

**EVENT:** AMI annual Plenary Conference in Retie, Belgium

VALUE: Strategic

Cost: 8 GO days

DETAILS:

7-14 Sept. 12 drove to Lexington and flew to **Brussels, BE** took the train through Belgium to Antwerp where AMI folks met us for Mass in the Cathedral with the Military Archbishop (and primate) of Belgium. Together with CH (LTC-P) Matt Pawlikowski represented the US military (and all Americans) in interaction with several senior officials including 5 bishops and three other generals, the deputy mayor of Antwerp, Governor of that province, member of the Flemish Parliament and he head of the Belgian Military Academy. All were pleased with American cooperation. Facilitated the English-language speaking group (9 nations), which was twice the size of the only other group (German), and produced that report on developing future forms of remembrance of sacrifice while reducing battlefield fear.

Observations:

- (1) Parallel to years of attendance at AMI conferences in Europe by a EUCOM Protestant chaplain, having Fr. Matt there was much better. [He helped by drinking with the crew and also with the final paper we condensed from the discussion. If he can participate with me next year in Slovenia, the hand-off to him (who should be a COL by then) will be complete. However, the AMI folks really like having a Catholic priest who is a GO there as long as we can.] International friendships built over the years pay great dividends.
- (2) The US is not a member of AMI (because we lack the connecting piece of a lay-led organization that actually represents military members), but the AMI leadership and delegates really like our participation because of our huge numbers of military Catholics and because they like seeing us as a World Partner. Other nations took the lead but we contributed significantly in right and proper ways.
- (3) Our one leadership action was with that working group because I had done so last year in the Philippines to their satisfaction. In the 75 minutes given us we synthesized and built upon 10 worthwhile and deep presentations. [The British delegation even approved of our writing.]
- (4) US contributions included: (a) The further one is from an ongoing threat, the less bitterness in remembering sacrifices; (b) US distinction between a Ramp or Memorial ceremony for the unit vs. a Service for the deceased and family; (c) European keeping the body present for the unit ceremonies vs. US having only the boots and ID tags; (d) The idea that hope overcomes fear and that such hope can come from (secular) ideas of pushing back a frontier or (Catholic, AMI) trust in the mercy of the Savior.
- (5) Questions arose about a need for a new style of memorializing for the millennial generation, allowing input into ceremony design and use of technology. However, the new generation needs also some guidance both because they are inexperienced and don't know the depth of some rituals as well as the general lack of "profound experiences" and emphasis on fleeting events that pervade their environment. The UK delegation emphasized that traditions, particularly within military units, are still highly regarded as "entrance into a tribe" and hence bestow a value that contributes to one's identity, which is needed in every generation.