

The Reel of the 51st - Background

In June 1940 after the fall of Dunkirk, over 180,000 British soldiers were left in France - including 10,000 soldiers of the 51st Highland Division captured on the Normandy coast after brutal fighting.

Following their forced march to captivity deep within Germany, over the next five years the men plotted to survive and escape.

Therefore, to keep up morale, three officers devised a new Scottish country dance based on the insignia of the St Andrews Cross. The reel quickly spread to other camps, and when the men tried to send details of the dance steps home on Red Cross cards to their families, their German captors were convinced they were trying to communicate in secret code. It was only when the men were released at the end of the war and reunited in Scotland with their wives, mothers, sisters and girlfriends could the whole dance be pieced together.

From battlefield to ballroom, The Reel of the 51st is an enduring memorial to the sacrifice and courage of the men of The Highland Division.

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