Every Friday and Saturday from 20 June to 26 July 2008, 600 volunteers of the “Connaissance de la Meuse” organisation will make us relive one of the most important conflict of the world:

**THE BATTLE OF VERDUN**

300 French and German actors on stage, 900 costumes, 1000 spotlights, 40 kilometres of cable, special effects for an imposing historical fresco played in an outstanding site in VERDUN

A moment full of emotion...

For one hour and twenty minutes, you first will be told about the events of the Edwardian era that will lead to the Great War. Then you will be plunged in the “hell of Verdun” with its daily fate of suffering and distress. Whether in the French or German trenches, soldiers suffered the same lot: cold, mud, louses and rats. Sometimes, they had a little respite at the rear in spite of their nights haunted by desperate and often vain fights.

After that, you will see the tragedy many evacuated civilians lived when they saw their devastated villages. Finally, you will share the immense joy of the armistice, the happiness of the regained Peace in spite of millions of missing, invalid or refugee people…

The show “Des flammes…à la lumière” ends on Peace a message of hope.

This message has an exceptional echo in Verdun which is the symbol of reconciliation.
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INTRODUCTION

The battle of Verdun in some words

At the beginning of 1916, the Staff officers of the German armies thought that France was on its knees. It wishes to lead a decisive battle which would allow them to definitively destroy the French army in order to face the English. That is why the site of Verdun was chosen. Actually, this zone forming a salient in the German Defence was both little protected and difficult to provide.

The battle of Verdun started on February 21, 1916 with the heaviest bombing that had ever taken place in a war. On February 25, General de Castelnau arrived in Verdun and ordered to resist hardly to the German attacks. Besides, he entrusted the command of the Verdun defence to General PETAIN.

From February 26th, confronted to a dramatic situation, General PETAIN took several decisions: he divided the front in four sectors, rearmed the forts and settled a line of resistance.

The road from Bar le Duc to Verdun, “la Voie sacrée” became strategic to provide the fight areas and to allow the relief of the soldiers. A ceaseless flow of Berliet lorries (the Noria) covered the 60 kilometres separating Verdun and bar le Duc. About 13000 fighters, 6400 tons of equipment, 1500 tons of ammunitions were daily transported on this road.

Fort Douaumont was captured on February 25 and fort Vaux on June 7 cut in spite of these two captures, the German strategy was a defeat. The French counter-attack started in November and fort Douaumont and fort Vaux were recaptured respectively on October 24 and November 3rd.

On December 18 1916, after 10 months of fight, Verdun had not fallen.

Today, numerous sites recall the of this battle: the citadel of Verdun, the memorial of Fleury, Fort Vaux, fort Douaumont, the ossuary of Douaumont, the destroyed villages, the show “Des flammes… à la lumière”,…

THE ROLE OF FORT VAUX, FORT DOUAUMONT AND THE CITADEL OF VERDUN IN THE BATTLE OF VERDUN

VAUX FORT

Small fort of Séré de Rivières, it was built from 1881 till 1884. It was strengthened from 1888. In 1915, it was demilitarized. Its garrison was abolished and its two casemates were disarmed. The fort according to the staff officers had become useless because of the use of torpedo shells which could perforate platings. Yet, they proved to be effective ramparts against the enemy progress but the Staff officers will only become aware of it a little later.

In 1916, the fort was bombarded. The dissolution of the “Région Fortifiée de Verdun” (The fortified region of Verdun) by Petain had for consequence, the arrival of a fixed garrison which from, June 2 to June 7 1916, under Major Raynal’s orders resisted to the 50th German division. Fort Vaux was taken on June 7 after heroic resistance. From this moment, the fort was bombed by the French army. The fort was recaptured on November 3 1916. It was rearm ed. It remained important until November 1918.
DOUAUMONT FORT

It was started in 1885 and became by its volume the first fort of the Verdun area in 1914. Its garrison was composed of an infantry company, artillerymen of the 5th regiment, elements of the engineer corps and fortification auxiliaries. They all had to insure the logistic for 7 officers and 477 non-commissioned officers and soldiers. It was disarmed in 1915 as all forts in the region.

On February 21 1916 when the battle of Verdun started, the fort was bombed. It was taken by the Germans on February 25. As the fort was over viewing the battlefield, it was an excellent look-out post. It was also used as a warehouse for the equipment. It was equipped with kitchens, ammunition dumps and all the necessary things to insure the day to day life of a barrack in the middle of an artillery battle.

The French bombings to recapture the fort were heavy. That is why the 52nd German regiment of infantry to entrench itself in the fort. It was then overpopulated and the infirmaries were crowded. On May 8, at night, there were three violent explosions in the fort. 679 German soldiers were killed and 1800 wounded.

On October 24 1916, the Moroccan Regiment of Colonial Infantry recaptured the fort without fighting.

VERDUN CITADEL

Built by Vauban during the XVII th century on a religious site, it was converted by the army into a logistic centre of Verdun.

The underground galleries were started in 1887. They were able to shelter and provide 2000 men. They were equipped with 6 powder stores, 7 ammunition dumps, a bakery with two kneading machines and 9 ovens, a mill, the radio, a telegraph centre, machines that were able to supply the town and the forts with water, kitchen and huge stores. As soon as 1914, offices and officers rooms were fitted out. An electric ventilation and a steam heater were installed…

The main galleries (4.5 metres of width) were connected with the upper part of the citadel by two staircases, one of which was a 90 stair spiral staircase. If the enemy had been able to take position in the upper part, the infrastructures of the lower part would have allowed the garrison to continue to play an active role in the defence of Verdun.

The galleries were also connected to the railway by a 330 metres long access tunnel which was insuring the supply of the troops. The lower part of the citadel played an important role in the logistics of the battle. For example, the ovens in the bakery worked twenty-four hours a day.

All these sites are open to the public all year round (except in January)

Texts from the Internet site of the General Council of the Meuse and the Roads of Memory.
As soon as 1915, there were American soldiers in Meuse. Indeed, American volunteer ambulance units transported the wounded Poilus. The next year, the famous Lafayette Escadrille was near Verdun.

**April 1917** : The USA entered the war. In June 1917, the soldiers of the American Expeditionary Force arrived in the south of Meuse. The cannons, machines guns, guns and munitions were supplied by the French. The French supervised the training of the American soldiers.

**The first phase of the offensive : Reducing the salient of Saint-Mihiel.**

The American First Army under the command of General Pershing was entrusted by Marshal Foch to take back control of the salient of saint Mihiel which had been held by the Germans since September 1914. The first major American offensive involving the American Expeditionary Force and 48,000 French troops took place on 12 September 1918. The American succeeded quickly. In only three days, they took back control of the Salient.

**The second phase of the offensive: The sector between the river Meuse and the Argonne forest.**

Ten days later, on 26 September 1918, 400 000 Americans, 100 000 French and considerable equipments were involved in the second major offensive: the Meuse-Argonne offensive. The Germans with their solid fortification, resisted with pugnacity until November. Forced to retreat, they were pushed away to the North of the “departement”. This battle was the last attack of the First World War. It was also for the Americans their first major operation outside their country.

**11 November 1918 : the Armistice**

The colossal involvement of Americans with about a million troops accelerated the ending of the war. The signature of the Armistice on 11 November 1918 put an end to the hostilities.

**The adaptation of the “Event Show” 2008**

“Des flammes ... à la lumière”

For the commemoration of both the 90th anniversary of the American offensives in Meuse and of the Armistice, a new dimension has been given to the show. The scenography has been adapted to interrelate the 1918’s events.

The adaptation pertains mainly on the creation of two new stages : the first one is about the Meuse-Argonne offensive and the second one is about the Armistice.

Numerous developments are planned :

- creation of cinematic news ;
- new costumes ;
- new Backgrounds and accessories : a 75mm cannon, an armoured car, …
1 - WHY THIS SHOW?

A MESSAGE TO THE SERVICE OF MEMORY AND TO PEACE

Verdun has been one of the most horrifying battlefields of the Great War.

On February 21st, 1916, one of the biggest battle man had ever seen, started in Verdun.

French and German soldiers lived in this place, a real “hell”. Hundreds of thousand men were mobilized in a cruel confrontation, during which more than 300,000 died, buried beneath the soil of Meuse. The survivors have since testified the horror, the inconceivable… but also the brotherhood.

The Event Show “Des flammes … à la lumière”
A poignant tribute to hundred thousands combatants

Years pass, the last First World War French veteran have died. The death of the last Poilu, Lazare Ponticelli, toppled over the First World War in the History. Today, memory, the will not to forget, to understand and to work for Peace remain.

The duty of Memory becomes a duty of citizenship, a duty of reflexion about conflicts. The show “Des flammes … à la lumière” is a powerful demonstration of such wills.

Hope, refusal of the indifference and commitment are the main points of the message given by the show.

Today, Verdun is the world capital of Peace. Its most powerful symbol has been the long handshake between President Mitterrand and Chancellor Kohl.
A young Belgian, Sandrine, a young French, Jean-Michel and a young German, Frederick, aged 20, meet in Verdun. Their grandparents were soldiers during the first world war that’s why they are in Verdun to take part in a show about the Battle of Verdun as volunteers. This show is an evocation and not a recreation of History. It recalls their grandparents’ life during the war and make them wonder about Peace.

Hélène (Sandrine's great grandmother) accused to help the French as many Belgian, ran away from German troops with her family. While her parents continued their road, she stopped in Verdun and worked as a medical aid at the hospital of Vadelaincourt. She tells about her life in the rear through postcards she sends.

Jean (Jean-Michel's great grandfather), a school teacher from Brittany, is mobilized in 1914 as many others. From this moment till the end of the war, he writes the events, his feelings and his reflections about the life of a common sergeant confronted with the horror of the war, in a diary.

Karl (Frederick’s great grandfather); German lieutenant quartered in Verdun, writes to his wife. His letters express his despair in front of men's killing madness: he even asks his wife to tell their daughter, one day, about the drama of this conflict...

The great grandparent’s relates testimonies of the period from 1914 to 1918 and also what happened after the war until today: from war to peace, from the flames...to the light...

So the actors make us live the key periods of the war, in the heart of the fights, but also the endless periods of expectation and the moments of the day to day life. At the rear, men and women of both camps suffer of the same troubles and wonder about the sense of the things they are living.

At the end of the battle of Verdun, in December, 1916, Karl and Jean are both seriously wounded. They are transported to the hospital of Vadelaincourt. Some days later, Karl dies from his terrible wounds. Jean, survive with his left leg paralyzed. At the hospital, Jean and Karl created privileged strong links with
Hélène who will maintain a continue correspondence with Karl’s wife and Jean. She will pursue her work as a medical aid till the end of the war and will only go back to Belgium in 1920.

During the inauguration of the Ossuary of Douaumont, in 1927, Hélène introduces Jean to Ingrid, Karl’s wife. In 1936, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the battle of Verdun, she also makes him meet Karl’s son-in-law who was then an opponent of Hitler.

Then in 1986, during a pilgrimage in Verdun, Jean and his great grandson, Jean-Michel have a conversation about Peace.

For the 90th anniversary of the American offensives in Meuse and of the Armistice, the meeting of Sandrine, Frederick and Jean-Michel in Verdun and during this show, is a symbol. The commitment of some of the volunteer actors in favour of a permanent fight against the hatred, and not in favour of an utopian peace goes further.

“Wouldn’t it be high time for the dead persons and those of all wars to open the eyes of the living people just as the living people have closed the eyes of the dead ones?”
3. THE WELCOMED PERSONALITIES AND SPECTATORS

A. THE WELCOMED PERSONALITIES

Since 1996, various French and foreign personalities were welcomed and have increased the fame of this show.

Among the personalities, some wrote their impressions on the visitor’s book:

• **The Duke of Luxemburg**: “Sincere congratulations”;

• **Mr. PONCELET**, President of the Senate: “Excellent show, emotional and full of education”;

• **Mr. Alain RICHARD**, Defence Minister: “I would like to honour this emotional show. Besides its beauty, it reaches for me, an eminent value as ethic is concerned: it is not unfair. Bravo”;

• **Mr. MASSERET**, State Secretary of the war veterans: “Congratulations on the organizers and the actors of this initiative dedicated to the Memory duty. Thanks for this pedagogy of Peace”;

• **Ambassador of Germany**: “I hope that this spectacle will be seen by many French and German young people so that they can appreciate the happiness to live in peace period.”;

• **The Ambassador of Algeria**: “Tremendous denunciation of the war. Tremendous hymn to peace”;

• **General BOURGEIOIS**, War veteran of Verdun: “It is an outstanding show I attended with a lot of emotion. I am happy to be able to recount memories of the Great War and in particularly those linked to Verdun where I was from September to November 1916 and where I was wounded.”

B. THE WELCOMED SPECTATORS

More than 248,500 spectators came to attend the event-show for eleven years. We had the pleasure to welcome spectators from France, Germany, Netherlands, Luxemburg and Belgium.
4 - THE IMPLEMENTATION

A. LOCATION

The place where the Spectacle Event is played is located just outside Verdun, in Haudainville in an outstanding site. This site was a lime quarry. During the war, it was used as an ammunition depot. After the decline of iron and steel metallurgy, it became an industrial fallow land but it started a second life with the show “Des flammes... à la lumière”.

B. THE VOLUNTARY WORK

600 volunteers...

The 600 German and French volunteers know what commitment means. They have been spending their free time and dedicating their abilities and skills to the show since 1996. This show is the result of the 300 actors’, the costume-makers’, decorators’, light and sound technicians’, logisticians’, special effect specialists’ and firework technicians’ work. Of course, we must not forget all the people in charge of promotion, catering, reception and security...

In 2007, 30000 voluntary work hours were made

C. THE TECHNICAL MEANS

• On a three hectare theatrical area, various fittings have been realized:
  • the village (French side);
  • the town (German side);
  • an area figuring the war;
  • 4 backstage area;
  • 4 towers for spotlights;
  • a gallery;
  • a 2400 seat stand.

• A lot of other technical means are used:
  • 900 costumes;
  • 1000 spotlights;
  • 40 kilometres of cables;
  • 5 sound stations;
  • special effects;
  • projection of images...
D. THE PRODUCTION TEAM

Scenario: Lucien GOURONG assisted by Jean-Luc DEMANDRE

Lucien GOURONG’s experience...

Story teller from Brittany, he has created many shows about stories and legends. Most of which have been published. He tells stories in festivals in Paris, Rennes, Blois, Paimpol and Bordeaux. He has created the story teller national festival in Chevilly-la-Rue. He has published many stories and legends.

Jean-Luc DEMANDRE’s experience...

He is a member of the regional historical committee. He is the founder and the president of “Connaissance de la Meuse”. Passionate of history and sound and light shows, he has been both the scriptwriter and the director of about 20 shows assembling hundreds of men and women of all ages and all horizons.

Stage setting: Jean-Luc DEMANDRE assisted by Lucien GOURONG
5 - PRACTICAL INFORMATION

A. LOCATION

To come to the show it takes:

- 1h15 from Nancy;
- 45 minutes from Metz;
- 2h30 from Paris – 1h by East TGV (high speed train);
- 3h00 from Brussels;
- 1h30 from Luxemburg;

B. DATES OF THE SHOW

Fridays and Saturdays

C. PRACTICAL INFORMATION

- Location: carrière d’Haudainville at the exit of Verdun. Follow the direction signs marked Nancy. Take the “Verdun” exit of the motorway.
- The way to the show is well signposted. Free car park on the site.
- Seats are numbered.
- Simultaneous translation in English, German and Dutch
- The show starts at nightfall but it is advisable to arrive at 22.00.
- It is compulsory to book your tickets.
- It is compulsory to book children tickets. For children and teenagers an identity card is compulsory.
- Diner held under a marquee. Booking is compulsory, please phone at (0033) (0)3 29 84 50 00.
- Free car park for camper-vans on the site; there is a service area at 2 km.
D. INFORMATION / BOOKING

« Connaissance de la Meuse »
Carrières d’Haudainville
F 55100 VERDUN

Phone number : (0033) (0)3 29 84 50 00 - Fax number : (0033) (0)3 29 84 82 00
e.mail : contact@spectacle-verdun.fr
Internet : www.spectacle-verdun.com

Association de Tourisme Agréée N° AG – 055 – 98- 0001 - Groupama Grand Est- 30 bd de champagne BP 97830 – 21078 DIJON
CEDEX - BPL – 3 rue F. de Curel – BP 124 - 57021 METZ Cedex 1 - Licence de spectacle n° 55 – 0012

E. TICKET OFFICES

Tickets for the show can also be bought at the different tourist information centres of Lorraine :

- In Verdun : Pavillon Japiot - F 55100 VERDUN
  Phone number : (0033) (0)3 29 84 55 55

- St-Mihiel : Rue du Palais de Justice - F 55300 SAINT-MIHIEL
  Phone number : (0033) (0)3 29 89 06 47

- Vaucouleurs : 15, rue Jeanne d’Arc - F 55140 VAUCOULEURS
  Phone number : (0033) (0)3 29 89 51 82

- Bar-le-Duc : 5 rue Jeanne d’Arc - F 55000 BAR LE DUC
  Phone number : (0033) (0)3 29 79 11 13

- Nancy : Place Stanislas - F 54000 NANCY
  Phone number : (0033) (0)3 83 35 22 41

- Metz : Place d’Armes – 57000 METZ
  Phone number : (0033) 36 25 say “Metz”
PRESS INVITATION

The volunteers of the show would be happy to welcome you to one of the performances of the Event Show "Des flammes ... à la lumière" in Verdun.

Name: ............................................................................................
Organisation: ..................................................................................
Adresse: ..............................................................................................
............................................................................................................
Phone number: ................................ Fax number: ............................
e-mail address: ................................................................................

☐ will attend the preview-performance evening of the 6 June 2008
or
will attend the performance of the:
☐ 20 June  ☐ 21 June  ☐ 27 June  ☐ 28 June  ☐ 4 July  ☐ 5 July
☐ 11 July  ☐ 12 July  ☐ 18 July  ☐ 19 July  ☐ 25 July  ☐ 26 July 2008
with ______ adults and ______ children

YOUR PROGRAM

• 20.00 : dinner on the site
• 21.30 : visit of the theatrical area and of the backstage
• 22.00 : Show followed by a reception in the VIP area.

Please specify hereafter the address (personnal or professionnal) where you would like us to send you your admission tickets and your press card:

............................................................................................................
............................................................................................................

Thank you for sending your answer 10 days in advance to:
Connaissance de la Meuse - F 55100 Verdun
Fax number: 0033 (0)3 29 84 82 00
7 - PARTNERS

*We would like to thank:* 

- The general council of Meuse
- The regional council of Lorraine
- Leader +
- La Fédération André Maginot
- Coop de Meuse
- La France Mutualiste
- La Fondation Entente Franco – Allemande
- L’Est Républicain
- Le Républicain Lorrain
- La Dépêche Meusienne
- France Bleu
- Meuse FM
- France 3 Lorraine
- Les Vieux Métiers d’Azannes
- Nancy Fnac Shop
- Tourist information centers of Verdun, Bar-le-Duc, Metz, Nancy, Virton
- Ticket Net
- All the advertisers and other partners
8 - THE ORGANISATION «CONNAISSANCE DE LA MEUSE »

A. OBJECTIVES

“Connaissance de la Meuse” is a cultural non-profit making organisation. It is composed of about one thousand people. Its aim is to highlight and to animate the patrimony of Meuse. The organisation was created on January 27th, 1982 by some friends living in the “Barrois” (an area south of Meuse). Its name was “Connaissance du Barrois”. As the events organized were very successful, the organisation was contacted in order to organize events in other parts of Meuse. This is how, on January 15th 1985, “Connaissance du Barrois” became “Connaissance de la Meuse”. The statutes were consequently changed in order to broaden its action area.

In 1991, the organisation rented the “Château de Thillombois” (Castle of Thillombois) for 30 years. After it had been completely refurbished, it became a touristico-cultural pole. This prestigious environment is perfectly adapted for the organization of seminars, weddings…

B. A CULTURAL SEASON THE “CHATEAU DE THILLOMBOIS”

Program:
- concert Quartet Ysaïe (June 18);
- theatrical performance: “la fille bien gardée”, a play by Eugène Labiche (24 and 31 August);
- Event with big fireworks around “Saint Nicolas” (30 November).

Information:
Connaissance de la Meuse:
0033 (0)3 29 84 50 00

C. SOUND AND LIGHT SHOW AT THE AMERICAN MEMORIAL OF MONFAUCON D’ARGONNE

September 26, 27, in October 3 and 4: Historic evocation consisting in a sound and light show at at the American memorial of Monfaucon d’Argonne. 200 volunteers with important technical means will make you relive the fights in Argonne, the entry of the United States, the offensive of the 26 September 1918 and the Armistice. The liberation of the North of the Meuse by the Americans in 1944 will be also evoked. This show is organized within the framework of the celebrations of the 90th anniversary of the American offensive Meuse-Argonne.

Information: Connaissance de la Meuse – 0033 (0)3 29 84 50 00