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## St Valery: The Impossible Odds

Posted by Big Stu - 2008/02/21 23:54

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I got some book tokens from the kids at Xmas (very imaginative girls) and this was one of the books I got from Borders at The Glasgow Fort. It's been a great read-I was really sorry when I got to the last pages. It's the story of the retreat and capture of the Highland Division in France in 1940 told by some soldiers, mostly from the Western Isles, who were a part of it. A couple of the narratives are translated from the Gaelic and this gives a very personal feel to the stories. The thing that struck me was the lack of bitterness or anger apparent in the men's memories in spite of the shocking cruelty they suffered at the hands of the Germans. That generation was very different from us and it's clear they expect no pity or sympathy from anyone, they simply got on and did what they felt was the right thing to do. The whole story of the 51st Division and their defiance and courage in captivity is an epic that seems to be largely forgotten in mainstream histories of the war. Elsewhere, I remember reading about one small detachment of Scots soldiers who fought the Germans completely outgunned, outnumbered and without officers right back through the countryside, through the town, to the harbour and right out into the English Channel to the lighthouse at the end of the breakwater where they smashed their rifles when they ran out of ammunition before surrendering. I must admit to having a big lump in my throat when I was reading this. Anyway, the stories of the lads who escaped and made their way to freedom across France and Spain are the best bits - Scots guys blagging their way as only Scots guys can. You have to read it to believe it. A great read - highly recommended.

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