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A CONCISE HISTORY OF:

30th INFANTRY BRIGADE (DEFENCE OF CALAIS)

CHAPTER 3

A concise history of the 30th Infantry Brigade during the Second World War in 1940. The brigade defended the French town of Calais against the German forces in May 1940, where it was captured. It was not reformed.

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A Concise History of the 30th Infantry Brigade and the Defence of Calais

Chapter 3. – The Situation on Friday, 24 May 1940

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Chapter 3. – The Situation on Friday, 24 May

Overnight 23 to 24 May, Brigadier NICHOLSON received several contradictory orders from the War Office. Just after midnight, Major General McNAUGHTON (the General Officer Commanding 1st Canadian Infantry Division) landed at Calais, and he stayed there for three hours. He had to come to survey whether it was possible to land his division at one of the Channel ports, but he determined that it was not prudent to land at Calais.

At about 03.00 hours, the Director of Military Operations at the War Office, Major General DEWING, telegraphed NICHOLSON advising him that 'Evacuation agreed in principle'. Authority had been given to evacuate the Guards Brigade at Boulogne and the planning of Operation 'Dynamo' for the evacuation from Dunkirk was underway. The Brigade Major, Captain Dennis TALBOT started planning for an evacuation of all troops from Calais.

That night, a patrol from 'B' Squadron 3rd Royal Tank Regiment set off along the Calais to Gravelines road. Sergeant CORNWALL led the advance, with Lieutenant Peter WILLIAMS the troop commander. Incredibly, they drove through three unmanned German roadblocks and reached Gravelines. Here they fought in defence of the town, knocking out five tanks and two troop carriers. The Squadron commander, Major W. R. REEVES was granted an immediate award of the Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O.) for his leadership. The citation for Major REEVES read:

For conspicuous gallantry and resourcefulness.

Major REEVES was in command of the advanced guard when his battalion sought to break out of a town invested by the enemy. He led his troops with great skill and determination through the German position, taking the enemy completely by surprise, and crossing several road blocks, one of which was mined. On arrival at the next town he cooperated with the French infantry garrison throughout the day with great skill, beating off a number of German tank attacks and destroying with fire from his own tank four enemy medium tanks and three other armoured vehicles.

Though himself and two members of his crew were wounded during the action he handled his small force of three light tanks and one cruiser tank with the greatest resourcefulness, manoeuvring constantly so as to conceal its small numbers. He finally withdrew after dark only on the orders of the French local commander when his ammunition was exhausted.

Lieutenant Peter WILLIAMS was awarded the Military Cross, and Sergeant Jimmy CORNWALL the Distinguished Conduct Medal. Lieutenant Colonel REEVES and his colleagues managed to be evacuated from Dunkirk. He later was promoted to the rank of Acting Lieutenant Colonel and assumed command of the 4th Royal Tank Regiment in Palestine and Libya. He was captured with the fall of Tobruk in October 1942 and became a prisoner of war.

REEVES escaped from an Italian prisoner of war camp, but he was recaptured and sent to Germany. He was repatriated in 1945 and retired from the Army in January 1949. After retiring, he owned a farm in Wales until his death on 26 November 2003, aged ninety-seven years.

Major HAMILTON-RUSSELL from 'B' Company, The Rifle Brigade, was placed in command of a composite force that was due to follow up the advance of Major REEVE's tanks. By 04.00 hours, nothing had been heard from Major REEVES, so NICHOLSON decided to order HAMILTON-RUSSELL to advance along the road to Dunkirk. Brigadier NICHOLSON and Lieutenant Colonel HOSKYNS decided to accompany the force, which comprised five tanks, three Bren gun carriers, three platoons of infantry mounted in lorries, and two platoons in reserve.

About two miles from Calais, while in the suburban ribbon development along the road, the force came upon a strong German roadblock that also contained anti-tank guns. The tanks were forced to halt, but they engaged the German defenders. Meanwhile, troops from the Rifle Brigade worked their way around the flanks of the roadblock. A fierce and intense battle took place, but the Germans held the position in some strength. By daylight, it was clear to HAMILTON-RUSSELL that he was in danger of being surrounded himself, so he withdrew back into the Calais perimeter. The force lost two riflemen killed, and several wounded.

The Bren Gun carriers, under the command of Second Lieutenant John SURTEES, helped to pin down the enemy troops, while 5 Platoon from 'B' Company, led by Second Lieutenant Edward BIRD, were sent around the right flank, and Platoon Serjeant Major STEVENS from 'I' Company, led a platoon to cover the left flank. Contact was lost with 5 Platoon, who were engaged with German infantry posts to the south of the road. The enemy began to direct mortar fire on the British troops, one truck receiving a direct hit, and Major HAMILTON-RUSSELL being forced to keep moving the location of his command post. After five hours of fighting, reports coming in to the command post made it clear that the men of the Rifle Brigade were steadily being surrounded and overwhelmed by superior German forces. Second Lieutenant BIRD's platoon managed to extract itself, feeling pleased that in their first battle, they had inflicted ten or more casualties on the enemy, but they had lost one Lance Corporal killed, and four wounded. The dead soldier was twenty-nine-year-old 6912077 Lance Corporal Gilbert David CROSS, who was the son of Ronald Edward and Letitia May CROSS, from Eltham, London. He lies buried in Plot O., Grave 8 of the Calais Southern Cemetery.

The Brigadier ordered Major HAMILTON-RUSSELL to withdraw his force, and to make his way back into Calais. The column arrived back in Calais at 11.00 hours, with 'B' Company (less 6 Platoon) taking up positions around the Cellulose factory, while the other elements of the force returned to their respective companies. NICHOLSON realised the dilemma of his position, and that there were now strong German forces all around Calais, and in particular any further attempt to get through to Dunkirk in one direction or Boulogne in the other was futile. The emphasis would now be on defence. At Calais docks, two ships, the 'Kohistan' and the 'City of Canterbury' were still moored at the quayside. A hospital train managed to get through to the station at the docks, the Gare Maritime during the night, although only after the French driver had been persuaded to finish the journey. It

drew in at about 07.00 hours, but many of the wounded were in a very poor state, with some having died during the three days the train had been trying to reach a port. The wounded were unloaded from the train and placed onboard the City of Canterbury.

At about this time, news of the decision by higher command to evacuate Calais was circulating around the troops. This gave them a sense of relief and that they were not about to be abandoned to their fate. Unfortunately, such was the confusion amongst the officers at Calais docks, and the concerns that the ships were vulnerable to air attack, the Movement Control Staff ordered them to sail. Major Alexander ALLAN, who was acting a Brigade Liaison Officer at the docks objected, but he was overruled. With this, he realised that no further evacuation would be possible for at least thirty-six hours. The vehicles belonging to the 2nd Bn. K.R.R.C. and Brigade Headquarters were unloaded by about 04.30 hours, and wounded personnel were embarked on the ship. The unloading of the other ship continued, but at 07.30 hours, the Movements Staff on the Quay stated to Major ALLAN that they had Brigadier NICHOLSON's permission to close down the holds and load the remainder of the wounded personnel from the hospital trains. About twenty men had died while on the trains, or by shellfire, and their bodies were left on the quayside. The stevedores then embarked, as did the personnel controlling the movements on the quay, and the Brigadier who had been in command at Boulogne Base. The first ship sailed at 08.30 hours, and the second followed around midday.

This left the 1st Bn. The Rifle Brigade seriously deficient in equipment. The scout cars had been handed over to the 1st Armoured Division before they sailed from England, and the early departure of the ships had left the battalion about 50% short in weapons, vehicles, and equipment. The Signals Officer, Lieutenant DUNCANSON, only had one truck, only one other company had its W/T truck, there was only enough carriers for two out of the four scout platoons, the Medical Officer had no medical stores or equipment, and 'B' Echelon had no tools. The Technical Officer, Lieutenant Dick TRYON, went around with some personnel taking possession of some of the abandoned materiel strewn around Calais, and the Quarter-Master, Captain Wally STRAIGHT, was successful in finding rations and distributing them around the battalion.

The Royal Navy had brought some ammunition and explosives for detonation of facilities, but the primers they brought were of the wrong size. At 13.00 hours, the Admiralty wireless ship, with the R.N. demolition party on-board, departed from Calais. This left the quay without any ships tied up, and the area was now covered in thick, black, and acrid smoke from burning oil tanks. The area was also congested with many civilians, milling about, hoping for evacuation which was not to happen.

During the night of 23/24 May, Second Lieutenant Francis REED, the Officer Commanding 10 Platoon of 'C' Company, 1st Bn. The Rifle Brigade, had placed himself under the command of Captain BOWER of the 2nd Bn. K.R.R.C. as the point where the junction of the two battalion's positions met. At 05.00 hours, two German prisoners were taken, and at 06.00 hours, two light tanks were driven off.

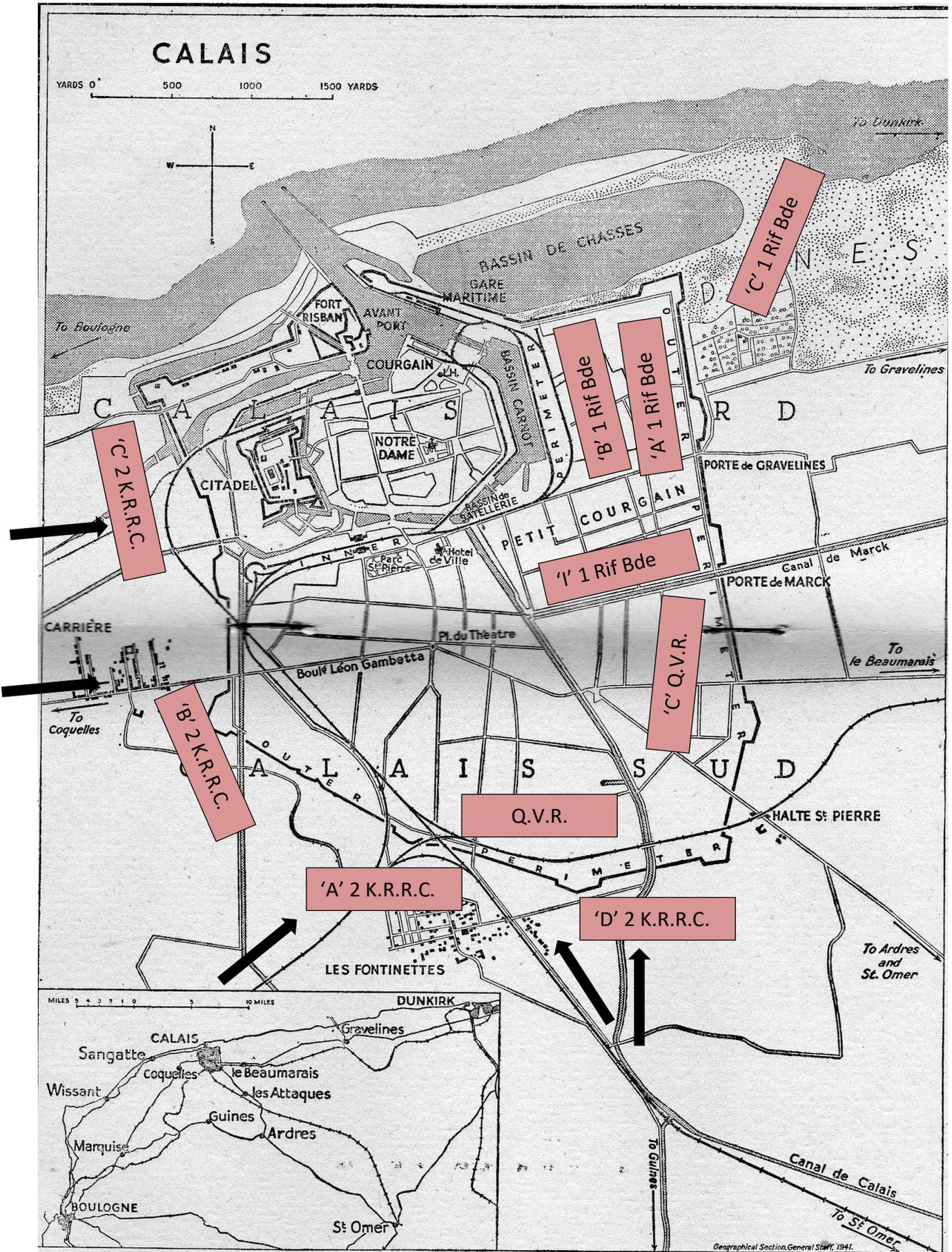
Brigadier NICHOLSON ordered Lieutenant Colonel KELLER to prepare for an evacuation. This meant burning and destroying the regiment's transport. The tanks were not to fall into enemy hands, but unfortunately this was misinterpreted, and two cruiser tanks were prematurely burnt. At 08.30 hours, the City of Canterbury sailed with many wounded lining the decks, but with other 'non-essential' personnel on board. Some personnel from the 3rd R.T.R. were also allowed to leave, as were about two-hundred men from the anti-aircraft units based in and around Calais. At about midday, the Kohistan sailed from Calais, the men who saw her leave confident that the ships would return for them.

Calais was by now a dark and foreboding place. Thick black, acrid smoke from the burning oil tanks at the docks drifted across the town. The sound of battle was growing in intensity and getting closer. Brigadier NICHOLSON changed his dispositions after realising his focus had to be the defence of the town, hopefully pending evacuation. He established an outer perimeter using the fortifications around the town, including the Citadel Bastion and Fort Nieulay. An inner perimeter was also formed using the waterways of the town falling back towards the docks. The main German attack commenced at dawn on 24 May 1940. The Germans launched a heavy mortar bombardment on the positions held by the Queen Victoria's Rifles to the south-west of the town. 11 Platoon from 'D' Company, 1st Q.V.R., under the command of Second Lieutenant R. SNOWDON, was located at the Chemin de Frethun. They saw about twenty men approaching their position. It was not clear if they were refugees or soldiers, but soon afterwards, the position came under accurate mortar fire. Two riflemen were killed and two injured.

At 07.00 hours, SNOWDEN's platoon was withdrawn to fill a gap between 'A' and 'D' Companies of the 2nd K.R.R.C.. Some French troops and British soldiers from the searchlight units were also used to plug the gap. At 09.00 hours, 11 Platoon was again in action in its new position. Second Lieutenant SNOWDEN was injured, so Sergeant ROBERTS assumed command of the platoon. By this time, this platoon of the Q.V.R. became intermingled with 3 Platoon, 'A' Company, 2nd K.R.R.C. under command of Second Lieutenant PHILIPS.

12 Platoon of the Q.V.R. under Second Lieutenant BREWESTER were ahead of the railway embankment, and suffered a dreadful time pinned down by machine gun and mortar fire. Twenty-seven-year-old Corporal 6896927 Francis Pavitt Jenks BURLTON went out from his position to attempt to retrieve a vitally needed Bren gun, but he was killed in the process. He now lies in Plot K, Grave 11 of the Calais Southern Memorial. Corporal BURTON was posthumously Mentioned in Dispatches for his bravery.

Second Lieutenant BREWESTER managed to set a German tank on fire by repeatedly firing at its engine louvres. Sections were moved about so that the artillery fire and mortar fire could not be ranged on a particular location.



The 10th Panzer Division was now under orders to capture Calais, and it began to tighten its grip on the town. The British High Command was now in a dilemma over the issue of Allied solidarity. Should the British troops be withdrawn leaving the French people to their fate, or should they stay and show support for the beleaguered French? At 09.33 hours, H.M.S. Wessex (a destroyer) and H.M.S. Gulzar (an armed yacht) arrived off Calais to bombard the German forces. They passed a message onto Brigadier NICHOLSON to the effect: *'Confirm that evacuation is not, repetition not, to take place except for non-essential non-fighting troops'*.

Brigadier NICHOLSON and Colonel HOLLAND decided to order tanks and transport no longer required for operational reasons to be destroyed. At about the same time, General GUDERIAN to his incredulity was ordered not to continue the attack on Dunkirk and Calais and to leave them to the Luftwaffe.

Captain MUNBY from the Q.V.R. gathered together fifty-two men from his own regiment, plus three from the Royal Artillery and joined some French troops in Fort Nieulay. This location was outside the main perimeter of Calais on the main road to Boulogne. The French were commanded by a Capitaine; who had a Lieutenant and about forty soldiers, plus seven Marines under command. They spent an uncomfortable night with little sleep, for they had no blankets. The force was also very short of ammunition and food. Notwithstanding this, for most of 24 May, this small force held off all German attempts to drive them from the Fort.

The 2nd Bn. K.R.R.C. was deployed with 'C' Company under Captain Maurice JOHNSON on the right from the coast inland to Bastion 9. 'B' Company under Major Jack POOLE was given the task of defending Bastion 9 and the central sector, with 'D' Company under Major Godfrey CROMWELL on the left of the battalion's sector. 'A' Company under Major Derek TROTTER was held in reserve.

'B' Company dug in on its sector, with Second Lieutenant SCOURFIELD-DAVIES (the commanding officer of the Scout Platoon) being ordered to defend a location called Bastion 9. This location was an area of scrubland, with some concrete blocks along the edge of the bastion. SCOURFIELD-DAVIES had under command two sections from 6 Platoon, one section of 7 Platoon and some men from company headquarters. His Scout Platoon was held in reserve under his command. 8 Platoon under Lieutenant Martin WILLAN was stationed to the left of the bastion, with Lieutenant Wally FINLAYSON and his men of 7 Platoon providing a screen out in front of the main positions. Lieutenant Dick SCOTT was with his men of 6 Platoon on the right of road. The company had some mines and barbed wire available to help strengthen the defensive positions. Major POOLE based his company headquarters in some buildings near the Pont Jourdan railway bridge.

Although the arrival of the two battalions had strengthened the defences around Calais, there were many gaps around the town. 'C' Company had to cover a front of some two-thousand, five-hundred yards, while the gap between the defenders of Bastion 9 and 8 Platoon was about six-hundred yards. The gaps in the defences were covered by mobile patrols but the defensive locations were vulnerable.

At about 04.45 hours on 24 May, three Bren gun carriers from the 2nd Bn. K.R.R.C. under command of Second Lieutenant SCOTT went past along the road to Coquelles. They returned shortly afterwards with about twenty men from the 1st Searchlight Battery. Having dropped off these soldiers, the carriers went back out towards Coquelles. This time only one returned, out of which jumped thirty-five-year-old Private BATEMAN. His driver Private WILSON was badly injured and the commander, twenty-eight-years-old 6844270 Lance Corporal Thomas William SMITH lay slumped, dead in the front of the carrier. A married man from Hammersmith in London, SMITH is now buried in Plot N, Grave 28 of the Calais Southern Cemetery.

BATEMAN reported that they had come under fire while advancing down the main road. They had attempted to outflank the Germans, but they were all hit in quick succession. BATEMAN thought that SCOTT's carrier was hit and all on board killed, and that the same fate had befallen the carrier commander by Corporal GORRINGE. However, SCOTT had not died even though he was injured. He had jumped from his carrier as it was hit and took cover beside the road. He shot one German who came close to him, and then crawled his way slowly along a water filled ditch back to British lines. He arrived back with a bullet hole through his tin hat and a nasty leg wound, but he refused treatment and collected the survivors of his platoon.

'C' Company of the 2nd Bn. K.R.R.C. were ordered to send out a patrol to the south of Calais, so after only two hours sleep, Lieutenant PARDOE was woken up to prepare a patrol to leave at 05.30 hours. His instructions were vague, and so they decided to patrol to Sangatte and then return. Having reached the far side of the village, they turned around, but on the way back, they heard firing and saw some Verey lights going up. They got back safely to find that the firing had involved Lieutenant SCOTT's platoon, which had gone out on patrol along the Coquelles Road.

At about 11.00 hours, German infantry suddenly emerged from a wood in front of Bastion 9 and advanced towards the positions held by 'D' Company of the 2nd K.R.R.C.. French artillery opened up on them causing several casualties, and the German withdrew to regroup. They came again, this time making better use of cover and dead ground to assault the positions held by 'D' Company. In addition, German mortars began firing on the British positions. A fierce battle erupted but the British held their ground. The Germans pressed again using tanks and infantry in a series of coordinated attacks on the positions held by the 2nd K.R.R.C., who were supported by three tanks of 3rd R.T.R. under command of Second Lieutenant GREGG who came up to support them. During these engagements, the British soldiers learnt that their Boyes anti-tank rifles were useless against the German tanks, despite the claims to the contrary made prior to their deployment to Calais.

Fort Nieulay was shelled regularly during the day. An intense bombardment commenced at about 14.00 hours. Two riflemen went out and collected a seriously injured soldier, and they took him in a civilian van into Calais. During this bombardment, the French anti-tank gun was destroyed. At about 15.30 hours, the Germans started a determined assault on the Fort.

By 16.30 hours, it was all over. The remaining soldiers had fought on as long as they could, but they were surrounded and forced to surrender. Captain MUNBY was later Mentioned in Dispatches for his leadership in the defence of Fort Nieulay.

No. 9 (Scout) Platoon of the 'C' Company, 2nd K.R.R.C., had been ordered to attempt to get through the beleaguered men of the Q.V.R. at Fort Nieulay, which was about a mile from their position. They had reported that they were out of ammunition and water, and they would have to surrender unless supplies got through to them. Lieutenant PARDOE loaded up his carriers, and they set off across the open countryside. One of carriers crashed into a ditch, and so another was used to attempt to pull it out. At the end of the lane they were using, Lieutenant PARDOE stopped to gather his thoughts and assess his next move. Then he realised that there was a machine gun in front of him, and then he saw a German soldier ahead. He turned the carrier around and retreated, now realising that the Fort had fallen and that German troops were in control of that locality. As they made their way back, German mortars attacked them.

After the loss of Fort Nieulay, the German troops increased their pressure on the troops of the 2nd Bn. K.R.R.C. opposite the Citadel. 'C' Company managed to hold their ground and repulse the German attack. The men of 'B' Company faced a series of attacks throughout the rest of the day, and at one stage, German troops managed to penetrate their positions. Reinforcements were sent from 'C' Company, and the situation was stabilised. Two of their 3" mortars proved to be very valuable in breaking up German attacks. To reinforce the men of 'B' Company, some men from the 1st Searchlight Regiment were sent by Brigadier NICHOLSON up to the road junction.

Lieutenant Colonel HOSKYN was given command of the north and east sectors of the perimeter, i.e., facing Dunkirk, and he was given command of the platoons of the Queen Victoria's Rifles (Q.V.R.) in that sector. The situation was confused, with contact lost with 6 Platoon under Lieutenant WELSH which were somewhere out on the Dunkirk road, until it was re-established at 16.00 hours. At 11.00 hours, 13 Platoon, under Second Lieutenant SLADEN, reported large numbers of German soldiers moving from south to north across its front, and so 14 Platoon was withdrawn to the main defensive line. At 11.45 hours, the Q.V.R. reported that the outer perimeter was no longer tenable, so Lieutenant Colonel HOSKYN ordered 'A' and 'I' Companies to occupy the inner perimeter. 'I' Company took up positions on the right from the bridge under the Mairie clock tower, where they met the positions held by the 2nd K.R.R.C., and then southwards over 400 yards to the canal junction, and then eastwards about 800 yards to the junction of the battlements with the canal. Here, 'A' Company took over the line, facing east to the Bassin des Chasses, with their Scout Platoon under Second Lieutenant ROLT covering from the Bassin to the sea. As both companies had long fronts to defend, 7 Platoon from 'B' Company under Second Lieutenant Fitz FLTECHER was sent to reinforce 'A' Company, and later, 6 Platoon was also sent to support 'A' Company. The remaining two platoons of 'B' Company were kept as a reserve. 'C' Company were digging in on the sand dunes, but they were also to act as a reserve. H.Q. Company remained located to the east of the harbour entrance, where they were for the whole battle.

Off-shore, on the afternoon of 24 May, British destroyers H.M.S. Wessex, H.M.S. Grafton, H.M.S. Greyhound, H.M.S. Vimiera, and the Polish destroyer Burza, arrived off-shore to bombard the German positions. Two other destroyers, H.M.S. Wolfhound and H.M.S. Verity, entered the harbour and landed some ammunition. At about 16.20 hours, the warships shelled a German armoured column above Sangatte. Ten minutes later, German aircraft attacked the Allied destroyers. H.M.S. Wessex (Lieutenant Commander William Archibald Rosebery CARTWRIGHT) was hit and sank slowly. Six men, all stokers from the engine room were lost, the rest being rescued.

During the afternoon, Lieutenant Colonel KELLER once again received confusing orders. Lieutenant General BROWNRIGG told KELLER to advance to Boulogne. KELLER went aboard H.M.S. Gulzar, which had moored in the harbour, and used her wireless equipment to send a message back to BROWNRIGG that his orders were impossible.

During the afternoon, as pressure grew in the south-west of the perimeter, Lieutenant Colonel MILLER, together with his Adjutant, Captain WILLIAMS found a cruiser tank, and took that with two reserve platoons to fill the gap. Major POOLE, the commanding officer of 'B' Company was concerned that this line could not be held much longer, and he used some troops from the searchlight regiment to occupy a couple of houses overlooking the Pont Jourdan. By 16.00 hours, the state of 'B' and 'D' Companies of the 2nd K.R.R.C. was becoming critical. MILLER ordered Major OWEN, the second-in-command to hold the three bridges over the canal. At this location, Second Lieutenant Airey NEAVE from the 1st Searchlight Regiment was badly wounded on being shot through the lung.¹

Throughout 24 May, the 1st Bn. The Rifle Brigade did not face much activity as they were deployed on the eastern side of the perimeter. NICHOLSON ordered ELLISON-MACARTNEY to bring the remnants of his battalion back into the inner perimeter. BROWN brought 'C' Company back from their advanced positions along the road to Dunkirk. JESSOP was ordered to retire 'D' Company to a line along the Bouelvard de l'Engalite. Another group of the Q.V.R. were brought back from a barricade on the St. Omer road. 'B' Company, which had been out at Sangatte, were forced out of Oyez Farm. Second Lieutenant DIZER managed to destroy the submarine cable before escaping. This company came back through the positions held by 'C' Company of the 2nd K.R.R.C. to join their colleagues in holding the line.

As the 2nd Bn. K.R.R.C. faced the most activity on its front, Lieutenant-Colonel HOSKYNS decided it was necessary on several occasions to send assistance from his reserves. Captain GORDON-DUFF led a platoon formed of spare drivers with which he held a section of the K.R.R.C. front until he was withdrawn from the outer perimeter at dark.

¹ Airey NEAVE became a prisoner of war, later being incarcerated at Colditz Castle. He famously escaped from Colditz and reached the United Kingdom. Lieutenant Colonel NEAVE, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C., Croix de Guerre, Bronze Star (U.S.A.) and Order of Oranje Nassau, became a Conservative M.P. only to be killed by an I.R.A. bomb planted on his car in the House of Commons on 30 March 1979.

At 16.00 hours, Major HAMILTON-RUSSELL took 8 Platoon (P.S.M. EASON) and half his Scout Platoon, was sent in trucks through 'I' Company's position into the town to support the K.R.R.C. and the Q.V.R. There was sniping in the town, which was believed to be down to Fifth Columnists, and at about this time, the Brigade H.Q. withdrew past the Mairie to its new location at the Gare Maritime. Also at about 16.00 hours, Second Lieutenant ROLT received an order through the Intelligence Officer to take his mortar section and 11 Platoon, 'C' Company (P.S.M. CRISS) to the K.R.R.C. area. ROLT was ordered to meet with Lieutenant Colonel MILLER, and to put down mortar fire onto an area of the Rue Gambetta, which Second Lieutenant PRICE had showed him on the map. It became apparent that German infantry were infiltrating into the town of Calais, and that they, rather than Fifth Columnists, were responsible for the sniping.

At about 18.00 hours, a motor torpedo boat brought the Principal Sea Transport Officer, Channel Ports, a Commodore, into Calais. He took over the Naval control of the docks and, having brought the necessary primers, wirelessed for the Naval demolition party to return. Now a swing bridge over the docks was prepared for demolition, and the party returned home, the Commodore himself remaining until 26 May.

Second Lieutenant ROLT withdrew his troops back to the lines of 'B' Company, where Major HAMILTON-RUSSELL still had two platoons (6 and 7) detached, a situation destined to remain for the rest of the battle. By 19.00 hours, both 6 and 7 Platoons were in position with 'A' Company, and two companies from 'C' Company, 11 Platoon (P.S.M. CRISS) and 12 Platoon (Second Lieutenant FELLOWS) were sent to reinforce 'I' Company. These two platoons were placed by Major BRUSH in reserve about 200 yards behind 16 Platoon.

As dusk fell, the troops that had borne the brunt of the German assaults were very tired, hungry, and thirsty. Ammunition was almost exhausted, in particular, anti-tank ammunition had run out and, in any case, only two, 2-pounder anti-tank guns from 229th Anti-Tank Battery were left in action. An increasing problem was the number of snipers now active in Calais, and they started to become a serious problem.

As dusk fell, Major POOLE commanding 'B' Company reviewed his situation. Most of his transport had been destroyed by the increased shelling and bombing. None of the wireless sets were working, so communication was maintained by runners only. Major POOLE sent his second-in-command, Major Henry SCOTT, back to battalion headquarters to find out the what the current situation was. SCOTT returned with the news that both 'D' and 'C' Companies had been forced to withdraw leaving 'B' Company somewhat isolated. Major POOLE decided to head back to battalion headquarters to obtain new orders and Major SCOTT went off to check on the situation on either flank. This left Second Lieutenant DAVIES-SCOURFIELD in practical charge of the company. Word started to spread that the garrison was to be evacuated and a sense of confusion developed.

The soldiers were becoming restless, they had not eaten for over twenty-four hours, and they had not even enjoyed a cup of tea. Major Jack POOLE returned and discussed the situation with his other officers. They agreed to withdraw back into the town of Calais and made their way back during the late evening to rejoin the rest of the battalion.

'C' Company received a message to retire into the Citadel as soon as it was dark. Lieutenant PARDOE went off on a motor-cycle to reconnoitre a route to retire along. He was then ordered to visit 'B' Company and tell them that 'C' Company was retiring at 20.30 hours, as it was known that all of the wireless sets used by 'B' Company were not working. PARDOE managed to reach the company headquarters and spoke with Major Henry SCOTT. He was obviously suffering from shell-shock, and he was struggling to concentrate. SCOTT and PARDOE set off on foot to find Major POOLE, and saw some British vehicles disappearing down a street, but they could not attract their attention. Both officers had now travelled about a mile when PARDOE decided to return and collect his motor-cycle. He left Major SCOTT, and this was the last time he saw him alive, as Major SCOTT was mortally wounded on Sunday, 26 May. PARDOE became disorientated, but eventually he found his motor-cycle, restarted it, and rode it back to his lines.

Lieutenant PARDOE then found out that Lieutenant Colonel MILLER had ordered 'A', 'B' and 'D' Companies to retire to hold an inner perimeter. Lieutenant MADDEN was told to ride through to 'C' Company to tell them not to retire, but his message was muddled, and 'C' Company retired as they thought they were ordered to do so. Lieutenant Colonel MILLER then saw them at the Citadel, and promptly ordered them to return to the positions they had just vacated. Luckily, they were able to do so as the Germans had not occupied them, and the Riflemen dug in and rested to await the next onslaught which would inevitably come soon.

The new positions were occupied by 21.00 hours, leaving 'I' Company of the 1st Bn. The Rifle Brigade holding a forward salient, with the nearest K.R.R.C. positions on a bridge overlooking the Hotel de Ville. By midnight, enemy activity in the town of Calais had ceased. Friday had been a day of great tension and significant fighting, particularly on the western and southern sectors of the perimeter. It was becoming obvious to the officers of 30th Infantry Brigade and their battalions that evacuation was now very unlikely, and certainly not before midnight on 25 May, and they were destined to fight to the end in Calais. At 19.00 hours, Lieutenant Colonel HOSKYNS sent a message to his companies that their current positions were to be held to the last man.

No-one had slept, except for a few hours on-board the ships on their way to Calais, and they had been working hard since the morning of 21 May; hence, all were suffering from intense fatigue. In spite of this, the morale of the British troops was high, even taking account that the majority of the troops of 30th Infantry Brigade deployed to Calais had not experienced combat before. All ranks were showing initiative and an offensive spirit, but they were having to be very flexible and adaptable. The situation was changing hourly, making planning difficult, and communications were unreliable and relied on runners delivering messages personally.

Unknown to the British troops, the German soldiers were surprised by the nature of the defence of Calais, and they were now more wary of making uncoordinated attacks. The 86th Infanterie Regiment had concentrated at Coquelles, to the south-west of Calais, and then they had emerged from some woods to attack Fort Nieulay. The 69th Infanterie Regiment had made its way around to the eastern side of Calais, and it was blocking the road between Calais and Dunkirk.

Lieutenant General Ferdinand SCHAAL was the General Officer Commanding, 10th Panzer Division, and he had led the division in the successful campaign in Poland. The level of resistance encountered with the British and French troops in Calais made him realise that the town could only be captured by a more systematic approach, using armour and infantry, supported by artillery. He decided to use the 86th Infanterie Regiment to attack from the west, while the 69th Infanterie Regiment attacked from the south and east. Each German infantry regiment was the equivalent of a British brigade, and the German forces now deployed against the 30th Infantry Brigade in Calais had significant armoured and artillery support, which the British troops were lacking. It was an unequal struggle that lasted for two more days.