



47 ROYAL MARINES COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

A DISPATCH

Millennium No. 3

From Editors to Readers

Chairman Peter caused grave concern to his comrades and fellow travellers on the coach return from Port-en-Bessin on the 8th June. He developed an extremely serious heart condition and it was only with the help of Lady Fortune and Dame Sandra Tebbutt that he was safely bedded down in the foremost hospital in France. The immediate arrival of Mike and Susie Parroy solved the language problem and a top class heart surgeon and his staff did the business. The presence of The Parroys, Carol Winter and Michel Deserable provided tender loving care. He is now very much 'back in charge'. Well done Frostie.

The editorial staff apologises for the delay in producing our July issue. The editor in chief was lounging on the beaches of Trouville – note that 57 years ago it was on the sands of Arromanche! The sub editor was AWOL 'drinking life to the lees all time he much enjoyed', nothing much changes. We pray that the August/September dispatch gives you pleasure. At the October AGM we will advise you of the cost of publishing and it will be for you to decide whether it is worth funding or otherwise. If the answer is 'yes' we would like to have it we would appreciate a young volunteer or two to join the editorial staff as unlike Cleopatra us old codgers are fast withering with age!

Chairman's 'Epistle'.

I appreciate I am breaking the rules by using space allocated for the Chairman's 'Epistle' for a personal message to you all. However there is no other way I could thank you for the mountain of calls, get well cards, e-mails and letters that came through by the score to both the French hospitals and Yeovil. I never realised I had so many true friends. Please allow me to echo Susie's comments that appear below.

Congratulations are due to our once redheaded Irishman, Mickie O'Brien, who on 10th August joined the illustrious ranks of octogenarians. The manner in which the day was spent is best not recorded!!

The news for which you have all been waiting is finally here. John Forfar tells us that the contract with the publishers for the history of 47 RM Commando has been completed and that they hope to publish this autumn. It will be a book of 400 odd pages with some 140 photographs.. Its title will probably be "OMAHA TO THE SCHELDT – the history of 47 Royal Marine Commando."

I look forward to seeing many of you at the next reunion and am really excited to hear the news about our new standard. The story behind this and a full report will be the subject of the next dispatch, but many thanks must go to Ted Hartwell who has been the driving force behind all of this.

Susie's Thankyou

Dear All

This is just a short note and a heartfelt "thank you" to everybody for keeping in touch by phone, card and email plus visiting while Dad has been in hospital. The French system looked after him remarkably well – I think we ought to write an article for the English health press entitled "croissants for breakfast". The one thing that none of the French staff could get over were the number of get well cards he got – this is obviously an English tradition. The cleaners got quite annoyed at having to move them all and Carol and I became quite inventive in finding ways to hang them up!

Although he has been very up and down since his return to the UK – mainly due to the fact that the pills don't seem to

agree with him he is now making steady progress in the right direction. He has never been a "walker", but he has been persuaded to walk twice a day and marches up the road to Wincanton Racecourse. He hopes to go and stay with his old friend John Cantrell soon and will come back to Gooselands before doing some other short trips in the UK. He plans to return to Spain probably sometime early November.

If it hadn't been for your quick thinking in getting him into hospital and all your support shown since I am quite sure the story would be a different one. Unfortunately I cannot come to the reunion in October to thank you all personally as I am organising a reunion myself – for Guys Hospital Physiotherapists and the date has been in the diary for two years.

I hope I will have the opportunity of speaking to you all soon and perhaps seeing some of you here at Gooselands in the not too distant future.

With best wishes and grateful thanks,

Susie

News

Lynne's resignation:

Peter Spears has heard from Gordon Taylor of Lynne's resignation from the association. We are very grateful for all the work she did as secretary for so many years.

Letters from Readers

'THEY DID NOT FORGET'

D-DAY 6TH JUNE 1944

AND 47 COMMANDO PORT-EN-BESSIN, 6TH – 7TH JUNE 2001 - Charles Smallbone

The Commandos of the last war were a unique body of men, seldom seen, not given much to small talk and were in a class of their own. The Macquarie Dictionary describes them as a 'small body of specially trained fighting men, making quick destructive raids against enemy-held areas'. (The name 'Commando' originated in the Boer War of 1898.) During the last 'Great War', those men of grit and steel would, today, find it hard to recognise these gentle, caring, yet formidable fighters of nearly sixty years ago.

I served at sea from 1937 to 1947. As a Midshipman, I was wounded at Dunkirk when the ship was bombed and sunk. I was again in hospital in Port Said after an eye wound sustained off Crete. I took my Master's Certificate but left the sea as a Second Officer to take up teaching.

I was privileged to be invited by the Secretary of the 47 Royal Marine Commando Association, Catherine Snook, together with her sister, Virginia, to take part in their visit to Port-en-Bessin on the Normandy coast, for their annual D-Day Commemoration. The three of us arrived at the Royal Sailors Home Club in Portsmouth and, after unpacking, dining and enjoying the harbour views, retired to our rooms. Following a very early call, by 7.45 am we were on our way to France, coach and all, on a glass-like surface. Our group, which included wives, guests etc was one of very many similar groups and we three soon began to recognise and mix with the party. After docking near Caen, we enjoyed the journey to the King Hotel. A good meal at the 'favourite' restaurant saw us retiring to our beds after a long but very pleasant day.

On Wednesday, 6th June – it was a Tuesday in 1944 – we travelled by coach to the Bayeux War Cemetery where we added to the already large assembly as more coaches continued to arrive. As the hour of eleven approached, the Standard Bearers, both British and French, the Platoon of Soldiers, the Civic Authorities and the hundreds of those who had assembled to respect the Fallen in moving solemnity. The Band, the hymns, the quietness which befell the Silence, the moving words in reply 'We will remember them' as a heavy shower of rain fell, almost like tears. A visit to the modern War Museum was followed by a lunch break in Bayeux, visiting the shops, the Cathedral, the gardens etc before travelling to Arromanches where the sun made up for the shortcomings of the morning. Visits were made to the Museum there, with its Circular Cinema, the model lay-out of the landings, before moving on to the town.

A festive air prevailed as hundreds of British visitors enjoyed the atmosphere, visiting the next Museum, looking at the remains of the Mulberry Harbour before returning to the hotel, with a special stop to visit the last remaining gun enclosure which still retains its original guns.

We all assembled for a superb supper but most unfortunately our Secretary was taken ill and an ambulance was called to take Catherine and her sister Virginia to the Bayeaux Hospital.

On Thursday, 7th June, the '47th' took part in their Annual Ceremony when wreaths were laid at the Port, the Church and the Mayor's Parlour. After lunch, as the rain began to fall, some of us went to the American Cemetery. The beauty of that place, with its thousands of graves, was not lost upon its visitors, despite the pouring rain. Following our return, a splendid meal awaited us and did much to lift the party's spirits.

Friday, our last day, a stop was made at one of the larger supermarkets. We then moved on to Caen, where we had lunch and spent some time in the magnificent War Museum. Sadly, we heard the news that Peter Winter, who had managed things so well, had suffered a heart attack and had been taken to the New Hospital where Mickie O'Brien stayed with him.

We then travelled to the ferry and had another beautiful trip with a flat sea, though the many school children were another story. Our final drinks in the Club, followed next morning by breakfast and departure saw us on our individual ways. Despite the misfortunes that befell us, it was an unforgettable visit and gave me great pleasure in meeting so many splendid 'Commandos'.

IT WAS NOT FUNNY!

by Gerry Brent

Christmas 1944 - the Germans had broken through the American lines in the Ardennes. Only Bastogne held on in one of the epics of the US101 Airborne Division. It was a massive attack by the largest tank force ever assembled on the western front for the purposes of breaking through to Antwerp. The weather had been lousy for days, giving the RAF little chance to exercise the air superiority they had gained in the last few days over the Luftwaffe.

The Germans had also assembled what they called a *Kampfgruppe* north of the river Maas to complete a pincer attack down towards Antwerp. It was just 80 km from Breda (south bank of the river) to Antwerp, however the Maas was in full flood and the only bridge across carrying the railway and main road from Utrecht, on the north bank of the river towards Antwerp, had been very successfully blown to smithereens by the Germans when retreating to the north of the river.

Crossing the river under such circumstances was most hazardous and virtually impossible. We 47 RMC were held in reserve in and around Bergen op Zoom. There was little -hardly anything -on the ground that could have stopped any determined German push, even only light armoured vehicles and artillery if they could get across the river Maas somehow.

On receipt of the news that the German had broken through at the Ardennes the 47 RMC was moved up to the river in the defence of Breda and the approaches to Antwerp. Our total effective strike force was just about 350 men who were to stop the threat of the German breakthrough from the north. In order to show the Germans that this area was held strongly by the allies we were actively patrolling day and night in our sector preventing the Germans from making an accurate assessment of what and how many troops were holding the approaches to Antwerp had been out on night patrol. We got caught up with a German fighting patrol and had to hole up in a demolished house for 24 hours before we managed to get back to our lines. We were ready to go to bed on the early hours when a terrible noise shaking the whole house made me go out on to the balcony to find out what was going on.

As I found out later, the German airforce had been using the first day of good flying weather to make a do-or-die effort to try to regain air superiority by a sneak attack at first light to destroy our aircraft on the ground. Although they managed to shoot up ground and repair installations, the RAF group was already up and about at first light, busying themselves with attacking the German forces that had broken through at the Ardennes.

As the RAF group returned to base they met the German planes, which had spent their ammo shooting up our airforce installations and had little ammunition left to defend themselves -it was an uneven fight. I was told that the German

planes were just shot out of the sky and their losses virtually annihilated any further activities of the German airforce in our sector.

What I saw, however, was just unbelievable, although this lasted only seconds it is firmly impregnated in my mind - there was this German plane coming straight for me. It was so close that I could make out the pilot's face behind his gun, and what prevented him from pressing the trigger and blasting me off into smithereens I do not know. What can go through one's mind in a split second is amazing -there I was, right in this fellow's gunsights, and yet I was not full of holes!

Of course, I did not realise that the Germans had run out of ammunition and were running for home any way they could, but then when nothing happened looked aghast at the plane that was still coming straight at me. To my horror, I saw that its engine had been shot out, and in its place was a large black hole. So if I were not to be shot I most certainly would be squashed by the plane's crash impact. Resigned, I shut my eyes waiting for the impact. In that split second you wonder if you really believed in the story of the 'big book' -that the 'big book' had all our names in it and when our name came up on any particular day, we copped it. Of course, the big book was always right because when one of us got killed or wounded it was always there, written in the book retrospectively

Obviously my name was not in the book on that day! The plane I had seen coming was the first jet plane I had encountered -no propeller or any other sign of engine propulsion -hedge-hopping or better, house-hopping its way back out of ammunition to its airfield north of the river Maas

Just a thought

July - when we were due to scribe is historically an interesting month.....

4th July 1776 - USA declared Independence

12th July - in Ireland celebrate the defeat by William III of James II at the Battle of the Boyne and Aughrin.

1st July 1690 - unkind cut. King Billy was married to Mary II, James II daughter!

14th July 1789 - storming of the Bastille.

On a lesser note.....

Night of July 22/23 1944 - twelve volunteers formed a fighting patrol to attack the enemy position at Sallenelles - one of those volunteers was John Wetjen. When he was asked fifty-three years later why he had volunteered he said *"It was my 21st birthday and I wanted some excitement"*! A fine soldier - well done John we wish you well. He continues to suffer greatly from wounds received on that patrol.

August - nothing much happens. It's a silly season; maybe a grumble or two from shooters - 'Wot no grouse.'

The glorious 12th - Susie's birthday. A belated Happy Birthday Susie.

This newsletter could not go to press without mention of the terrible happenings in America last week. Words cannot express what we all must be feeling and our condolences go to all people affected by the tragedy. It is sobering if somewhat frightening to find Nostradamus' prediction on World War III, which is printed below. Let us hope he will be proved wrong.

Nostradamus' prediction on World War III

"In the year of the new century and nine months, from the sky will come a great King of Terror...
The sky will burn at forty-five degrees. Fire approaches the great new city..."

"In the city of York there will be a great collapse, two twin brothers torn apart by chaos while the fortress falls the great leader will succumb third big war will begin when the big city is burning"

He said this will be bigger than the previous two Wars and 2001 is the first year of the new century and this is the 9th month. New York is also located at the 41st degree Latitude.

A corner to 'A' Muse

"Drinking"

The thirsty earth soaks up the rain,
And drinks and gapes for drink again;
The plants suck in the earth, and are
With constant drinking fresh and fair;
The sea itself (which one would think
Should have but little need of drink)
Drinks twice ten thousand rivers up,
So fill'd that they o'erflow the cup.
The busy Sun (and one would guess
By's drunken fiery face no less)
Drinks up the sea, and when he's done,
The Moon and Stars drink up the Sun:
They drink and dance by their own light,
They drink and revel all the night:
Nothing in Nature's sober found,
But an eternal health goes round.
Fill up the bowl, then, fill it high,
Fill all the glasses there - for why
Should every creature drink but I?
Why, man of morals, tell me why?

Ode to old age

A Poem by Sandra Tebbutt

When the laughter lines become tracks,
And the bags under your eyes are more like sacks,
Your hair is going grey,
And you can't always hear what people say,
Those once slim hips,
Are more like rubbish tips,
When your memory begins to fade,
And you think, "have I paid"
When your knees begin to creek,
And you feel life is bleak,
Just remember your youth,
And be prepared to face the awful truth.

Funny corner



"Don't eat the hard bit on it's back,
they make you fart"

Invasion

Saddam Hussain was sitting in his office wondering who to invade next when the telephone rang.

"Hello Mr. Hussain" a heavily accented voice said. "This is Paddy down in County Cork Ireland. I am ringing to inform you that we are officially declaring war on you".

"Well Paddy", Saddam replied. "This is indeed important news. Tell me how big is your army? "At this moment in time", said Paddy after a moments calculation. "there is myself and my cousin Sean, my next door neighbour Gerry, and the entire dominoes team from the pub – that makes eight."

Saddam sighed. "I must tell you Paddy that I have one million men in my army waiting to move on my command."

"Begorra!" said Paddy. "I'll have to ring you back." Sure enough the next day Paddy rang back. "Right Mr. Hussain the war is still on. We have managed to acquire some equipment."

"And what equipment would that be, Paddy?" Saddam asked.

"Well we have two combine harvesters, a bulldozer and Murphy's tractor from the farm."

Once more Saddam sighed. "I must tell you, Paddy, I have 16,000 tanks, 14,000 armoured personnel carriers, and my army has increased to one and a half million men since we last spoke.

"Really?" said Paddy. "I'll have to ring you back.

Paddy rang again the next day". "Right Mr. Hussain, the war is still on. We have managed to get ourselves airborne. We've modified Ted's ultralight with a couple of rifles in the cockpit, and the bridge team has joined us as well."

Saddam was silent for a minute then sighed. "I must tell you, Paddy, that I have 10,000 bombers, 20,000 MiG-19 attack planes, my military complex is surrounded by laser-guided surface-to-air missile sites, and since we last spoke, my army has increased to two million men."

"Faith and begorra!" said Paddy. "I'll have to ring you back." Sure enough Paddy called again the next day. "Right, Mr. Hussain, I am sorry to tell you that we have had to call off the war." "I'm sorry to hear that", said Saddam. "Why the sudden change of heart?"

"Well" said Paddy. "We've all had a chat, and there is no way we can feed two million prisoners."

Matches and Hatches

A total lack of activity leaves nothing to report!