

47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

Committee

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Despatch No.4 January 2002

Editors to Readers

For many 2001 was a difficult year, age is cruel to us all and for some she has been particularly nasty. Our one hope is that all the old crocks are now on the road to recovery and fulfilment in their twilight years! For those of you who are suffering from the ravages of Time, please let the Editor know so we can offer our services to help as best we can.

The Editorial Team for the Despatch has now changed and it falls upon me, Jerry Maycock, and Lannah Battley to keep you informed as to what is going on. Please humour us as we find our literary feet and remember we are both novices so we are bound to make mistakes.

Unfortunately the Editors of the last Dispatch were somewhat geographically dispersed at the time it was sent out and several errors were allowed to be included. Mickie O'Brien was not the only one to be congratulated on becoming an octogenarian! Mint Burkinshaw achieved the same honour, though by a short head so to Mint our congratulations and please accept our apologies!

The Chairman's Epistle

I would like to thank, through this column, all the veterans, their Families and Friends who have sent me such a huge collection of Christmas cards. I am really touched to be remembered by so many of you. Unfortunately, owing to an error in the delivery of my Christmas card order, I have been unable to send any out this year. Please do not think I have forgotten. It has been just the reverse, wondering what you would have been thinking. I have managed to send an e-mail card to those I know have computers. Thank you all again and Good Luck, Good Health to you and yours in 2002.

We are delighted to inform Members who were not present at the AGM in Portsmouth that the Association now has its own standard. Mr Malcolm Ross presented this most generous gift to us. Malcolm was present at the Port-en-Bessin reunion with three friends, two of who were Standard Bearers for the NVA. They all kindly joined our ceremony. He was distressed to see that we had no Standard of our own and decided to present us with one. Having most competently designed the Association tie our erstwhile artist, Ted Battley, produced another most satisfactory original design for which we are all most appreciative. We are pleased to report that Malcolm has accepted our invitation to become a member of the Association and, indeed, will always be most welcome at any of the reunions. As a matter of interest Malcolm was most dissatisfied with the bag holding our Standard, of which we were very proud! He has therefore ordered a new bag to be embroidered with the Associations name on it. On behalf of us all, a humble and most sincere thank you Malcolm

John (Doc) Forfar's long awaited book '**Omaha to the Scheldt – The History of 47 Royal Marine Commando**' is now available and John has received the first copy. Containing some 400 pages with 130 illustrations the book costs £20 (inclusive of P&P) and is available from

Tuckwell Press
The Mall House
Phantassie
East Lothian
EH40 3DG
Tel: 01620 860164

You may order by phone using a credit card. The book is also being marketed in the States, and the inclusion of 'Omaha' should be an incentive for the Americans to buy it!

With the publication of John's book, we now intend producing a web site for 47 Royal Marine Commando. This will include a short history of the unit's epic events, with photographs, the Despatch and Association information. This should ensure the name will continue in perpetuity.

Regarding the 'Doc', he still takes part, as a discussant, in the annual 'Realities of Warfare' course at the Joint Services Command and Staff College and was invited to speak to the Royal Marines Advanced Amphibious Warfare Course on the battle for Port-en-Bessin. Major General Julian Thompson, latterly Brigade Commander of the Royal Marine Commandos and Falklands fame, is now a leading military historian and was instrumental in John's invitation. In Gen. Thompson's own words he expressed the following opinion, **'the capture of Port-en-Bessin was one of the most remarkable episodes in the history of the Corps and yet is not talked about nearly enough.'** And was, **'one of the great feats of arms of any unit, Royal Marines, Army, Navy or Air Force, of any Nation in the Second World War, and far more worthy of study than many others.'** Praise indeed from such an authoritative quarter!

Efforts continue to persuade the French Authorities to agree that 47's clandestine march from Asnelles to Point 72 be made into an official Tourist Walk. We have two very influential people who are supporting our request but it will prove no doubt a lengthy procedure.

We very much regret that Catherine Snook will not continue as our Secretary owing to ill health. Those who were present at our last two reunions will recall how unwell she was. Thank you Catherine from all of us for what you have done in the short time you have been with us, especially for the database you produced! We wish you well and hope your health improves considerably.

Editor's Comment – a personal note.

Well who would have believed it! Back in early October my Mother and I trepidaciously went to Portsmouth to the Annual General Meeting of 47 Royal Marine Commando Association to try to find out information about my late Father, George Maycock. Little did I envisage that I would soon be joint editor for your Despatch! Well here I am, warts and all so do I give you some information on my association with 47? Guess so:

My Father joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve in 1943 at the tender age of 17, before volunteering for Commando Training in the winter 43/44. He was attached to 47 RM Commando in May 1944 and served with the Unit both in Normandy and on Walcheren. In between times he played silly buggers with 30 Special Assault Group. He was demobbed in 1947, recalled to the Colours for Korea (ended up with polio in Hong Kong so stayed there till '54). Demobbed again in 1954, he stayed with the Royal Naval Reserve till 1982 when he was paid off as a Commander, his last post being Officer Commanding HMS Scotia up in Rosyth, Scotland. In between being a sailor he managed to become a Planning Inspector both in England and Scotland. His love of the Navy and for the Commandos' never left him and I can often recall him wearing his Green Beret with his naval uniform whenever and wherever possible. He died in April 1996, just after his 70th birthday.

George rarely spoke of the war, keeping his thoughts very much to himself. As I grew up I often wondered what Dad did in the War and slowly I gleaned some small snippets of information. With his passing I felt deprived of Family Heritage. I wanted to know what he did, what his colleagues were like, who were they and so on. I decided to research 47 RM Commando but information is very sparse and sketchy. Prof. Forfar's new book, now out, should fill some of the gaps but it is the Marine's Stories that lack, that need recording so my generation and my son's generation can know what their Father's/Grandfather's did – the sacrifices you made so we could be free! Therefore I am asking you to send me your stories, written, taped or videoed to compile your history, your record of your 'Band of Brothers'.

Portsmouth AGM

This year's A.G.M and Reunion took place in Portsmouth over the weekend 6th to 9th October. Mother Nature did us proud – not! The rain came in waves across the streets and the wind blew with a wicked ferocity rarely seen for the time of year. So adverse were the conditions that it was decided to hold the Association's Standards Dedication and Remembrance Service inside as opposed to at the Memorial Stone. The Royal Marine Museum was very accommodating and allowed us the use of the Mountbatten Room.

Mr Malcolm Ross, a successful businessman from South Staffordshire, had very kindly agreed to present the Association with two Standards made up in the colours adopted by the Association, blue and green. These were marched in and presented either side of a small dais from where the Reverend Wort conducted a brief dedication and Remembrance Service. Marine S. Warmington sounded 'Last Post' before our Chair, Peter Winter made a short speech,

thanking Mr Ross, Rev. Wort and Marine Warmington. At least one hardy soul made his way in the lashing rain to the Memorial Stone for their own period of reflection. Again with the help of the RMM we managed to get the coach as close as possible to the Museum entrance to act as a makeshift windbreak, a move much appreciated! Our return to the RSHC was delayed as the shore-road was closed to traffic due to the sea washing over the defences. Some unknown soul likened it to Arromanche in mid-June 1944

The AGM was fairly well attended, some twenty veterans managing to make the trip. It was really good to see Peter Winter and Mickie O'Brien in such good form. Peter has done very well thanks to the French Medical Services and is now back in Mallorca. The Committee consisting of Peter Winter (Chair), Peter Spear (vice Chair), Prof. John Forfar, Ted Battley, Ted Hartwell, Sandra Tebbutt, Betty Field were re-elected. Prof. Forfar could not make the Reunion due to his son's continuing very serious illness. In the Chairman's words: "...our thoughts and best wishes are with you John and your Family."

Business started with the Secretary, Catherine Snook, expressing concern over the cost of the Newsletter and the income from subscriptions. It was agreed that to balance the books we would send out two newsletters a year from 2002, one in December/January, the second in July/August. The Committee sought a new editor and both Lannah Battley and Jerry Maycock volunteered to form the Editorial Staff.

The Membership of the Association stands at 80 on the books, of which almost half have not paid the £10 subscription. The Committee's concern was not about the monies but about the welfare of those non-subscribing members. Being scattered throughout the world it is very difficult to keep track of people so it was agreed to attach a Membership List to this Newsletter and all members are asked to update the Editor on their circumstances, and any change in circumstances they know of other members. Should any current Member wish to withdraw from the Association, or if you know of any veteran not in the Association please let us know.

It was with sadness that we accepted the resignation from the Association of Lynn, Gordon and Corral. Their individual and collective support over the years has been a source of great strength and we wish them well and hope they do keep in touch.

Discussions then went onto Walcheren 2001, and the visits for 2002. It was suggested that for 2002 three trips, Port-en-Bessin, Fecamp and Walcheren, be considered. It was suggested that a visit to both Port-en-Bessin and Fecamp in early June would be appropriate. This would mean travelling from Portsmouth to Cherbourg or Caen and returning via Le Havre or Dieppe. It was agreed to sound the Membership out and a reply form is attached.

Walcheren 2001 was going to be a low turnout but two veterans and two other members did make the trip. For 2002 closer liaison with 4 Commando Brigade (41/47 & 48 RMCdo) will be needed and it was felt a combined trip would be best, with the pilgrimage immediately following a late October AGM.

2004 sees the 60th Anniversary of the Normandy (and Walcheren) Landings. Already accommodation is getting to be at a premium and the Association has reserved 30 rooms at the Kings Hotel. As this will, in all probability, be the last big re-union, it is hoped as many veterans and their families can make the trip. An early indication of your intent would prove most helpful. The Association is prepared to make any necessary 'special arrangements' it is able to. The lessons from the 50th have been learnt!

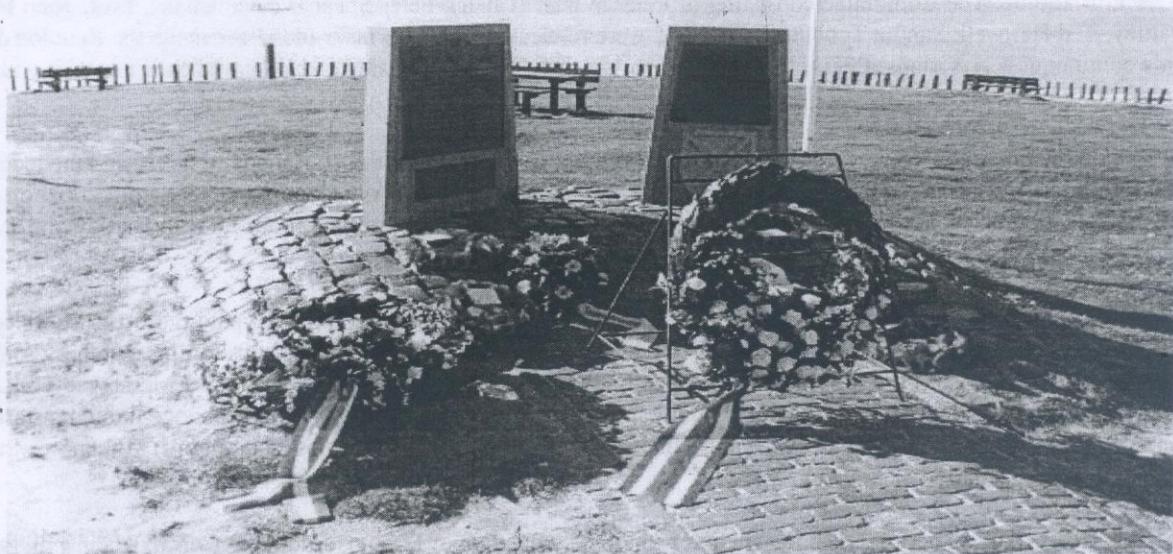
The AGM concluded to the RSHC bar for lunch (!) and in the evening the Association had a successful and cordial dinner before going their own ways on the 10th.

Walcheren 2001

Holland in November doesn't always bring out the best in the country but 2001 was different. The entire weekend was beautiful sunshine with a mild coastal breeze – very different from 57 years ago! Not that all went well. The forward party of Jerry and Robbie Maycock had their problems, the Dover-Ostend ferry became the Dover-Calais ferry (booze cruises being more profitable) so an hours drive in daylight to Middelburg became three hours and into darkness. Heading for Breskens at a leisurely rate a diversion sign! Narrow canal sidetracks! What next? Fortunately we were in a car, not the 42-seater coach bringing up the main group. Roy Bryant and Ken Parker really had fun but the driver excelled and managed to get the main group to Middelburg only 90 minutes late, no wash up, no comfort visits, straight into the Veterans Reception in the beautifully restored town hall.

Next morning saw us all muster outside the Hotel du Commerce for a 9 o'clock start. First stop was Westkapelle and the church service. A short but moving Act of Remembrance attended not only by the Vets. but by many local people who paid their silent tribute in the town square. Light refreshment, the first of many, was then taken before proceeding to the

south side of the breech made in '44. The weather was beautiful as the wreath laying took place, a light breeze in glorious sunshine! How so very different from 57 years ago. The local schoolchildren laid the community wreaths and representatives from each attending Unit lay their wreaths. The Band from the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps played a sombre tribute and Last Post. (They attended throughout the day and did very well – our heartfelt thanks to them.)



Westkapelle Monument

From the beach we moved off to the old lighthouse in Westkapelle to pay our respects to the civilians who died during the bombing and liberation of the island.



Roy Bryant and Ken Parker at 47 Memorial Tablet - Dishoek

After this, [perhaps the most moving of the day's services, it was off to lunch just behind the dunes, before proceeding to the Open Church at Dishoek and the plaque commemorating 47 RMCdo. Again many locals took the time to attend the wreath laying and it was quite moving to see so many young people remembering their liberators from so long ago. Roy Bryant and Ken Parker paid our respects and laid the Remembrance Wreath

The Church provided yet another refreshment break before moving onto Domburg and the final Act of Remembrance for the day. Being late, many of the village attended a candle lit service where the children, yet again, played such an

important part in remembering. A weary group then made its way back to Middelburg and their respective hotels/homes. It was felt 47s reps. needed some light refreshment so we popped into a bar across the road where the Dutch treated us to free beer, good conversation and a really warm and friendly evening.

The next day saw an early start. The CWG Cemetery at Bergen-op-Zoom is the final resting place of many members of 47 RMCdo. as well as other Walcheren units. The day was bright but cold as we paraded for this final Act of Remembrance. The RNMC bugler was there to sound Last Post and Reveille along with the Naval Attaché from Den Hague, a platoon of Dutch soldiers and a large crowd of locals. The Parade was efficient and it was quite moving but it was the sight of the old Marines, moving amongst the headstones, wiping away tears and recalling their long lost Friends that I will remember. I was humbled and honoured to be there. Again, Roy and Ken did the Honours.

The main party then left for a formal reception in Bergen-op-Zoom. I unfortunately had to return home as earlier. work beckoned but I had enjoyed my time and felt I knew far more than I had a mere 48 hours earlier. JM

Contributed by Carol Winter

**"He was just a common soldier and his ranks are growing thin
But his presence should remind us we may need his likes again.
For when countries are in conflict, then we find the soldier's part
Is to clear up all the troubles that the politicians start."**

OUR WELSH CONTINGENT IN CRETE (by Lannah Battley)

May 2001 brought the sixtieth anniversary of the Battle of Crete and E Gurnos Jones, who was there as a Marine in 1941, returned in company with other UK veterans. He and Shirley enjoyed excellent hotel accommodation in good company, hot weather, a sandy beach and were able to see some of the stunning scenery which Crete provides. They also attended the Commemoration Service at the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery at Souda Bay on 19th May.

This was attended by HRH, the Duke of Kent and as well as British veterans there were many Australians and New Zealanders who played a major part in the battle from 20th May to 1st June 1941.

Some of the music was provided by the Royal Australian Navy Band and the choir of the NZ Defence Force Maori Cultural Group sang *Whakaria Mai* (How Great Thou Art) in that wonderful harmonic Maori style. A piper from a New Zealand regiment played during the laying of the wreaths and the Greek Army Band accompanied all of the National Anthems.

HMS Richmond, lay at anchor in the bay and its Commanding Officer, spoke the words from Laurence Binyon's poem *For the Fallen*, "They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old...". Towards the end of the moving ceremony, HMS Richmond fired a 21 gun salute.

Gurnos was invited aboard HMS Richmond but because of his group's travel commitments was unable to accept the offer. However, he did receive a commemorative medal and a beautifully designed scroll from the Greek government. The scroll, appropriately enough, is decorated with Greek borders, a laurel wreath and fluted Corinthian columns twined with vine leaves.

The dedication states in both Greek and English *WE AWARD The commemorative medal of honour to the Veteran soldiers of the Battle of Crete for their participation in the struggle of the Greek people against the Nazi occupying forces in May 1941.*

By coincidence, Ted and Lannah Battley also visited Crete this year. This had nothing to do with the anniversary though Lannah's uncle, who served in the Tank Regiment, was captured there in May 1941 and spent the rest of the war as a POW.

During their stay, the Battleys visited Knossos and did all the things one might expect to on a Mediterranean holiday. A less typical holiday destination was their visit to the British Cemetery at Souda Bay where there are just under two thousand gravestones. As with all Commonwealth War Graves, the whole site is kept in pristine condition and reading the dedications and observing the youth of many of those killed has great poignancy. As elsewhere, there are many stones without names: soldiers, sailors and airmen simply "known unto God". Some named stones have the rider, 'buried in this vicinity', presumably a sign that this was not just a cemetery but where part of the battle had raged. There are Royal Marines and members of various British Regiments and large numbers of Australians and New Zealanders, many of them airmen. The entire crew of one Australian warplane is buried together, their gravestones not spaced out but side

by side, shoulder to shoulder. Several member of the Merchant Marine are also buried here. One was a deck-hand of sixteen, another a crewman of sixty-five.

The most striking thing about the cemetery is the greenness of the billiard-table turf sloping down to the blue waters of Souda Bay. Crete has wonderful scenery, sea and mountains, beaches, rocky coastal views, olive groves and picturesque villages but nothing is truly green. Except for the British Cemetery. In fact, it is so like home that it makes one think of the famous line from Rupert Brooke, *That there's some corner of a foreign field/ That is forever England.*

Cretans still remember the occupation and those too young to remember still celebrate Ohi Day ('No' Day) along with everyone else. It's one of the biggest days in their calendar and celebrates the

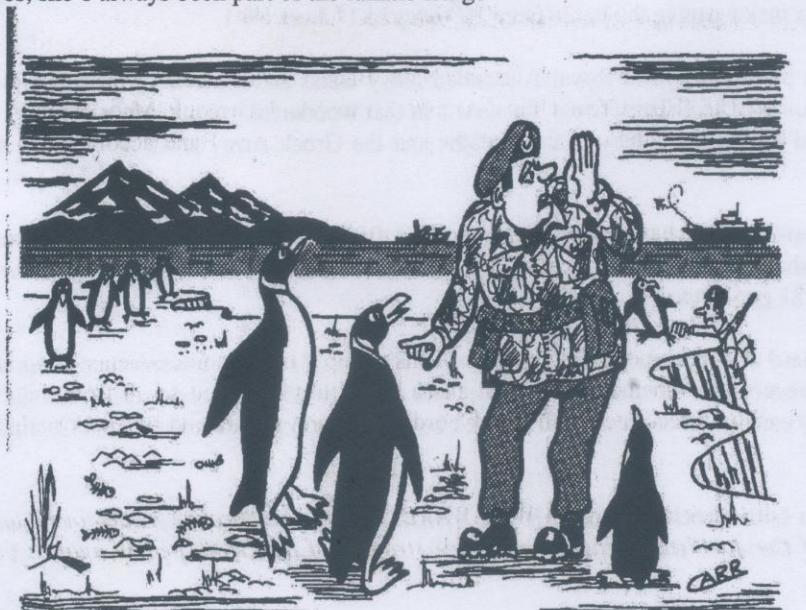
Cretan defiance in denying the demands of Mussolini which in the end brought about the occupation.

The ceremony on 19th May was a big event for everyone in Crete, still spoken of in September. The British Cemetery is clearly marked on maps and very well sign-posted. Many holiday-makers make the journey to see what is a poignant and beautifully maintained site in a very striking setting.

Ladie's corner

Ted Battley took part in Carmarthenshire Artists' Open Studios in September. This is a group of professional and semi-professional artists with some sponsorship from Carmarthenshire County Council and the Welsh Arts Council who each open up their studios to the public for a specific period. They produce a glossy illustrated brochure and get as much local publicity as possible. Ted had to rearrange his studio to some extent as it is normally used twice a month as the meeting place of the local Art Society of which he is Chairman. Every inch of wall space was crammed with the great variety of paintings he produces, oils, watercolours, acrylics and so on. He also had the tools of the trade on display. However, the 47 RM Commando plaque, replica commando knife and other memorabilia retained their commanding position over the main doorway.

Lannah Battley had a science fiction story on the internet in August. You can still see it by clicking LIBRARY on <http://www.sfcrownsnest.com> and looking for her name or the title *The Liar's Tale* under back issues for August 01. She also recently had another story shortlisted to the last 5 in a competition. The winner had to be free to attend a presentation in Belfast on a particular weekend in November. – Lannah suspects the second prize was two weekends in Belfast and says, yes, she's always been part of the lunatic fringe



"APPARENTLY THEY'RE SBS AND HAVE BEEN HERE 3 WEEKS ALREADY.
.....OH, AND SIR, THEY WANT TO KNOW IF WE'VE GOT ANY FISH."

In closing, the Chairman, The Committee and your Editorial Staff would like to wish you all a most prosperous and happy 2002.

Farewell

News has reached us, from the family and the Commando Association of the tragic death of JOHN BENNETT on the 5th June. John was a kind and very generous friend to our Association and indeed to many others. His return to the reunions of his comrades between October 2000 and June 2001 gave him much happiness. Our thoughts and condolences go out to all his family and friends.

Gerry Brent telephoned out Association from Australia to give us the sad news of the death of DAVID WALTERS. David had been unwell for a lengthy time and had to attend hospital for a blood transfusion every three weeks. He was always delighted to receive news of the Association and had regular telephone conversations with our Chairman. Our sincere condolences go to his wife and family.

Of particular sadness to the Chairman was the announcement of the death of BERNARD WOODGATE. Bernard had been Peter Winter's MOA throughout his time with the Commando. They had lost touch for over fifty years and only met up again about a year ago. Bernard joined us for two reunions, which gave him enormous pleasure. His nephew, Steve Mason had promised to drive him to France to visit Peter in hospital. Alas, time was not to permit such kindness as Bernard died a few days before the journey. Both his and Peter's family together with veterans decided to withhold this tragic news from Peter until after his operation. Our thoughts go out to Len his brother, with whom he lived, and to all his family.

It is sad to see that all the above were members of 'Y' Troop.

'Attenshun'

According to our records (which are not brilliant but getting better!). We still have a significant number of unpaid subscriptions, which makes day to day administration difficult. These are needed if the Association is to keep going. The Committee would ask anyone who has forgotten to forward your subscription to our secretary as soon as possible. Many thanks.

**LOOKING FORWARD TO MEETING AS MANY OF YOU AS POSSIBLE AT OUR AGM IN
PORTSMOUTH IN OCTOBER.**

WITH WARMEST REGARDS TO YOU ALL.

THE EDITORS.

Ladies Corner

Barbara Harmer



On March 25th 1993, aged 39, Barbara Harmer became one of an elite group of pilots who fly Concorde – the world's only supersonic passenger airliner. This is all the more extraordinary when you find out that she is also the first and only women to have achieved these prestigious 'heights', although she would like to see more.

"I do not think there is a pilot alive who would say they wouldn't like to fly her (Concorde). It is a privilege to be the first women to have flown her, but I hope I will not be the only one."

As one of only 100 women pilots currently employed by BA, compared to the 3,500 odd men, Barbara's achievements are all the more remarkable. Since that groundbreaking day in 1993, she has flown Concorde numerous times, but the path that led her there was not always a smooth one.

After leaving school and training as a hairdresser, Barbara found she needed more in the way of mental stimulation and began training as an air traffic controller whilst taking private flying lessons. She then turned down a promotion to teach others to fly, before successfully gaining her commercial pilots licence in 1982.

In 1992, ten years later, she was one of a handful of pilots chosen by BA to undergo six months of rigorous training in the Concorde flight simulation at British Aerospace Filton, near Bristol. She passed with 'flying' colours and went on to fly Concorde over 500 times until it was grounded in July 2000, the first time since it's first commercial flight on January 21, 1976.

Unlike Air France, BA did not ground Concorde until 3 weeks later and Barbara was happy to fly her the day after the accident, which had killed all on board. She says of the cabin crew aboard "*They were given the choice of whether to go or not, but their attitude was that if Barbara was willing to fly her it must be okay. There was nothing to worry about*"

Fear is not an emotion Barbara is familiar with and believes that Concorde is safe and should not have been grounded. Even when piloting a BAC-11, one of it's engines having failed, she wasn't scared. "*You are so busy and the adrenaline is flowing that you just do not have time to be frightened*"

Barbara has no hesitation in saying she would love to pilot Concorde again, adding '*if you want to do something, there is always a way. You just have to be dedicated and determined.*'