



La bataille de Dunkerque

1940 – 2010 : 70th anniversary of the Battle of Dunkirk and Operation Dynamo

Programme

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.*

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.

□

20.00 - Saint Eloi Church

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

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 below

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)

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.

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.

Contact : Dunkirk Tourist Information Centre
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