

Defense of Calais 23 to 26 May 1940

During the so-called ‘Phony War,’ German and French forces faced each other across their frontier, and Great Britain transported its British Expeditionary Force (BEF) commanded by General Lord Gort, across the Channel. By May 1940, reservists and territorial troops had expanded its four regular army divisions to nine, and the BEF was assigned to be part of French First Army Group. With the German invasion of Holland and Belgium, the BEF moved north to pre-assigned positions on the Dyle River Line, arriving on 11 May. With the movement of German armored units across the Meuse to the south, the entire BEF was at risk of being cut-off. On 16 May, it began executing three successive nighttime withdrawals to the Escaut Line along the canal, south of Oudenaarde. Général Maxime Weygand replaced général Gamelin as Commander-in-Chief of the French Army and after three days of decision-making, produced a plan for joint Anglo–French thrusts aimed at breaking the ‘Panzer Corridor.’ The plan was unsupported by the battlefield situation. The units involved could not disengage from their active fronts and attack in an altogether different direction. Gort felt the decision to be foolhardy and refused. The plan came to naught.

The French government feared a strike toward Paris and planned for a relocation of the government to Tours. Defeatism was in the air, as exemplified in a dramatic scene witnessed and described by Winston Churchill, when clouds of smoke drifted over the Quai d’Orsay (French Foreign Office) while officials stoked bonfires with sensitive documents.

By 20 May, only ten days after the Germans had crossed the Belgian frontier and, according to French Military planning, were supposed to be amassing forces in front of the Meuse River barrier, the men of Major Spitta’s Battalion, 2nd Panzer Division wet their feet in the English Channel, west of Abbeville near Noyelles-sur- Mer.

On 21 May, général Maxime Weygand, recalled from Syria to assume command as French Commander -in-Chief replacing général Gamelin, flew to Calais and by car to Ypres for an inter-allied conference with Belgian and French field commanders. At length the conference revolved around the demoralized retreating Belgian units. No consensus could be obtained. Allied unity was rapidly disintegrating. That night général Billotte, commander French First Armée, was fatally injured in an automobile accident. He died two days later.

In Boulogne-sur-Mer, British and French destroyers shelled enemy gun positions while the British evacuated their wounded. The town was defended by mere elements of the French 21st Division of Infantry (général Pierre Lanquetot) and British 20th Guards Brigade (Brigadier W Fox-Pitt) planned reinforcements having not been able to leave Calais. Kampfgruppe von Kleist’s 2nd Panzer Division made first contact on the outskirts of Boulogne on 22 May. British troops evacuated during the night of 23 May not having informed their French counterparts. général Lanquetot was livid the next morning when he found that the British had gone home during the night. The French garrison fought until 25 May making a last stand in the citadelle. Around 2,000 were taken prisoner.

Days later the BEF was in full flight toward the channel ports, and its Imperial General Staff was already drafting plans to evacuate as many men and resources as possible from the port of Dunkerque. To implement those plans the British Army needed time, and they received it – partially due to Hitler and his High Command’s fear of counterattack and partially from the dogged defense of Calais by a few thousand men, who fought through the streets of the city until overwhelmed.

Objective	To delay the German advance sufficiently for the embarkation of British troops from Dunkerque
Forces British:	3,300 men (Brigadier Claude Nicholson)

French:	1,000 men (commandant Raymond le Tellier)
German:	10th Panzer Division (Generalmajor Ferdinand Schaal)
Result	The Anglo-French contingent held off an armored division for three days.
Casualties	
British:	292 killed, 500 wounded, 2,400 taken prisoner.
French:	Casualties are unknown, but few of the 1,000 soldiers and marines escaped.
German:	Unknown
Location	Calais is 290 km north of Paris

Battle

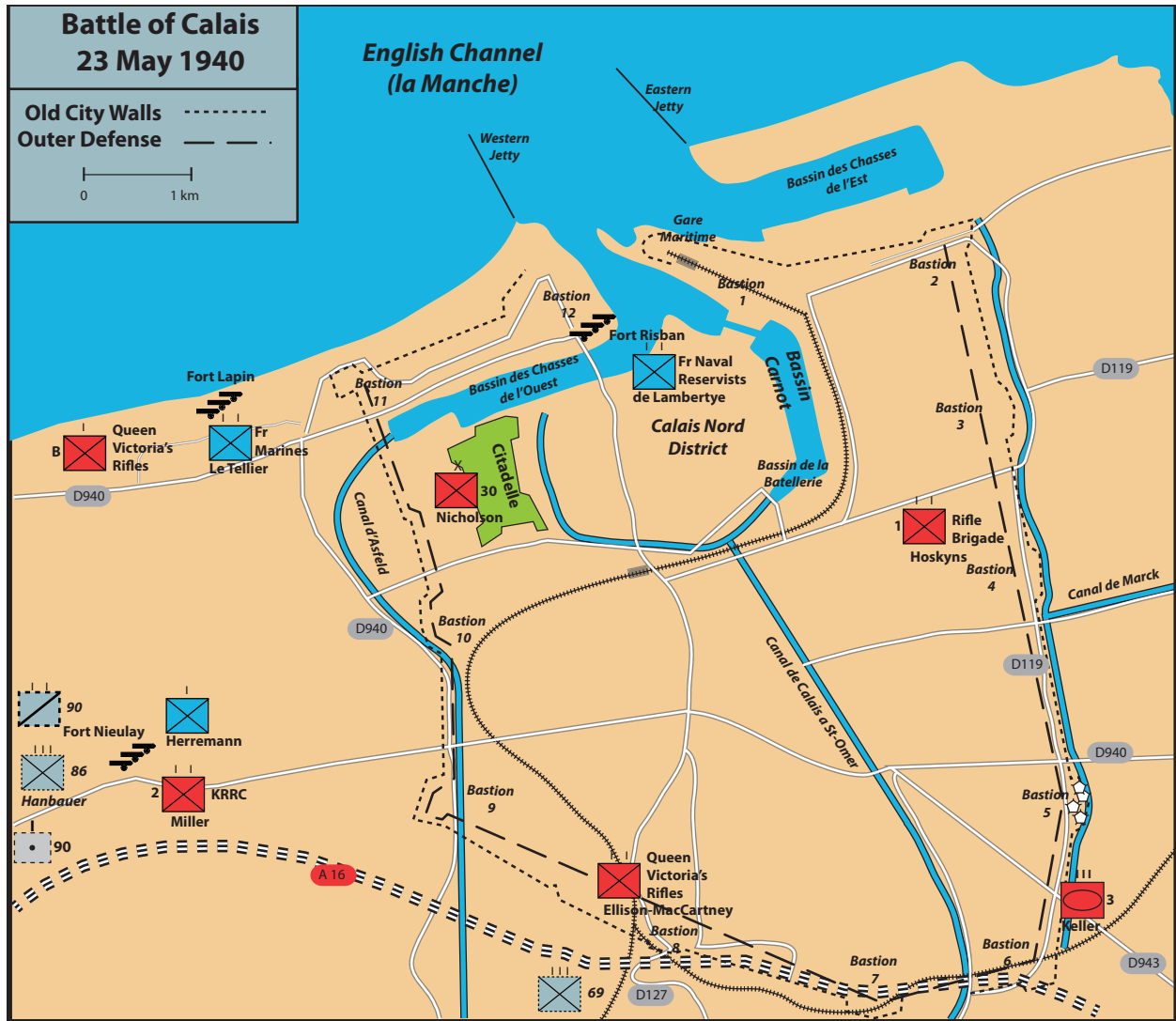
Scattered French infantry and naval units were stationed in the citadel, Fort Risban, Fort Lapin, and several of the ancient bastions which surrounded Calais. On 21 May, reinforcements arrived from England, consisting of the 30th Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Claude Nicholson) – known as the Green Jackets – and 3rd Royal Tank Regiment [Lieutenant Colonel Reginald Keller] with forty-eight light and medium tanks. The units had been grabbed piecemeal and shipped across the channel with no advance preparation to face an enemy force of underdetermined size. From the moment of their landing on the docks at Calais, they were starved for essential supplies and equipment. Communications units had no radios, tank units had no tanks, and motorcycles troops had few weapons. They were to do their best.

French forces were even more disparate, consisting of one machine-gun company, a partial battalion of infantry, two platoons of anti-aircraft guns, a battery of self-propelled guns, and miscellaneous artillery troops without weapons. French naval units manned guns at Fort Lapin and several seaside bastions, but many of their guns fired only toward the channel. Brigadier Claude Nicholson was put in charge of the Anglo-French contingent and established defenses along an outer perimeter formed by the city's 19th century moat and an inner perimeter formed by the canals around the old Calais-Nord district.

The first contact was made on 23 May west of Guines with an encounter between an armored column of 1st Panzer Division's Assault Group Kruger, which was bypassing Calais for their assault on Dunkerque, and a detachment from the tank regiment attempting to contact British GHQ in St-Omer. Severely outgunned, the British force beat a hasty retreat after losing seven tanks. Kruger's group continued northeast, to an encounter with the men of the British Searchlight Regiment holding a key bridge across the Canal de Calais at Les Attaques.¹ The German tanks took three hours to push aside the vehicular roadblock and continue toward their lodgment area east of Calais. Late that night a British tank regiment had another unfortunate encounter while, trying to accompany a rations shipment to Dunkerque. They were in the midst of the 1st Panzer Division lodgment; more tanks were lost, and the rations never left Calais.

At dawn on 24 May, Rifle Regiment 69, 10th Panzer Division began the assault upon the outer perimeter by attacking along roads from the southwest. Over the course of the day, they fought their way through Calais to the canal barrier around Calais-Nord. At the same hour, Rifle Regiment 86, supported by the 90th Reconnaissance Battalion, moved east from Coquelles, planning to enter the city from the west. To advance, they would have to take Fort Nieulay, an obsolete 17th century fortification occupied by a small garrison of French soldiers and augmented the previous night by British troops. Nieulay blocked approaches to Calais from the west, and the Germans took twelve hours to overcome stiff resistance by the combined Anglo-French force. The defenders held their ground until surrendering to an overpowering mortar, artil-

¹ The Communal Cemetery in Les Attaques holds ten Commonwealth war grave; seven are identified and six of those are men of the 1st Battery, 1st Searchlight Regiment. (50.9056308, 1.93181276)



lery, and infantry force in the late afternoon.

German riflemen, supported by tanks, then moved against the western outer perimeter. Around the ancient Bastion #9 they were met by 2nd Battalion, 2nd Battalion King Royal Rifle Corps (KRRC) (Lieutenant Colonel Euan Miller²), who, despite taking direct tank fire, held off the advance into the night.

With his troops thinly spread and without reserves, Brigadier Nicholson decided that the outer perimeter could not be defended for another day and ordered a withdrawal to within the ship basin and canals around the old district. Key to this new defense line were the three bridges across the Bassin de Batellerie.

By 08:00 on 25 May, Rifle Regiment 69 had pushed through Bastion 8 south of the city, crossed most of the city center, and captured the Hôtel-de-Ville and its clock tower. They now had an excellent observation and sniper platform with visibility over the key bridges.

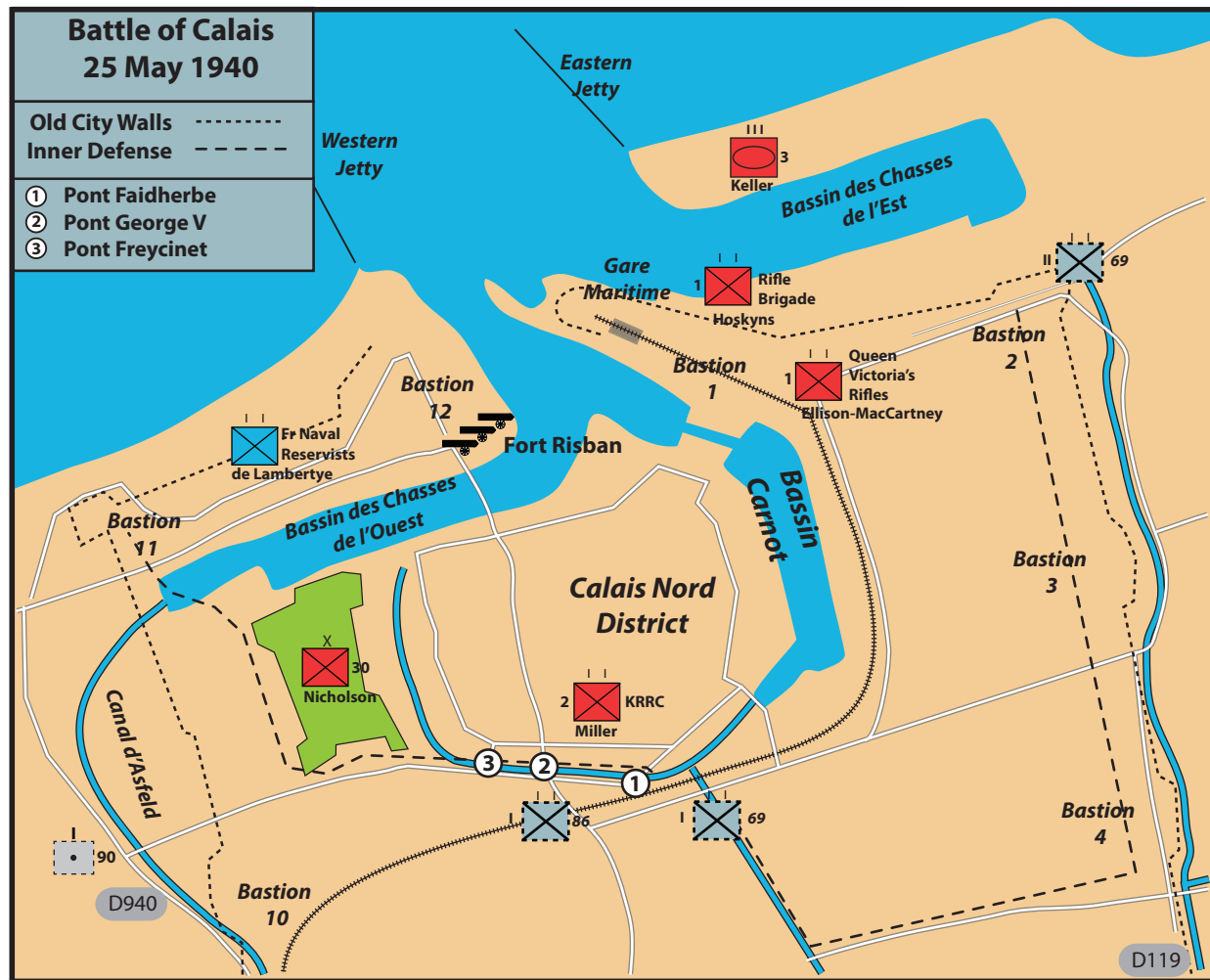
British infantry barricaded the bridges with trucks, buses, and whatever else was available. Houses fronting the waterway bristled with rifles and machine guns. Nicholson's headquarters was in the citadel, where the mayor of Calais brought an ultimatum from General Schaal to surrender or see Calais destroyed. Nicholson's refusal triggered artillery and Stuka attacks. Shelling of the old town collapsed buildings blocking streets and starting fires that shrouded the city in smoke.

² Lt-Col Euan Miller survived his injuries to receive the Distinguished Service Order for his leadership at Calais. He retired as a lieutenant-general.

In the early afternoon, a German officer crossed Pont Richelieu (now Pont Georges V) under a white flag to demand surrender once again. Schaal was following Guderian's instructions to take Calais and avoid unnecessary losses. Nicholson again refused with the words, 'The answer is no as it is the British Army's duty to fight as well as the German's.'³

On the opposite side of the city the battle progressed similarly, with house- to-house fighting gradually pushing the 1st Battalion, Rifle Brigade [Lieutenant Colonel Chandos Hoskyns⁴] and 1st Battalion, Queen Victoria's Regiment [Lieutenant-Colonel J. A. M. Ellison-Macartney⁵] back from the outer perimeter and up the narrow isthmus toward the Gare Maritime. Artillery bombardments alternated with small arms fire for most of the day. By 19:30, a deadly silence fell over Calais-Nord, broken by the steady rumble of tank engines and the clank of their treads. The panzers were going to force their way across the bridges.

Assaults upon Pont Richelieu (now Georges V) and Pont Faidherbe were repulsed with heavy fire



3 Brigadier Claude Nicholson, taken prisoner towards the end of the defense, died on 26 June 1943 speculatively by his own hand after falling out of a window. He was taken to the local German hospital where he perished. He is buried in the communal cemetery in Rotenburg an der Fulda, Germany

4 Hoskyns was wound by splinters from a mortar shell and evacuated by a small yacht. He perished from his wounds in England the next month. He is buried in his communal churchyard.

5 Lieutenant-Colonel J. A. M. Ellison-Macartney was captured at Calais and held at Oflag 12B until released at war's end.

from the houses fronting the canal, driving back supporting infantry. One tank, however, forced Pont Freycinet, and I Battalion, Infantry Regiment 86 streamed across in its wake. A counterattack stopped the tank, but the infantry took up positions in the houses along esplanade Jacques Vendroux and brought the citadel under small arms fire. In the late evening, Stukas returned to bomb the port facilities and the citadel, cutting the water supply, and setting the food stores, hospital, and ammunition dump on fire. The fighting ceased when night approached, the darkness punctuated by the glare of burning buildings. The British repositioned their meager forces while the two German regiments moved heavy weapons in for the kill.

On 26 May, the Germans again unleashed their artillery and Stukas. After two hours, much of Calais-Nord was in flames. Tanks finally pushed aside the bridge barricades, now manned only by the dead and dying. By the afternoon ammunition was almost completely expended, and water was scarce. The eastern defenses consolidated, slowly withdrawing toward final positions around the harbor. At 15:30, I Battalion, Rifle Regiment 69 surrounded the remnants of the Rifle Brigade at Bastion 1, and they surrendered. At 16:30 across town, the citadel fell when the Boulogne Gate was battered down; shortly thereafter the French at Fort Risban were taken. Brigadier Nicholson and commandant Le Tellier were taken prisoner,

Calais remained under German control for five years, becoming a center for German naval activity and defensive works to thwart the allied invasion that was expected in the Pas de Calais. The city was liberated by Canadian forces on 1 October 1944, after a week of bitter fighting.

Battlefield Tour

Calais has been a port of entry for English warriors and tourists since its conquest by King Edward III in 1346. Since the construction of the train tunnel under the English Channel and its terminal at nearby Sangatte, new construction on the outskirts of Calais has accelerated. Nevertheless, the areas included on our tour are easily navigated and still present the city that was so stubbornly defended by rag-tag elements of the British Expeditionary Force and French Army.

Approach Calais from Coquelles, as did the men of Generalmajor Schaal's 10th Panzer Division. The Centre de l'Europe should be avoided due to the confusing and complicated road network servicing this commercial hub and terminal for the EuroTunnel train. Historically The Centre was near the site of **Stützpunkt (Stp) 107 - Batterie Lindemann**, the largest German gun battery of the Atlantic Wall. Named after Ernst Lindemann, captain of the sunken German battleship Bismarck, the battery held three 406-mm guns retrieved from Battery Schleswig Holstein in Poland. These enormous guns could fire a 2250-pound shell up

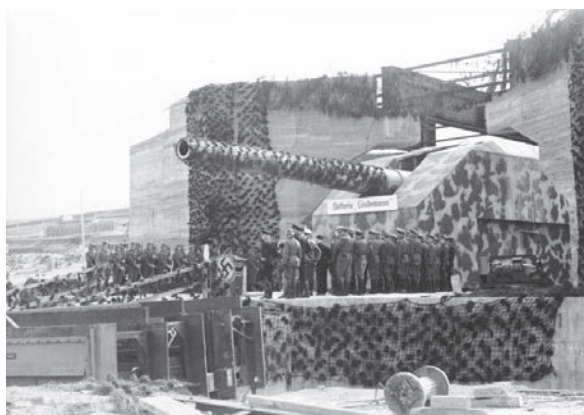


Figure 1. Batterie Lindemann

to 41 kilometers (26 miles) and lighter shells capable of striking England across the channel. The guns became a prime Allied air target, but their bombs had a negligible effect on the massive concrete casemates. Finally, on 4 September 1944, shell from an English railway gun hit one of the guns. On 21 September 1944, 400 bombers struck the area, and a second gun was hit. Finally, the last gun was captured by attacking Canadian infantry on 26 September. During the construction of the Channel Tunnel, the three gun bunkers were partially buried with sand and debris from the tunnel construction. The area is now a man-made lake. (50.951107, 1.8011364)



If coming from Boulogne, exit the A16 Autoroute at exit #41 toward Coquelles. If approaching from Boulogne by departmental roads, follow D243e3 into Coquelles. In all situations enter the large roundabout south of Coquelles on the avenue Charles de Gaulle and exit toward Coquelles Centre. Unfortunately, this area has become highly commercialized. Follow highway D243e3 as it passes through Coquelles.

Before the sweeping curve where the road turns to the east, a white château and woods is on the right. German artillery established positions in those woods on the night of 23 May before beginning its bombardment of Fort Nieulay.

Continue along the road (becomes Av Roger Salengro) around the large curve to approach Fort Nieulay. From this perspective its defensive position along the roadway is obvious. The defenders lacked heavy weapons besides one antitank gun and two heavy machine guns. Proceed into the parking area. (50.939796, 1.802623)

Fort Nieulay

Av. Roger Salengro

62100 Calais, France

Tel: +33 (0) 321466641

Contact for open hours. (Parking: 50.939796, 1.802623)

Fort Nieulay was constructed in 1525 with a rather peculiar application. Originally designed as a tollgate to levy fees for entering the city, it became a defensive area because the fort stands upon locks in the Hames River, which could be opened to flood the surrounding countryside. In 1940, the French commander, capitaine Herremann, led the small garrison of forty-eight French soldiers and seven marines, supplemented by the fifty-nine-man British contingent. They positioned their 25-mm anti-tank gun in Porte Dauphine. At 05:00, German heavy artillery opened a mild bombardment while infantry moved across the fields to the west of the fort. Intermittent machine-gun exchanges continued. The weak assault was easily repulsed, and a game of probe and fire continued for the rest of the morning. At approximately 14:00, German artillery fire resumed, eliminating the French antitank gun with a direct hit upon Porte Dauphine. The artillery fire continued for over an hour, answered by allied warships off the coast until Luftwaffe bombs sunk *HMS Wesssex* and severely damaged the Polish destroyer *Burza* forcing a withdrawal of the ships. The German fire gradually reduced the fort's bastions and ramparts. At 16:30, German troops approached the fort under a leading mortar barrage. Capitaine Herremann surrendered the fort.

In 1944, the Germans added Stützpunkt Glan when it served as the command post of II Bataillon, Grenadier-Regiment 103, 47th Infantry Division. In September, the attack of the Canadian Royal Winnipeg Rifles overcome resistance.

Damage to the stout walls incurred in 1940 and RAF bombing in 1944 has been repaired, and the iron gates at each of the major entrances have been replaced. Grass fields inside the fort are crossed by arched bridges, under which floodwaters were channeled. Only one lonely segment of the chapel's façade still stands. The *Poudrière* has been repaired and now contains a small museum on the fort's history.

Damage to the stout walls incurred in 1940 and RAF bombing in 1944 has been repaired, and the iron gates at each of the major entrances have been replaced. Grass fields inside the fort are crossed by arched bridges, under which floodwaters were channeled. Only one lonely segment of the chapel's façade still stands. The *Poudrière* has been repaired and now contains a small museum on the fort's history.

Continue east for 1.6 km into a roundabout. Exit north on highway D940; after 1.1 km find a convenient place to stop on the left to view the concrete structure across the canal to the right. (Approximately 50.953437, 1.8303259)

Stützpunkt 89 'Fulda' belonged to the Eisenbahntilleriebatterie (Railway Artillery Battery) E710, which was part of the Eisenbahntillerieabteilung (Railway Artillery Battalion) 725. The strongpoint was commanded by Hauptmann Metzger. As early as 1940, 280-mm railway guns were positioned here at first to support Operation Seelöwe (Sealion – the invasion of Britain) and later to fire on English batteries across the Channel. The strongpoint also contained a Gerätebatterie, destined to defend the battery against land attack and equipped with four 155-mm sFH414 (f) field guns. The most impressive bunkers on the grounds of a car manufacturer, are a dombunker built in 1940 to house the railway guns from air attack and an ammunition bunker. Dombunker is an 80-meter-long concrete tunnel with walls 2.5-meters thick. In all, three such bunkers were built. (Dombunker position: 50.954406, 1.831514)



Figure 2. Fort Nieulay ©French Battlefields



Figure 3. Stützpunkt 89 'Fulda' railroad gun bunker seen from D940 ©French Battlefields



Figure 4. A 280-mm railway gun from the outdoor display at Batterie Todt ©French Battlefields

Reverse direction and return to the roundabout. Exit east, becomes boulevard Leon Gambetta, and immediately cross the Canal de la Rivière Neuve on Pont Jordan. (50.954406, 1.831514) The members of the KRRC established the outer perimeter along the quai Catinat on the right near Bastion #9 during the night of 23 May, although nothing of interest remains to be seen.

Continue on boulevard Leon Gambetta and turn left onto boulevard Jacquard. (One-way streets will require a slight loop around to the right, ending with a left turn onto boulevard Loius Pasteur, which becomes boulevard Jacquard after passing place Albert 1st). Park in front of the Hôtel de Ville (50.9523586, 1.854286), around the Parc de St-Pierre, at the SNCF regional train station, or on the esplanade Jacques Vendroux near the citadel. It is best to view the next few sites on foot.

Boulevard Jacquard runs between the Parc St-Pierre and the ornately decorated Flemish Renaissance **Hôtel de Ville** and its equally ornate, 75-meter bell tower. Both were captured and occupied by German troops during the street fighting early on 25 May and provided observation positions during the attack on the old district.

A late 19th century masterpiece '*Les Bourgeois de Calais*' (Burghers of Calais) by Auguste Rodin, stands in the park in front of the town hall. The statue group commemorates the offer in 1347 by six



Figure 5. Belfry Hôtel de Ville ©French Battlefields



Figure 6. Les Bourgeois de Calais ©French Battlefields

town fathers to sacrifice themselves to save the city's inhabitants from the army of Edward III. They were spared through the entreaties of Edward's wife, Philippa of Hainault. The sculpture shows the six when they emerged from the city walls, thin and haggard from the effects of the eleven-month siege, sullen and worn as they prepared themselves for death, with nooses already around their necks.

Musée Mémoire 39-45 De Calais

Parc Saint-Pierre

62100 Calais

Tel: +33 (0)3 21 34 21 57

Email: museedelaguerredcalais@wanadoo.fr

Web: <https://musee-memoire-calais.com/>

Open every day from 1 May to 30 September from 10:00 to 18:00; and school holidays from 11:00 to 17:00; closed December and January. Fee. (50.952186, 1.8510396)

In 1941, the Todt Organization built a bunker to house a military telephone exchange under the trees in the Parc St-Pierre across the street. The building measures 94 meters in length by 24 meters at its widest point. During the liberation of Calais, it was taken by Canadian troops using flame-throwers. It was converted into a museum in 1962.

The building's twenty-two rooms have been converted into the **Musée Mémoire 39-45 De Calais**. The long central corridor accesses themed rooms containing numerous objects, some weapons, and a multitude of newspapers, drawings, postcards, maps, and letters illustrating the hardships of the people of Calais during the occupation. The main corridor displays an impressive collection of First World War propaganda posters as well as soldiers' drawings from the Second World War. They really should not be missed. One room contains an excellent model of the Batterie Lindemann, the colossus of German cross-channel gun emplacements, the three casemates – named Antoine, Bruno, and Caesar – each housed 406-mm guns. Most displays are labeled in French only.

Immediately north of the park is **Pont Georges V**. German tanks made their first attempt to enter the old district here. The houses and shops lining the basin provided cover for British riflemen, whose intense fire stopped the Germans' first attack. After the two-hour bombardment on the morning of 26 May, their smoking rubble afforded less cover to the survivors, and the panzers were able to force their way across the bridge and down rue Royale to the boulevard des Allies, where they divided to attack the remaining defenders at Fort Risban and at the harbor. (50.954473, 1.850664)

The smaller **Pont Freycinet** is to the west, over which the Germans made their advance on 25 May. Proceed west on avenue Pierre de Coubertin, which is the first street south of Pont Freycinet. The non-descript Porte de Boulogne entrance into the citadel is 500 meters ahead on the right. (50.954546, 1.847665)

Construction of **Calais' Citadel** began in 1560, almost immediately after the expulsion of the



Figure 7. Musée Mémoire 39-45 De Calais ©French Battlefields



Figure 8. Pont Georges V ©French Battlefields



Figure 9. Porte de Boulogne ©French Battlefields



Figure 10. Neptune's Gate ©French Battlefields

English from Calais. The city's importance encouraged succeeding monarchs to improve its defenses, culminating in the current design by Louis XIV's master fort builder, Sébastien Le Prestre, Seigneur de Vauban. Within the inner gate is a dark gray **stone memorial** to the '19 officers, and 185 warrant officers, NCOs and men of the King's Royal Rifle Corps, the Rifle Brigade, and Queen Victoria's Rifles who fell in the defense of Calais 23-26 May 1940.' The memorial's date of May 1945 makes it one of the earliest Second World War commemorations erected on the continent. The fort's interior was destroyed during the war and never rebuilt. It has been converted into a stadium and sports fields with a perfunctory dedication to war heroes. The tunnels in the northeast bastion held Brigadier Nicholson's headquarters. The Porte de Boulogne s always open; no admission charge. (50.955145, 1.842853)

Pass through the sports field to the eastern (Neptune's) gate. Inside the gate is a memorial to the soldiers of France who fought in the defense of Calais. **Neptune's Gate** is a more picturesque entrance to the citadel, the exit being through a beautifully landscaped demilune. The gate is known for its relief of the god Neptune, seen above the entrance. A plaque just inside the gate pays '...homage to the veterans of the 110th Regiment of Infantry and their comrades.' (50.957505, 1.843179)

Return to the three bridges via the esplanade Jacques Vendroux (esplanade de la Citadelle in 1940). German infantry established itself on the evening of 25 May in houses along this street.

Return to your vehicle and proceed north on rue Royale through the narrow streets of the old city. Alternatively, cross Pont George V and exit the roundabout west on Quai de l'Escaut. Follow around the old city, becomes Esp Jacques Vendroux then Bld de la Resistance, turn left directly over the double spans of the Pont Henri Hénon. On the right immediately after crossing the second bridge is a small parking area. (50.963589, 1.848344)

Fort Risban

21 Rue de la Mer
62100 Calais, France

Fort Risban's existence dates from King Edward III, who ordered the construction of a defensive tower on this location in 1346 to block re-supply of the town during the siege. The fort was reconstructed many times over the centuries, its latest incarnation during the Second World War. Facing the roundabout in front of the fort is black granite stone with a plaque erected by the friends of the veterans of the **Maritime Dunkerque** 'In the memory of commandant Charles de Lambertye and his marines, soldiers, and

allies killed in the defense of Calais May 1940.’ De Lamdertye led eight hundred French volunteers to man guns at the fort and at bastions 11 and 12. He died during the battle of a heart attack. (Parking: 50.963202, 1.847121)

The fort is open 24 hours. A walk around the southern quarter offers views of the harbor and of the significant orientation markers of Calais; from left to right, they are the lighthouse, the spire of église Notre-Dame, and the belfry. A type 643 bunker was part of Stützpunkt Löwe constructed by the Germans to defend the harbor. Designed to mount a machine gun turret, the dome has disappeared, and entry is prohibited.

From the large roundabout in front of Fort Risban, proceed along avenue Raymond Poincaré and turn right at the next roundabout, into the large parking area serving Calais beach. Proceed to the right-most point closest to the harbor entrance.

A Cross of Sacrifice marks the **Green Jack-ets Memorial** on the harbor jetty, right at the corner where the ships enter the harbor. Appropriately, every cross-channel ferry that enters Calais passes it. On the wall behind the Cross of Sacrifice is a plaque which commemorates the sacrifice of the Green Jackets of 30th Brigade. Text on the memorial: To the glory of God and in memory of all riflemen of The Kings Royal Rifle Corps, The Rifle Brigade and Queen Victoria’s Rifles, who fell defending Calais May 23-26, 1940.’



Figure 11. Green Jackets Memorial ©French Battlefields

The site of Bastion 12, which is to the landward side of the monument, has undergone revitalization with parking, fast food shops, and an expensive beach. (Parking: 50.966245, 1.8440552; Memorial: 50.967274, 1.844551)

The ferry terminal across the harbor entrance from the Green Jackets Memorial was the location of the red brick **Gare Maritime**. Here the survivors of the 1st Rifle Brigade and 1st Queen’s Victoria Rifles made their last stand until, with ammunition expended and engulfed in wounded comrades, they surrendered. The building is now overshadowed by the enormous expansion of port facilities. (50.965670, 1.852659)

Military Cemeteries

As one might imagine, Calais has its share of First and Second World War military burials. Whether from a direct battlefield death or possibly from the 1919 Spanish Flu epidemic, most major belligerent countries are represented. The major burials and described below with GPS co-ordinates to their locations. Most are open 24 hours except for Cimetière Sud.

Les Baraques Military Cemetery, Sangatte

During the First World War, Calais was a major British supply depot and the site of three mil-



Figure 12. Les Baraques Cemetery ©French Battlefields

itary hospitals. Originally, those that perished were buried in Calais's Communal South Cemetery, but a new cemetery at Baraques was established in 1917 and continued its use until 1921. The cemetery now contains 1,303 Commonwealth burials of the First World War, together with more than 250 war graves of other nationalities, all but two of them German. A special section of First World War burials is devoted to Chinese laborers who were imported for manual labor such as transport and trench construction. The German deaths all occurred after the Armistice. The cemetery also contains seven Second World War burials. (Parking Area: 50.959660, 1.822854)

Calais German War Cemetery

Calais German War Cemetery was established in July 1922 by the French military authorities, who reburied the 394 German dead from various temporary hospital cemeteries. In 1977, the previous provisional wooden grave markers were replaced by permanent crosses made of Belgian granite, in which the names and dates of the dead are engraved. Of the 394 fallen, 365 rest in individual graves. In the common grave for twenty-nine victims, eight are known and their names recorded on a plaque. A monolithic block of natural stone was erected as the central monument. Adjacent to the Cimetière Nord and immediately east of Stützpunkt 89 (50.954758, 1.834075)

Cimetière Nord

Avenue Pierre de Coubertin

Open 08:30 to 17:00.

This communal cemetery, located beyond the western fields of the citadelle, holds 473 Belgian war graves from the two World Wars. (50.954527, 1.833814)

Cimetière Sud

4 Av. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

62100 Calais, France

Tel: +33 (0) 3 21 19 37 39

Open 08:30 to 17:00.

Parking is available on Av. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry near the cemetery entrance (50.946025, 1.885315). The expansive French military graves are in three plots on the right side of the main walkway approximately 50 meters into the cemetery. A memorial commemorates the 200 – 300 of 'the disappeared', however all of the names have been worn off by the weather. (50.945267, 1.884872)

Commonwealth War Graves are to the left and rear of the walled cemetery. The British section is large enough to have a Cross of Sacrifice, War Stone (or Stone of Remembrance), and two shelters on either side of the War Stone. The cemetery contains 721 First World War burials, and 224 burials of the Second World War, 56 of which are unidentified, the majority dating from May 1940. The WW II burials are mainly around the periphery. (50.944344, 1.887342)

Atlantic Wall

The Atlantic Wall defenses are extensive, frequently partially buried in sand, and sometime quite dangerous. They cannot possibly be described in detail. We suggest some of the easier to get to and more complete structures as representative examples of the post-1940 construction of invasion defenses in the Calais area. In addition, this area is known for large concentrations of immigrants seeking to cross the English Channel. Beware!! These areas could be dangerous to visitors!!

For a reasonable view of extensive Atlantic Wall fortification without even leaving one's vehicle, proceed from Les Baraques cemetery along Rue Vigier and turn north onto Rue du Semaphore and follow to the end. A higher sand dune directly north displays the remnants of concrete observation post on the left and smaller gun and personnel bunkers of **Widerstandsnest (WN or Resistance Nest) 79 'Otter'** across

the top of the dune. (Parking area: 50.959450, 1.818262)

Among the various positions comprising WN 79 are a graffitied Beobachter (observation post) (50.96014, 1.817754); SK Kommandostand (Command Post) (50.960294, 1.818398); and two type 612 Schartenstand (anti-assault gun bunkers) (50.960707, 1.818124) including one tilted 30 degrees due shifting sand. (50.960785, 1.817845)

The most impressive gun site in the area is **Marine Küstenbatterie (MKB) 'Oldenburg'**, also known as **Stützpunkt 18**, which retains several large structures including two gun casemates measuring 35 meters wide and 15 meters deep (approximately 115 feet by 50 feet). Each giant casemate held a SK 240-mm gun. (50.975139, 1.902268) and (50.975992, 1.904963) Also the SK Leitstand/Hospitaal medical building remains mostly intact. (tall square block: (50.97493, 1.901288) Numerous machine gun nests and mortar positions as well as anti-tank bunkers surround the complex some of which can be found at least partially existent. Access is possible east of Calais on highway D119 (Rte de Gravelines) by turning north on Chem de Dunes and following to the wildlife sanctuary where the casemates are clearly visible.



Figure 13. MKB 'Oldenburg' Bloc 2 ©French Battlefields

Batterie Waldam stands along the beach front 1.4 kilometers east by foot or 2.4 kilometers by car. The complex includes an outstanding multi-level observation and control station which also provided fire control to MKB Oldenburg. The tower was damaged during the war and displays its dangerous condition. (50.981911, 1.920706)

The experimental Vf Gun Bunker "Drehturm" (turret) stands across the road. This unique domed structure was designed to be able to rotate 360 degrees on a circular track permitting its 150-mm gun to fire at any point on the compass and in fact was used to fire inland upon advancing Canadian troops in 1944. After firing, the turret rotated to show the especially thick reinforced concrete back to the enemy. The curved surfaces were designed to ricochet projectiles. A Canadian shell entered the gap between the housing and rollers, jamming the gun in its current orientation. The bunker room used for ammunition storage under the dome can be entered but is frequently filled with water. (50.982026, 1.921361)

The main guns of Batterie Waldam were housed in two type M270 casemates. The first casemate is 110 meters east of the experimental bunker, (50.982398, 1.922725) The second is an additional 120 meters east. Following the gravel road as it curves around to the south, two more Batterie Waldam structures come into view. The small building with a flat front looks like a garage because it was - used to store vehicles. And finally, a large, almost overgrown bunker that appears to have been a personnel shelter stands 120 meters from the second casemate. (50.982611, 1.92547) Numerous other structures can be found in the dunes behind the casemates. This outstanding site is very difficult to access. Although maps show a drivable Digue Taaf, the partially paved roadway is barely drivable and may require prior permission from local officials. Batterie Waldam is 2.1 kilometers west from a dirt parking area for the nature conservatory. Although Digue Taaf continues west, the road is restricted to residents only. (Parking area: 50.984201, 1.949402) The belvedere Taaf observation point is constructed atop one of two identical casemates slightly south of the dike that form Batterie Rosamunde. (50.982387, 1.941427) and (50.981355, 1.934685)



Figure 14. MKB Oye Plage Observation Tower ©French Battlefields

MKB Oye Plage presents one of the more unusual German Atlantic Wall structures in the leaning control tower that appears it might fall over at any time. The tower is rectangular with a pointed roof in order to appear as a church steeple. It provided fire control to four casemates that sheltered the 150-mm guns of a naval artillery battery. The casemates were nearer the beach but all have been destroyed leaving only rubble piles. The ammunition storage building remains on the route des Dunes slightly farther east.

MKB Oye Plage is 7.0 kilometers east on highway D119 then turning left onto Rue de Mer then right onto Rte des Dunes. (50.996515, 2.052467)

Numerous strongpoints or defensive Atlantic Wall structures are scattered in and around Calais. The following are of minor interest.

Stützpunkt (Stp, strong point) 'Maus' – a number of various design positions now mostly destroyed, or sand covered. Most visible is a type 621: Gruppenunterstand (sub-group gun bunker) for machine guns that is located behind the Les Baraques Cemetery. (50.960545, 1.822544)

Batterie 'Fort Lapin' – German coastal battery constructed near the old French Fort Lapin as part of the Atlantikwall. (50.960275, 1.818173)

Stützpunkt 80 'Pinguin' – Originally a French battery armed with four 165-mm guns, reused and modernized by the German Kriegsmarine as part of an Atlantikwall position holding 76.2-mm guns. (50.959978, 1.815329); a type M176 Geschützschartenstand (120° gun casemate) (50.960093, 1.814417); type 118c Grosser Sanitätsunterstand (medical bunker) (50.958937, 1.812942); and Unterstand (shelter) (50.959167, 1.81291)

Stützpunkt 81 'Qualle' – a type Vf2a Doppelschartenstand (double embrasure bunker) now used for storage of farm equipment. (50.954912, 1.801735)

Stützpunkt 82 'Raabe' – SK Mehrkammerbeälter (multi-room bunker). (50.954933, 1.794005)

Widerstandsnest 86/2 – a type 677 Schartenstand containing 88mm Pak 43-41 antitank guns (50.950878, 1.817496) and a Unterstand (50.950093, 1.816573)

Widerstandsnest 78 'Schwan' – concrete garage. (50.951993, 1.78738)

Widerstandsnest 102 'Berlin' – consists of two type 612 gun casemates. (50.953236, 1.775325)

Widerstandsnest 103 'München' – Vf HWB – Infantry shelter and domed machine gun position. (50.949957, 1.765054)

The following are near the lake holding Batterie Lindemann:

Widerstandsnest 87 'Unstrut' – Vf Flakstand – two anti-aircraft gun positions (50.945778, 1.796232); and type 677 antitank gun bunker (50.946014, 1.795411)

Widerstandsnest 86/3 'Trave' – Vf Unterstand – (50.945767, 1.8035)

Near the railway gun shelter:

Widerstandsnest 70 'Write' – a fully functional machine gun tobruk position with a circular top opening upon which a machine gun could be mounted. (50.949012, 1.823258)

