

47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

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DESPATCH No 5 August 2002

The Queens Golden Jubilee has now past and we enter Her Majesty's Fifty-first year. Many of you were still young men in 1952 when the King died and Queen Elizabeth came to the Throne. Some were still in the Service, others settled into their civvy street careers, whilst a few still suffered from the physical wounds of a mere seven years earlier, unable to work through injury. I wasn't even born and my Father was on active service in Hong Kong having contracted polio en-route to Korea. To me it was a lifetime ago, to you proud and honoured Gentlemen I wonder?

From the feedback I received it appears most of you enjoyed your last Despatch. Thank you for your words of support and encouragement. Elsewhere in this Despatch Doc Forfar states to run a good newsletter we need your input so please keep it coming!

I was unable to make Normandy this year but will be at Walcheren. I must first apologise for the rush over Normandy. No one had picked up the reins of Secretary until Betty Field came to the rescue hence the sudden rush in April/May. We promise 2003 will be better organised now our roles are defined and we know what to do! A big thank you to Betty and to Peter Spear who yet again organised the accommodation in France.

Walcheren News

As of this date (end July 2002) some 14 names are down for Walcheren, a marvellous response. Unfortunately the exact dates are not finalised but working with the Dutch authorities and 41 and 48 Commando we expect confirmation very shortly. A further 'bug' is that the projected current cost including transport will exceed £300 per person and we are making serious endeavours to reduce this considerably. Interested parties will be kept informed as to whether we can indeed make it as a group. As things stand the AGM will be held in Portsmouth at the Royal Sailors Home the 29/30th October followed by a coach trip to Walcheren on the 31st. The return is scheduled for the 3rd November. Please note that this is provisional and will be confirmed as soon as we know! An attempt to secure the Zuiderdune Hotel right on the beach fell through but better luck next year. Watch this space! As with Normandy both Betty and Peter are doing the lions share at short notice and are to be commended.

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FEEDBACK

The Editor has heard both good and bad news over the past few months. Rose Wood has been in contact and though far from well she is still quite sprightly having suffered from hip problems for some time. Chuck Harris has moved and is now quite close to Rose who has been given his address for a local 47 contact. Ron 'Ginger' Liggins is soldiering on despite suffering a minor stroke last April (2001). His partner of 14 years has undergone major hip surgery but Ginger is in receipt of Doc Forfars book and promises to keep in touch. Bert Rutherford is still busy visiting all sorts of far flung places with his family. He reports to be in good health. We have also heard from Stan Dignam, son of Charles Dignam an ex-47 member who seeks info on his Father. Any help? Another new contact is Doug Smith. It seems that as time passes more and more of the Families of 47 vets want

information that has been hidden from them about their Fathers' exploits – a reflection perhaps that at long last the neglect shown our War veterans is being recognised.

Three Question Quiz!

Carol Winter kindly(?) submitted the following three question quiz. No pen, paper or calculator allowed and speed is of the essence! Answers on the last page.

Q.1 You are participating in a race and overtake the second person. What position are you in?

Q.2 If you overtake the last person in the race, what position are you in?

Q.3 Take 1000 and add 40. Now take another 1000 and add 30, another 1000 add 20 and finally another 1000 and add 10. What is your total number?

Scanning the internet the Editor came upon a series of poems about June 6th 1944 written by Tony Chapman. Tony was asked if we could reproduce his work over a series of Despatches to which he kindly agreed. To honour 47 he wrote the following about your exploits that day. I hope you like it.

The Men of 47

47 Commando...were present on D-Day
 With the 50th...on Gold Beach
 Went their LCA
 The landing ships 'Victoria'
 And 'Josephine Charlotte'
 Carried 47...to that awful war torn plot
 Resistance met...at Le Hamel
 By the Hampshire's caused delay
 The fighting there...was fierce indeed
 And went on through the day
 This unforeseen situation
 Had to be resolved
 The Commandoes in their LCA's
 To the eastward...they hoved
 Landing close by La Roquette
 They quickly stormed ashore
 The immediate requirement
 A foothold...to secure
 Once there...and established
 They carried out the plan
 Marching back..to the westward
 To take..Port-en-Bessin
 The march they made that summer's day
 Their objective..to secure
 Is written into the history..of June 6th of '44
 The men of 47..who landed there that day
 Their ranks..now sadly thinning
 As with Time...they march away
 But the Memory..of what they did
 Our Freedom...to secure
 Ensures their place in history
 Both now...and evermore.
 @Tony Chapman 2002

Do you remember?

Tony also supplied the following historical note regarding your epic voyage of 5th/6th June 1944.

SS Victoria – embarked her troops at Southampton Berth 37, departing the Solent Anchorage No. 7/10 on June 5th as part of Force J in Assault Convoy G9E. Embarked onboard was 508 LCA Flotilla with the following serials: 579*, 586, 593*, 593*, 594* and 859*. Troop capacity: 320.

Princess Josephine Charlotte – embarked her troops off Berth 39 and departed Solent anchorage 7/9, Force J Convoy G9E. She carried 502 LCA Flotilla with the following serials:

290, 320*, 349*, 412, 431*, 442*, 503* and 509*. Troop capacity 210.

* indicates LCA lost in action Normandy June 6th 1944.

(many thanks to Tony Chapman and the LST and Landing Craft Association)

DOC'S DONATION

Subscriptions:

A few of our Members have not yet paid their 2002 subscription (GBP10). Our veteran members may have the excuse that advancing years have an adverse effect on short-term memory but this memory jog should remedy that! For our younger members no obvious excuse comes to mind but it is hoped that this jog will have the same effect!!

Membership of the Association and the role of the Despatch.

Traditionally tax-gathering (aka subscriptions) has not been the most popular or sought after occupation but it can have its worthwhile incidental offshoots. In the case of 47 RM Commando Association there have been two such.

A letter, or informative short note has often accompanied subscriptions. Some of our members – and this obviously applies especially to our veteran members – feel that they are no longer able to attend reunions abroad or, in some cases, even at home. For those who served in 47, but also for younger members for whom membership of the Association represents a treasured link with a respected relative who did serve, Membership alone may have a symbolic significance that they wish to preserve and retain. The existence and adherence of such non-attending members is welcomed and highly valued.

A more direct comment, often elated to non-attending membership, has been the indication of the significance of the Despatch. For non-attending members particularly this is their main link with the Association. Friendships developed in the battlefield are probably deeper than any others and the influence of such friendships may spread to families and friends. Distance and inability to travel, however, may make friendships difficult to preserve and some of those who find themselves in this position have particularly emphasised how much they value the Despatch as the means by which the inevitability of their detachment can be ameliorated and their continuing interest sustained.

But the Despatch must have news. The Editors have undertaken to produce the newsletter but in addition to their own vital core role they require an input from members, no matter how short, no matter how profound or trivial, no matter how personal, no matter how communicated to them. The Despatch is an important medium through which distance and disability can be discounted.

The Membership List

For a very considerable time there has been no accurate membership list of the Association and a number of members have rightly expressed dissatisfaction that they do not know who their fellow members are. Also there is no point in sending out letters and administration documents to those who have no interest in them or continuing their membership of the Association. It is financially wasteful to do so. A number of those on the current membership list may come into this category. At the same time at the last AGM it was agreed that 'people who cannot afford to pay will still get the Despatch'. On the assumption that those who remain on the membership list of the association would wish to receive the Despatch it is hoped that those who do not wish to remain members

membership list of the association would wish to receive the Despatch it is hoped that those who do not wish to remain members will indicate this directly or that knowledge of their secession from the Association may be indicated from other sources.

John 'Doc' Forfar

Chairman's 'Epistle.'

Perhaps the best bit of news for members who do not already know is that Betty Field has very kindly agreed to become the Association Secretary. Thank you Betty from all of us for taking over this onerous task, we can already see the difference in our administration. Both Peter Spear, as reunion co-ordinator, and Betty are responsible for our reunions, and Lannah Battley and Jerry Maycock are the Editors of our Dispatch. .

Those of you who were not at the last reunion will, I am sure, be delighted to hear that the French Authorities are in total agreement with our project to have 47 RM Commando's clandestine march from Arnelles to Port-en-Bessin accepted as an official French Tourist Trail. The Mayors of the areas which the march covered have not only agreed but have indicated that they would wish to be included in any opening ceremony. It was hoped that this could take place at the last reunion but unfortunately the plaques required had not been completed.

Congratulations to all of you for the splendid turn out at the Port-en-Bessin reunion. Attendees numbered over thirty if you count the whole of the Clan Burkinshaw. It is believed that we may well have some six new members amongst those who joined us. We will not divulge their names until they have signed up officially with Betty. We are delighted to let you all know that, after years of asking him, Michel Déséral has finally decided to accept the invitation to join our Association as an Honorary member. We can never thank Michel enough for all he has done for us over the years. Although he is due to retire from College Hemingway in September, his acceptance of our invitation assures us that he will never retire from the Association! A most sincere welcome to you, Michel, from every one of us.

A very pleasant unannounced visit was paid to Sallenelles. Happily Yann de Chevigny, wearing his 47 RM Commando Association tie, and his charming wife who laid a beautiful wreath of flowers from her garden, joined us.

All of us felt very proud to see our Standard being used for the first time in Port-en-Bessin. Our thanks go to Tim Tye, now the official Standard Bearer, for the very professional manner in which he carried out his duties. It is reported that a moment of discord occurred when Tim, who when practising on the lawn with his Standard, was asked by Betty to "stop playing with your flag and come in for lunch". The explosion was momentary, but Betty has vowed by all things Holy never again to refer to our Standard as "Tim's flag".

Some of you will remember that 'Doc' Forfar took a number of families and friends of the veterans to visit the pillbox on the Western Sector where some eleven of our men died. Everyone was distressed beyond measure at the dreadful condition into which this had been allowed to deteriorate. It had, regrettably, become nothing more than an unofficial and unattended public lavatory. John Forfar has written a splendid letter to the Mayor of Port-en-Bessin expressing the feelings of those who had witnessed this disaster. It had been reported that the pillbox was to be removed, as it had become unsafe. John put forward a suggestion that a new memorial be built on the location with perhaps thirteen trees planted in honour of those who died there. Once again Malcolm Ross has come to our rescue and offered to provide an architect and a considerable sum of money to pay for the construction of the suggested monument including also a similar one on the Eastern feature where Capt. Terry Cousins was killed. You will be kept informed of any progress made.

Having a farewell drink late on our last night at the Commando Bar who should come rushing in to see us, with a welcome gift of a bottle of wine, but Marianne Lhermitte, the student from College Hemingway who had 'adopted' both Mint Birkenshaw and Bert Quinney. There were tears in her eyes as she asked tenderly after both Mint and Bert and was devastated to learn that Mint had left the day before. So what about a letter Bert saying 'sorry to have missed you Marianne' as Mint has already written?

Our dear and close colleague, Michel Deserable has just retired from the College Hemingway in Port-en-Bessin. In recognition of his services to overseas visitors, school exchanges and especially 47 R.M. Cdo assoc. he was award the Port's Silver Medal by the Municipality. Congratulations Michel and may you enjoy your retirement whilst still maintaining your links with 47!

Peter Winter

FAREWELL

It is with great regret we record the following deaths

Mrs Thomas Payne –
 Mr T. McConnell
 Mr F. Hucklebridge
 Mr G. Lomax
 Mr D.A. Gibson
 Mr John Bennett
 Mr John McDougall
 Mr E. Killingback

We also record, with great sadness and a unified sense of grief the tragic loss of Arthur Delap's granddaughter in a road traffic accident in February this year. Arthur, himself, has been undergoing various treatments at hospital and we send him our very best wishes.

At the going down of the sun, and in the morning we will remember them – amen

Quiz Answers:

- Q.1 If you answered that you were first you are wrong. You took second place and are therefore second.
- Q.2. If you say you are second from last you are again wrong. How can you overtake the last person?
- Q.3. If you say 5000 then I'm afraid you are wrong. The answer is 4100. The brain is confused by decimal sequences making it jump to the highest decimal (100's instead of 10's)

NORMANDY 2002

On Tuesday, 4th June, veterans of 47 Royal Marine Commando and their families and friends began to arrive at the Royal Sailors Home Club in Portsmouth. After many smiles and greetings on meeting again or, in some cases, for the first time, people began to settle into their rooms and in due course took advantage of the excellent facilities. Some intrepid souls made use of the pool and the jacuzzi (okay, two of us) and most dined in the restaurant and eventually gravitated to the bar. With an early ferry to catch next day, few opted for a late night.

Everyone was 'on parade' in good time to board the coach at 6.20 am next morning and after a calm crossing, ultimately arrived at the King Hotel, Port-en-Bessin.

Despite the early start, many were feeling in fine enough fettle to accompany John Forfar to the top of both the Western and Eastern Feature of the Port. The glue-like clay sticking to footwear showed who had had the fortitude to undertake the trip and a deal of spit and polish became necessary in readiness for the next day's ceremonies.

On 6th June we joined the throng at the Normandy Veterans Association service at Bayeux Cemetery. Attendance appeared to be bigger than ever despite the passing years and the French police kept tight security, cordoning off many of the approach roads. This must have been partly due to the attendance of many ambassadors to France and other senior diplomats from all the countries involved in the liberation of Normandy. Gordon Tye, looking extremely smart, carried our splendid new standard and Chuck Harris laid the wreath on behalf of 47 Commando.

There had been hopes of meeting up with 48 Commando at Sallanelles after our own ceremony on the 7th June. However, on learning that they were there on Friday morning, clashing with our own wreath-laying at Port-en-Bessin, it became apparent that this could not be managed. Ever capable of flexibility, it was decided that 47 would go and have their own private ceremony after lunching in Bayeux.

Thus it was that later that afternoon we arrived to find the Union Jack and the Tricolour flying on either side of the memorial outside Maison Chevigny. Peter Spear and John Forfar went and knocked upon the door. Monsieur and Madame de Chevigny were, of course, surprised to see us but, happily, also very pleased. By the time the veterans were ready to begin the ceremony both Monsieur and Madame had arrived from the house. We were impressed that Madame had very swiftly picked flowers from the garden to lay at the memorial and M de Chevigny had put on his 47 RM Cdo tie.

During a brief but very effective ceremony, Frank Makings laid the wreath and Madame de Chevigny also placed her flowers beneath the plaque. The Last Post was played and a two minute silence observed. Chuck Harris spoke Laurence Binyon's words: "They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old..."

There was time for some happy group photos to be taken with the de Chevignys before making our farewells and boarding the coach to return to Port-en-Bessin.

On the evening of the 6th, Peter and Blanche Spear arranged for everyone to have dinner at the Bar de les Marins right on the harbour. As it also happened to be Ted and Lannah Battley's wedding anniversary (their 38th), some champagne was cracked and it turned into a quite a lively party.

Next day, being the 7th June, the fifty-eighth anniversary of the liberation of Port-en-Bessin was commemorated at 47's Memorial by the harbour wall to the sound of waves breaking on the shore on the seaward side. The flags of many nations flew in the stiff breeze and 47's standard was raised along with those of our friends, the French veterans, Les Anciens Combattants et Prisonniers de Guerre. Monsieur Sachet, the Mayor of Port-en-Bessin laid a beautiful floral tribute and Gurnos Jones laid the wreath on behalf of 47 Commando. The Last Post was sounded and a two minute silence observed, again followed by Laurence Binyon's lines.

After the parade was dismissed, the Commandos and citizens of Port-en-Bessin and everyone else attending, made their way by coach, car or on foot to the Civil Memorial outside the Church. There, another ceremony took place. The Commando lined up and the Mayor of Port-en-Bessin laid flowers while Gemma Davison laid the wreath on behalf of 47 Commando. Gemma represents a milestone in the Association's history. As the daughter of Committee Member Sandra Tebbutt and granddaughter of S/M Frank 'Tiny' Tynan of Y Troop, she is the first member who is a grandchild of a 47 veteran. It must be said that we also had a grandson present on this trip. Stan Dignam, whose father also served with 47, came on the trip accompanied by his son, Gary.

An excellent 'vin d'honneur' followed this ceremony, laid on at the Mairie, close by. The Mayor welcomed everyone and said what a pleasure and an honour it was to receive 47 Commando in the Port again. Among other things, his speech, which was very kindly translated into English for us by Michel Désérable, conveyed the thanks of the people for restoring liberty to their country fifty-eight years ago and stressed their continuing friendship. In his conclusion, he hoped that the glasses which we now raised together would be a symbol of our unity as well as an expression of their gratitude.

Baron Philippe de Bourgoing, Mayor of Tracy, then spoke with some humour of the efforts of the four local Mayors, each representing Port-en-Bessin and Huppain, Commes, Asnelles and Tracy to get the scheme for a Tourist Trail following 47's route on 6th-7th June 1944, accepted by the powers-that-be. He was pleased to say that, at last, the plan was going through and the appropriate information boards were about to be erected. Baron de Bourgoing, incidentally, wore the impressive Order Ribbon of the KCBE, having had a knighthood bestowed upon him some time ago by H M the Queen.

After plenty of time to eat, drink and converse with our hosts, our company gravitated towards the quay and the hotel, a fairly comfortable downhill walk for those on foot.

Later, many took up the opportunity to visit the American Cemetery at Omaha and Pointe du Hoc where the Americans were so lethally pinned down on D-Day. Others who had been there before opted to watch television and see England beat Argentina in the World Cup.

Following plenty of opportunity to explore the Port, there was food, refreshment and good conversation as the background to another pleasant evening in the Bar de les Marins (overheard being called 'the Commando Bar' by some). However, this was our last evening with another early start due next morning in order to catch the ferry home.

Again, we had a very smooth crossing and eventually made our farewells on the steps and in the foyer of the Royal Sailors Home Club. At the end of a happy and very enjoyable reunion, at least we could look forward to the next time.