

James Hector Oliver



James Hector Oliver is understood to have been an orphan of the village. Initially he was looked after by Polly Howell, Laburnum House. James served as a Private (service number 3599132) with the 4th Battalion, Border Regiment. He Died 6th June 1940 at Dunkirk aged 27 and is remembered with honour on the Dunkirk Memorial. The memorial commemorates more than 4,500 casualties of the British Expeditionary Force who died in the campaign of 1939-40 or who died in captivity who were captured during this campaign and who have no known grave.

James moved to live in a caravan in the orchard of Bolton Mill and worked at British Gypsum prior to enlistment.

The following article was submitted to the BBC "People's War" website and it deals with the experiences of the 4th Battalion the Border Regiment during World War Two.

Fighting on in France in 1940 after Dunkirk

"Now little remembered, regarded and even by-passed in the history of the time, there were men who fought on in France after the main force of the B.E.F. was evacuated. Two whole Divisions, plus many lines of communications and troops were drawn into battle with the Germans. The fighting took place in Picardy, Artois and finally in Normandy.

The two Divisions were the 51st Highland Division and the 1st Armoured Brigade. Line of Communication troops were brigaded together as infantry to act as support to those two Divisions. One of these brigades of infantry was named the 23rd Brigade and attached to the 1st Armoured Division. Part of the new brigade was the 4th Battalion The Border Regiment. This was a regimental formation of men drawn from the towns and villages of Cumberland and Westmorland: Carlisle, Penrith, Keswick, Grasmere, Longtown, Brampton, Hexham, Alston and many others. The HQ of the battalion was in Kendal, then in Westmorland.

The 4th Borders go into action

Moving out from the Brittany towns of Brest, Morlaix and St Malo, and then finally arriving at Aumale, the 4th Border was allotted the task of capturing three bridges west of Amiens on the River Somme. So, following in the footsteps of their fathers and uncles of the Great War, the men of Cumberland and Westmorland went down to the battle alongside the Queen's Bays of the 2nd Armoured Brigade.

The date of the first contact with the enemy was early on the morning of 24th May 1940. This was the old date for 'Empire Day'. The early dawn mist gave way to brilliant unclouded weather as the tanks and infantry moved to the attack.

Mixed fortunes followed: one company was ambushed before they reached their objective and scattered. Another of the companies reached the north bank of the Somme and were engaged in mortar machine gun and rifle exchanges with the Germans. The third company reached their allotted bridge, crossed to the east bank and drove off the enemy. The fighting continued all

day in the beautiful spring day until nightfall when all the companies withdrew, taking numbers of prisoners with them.

The battle continues

Next day the force moved North to regroup. Under orders from the 10th French Army Commander, the 4th Border moved North-West to the line of the River Bresle. Here in the Basse Forêt d'Eu, supported by the artillery of the 51st Highland Division. The 4th Battalion of the Borders were given the task of clearing the woods that were partially held by the Germans. They were also given the task of relieving the Black Watch Battalion who were in the village of Incheville.

Fighting in the Forest continued for two days in support of the 5th Sherwood Foresters. There were varying degrees of success. Finally, while still holding Incheville with 'D Company', the Borders and Foresters were driven back, suffering casualties from heavy German mortaring and shelling.

'D Company' held on to Incheville for several days until they ran short of ammunition. By then, they were surrounded. Many men from 'D Company' of the Borders were killed or captured. There were so many that the newspapers at home dubbed Kendal, the hometown of most of them, 'The Town of Missing Men'.

In Memory of

Private

James Hector Oliver

3599132, 4th Bn., Border Regiment who died on 06 June 1940 Age 27

Remembered with Honour

Dunkirk Memorial



Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Location Information

The Dunkirk Memorial stands at the entrance to the British War Graves Section of Dunkirk Town Cemetery, which lies at the south-eastern corner of the town of Dunkirk, immediately south of the canal and on the road to Veurne (Furnes) in Belgium.

On entering the cemetery through the columns of the Dunkirk Memorial, two Commonwealth war graves sections will be seen: Plots IV and V from the First World War and Plots I and II from the Second World War.

There is also a further First World War section (Plots I, II and III) in the main part of the cemetery to the right of the main entrance.

Visiting Information

Wheelchair access is possible to the cemetery. There is a disabled parking space marked on the road immediately in front of the Dunkirk Memorial, and a slope has been built to allow wheelchair access from the pavement to the memorial and thus Plots IV and V from the First World War and Plots I and II from the Second World War in the cemetery. Plots I, II and III from the First World War, in the main part of the cemetery, are accessible via the Civil Cemetery entrance.

Historical Information

During the Second World War, Dunkirk was the scene of the historic evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from France in May 1940.

The DUNKIRK MEMORIAL stands at the entrance to the Commonwealth War Graves section of Dunkirk Town Cemetery. It commemorates more than 4,500 casualties of the British Expeditionary Force who died in the campaign of 1939-40 or who died in captivity who were captured during this campaign and who have no known grave.

The memorial was designed by Philip Hepworth and unveiled by Queen Elizabeth II on 29 June 1957. The engraved glass panel, depicting the evacuation, was designed by John Hutton.