

## INSTITUTE HISTORY WORKSHEET

### TOPIC: Mère Maria Julienne (1912-1934)

#### World War I: Impact on SNDdeN Belgium and SNDdeN in General

**Two primary sources of information:** Mary Elizabeth Towneley (Life of Sister Marie des Saints Anges) and Life of Our Venerated Mère Maria Julienne (linked on this page: <https://www.sndohio.org/sisters-notre-dame/access-files> )

#### People & Relationships between them:

- Bishop Heylen in Namur
- Mère Maria Julienne
- Sister Marie des Saints Anges (in charge of English affairs, Postulant Mistress)
- Sister Thérèse de St. François (Superior at Namur, Assistant)
- Sister Mary Borgia (Superior of east of the Rockies in USA)
- Queen Victoria's Nephews (England, Russia, Germany)
- Millicent, Duchess of Sutherland

[https://books.google.com/books?id=1TA7AwAAQBAJ&pg=PA35&lpg=PA35&dq=duchess+of+sutherland+namur+belgium&source=bl&ots=Er8KzGjGcb&sig=ACfU3U3gF9rBfNHUWWHDAFZi4Ik9\\_Y5ibQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwippanht9X4AhUPGFkFHcK\\_CNwQ6AF6BAgPEAM#v=onepage&q=duchess%20of%20sutherland%20namur%20belgium&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=1TA7AwAAQBAJ&pg=PA35&lpg=PA35&dq=duchess+of+sutherland+namur+belgium&source=bl&ots=Er8KzGjGcb&sig=ACfU3U3gF9rBfNHUWWHDAFZi4Ik9_Y5ibQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwippanht9X4AhUPGFkFHcK_CNwQ6AF6BAgPEAM#v=onepage&q=duchess%20of%20sutherland%20namur%20belgium&f=false)

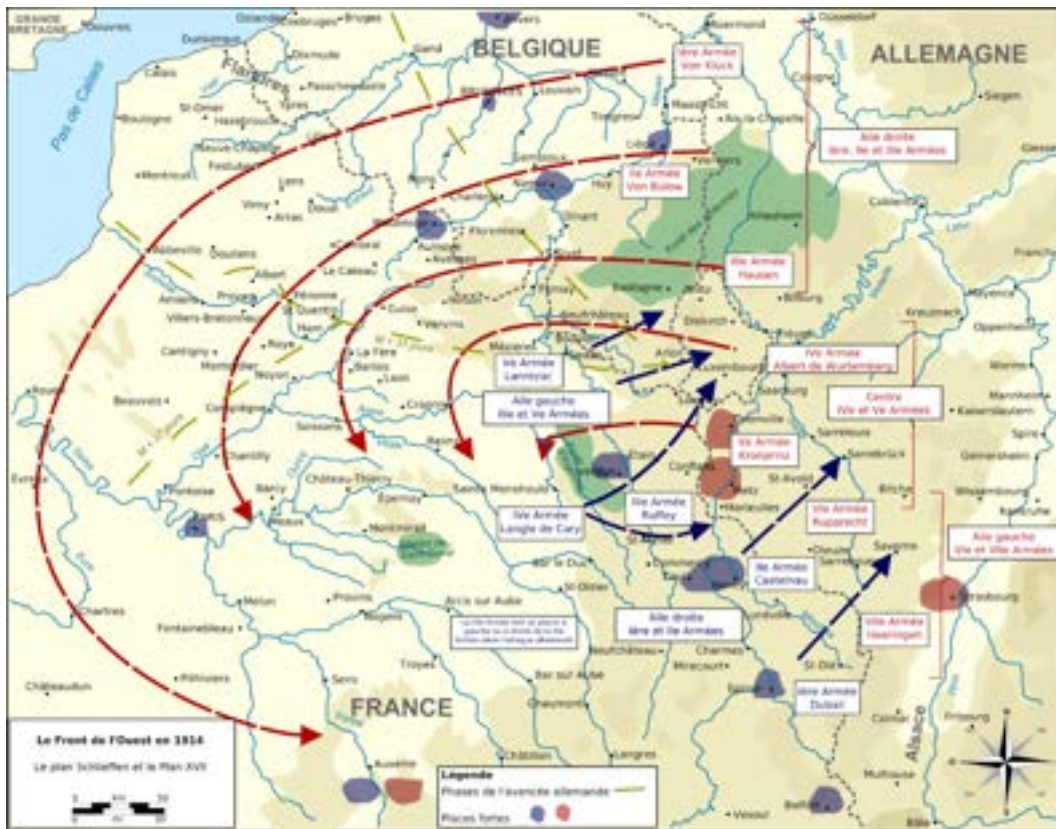
- President Woodrow Wilson
- General Pershing (in charge of U.S. forces)

#### Places:



**Visé:** convent destroyed during WWI and SNDdeN did not return there

**Dinant:** story of Sisters' fleeing



**Suggested video:**

<https://www.knowitall.org/video/world-war-i-history-nutshell>

### **Dates & Events:**

#### **• General:**

- War begins July 28, 1914 and ends November 11, 1918
- Roughly 40 million casualties (9-11 million military & 6-13 million civilians; the rest wounded & missing)

#### **• Belgium:**

- Siege of Namur begins August 4 – very sudden, felt like no warning
- Sisters stay up all night making horses' food bags for cavalry & bandages; preparing to receive the wounded
- Sisters provide coffee, sandwiches & soup for soldiers, not asked house soldiers
- Precious objects hidden away - many walled up in cellars
- August 22/23, 1914 - shelling of Namur; Sisters shelter under Convent Church; Sister Marie des Saints Anges and secretary watch attack from Novitiate attics
- August 25, 1914 Namur falls; Germans intend to burn entire town and IS burning parts of town
- Mère Maria Julienne informed of German intent but doesn't tell the Sisters
- Bishop Heylen convinces German commander to stop burning town; taken hostage to assure town's cooperation; saving of town seen as intervention of Blessed Virgin
- August 25, 1914 Germans break into motherhouse and search for arms
- Namur abruptly and completely severed from news of outside world
- Between beginning of siege and fall of Namur, Mère Maria Julienne sends a communication to all secondary houses: both a letter and a postcard in case the letter doesn't get through. Gist of

message: we're ok; if you don't hear from me about a needed decision pray and act for the best; stay united in prayer

- Elementary school on rue des Lombards & part of boarding school transformed into hospital & Red Cross Ambulance center sponsored by the Duchess of Sutherland (1914-1915)
- Sisters at Namur work to care for 200+ wounded
- Other houses also serve as hospitals
- Sisters put themselves under protection of heaven: extra prayers
- Cruelty of German warfare: bombing churches, looting stores, patrolling streets, random shooting of civilians to make an example of them.
- Convent at Visé burnt & community forced to flee to Holland, then Scotland— Sisters never return to Visé
- Dinant Community flee to Namur
- 100 + Sisters from Antwerp area flee to England
- German SNDdeN sent to Amersfoort for safety during war; some sent to Germany
- September 1914 – battle impacts Cuvilly
- SNDdeN work in Belgium crippled by occupation of Germans: asap poor schools reopen to keep children safe; most boarding schools closed 1-2 years; Namur boarding school closed 4 years
- Mère Maria Julienne insists we take the poor children before paying students;
- For centenary of Julie's death in 1916 Mère Maria Julienne manages to provide a new dress for each student at poor schools
- Postulants & novices continued to be received in Belgium, vows made (healthy number of vocations); visitation of secondary houses in Belgium continued
- Lack of sleep & proper food, severe rationing; lack of heat & light; Namur shares resources with smaller houses that can't get food
- Namur convent buildings inundated by water in floods of December 1915 & New Year's 1917
- Huge difficulties w/English Sisters in Belgium when War breaks out – Mère Marie Julienne orders Sister Marie des Saints Anges to England w/English Sisters (she needs to be able to see to English affairs)
- Difficulty w/passports & travel = months for Marie des Saints Anges to get 34 English Sisters & herself out of Belgium (departs Namur June 21, 1915 – returns Feb. 1919)
- Marie des Saints Anges cares for England, Southern Africa & Congo from Clapham
- Air raids in London; Zeppelin attacks at Northampton
- June, 1918 – Cuvilly takes heavy damage
- 1918 retreating German troops occupy convent after convent forcing Sisters to evacuate - Mère Maria Julienne frequently went in person to help Sisters; people are generous offering shelter to Sisters & places for classrooms
- October 1918 increased bombardments forced Sisters to sleep in cellars
- Towards the end of the war, the Mayor of Namur shot under charges of espionage, which prompted Sisters to burn diaries & other written accounts of experiences to prevent any suspicions of spying
- Sister who wanted to pray in the chapel after curfew: light of the candle caught attention of a patrolling soldier who shot at her
- Normal School at Namur moved closer to Community but a Novice & Postulant still killed by shrapnel November 9, 1918

- Rumor Namur would need to be evacuated – Mère Maria Julienne spends long day at German Headquarters to get guarantee of safety of community
- By November 21, 1918 English troops are being housed in Namur
- Mère Maria Julienne seen as "heroine of the war"; she later confided in a Sister: "I emptied all the cash boxes of the Institute, but my Sisters did not suffer from hunger."
- Changes in Canon Law a direct result of war (?)
- **England & Scotland:**
  - Sisters impacted from 1914 on: rationing and fear of attack, not able to send novices to Namur
  - Becomes easier once Sister Marie des Saints Anges is on English soil
  - Tremendous generosity of taking in Sisters from Belgium
  - Anxiety for Sisters in Belgium – they know them.
- **In America:** U.S. does not enter the war until Spring of 1917
  - President Wilson is a pacifist; declares neutrality and tries to broker peace
  - Sisters in U.S. greatly anxious for Sisters in Europe: send prayers, letters and financial assistance
  - Communities' efforts for end of war & peace multiply
  - Communication w/Namur becomes possible after occupation & financial assistance begins to flow toward Belgium
  - All communities are asked to cut down expenses & self-ration to make more financial aid possible
  - If Sisters' families give gifts of money – Sisters are asked to consider donating them to the Belgian Relief Fund.
  - Alumnae step up to help raise money for the Belgian Relief fund
  - Anti-German sentiment grows after their attack on neutral Belgium
  - May 7, 1916: sinking of the Lusitania by German torpedo; 128 U.S. citizens killed
  - November 7, 1916: Woodrow Wilson re-elected under campaign slogan 'He Kept Us Out of War'
  - March 1, 1917: U.S. is alerted about the Zimmermann Telegram (German attempt to get Mexico to enter the war)
  - April 1, 1917 the steamer Aztec is torpedoed and 18 U.S. citizens are killed
  - April 6, 1917 the U.S. declares war
  - June 25, 1917 the 1st American draftees are chosen (only 175,000 U.S. G.I.'s in Europe by end of 1917; 10,000 a day arriving by mid-1918)
- **In Cincinnati :**
  - A movement begins to bar teaching of German in 1-8th grades (law passed by State in 1919 does just that)
  - Mass is no longer said in German
  - Streets with German names are renamed
  - German newspapers go out of business
  - German books & periodicals are removed from circulation in the public library
  - Once U.S. entered war rationing of food, coal and gas begin. Weekly reports of the amount of flour, rye, barley, potatoes, sugar and shortening consumed – failure to report meant losing Baker's License.
  - March 8, 1918: Spanish Flu Epidemic begins with 1st reported case at Fort Riley, Kansas
  - American impact on key battles beginning in June, 1918 help bring about the armistice.

## **Experiences at Visé & Dinant**

### **Visé**

One of the first stops the German army made across the Belgian border was a town call Visé, home to a Notre Dame community. Within days of hearing Germany declare war on France, the people of Visé heard rumors of an approaching German army. Some people fled, while others armed themselves and fortified forts. When the rumors of the approaching army was confirmed, the Belgians blew up the bridge over the Meuse River. The Germans were surprised at the resistance the Belgians showed and were frustrated at finding their route over the Meuse River disrupted. With the bridge blown up, the army was effectively trapped in the town. The frustrated Germans took out their anger on the town – blowing up buildings, firing at resisters, and eventually occupying the town. Once they took over Visé, the army continued damaging buildings, including bombing the church, looting stores, and patrolling streets, where they would take fathers and sons out of their homes and shoot them in the streets to make an example of them.

It is very hard to accurately describe the terror and horror that the Sisters felt. It was hard to eat, difficult to sleep – fear was constant and panic was universal. These feelings were compounded when the German officers took the Superior and a younger Sister as hostages. Taking hostages was a common tactic to keep people from opposing their martial rules – breaking curfews, hiding contraband weapons, hiding food. So the Sisters and the mayor and dean of the town were taken to a farm on the outskirts of town where they were placed in a small, dirty room with one window and two chairs. They had little to eat, could not leave, and were watched by soldiers guarding the door. Eventually, the Sisters were released after 3 days, much to the relief of the community. While the Superior and Sister were held hostage, the Germans continued to shoot at buildings and bomb buildings. Not long after the Sisters returned, a German General declared that Visé must be punished, so the town was set on fire. The Sister who wrote the diary account that described the events of Visé wrote of how the Sisters panicked and fled from their home, while she rushed to grab the hosts from the tabernacle of their chapel, before rushing to catch up with them. The Sisters join hundreds of refugees fleeing Visé to the safety of the Netherlands. If they turned around, they would see their town, their home burning. The Sisters were taken in along their journey to the ND community in Scotland.

### **Dinant:**

Dinant faced similar experiences as that of Visé. The town heard rumors of an approaching army, the German army quickly arrived and easily overpowered any Belgian resistance fighters defending the town. Because Dinant borders the Meuse River, the Sisters were unable to flee the invading army. They watched in horror as the town was bombed, bullets littered the walls of buildings, and families of some of the Sisters were taken out of their homes and shot in the streets. Shots were fired into the convent, but miraculously, the bullets stopped just before the painting of St Julie. After a couple days of German occupation, fire-setting brigades marched up and down the streets, dowsing curtains and roofs with flammable liquid. The Sisters watch as the fire spread from their school to their convent. They grabbed the painting of St Julie and joined the other refugees fleeing Dinant. The Sisters stayed 1 week in a nearby town in the home of another religious order. 29 Sisters shared 1 room, 2 chairs, 2 plates, and 1 cup. After a week, the Sisters continued their exodus to Namur where they found shelter and food.

### **Recommended to read:**

**To the Last Man** by Jeffrey Shaara (a well-researched novel that tells the story from the German, American & Allied perspective)

**Women in the War Zone: Hospital Service in the First World War** by Anne Powell; pages 35-43 are chapter titled Millicent, Duchess of Sutherland and recount experiences at Namur. It can be found on Google Books. After clicking the link, click the “close this search” option right side of the yellow bar:

[https://books.google.com/books?id=I6ETDQAAQBAJ&pg=PT42&dq=duchess+of+sutherland+namur+belgium&source=gbp\\_toc\\_r&cad=3#v=onepage&q=duchess%20of%20sutherland%20namur%20belgium&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=I6ETDQAAQBAJ&pg=PT42&dq=duchess+of+sutherland+namur+belgium&source=gbp_toc_r&cad=3#v=onepage&q=duchess%20of%20sutherland%20namur%20belgium&f=false)