

47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

Committee

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DESPATCH 10 December 2004

COMMENT

Another sixtieth anniversary has passed, with our trip to Walcheren the big event since the last issue. As in June, it was a pleasure to get together with friends and see former comrades able to meet and discuss old times. To those who weren't there, we missed you and you were often in our thoughts. We also made plenty of new friends and recruited a lot of new members. To all of you, welcome.

One 'goodbye' is to co-editor Jerry Maycock, not as a member of the Association but as an editor. On everybody's behalf I'd like to thank Jerry for his past efforts and congratulate him on his achievements with the Despatch.

It's definitely a time of change. Peter Winter has decided to stand down as Chairman and C J "Chuck" Harris is stepping into his shoes. Every good wish to Peter and sincere gratitude for the enormous amount he has done for the Association. It was he who got the Despatch off to a flying start and set a very high standard. He assures us that he will still have an influence within the Association "from the back benches". And a warm welcome to Chuck who will certainly be an excellent, conscientious and hard-working Chairman.

Judging by the expanding circulation list for the Despatch, the Association is thriving and we have every right to look forward to a successful 2005.

I hope you had an enjoyable Christmas and wish everyone a very happy and peaceful new year.

Lannah

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

To tread in the footsteps of Peter Winter, our revered Captain and "Boss", as I always called him is indeed a hard act to follow. It was after some protracted deliberation on my part that I eventually agreed to take on the office of Chairman for the forthcoming two years and then, hopefully, be able to hand over to a lady or gentleman of a more vigorous age.

Peter Winter's time-consuming endeavours of many hours and days 'twisting the

tails' of the Royal Marines serving Corps Commandant and staff with such persistence that ultimately 47 acquired the attendance of a Royal Marine band in June, a bugler and Brigadier G S Robison, ADC as representative of the Commandant General RM. I firmly believe that Peter's success stirred up the Service to do much more than was formerly proposed, so that as well as the D-Day commemorations, the Walcheren 60th anniversary was also very well attended by serving Royal Marines, their officers and the Bands.

The veterans of 47 owe thanks to a variety of other people, including Betty Field, our very capable and hard-working Secretary and Doc Forfar and the Committee members for all they have done to 'keep the flag flying' and overcome the many trials and tribulations that have beset the Association in the past years. Young Peter Spear, a very dedicated son of brilliant fighting Troop Sergeant Major, Bill Spears, also deserves a 'mention in despatches' for his very considerable contribution to the growing success of the Association.

The Committee intend to hold an AGM during March 2005 in a hotel in the Lichfield area so that it can be combined with a visit to the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas in Staffordshire. Among the 40,000 trees planted there since 1997, is one dedicated to men of 47 who died in WWII sited among other commandos (RM & Army) in "Royal Naval Review Avenue". We want as many to attend as possible. The meeting will be on a Saturday so that working members can attend and we hope that the Midlands will prove to be a good location for members to reach from all directions.

Wishing you a very happy, healthy and prosperous New Year. Sincerely,

C.J.Harris "Chuck"

47 RM Commando Association in Holland WALCHEREN 2004

For the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Walcheren, veterans of 47 RM Commando, families and friends gathered from far and wide on 31st October 2004 and travelled via ferry and coach to the Westduin Hotel in Koudekerke. Once arrived, all were spruced up in record time and back on the coach for the reception in the town hall at Middelburg, an impressive stone-flagged medieval building, beautifully restored following extensive bomb-damage during the war. There, Dr Leon DeWitte, President of the Walcheren Liberators Support Foundation together with the Mayor of Middelburg welcomed everybody to a week of commemorations and thanked the veterans for their efforts and sacrifices sixty years ago. A Book of Commemoration was signed and people were able to mix with old and new friends and enjoy wine and canapes.

Next day, 1st November, the exact anniversary of the start of the landings, a ceremony was held at the Tank Monument on the sea wall at Westkapelle. This required a certain amount of stage management with only a narrow width available. However, all were safely assembled; veterans of 41, 47, 48 Commando and Landing Craft personnel, the Royal Marines Band, a smart Guard of Honour from 42 RM Commando plus a great number of lookers-on. Dr DeWitte opened the ceremony and Brigadier Simon Hill OBE RM welcomed those gathered to commemorate what was a momentous but extreme point in both Dutch and Royal Marines history. Major Gill S Duncan, RM Liaison Officer to the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps, made the reading. Our bugler, Corporal Bugler James Christopher, combined with the buglers accompanying 41 and 48 Commando to sound the Last Post. Wreaths were laid by all the groups involved, including a small but welcome contingent of Norwegian

Commandos. Brigadier Hill gave a few words of thanks to close the ceremony. Lunch was provided at a restaurant in the centre of Westkapelle before everyone moved on for a ceremony at the monument at Erica Beach. Before the start, a spitfire flew low over the site and performed a wonderful aerobatic display, looping the loop several times and executing a stunning belly-roll before its departure. The ceremony then followed a similar pattern to the morning's events with the Rev Mike Sharkey RN, padre to 42 Commando, leading the prayers and Captain Phillips OBE of 48 Commando speaking the Exhortation. Dutch school children assisted the veterans with the laying of wreaths and Piper, Mr Marcel Adriaanse of the Scaldis Pipes and Drums of Flushing, played the lament.

At the 'Lighthouse' cemetery, a further ceremony took place. When, in 1944, residents were warned to evacuate the area prior to the RAF bombing the dikes to flood the island, some felt sure that their very solidly built windmill would protect them. The many civilian graves bear witness to the tragic deaths of whole families including the very young and very old.

Afterwards, the Royal Marines Band played and marched to the Polderhuis for the official opening of the Museum of Westkapelle. As the flags were raised a discernible murmur rippled through the British servicemen who had immediately noticed that the Union flag flew upside down. Not surprisingly, Dutch friends and observers appeared bemused at the British cheers as the flag was lowered. Some very senior serving Royal Marines displayed their speed and skill by having the flag flying correctly within seconds.

A reception and opening speeches followed with an opportunity to visit the museum, the whole project a great achievement for such a tiny community. As well as insights into life under the occupation it includes much fascinating material on the history of the town and the huge task of building and maintaining the sea wall prior to the advent of modern technology.

The day's events concluded with an evening concert played to a packed audience by the Royal Marines Band CTRM, proving their musicianship all over again in a programme which included jazz, dance band music and a good deal of humour too. Brilliant!

Next day there were ceremonies at the individual memorials of each Commando unit, 47's at Dishoek, 48's at Zoutelande and 41's at Domburg which is also the Belgian Commando Monument. The buglers with each Commando combined to play the Last Post and the Piper again sounded the lament. Afterwards we were whisked off to the restaurant of a leisure complex in Domburg where a three-course meal was laid on with a fine choice of good food, wine and the whole thing very well-organized to provide for such a great number of people.

From there our coaches transported us to an evening concert, this time provided by the Netherlands Marine Band. A very talented quintet played music by composers from the various nationalities of the liberators. The programme included Grieg, Holst, Gilbert and Sullivan and also a song sheet, some in English, some in Dutch for the 'Liberation Medley'. It's safe to say those singing 'Pack up your Troubles' produced more quantity if not quality than the '*Pak al je Zorgen*' version. All the veterans who were leaving for home before Friday were presented with their commemoration medals.

Next day 47 went to Kapelsche Veer where 11 men were killed and 47 wounded in January 1945. The rest of the veterans went to Vlissingen (Flushing) for a ceremony at the Commando Monument and a service at St Jacobs Cathedral. Aubrey James, who landed at Flushing, was happy to attend both these events and laid a wreath on

behalf of 47 Commando.

The rest of us made the long trip to the town of Waalwijk. There we were made welcome in the new town hall where we were served lunch and given a slide show about 47's time in the area by Mr Heideveld, the chairman of the Dutch Friends of the Allied War Graves Foundation. Professor John Forfar, 47's former Medical Officer and historian added to the information. Later, we were given a tour of the splendid old town hall including a visit to the former prison cells in the basement.

The first ceremony of the day was at the monument at Kapelsche Veer where, very appropriately, Gordon "Tim" Tye, one of those wounded there, laid the wreath. From there we continued to a civilian cemetery where Lt Adam of 47 Cdo is buried. For many years the local people looked after his grave but recently the War Graves Commission have taken over its maintenance. The family of the Lieutenant opted for the grave to stay in this position and the ceremony in its silent autumnal setting was very moving with CJ "Chuck" Harris speaking Binyon's lines and our bugler, Jim Christopher, sounding the perfect Last Post.

The following day we rejoined the other Commando groups at a ceremony at Bergen op Zoom. Arthur Thompson for 47 laid the wreath jointly with John Baker, representing RM Landing Craft personnel. Afterwards we had lunch at the Dutch Commando Barracks. In the evening 47 enjoyed their corps dinner at the hotel and the toasts, naturally, included absent friends.

On our last full day in Holland, a brief but telling ceremony was held at the monument to the Dutch civilian dead in Middelburg where Sir Colin Budd KCMG, British Ambassador to the Netherlands, laid a wreath on behalf of H M Government. A reception in the adjacent Staatenzaal followed and later we were transported back to the restaurant at Domburg for the Farewell Dinner. Another wonderful three-course meal was served and the veterans were presented with their medals. On behalf of 47 RM Cdo Association our Chairman, Captain Peter Winter, thanked our Dutch hosts for their wonderful hospitality throughout the week and for the organization, intense preparation and hard work which Dr DeWitte and all of his associates had clearly undertaken.

As usual, the veterans of 47 stood up well to a punishing itinerary but came out smiling and looking great. We all returned to Dover happy to have renewed old acquaintance and to have made many new friends and, not least, to have honoured those who never returned.

LB

[This is the report as it should appear in the Jan/Feb issue of The Globe & Laurel plus a photo of the veterans lined up outside the Old Town Hall, Waalwijk together with "Burglar" Jim Christopher.]

Space in the Globe is limited and intended for a wider audience so here are a few extras for 47 readers:

It was good to meet up with 47 veterans who were travelling independently; member "Pat" Plumb travelling with Albert Rutherford and Arthur Delap as well as George Amos who was staying with his son in Holland.

A big thank you to Peter Hughes, ex-RM, who joined us in Normandy this year. Due to illness, he wasn't able to take up his place on the Walcheren trip but paid for the wine at the Corps dinner. No wonder it got a bit rowdy at times!

James Delingpole who travelled with us in June and wrote the article in *The Spectator*, was with us in Walcheren and interviewed veterans for a book he is planning. If you weren't on the trip and would like to add your experiences, please drop James a line: c/o 77 Knatchbull Road, London SE5 9QU.

Glad to meet up again with former Netherlands commando, Ed Thoden van Velzen

who was able to join us on 1st November. Ed is now a member.

Leen van de Merbel, another ex-Commando, was the guide on our coach in Walcheren and has also opted to become a member. We were very pleased to receive the following item from him for the Despatch:

MEETING 47 RMC

Being a new member of the 47 Royal Marine Commando Association it might be convenient to introduce myself to you, particularly to those who were not in Walcheren in the first week of November 2004.

My name is L W ("Len") van de Merbel and I live in Middelburg, Zeeland in the Netherlands.

How did I come into contact with the 47 RMC?

A few days before the 1944 liberators of Walcheren were to come to this island to celebrate the landing of 41, 47 and 48 RM Commandos and 4 & 5 Battalions KOSB 60 years ago, I was asked to be the guide of one of these groups. I asked for one of the RM Commandos because I myself was a commando in the Dutch Korps Commandotroepen, part of the Army. I was assigned to 47 RMC.

This assignment brought me a splendid week! We attended several celebrations and receptions and for my guests it must have been a very emotional time as it was for me. And, as often in these circumstances, in no time we got to know each other and became firm friends. I will never forget this week and I am proud of the people of Walcheren and Waalwijk (Kapelsche Veer) who showed their gratitude to their liberators in such an enthusiastic way. At the end of the week Professor Forfar offered me membership of 47 RMC Association which made me very proud.

When the group left on Saturday morning I felt a certain sadness because it was all over now...

To reflect on all my emotions I decided to walk through the dunes from Westkapelle to the tankbarrier at Dishoek, in the neighbourhood of W11 and W238 bunkers. It was a great walk: the friendly sea at my right and a peaceful landscape at my left side. How different from 60 years ago! I suppose Captain Peter Winter still knows this route very well since he marched there several times, with and without German POWs, as I learned from Prof Forfar's book!

I thought of the men who fought here in those days and how I had got acquainted with some of these brave men this week. How miserable it must have been then...

You did a great job, you brought us freedom. I can assure you that the people of Walcheren have not forgotten all you did for them.

If I were a young second lieutenant again I would be more than happy to have Chuck as a Platoon Sergeant, I would learn a lot from him. And what a blessing it would be to have Captain Peter Winter as my company commander!

For Peter is an honourable man, so are you all, you veterans, all honourable men!

L W van de Merbel Middelburg, 7th November 2004

IN MEMORIAM

We have learned with regret of the death of the following veterans and offer our condolences to their family and friends:

Harry Horsfield on 16th April 2004. Harry was a Sergeant in B Troop and took part in both the Normandy landings, where he was awarded the MM, and Walcheren where he received shrapnel wounds when his landing craft was hit. After the war he returned to being a member of Lancashire Constabulary. He was a modest man and few knew of his MM. Nevertheless, he was very proud to have been a Royal Marine.

Fred Roberts on 2nd May 2004. Fred was a member of Y Troop and took part in the Normandy landings and the capture of Port-en-Bessin. Later he served in Italy and in Egypt before his demob in 1946.

E Gurnos Jones on 16th December 2004. Gurnos joined the Royal Marines as a regular before the war and served in many different parts of the world, including Crete in 1941. In due course, he served with both 45 and 47 RM Commando. He was always proud of his service with the Commando and was a staunch supporter of the Association, always attending functions and going on trips when his health allowed, including our most recent visit to Walcheren. He will be sorely missed.

VIDEOS Ted Hartwell has videos of the 60th anniversary trip to Normandy this year for £10. Please ring him on 01788 812460 if you are interested

REPRODUCTIONS of Ted Battley's oil painting of the veterans on the Western Feature in June sold like hot cakes during the Walcheren trip at £10 each. There are only 2 left out of a limited edition of 25. Ring 01239 710782 for further details.

NOR ANY DROP TO DRINK

Christmas Eve 1943. The Commando were practising a night landing at Studland Bay. Or was it Freshwater Bay? Wherever, it was a steep, stony beach on a pitch-black, freezing night. A motley collection of craft were being used including R N lifeboats and the ubiquitous Dory – her with her nose in the air. To jump off her bow meant going into freefall.

The drill on B Troop's Dory was that the Bren team, Roy Emsley and myself, hop off first, tear up the beach to the high ground and give covering fire to the hoi polloi behind. Simple. Like blind men wearing sun-glasses we are perched on the bows. Suddenly the boat grinds on the bottom and almost stops. We both take a flying leap and sink out of our depth into eight foot of turbulent water. I force my way forward, find my footing and lope like a half-drowned hare up the beach until I realise that I'm alone. Turning back to look for Roy, I find him emerging from the sea minus the Bren gun. The boat had hit a reef and then over-ridden it and in the process had hit Roy in the back making him drop the weapon. – Despair! Never mind, it's Christmas tomorrow and we might get a beer and a fag before the Court Martial.

In the morning, half a dozen volunteers and we two 'irresponsibles' formed a swimming party to search for the missing gun with orders not to come back without it. It took half an hour floundering about in freezing conditions before the final successful dive. I was so cold, I couldn't bear walking on the pebbled beach. I literally crawled back to the transport.

After drying off and getting dressed, our spirits were given a huge boost by being invited to that Holy of Holies, the Officers' Mess where, plied with tots of whisky, our Christmas celebrations began. It is no wonder, then, that every Christmas since I have declined to take water with my tot.

Ted ("Ben") Battley CH/X 103811

LADIES CORNER

[Just an excuse for a sexist joke, really. Sorry, guys, we don't mean it.]

One day three men were hiking and unexpectedly came upon a large and violently raging river. They needed to get to the other side but had no idea how to do it. The first man prayed to God saying, "Please God, give me strength to cross this

river.” And WHOOSH! God gave him big arms and strong legs and he was able to swim across but it was a great struggle, taking two hours and a couple of times he almost drowned.

Seeing this, the second man prayed to God, “Please God, give me the strength and the tools to cross this river.” WHOOSH! God gave him a rowing boat and he was able to cross but it took an hour and a couple of times he almost capsized in the turbulent waters.

The third man, seeing how this had worked out, also prayed, saying, “Please God, give me the strength, the tools and the intelligence to cross this river.” And WHOOSH! God turned him into a woman. She looked at the map, hiked upstream around the river’s bend a couple of hundred yards and walked across the bridge.

IN THE PRESS

These are all from the *Globe & Laurel* this time:

July/Aug issue: A complimentary and very charming letter appeared about his day spent with 47 in Port-en-Bessin on 7th June from Brigadier Robison.

Sep/Oct: Mark Bentinck had an interesting and very comprehensive account of Operation Infatuate, the liberation of Walcheren.

Nov/Dec: As part of a Young Officer Batch ‘Normandy Battlefield Tour’, John Forfar clearly fascinated the group with his account of the action and walked them off their feet. The article includes a photo of John amongst the group outside his RAP in Sallenelles.

There’s also a good photo of our bugler, Jim Christopher, doing his stuff on Trafalgar Day at St Paul’s Cathedral.

SUBSCRIPTIONS for 2005 are now due at £10 per head. Please send your cheques payable to ‘47 RM Commando Association’ to the Treasurer, Prof J O Forfar, 9 Ravelston Heights, Edinburgh EH4 3LX

NORMANDY 2005

Secretary, Betty Field, needs to know numbers for the Normandy trip just as soon as possible so that the coach, ferry etc can be booked in good time. If you plan to go (likely dates 5th to 8th June 2005) please let her know asap and send a deposit of £25 per head, payable to ‘47’ as above.

AGM If you hope to attend this (as mentioned in the Chairman’s Report) could you also let Betty know as soon as possible then further details can be sent to you when available.

Next issue: July 2005. Future issues will appear each January and July.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!