

NATO MEMORIAL FRETHUN

Since the end of World War II, the French Army have taken part in operations led by international organizations primarily NATO and the United Nations.

Willy Breton, a French soldier serving with the Gendarmerie Nationale, returned from his third tour in Afghanistan in 2010, with the desire to honour the memory of two colleagues who were based near Kabul, both were killed in combat during their mission in Afghanistan.

Willy Breton was deeply touched by the mark of respect paid by other soldiers from allied NATO countries who lined the route on which the bodies of his comrades in arms were transported on their way to the military air base in Kabul. All the soldiers from the different Nations spontaneously formed a guard of honour along the path of the escorted soldiers for a final salute to both victims.

Willy decided to do everything he could to make the memory of his comrades live among us, an idea came to him to create a memorial dedicated to all military personnel who died whilst serving under the banner of NATO since World War II.

With two Associations, the AECOPSD (European Association of Corps and Organisms of Security and Defence) for which Willy is Chancellor, and CNAMFSA (Cercle National of French Veterans Militaries stationed in Germany) whose President is Philippe Lyoen, and with the support of the town of Fréthun, whose Mayor is Catherine Fournier, Willy set about making his idea a reality.

Fréthun was chosen as it has the advantage of being central to its surrounding NATO members and is connected to London, United Kingdom, Brussels, Belgium and Paris by Calais Fréthun International Railway Station. With the consent and support from the people of Fréthun and the NATO authorities, the NATO Memorial has been constructed in the town.

The Memorial was inaugurated on 25th February 2012 in the presence of National Representatives from France, Consular and Military representatives from NATO member countries, and the families of victims who fell whilst serving on a NATO mission. Also in attendance were associations such as Souvenir Français, Associations from Belgium who are members of the Royal Entente in Belgium, and representatives of the United Kingdom charity organisation Help for Heroes.

The significant presence of two young British soldiers who were both injured during their tour of duty in Afghanistan paid their respects to the fallen. Craig Wood, who was serving with the 2nd Regiment of Rifles, was injured by a land mine exploding causing serious wounds to three of his limbs, which resulted in a triple amputation operation.

The second Soldier was standing next to Craig when he suffered the injuries, it was by the quick actions of Alex Bauer that Craig's life was saved, Alex donated a kidney to Craig showing his resolve to a close friend and making sure Craig survived post the initial blast injuries being treated.

Lt. Eric Smallwood, 2nd Royal Tank Regiment, who is a veteran of World War II, was also present at the inauguration. Eric holds the honour of being the first tank commander into Hamburg at the cessation of the war, he took the surrender of the German Forces in Hamburg before going on to Berlin, where he was introduced to Field Marshal Zhukov, commander of the Red Army, here Eric was briefed on the permissions granted by Zhukov permitting allied troops to enter east Berlin.

The NATO Memorial is for the remembrance all those soldiers who have sacrificed their lives whilst serving under the banner of NATO, it also permits their families, friends and supporters to gather and offer their prayers and thoughts of their loved ones who have died in the line of preserving peace all over the world.

The NATO Memorial is dedicated to preserve the memory of those who have fallen, but it is also to encourage and involve new generations to promote the duty of Remembrance both at European and International level.

The Federation of the NATO Memorial administers the Memorial, Mr Philippe Lyoen is the President, and Mr Willy Breton holds the position of First Vice President.

The Memorial Federation currently has 16,707 members from all NATO member countries; both Individual membership and Association membership are actively sought. There is no cost to becoming a member.

World Peace is often difficult to maintain both in the international context and along with the economic and political interests constantly interacting thereby weakening the balance of world stability. By creating a strong relationship with a focus on international relations, through diplomacy, will have an important continuing role to play, it is with this in mind the NATO Memorial is a reminder of those who have strived to achieve this stability and preserve the balance which we all hope can be the pivotal point on which peace and harmony will be achieved with an on going and lasting effect.

Marie-Pierre Williams,

NATO Memorial British liaison