

47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

Committee

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Despatch No.8 Christmas 2003.

Editors Comment

Welcome to Despatch No 8 and to each and everyone of you a very Happy and Joyful Christmas and New Year! Since July much has happened both here and in France, more of which later under the Chair's Epistle. The response from the Membership for Normandy next year has been, literally, overwhelming and Betty Field and Peter Spear are up to their armpits sorting out the travel and accommodation arrangements. Individuals will be notified of the finalised plans in due course! Meantime we, collectively, thank them and their assisting cohorts profusely!

But Normandy isn't our only Commemoration next year, the Dutch Authorities wish to mark the 60th Anniversary of their Liberation in style and the small seaside town of Westkappel along with Middleburg intend to honour their Liberators in grand style. November is a very unpredictable month but all Veterans who are interested in this Commemoration are asked to complete the attached 'notice of interest' so we can liaise with fellow RM Commando Associations and the Dutch Authorities.

Many of you may be aware that in the last Despatch comment was made regarding our own illustrious Government's commitment to the 60th Anniversary of the Normandy Landings. It appears that the £1m needed to fund sending the Veterans to Normandy is beyond the Government's scope and the National Lottery has been asked to consider supporting 'suitable applications'. Doc Forfar has been in contact on our behalf and we await his report on the progress made. £10m on 'protecting' President Bush can be found without question, but to pay homage to those who fought and those who died so the two B's can walk 'free', there lies another story! Attached is Peter Winter's letter to Mr Blair. He still awaits a reply.....surprise, surprise!

Many people are trying very hard to ease the financial burden of the Commemorations especially on you the Veterans. Let us hope, and pray, sense and decency prevails and the correct level of support is provided from the Public Purse to allow you to pay your respects to your colleagues who paid the Ultimate Price.

Finally Betty WILL require a non-refundable deposit of £25 for Normandy 2004 in January -sorry but could you send her your remittance made out to '47 RM Commando Association'.

JM

Chairman's Epistle

For this issue there are six pieces of news for you, one bad and the rest good. Let us dispose then of the bad one first. For some months now there have been articles in the press indicating that the Government were intending to assist financially those veterans wanting to attend the 60th anniversary of D-Day. A few days ago our secretary read me an article in the Mail on Sunday. I was incensed at its content and elected to write a letter to the Prime Minister, a copy of which is enclosed for your information. It is self-explanatory and needs no comment. If there is any reply you will be kept informed. The secretary of the RMA tells me that P & O are offering a 50% reduction in ferry charges for those veteran travelling to Normandy at this time and the Passport Office is giving a concessionary two year passport to veterans not already in possession of one.

You will be pleased to know that the first edition (1200 copies) of John Forfar's book has been a sell out. The publishers have agreed to print a second edition of 800 copies, which has now been done. Please continue to do all you can as 'salesmen' amongst your family and friends. Remember that any profit from the book will, thanks to the generosity of the author, be credited to the Association's account.

I have recently received a letter from a Mr. James Delingpole a free lance journalist whose work often appears in the Times, Telegraph and Spectator. He is writing a war book in which there will be mention of 47 Commando. However after reading John's book, at my suggestion, he was simply delighted and now wants to meet you all to hear of your experiences as he has decided to do a separate article on 47 RM Commando. He has booked to come with us to Port-en-Bessin and will also be staying at the Royal Sailor's Club in Portsmouth on the night of the 4th. June. Please do your best to help him by telling him of your adventures when he asks you and don't be shy!

A month ago I received a charming letter, kindly written in English, from the Mayor of Asnelles, the beach where we landed, in which he and the Council have invited us all to join them in their celebrations on 6th June 2004. It promises to be some event. I have accepted the invitation on your behalf.

You will no doubt remember the splendid 'brochure' done by the children of College Hemingway. Michel Désérable, the former English teacher, at the College tells me that the present generation of children at the College have expressed a wish to do something as a 'thank you' to the veterans for their liberation of the Port. They have an idea with which I wholeheartedly agree. They suggest doing much the same as the previous children but instead of a brochure they would like to put it all on a Web Site. No firm decisions have yet been made.

Betty tells me that at the last count there will be 54 of us going that does not include Mint Birkenshaw's clan!! A wonderful turn out. I very much look forward to seeing you all again for our Bonanza reunion of the 60th anniversary on 6th June 2004. In the meantime have a fabulous Christmas.

Peter Winter

• Open letter to the Prime Minister

The Prime Minister,
The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair,
10 Downing Street,
London. SW1A 2AA

20th November 2003

Dear Mr. Blair,

I have noticed in various issues of the press that the Government have refused to offer any financial assistance to those veterans wanting to attend the sixtieth anniversary of D-Day in Normandy. Allow me to point out that there will be Kings, Princes, Dukes, Lords, Knights, Prime Ministers and Ministers attending this event, together with their wives and very considerable entourage, almost certainly at the expense of their tax payers.

Has anyone in authority given the slightest thought as to who fought and won this battle? There remain a few brave veterans, now all over eighty years of age who, because of shortage of funds, will be unable to attend what will surely be, the final reunion of Normandy veterans. A small part of the incredible amount of money allocated for the security of an *American*, President on his trip to England would have been sufficient to assist these veterans in their need. They are not asking to be attended by 14,000 policemen. The Government's decision is nothing less than a prize insult to those brave men and women still living, but more especially to their gallant comrades who were unable to return. It is because of their efforts and those who fell that you are the Prime Minister today. I urge you most strongly to reconsider this infamous decision and to give help where help is truly deserved.

Yours sincerely,

P.L. Winter,
Chairman.

Ladies Corner:

Our own Lannah Batterly continues to educate and inform us of some of the Nation's War Poets.

WILFRED OWEN

Perhaps the greatest of the First World War poets, Wilfred Owen was born in Oswestry, Shropshire in 1893 and educated at Birkenhead Institute and London University.

At the age of twenty he went to work as a tutor for a family in Bordeaux in France and returned to England to enlist in 1915, arriving on the Western Front when trench warfare and the men's conditions were at their worst.

Owen had been drawn to poetry as a child and his early writing was in the romantic vein of Keats. In 1915 he could write, 'There is a fine heroic feeling about being in France.' However, the brutal reality of the trenches soon changed his attitude. The conditions took their toll and Owen was invalided out in 1917 with shell shock to be treated at the Craiglockart War Hospital in Edinburgh. There he met fellow poet Siegfried Sassoon as well as Robert Graves. Sassoon's influence may well have encouraged him to "tell it how it was".

During 1917 and 1918 he wrote, among other things, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*: "...What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?..." and *Futility* with its sense of pity for the dead soldier: "Move him into the sun...". In fact Owen's poetic manifesto was, 'My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity.'

His poem *Dulce et Decorum Est* also captures the frantic haste of men in imminent danger: "Gas! Gas! Quick, boys! - An ecstasy of fumbling..." and records the ghastly and prolonged death of a comrade, unable to get his gas mask on in time. The end of the poem states that if you had seen it,

"My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori."

The latin quotation is from the *Odes* of Horace and translates as 'It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country.'

Perhaps such an attitude could have been deemed traitorous at that time, at least on the Home Front, but Owen could hardly be accused of shirking his duty. After recovering from his ills, he returned to the front in August 1918. Between then and his death, he won the Military Cross. Wilfred Owen was killed in action on the 4th November 1918 just one week before the Armistice.

He published only four poems during his lifetime and was largely unknown as a poet until Sassoon published *Poems of Wilfred Owen* in 1920. His work has never been out of print since.

LB

Free Passports

Lannah has also submitted the following information that may well be of use to some of you.

Our local paper has a Citizens Advice Bureau column and the question this week is from a woman whose father would like to attend the sixtieth anniversary commemorations of the D-Day Landings in France. She says that as he is 88 years old he doesn't need a 10 year passport and asks if one-year ones can still be obtained. Their answer is:

'World War Two Veterans, their spouses and widows and widowers, who want to travel to France next year for the 60th Anniversary... will all be eligible for special free passports valid for one year. These passports will be available through accredited Veterans organisations which will need to certify that applicants are eligible and that they are attending one of the organised commemorations. The passports will be available from January 2004.'

My answer: Oo-er. Sounds like a lot of red tape, delays and worry. It's never too late. Even at 88 it's worth saving your pennies if you can and splashing out on the full passport and thinking about the Costa del Sol, Mallorca or the relaxing cruise in the sun next year and the year after that and the year after that... etc

More seriously, all the details of free passports are in the current issue of the Royal British Legion's

magazine *Legion* and both our Secretary and our Treasurer have details. The passports aren't available to anyone already holding a British passport valid for the journey being arranged. Though available from January 2004, it is hoped that applications will not be submitted too far in advance as it's hoped most of the special passports will cover up to VE Day on 8th May 2005.

LB

I QUOTE:

1) Anonymous SNCO, Falkland Islands, 1982:

If there's one thing more dangerous than an Officer with a map it's a Matelot with a gun.

2) During a Major General Inspection the General asked a young Marine what he did.

"I'm a chef, Sir," he replied.

The General said there were no Chefs in the Royal Marines. He was a Cook.

Moving on to the next man, he asked the same question.

Mindful of what had gone on before the Marine said, "I'm a Cook, Sir."

"And how long have you been a Cook?" asked the General.

"Oh," said the Marine, pausing for thought. "About thirty seconds."

If you're on the net there are lots of anecdotes, poems, information and plenty of other stuff such as contacting old comrades on www.onceamarinealwaysamarine.co.uk

IT'S A WISE CHILD

(A sexist joke for Ladeez Korna)

A little boy asked his father what marriage was. Although he'd always been a bright child, however hard the father tried to explain, the young lad still didn't understand. Then the father had a brilliant idea and got out all the wedding photographs and seeing the smile of understanding on his son's face realised that he'd at last got through to him.

"Of course," said the little lad. "I see it now. It's when Mummy came to work for us."

Peter's daughter, the delightful Carol has located this 'plain English' translation from an information brochure she located in Tokyo,

Tokyo Car Rental

"When passengers of foot heave in sight, tootle the horn. Trumpet him melodiously at first, but if he still obstacles your passage, then tootle him with vigor." From a brochure of a car rental firm in Tokyo"

So, now you know!!!!

IN MEMORIUM

We record with great sadness the sudden and unexpected death of Mr Douglas Smith. Doug was the brother-in-law of a 47 member, and Uncle to Associate Members Martyn and Peter Parker, who only joined the Association a couple of years ago. In the short time he was with us Doug gave great support to the Association and we send his Family and Friends our deepest condolences.

Late News:

Apparently we have been allocated a Royal Marine bugler for Normandy.....to the Corps and the individual our heartfelt thanks! - and please read the just received letter from College Hemingway in Port-en-Bessin attached - in the first instance please contact me at the above address and I will pass on your interest/willingness. I feel this is an important opportunity we cannot afford to pass up so *please* give your support! JM

I would like to record my interest in attending the Liberation Commemoration in Walcheren in November 2004.

Name:

Address:

Telephone:

e-mail:

I realise that by registering interest I am not committing myself to the venture which will be confirmed to me in writing as soon as full details are available.

Please return to Jerry Maycock, 8 Redshaw Close, Buckingham MK18 7BS

Catherine Romano
Documentaliste
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47eme RCM
14520 Port-en-Bessin Huppain
Tel: 02 31 21 73 22
Fax: 02 31 51 98 38

Mr Peter Winter

25th November 2003.

Dear Sir,

On the occasion of the 60th Landing Anniversary, our school would like to join in the events organized by Port-en-Bessin.

We already know that in 1998 Mr Dēsērable together with some pupils carried out a cultural project and thus corresponded with the 47th Royal Marine Commando and met them.

Since we haven't got enough time to carry out such a project, we suggest corresponding with the Veterans who are likely to cross over to France in June 2004 (we have chosen our 4th Year pupils). On the other hand, we could take the preliminary steps for a meeting.

Consequently, we took up with our former colleague Michel again, who told us that you were eager to renew friendship with us and our pupils.

Being aware of your enthusiasm at the time of the former meetings, we take the liberty of appealing to you in order to give us a hand with that project.

Could you please hand our message to the members of your Association (old and new generations) and give us the addresses and phone numbers of the people who are interested in this exchange.

We remain yours faithfully

Catherine Romano
Nichole Gindre (English teacher)
Jean-Jacques Legendre (History teacher)
Laurence Pierre (History teacher)