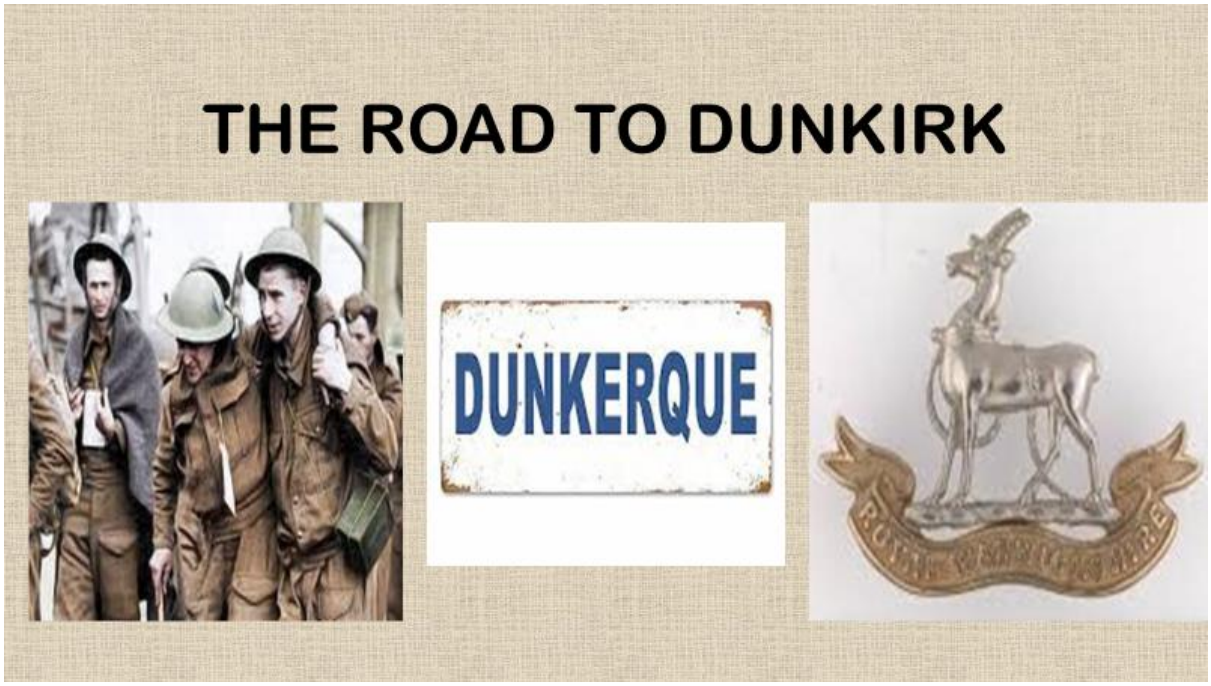
‘The Road to Dunkirk’ by Dave Seeney.



Dave described the content of his talk to include the battle of Dunkirk, the battalions and contributions of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment and the Wormhout Massacre and consequences. He started his talk by referencing Montgomery [‘Monty’] the first general to wear battledress.

Monty was a great contingency planner and his men were well practised in day and night withdrawals something that was to be a key feature after the Germans launched their attack on Holland, Belgium and France and prior to Operation ‘Dynamo’ the operation to evacuate Allied Servicemen from the beaches and harbour of Dunkirk [also known as the ‘Miracle of Dunkirk’].

This was an era of equipment shortage for the British Army, in particular, there being so few radio communications sets.

Monty was ‘prepared’ and forward thinking even to the extent of prevention of venereal disease in the troops by provision of contraceptives though this move would bring him into conflict with the Chaplain General. Monty was recognised for his leadership/training. Towards the end of Dunkirk, Monty was given command of II Corps for the final withdrawal. He instructed his engineers to improvise on the beaches of Dunkirk by making jetties out of abandoned lorries for the use of the small boats in the evacuation. He was evacuated from Dunkirk on HMS Coddrington.

Monty was GOC 3rd Infantry Division.

One of the German commanders was Erwin Rommel who would be his opponent in the desert campaign of North Africa in 1942. Rommel had studied tank warfare/tactics and practised in Russia in the interwar period [thus avoiding the restrictions of the Versaille’s Treaty]. In command of the 7th Panzers, the Panzers made rapid progress. Rommel received the Knight’s Cross for his part in the campaign in which he took 10,000 French POWs.

Loss of equipment and personnel:

Dave reflected on the huge loss of army equipment because of Dunkirk which included 20548 motorcycles. The RAF sustained significant loss of aircraft [931 lost] and personnel with 1528 KIA, DOW or POW. Many Merchant ships were lost which are not documented here.

ROYAL NAVY LOSSES

6 x Destroyers sunk, 9 x Major vessels lost. 19 Destroyers Damaged and 100s of small craft sunk.

BRITISH ARMY LOSSES

Guns x 2,472 - Vehicles x 63,879 - Motorcycles x 20,548
Ammunition (Tons) x 76,697 - Stores (Tons) x 415,940
Petrol (Tons) x 164,929 - Cruiser Tanks x 161
Light Tanks (Vickers Mk VI) x 162. MGs x 11,000.
Infantry Tanks (Matilda)Mk 1 x 100 (Total sent to France)
Killed, Died of Wounds, Missing, POW – 68,111

ROYAL AIR FORCE LOSSES

931 Aircraft - Failed to return, destroyed on the ground, damaged beyond repair.

1,526 Men Killed in Action, Died of Wounds, Lost at Sea, POW – Majority of these were pilots and aircrew.

Squadrons – 1, 12, 54,73, 114, 501, 600.

The efforts of the RAF had a [wrongly] tarnished image regarding the Battle of Dunkirk – Dave reflected on the main reason for this which was that the many RAF sorties against enemy airfields, planes or shipping, for example, were simply not visible to men on the beaches.

Warwickshire Regiment:

12th Bn Royal Warwickshire Regt

Battalion reached France in March 1940 and did valuable service in guarding docks, ammo depots, petrol and other supply dumps. The Bn was evacuated without loss from St Marlo and Brest by the 17th June.

Formed as a Garrison Bn 18.01.40 at Newton Abbot. Disbanded 19.03.42 personnel RA.

The 1/7th Royal Warwickshire Regiment took up defensive positions along the canal lines – they sustained significant losses [see slide below] but their efforts brought valuable time for the operation 'Dynamo'. It is possible but not yet confirmed that units which had had heavy casualties in this campaign may have had their evacuation from the beaches prioritised.

1/7th Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regt 143 BDE
48th Division

Jan 1940 Arrived France stationed at Raches.

10th May moved to Brussels as A.A defence for BEF.

11th In position in action continuously next six days.
Worked under direct control of 1st Division.

17th May Reverted to 143 Brigade at Hal. Withdrawal to Escaut Canal – The blooding of the Bn.

22nd bewildering withdrawls – slowly to the west.

25th Passed through – Orchies, Degregraincourt, Don-En-Sanghien and arrived north of Lille near Commines. Took up position covering the Commines Canal from Ypres to North of Houthem.
26th Moved to canal at Houthem.
27th Germans broke through on left flank, by mid-day A & B Coys had been overrun. Counter attack led by the Adjt restored the situation.
28th "Grim battle, holding on by skin of our teeth"

31st Withdraw to Dunkirk.
1st June left via the Mole on HMS Malcolm for Dover.

CASUALTIES

Officers - 2 Killed, 5 Wounded, 8 POW, 1 Missing.
Other Ranks – 250 Killed Wounded and Missing.

DECORATIONS

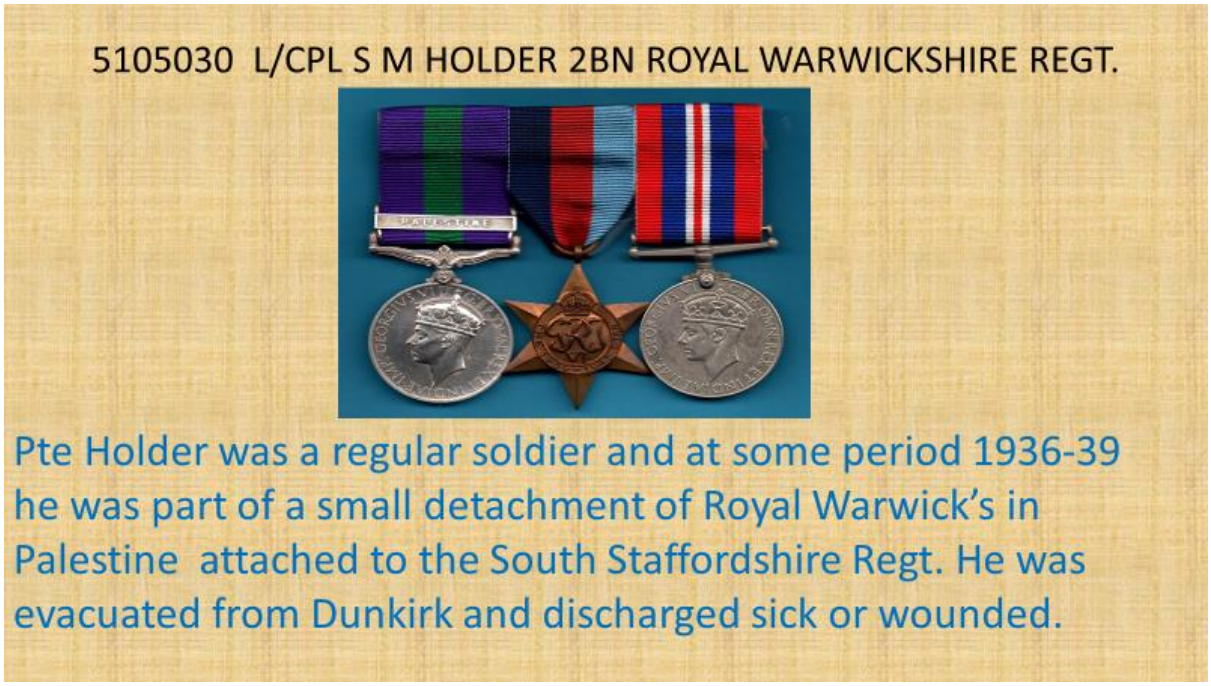
1 x DSO, 3 x MC, 3 x DCM, 1 x MM. MID x 1+ ?

Medals to Private AH Goodman were shown – they were 1939-45 Star, British War Medal and Territorial Efficiency Medal awarded in 1948. He'd been taken POW 16.7.1940 until his release 18.7.1945. The eye witness accounts of treatment of troops made POW by the SS were appalling – typically characterised by long route marches and train journeys with no food or water.

German tactics – to facilitate their advance across the canals, German soldiers were known to wear civilian clothes, use civilian vehicles and, sometimes, even wear British uniform.

The fighting withdrawal of the British was noted for heavy losses. Tactically, defensive preparations had been made rapidly redundant as the German advance through Belgium and Holland bypassed the Maginot Line. Various casualty listings for the Warwickshire battalions were shown.

A trio of medals to L Cpl S. Holder [2nd Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment] were shown. He had pre-war service in Palestine.



WOII Charles Smith – He was KIA 29.5.1940 in Bray Sands [subsequent MID for this action LG 07/1940] whilst defending the perimeter. Medals were 1939-45 Star, British War Medal and Coronation Medal 1937 [see photograph below]. His extensive service was discussed. He had enlisted in 1918 into the 53rd Young Soldiers Battalion of the Warwickshire Regiment, he was in France in 1919 but didn't qualify for any first War or interwar campaign medals [He had been in India 1937].

WOII Frank Charles Smith 2Bn Royal Warwickshire Regt
CSM "C" Company KIA Bray Sands Dunkirk 29 May 1940

By the KING'S Order the name of
Company Sergeant-Major F.C. Smith,
The Royal Warwickshire Regiment,
was published in the London Gazette on
26 July, 1940,
as mentioned in a Despatch for distinguished service.
I am charged to record
His Majesty's high appreciation.

Secretary of State for War

The Battle for Wormhout:

BATTLE FOR WORMHOUT

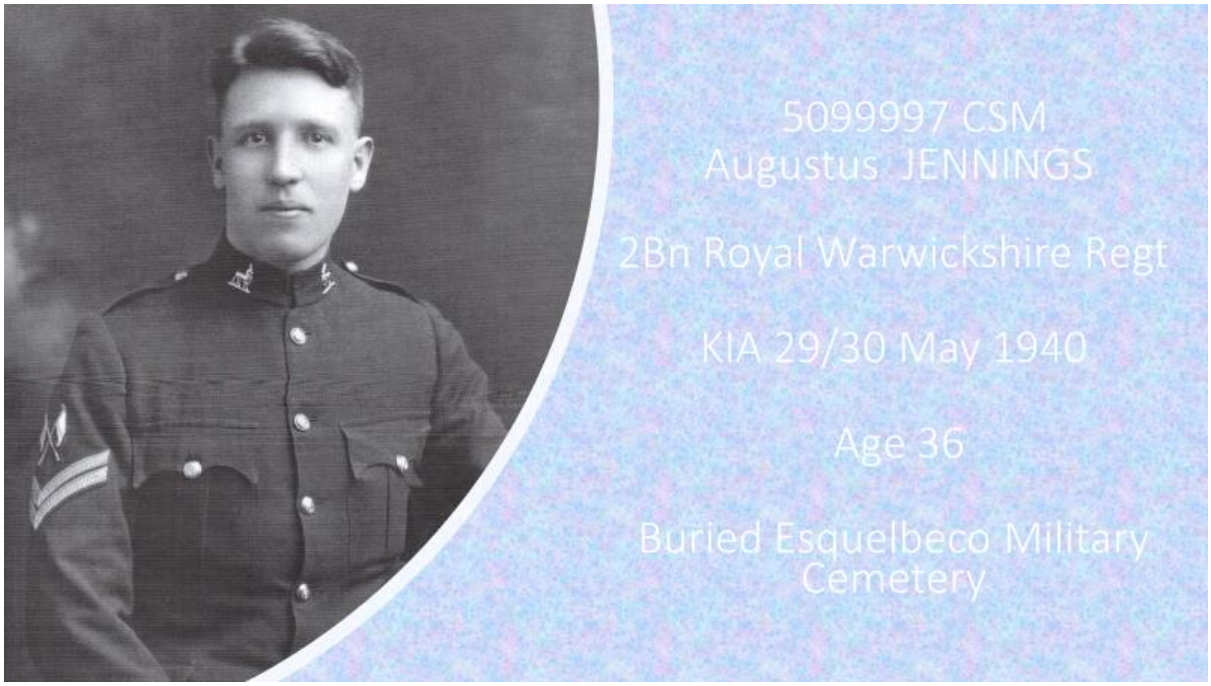
- 26th May The Battalion arrived at Wormhout. – Took up positions and dug in. With support from two MG Platoons 4th Cheshires and 53rd Anti-Tank Regt.
- 27th The area was bombed by 15 planes and the Pioneer Plt had casualties.
- "C" Company withdrawn to defend 48th Division HQ.
- 28th At 12 noon 200 enemy east of the Dunkirk road. Heavy fire and shelling.
- Positions overrun by tanks . CO with 65 soldiers escaped to Brigade HQ.
- 29th Survivors reorganized with LT-Col Hicks as CO. Defence positions.
- 30th Orders to move to Bray Dunes Dunkirk arrived 5 am at 10 am the remains of 144 Brigade evacuated in small boats. After 13 days in contact with the enemy.

Wormhaut Massacre 28.5.1940 : Heavy resistance to the SS was offered by the two machine gun platoons. Sixty-five British soldiers managed to escape to Brigade HQ – Maps showed that they were encircled. Importantly, they did block the route to Dunkirk.

THE KILLING OF PRISONERS

28th May 1400hrs German tanks and troops in Wormhout , 1500hrs Germans in full control, some prisoners killed on site. 50 prisoners were rounded up and moved close to Wormhout church. They were marched North then to the Ledringham road. On route Pte Albert Evans reported seeing 15 men shot. Also men who could not keep up were shot or bayoneted . Eventually arriving at a Barn/Milking shed!

Many POW were killed on site at Wormhout or en route if they were wounded or sick and unable to keep up – they were treated appallingly with witnesses recording bayonetting and shooting. Some [numbers vary but between 50 and 90 men] were eventually reached a barn [or milking shed] where some were shot. To encourage British POWs to come out of the barn, the Germans threw in grenades – Two soldiers, Sergeant- Major Jennings and Sergeant Moore, threw themselves onto the grenades and were killed trying to save others. Their dates of death were 28.5.1940 but are documented as 30.5.1940.



5108000 Sgt Stanley Moore
2Bn Royal Warwickshire Regt

Missing - Died 11/30 May 1940 Age 24

Esquelbeco Military Cemetery

Husband of Martha Louisa Moore of Paddington London

There were two escapees from the barn who reached a nearby pond. Captain Lynn-Alan was shot in the head and killed by a German Officer and Private Bert Evens who was also shot by the same Officer, left for dead but survived this and survived the war [He died in 2013]. Bert Evens had lost an arm in the war but was to receive a Royal Humane Society Award in 1955 for the rescue of a child at a swimming baths.

53157 Capt James Frazer LYNN – ALLEN D Company
2Bn Royal Warwickshire Regiment.

Escaped with Bert Evans but shot and killed in a pond near to the Barn.

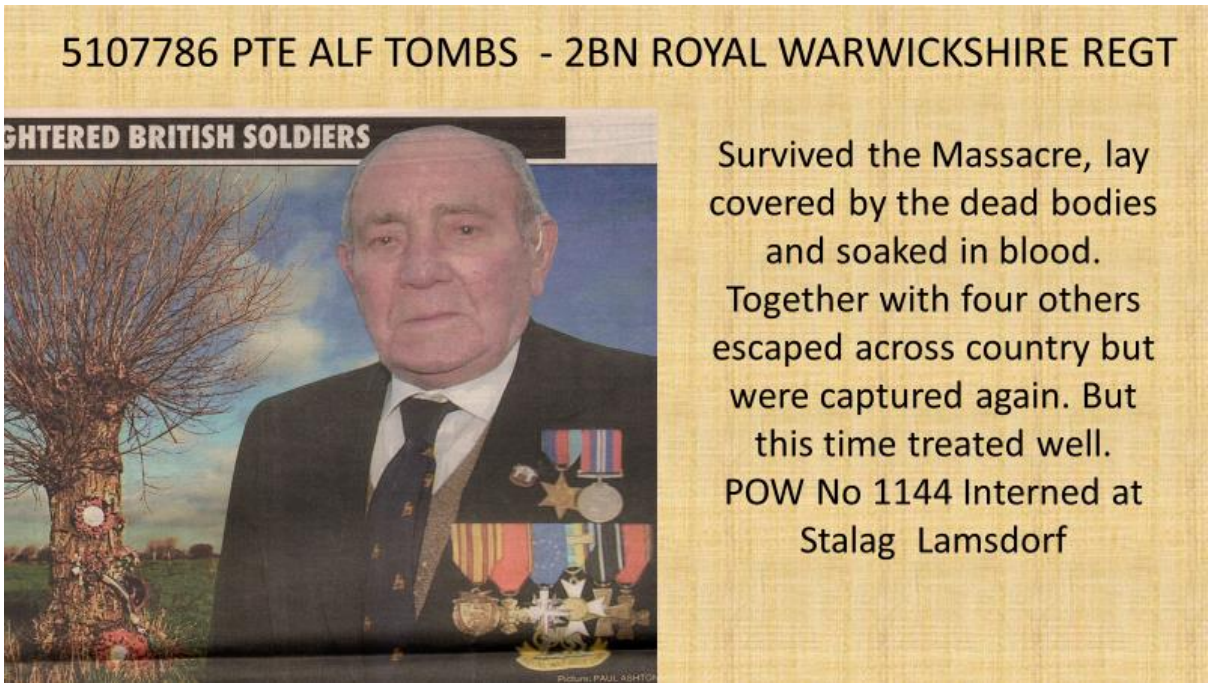
Husband of Beryl Lynn – Allen of Tyndrum Perthshire.
Commemorated on the Dunkirk Memorial
Recommended for MC

These are the medals to Charles A Dodd a Wormhout casualty – It is not his original WWI British War Medal shown below. His LSGC [Long Service and Good Conduct] was awarded in 1938.

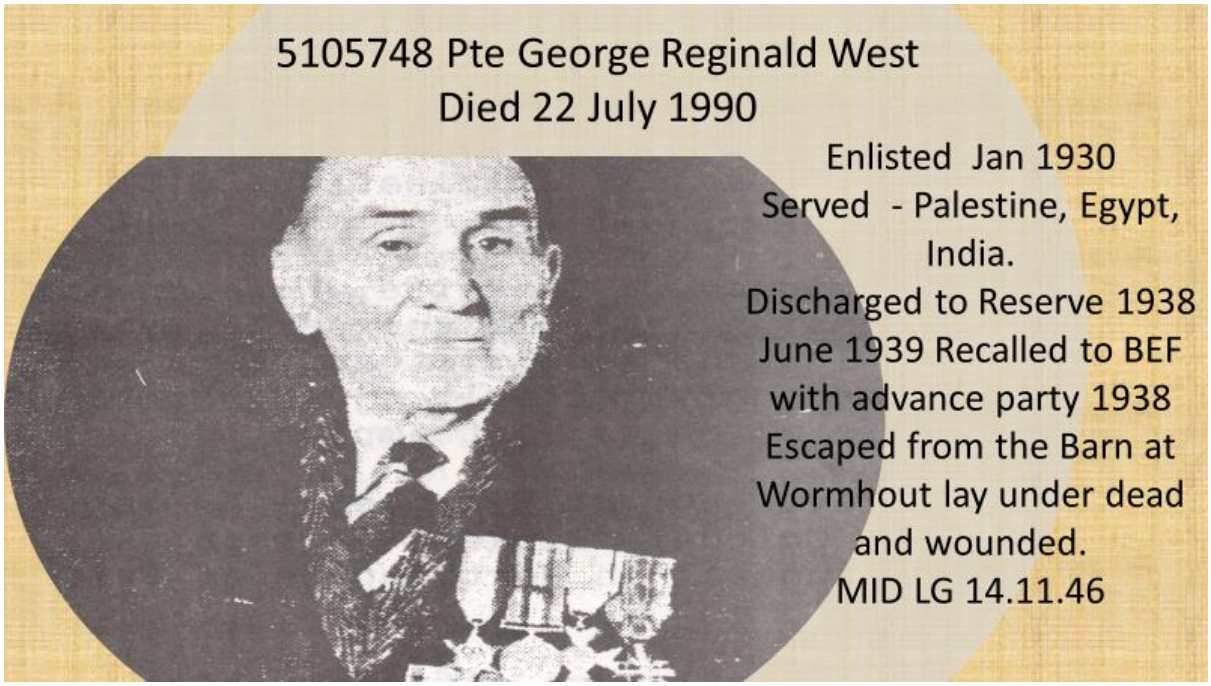
<u>Wormhout Survivors</u>:

About 20 personnel survived the Wormhout massacre but by the end of WWII, about 12 survivors were left.

Private Alf Tombes survived and was made a POW.



Private George Reginald West [who died in 1990] escaped and for 18 months, helped a Church of Scotland Minister Reverend Donald Caskie in his extraordinary wartime task of helping several hundred Allied servicemen escape from the south of France into Spain. Caskie became known as the 'Tartan Pimpernel'. Dave had visited George West some fifty years ago.

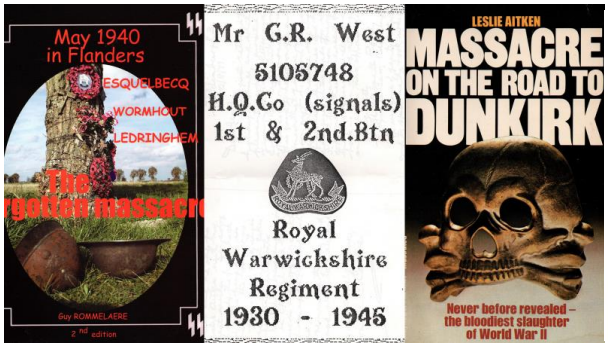


The first report of the Wormhaut incident was made by Private Jim Dutton who told Major Keynes when they both recovering in military hospital in Ghent in July, 1940. Dutton's story was corroborated by other soldiers but, only on Keynes' repatriation because of wounds in 1943, was Major Keynes able to report the incident to the War Office. Dutton had lost his brother in the massacre at the barn.

Responsibility on the German side lay with SS Captain William Mohnke. He was a POW of the Russians till 1955 and was known to be retired on a substantial pension in the 1990's. No charges were pressed after this incident presumably as he'd been a POW long after WWII ended and, also, possibly as this was not a concentration camp atrocity.

A picture of the preserved barn was shown and also reading materials available on 'Wormhout'.

[See next photographs]



In commemoration of Dunkirk, the Mayor of Dunkirk issued a medal in 1960. [see below Left] There is also the Dunkirk commemorative monument.[see photo below Right]

Further medals were shown [apologies as no photos], firstly a trio to Private Hoar a Dunkirk casualty full details as follows:

2927124 Private G V Hoar 2nd Bn Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders

Later Lieutenant 1st Bn Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders

Medals: General Service Medal (1918 – 62): Palestine, The 1939 – 1945 Star, War Medal 1939 – 1945.

Born 8 May 1911 in Southsea, Hampshire. Enlisted in the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders 12 May 1930.

As a Lance Corporal he became a Cadet at Royal Military College Sandhurst. After 2 years he left the College without a Commission He was given the choice of taking his discharge or rejoin the ranks of his Regiment. He elected to stay in the ranks and was posted to the 2nd Battalion, serving in Palestine and Egypt. Discharged to the Reserve in November 1937. In September 1939 he was recalled from the reserve and joined the 1st Battalion. As a Lance Corporal serving in HQ Company he went to France with the 1st Battalion in October 1939. Shortly after arriving in France, he was recommended for commission and returned to the UK. Commissioned Lieutenant on 9 December 1939, he returned to the 1st Bn Cameron Highlanders in France. During May 1940, detached from the 1st Cameron Highlanders, he commander a Company made up of reinforcements holding a position on the Aire Canal until wounded and left behind. POW in Bavaria until April 1945. He was subsequently invalided out, on pension.

Finally came the solitary MM to WO2 W.E. Jack.

2930785 Acting Warrant Officer Class II W. E. Jack 4th Bn Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders

Medal: Military Medal (GVIR)

The MM was awarded in the London Gazette 11 October 1945 "in recognition of gallant and distinguished services in the field". This did not help in identifying which Battalion or campaign it was awarded for. From a review of the regimental magazine of the time, it seemed to indicate that the regimental awards in the Gazette of 11 October 1945 might well be for France 1940. During the first lockdown I was playing around on Find my Past in their British Army Casualty Lists 1939-45, when up pop Jack's name showing him wounded in France as a Lance Sergeant in the 4th Battalion. The 4th Bn was one of two Territorial Battalions of the Cameron Highlanders, was part of 51st Highland Division (51st HD). 51st HD was surrounded and captured at St Valery-en-Caux on 2 July 1940. I know that Jack was evacuated from France because later in the war he was serving with 1st Liverpool Scottish, also a Territorial Bn of the Cameron Highlanders, who served in the UK and Gibraltar

There followed some further discussion on SS Captain Mohnke who featured in the film 'Downfall' about the final days of the Third Reich.

President Roger Bragger closed the meeting at 20.12hrs thanked our speaker Dave Seeney and other contributors for an excellent presentation.

Our next 'ZOOM' meeting will be on Thursday, 3rd December, 2020 and is entitled 'Saturday Night Soldier' by Martin Harrison.

Typed 23-26.11

Chris Davies BMS Secretary

My thanks to Dave Seeney for permission to use his powerpoint slides in my summary and to John Scott for sending the précis of the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders soldiers.