

47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

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DESPATCH No 6 **Christmas 2002**

Editors Comment.

The past year has been a successful one for the Association with the establishment of the '47 RM Commando Walk' and positive movement towards permanent memorials on the east and west features in Port-en-Bessin. On the downside was the continual rejection of all the advances to properly recognize Terry Cousins leadership and heroism. Those who knew Terry know he deserved the Victoria Cross and that knowledge is beyond the scope of any politician.

As 2002 draws to a close I must remind you all of the significance of 2004 and ask you to indicate your interest in attending the 60th Anniversary by returning the attached 'Notice of Intent'. May I, on behalf of the editorial team wish you Seasons Greetings and a good and happy New Year.

Unfortunately there was no formal representation at Walcheren this year. Efforts are being made via the other Commando Associations to link up in 2003 and you will be kept informed.

Chairman's Epistle.

Thanks to all of you for making our last reunion the success it was. A special 'thank you' from all of us goes to Betty for her untiring efforts in providing us all with such a varied and interesting entertainment schedule. It was a pity that time did not permit us to visit the Explosion Museum. I am sure that would have gone down with a bang (!?!). Thanks too to Jerry for furnishing the transport, which made life so much easier and more comfortable.

It was great to have Julie with us, yet another of our Vice-Chairman's daughters. She admitted to being somewhat overwhelmed at the reception she received from all the members and has promised to join us again in Port-en-Bessin in June. It is of paramount importance that we know how many of you will be with us so that the provisional bookings of hotel already made can be confirmed. In addition to our 2003 reunion would you kindly let Betty know how many of you intend to be present for the 60th anniversary in 2004. All hotels and coaches in the neighbourhood are already booked for this event. The French are reputed to be putting on an even bigger show than they did for the 50th anniversary Thankfully Peter Spear had the

foresight to make provisional reservations earlier this year. So a note to Betty please from those of you who will be with us for either or both of these two reunions.

Negotiations are at present underway with the Americans who have kindly invited us to their ceremony at the American Cemetery on 6th June 2003. Since, having liberated the village of Huppain, they are anxious to have a first visit there. As the Mayor of Huppain and Port-en-Bessin are one and the same person the Committee feel that they should also be invited to our ceremonies in Port-en-Bessin and Huppain on 7th June 2003 and to the unveiling of the 47 RM Commando Tourist Trail at Arnelles which the French hope to perform on the morning of the 7th June.

Malcolm Ross has produced some excellent plans, drawn by his architect, for the memorials on the Eastern and Western features of the Port. Earlier this year John Forfar paid a special visit to Port-en-Bessin and, together with Michel Désérable, discussed with the Mayor the type of work which could be carried out on the two features. Malcolm is most anxious that this be carried out as soon as possible and if no delays take place there is a chance that the memorials could be finished and included in the unveiling of the Tourist Trail in June 2003.

All of us are of the same opinion that Capt. Terry Cousins should have been awarded the Victoria Cross for his most gallant attack on the Eastern Feature instead of the posthumous Mention in Despatches that he received. In an effort to reverse this decision an excellent and very persuasive letter was written to the Ministry of Defence by John Forfar and signed by Arthur Delap, Mickie O'Brien and myself. As was half expected a reply was received congratulating 47 RM Commando on its valiant efforts in liberating the Port but explaining that no alterations could be made to WW2 decorations already given. Although our efforts failed it was worth a try.

Regretfully Mickie O'Brien has had to move from Mallorca to mainland Spain to look after a house that his daughter has bought there. I personally miss him and our twice-weekly lunches together greatly. Although no longer on the Committee he has been a tower of strength in helping with suggestions that would benefit the Association.

AGM Report:

The AGM was held at the Royal Sailors Home Club on the 29th October 2002.

Immediately prior to the AGM Mark Bentinck, Historical Records Officer, Royal Marines, presented a lecture on the 'Cockleshell Heroes'. A most interesting presentation with rare photographs and documents we look forward to using Mark's skills in the future. Many thanks.

The AGM opened with our Chairman, Peter Winter, welcoming Doug Smith and his nephew Martin as new members.

The members present were then told by Peter Winter of the exciting plans for the east and west features at Port-en-Bessin (full details in the Spring 2003 edition). John Forfar went on to explain the role of Malcolm Ross in the plans and we remain deeply indebted for his continual support.

The planned tourist route from Anselles to the Port is coming along nicely. Three plaques will be erected to enable tourists to realize the significance of the march/trail.

The late Frank Sheardown's generosity in leaving instructions that any donations from mourners come to the funds of 47 RM Commando Association has resulted in £430 being received. We are most grateful to Frank and his Family to whom we extend our deepest sympathy.

Ladies Corner.

AS OTHERS SEE US

In the last issue of *Omega*, a publication of the Association of Open University Graduates, I was interested to find an article about a visit by one regional group to the Royal Marines Museum in Eastney.

They began in true OU tradition with lunch at the Bugle Major which received a definite thumbs-up and then proceeded on what sounds like a very thorough tour.

All of the historical background and the accompanying artefacts were appreciated and, of course, their meeting with Hannah Snell impressed. The formation of the Commandos and their wartime service and the lifelike reconstructions of the environments in which they served were also given approval.

Mature students, in due course, become mature graduates and some of the very mature (like me) could endorse the authenticity of the reconstruction of a 1940s kitchen and, in fact, one of the colour photos illustrating the article shows just how good it is.

The group also appreciated the crucial contribution of the Commandos in the Falkland conflict and their abilities as UN Peacekeepers in various difficult situations. The very excellent Ice Warriors Arctic Exhibition which was on during our last visit was also seen showing their ability to function in hostile and extreme terrain. The article pre-dated the arrival of Commandos in Afghanistan but one can visualize that in due course this will be an area covered by the Museum.

The author, Linda Brown also tells of the group indulging in some hands-on activity: having a go at firing a pistol, tying knots and lifting a 120lb rucksack. 'No chance!' is her comment on the last.

As one might expect, the graduates also appreciated the impressive number of awards in the Medal Room and the architecture and general appearance of the building with its grand staircase, high ceilings and fine paintings.

The tour ended with a concert in the Band Room but perhaps one of the most gratifying things about this group's visit was that it included a tour of the memorial gardens. It is certainly good to know that visitors get to see the memorial stone to the fallen of 47 and the other Commandos and appreciate the sacrifices made.

LB

SOME CORNER OF A FOREIGN FIELD

Reporting on the greenness of the British War Cemetery in Crete in our last issue, compelled me to quote Rupert Brooke's poem *The Soldier*. This also brought to mind some facts about the poet's life and his tragically early death.

Because he was a war poet and died in 1915, many presume that he was killed in the trenches but this is not so.

He was born in 1887, the son of a master at Rugby School where he was educated before going on to King's College, Cambridge. Described by W.B. Yeats as the handsomest man in Europe, he travelled widely after university. While in England Brookes lived at The Old Vicarage, Grantchester, just outside Cambridge.

The Sentimental Exile, written in Berlin in 1912 expresses his nostalgia for home, presenting an idyll of a tranquil English village. Better known as *The Old Vicarage, Grantchester*, it ends with probably his best known lines after *The Soldier*:

Stands the Church clock at ten to three?
And is there honey still for tea?

They have been much parodied, of course, but some commentators suggest that *The Old Vicarage, Grantchester* was intended to be part-sentimental, part-satirical. Incidentally, a later owner of The Old Vicarage was (or is) Jeffrey Archer though not actually resident, at present.

The Soldier, probably Brooke's best known work, was well received, being published early in the First World War and before the onset of disillusionment as the slaughter on the Western Front mounted. Written in sonnet form, it remains a moving evocation of a stoic and patriotic approach to the possibility of dying in the service of one's country:

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.
And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given.
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

From 1913 to 1914 Brooke travelled in the Americas but with the outbreak of war he took a commission in the Royal Naval Division. He died of blood poisoning while on the way to join the campaign in the Dardanelles and is buried on the island of Scyros. Copies of Brooke's poems *The Dead* and *The Soldier* are held in a sidechapel at King's College Chapel, Cambridge. Fittingly, his name appears on the War Memorial in the Chapel dedicated to those killed during World War I.

LB

Next issue: Laurence Binyon and those lines from his *Poems for the Fallen*, now almost always quoted at remembrance ceremonies.

SOUNDS FAMILIAR?

If you've ever had dealings with government departments or worked in large institutions such as the NHS or even in a large office, it probably does:

"We trained very hard, but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams, we would be reorganised. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganising and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress, while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralisation."

Caius Petronius [AD 66]

PORTSMOUTH REUNION 2002

Members of 47 Royal Marine Commando Association began to gather at the Portsmouth Royal Sailors Home Club on Monday, 28th October. There was ample time to unpack, settle in and meet old friends. Due to the gales over the weekend, one or two with long journeys from the north didn't have such a relaxing time, held up by late or cancelled trains. However, despite the disrupted rail service and the long delays almost everyone arrived in time for some conviviality in the bar.

On Tuesday morning, Jerry Maycock arrived with a minivan and we piled in for our first port of call, the Royal Armouries Museum at Fort Nelson, Portsdown Hill. Thanks to the local knowledge of our Secretary, Betty Field, we were able to take the scenic route with magnificent views across the port on the way.

Fort Nelson is an impressive Victorian pile built in 1860, once part of the south coast defences. The seaward walls are formed by a high embankment with a maze of tunnels beneath. These originally housed ammunition and allowed the defenders to deploy in safety. These days, a variety of buildings and courtyards inside the walls contain a magnificent collection of field guns and their accessories from all periods. Some date from the fifteenth century and earlier, including a Turkish gun with ornate decoration worked into the metal of its barrel. More recent were a Bofors gun and an 'Ack-Ack' gun with its necessary mobile searchlight beside it. There were also lengths of Saddam Hussein's notorious 'Supergun', made to look like sections of an oil pipeline and intended to be mounted on an enormous earth ramp. This meant the gun would have had a fixed elevation and direction but the location of the intended target is not known. Outside, a reconstruction of a Roman catapult, built with huge timbers lashed together, towers above the visitors.

At mid-day members of staff gave a demonstration-firing in a cordoned off area of the parade ground. On this occasion it was a Second World War artillery piece which we were allowed through to examine afterwards.

In due course, everybody gravitated to the café for refreshment before the next leg of our journey. This was along the coast to Warsash where there is a memorial on the seafront to those who embarked for D-Day from this spot. Gordon Tye carried the standard for a brief ceremony as yachts glided by, to and from the nearby marina. The Last Post was played followed by a two-minute silence and Chuck Harris spoke Laurence Binyon's famous lines. Kathleen (Kath) Hartwell laid a wreath on behalf of the Association with Ted Hartwell as her escort.

A public house opposite the memorial called the Rising Sun has a plaque on the wall naming all the units which took part in the landings and 47 Commando is named as part of the Special Forces. The consensus was that 47 embarked from Southampton Water itself not from this point which is, in effect, a small arm extending from it.

The lure of the Rising Sun was hard to resist. It proved to be a good move as on the bar walls were many framed photographs, maps and other material relating to the embarkation and, of course, everybody was ready for a break and a little light refreshment.

On our return to the Club, we found that several other members unable to travel on Monday had arrived, including Major Mark Bentinck who was giving us an illustrated talk on the Cockleshell Heroes that evening.

Many will have been familiar with some aspects of their tale possibly through the film made after the war. However, Mark had clearly studied their achievements in depth and provided a detailed and fascinating account of their training and the hazards involved. His slides of early photographs of the participants in their flimsy canoes and the maps of the Gironde estuary brought it all to life. There were also comparatively recent photos of those who survived from the original eight and the people who gave them shelter when they were on the run from the Germans. Sadly, not

many did survive. Only the leader, Major Hasler DSO and Mne. Bill Sparks DSM returned from the raid and some of the French civilians were caught by the occupying forces and executed.

Although, ultimately a rather sad tale it was nevertheless one of courage in the face of difficult odds and of a successful raid. They managed to lay their limpet mines and caused a great deal of damage and delay to the enemy forces.

After the talk, the Association's Annual General Meeting was held and later everybody gathered in the restaurant for the Corps Dinner. As in the past, the staff of Horatio's Restaurant did us proud managing to seat us in a 'horseshoe'. After enjoying our meal, it only remained to round everything off in the bar to conclude what had been a busy but enjoyable day.

Next morning, our company made its way to Eastney Barracks. Our veterans, well turned out in their green berets and medals, with Gordon Tye, equally smart, bearing the standard, lined up at 47 Commando's monument in the Memorial Gardens. Again, the Last Post was played and a two minute silence observed. Chuck Harris, in charge of the parade, also spoke Laurence Binyon's words: "They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old..." Lannah Battley laid the wreath with Ted Battley acting as her escort.

There was then an opportunity to admire all the stones in the Memorial Gardens and appreciate the pleasing design of the area and the pristine condition in which it is kept. Afterwards, most people went to see at least a little of the Museum, even if they'd been often before. The exhibits are often rearranged and added to so there's always something different to find. There was also time to have something to eat and drink in the adjoining Bugle Major and a chance to browse in the shop. There, we learned that *From Omaha to the Scheldt* was on their bestseller list and John Forfar signed all the books which remained in stock for them.

Some of our number then had to leave for home because of the demands of work but the majority of us were able to continue to Gosport to visit the Royal Navy Submarine Museum. This covers submarines from earliest times and includes Britain's first submarine *Holland I* recovered from the seabed in 1982. The comprehensive coverage included plenty of hands-on experience. One could 'up periscope' and observe the vessels making their way across Portsmouth Harbour. Some of the exhibits such as the example of a standard submarine water-closet gave considerable insight into the problems of everyday living which could arise under the sea. (Don't ask.) The highlight was undoubtedly a tour of the submarine HMS Alliance conducted by a submariner who had actually served on her. It made one admire those who undertook such a rigorous service but, despite that, none of us thought it could ever be the life for us.

We returned to the Sailors Club for our last evening there and made our farewells and went our separate ways next morning after breakfast.

There was just not time to visit the Explosion Museum which featured on our itinerary but, with such a pythonic title, we all look forward to that trip next time.

LB

Doc's Report:

John Bain our most far flung member resident within Britain has moved south from the Island of Westray to what in that part of the world is called the 'mainland' – Orkney! The years are taking their toll on John but he welcomes the opportunity of keeping in touch through the 'Despatch'.

Frank Roberts, one of 47s stretcher bearers has himself been under the knife. Despite a series of illnesses and a major operation he 'bears on'. He sends his best wishes.

George Skinner has been under the knife too, but is on the road to recovery. The timeless aphorism which George uttered at Dorchester when the Commando celebrated its 1943 formation is still remembered – ‘They were pretty keen when they wanted you to pick u a rifle, but not so keen when you wanted to pick up a pension.’ (*nothing new there! Ed*).

Rose Wood, widow of George ‘Chopper’ Wood has suffered from indifferent health for some time but we were all very pleased to see her at Portsmouth in October, as charming and bright as ever. Our thanks to Chuck Harris for all his help in getting Rose to Portsmouth.

Mark Bentinck, the Historical Records Officer of the Royal Marines (and Association member) writes: ‘On 1st November 2002 all the staff of the Directorate Royal Marines were gathered in one place, and the Corps Secretary read out a brief account of the Walcheren operation. We then drank a toast in the Corps’ port to those who took part; the recent painting that the Dutch commissioned stood in a place of honour in the background. An inspiring start to our day.’

50th Anniversary of the Unveiling of the Commando Memorial – Spean Bridge.

The Association was well represented by Chuck Harris, Ted and Kath Hartwell, Gurnos Jones, Shirley Price, Frank Makings, Tom McAndrew and Jon Forfar. The Service was well attended and emotive. Chuck Harris laid the 47 RM Commando Association wreath in the impeccable manner in which he does such things. The surrounding hills were gloomy and snow-capped. Achnacarry was open for the afternoon and as usual rain was falling and the Arkaig flowing fast and deep but inside the Castle the reception by Sir Donald and Lady Cameron was as warm as ever.

The Association now has 74 full members, half being veterans of 47 Royal Marine Commando. The Association gains strength from the increasing number of relatives and friends joining. With the 60th Anniversary rapidly approaching we would like to try to recruit as many veterans as possible so if any of you know of any ex 47 members not in the Association please let us know.

FAREWELL

It is with great sadness we report the passing of the following veterans and friends.

Frank Sheardown (July 2002)

Marine P. Pickup(6.10.02)

Mrs Molly Delap -wife Arthur Delap (28.11.02)

Our thoughts are with you and our condolences to all your Families, especially to Arthur in this a most tragic year for him.

Breaking news:

It is with deep regret that it has been reported that Marine Bill Sparks DSM passed away 3rd December 2002. Farewell the ‘Cockleshell Heroes’.