

47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

Committee

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COMMENT

In the last issue, I mentioned not only the sadness but also the difficulty of compiling the obituary section. One aspect of this is insufficient information about the person concerned. Though there is not excessive space it is good to be able to mention some aspects of the former life. If you would like to send information regarding a late member or friend of the Association, it is always possible to add an appreciation at a later time as John Forfar has done for M de Chevigny in this issue.

Of course, sometimes news of a death is only hearsay so there's also the risk of writing an obituary for somebody still in the land of the living and probably fighting fit. If this should happen to you, please let me know, perhaps with the famous (and usually slightly misquoted) words of Mark Twain in the New York Journal in June 1897: "Reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated."

Moving to the other end of the age scale, it is always great to know that the Association has many younger members and included in this Despatch are details of our youngest member ever.

Lannah

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Since November 2004 when we last had the privilege and honour of the leadership of 'the Boss', Peter Winter, we have, sadly, lost several notable members. Early in the year Peter himself died and we also lost the steadfast support of Gurnos Jones and later Albert Shurvington and his wife Rose. Others who are missed include Hal Smithson and Bert Quinney another stalwart member who at one time travelled quite frequently with us.

I would like to thank all members for their effort and support but especially 'Doc' Forfar who, despite having to devote much time to his wife, Isobel's, failing health, has still managed to be a thoroughly efficient treasurer and always been available to provide assistance by telephone and post. We have been involved in and 'seen' at quite a few venues in the course of the year and those that have taken place since the last issue in July are mentioned elsewhere in the *Despatch*.

God bless you all and a healthy, happy and prosperous New Year

C.J. "Chuck" Harris

THE 2005 COMMEMORATION OF THE WALCHEREN OPERATIONS

On the 4th of November 2005 the commemoration of Infatuate I and II took place, this year for obvious reasons, not attended by as many UK veterans as last year.

In the morning the British War Cemetery at Bergen op Zoom was visited. The Deputy Mayor of the City of Bergen op Zoom spoke impressive words, the Exortion was said by a veteran, wreathes were laid and the lament was played.

In the afternoon a ceremony took place at the Erica Landing Monument at Westkapelle. Here the same programme as in the morning went ahead, to which was added a short address by the local Minister of Westkapelle, Rev Arie Spaans. He ended with the Lords Prayer and the Blessing. Very emotional and impressive! The local band played the British and Dutch national anthems.

After that everyone went to the cemetery at the Lighthouse, where the civilian war victims of Westkapelle were buried, to meet about 100 former and active Dutch Commandos and also children of the local school. The children sang a song and at each grave flowers were laid by a child, together with a British or Dutch veteran.

Sad to say, but understandable, there were no veterans of 47 RMC, but Ed Thoden van Velzen and I tried to be good representatives of 47 RMCA!

Leen van de Merbel

CORPORATION OF LONDON RECEPTION AT ST JAMES'S PALACE

This was on 8th July, following the horrific bombing in central London on the 7th so there was, naturally, a doubt about travelling. My daughter Jacqueline and I decided to attempt the journey and drove to Witham Station and parked the car. We caught the 1303 hours fast train to London which stopped only at Chelmsford and Stratford prior to Liverpool Street terminus. Taking the Central Line and changing at Bond Street onto the Jubilee Line for one stop to Green Park, we emerged into Piccadilly at 1405 hours, the fastest journey I have ever made to the West End!

We had an excellent lunch in an Italian restaurant then walked towards St James's Palace via The Mall. A Veterans' Centre and Living Museum had been established in the Park. Naturally we were checked out by the Police, body search etc, and rightly so. Once in, we were treated like royalty, the whole thing very interesting and entertaining. There was an ENSA concert, tea, cakes and beer, all free.

After a few hours which absolutely flew by, we strolled up to St James's Palace at about 1820 hours. Following more security checks, we handed in our entrance passes and were given a printed green card with our name on and ushered into the State Apartments. The card indicated that we were to go to the Green Apartment and we walked through several massive rooms hung with impressive paintings, swords, pistols, daggers and many other artefacts clearly of great value.

I estimated around 2,000 ex-service men and women were there, the majority WWII veterans but also ex-members of the Fire Brigade, Police and Ambulance Service. Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester moved through the various apartments but we didn't get to speak to them. However, in the course of the evening, I did talk with Joyce Carruthers Nash OBE a Deputy Commoner of the City, also to the Lord Mayor, Locum Tenens, Sir Gavyn Arthur, and Police Commissioner, City of London and many others, generals, serving officers and, of course, ex-Royals comrades from 40, 41, 45, 46 and 48 RMCdos, some of whom I knew.

The excellent champagne was topped up as soon as the level dropped and canapes were circulated non-stop.

All in all, it was a very enjoyable couple of hours. Our journey home at 2100 hours was more leisurely and the train not so packed as on the journey in. CJHarris

IN MEMORIAM

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

Bert Quinney, September 2005, Gainsborough, Lincolnshire

Bert, who died just short of his 84th birthday, served with Y Troop, landing in both Normandy and Walcheren. He continued through all of 47's travails right on to Germany and the peace. His service also included an early trip to occupied Europe when he travelled by Motor Torpedo Boat on a clandestine operation to Norway with John Bennett (then a lieutenant). In the event, a violent North Sea storm on the return journey put their lives at far greater risk than the occupying power.

Until recently Bert and his wife, Betty, came on many trips with the Association and he will be very much missed by all who remember him.

Harold (Hal) Smithson, 18th September 2005

Hal, who died aged 80, served with 45 RM Commando but often travelled (sometimes accompanied by his son, Barry) with 47 RMCA whose company he enjoyed. Hal trained at Achnacarry and was a Landing Craft Coxswain at Arromanches on D-Day and later served in China, travelling there on HMS *Ranna*. He was later involved in the design of the Garden of Remembrance near the Commando Monument at Spean Bridge and his ashes were scattered there by his family in November 2005.

Roy Bryant, November 2005, Bristol

Roy died aged 81. In June 1944 he was wounded and captured at Hill 72 on the outskirts of Port-en-Bessin. When the German military hospital at Chateau Balleroi was evacuated he and an American paratrooper managed to escape into adjacent woodland and eventually reached the American lines.

Ken Parker and Bristol RMA members attended his funeral.

Harry McAllister, December 2005, Kettering, Northants

Harry served with A Troop and took part in the D-Day landing. Later he was badly wounded on the Western feature at Port-en-Bessin.

Yann de Chevigny:

Many 47 veterans have vivid memories of Sallenelles and 'Maison Chevigny' (as it became known). The house, as 47's regimental aid post from June 12 to July 23 1944, was sited ahead of the commando's forward positions. Shielded from a hostile no-man's land by only a minefield and barbed wire it yet proved a haven of rescue. As the Battle of the Bridgehead ground remorselessly on 95 wounded soldiers were treated there.

An attempted visit to the house shortly after the war was aborted and it was 25 years post-war before another such. On this occasion, fearing a rebuff the 'doc', in virtue of past tenancy, was despatched up the short stairway to the door while a score green-bereted, bemedalled ex commandos stood portentously below. An expectant knock, a wait – and then relief, as the door opened and a different owner appeared! Monsieur Yann de Chevigny and his wife beheld this intimidating, unannounced invasion with only felicity and understanding. The phalanx of veteran soldiery was welcomed in with a French charm, warmth and generosity, and with a remarkable ability to entertain a multitude without warning, which left all captivated. A friendship was born, personal and communal, which was to last for more than 30 years.

Yann de Chevigny became the distinguished Mayor of Sallenelles. At Maison Chevigny he entertained countless veteran visitations. His name became revered by the veterans of 47 RM Commando and also as the years passed by the widening circle of accompanying relatives and friends. As the community leader he generated great local goodwill towards the Commando.

RM commandos other than 47 also served in the Sallenelles area. It was Yann who conceived the idea of the Memorial to those of 41, 46, 47, 48 RM Commandos and Special Service Brigade HQ who died there. He was instrumental in having the Memorial established close to Maison Chevigny and unveiled at an impressive ceremony which he conducted.

Sadly, Yann died some months ago. His wife had predeceased him. To his present wife and his family our Association extends its deepest sympathy and thanks for a man who so endeared himself to us all. J.O.F

BIRTHS

DAVISON. On August 2nd 2005 to Gemma and Nick, a daughter, Brisen Eva. Congratulations to all concerned!

OUR YOUNGEST MEMBER

Brisen Eva Davison became our youngest member soon after her birth in August 2005 sponsored by Mickie O'Brien, one of our oldest. Our Treasurer acknowledged receipt of her subscription and I thought you might like to read some extracts from his letter: My Dear Brisen

What a wonderful surprise it was to hear that you have taken up residence in the United Kingdom and wish to join 47 Royal Marine Commando Association.

Thank you for letting me know your weight... a splendid [one] for a young lady like you – no sign of the obesity... from which so many young girls suffer these days. The Association was formed by a group of Royal Marines who fought 60 years ago... against an Army led by a bad man named Hitler... so that the UK remained a free country.

... Your great-grandfather was a very distinguished Sergeant-Major in 47 RM Commando. He was very brave in battle when fighting the bad men... and he was wounded at a Dutch island called Walcheren which you will learn about later when you are studying geography. Because he was a Sergeant Major he had also to ensure that the soldiers whom he commanded behaved well – in the Marines behaving well is a thing called discipline – and sometimes a Sergeant Major who has to enforce discipline is, for that reason, not very popular. Your great-granddad on the other hand was very popular and greatly respected by all. He was also a good boxer which helped!

Sadly your great-granddad died some years ago but his daughter, your grand-mother – ... (I know her well and call her Sandra) – became very interested in 47 RM Commando Association and is a member of the Committee. Committees are groups of people who are supposed to be chosen for their wisdom in organising things – not all turn out to be much good at that but your Granny is very successful in this and is wise, tolerant and very generous...

I have your photograph in front of me. I can see that you have the determination and commanding presence of your great-grandfather, the kindness and generosity of your grand-mother, the charm of your mother – and of course one or two other good qualities to which your Dad can lay claim!

Your sponsor... was also a splendidly brave Royal Marine. On one occasion he led a

dangerous raid against the enemy which was successful, and in which he was wounded. He was rightly awarded a medal for this. The glamour of his achievement was only compromised by one thing, the site of his wound – oh dear! – for a while he could not sit down.

I was the Commando's medical officer, usually politely called 'the doc', especially before the Marines were about to engage in a fight in which they might get wounded, but on other occasions, when I was sending them on duty and they didn't want to, 'the saw-bones', 'the quack' or even 'the butcher'.

The Association is delighted to have you as its youngest member.

The 'doc' (to you)

GEORGE AMOS'S MEMORIES OF CAPTAIN COUSINS AND A TROOP

I first met Captain Cousins when I was chosen to fill a vacancy in A troop of 47 RM Commando as a junior NCO. My first impression of him was that he was young, athletic and self-assured. I was allocated to No 1 section with Sgt Fletcher and Corporal Simpson. Captain Cousins, though only 22 years old, was an experienced officer.

Thinking back, various incidents come to mind. In Kirkcudbright, for instance, our morning parades were often the target of a local police sergeant regarding poaching. Captain Cousins would castigate Simpson and Packer to the delight of the police sergeant but it was cosmetic, poaching was rife. Before we left for Herne Bay we had to destroy explosives and, unfortunately, an ill-timed explosion brought down some telephone wires. We didn't stop to investigate but were told to make ourselves scarce! At Herne Bay we settled down in new billets and carried out rehearsals for our landing. The Captain's relationship with the senior NCOs seemed good, drinking with them in the White Horse which was next to his billet. I used to drink there sometimes with the senior NCOs but when the officers appeared junior NCOs tended to disappear.

One very hot day at Studland Bay following a D-Day rehearsal I was delegated to buy 64 pints of beer from a small pub nearby. The publican would not serve us any more because we had used his ration!

One of our number was a great sniper but had great difficulty in getting back from leave on time. On the journey back he tended to treat the sorrows of his separation from home with a 'touch' of alcohol. All the NCOs were instructed by Cousins to bring him back from the station, come what may, drunk or sober. We always made it with seconds to spare.

After our move to Southampton, we had a sports day and Captain Cousins very successfully put the shot. On another day, as D-Day was delayed, we went for a recreational walk and again repeated a pub visit at the expense of Paul Spencer, later to become Adjutant. On leaving the pub, a feeling of youthful exuberance seemed to take over the Troop, perhaps with future battles looming — a case of letting off steam like schoolboys on an outing. At all events, crossing Southampton Common, we approached a children's paddling pool. Captain Cousins gave the order to right-wheel but the men, in view of the recreational nature of the exercise, ignored him and marched straight through the pool. Approaching a golf course the players shouted at us. The Captain, perhaps conscious that his authority on a military training exercise was being challenged asked me for the pistol used for firing an explosive cord for clearing mines and fired it. It blasted a brown pathway across the grass. Due to dockers blocking our stores I was never able to renew the cord but, in the event, this was neither here nor there as I lost all my gear in the landing, anyway.

My only personal conversation with Captain Cousins during the short time that I knew him was on board ship when he was writing a letter to his wife and enclosing a drawing of a house. After the landing and approach to Port-en-Bessin he was very much in control and supportive of all the men, a leader of impressive authority. The last time I saw him was when ordered to blow the wire on the approach to the Western Feature. It was unfortunate that A Troop was ambushed though perhaps inevitable that the Germans were well-prepared and ready for us. Captain Cousins returned from the headland to famously lead the assault on the Eastern Feature and successfully take the vital position, though at the cost of his life. I, of course, knew nothing of this till after the event, having my own problems on the western headland. For many years after the war the Captain's father, himself a military man, placed an annual memorial to his son in *The Times*. Sadly, when the naming of the roundabout in Port-en-Bessin was being planned, no surviving relative of Captain Cousins could be traced.

DOUBLE CONGRATULATIONS

The Royal Marines Historical Society has presented John Forfar with its 2005 Award. This consists of a silver statuette of a Royal Marine of past vintage mounted on an oak base with an inscribed plaque. The Citation by Major-General Julian Thompson details his exemplary service as Medical Officer throughout the existence of 47 Commando, his award of the MC and Mention in Despatches. It goes on to laud the value of John's lecturing and writing, particularly *From Omaha to the Scheldt* and ends, "It is for writing this valuable book, and for recording for posterity the bravery, endurance and sacrifice of the men of 47, that we honour John today." John says that the award "should be seen primarily as a tribute to the men of 47 RM Commando whose deeds my writing and lecturing commemorate."

John was also recently awarded the Presidential Medal of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health for the part he played as President of the British Paediatric Association in transforming that Association into a Royal College.

SHIPS THAT PASS

1. A newspaper report about the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar mentioned that, to mark the occasion, a ship of the Royal Navy, a Spanish vessel and a French frigate left the port of Cadiz to the area close by where the battle took place. The name of the French ship was the *Montcalm*. Surely not that same vessel which graced the waters off Port-en-Bessin in 1944? The name no doubt lives on as newer ships are brought into service as in the Royal Navy and presumably recalls the Marquis de Montcalm, French 18th century General and hero of the battle on the Plains of Abraham in Canada. Perhaps our French members know? General Montcalm was fighting the Brits, of course. Afraid we were always scrapping then.
2. Barry Smithson kindly sent me pictures and articles from a publication called "Sea Breezes" with photos and an article about the ships which escorted the veterans across the channel in June 2004 for the 60th anniversary of D-Day. I don't have space (or the skill) to reproduce them here but seeing pictures of HMS *Gloucester*, FNS *Cassard* from France, the USS *Ross* (USA) and HMCS *Charlottetown* (Canada) brought back memories of a fantastic day, not just the escorts but the thousands of people thronging the quayside at Portsmouth to wave the veterans off.
3. At Walcheren, a ship on the stocks in the shipyards in Flushing (Vlissingen) at the time of Operation Infatuate escaped demolition by the Germans and in due course became the passenger liner *Willem Reys*. Later sold, it became the Italian cruise liner

Achille Lauro which was involved in an unfortunate and well-publicised hi-jacking in 1985. Subsequently it was destroyed by fire and sank in 1994. – Not many people know that. LB

REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY AT EASTNEY

Gordon “Tim” Tye laid a wreath on behalf of 47 at the ceremony at Eastney Barracks, Southsea on Remembrance Sunday. He was accompanied by our Secretary, Betty Field, who was still in a wheelchair following breaking her ankle. Best wishes from everyone for a full recovery.

REMEMBRANCE AT SPEAN BRIDGE

Ten members of 47 RM Commando Association attended the weekend: Tom and Edna MacAndrew, Ted and Lannah Battley, Shirley Price, two of our Dutch members, Marc de Bolster and Mariel van Mierlo, Chuck and John Stuart Harris, all staying at the Alexandra Hotel, Fort William. Barry Smithson stayed elsewhere with his family who, after the main ceremony on Sunday at Spean Bridge, scattered the ashes of his father, Hal, at the Garden of Remembrance beside the monument.

A number of stalwart ex-Commandos held a service at the Spean Bridge monument on Friday, 11th November at the 11th hour. The weather was diabolical, bitter cold with a Nor-East wind plus the usual rain.

The Sunday dawned very cold but fine. The morning parade and service in Fort William was attended by approximately 400 Commando veterans, a troop of 45 RM Commando, a troop of Royal Artillery Commandos who also fired a salute of big guns and various other volunteer groups such as RN Cadets as well as over 600 spectators.

This very good and impressive turn-out was repeated in the afternoon at the Commando Memorial at Spean Bridge where Tom MacAndrew, resplendent in his kilt, laid a wreath on behalf of 47 Commando. After the ceremony we all retired to a nearby hostelry to sample the local ‘water’.

A very good effort on the part of our members and thank you for your support. CJH

COMMANDO VETERANS ASSOCIATION

We met this group at the hotel in Fort William (and some of us had lifts in one of their coaches to Spean Bridge). They have been going for about 2 years and largely came about because the Commando Association was winding up. It is intended for all commandos, Army, RM and all ages. They had a good itinerary at Fort William and have other activities. Like 47 RMC Assoc, it is also a way to keep in touch for those who are unable to participate and they produce a small, nicely- produced newsletter. Membership is for veterans but family, supporters and those interested in Commandos can become Associate members. The annual subscription is £6. Contact Hon Secretary & Treasurer Vic Ralph on 01778 344776 for further details. LB

THE SECRETARY’S SECTION

AGM 2006 The Annual General Meeting is planned for Saturday, 25th March 2006 and is back in Portsmouth this year at the Royal Sailors’ Home Club. Please let Betty know (address below) or phone 01329 314890. If you plan to stay at the Club please make your own bookings direct on (023) 92837681 (office hours) quoting the Association’s number: 4600

NORMANDY 2006 Please let Betty know asap and send a deposit of £25 per head to: Mrs E A Field, 12 Alfred Road, Stubbington, Fareham, Hants PO14 2QY

Cheques should be made payable to '47 RM Commando Association'.

Betty received a letter from A F Tull in Australia asking if anyone remembers his brother, Mne Arthur Tull CH/X 164128 who was killed on 7th June 1944 and his brother-in-law, Cpl Fred Dyke who was killed crossing the Maas. Please get in touch with Betty if you can help

Betty thanks everybody for their Christmas cards. She was inundated, so unable to reciprocate in every case.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Annual subscriptions of £10 are now due for 2006. Please make cheques payable to 47 RM Commando Association and send them to:

Professor J O Forfar, 9 Ravelston Heights, Edinburgh EH4 3LX

TRACING THE PAST

Ernie Staphnill asked Marc de Bolster if he could try to trace the Dutch family on Walcheren with whom he stayed in 1945. Leen van der Merbel also got drawn into the hunt and was able to trace a cousin in Wolphaartsdijk but his uncle, remembered by Ernie, died some time ago. Our thanks to our Dutch friends for all their efforts.

ONE FOR THE WOAD

As one of the spotty youths joining the 10th Battalion Royal Marines, Sick Parades were a frequent occurrence. Regularly our faces were daubed with a vivid substance called gentian violet, presumably with the idea that if it didn't cure our pimples at least it would hide them. There we were, young warriors, trying hard to look fearsome, disfigured by a vivid blue dye. It reminded me of tales of Ancient Brits, frightening the enemy with their woad-blue faces and possibly similarly colourful language. Perhaps, after all, they were just trying to cure their acne. Ted Battley

47 RMC WEBSITE

While in touch with Marc, Ernie Staphnill sent him some photos from his service days for the website, as have one or two other veterans. Marc is keen to have other personal photos from that time. They would appear in the secure section of the website, available only to Association members via their passwords. Veterans who are not online but would still like photos on the site can send copies 'snailmail' to:

Marc de Bolster, Elzendreef 29, 2272 CG, Voorburg, Netherlands.

Our thanks to Marc for lavishing time and euros on this project all for the love of the thing. The web address is:

www.47Commando.org.uk

Happy New Year!!

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