

## RETREAT FROM ABBEVILLE

### 5<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> JUNE 1940

**5<sup>th</sup> June:** The 4<sup>th</sup> Seaforths withdrew to Limeaux, south-east of Limercourt.  
PM. *"We reached Limeaux just as it was getting light. It was a small, tumbledown village, completely deserted, and for some reason had obviously been rather badly dive-bombed. There were enormous craters all round it and one or two actually in the village."*  
2300 withdrew to Battalion Headquarters at Ramburelles.

**6<sup>th</sup> June:** Arrived Ramburelles 0500.  
2100 Withdrew across the River Bresle. Arrived Blangy at midnight.

**7<sup>th</sup> June:** Reached 'Star Fish Crossroads', Forest d'Eu. At night, no transport arrived for journey to Le Treport, so the troops started marching to Cuverville-sur-Yeres.

**8<sup>th</sup> June:** 0600 Arrived Cuverville.  
p.m. Moved to Bois Robert, a village south of Dieppe  
2100 Orders to move immediately to Arques la Bataille.

**9<sup>th</sup> June:** Early a.m. arrived Arques la Bataille.  
PM. *"The Company was holding a line running parallel with a railway and a river; however the ground we were occupying was low and inclined to be marshy with the river Bethune running along our front. The platoons found that on digging down to a depth of two feet, they struck water."*

*"The village was still occupied but at 11 a.m. the Mayor issued a very belated evacuation order. I was immediately besieged by weeping women and children, all saying what were they to do, where were they to go etc.?"*

**10<sup>th</sup> June:** During the night of 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> June the bridges across the River Bethune were destroyed by allied forces.

The Adjutant's official diary quotes: *"1300 hours. 'D' Company reported that the enemy were attacking and trying to cross the Bethune River by the destroyed [main] bridge. It was also reported that German lorries were debussing troops the other side of the Bethune at a crossroads. This information was passed back to the Royal Horse Gunners who immediately concentrated fire on the crossroads. However, enemy troops managed to cross the river and establish a post in an old factory near the railway"*.

*"The RHA shelled the bridge and scored a direct hit on the ruin, which blew it to pieces. The Mortar Pl[atoon] shelled the factory post and drove the enemy out of it. 1400 hours. BN. HQ was heavily shelled, causing several casualties."*



Bethune River with railway line in foreground and CWGC WW1 cemetery in distance

Photo: Clare Church

Eight 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Seaforth Highlanders are buried in the **Communal Cemetery**.



Photo: Clare Church

**10<sup>th</sup> June:** PM. *“At 6.15 p.m. I received a message from Bn. HQ to the effect that the Battalion would hold on at all costs till 11 p.m. and then withdraw to a pre-arranged RV about two miles further back.”*

2300 The troops marched westwards then were transported towards Battalion Headquarters at Yelon [Iclon on present day map].

**11<sup>th</sup> June:** In the early hours of the morning the Battalion came up against close range German gunfire. Shots were being fired from windows of the houses in a village. Much mayhem ensued, with an ammunition truck on fire and vehicles facing the wrong way in the narrow streets. Eventually Captain Munro found the Divisional Headquarters at Cailleville and reported the incident, much to the officers' surprise that the Germans were so close.

1130 The Battalion arrived at Yelon.

**12<sup>th</sup> June:** 0500 Battalion reached St Valéry en Caux  
 0800 **General Ihler** [CO French 9<sup>th</sup> Army Corps] gave the order to surrender, but **General Fortune** was determined to fight on but surrendered at 1000.

More than 8,000 members of the 51st (Highland) Division were taken prisoner.

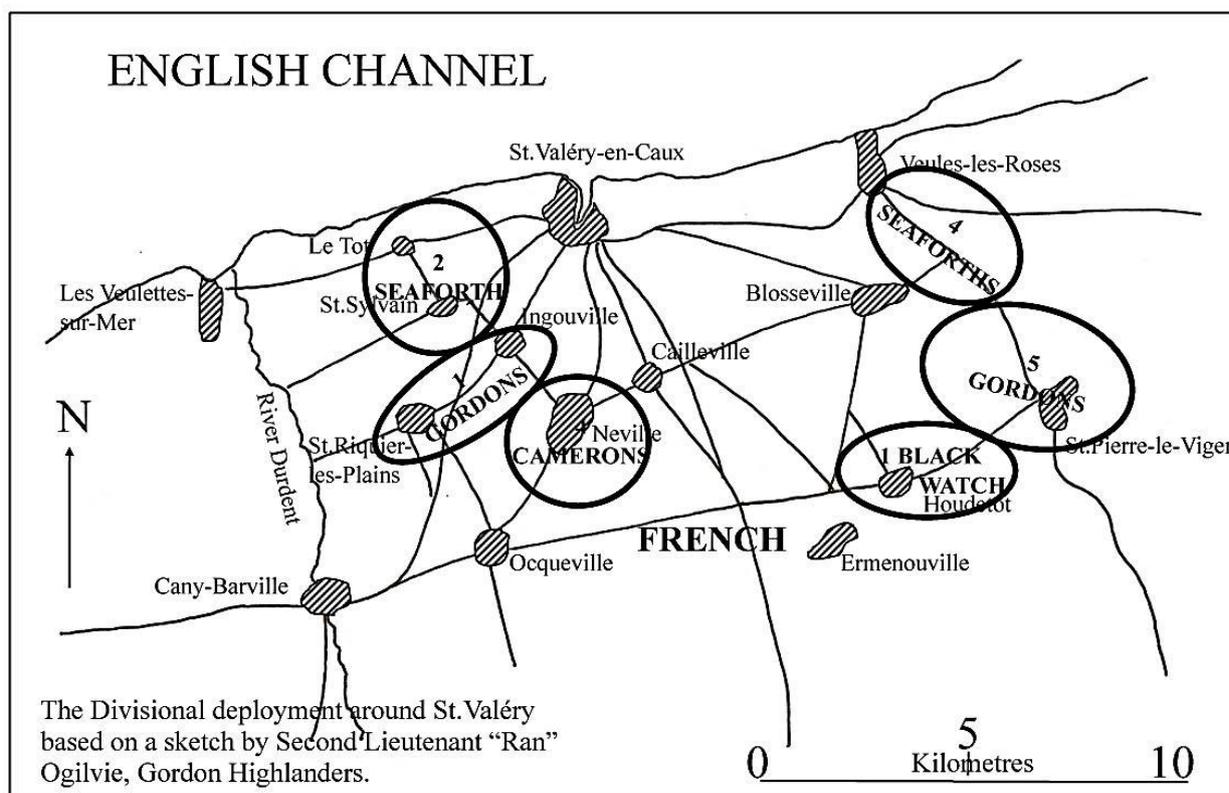




Photo: IWM RM4 342

**Major General V M Fortune, GOC [General Officer Commanding] 51st Highland Division (right), with General Major Erwin Rommel at St. Valéry after the surrender of the 51st Division to Rommel's 7th Panzer Division (12th June 1940)**



**Seaforth and Cameron Highlanders buttons found at St Valéry  
Photo: Dunkirk Veterans**