

47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

Committee

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DESPATCH No 7 August 2003.

Editors Comments:

A lot has happened since the previous Despatch, the Royal Marines have been on active Service in Iraq, suffering a number of casualties while maintaining the very high standards associated with the Corps. Our heartfelt sympathies go to those bereaved and those wounded in a conflict yet to be justified.

On the Association front I am pleased to report that a growing number of you are in contact and it is pleasing to hear from you, no matter what the circumstances. The membership stands at forty Veterans, two Honorary Members and forty four adherent members, a total of eighty six. It is pleasing to note a growing number of adherent members from the younger generations, a sign that as Time passes, the endeavours of you will live on.

It is most regrettable that our erstwhile Government appears to regard the 60th Anniversary of the Normandy Landings with slight regard. Apparently only one Army Band and a Junior Minister have been assigned to attend Normandy next year! To the Veterans and their Families this anniversary will be their swansong. Age waits for no man and with most if not all Veterans now in their 80s the rigours and stress of travelling prevents many from making the annual pilgrimage. With 2004 being such a significant year it is hoped as many Veterans and friends can make the journey as possible. All interested parties are asked to notify the Secretary, Betty Field as soon as possible (12 Alfred Road, Stubbington, Hants. PO14 2QY).

JM

Chairman's Epistle.

As each reunion passes it appears that the friendship and generosity of the French people grows deeper. It seems that nothing could have passed the simply splendid reception accorded to the veterans and their friends and families on this last reunion. For details of this I will leave you to read Lanna report of events. We are warned, however, of the forthcoming sixtieth anniversary, in 2004, of the D-Day landing. It seems that the people of Normandy are determined to make this a Bonanza Reunion. So, please 'dig out' all your long lost friends and relations to come and join the party. The more there are the cheaper it is for everybody.

For those who were not there to see them, the four 'plaques' which the French had erected along 47 RM Commando's 'Route March', turned out to be very much more than plaques. They are in fact ten-foot high very elegant square posts embedded in a flowerbed and with the history of events written in both French and English. Such generosity made all of us realise that those of our comrades who did not return will now and forever be remembered.

The French have decided that the widows, sons and daughters of deceased veterans, as well as the veterans themselves, of the Port-en-Bessin battle will also receive medals at the 60th Anniversary. **Medals will only be presented to those who are actually attending the 2004 Reunion.** The medals will be engraved with the name and rank of recipients. **All of those who will be attending this reunion please confirm this to Betty Field together with the names and rank of those of your families who you will be representing.**

Many of you will remember and others will have heard of Adolf Hitler's decree. Addressed to Field Commanders, and signed on 18th Oct. 1942, instructing that all **Commando prisoners and those who surrendered** were to be shot on sight. For the information and interest of the younger generation members a translation of this document by the US Chief Council will be found on later pages of this Dispatch.

We have heard that Mickie O'Brien has unfortunately had to have some back surgery during which two 'bumps' were removed. It is believed that the surgeons were amazed that these were NOT filled with alcohol! May I ask all of you to join me in keeping Mickie in your prayers? If anyone knows how to kill this problem - he does.

Finally I would very much like to offer my sincere apologies to all members present at the last reunion for the very weak manner of my efforts to discharge my duties as Chairman. There were moments, health wise, when I had been feeling considerably better. Most of my thoughts and actions were directed against the various 'poisons' with which my doctors and surgeons were attempting to assassinate me. They failed and God willing I hope to be able to do a better job in 2004. God Bless you all and please be there in your hoards!

(Peter has been going through a VERY rough time medically but Peter being Peter is determined not to let this interfere with his Life - on behalf of all of the Association all our very best wishes for a speedy and full recovery!!! JM)

Normandy News:

In the August and December *Despatch's* Peter Winter indicated the initiative which 'Doc' Forfar had developed in consultation with him regarding a possible Memorial which would recognise by name those of 47 Royal Marine Commando who had laid down their lives in the Liberation of Port-en-Bessin. This was in consequence of the visit made to the Western Feature in June 2002 during the Anniversary Reunion to visit the bunker where 12 members of the Commando had died and a further 17 were wounded whilst assaulting it. A subsequent visit to the Eastern Feature where Terry Cousins died revealed both bunkers in a very poor state.

Independently Cpl George Amos had contacted 'Doc' about the bunker on the western Feature. Captured whilst attending his dying Sergeant, Sergeant Fletcher, George had visited Port-en-Bessin for the first time since the War and he was very disturbed by the state the area was in, the area where his colleagues in 'A' troop had suffered so badly.

'Doc', as the Association's Historian, thought it would be appropriate if the two bunkers were renovated and fittingly preserved as Memorials to those who had died in the Liberation. Such a project would

have to be primarily French but might benefit from British support. As you will know Mr Malcolm Ross has been a most generous Patron to the Association and 'Doc' felt suitably emboldened to approach him to see if the Memorial project would find favour with him. Malcolm responded most positively with an assurance of financial and planning support. 'Doc' then wrote to Mon. Lucien Sachet, the Mayor of Port-en-Bessin requesting that consideration be given to a permanent Memorial around the bunkers.

Mon. Sachet presented the proposal to the Municipal Council who requested a formal meeting with 'Doc'. To assist in the translation needs 'Doc' asked our very good Friend and Honorary Member Michel Deserable to assist. On the 16th September 2002 the meeting took place in Port-en-Bessin. Mon. Sachet reported that the proposal had been presented to the Council and that they had agreed in principle to its implementation. With Michel acting as translator and wise-counsellor the Mayor also graciously indicated that he would be open to any suggestions that might be put forward regarding the nature of the Memorials.

Malcolm Ross engaged Mr Clifford Kingstone, his architect, and between them they produced some definitive plans which were presented to Mon. Sachet on 16th January 2003. Joining the Planning Team was Sir Philippe de Bourgoing, mayor of Tracy-sur-Mer, Honorary Vice President of the Conseil General, ex French Senator and Chair of the Senate Franco-British Liaison Committee (for which he received his Honorary Knighthood from Her Majesty). Accepting the outline plans presented the Planning Committee is now engaged in definitive planning and implementation. It is envisaged the two bunkers be renovated along with their surroundings. They embody a Memorial beside the Western Feature bunker naming the 46 Marines of all ranks who died during the landings and Liberation of the Port, along with a record of the numbers wounded. On the Eastern Feature a plaque will be provided explaining the actions of Capt. Cousins and his group. Both Memorials will be in French and English.

The French Authorities have shown the greatest generosity, initiative and sensitivity in their approach to the project. They have greatly widened the scope and scale of the plans suggested to them to include landscaping around the bunkers and the development of the routes leading to them. The cost of the plans which they have endorsed will greatly exceed that of the original plans put to them. The lead role of the Port-en-Bessin Municipal Council is being supported by the Normandie Regional Council and the National (French) Councils and Committees. To these bodies we, as an Association, are most profoundly grateful.

Finally, the 47 RM Commando Trail with its explanatory Totem Poles will follow 47s approach march from the beach near Anselles to the Port. Both Trail and Memorials will have the advantage of contributing to the amenity of Port-en-Bessin. They will add to the town the attraction of the Trail's sojourn through the rolling Normandie countryside whilst in the Port itself reveal the commanding views over the harbour, the coast and the sites of the Memorials themselves.

JM/JF

NORMANDY 2003 On Wednesday, 4th June, veterans of 47 Royal Marine Commando and their families and friends gathered at the Royal Sailors Home Club in Portsmouth before embarking for the Normandy commemorations. There was the opportunity for an evening meal in the restaurant and conversation over a drink in the bar but, unfortunately, no time for the full English breakfast next morning. Instead everyone mustered outside at 6am for the coach in order to catch the early ferry. In due course, Ricky, our driver, distributed our packed breakfasts and we all felt as if we were off on the school picnic.

On arrival at the King Hotel in Port-en-Bessin many intrepid souls, despite our early start, joined John Forfar to visit the top of both the Western and Eastern Feature to see the progress made in cleaning up and refurbishing the two areas.

Next day, 6th June, we travelled to Bayeux Cathedral for a service of Remembrance organized by the Normandy-Calvados Branch of the Royal British Legion. The service began with the procession of the clergy, the Standards, including our own carried by Gordon ("Tim") Tye, and V I Ps into the magnificent medieval building. During the service, the music was provided by the Brass Quintet of the Central Band of the Royal Air Force. Sir John Holmes, British Ambassador to France, read the lesson and laid a wreath. It proved to be a moving occasion and at the end, Monseigneur Pican, Bishop of Bayeux and the Rev Loveday, Chaplain to the Normandy-Calvados Branch, shook hands with everybody as they left the Cathedral.

Our next stop was the British Cemetery at Bayeux for the traditional D-Day Service. Again, Gordon carried the standard on our behalf and Chuck Harris laid the 47 Commando wreath. Afterwards there was time to wander through the cemetery to see the headstones recording the deaths of scores of 47's brave young men and many more besides. While doing so, a couple of the veterans were approached by Winston Churchill who introduced himself and stopped for a chat. He had also been at Bayeux Cathedral and several people had recognised him, being quite similar in looks to his grandfather. He was continuing to Arromanches later that day to unveil a plaque to the British Merchant Marine, a thoroughly deserved recognition, we agreed.

After lunch in Bayeux our group continued to Arromanches and later to the impressive "in the round" film show at the 360° Cinema. While in the vicinity and with quite a few people on their first D-Day trip, there was still time to visit the scarred but still immovable batteries at Longues-sur-Mer. In the evening most people dined at the Bar de la Marée with its view of the harbour and where the veterans are always made so welcome.

Next day, the 7th June, as well as the usual commemoration of the liberation of Port-en-Bessin, several new monuments were to be unveiled indicating the 47 Commando Tourist Trail. Each of these flat pillars, called totems by the French, mark the route taken by 47 Cdo after it landed and give information in French and English about their progress and setbacks at each point.

The day began with our usual ceremony at the commando monument beneath the Vauban Tower. Wreaths were laid by the Mayor, Monsieur Sachet, and by Frank Makings for the Commando with our standard raised alongside those of the French veterans, Les Anciens Combattants et Prisonniers de Guerre. After the parade was dismissed, everyone moved the short distance to the quay almost opposite the Bar for the inauguration of the first totem. After the unveiling, Monsieur Sachet and Peter Winter both laid floral tributes. John Forfar, who had been much involved in the wording of the text read out the English version. Although the first totem unveiled, it was the last in the sequence, telling of the final assault upon and capture of the Port.

Following this, the Commandos, 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 and Sandra Tebbutt together laid flowers before continuing to Huppain. The Huppain monument has now been moved from the former rather dangerous crossroad to an attractively laid out area close to the Mairie. A similar ceremony took place with Madame Autin, the Mayor of Huppain laying a wreath. Following the ceremony, there was a reception with wine ("le verre de l'amitié") in the Mairie.

Next came a buffet lunch in the Salle des Fetes back in the Port. In fact, it proved to be much more than a buffet with everyone seated and several courses provided with lots of choice and variety including many local specialities. Plenty of wine was available, too, and also the opportunity to sample some Calvados. Our French hosts are always so generous and thoughtful. Unfortunately, Tim Tye, our doughty standard bearer, had not been too well and Michel Désérable and Michel Laulier kindly took some food for him and Betty to make sure they didn't miss out.

After lunch there were three more totems to be inaugurated, the first being at the very beginning of the Tourist Trail at Asnelles. Everyone was welcomed by the Mayor, Monsieur Malo. He and Peter Winter both laid wreaths, while Peter Spear took over carrying the standard and John Forfar read and commented upon the inscription. The whole company moved on to Tracy-sur-Mer where a similar ceremony took place. Here, the Mayor, Baron Philippe de Bourgoing spoke and laid the wreath before we all continued to Commes for a similar ceremony. At the Union Jack-bedecked monument, the wreath was laid by the Mayor, Monsieur de Gouville who very kindly invited us back to his house. This proved to be a big mansion with a very impressive frontage and sweeping drive. Tables and awnings were set out in front of the house and we were able to relax and drink champagne and enjoy nibbles in the warm afternoon sun. Shortly after this the veterans and also the relatives of veterans not with us were each presented with a very handsome medallion expressing the thanks of the people of Commes to 47 RM Commando and depicting clasped hands within a laurel wreath.

Our itinerary showed the next day to be not quite so busy. However, John Forfar was keen to follow in the 1944 footsteps of the Commando and walk the Tourist Trail again. Michel Désérable and Michel Laulier had spent much time over meals in the Bar devising ways for us to follow the accessible parts of the route and, it being Sunday, find places to stop off for suitable breaks. In the event, this was resolved when the group were invited to Philippe de Bourgoing's home at Tracy for champagne at eleven o'clock on Sunday morning. So the happy band of walkers, including Michel Désérable as guide, set off and were later picked up by Ricky in the coach to have a pleasant "champagne break". At Tracy we found another impressive building with a wide frontage and a Union Jack planted in the centre of the lawn within the long, circular drive. We were welcomed by "Sir" Philippe (he was knighted by the Queen but as a non-Britisher cannot strictly use the title) together with his daughter, who, later, showed us many of the paintings on the first floor and the panelling designed and painted by her grandmother.

After this pleasant interlude, the walkers continued on their way, stopping en route at the Abbaye Sainte Marie where we had enjoyed such a wonderful picnic on the original march in 1997. Doc Forfar bravely rang the bell outside the walls setting the dogs barking and Monsieur D'Anglejan-Chatillon himself opened the door. He seemed delighted to see us and showed us around the grounds. The dogs proved to be very friendly tail-waggers.

Next day before setting out on our return trip to England, we found a report in the local paper of the ceremonies in Port-en-Bessin with an excellent photograph of the veterans in front of the new totem on the quay. It was placed just above one of Winston Churchill unveiling the plaque to the Merchant Navy at Arromanches.

So we set out for home. Blessed with good weather throughout our trip and receiving, as ever, wonderful hospitality, it was probably one of the Association's most enjoyable Normandy trips.

LB

Walcheren News:

A letter has been received from 41 Royal Marine Commando Veterans Association informing us that the President of The Foundation to Support the Liberators of Walcheren 1-8th November 1944, Dr Leon DeWitte has been honoured for his services to the Foundation by H.R.H. Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands. Dr DeWitte was awarded a Knighthood of the Order of Oranje Nassau, a very personal award from the Monarch. Our heartfelt congratulations go to Leon and his Family and erstwhile colleagues in the Foundation. Dr DeWitte has informed 41 that things are getting geared up for 2004 and that it is envisaged that for the Veterans this will be the last formal 'hurrah'. This year's anniversary will be a low key affair in order to provide for the 60th.

41 had a Portsmouth Reunion this June, numbers preventing a viable Channel crossing. They are hopeful of a good turnout next year both for Normandy and for Walcheren. 48 RMCdoA are also planning a big push for 2004 but their numbers too are falling as the years pass.

Our Editor will be making the pilgrimage to Walcheren this November to pay both his and the Associations respects.

Ladies Corner:**47 Brain Teaser**

Count the number of F's in the following text:

FINISHED FILES ARE THE
RESULT OF YEARS OF SCIENTIFIC
STUDY COMBINED WITH THE
EXPERIENCE OF YEARS

Managed it?
How many?

Write down your answer and check the result on the last page.

SUBMARINE SUCCESS

Those who visited the Royal Navy Submarine Museum in Gosport on our last visit to Portsmouth will be pleased to hear that it was awarded the Pilgrim Trust award for conservation. This was reported in the Jan/Feb 2003 issue of the Royal British Legion Magazine.

The award is, apparently, very prestigious, being the equivalent of an Oscar in the world of conservation and was presented at the British Library in London. The Submarine Museum received the award for its work on Holland I, the Royal Navy's first submarine which was rescued from the seabed in 1981. As it had foundered in 1913 while being towed to the breaker's, one can imagine that it required a great deal of attention and the Museum received its award for the innovative way in which they carried out the work over a long period. There is more about this and other aspects of the Museum on their excellent website at www.rnsubmus.co.uk

Meanwhile we can look forward to our visit to the Explosions Museum next time which, surely, must be in line for the Monty Python Award for the Museum with the Most Unlikely and Equally Ear-Blasting Name.

Submarine trivia 1: The Hollywood film *U-571* is, apparently, exciting and well-made. Unfortunately, it purports to tell how Americans captured the German Enigma code machine. As most of us probably know, this was a British operation. It involved HMS Bulldog and HMS Aubretia in May 1941, a full six months before the United States entered the war. How do they get away with it? That's the enigma.

Submarine trivia 2: During World War II, a German U-boat was sunk by a truck. Having successfully attacked a convoy in the Atlantic, the U-boat came to the surface to see the effect. A merchant ship which it hit had a variety of cargo secured on its deck including a fleet of trucks one of which was thrown in the air by the explosion and landed on the U-boat, breaking its back. This was on the net but, unlike the Enigma account, there is no mention of actual ships involved. A case of no name, no pack-drill, makes one wonder if it's really true. Anybody have any idea?

VETERANS' AGENCY

Many members will have heard from the newly named Veterans' Agency which now deals with War Pensions among many other things. This also has a website: www.veteransagency.mod.uk as well as a telephone helpline: 0800 169 2277 and a textphone number: 0800 169 3458.

Their literature says they can help on a wide range of subjects including how to secure accommodation, the types of flags and hymns that can be used at ex-servicemen's funerals, where to obtain regimental badges and, surprisingly, how to purchase army vehicles. Arthur Daly at the MOD? Er, don't think we're in the market for one of those at the moment, thanks.

POCKET CARTOON by 'Austin' in *The Guardian* following television coverage of one of Saddam's captured palaces:-

An official holds up a document with the bold heading, "Saddam Hussein, CRIMES" and in much smaller print, "against interior decoration" and he's saying "Who sold him those gold taps?"

LAURENCE BINYON

*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, not the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.*

These famous lines from Laurence Binyon's poem *For the Fallen* are inscribed on the Cenotaph, unveiled in Whitehall on 11th November, 1920. One wonders if, at the time, he realised how his words would live on and be so often repeated for decades to come. By the time of his death in 1943, Binyon probably did have some inkling because the lines appeared on war memorials throughout the British Commonwealth and were evoked at Remembrance Services for the Great War dead on an annual basis.

Unlike many other First World War poets, he did not see service. Born in Lancaster in 1869, Binyon could hardly be said to be in his prime by 1914 and, in any case, was an academic rather than a soldier.

Educated at St Paul's School in London and Trinity College, Oxford where he won the Newdigate Prize for Poetry, he worked at the British Museum for forty years. Binyon was a specialist in primarily Oriental, but also other, prints and painting and published work on Far Eastern and Japanese art as well as Botticelli and William Blake. Having spent his entire career at the museum, it should come as no surprise to learn that lines from *For the Fallen* are carved on the wall at the entrance to the British Museum as a war memorial to museum staff who lost their lives.

His career as a poet ran alongside his academic career. When he retired from the British Museum in 1933 Binyon spent a year in America as Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard. He also translated Dante's *Divine Comedy* into terza rima, an Italian verse form with a complex rhyme scheme.

For the Fallen was published very early in the war long before the horrors and attrition of trench warfare began. It first appeared in *The Times* on 21st September 1914, less than two months after Britain declared war on Germany following the latter's encroachment upon Belgium.

Of his other poems, *The Burning of the Leaves* is probably the best known. However, the brief excerpt from *For the Fallen* is known and has been heard and repeated by thousands, perhaps millions, of people. If pressed, many of them would claim to know nothing of poetry but through these four lines they must, at least, be aware that very often it has the power to move.

LB

Next issue: Wilfred Owen who fought and died on the Western Front.

In Memoriam

It is with the deepest regret that we record the Passing of the following Member.

CSM (TY) Albert Hooper PO.X102479 27th May 2003.

To Audrey and the Family, our most sincere condolences.

Answer to Brain Teaser.

There are 6 (six) 'F's' in the sentence. Any one getting the right answer first time will be considered a 'genius'. We have only known one first time right answer so far, Michael Parroy. His wife Susan, on learning this was heard to remark - "Well we all knew he was a bloody genius from the start didn't we?" No comment!

The reasoning is as follows. It seems that the brain cannot process the word "OF".as a word. Incredible or what? Three is the normal.. answer.

CW