

47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

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COMMENT

One of the most difficult parts of editing the Despatch is compiling the obituary section. Unfortunately, there is quite long one in this issue and as we have just returned from the commemorations for the 61st anniversary of the D-Day landings, one has to accept a certain inevitability.

Sadly, among the list of names in this issue is that of Captain Peter Winter, until very recently our Chairman and a great loss to the Association. A full obituary appears in the current issue (May/June 2005) of the *Globe & Laurel* written jointly by John Forfar and Peter's lifelong friend, Colonel John Cantrell. What appears here in the Despatch is, necessarily, briefer but it would be fitting to add that Peter's funeral took place in Mallorca where he had been resident for many years. His family attended and several friends, including Mickie O'Brien, and tributes appeared in the local paper. Flowers were sent by the Mayor and people of Port-en-Bessin and cards and letters were received from many other French and Dutch connections. One feels this not only as a tribute to him but also, by extension, through him and his efforts, to 47 Commando as a unit. He will be missed.

Lannah

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

After our wet and windy visit to the Arboretum attended by 17 members of the Association, I, with my son John Stuart Harris and Patrick Hagan attended the Royal Marines Memorial (Graspan) Annual Parade on Sunday, 8th May in the Mall in London. John Stuart acted as wheelchair-pusher for a veteran from the Isle of Thanet. There was a very good turn out of ex-Royal Marines.

Our Port-en-Bessin trip also attracted 17 members, augmented by Mickie O'Brien and Samantha, Aubrey James with Jean and our staunch Dutch members, Marc de Bolster and Mariel.

We attended the Normandy Veterans' parade at Bayeux and all of 47's contingent marched very well. The civic reception in Port-en-Bessin on the 7th was a very welcome interlude with drinks and canapes. The speeches were interpreted by Michel Deserable and an impromptu sing-song in French and English by a joint 'choir' and our members followed before the party broke up. *Tres bien*. Our trip also included a

visit to Maison Chevegny and Doc's RAP at Sallenelles as well as Ranville, Arromanches, the Longues batteries, Pointe du Hoc and the American cemetery. In the course of it all, wreaths were laid by Frank Makings, Pat Hagan, John Baker, Peter Ford, Ted Battley, Marc and Mariel (in tandem) and Arthur Thompson. The weather was kind to us, not so hot as in 2004.

My thanks, as ever, to Betty Field for her expertise and hard work in organizing the whole thing for us and to you all for your support and cooperation.

C.J.Harris "Chuck"

CEREMONY AT CAPELSE VEER, January 2005

Leen van de Merbel kindly sent this report of the commemoration on the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the area:

On Saturday, 29th January 2005 the people of Sprang-Capelle, the village near to Capelse Veer, nowadays belonging to the town of Waalwijk, commemorated the fierce fighting there that ended on 31st January, 60 years ago. The ceremony was organized by the local "4th and 5th of May Committee" (In the Netherlands the war victims are commemorated on the 4th May, the liberation from the Nazis on the 5th). The Committee invited Ed Thoden van Velzen and myself to attend this ceremony and of course we accepted. We thought it would be appropriate for some members of the Regional Former Commando Association to accompany us so there were ten of us in all.

The ceremony was very impressive. The Burgomaster of Waalwijk and the Chairman of the Committee spoke words worthy of consideration. The struggle and suffering of the Allied Forces, among them 47 RMC, was mentioned with respect and gratitude. A short part of the speech of the Burgomaster: "At the graveyard at Capelle we find the grave of the British Lieutenant I W Adam, 47 Royal Marine Commando. He was nineteen years old when killed in action on the night of 13-14th January 1945. Another officer, Captain Gerry Brent, survived. Together with his wife, he returned from Australia to Capelle to share with her memories of that horrible night when the unit suffered so many losses that it had to be withdrawn. Long and lonely he stood there on the dyke at the monument.

Back home, he sent Christmas greetings and I quote from his letter: "It was a thrill to be able to look at the other side of the dyke and realise that our task was quite hopeless... in a bitter battle for this little spot around the ferry that now looks so peaceful".

At the ceremony, we listened to the Dutch National Anthem and the Last Post, followed by a minute's silence. Wreaths and flowers were laid at the monument. Ed, accompanied by all former Commandos, laid flowers at the plaque of 47 RMC. It was a really worthy moment.

Afterwards, we went to the local cultural centre for drinks and were addressed by several people who expressed their appreciation for the honour and gratitude we showed the veterans of 47 RMC.

Finally we went to the local graveyard where, among others, Ed laid flowers at the grave of young Lieutenant Adam. The wreath laid by the Association on the 3rd November 2004 was still there. The people of the village take good care of the grave, keeping it spotlessly clean. The words of Laurence Binyon were spoken and we gave the salute of honour.

We were addressed by an older lady who, in the local dialect, said it was good that we did not forget that poor young lad. She wept...

Leen van de Merbel, Middelburg, 1st February 2005

AGM & NATIONAL ARBORETUM

The Association held its Annual General Meeting at the National Arboretum, near Lichfield, Staffs, on Saturday, 5th March 2005. There was time for everyone to gather and exchange their news over a coffee and have a look at the building and the variety of items on display. The AGM got under way in the Conference Room with "Chuck" Harris in the chair following lunch.

Afterwards, one of the Friends of the Arboretum gave us much of the background to getting the Arboretum project off the ground as well as some interesting insights into the production of the beautiful wooden artefacts in the wood-built chapel. He also reminded us that Commando units are represented by alders because they can thrive in damp soil and 'don't mind getting their feet wet'. Later, braving an arctic wind, we walked out to 47's alder tree and laid (and anchored down) a wreath. Feeling very intrepid the seventeen of us were glad to return to the main building and shelter from the gale.

Having the AGM in a different location seems to have worked out well, in that members who live in the West Midlands were able to attend who might otherwise find it difficult to get to Portsmouth, for instance, though many others travelled longer distances.

Our alder is tall and handsome compared to many of the other species which have been planted. Some of the veterans joked they would return in about 25 years time when all the young saplings have grown taller. Good idea but perhaps only if it's a hot, balmy summer's day.

LB

NORMANDY 2005

[This is the report as it should appear in the July/August issue of The Globe & Laurel together with a group photo at Sallenelles and veterans lined up at Port-en-Bessin Church. Thanks to Marc de Bolster for emailing me lots of excellent photos.]

47 RM Commando Association in Normandy, June 2005

The majority of our group gathered at the Royal Sailors Home Club in Portsmouth which provided a good ambience for old friends and comrades to meet and enjoy each other's company. Next day, following a smooth crossing to Ouistreham we arrived in Port-en-Bessin, the town 47 Commando captured in 1944, with further opportunity to catch up with friends, eating and drinking in the Bar de La Maree with it's view over the harbour.

The following day, 6th June, the 61st anniversary of D-Day, our party set out for Bayeux cemetery with none of the security which had hampered the journey last year. There were plenty of other contrasts, too. Instead of the heat and people packed shoulder to shoulder, it was unseasonably cold with plenty of space for all. Our veterans joined those of the Normandy Veterans Association in their service of commemoration during which Frank Makings laid a wreath on behalf of 47 Commando.

After the service there was time to explore Bayeux and eat before continuing to Arromanches. On the way back to Port-en-Bessin we stopped at Longues-sur-Mer. Its huge gun emplacements battered but still standing are always an impressive sight. However, many who had been there before opted not to venture forth into the biting wind, probably the coldest weather anyone could remember in Normandy in June.

Port-en-Bessin was liberated on 7th June and several people were able to join us for the day including Michel Deserable and Michel Laulier who have been so helpful over the years. The anniversary was celebrated and the fallen commemorated at several memorials around the town including the newest one, dedicated only last

year at the 60th celebrations. This stands on the western headland overlooking the port which, like the eastern one was hard fought for in 1944. Gordon "Tim" Tye held aloft the standard of 47 Cdo alongside the standards of the French veterans, Les Anciens Combattants et Prisonniers de Guerre. The mayor of Port-en-Bessin, M Sachet, and Pat Hagan of 47 Commando laid wreaths. As at all our ceremonies, "Chuck" Harris led the parade and spoke Laurence Binyon's poignant words, "They shall grow not old as we who are left grow old..."

After the ceremonies everybody was able to mix with the townspeople at a reception in the Salle des Fetes with many of them asking after Commandos and their families known to them but sadly not with us this year.

In the evening the whole group joined together for the corps dinner in the Bar de la Maree where Christophe always proudly displays the 47 Cdo plaque and flag. Naturally, a number of toasts were pledged including absent friends.

Next day we travelled to Sallenelles, stopping at Pegasus Bridge where it was a pleasure to sit with one's beverage of choice in the hot sunshine which Normandy at last provided.

At Sallenelles the veterans lined up outside Maison Chevigny at the roadside monument, flanked by the Union Jack and the tricolour. Ted Battley laid the wreath at the brief but telling ceremony which followed. Sadly M de Chevigny died last year but his daughter had arrived from Paris and was pleased to show people down to the cellar of the Maison to see where Professor Forfar, then the unit's MO, had tended the wounded.

The group continued to Ranville Cemetery for the final ceremony of the day and plenty of opportunity to look around and appreciate the ambience and the care which the War Graves Commission lavishes on these special places.

On our last day in Normandy we had time to visit the American Cemetery to the west of Port-en-Bessin. During the landings, 47 Commando constituted the extreme right flank of Gold Beach and ultimately made contact with the left flank of the American troops of Omaha Beach. Arthur Thompson laid the wreath at our final ceremony, held under the classical portico which overlooks the seemingly endless rows of white gravestones radiating to the horizon.

There was still time to visit the bomb-blasted promontory of Pointe du Hoc before the traditional hypermarket visit on the way to the ferry.

Thanks are due to our hard-working secretary, Betty Field, and Committee member, Peter Spear, for successfully orchestrating everything again.

As expected, this proved to be a quite different experience to last year's events but still managed to be an enjoyable and meaningful trip with plenty of laughter and good fellowship along the way. LB

[The account of the 60th anniversary in Walcheren appeared in a supplement produced by the Globe & Laurel together with items from the other Commandos. In the main magazine Major Gill Duncan wrote an overall account of events & the photo of 47 lined up with Corporal Bugler Jim Christopher at Waalwijk appeared in both.]

VETERANS' AWARENESS WEEK

The week runs from 4th to 10th July with a National Day of Celebration for the end of the Second World War on the 10th July which will be marked by wreath-laying ceremonies.

Also, two veterans of 47 will attend and proudly represent the Commando at a reception at St James's Palace, invited by the City of London, also to mark the end of the war. We hope to have an account of their day in the next issue.

STAND-DOWN

The Commando Association, specifically for Army Commandos but to which many RM Commandos belonged as Associate Members, is winding up. The Association is holding a Stand-down & Drumhead Ceremony at Eastney Barracks Parade Ground, Southsea (near the RM Museum) on Sunday, 18th September 2005 at 11 am.

IN MEMORIAM

We have learned of the deaths of the following and offer sincere condolences to families and friends:

The wife of Norman Brangwin, Northolt, Middlesex.

A H (Nick) Carter, Southend, Essex.

Yann de Chevigny, Sallenelles, Normandy.

John Forfar will be writing an appreciation of M de Chevigny's association with 47 Commando for the next issue.

Frederick Woodman Lanyon, Bodmin, Cornwall, 2nd February 2005

Fred Lanyon was a Cornishman, born and bred, who joined the 10th Battalion Royal Marines which laid the basis for 47 RM Commando. He remained with the Commando from its inception to its disbandment as a member of B Troop, taking part in the Normandy landings and the battle for Walcheren where he earned the Military Medal for "gallantry, leadership and undaunted devotion to duty during the assault..." After the war he returned to his job as a stonemason at the local quarry but had to give up due to dust affecting his lungs and so joined the South Western Electricity Board. He was a great family man and enjoyed tending his garden. He also made a trip each year to Poole and, having great pride in the Corps, always thoroughly enjoyed the great view from his apartment which allowed him to watch the 'Royals' on exercises. Fred is survived by his devoted wife, Millie, and his daughter Sheila.

Ron Piles, Crawley, Sussex, Spring 2005

Albert Shurvinton, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, March 2005

Albert served with Landing Craft and Beach Party personnel and took part in the Normandy Landings. He attended many of our reunions in Normandy and Walcheren. His staunch support of 47 was often practical as, for example, in giving a great deal of assistance and background information when the Association acquired its official Standard. Albert had been an Associate Member of 47 RM Commando Association for several years.

(Arthur) John Wetjen, Herne Bay, Kent.

Peter Lawrence Winter, Mallorca, 11th March 2005

Peter was born in Egypt to a service family, his father being a doctor with the RAMC, and was educated in England. He joined the Fleet Air Arm in 1941 hoping to be a pilot but when nothing came of that, he joined the Corps in 1942 as a potential officer candidate. Commissioned in August of that year, he ultimately joined 47 Commando. During the D-Day landings, his LCA carrying Y Troop struck a mine and sank. Sustaining a broken right arm, right leg and a broken nose, Peter with great difficulty

managed to get ashore and in due course, returned to England on a hospital ship. After weeks of hospitalization and recuperation he returned to his unit in time for the preparations for the landing on Walcheren Island. This time he reached the shore in fighting fettle and was heavily involved in the two-day battle to subdue Battery W11 at Dishoek and ultimately Battery W3/4, the enemy command HQ. When his troop commander became a casualty, Peter was promoted in the field to replace him. As a German speaker he became much involved in negotiating a surrender with the German commander. Later, he was seconded to a Dutch partisan group for a few days to take part in a raid on an enemy post on the further side of the River Maas and also took part in the ill-fated night attack on Kapelche Veer Island which subsequently took a Canadian Armoured Division and Infantry Brigade five days to take, suffering 234 casualties in the process. After the war, Peter worked in the oil exploration industry for some time in the Middle East, the Caribbean and Canada. Ultimately he found his niche skippering his own charter vessel in the Med with many famous people as regular passengers. He finished his days in Mallorca, where he lived for many years and from where, in due course, he became immersed in the activities of 47 RM Commando Association of which he became the distinguished Chairman. Peter is survived by his two daughters, Susan and Carol.

Sgt Denis (Bill) Woolford, in Australia.

LEGAL ADVICE

The Legal Services Commission has a new leaflet *Veterans - Rights for former servicemen and women and their families* which includes info re rights to pensions, healthcare and housing assistance. Copies are available by phone: 0845 3000 343 or visit www.clsdirect.org.uk and download the leaflet.

MOUNTBATTEN FESTIVAL OF MUSIC

For the first time, we went to the Mountbatten Festival of Music at the Royal Albert Hall this year. We were delighted to bump into Bugler Matt Abbott, before the concert, still in civvies and wearing his 47 tie. We were impressed and awarded Brownie Points. The concert was excellent, the main theme concentrating on the bi-centenary of Trafalgar and our other bandsman, Corporal Bugler Jim Christopher, played the Sunset solo at the finale, perched high up on the balcony to the organ loft, a man with a head for heights as well as a fine musician! We would recommend this annual event to anybody. As well as providing first-class musicianship, precision timing, obvious pride in the Corps, it all takes place in a wonderful venue. LB

BOOK REVIEW

Simon Garfield: *Our Hidden Lives, The Remarkable Diaries of Post-War Britain*, Ebury Press, paperback edition 2005, £6.99

These are extracts from the Mass Observation Diaries kept by five disparate people living in various parts of Britain from VE-Day to July 1948. It may sound dry but, in fact, reads almost like a novel as it follows the progress of their lives. In the process it captures entirely the flavour of that period when having survived the privations of war, people found themselves still severely rationed with food and fuel shortages. The word austerity features a lot and, naturally, the diarists grouse quite a bit but there is also a great deal of humour both witting and unwitting. Odd quotes: "I went to... a Pawnbrokers Annual Meeting. It seems that already they are getting quite a few of the

new demobilisation suits in pawn.” In a cinema newsreel, two women friends see American troops on parade in New York. One exclaims, “Good Lord! I’ve never seen a GI marching, have you? They were always leaning up against something.” The way people lived and the social and political background all come to life: prefabs and the Nuremburg Trials, clothing coupons and Lord Haw Haw, *Forever Amber* and the first bananas to be sighted since before the war. Recommended. LB

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

Another of those irresistible anecdotes:

When A Troop were carrying out landing exercises in Studland Bay in May 1944 the weather was extremely hot. As a result, George Amos was sent into a local pub for 64 pints of beer. Fine. Unfortunately, the landlord wouldn’t oblige with seconds!

FEEDBACK

I was pleased to hear from Michel Laulier to say that he enjoyed reading the Despatch but as his English is far from perfect, he had to resort to the dictionary quite a lot. Following Ted Battley’s account of losing a Bren gun in the sea and his subsequent invitation to drink whisky with the officer classes, Michel assures me that when he did his military service he never once took his tot to the Officers’ Mess.

WALCHEREN 2005

URGENT Our generous Dutch hosts always plan well in advance and need to know the numbers attending at Walcheren – probable dates, 31st October to 4th November. Please let Secretary, Betty Field, know by 31st July or even sooner if possible and send a deposit of £25 per head to her at:
12 Alfred Road, Stubbington, Fareham, Hants PO14 2QY
Cheques should be made payable to ‘47 RM Commando Association’.

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

Some of our members have not yet paid their 2005 subscription – payable to 47 RM Commando Association. Subscriptions should be sent to Professor J O Forfar, 9 Ravelston Heights, Edinburgh EH4 3LX

47 RMC WEBSITE

Marc de Bolster has been in the process of getting a website up and running and it is now online. If you have internet access please take a look. Marc says that it’s going to be as good as members make it and will need plenty of input from everyone. But up to now all the work and expertise has come from Marc and his associates. Sincere thanks from us all. The address is:

www.47Commando.org.uk

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