

Dunkirk 1940 - 2010

70th anniversary of Operation Dynamo and the Battle of Dunkirk

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Tribute

At the end of May 2010 the community of Dunkirk celebrates the 70th anniversary of Operation Dynamo and the Battle of Dunkirk. As they do every five years, the "Little Ships" will cross the Channel and come to pay to Dunkirk and to the combatants of 1940 the tributes of their peers and of new generations keen to perpetuate the memory of the men and of the sacrifices made to defend freedom and re-establish peace in Europe.

Let those who laid down their lives on our beaches or at sea, those whose frail vessels were sunk by the German air force on the road to hope, those who survive today, moving and proud veterans, inseparable from our collective memory, be honoured.

This year I have some very special reasons to be pleased about these commemorations taking place, marked both by solemnity and by friendship between peoples. This year 2010 is in fact marked by the desire of several of the area's districts to add their efforts to those of the Town of Dunkirk in order to celebrate together, with the same reverence, this 70th anniversary: so, Bray-Dunes, Coudekerque-Village, Leffrinckoucke and Zuydcoote are taking part in our briefing meetings, and the programme of this 70th anniversary of Operation Dynamo highlights the events retained by each district, both commemorative and cultural.

As was the case five years ago, the districts of Esquelbecq, Ledringhem and Wormhout are heavily involved in the event and the commemorative ceremonies; their memorial sites will be visited by personalities and guests, in particular British ones.

Another reason for satisfaction, Dunkirk will have the pleasure this year of welcoming a significant Czech delegation from the town of Liberec, in the presence of the civil, military and diplomatic authorities of the Czech Republic in France.

It is in tribute to the Czechoslovak independent armoured brigade which contributed to the liberation of Dunkirk on 9 May 1945 and to its commander, General Alois Liska, that the Town of Dunkirk will receive this delegation, taking advantage of the 70th anniversary of Dynamo and the quality of the proposed programme.

The presence of the Czech delegation from Liberec in May 2010 in Dunkirk marks the demonstrated desire for future co-operation between the two towns, co-operation which may ultimately translate into twinning arrangements.

Finally, may I be permitted to thank all those, personalities, civil and military authorities, delegations of war veterans, miscellaneous associations, municipal departments, who have spared no effort so that this 70th anniversary of Operation Dynamo and the Battle of Dunkirk will remain in the memories of everybody and be worthy of "the Dunkirk Spirit", an immense hope for resistance and deliverance born out of Dynamo.

Michel Delebarre
Former Minister of State
MP, Mayor of Dunkirk
Chairman of the urban Authority

When the sand was red...

It was spring 1940. The Allied forces, victims of the devastating breakthrough by the German armour towards the northern ports, found themselves trapped and with the sea as their only means of salvation. After the outbreak of the battle, England quickly realised the strategic error of its own troops' entry into Belgium. So it urgently devised the greatest evacuation undertaking in military history and pulled off a gamble beyond all its expectations.

Devised on 19 May in a room at Dover Castle, which during the First World War housed a generator (hence the name Dynamo), by Admiral Bertram Ramsay, Allied naval Commander-in-Chief, Operation Dynamo, implemented from 26 May to 4 June 1940, ensured the re-embarkation of the British expeditionary Force and thousands of French and Belgian soldiers from the armies of the North.

Consequently 338 226 troops (including 123 095 French soldiers) escaped from the hell of Dunkirk and made it to Great Britain, a nation which became the spearhead of the fight against Nazism.

With Operation Dynamo, the name of Dunkirk made the headlines world-wide and even the smallest newspapers of countries still spared by the war evoked the martyrdom of that crushed town, annihilated in that storm in History which still today refuses to be forgotten.

For the British, Dunkirk represented a "miracle" at the heart of an almighty disaster. Through its clear-sightedness and its initiatives, Great Britain was able to preserve, despite enormous material losses, the core of the human potential of its professional army and remain protected by its glorious navy and air force. Across the Channel, the drama consolidated national cohesion and the English drew pride from the success of the re-embarkation of their expeditionary Force. The British people henceforth drew their strength from the "Dunkirk Spirit", that "Dunkirk Spirit" hammered out by the lyricism of the perceptive Winston Churchill, which raised the last European democracy as the standard bearer of all resistances against Nazism.

A programme of exhibitions

- **At the Mémorial du Souvenir, rue des Chantiers de France, Dunkirk**

The walls of Bastion 32 are the last vestiges of this bastion which in 1940, before the German invasion, was the command post of Admiral Abrial, Commander of the northern naval forces.

Apart from the Mémorial's permanent collections, dedicated to Operation Dynamo from May-June 1940 and to the Battle of Dunkirk, under the generic title of "From the battle of Dunkirk - Operation Dynamo to the Liberation of Dunkirk - 9 May 1945", the Town of Dunkirk and the Mémorial du Souvenir welcome three institutions and three exhibitions. The latter shed their light on those years of suffering and mourning, revealing the history of Dunkirk from 1940 to 1945 and the partners who, as time goes by, maintain the memory and reminders of those who disappeared.

- From 20 March to 30 June

The French veterans association is offering three main themes on the subject "1940 - Combat and Resistance": fighting, the establishing of the Vichy regime, the first resistances and the setting up of the Free French Forces after the appeal from General de Gaulle.

- From 21 to 31 May

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission summarises its missions and history, and reveals the work it carries out to maintain, all year round, the cemeteries and memorials of the members of Commonwealth forces who died during the two world wars. The Commission maintains 3 000 sites, such as the Dunkirk Memorial, a necropolis where the names of more than 4 500 soldiers appear.

- From 24 to 31 May

The Town of Liberec, in the Czech Republic, and the Rota Nazdar association, whose vocation is the history of Czechoslovakia (Army) from 1914 to 1945, present at the Mémorial du Souvenir explanatory panels, historical objects, weapons and significant uniforms from the Second World War and of too often forgotten generations.

- **At the port Museum, quai de la Citadelle – Dunkirk**

***"Chronicles of a port at war, Dunkirk 1939-1945" exhibition,
from 27 May 2010 to 16 January 2011***

In 1939, the port of Dunkirk, equipped with a new sea lock, seemed assured of a bright future. However, from the month of September, France's entry into the Second World War was to undermine that promise. For more than five years, this highly strategic place, the object of all desires and attacks, was alternately bombed, pillaged then sabotaged.

Presented in the exhibition in the form of a chronicle, this story is told by multiple civilian or military players involved, in one way or another, in the conflict. It bears witness to the role of the sailors and fishermen assigned to mine-sweeping operations or monitoring of the strait, of the epic embarkation of French and English soldiers who made it to Great Britain under operation Dynamo, the despair of a French soldier taken prisoner because he was unable to embark... It shows the harsh living conditions of civilians left in Dunkirk under the Occupation: the difficulties with supplies and movement, the resumption of fishing and work in the few businesses spared the bombardments... while the German authorities prepared for a disembarkation in England before concentrating on defence of the coast. It recalls survival in the "pocket" fiercely defended by the Germans until liberation of the town, then the rebirth of the port rebuilt through courage and perseverance. So ends the chronicle of events which have marked European history forever.

The exhibition is produced in partnership with Patrick Oddone, scientific adviser, the Dunkirk municipal Archives and the local social welfare Centre.

On Wednesday 26 May at 18.30, at the opening of the exhibition, the special edition of the Dunkirk history and archaeology Society *"Dunkirk and Contemporary Conflicts"* will be presented to the public.

As it was able to do in 2005, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Dunkirk, the Dunkirk history and archaeology Society is publishing a special edition of its magazine dedicated to contemporary conflicts, to accompany the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of Operation Dynamo. Based on the principle that memories of the two world wars in the 20th century are inseparable, this publication brings together a number of studies and documents putting into perspective various situations specific to the Dunkirk area during those tragic years. It dwells in particular on the experiences of the populations and devotes itself to the narrating of atypical individual experiences gathered from the last participants from that time or from their descendants.

- **At the Dunkirk urban Authority, Pertuis de la Marine**

***"From Operation Dynamo to the Liberation of Dunkirk"* exhibition,
from 27 to 30 May**

Stamp and postcard collecting exhibition at the initiative of the Dunkirk philatelic Club in partnership with the urban Authority and the Town of Dunkirk.

A programme of lectures

- **Café musical performance on the 1940s**

by Michel Nierenberger and Alain Vaast, musicians

Wednesday 26 May 2010 at 19.00 - Fort des Dunes, Leffrinckoucke

- **1940: 100 000 forgotten dead. Dunkirk at the heart of the battle**

by Jean-Pierre Richardot, historian, former Le Monde, L'Express, France 2 and RTL journalist

Thursday 27 May at 18.00 - Dunkirk Town Hall, Salle Vauban

On the initiative of the Dunkirk history and archaeology Society

In 47 days, France fell and 100 000 French troops were killed on the spot defending our country and our ally, Great Britain, to which they contributed crucial help which enabled it to a large extent to survive and continue the fight. They saved the expeditionary force in Dunkirk fighting with the energy which is drawn from despair. Because France suffered the most stinging of defeats, in the face of a German superiority which was one above all of intelligence and of organisation of a scientific type, those 100 000 dead have been forgotten, as if they were responsible for the chaos and for that tragedy. They are, however, beyond their sacrifice, the forerunners of the Resistance, and constituted, with the Allies, the vanguard of freedom.

The speaker will try to demonstrate how fascinating Dunkirk in 1940 was: the battle itself and the dual account of that battle, one French, the other British, in short two quite different stories. He will also recall that our fathers and grandfathers fought as hard as the Americans did four years later at Omaha Beach.

This story, which has practically disappeared from school books, has been revisited by Jean-Pierre Richardot who rebels against the eternal clichés conveyed by Vichy propaganda and still peddled. Do we know that in 1940 our soldiers wanted to continue the fight? Do we know that the French people did not go mad at all, as the invasion swept in? Any more than they called Pétain to power? Dunkirk 1940, collapse and disaster, already carried the seeds of that coup d'Etat, with lies and use of forgery, which enabled the anti-republican French generals to deliver our soldiers up to the enemy, to threaten them with court-martial if they continued to fight, completely incompetent and behind-the-times generals who deliberately broke with England and placed our country under Nazi control.

- **Operation Dynamo**
by Patrick Oddone and Olivier Vermesch, Chairman
and member respectively of the Dunkirk history and archaeology Society

Wednesday 2 June at 18.30 - Fort des Dunes, Leffrinckoucke

- **The story of the Princess Elizabeth during Operation Dynamo**

By Yves Sanche, history buff

- **The fighting of the 7th GRDI (Infantry Division Reserve Group) at Coudekerque**

By Laurent Soyer, historian (military archaeological and historical research Association)

*Saturday 5 June at 19.00 - Coudekerque-Village,
Jean-Marie Vandembroucke hall*

Before the lectures, a documentary will be shown. Lasting one hour, it consists of accounts from veterans of the 7th GRDI and archive pictures.

Norfolkline Commemorates Dunkerque Evacuation – 27 May 2010

Norfolkline will be taking WWII veterans, old military vehicles, members of the British Legion, Help for Heroes and many others across the Channel to join in the afternoon of tribute and remembrance.

Order of events (Please note all times are local).

09.30 Port of Dover. Parachute Regiment Military Band plays before marching onto ferry. Royal Choral Society sings as band arrives and takes position with veterans on aft upper deck

10:00 Port of Dover. Military Band plays as ferry departs.

13:00 Dunkirk Ferry Port. Military Band leads procession of veterans and military vehicles off ferry which will travel by road □to Old Town Harbour.

15.30 Old Town Harbour. Little Ships, accompanied by Royal Naval frigate and RNLi lifeboat, enter Harbour and sail in formation past the ferry. They take position in front of ferry, accompanied by the Military Band and Choir in turn. The French and British national anthems will be followed by the official Commemoration service to include laying of petals and wreaths, hymns and a short address by British and French representatives.

A small number of places will be available for people wishing to join the 10 am ferry from Dover on the 27th. There will be facilities available at the harbour side in Dunkerque old town for those wishing to take part in the afternoon events.

Dunkerque

The "Little Ships" return to Dunkirk

The *Little Ships* are expected at the Bassin du Commerce in Dunkirk on Thursday 27 May at 17.00 (weather conditions permitting). They will be welcomed by the 1940 military vehicles of the "War and Peace Display Team" Association and the Paul Garein Jazz Big Band with 1940 tunes.

It was on the evening of 27 May 1940 that the decision was taken to reroute the evacuation fleet to the beaches between La Panne (Belgium) and Dunkirk Malo-les-Bains, as the port was now subject to too violent air attacks. Hundreds of vehicles were arranged perpendicularly to the coast to facilitate embarkation at high tide and an endless stream of small vessels, which became the famous *Little Ships*, operated as shuttles with the vessels anchored offshore.

On the frequently machine-gunned beaches, endless columns of British soldiers waited to be rescued with a legendary composure which commanded admiration. Around 1 400 British and French ships of all sorts, including pleasure craft, would, over nine days, evacuate around 340 000 men to England.

Thanks to remarkable coordination of the resources implemented, operation Dynamo was a success in the midst of defeat.

However, 35 000 French soldiers were unable to escape from the trap and endured the harsh conditions of captivity in Germany.

Dunkirk and its port were completely destroyed.

Today, anchored at the Bassin de la Marine, in front of the urban Authority, the "Princess Elizabeth", which contributed to the re-embarkation of the allied troops in 1940, stands as the symbol of the mythical saga that was Operation Dynamo.

Free visits to the "Princess Elizabeth" will be organised on Thursday 27 May from 10.00 to 19.00 and from Friday 28 to Monday 31 May from 10.00 to 17.00.

In addition, the French command and supply vessel (BCR) "Marne" (quai Freycinet 6), the English frigate "HMS Monmouth" and the Belgian auxiliary unit "Stern" (quai Freycinet 1) will be open to the public on 29 and 30 May from 14.00 to 17.00.

The commemorations marking the 70th anniversary of the Battle of Dunkirk and Operation Dynamo

Friday 28 May

- ***15.15 - British Memorial, route de Furnes***

Commemorative ceremony in tribute to the British troops

With the participation of the choir of the pupils from Dunkirk Music School and la Porte d'Eau primary school.*

Esquelbecq - Ledringhem - Wormhout

- ***16.30 - Esquelbecq***

Ceremony commemorating the massacre of "La Plaine au Bois"

On 28 May 1940, the Germans blocked off access to the town of Wormhout, as well as to Ledringhem and Esquelbecq, strategic points for possible progression towards Dunkirk. During this confrontation, around a hundred soldiers from the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, Cheshire Regiment and Royal Artillery were taken prisoner and locked in a barn in a pasture at the place called "La Plaine au Bois", in the district of Esquelbecq.

This memorial site evokes the massacre of more than 80 British and Welsh soldiers and a French soldier.

The barn was a cattle shelter. About a hundred prisoners, all packed in together with one another, were crammed in there in the late afternoon of 28 May 1940. Twelve SS from the Leibstandarte, commanded by Wilhelm Mohnke, started their terrible work by throwing grenades into the barn.

The barn was rebuilt and inaugurated in 2001 by two survivors of the massacre, Alf Tombs and Bert Evans. The site has become a place of pilgrimage, and has borne witness to the visits of thousands of veterans who have come to pay tribute to the 80 victims of Nazi barbarity.

The victims of that massacre rest in the Commonwealth military cemetery of Esquelbecq and in Ledringhem and Wormhout cemeteries.*

Information: Esquelbecq Tourist Office (Tel. 03 28 62 88 57).

- **17.45 - Wormhout**

Surrender of the "Fortress" of Dunkirk

In Wormhout, the participants will bow in front of the plaque commemorating the surrender of the "Fortress" of Dunkirk on 9 May 1945, in the presence of a delegation of Czech veterans, symbols of the Liberation of Dunkirk in 1945, and will reflect in silence for a few moments, in memory of the allied soldiers killed or injured during the fighting and of the civilian victims of the districts of Esquelbecq, Ledringhem and Wormhout. *

Information: Wormhout Tourist Office (Tel. 03 28 62 81 23).

* With the participation of the members of the association of British vehicles of the second world war War and Peace Display Team.

Saturday 29 May

- **11.30 - Esplanade Georges Cavrois, Allied Monument in Malo-les-Bains**

At sea, opposite the digue des Alliés site: presence of the *Little Ships* accompanied by the Royal Navy and Royal Lifeboat Institution vessels (weather conditions permitting).

Commemorative ceremony marking the 70th anniversary of the Battle of Dunkirk and Operation Dynamo, in the presence of the civil, military and diplomatic authorities, a Czech delegation from Liberec, with the participation of delegations of British, Belgian and French war veterans, the flag and guard of honour of the 43rd Infantry Regiment, two sections from Cambrai Air Base 103, the crews of the Belgian and Dutch Royal Navy vessels, the command and supply ship "Marne", a delegation of army Cadets and a British band, as well as the band of the 43rd Infantry Regiment. *

- **15.30 - Dunkirk-Centre**

Parade, from the Cenotaph of the Saint-Eloi Belfry to the Town Hall, of all the participants in the commemorative ceremony at the end of the morning, at the Allied Memorial.

Performance of the European Hymn by the Dunkirk Music School Junior Orchestra. *

- With the participation of the members of the association of British vehicles of the second world war War and Peace Display Team.
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- **20.00 - Saint Eloi Church**

... *Let victory rest with those who have fought the war without loving it!*

André Malraux

Antimémoires

Readings evening (duration 1 hour) organised by the Town of Dunkirk, with the participation of the "Young France" Choir, the Dunkirk Music School and the Théâtre de l'Escarmouche, in tribute to the soldiers of the allied armies who died in Operation Dynamo and the Battle of Dunkirk, in tribute to the British, Belgian and French troops who trod the land of Flanders in May-June 1940, in tribute to the *Little Ships* and their heroic and miraculous armada.

Major texts of French literature, in particular by Louis Aragon, Marc Bloch, Julien Gracq, Joseph Kessel, Robert Merle, Paul Nizan... "all involved in the torment of Dunkirk", will punctuate the evening and plunge the public back into the tragic times of May-June 1940.

* Thanks to Jean-Marc Alcalay, author of "La Plume et le Fusil - 1940: des écrivains dans la tourmente".

The "Young France" men's choir will perform four works:

- Handel's "Alleluia", in English
- Cherubini's "Pie Jesu", in Latin
- The Soldiers' Chorus from Gounod's "Faust"
- the Chant des Marais (music: Rudie Goguet, harmonising Olivier François), while the great organ of Saint-Eloi will thunder out and, for the record, the names of the *Little Ships*, the names of the miraculous survivors of that hell and the names of those who did not come back, will be heard one by one ...

Sunday 30 May

- **09.30 – Dunkirk Memorial, Grand Large district**

Official visit to the exhibitions* of the Dunkirk Memorial, in the surroundings of the curtains of Bastion 32

* *presented in the Exhibitions section of the press file*

followed by an **inauguration of streets**, under the 70th anniversary of the Battle of Dunkirk and Operation Dynamo, on the initiative of the Town of Dunkirk.

- rue Jean Becaert, a French officer from the 110th IR, FFI resistance member - Voix du Nord network-Liberation of Dunkirk (9 May 1945)
- passage Sir Bertram Ramsay, a British Admiral, allied Commander-in-Chief
- passage du Major Général Alois Liska, Commander of the Czechoslovak independent armoured Brigade, Liberation of Dunkirk (9 May 1945)

followed, at the Guy Debeyre school, Grand Large district, rue du Contre-Torpilleur Triomphant in Dunkirk, by a reception and the **official signing of a declaration of commitment** with a view to twinning in the not too distant future between the town of Liberec (Czech Republic) and the town of Dunkirk.

The Czechs and Dunkirk

2010 will mark the 65th anniversary of the Liberation of Dunkirk, on 9 May 1945.

The last town in France to be liberated, it is to the Canadian, British, French and Czechoslovak troops that the City of Jean Bart owed its re-found freedom. It has an affection for, with a very special acknowledgement, the Czechoslovak independent armoured Brigade of General Alois Liska, the General Liska who at Wormhout received from the German Admiral Frisius, the letter of surrender of the "Fortress" of Dunkirk.

For the first time since 1945, the Town of Dunkirk officially welcomes, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of Dynamo, a delegation from Liberec and from the Czech Republic, composed of a number of veterans.

Contacts

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