiers on the Western Front were cut off from their families in the rest of Belgium, behind the German front line. Liège was part of this "impossible rear" which was under enemy control. In these dark days, resistance was organised in the shadows, using networks and individuals in a clandestine conflict which went hand-in-hand with the interminable daily struggle to survive. In the wider context of the war, the occupation went on for a long time and, although most events were less dramatic than at the start, Liège is a good example of the specific problems encountered in Belgium during the First World War, which would inform memories of the war after the end of hostilities.

VII. Statement by Jacques Donjean (director)

The aim of this documentary-fiction film is clearly not to re-enact the whole First World War, but rather to look with present-day eyes at the events that took place in the Province of Liège and more widely in Belgium during the German occupation from 1914 to 1918.

Through interviews with historians (from several countries), film archives, photographs, re-enacted scenes and a fictional narrative storyline, this film aims to piece together the jigsaw puzzle so that we can understand what was at stake, the difficulties and the tragedies, and thus highlight the memories of history brought to life for audiences of all ages.



From a practical point of view, we filmed the remembrance sites which still today bear the scars of war (among others, the forts around Liège) and also the countryside of the Meuse valley (helped by the tugboat “Atlas V”). Understanding the significance of the statues and memorials we see every day without knowing why they were erected, is important.

Some of the re-enactments used actors in costume (but without dialogue), especially at Loncin Fort. The locations used for filming are an important part of the remembrance heritage of the Province of Liège, the Walloon Region and Belgium in general. The film is a unique opportunity to see and experience the local places where the Great War was played out.

VIII. Experts interviewed in the film



- Francis Balace (University of Liège, Belgium): military events.
- Sophie de Schaepdrijver (Pennsylvania State University, USA): Belgium at war.
- Annette Becker (University of Paris-Nanterre, France): Daily privations suffered by the Belgian civilian population.
- Michel Dumoulin (Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium): the economic aspects of the First World War in Belgium.
- Robert Halleux (University of Liège, Belgium): The impact of the First World War on industry in the Province of Liège.
- Emmanuel Debruyne (Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium): Resistance and espionage.
- Gerd Krumeich (University of Düsseldorf, Germany): The German view of the First World War.
- Christophe Brüll (University of Liège, Belgium): The First World War as experienced by the German-speaking community in the Province of Liège.
- Christine Van Everbroeck (Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and Military History, Brussels, Belgium): The Flemish Nationalist movement during the First World War.
- Laurence Van Ypersele (Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium): The memorialisation of the First World War in Belgium.

IX. Themes

The historical themes developed in the narration and interwoven with the fictional story are those taken up by the “*Commémorer 14-18 en Belgique francophone*” group and programme of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. They are also endorsed the most recent and in-depth historiography of today:

- The fighting in August 1914: the war of movement.
- The resistance of the Belgian army to the invasion (in particular in Liège and at the Loncin Fort).
- Involvement of other armies: British (Mons) and French (Luxembourg, Charleroi /Sambre).
- War violence: civilian massacres in August/September 1914 and the “martyr towns”.
- Breaches of international law and war crimes.
- Use of German violence against civilians in Allied propaganda and its consequences after the war.
- The Western Front: static trench warfare.
- The Battle of the Yser.
- Occupied Belgium and the civilian population’s experience of total war.
- The German military occupation regime.
- Economic destruction under the occupation.
- Resistance (reasons and types) and collaboration (economic and political).
- Daily life.
- International aid and support.
- Exile and deportations (huge numbers of Belgian refugees in France, the UK and the Netherlands; Forced labour; Deportations).
- Liberation of Belgium.
- The post-war era.
- Universal suffrage and democracy.
- Military and Civilian remembrance of the war: war memorials, military cemeteries, remembrance ceremonies, commemorations, images and representations of the war and its protagonists.
- The peace treaties and their consequences.
- The impact of the war on inter-war Belgium, in 1940 and during the Second World War.
- The language and community questions in Belgium.

X. The transmission of memories

The Three Pledges is part of history, because it recounts historical events and facts, but it is also part of the remembrance process. Memory is the presence of the past in Society, and its expression is part of our day-to-day environment.

The history of the Great War is all around us, in the memories of our contemporaries, in war memorials and in remembrance ceremonies, and it creates vivid memories for all those who want to learn the huge and terrible lessons of this worldwide conflagration. *The Three Pledges* would like to create a bridge between the past and the present; to pass on factual memories of this dark period in history to help each of us understand the present. It is also a tool that allows us to learn about, analyse, understand and recreate the diverse themes it covers.

Based on our remembrance heritage, which bear witness to the past, the film invites its audience to follow the remembrance trail of the First World War. The film sheds light on the heritage sites linked to “the war to end all wars”, a painful event which profoundly touched previous generations and which still affects us today.



Theux war memorial

Nieuwpoort war memorial Photos © J Donjean