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A CONCISE HISTORY OF:

30th INFANTRY BRIGADE (DEFENCE OF CALAIS)

CHAPTER 6

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 6. Escape Captivity and Epilogue

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Chapter 6 – Escape, Captivity and Epilogue.

The end of armed resistance in Calais left many men uncertain what to do. In a similar manner to Dunkirk, some men made remarkable efforts to escape, with many acts of selfless bravery undertaken. H.M.S. Conidaw, a yacht under Royal Navy command, managed to take off one-hundred and sixty-five men late on 26 May. The Belgian yacht Semois made four runs into Calais and took off several wounded soldiers and conveyed them back to England. A trawler, H.M.S. Mona's Isle under the command of Lieutenant Commander P. F. CAMMIADE, R.N.V.R. managed to enter the harbour and evacuated one-thousand, four hundred and twenty men before Calais fell.

H.M.S. Gulzar, another yacht under Royal Navy command, had been in and around Calais during the battle. Its commanding officer, thirty-six-year-old Temporary Lieutenant Cedric Victor BRAMMALL, R.N.R. sent some of his crew ashore to search for survivors at about 02.00 hours on 27 May. The yacht was subject to machine gun fire, and so BRAMMALL decided to leave the port. As he did so, the crew heard shouts from under the pier. BRAMMALL swung the yacht around and ordered the men on the pier to jump onto the yacht as he sailed past. All forty-seven men hiding under the pier managed to get aboard the Gulzar, and safely reached Dover. For this exploit and similar work at Dunkirk, BRAMMALL was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross on 7 June 1940.

Second Lieutenant Timothy Stoyin LUCAS from the Q.V.R. managed to cross the English Channel in a dinghy. His story is remarkable in itself, and it is a tribute to the determination of some men to avoid capture. He was taken prisoner at the harbour in Calais, and he was told to march along the road to a church. The church steadily filled up with prisoners to reach about twenty to twenty-five British officers, and three hundred men. In addition, there were about one-thousand French soldiers present. The prisoners were marched out of Calais that night to Guines, where they rested in the Square for a time. Then they were marched onwards. LUCAS realised that there were few German guards, so at a fork in the road, when the column turned left, he turned to the right. He went on a short distance, got into some bushes, and fell asleep. He awoke at daylight at about 05.00 hours, discarded his army greatcoat, replacing it with some sacking.

LUCAS walked across country, avoiding villages and collections of houses. He reached the coast at Le Chatelet at about 16.00 hours and rested. He lay in the sand dunes until dark, when he went back to the beach and found a dinghy with some oars. LUCAS then met an old French fisherman, who provided him with some beer and bread, and helped him launch the dinghy. He started rowing at about 22.00 hours, using a searchlight as a guide. By daybreak, he saw he was about halfway across the English Channel, and he could see the white cliffs at Dover. He made for these and reached a point only half a mile off Dover when a Royal Navy minesweeper picked him up, landing him safely at Dover. For his exploits, he was awarded the Military Cross on 29 November 1940. LUCAS survived the war.

Captain E. A. W. WILLIAMS, the Adjutant of the 2nd Bn. K.R.R.C., Captain Dennis TALBOT from Brigadier NICHOLSON's staff, 126047 Lieutenant William MILLET, the signals officer, Corporal R. ILLINGWORTH from the Q.V.R., and Rifleman HARINGTON from the 2nd K.R.R.C. were picked up eight miles off the English coast having commandeered a motorboat. Gunner G. INSTONE from the 2nd Searchlight Battery successfully reached Spain.

The 1st Bn. The Queen Victoria's Rifles had lost two officers killed, and four wounded. The battalion lost thirty other ranks killed in consequence of the Defence of Calais. The 2nd Bn. The King's Royal Rifles Corps suffered heavier casualties, with eight officers killed, and seven wounded. They also lost sixty-five other ranks killed immediately before, during and after the Defence of Calais.

In terms of the 3rd Royal Tank Regiment, of the five-hundred and fifty men who left England for France only a few days earlier, slightly more than half managed to make their way back to England. The regiment was re-equipped, and still under command of Lieutenant Colonel KELLER, it sailed for the Middle East where it served in Greece and faced another desperate evacuation.

For the survivors, they had reached the depths of humiliation. They were lined up and searched, with any valuables removed as well as any arms or ammunition. Most of the men were physically and mentally shattered. A number of British soldiers were put to work digging a large grave for the fallen, and working parties collected the corpses from around the town. Some of the deceased had been dead for two or three days, and the stench was unforgettable. Some bodies were complete, for others their remains could only be collected on a shovel. Lieutenant PARDOE searched the deceased for their identity discs, a difficult and unpleasant duty. Nearby, the Germans were collecting and burying their own dead. PARDOE was impressed by the behaviour of the German troops at this time, who expressed their admiration for the fighting quality of the British and French troops. They did not show any animosity against the captured British troops.

Slowly, the captured British and French troops were brought together, initially at the church in the centre of the town. After sleeping the night in the church, at 11.00 hours on 27 May, the men were roused to shouts of 'Aus, auf, los', words that would become only too familiar to the prisoners of war over the next weeks. Slowly all the French and British prisoners of war were marshalled into a long column and march towards Germany began. On the first day, the column covered about twelve miles and reached Guines. On the third day, the column reached a greyhound stadium at Le Wast, which was packed with thousands of other prisoners of war. Here, for the first time, many of the men of 30th Infantry Brigade met others from their units, and some scale and context was placed on the events of the last few days. It was here that men learnt the fate of some of their friends and colleagues, and that for many, they would never leave Calais.¹

¹ For detailed accounts of the long, forced march, the prisoners of war made from Calais to Germany and onward to Poland, I recommend you read: JAY, John *Facing Fearful Odds – My Father's Story of Captivity Escape & Resistance 1940 – 1945* (Barnsley, Pen & Sword Military, 2014) [ISBN 978-1-47382-734-9] McENTEE-TAYLOR, Carole *Surviving the Nazi Onslaught – the Defence of Calais to the Death March to Freedom* (U.K., Pen & Sword Military, 2014) [ISBN 978 1 78383 106 7] or PARDOE, Philip *From Calais to Colditz – A Rifleman's Memoir of Captivity & Escape* (Barnsley, Pen & Sword Military, 2016) [ISBN 978 1 47387 539 5]

The fates of the many officers and men who had fought at Calais varied considerably. Some have been covered above, but the stories of some others remain to bring to a close.

Brigadier Claude NICHOLSON was captured and taken to a prisoner of war camp in Germany, becoming the second most senior British Army officer in captivity. The effects of the battle for Calais must have been significant, and having been in command, this was, no doubt, an additional burden. He is described as not being a strong man whilst in captivity and was frequently ill. In the early morning of 26 June 1943, NICHOLSON was found dead at his camp, his death coming as a shock to the rest of the inmates of the camp. He is now buried in Grave 71 of Field 7 of the Rotenburg Civil Cemetery in Germany.

It was little recompense that on 20 September 1945, His Majesty, The King, appointed NICHOLSON to be an Additional Member of the Military Division of the Third Class, or Companion, of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath (C.B.). This was granted in recognition of his gallant and distinguished services in the defence of Calais in May 1940. The award was date to the 25 June 1943, i.e., the day before he died, although he never knew of the award.

Colonel Rupert Thurstan HOLLAND, D.S.O., M.C. endured the four years of captivity. He had been born on 17 October 1885, at The Hall, Marchington, in Staffordshire, and he was baptized on 29 November 1885 in the Parish Church of Sudbury in Derbyshire. He had two younger brothers, Tom Herbert HOLLAND (1888 – 1964), who was born on 23 January 1888, Victor Christian HOLLAND (1897 – 1964), who was born on 22 June 1897 in Doveridge, Derbyshire, and Lawrence Henry HOLLAND (1901 – 1916), who was born in Littleover, Derbyshire. HOLLAND was educated at Eton College, after which he entered the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich as a Gentleman Cadet. In 1911, he was serving in India, and in May 1916, he suffered the loss of both his father and his brother Lawrence in separate incidents. In 1920, HOLLAND was living in the City of Westminster, and in 1924, he married Marjory Ella RAWTHORNE (1897 – 1978) in Chorley in Lancashire. His mother died on 29 April 1948 in Tavistock, Devon.

On 20 September 1945, his award of the Commander of the Military Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (C.B.E.) was published in the London Gazette. Again, this was in recognition of his gallant and distinguished services in the defence of Calais. After the war, he reverted to retired pay. He retired to live at Corner Cottage, Milford, Salisbury in the county of Wiltshire. He died on 8 November 1959, and he was survived by his wife.

Colonel HOLLAND's Principal Staff Officer, in effect, a Brigade Major, was 18403 Major George Douglas HILL. He was an officer 7th Queen's Own Hussars, and he died on some date between 20 May and 17 June 1940. HILL has no known grave, and so he is commemorated on Column 2 of the Dunkirk Memorial.

Lieutenant Colonel KELLER later saw active service in Greece, after which he was promoted to the rank of Brigadier in September and served in India as the Commandant of the Armoured Fighting School. He left that role in February 1943. He retired from the Army on 27 March 1948 with the rank of Honorary Brigadier, his substantive rank being Lieutenant Colonel. After retirement, he lived in Ballylickey, County Cork in Ireland, where he died on 30 October 1986, aged ninety-two years.

Lieutenant Colonel Euan Alfred Bews MILLER, spent the rest of the war in captivity. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order on 20 September 1945, although there is no citation available. After his release, he was promoted to the rank of Brigadier and became the Deputy Military Secretary 'A' at the War Office in February 1946. From the War Office, he was promoted to the rank of Temporary Major General on 18 September 1948 on being appointed the General Officer Commanding (G.O.C.) Hanover District. He was the G.O.C. for the 7th Armoured Division from September 1948 until May 1949; being made a Companion of the Order of the Bath in the New Year's Honours List of 1949. He was Chief of Staff of Middle East Land Forces from 1949 until 1951. MILLER was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General on 15 March 1951 on being appointed the Military Secretary to the Secretary of State for War. He was knighted as a Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire (K.B.E.) on 7 June 1951, and a Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath (K.C.B.) on 10 June 1954.

Lieutenant General Sir Euan MILLER, K.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., M.C. retired from the Army on 29 March 1955. He was Colonel Commandant of the 1st Battalion, The King's Royal Rifle Corps from 30 June 1954 until November 1958. From 1 November 1958 until 10 September 1960, he was the Lieutenant of the Tower of London. He lived in Brenchley, Kent until his death on 30 August 1985, aged eighty-eight years. He was married and had one son and two daughters.

Major Alexander William ALLAN was also awarded the Distinguished Service Order in recognition of gallant and distinguished services in the defence of Calais in May 1940. He remained a prisoner of war in Oflag 09A/H until May 1945. He retired shortly after the war on 17 March 1946. His diary covering the events at Calais was published in 1953.

The third recipient of the Distinguished Service Order on 20 September 1945 was Major Edward James Augustus BRUSH, again in recognition of gallant and distinguished services in the defence of Calais in May 1940. He was detained at Oflag VB and took part in many escape activities. He was transferred to Oflag IX A/Z and took charge of the escape committee, and Chief Security Officer at the camp. He was awarded made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (O.B.E.) on 18 April 1946 for his actions whilst a prisoner of war. He retired from the Army on 6 May 1947 with the rank of Honorary Lieutenant Colonel. He settled in County Down in Northern Ireland where he became High Sheriff, a Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lord Lieutenant. He died in 1984.

Rifleman Henry DAWKINS became a prisoner of war, and with his colleagues, they had to endure the six-hundred-mile march into captivity in eastern Germany. They were often pelted with rotten vegetables by German civilians on-route to their camps.

DAWKINS was held at Stalag 8B, a large prisoner of war camp in the Lamsdorf area with some 10,000 inmates, which grew during the war to hold approximately 100,000 men. The men were used as slave labour, and DAWKINS was employed on the construction of a vast oil shale plant. The British found themselves treated reasonably well, compared to the other Europeans, with the Russians and Poles being especially badly treated. Many of these men simply disappeared, never to be seen again. In late 1944, the plant was nearing completion, but just as it was being formally opened, the U.S. Army Air Force bombed it and the area was flattened. Many of the workmen wept as they saw the result of their dedication destroyed, albeit it was for their captors.

Rifleman DAWKINS contracted rheumatic fever, and he nearly died as a result. He was read the Last Rites, but he pulled through. In the Spring of 1945, with the advance of the Soviets from the east, many prisoners of war were forced to march westwards, in what was became known as 'the Death March'. Eventually, they were liberated by the advancing U.S. Army forces. DAWKINS married and had a family, but rarely talked of his experiences. He died in 1980, aged sixty-one years.



The scene of destruction at the Gare Maritime, Calais after the fighting ceased.

Courtesy of the German Federal Archive



German soldiers entering the Gare Maritime and docks area on 27 May 1940.

Courtesy of the German Federal Archive.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-1073-050-71
Foto: o. Ang. | 31. Mai 1940

Above - The Final Resting Place for one, unknown British soldier.

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