

The fall of Norway increases the vulnerability of Britain's sea lanes to German attack. Having occupied Norway German forces now control the entire western seaboard from the Dutch border to north of the Arctic Circle.



King Haakon escapes into exile aboard HMS Devonshire leaving the pro-Nazi, Vidkun Quisling, to collaborate with the occupiers.



Some merchant seamen escape into Sweden where they are interned. The manuscript additions to this cover suggest Nicholson, who has returned to the UK, was a crewmember of the merchantman S S Riverlan which sank in Narvik harbour during the hostilities. The cachet on the reverse indicates this correspondence was returned via the British Consulate in Stockholm after a considerable lapse of time.



Cachet on reverse (Actual size)



On 20 June the British submarine HMS Clyde torpedoes and damages the Gneisenau while she is returning to Germany, putting her out of action for five months. It is a small consolation for defeat. Feldpost number M 00105 was allocated to the Gneisenau.

Closing the 'Atlantic Door' becomes an immediate objective to counter the increased threat of German ships accessing the North Atlantic. The strategic location of the Faroe Islands and Iceland makes their occupation a necessity.



On 12 April 200 Royal Marines land on the Faroes, being quickly reinforced by other units. Danish stamps are surcharged with new values under the British Administration.



The first British troops land in Iceland on 10 May followed seven days later by 146 and 147 Brigades. No Postal Units accompanied the first troops, home mail being sent directly to Home Depot at Bournemouth where it was cancelled with 'HOME DEPOT REPS 18' or '19' date stamps and endorsed by censor numbers including 1171. The address on the enclosure includes 'APO 500', the security address for troops stationed in Iceland.



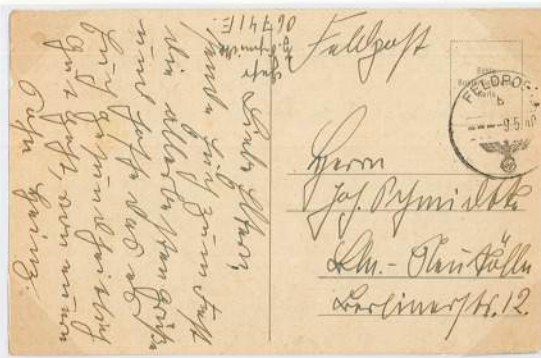
Hudsons fly constant reconnaissance missions from the island.

On 16 June the Canadian troops of Z Force arrive in Iceland, but their unwillingness to share command sees them replaced in October by the British 70<sup>th</sup> Brigade. The FPO 2 date stamp was allocated to Iceland on 28 August and used at a Stationery Office in the Reykjavik area from 10 October. The address and date of posting suggests this Canadian YMCA cover was sent by a Canadian soldier.



3.4 Hitler's ensuing westward offensive quickly overruns Holland and Belgium ....

On the 10 May Hitler launches "Fall Sichelschnitt" (Plan 'Sickle Cut'). While British troops are still engaged in Norway, German troops mount a Blitzkrieg attack across the Dutch, Belgium and Luxembourg borders, their objective to encircle French and British forces between the Somme and the Channel by sweeping across northern France.



Feldpost number 06741E (in manuscript) was allotted to 4<sup>th</sup> Company, Infantry Regiment 9, 23 Infantry Division, III Army Corps, 12<sup>th</sup> Army, Army Group A. A day after the posting of this card the division attack west from the Bitburg area into Luxembourg heading for Bastogne in Belgium.



The speed and penetration of the German forces take the Dutch and Belgium defenders by surprise.



British troops are issued with Field Service Post Cards which enable the sender to quickly compose a brief message, the reverse bearing a number of pre-printed sentences that can be crossed through leaving the desired message. The FPO 22 cancel was used by the British 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division in Belgium from 11 to 24 May. This card is dated 18 MY 40.



The Allied military response is swift, ten British Divisions together with the French First Army immediately advancing into Belgium. By 15 May they are in pre-planned defensive positions along the River Dyle.

The political repercussions in Britain are immediate. At 6 pm on 10 May Winston Churchill drives to Buckingham Palace to be appointed Prime Minister by King George VI. That same evening Chamberlain broadcasts to the nation announcing his resignation, his policy of appeasement in tatters.



The impact on postal services is also immediate. Posted one day before the German invasion of Holland this cover is returned to the sender. The boxed 'NO SERVICE / RETURN TO SENDER' cachet was the most commonly used on mail from Britain to foreign destinations.



(Dark blue shade)



Clement Attlee takes the opposition Labour Party into a coalition Government under Churchill, Attlee becoming Lord Privy Seal in the coalition administration.



Germany ridicules Churchill with the issue of 'Wert Keinen Pfennig' (Not worth a Pfennig) Feldpost cards, but they are to discover he is a determined adversary. This card, together with a similar one depicting Neville Chamberlain, went on sale in military Army canteens and civilian outlets on 1 May 1940. They could be sent freepost by members of the armed forces while civilians had to affix postage.



The Allies retreat towards Dunkirk, but despite heroic holding actions around Boulogne and Calais, are by the 24 May being pressed by the German advance. Fortunately Hitler orders the Panzers to halt for two days giving Britain valuable time to mount an evacuation.



Calais falls on 24 May. Boulogne is evacuated the same day.



The reverse of this letter sheet bears a manuscript Feldpost number '34474' allotted to 10<sup>th</sup> Company Infantry Regiment (Motorised). By 24 May the unit is in action on the outskirts of Dunkirk.



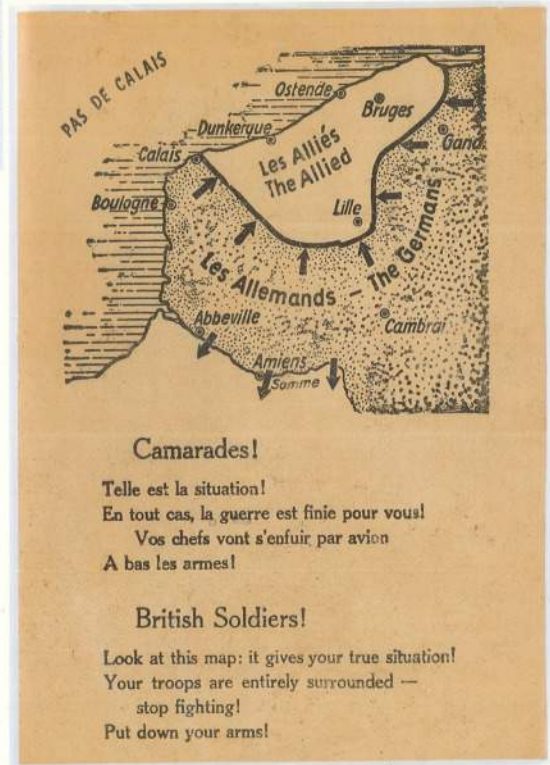
Wounded British personnel are brought to the Channel ports, often in hospital trains, to be hurriedly evacuated to the UK.



While the Panzers halt just a few kilometres from Dunkirk German infantry continue pushing retreating British forces back towards the port.



Redirected to No 3 General Hospital at Ofranville, near Dieppe, before being returned to the sender, the intended recipient, probably wounded, has been evacuated to the U.K. The cover is back stamped with a Base Army Post Office No 1 cancel dated 31 MY 40, at this time located in Le Havre, and a dumb 'ARMY POST OFFICE' cachet.



**Camarades!**  
 Telle est la situation!  
 En tout cas, la guerre est finie pour vous!  
 Vos chefs vont s'enfuir par avion  
 A bas les armes!

**British Soldiers!**  
 Look at this map: it gives your true situation!  
 Your troops are entirely surrounded —  
 stop fighting!  
 Put down your arms!

This Luftwaffe 'airmail' delivered to the encircled French and British troops at Dunkirk graphically illustrates their dire predicament.



The Channel Island ferry *St Julian* is converted to serve as a hospital carrier sailing between Dieppe and Newhaven.

Some wounded personnel are returned to the U.K. through Southampton. This cover for use only by family members is back stamped with a FPO 39 cancel dated 18 MY 40, at this time possibly being used at La Baule (the location of No 4 General Hospital), a Base Army PO 1 Krag machine cancel similarly dated, and a boxed RETURNED TO THE UNITED KINGDOM / PRESENT ADDRESS UNKNOWN handstamp.

Encircled at Dunkirk British and French troops await rescue. Under the direction of Admiral Ramsey in his Dover headquarters, Operation *Dynamo* brings together a vast armada of vessels to ferry the stranded troops from the Dunkirk beaches back to Britain.



Ramsey's organisational skills contribute greatly to the success of the evacuation.



Small fishing vessels ferry troops from the beaches to larger ships.



Tugs work in the turmoil of the harbour to enable rescuing ships to berth or swing in.



The paddle steamer *Medway Queen* makes seven trips, rescuing over 7,000 men.



Royal Navy destroyers, including HMS *Gallant*, play a major role in the operation, evacuating almost a third of the troops landed in Britain.



Crewed by the owner, his son and a sea scout, the 58 foot Bermudian schooner *Sundowner* ferries 122 troops back to Ramsgate.



The Weymouth based cargo ship *Footback* disembarks 689 troops, including 119 wounded, at Dover on 30 May.



The 'SHIP LOST' cachet tells its own story. HMS *Grenade* is one of six destroyers sunk while rescuing troops from Dunkirk. On 29 May, having come under heavy fire while embarking troops, she is towed out of the harbour where she sinks.

Between 26 May and 4 June an army is saved, over 338,800 troops being evacuated from the Dunkirk beaches, but leaving the vast majority of their arms and equipment behind. The town of Dunkirk is left in ruins.



Orderly lines of troops under constant air and artillery attack snake down to the water's edge waiting for the small boats to ferry them out to the ships that will take them back to Britain.



The Isle of Man packet, *Tyrwald*, during five trips brings 8,953 men back from Dunkirk.

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Engraver's (G Barlangue) signed die proof with issued stamp from the French 1945 'Devastated Towns' issue.

The Isle of Man Steam Packet Company's vessel, *Mona's Queen*, having rescued 1,200 men on her first trip, strikes a mine outside Dunkirk harbour on her return and sinks within two minutes.



The final withdrawal sees remnants of the BEF and RAF retreating westward towards ports from which they might escape. While the French Government leaves Paris for Tours civilians flee their homes and head south.



The proof in black on thin paper for the French Colonies 1943 'French Solidarity Fund' issue with issued stamp.



Forces mail continues to be handled to the last moment, BAPO 1 operating for just two days, 13-14 June, in St Malo. The cancel on this card is dated 13 JU 40.



Yachts of the Jersey Yacht Club ferry troops to waiting ships at St Malo.



During the turmoil of retreat and evacuation the whereabouts of many individual soldiers becomes unknown giving rise to a variety of handstamps including 'ADDRESS NOT KNOWN', 'CANNOT BE TRACED' and 'Addressee Reported Missing' informing their status to the sender.

Major T G Rennie is taken prisoner when the 51st Division, trapped at St Valery, surrender on 12 June.

Gunner Kenneth Victor Hall drowns on 17 June, a victim of the sinking of the troopship *Lancastria* off St Nazaire.

Major M B Gilmore is captured at Cassel on 29th May following a heroic rearguard action by the 'Glosters'.



The last RAF fighters to leave France, Hurricanes of No 73 Squadron, take off from Nantes on 18 June.



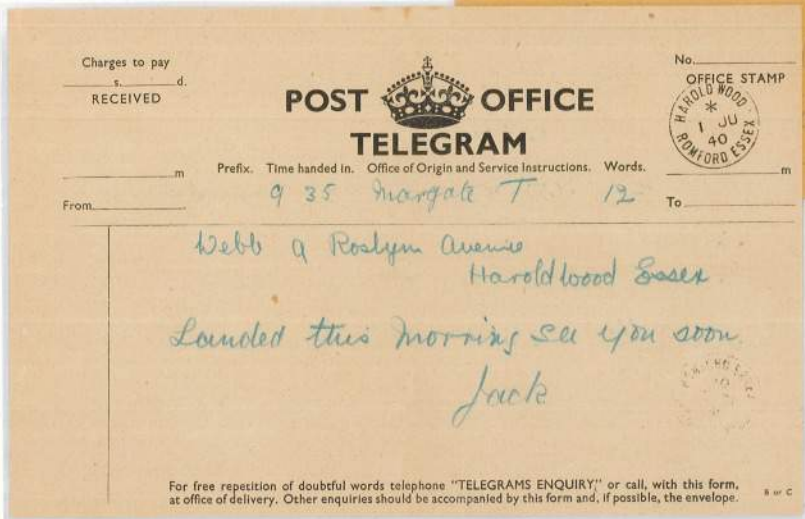
SS *Viceroy of India* evacuates troops and airmen from Marseilles and St Jean de Luz.



Protected by only limited air cover, 215,000 British and Allied servicemen together with some civilians are evacuated from western and southern French ports between 10 and 17 June.



Troops evacuated to England take the first opportunity to inform loved ones of their safe return before being entrained to destinations well away from the channel ports. Some make use of telegrams, but many send post cards distributed by well-wishers at the arrival ports.



For free repetition of doubtful words telephone "TELEGRAMS ENQUIRY" or call, with this form, at office of delivery. Other enquiries should be accompanied by this form and, if possible, the envelope.



Various organisations including the Salvation Army hand out tea and sandwiches to troops gathered at railway stations awaiting transportation away from the ports.



Mail from returning members of the BEF is usually identifiable by the use of manuscript 'BEF', appropriate date and red PAID handstamps or machine cancels.

Others are less fortunate, over 68,000 British soldiers and RAF personnel do not return from France. Over 40,000 endure a long march into captivity.



For the Prisoners of War (POWs) the war is over and they have now to resign themselves to an unknown period of captivity.



Kriegsgefangenenpost letter sheet from a British POW in Stalag XXI-B-H, located at Thure bei Schubin, despatched from Germany to Britain via Switzerland. The correspondence is dated 9 July.



Some correspondents know of the addressee's misfortune soon after their capture, mail being returned with the explanatory handstamp, 'Addressee Reported / Prisoner of War'.