

47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

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DESPATCH 13 July 2006

COMMENT

The *Despatch* often generates further items for the following issues and these are always welcome. On reading of our youngest member, Brisen Eva Davison, Brian Bates was inspired to write something of her great-grandfather, the late Sergeant Major Frank Tynan. Brian has written a lot of family history and, it should be added, Brisen is his great-niece. There was also a welcome response from Michel Lauhier regarding the French warship *Montcalm*.

Other material and contacts have come by way of Marc de Bolster and the 47 website and it is pleasing to know that veterans, friends and families have more than one way to get in touch.

Two other items in this issue end on a similar note. These are the contributions from Elizabeth Boardman and Tommy Payne. Both make it clear that the powers-that-be were often extremely mean when it came to pay and never truly appreciated the dangers and discomfort which our servicemen withstood.

Fortunately, our veterans' efforts are more appreciated these days. The 27th June was the first annual Veterans' Day and though not too much went on in my locality, several events did receive publicity via television news and other media. It may receive more advance publicity next year and, who knows, perhaps the date could even be considered for that elusive extra Bank Holiday that is often mooted.

Lannah

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

I received a letter from the Mayor of Port-en-Bessin on 27th May detailing their plans for the 2006 Normandy Commemoration but, of course, there were not enough people for a group trip to be planned this year. In the end, I went with my daughter and son-in-law and an account of our trip appears separately. For me this was an ideal solution and it may well be for others, where family and friends are willing to drive. It gives an opportunity to see the Normandy countryside as well as attend ceremonies and meet old friends in France.

However, we still hope to gather enough people for group trips. The Association will be able to fund transport for Walcheren this year and there will be financial help for veterans wishing to attend Spean Bridge in November, too. I hope the details at the

end of the newsletter will inspire more people to make the trips especially as our friends in both Holland and France are always keen to see us.

As ever, I send my regards and best wishes to all members of 47 RM Commando Association.

C.J. "Chuck" Harris

BRIAN BATES on SGT MAJOR TYNAN

[Brian, a member of the Association, is Frank Tynan's nephew. He is also, of course, the cousin of long-time Committee member, Sandra Tebbutt, Frank's daughter.]

Frank "Tiny" Tynan was working as a warehouseman in London when he first decided to join the Royal Marines. Though underage, he wasn't going to let that stop him and on the 14th August 1934 he signed on the dotted line.

After training at Portsmouth and Chatham, he served on the aircraft carrier "Courageous" until the end of November 1938. Leaving proved a lucky escape. The ship was sunk by a U-boat the following September with the loss of 519 lives.

During his second posting to the gunboat HMS Scorpion on the China Station, Frank saw at first-hand the terrible treatment the Japanese were dishing out to the Chinese civilian population. Frank's nickname "Tiny" didn't just echo his surname, it also referred somewhat ironically to his height. Not only tall but also a skilful boxer, he became the Lightweight Boxing Champion of the China Fleet.

On the outbreak of war Tiny requested a return to Europe and it was at this point that his history becomes uncertain. His service record shows a posting to Portsmouth from March 1940 to October 1942 but there is nothing to say what he did during this period. My father told me that Frank probably took part in the Dieppe raid in August 1942 which seems likely because, by October he is shown as being part of 40 Commando which was involved in that ill-fated raid.

What we know for certain is that, in November 1942, Tiny joined 30 Commando later to become 30 Assault Unit, the brainchild of Ian Fleming. Formed as a special force, its task was to land with the first troops on an assault and capture enemy intelligence before it could be destroyed. At their Amersham headquarters, Frank taught specially recruited men the art of commando-style combat. My friend, John Brereton, who is also a member of the Association and one of the early recruits to 30, has fond memories of Frank. These include the occasion when he and some of the other lads pulled the bride and groom's carriage at Frank's marriage to Eva.

In North Africa, 30 Commando took part in Operation Torch and they also landed with the first troops on Sicily and Italy where Frank became involved in many "interesting" excursions.

When the D-Day landings were being planned and new commando units formed it was found that a severe shortage of experienced NCOs existed. As a result, Frank found himself in the Dorset town of Dorchester as part of 47.

On D-Day, Frank had his second lucky escape when his landing craft received a hit and sank off Port-en-Bessin. Some days later Eva received the dreaded telegram saying that he had been lost in action. But, not so. Always a strong swimmer, the family story is that the Americans pulled Uncle Frank out of the water.

Later, having rejoined Peter Winter's Y Troop, he took part in the assault on Walcheren where he had his third lucky escape. Once again his landing craft was hit and he received a shrapnel wound in the shoulder.

As far as I know, he stayed with 47 until 1946 before being posted to the Commando Training Unit at Gibraltar Camp. He finally left the RM in October 1947 having received the British Empire Medal, at that time awarded to service personnel as well

as civilians.

Frank became a pub landlord in a tough area of London and with his reputation as a boxer, he commanded the same sort of respect from his customers, even the rowdier ones, as he did from the men under his command in 47.

He died in 1979 to be much missed by family and friends.

IN MEMORIAM

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

John Bain, September 2005, aged 83, St Ola, Orkney

Daniel Caldwell, 18th November 2005, Mullion, Cornwall

FEEDBACK

Michel Laulier very kindly responded to my musings in the last issue regarding the French warship *Montcalm*.

The original *Montcalm* was a cruiser which took up active service on 4th December 1937. Once the war began, she took part in the protection of Atlantic convoys together with other ships of the Home Fleet. As a result, the cruiser also became involved in the hunt for the German battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*. In April 1940 *Montcalm* assisted in the evacuation of allied troops from Namsos in Norway.

Refitted in the USA in 1943, she then provided support during the invasion of Normandy and also Provence. From the end of 1961 until 1969, the ship served as a shore-based submarine weapons training school.

The current *Montcalm* is a frigate of the French Navy which entered service in June 1982. Specialising in anti-submarine warfare, she also fulfills coastal defence missions and acts as escort on the high seas when required. To date, the frigate has taken part in Operation Olifant along the Lebanon coast, 1982-86, and enforced the blockade of goods to Iraq during the Gulf War, 1990-91, as well as a similar mission, Operation Sharp Guard, against Serbia and Montenegro 1994-95.

Points of interest:

1. Since September 1993 10% of *Montcalm*'s crew has been female.
2. In the same class of frigate is the *Georges Leygues* bearing the same name as the cruiser which also took part in the invasion in 1944 and whose name graces the 47 plaque on the harbour at Port-en-Bessin along with that of *Montcalm*.

This is a 'free' translation from the French and I hope I've got it right! LB

NORMANDY 2006

With not enough people for a group trip, my daughter and her husband took me to Normandy, having 'surfed' the internet to find accommodation at a gite about 7 kilometres from Arromanches.

On the 6th we went to Bayeux Cemetery and laid a wreath in company with about a dozen Normandy veterans with a padre and one other Royal Marine (not 47). We then went to Arromanche where we visited the Museum, the cinema on the hill, the Longues-sur-Mer Battery and attended the service in the square. Somewhere in between we fitted in an excellent lunch.

Next day, the 7th, we drove to Port-en-Bessin and met Mickie O'Brien, his daughter, Samantha, also Mint Burkinshaw with Margaret, their children and grandchildren. Our friends Michel Désérable and Michel Laulier also attended. Wreathes were laid at the monuments on the Western Feature, at Huppain, the Church and at the harbour. Afterwards we went to the village hall for champagne or orange juice and biscuits.

The Mayor, M Sachet, gave a speech in English and French. I replied with a short speech in English with a very limited French supplement.

We ended the day in our usual bar on the harbour for food, drink and good company. We had a few songs and Mint's rendition of 'Maggie May' was very well received and loudly applauded. We were joined by several serving Royals and their Padre and everybody enjoyed themselves.

On the 8th my daughter wanted to return to the Western Feature to take some more photographs and there we met a group of Royal Marine recruits who all wanted photos with the green-bereted veteran. Later we continued to the American Cemetery, where more photographs were required with several pleasant young Americans, and continued to the beaches of Omaha and Utah. My son-in-law and daughter have travelled quite extensively in France but had never visited Normandy before so found everything of great interest and were at all times totally supportive.

C.J. "Chuck" Harris

A WIFE REMEMBERS

A word in the House, a stroke of a pen,
 The country disbanded a body of men
 With fighting finesse and fitness supreme
 The crème de la crème wore the berets of green.
 Their training was tough, it had to be so,
 How to fight with a knife, how to kill with one blow.
 Walcheren, Salerno, Dieppe, St Nazaire,
 When impossible odds, the commandos were there.
 Their raids so successful that Herr Hitler said,
 "If captured, no prisoners, I want these men dead!"
 Too late he discovered his men were not keen
 To battle with those wearing berets of green.
 On D-Day, on Sword beach and Gold to the fore,
 They jumped from their craft and made for the shore.
 Their contempt for the Nazis was plain to be seen
 For they wore not steel helmets but berets of green.
 When it was over, the fighting no more,
 The first they disbanded, the green beret 'corps'
 Who went back to their shire, their town and their glen,
 A body of gentle, self-disciplined men.
 Yet fifty years on they still meet, it is said,
 To talk, toast their Queen and remember their dead
 Whose memorial stands at the foot of the Ben
 Where they trained for the right to be green beret men.
 For our freedom of movement, our freedom of speech,
 To those who come after, this gospel I preach:
 A word in the House, a stroke of a pen
 Cannot wipe out the debt to those green beret men.

Elizabeth Boardman

Thanks to Elizabeth Boardman for allowing The Despatch to publish her poem and to adapt it slightly to fit in with 47 Commando's activities. It was first published around the time of the 50th anniversary of D-Day. Elizabeth, a member of the Commando Veteran's Association, is the widow of Sergeant Arthur D Boardman of the South Lancashire Regiment, No 2 Commando and 22nd Independent Parachute Company

also known as the "Pathfinders". Her husband spent a part of his service "as a guest of the Royal Navy", as he put it. During the siege of Malta 1941/42 he was a member of Special Service forces who, from September 1941, were designated Commandos on detachment to the Royal Navy, though for security purposes the terms Commando and Special Services were never used openly. His unit, among other things, made covert trips to the north African coast, dropping and picking up agents, and to the Italian coast to blow up railway lines, trains and tunnels. Much later, after the siege of Malta had ended and on return to the UK, he and his comrades learnt that, although on detachment to the Navy, they were in fact Army personnel and therefore not entitled to the Navy equivalent pay they had been getting. As a result, the money was docked from their weekly salary until the debt was paid. Such gratitude. Sergeant Boardman finished up in a POW camp from September 1944 until liberation. LB

NEWS OF VETERANS AND ENQUIRIES

Norman Viner, unfortunately, has had a stroke. Naturally, we all wish him and his wife well. Norman has had an active and successful life. He worked his way up from 'trolley lad' to member of the Senior Management at Cadbury's in Bourneville. He also received the award of Birmingham's Citizen of the Year for his work as a Welfare Officer with BLESMA.

William (Bill) MacLennan who served in Q Troop has suffered, unfortunately, from Alzheimers Disease for the past several months and has had to move into a nursing home in East Kilbride near Glasgow. His wife is also in hospital and the family worry about Bill having so few visitors and wonder if anybody connected with 47 could visit. Although Bill's short term memory is poor, he still remembers his wartime experiences and would enjoy talking about them. If you can help or know of anybody who could, please email Bill's daughter, Rhona MacLennan, at rreid@easynet.co.uk or make contact by phoning or writing to the editor. Marc de Bolster has also been publicising this on our website.

Marc has also had information and enquiries via the website:

1. Moira Doherty, the daughter of Peter Hogan who served with HQ Troop, has been in touch with Marc sending him wartime and pre-wartime photographs for the web of Derek Shead (known as Rick) a family friend, who served with 47 in Heavy Weapons. Moira's father was at Port-en-Bessin, Sallanelles and Walcheren and was detailed to guard Field Marshal Montgomery at some point. Earlier, he served in Iceland, the ship they returned on then went to Dunkirk to evacuate troops from the beaches and was sunk on the third trip.
2. Marc has also heard from a young Dutch woman whose late grandfather was in the resistance and had contact with RM Commandos, possibly including 47. His name was Willem Gijzen, a teacher at a RC primary school in or near Bergen op Zoom. Later, he carried out guard duty at a camp in Bergen op Zoom called Meilust and then one at Steenvoorden. He had four daughters, played the violin and received regular visits from two British servicemen named Jack and Fred at one time. If anybody can remember him and add further information, his granddaughter would be delighted.

Betty Field, our Secretary, has had an enquiry from a David Charlton regarding the family history which he is writing. He would like to make contact with anyone who knew his two uncles, Cpl Andy Hardy and Cpl Jock Mckenzie who both served in 47. If you have any memories of them, you can get in touch with Mr Charlton through Betty on 01329 314890 or write to her at 12 Alfred Road, Stubbington, Fareham, Hants PO14 2QY.

TOMMY PAYNE ON SERVING ON A NAVAL SEA FORT 1942

I joined HMS Sunkhead Fort at Tilbury Docks in February 1942. It was towed about ten miles out to sea in May, somewhere between Harwich and Dover, where its supporting legs were lowered to the seabed.

Our armament comprised two 3.7 Heavy Anti-Aircraft guns, two Bofors and two twin Brownings. Our object was to stop mines being dropped by planes or E Boats in the estuary where poor merchant seamen, having crossed the Atlantic, were getting sunk on the doorstep of home.

Our duties aboard were four hours on, four hours off, seven days a week for six weeks, then a fortnight ashore, being one week at the base and a week's leave.

The most sleep anyone could get was four hours at a time, if you were lucky, but one's four hours off could be spent at Action Stations.

Most of the time water was at a premium. There were twelve blokes to a mess deck, six atop and six down below with one bucket of water between six men. You cleaned your teeth, had a wash, then washed your plates and mugs, then the mess deck table and the deck. You could have a shower in sea water but it was cold and soap didn't lather. We had to have water brought out to us and when the weather was too rough water went on ration.

Fresh bread was another item we were lucky to see, usually being between one and seven days old. In fact, the food aboard was terrible. We were canteen messing. Each mess prepared its own meals and took it up to the galley to be cooked. We were allowed 10 ounces of meat a day, generous for the time, but food was wasted, mainly because never properly cooked and prepared with no imagination on the part of the twelve blokes.

We used to fire at planes high in the sky but usually could never tell if we ever hit anything. At dusk we always stood to and one night I was sitting at the handles of a Bofors and a Jerry plane came by. We couldn't see it but it dropped a chandelier of light as another plane followed. It was silhouetted between us and the flare. Someone shouted, "Get it down (or maybe round), Payne." We opened fire and hit the plane with three rounds and it went down into the sea. What an explosion. It had been carrying mines to dump in the sea lane. Afterwards we had a Recommendation from our base Captain at Harwich.

But generally speaking our efforts were not appreciated. At the end of some six weeks we owed the navy as much as a week's pay for our appalling food and they took it. I always reckoned we were being fleeced.

[Tommy sent me a postcard showing an aerial view of a Naval Sea Fort 5 miles off Margate, taken in 1992. They were called Maunsell Sea Forts and looked very similar to modern-day oil-rigs but with gun platforms on top rather than helipads. I am unable to reproduce the photo here but Marc de Bolster will be putting the Despatch online and if you can access the internet you can see the picture there. Eventually Tommy, along with several other Royal Marines from the Sea Fort, was transferred to Achnacarry where he completed his Commando training. He joined 47 at Wenduine, prior to the Walcheren landing and served in X Troop until the Commando was disbanded. LB]

MOUNTBATTEN FESTIVAL OF MUSIC, 2006

After enjoying our first visit to this event last February, together with my brother Fred Fearn who is an Associate Member and his wife Ingrid, we all decided to go again. The bands from Portsmouth, Plymouth, Scotland and the Commando Training Centre took part and provided a great mix of traditional band music, jazz, swing and

classical. To the excellence of the Massed Bands can be added the sheer talent of the soloists, including a fine pianist playing excerpts from Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto. A 'circus' comedy feature also included some incredibly fast playing by what Darren Jordon, the compere, described as the 'massed xylophones of the Royal Marines'. The Royal Albert Hall setting added to the grandeur of the stirring finale with 'Sunset', 'Heart of Oak' and, of course, 'A Life on the Ocean Wave'. LB

AGM

The Annual General meeting was held at the Royal Sailors' Home Club in Portsmouth on the weekend of the 25th March. Those who were able to attend enjoyed the chance to meet old friends and to chat over food and a drink or three in comfortable surroundings.

PROPOSED COMBINED RM COMMANDO REMEMBRANCE SERVICE

Chairman, Chuck Harris, heard from Lt General Sir Robin Ross who is President of 43 Commando Association. He had received a suggestion that, as the number of WWII Commando veterans are in decline, there should be a single Service of Remembrance, to those who gave their lives from all RM Commandos, being 40 to 48 inclusive. Currently, 43 Cdo have an annual service at their memorial at Eastney which is timed to commemorate the Battle of Commacchio but for a service for all the Commando units, a date could be decided upon which suited all. Chuck has been asked to 'sound out' the reaction of our Association members to the idea.

IN THE PRESS

"AS PART OF ITS 60th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS, aid agency Care International is looking for anyone who received a food package from them immediately after World War II. Please contact CARE on 020 7934 9334." (*Legion*, the RBL magazine, #3 2006)

"HOW TO... AVOID MIDGES IN SCOTLAND... Avon, as in the ding-dong make-up ladies, could hold the key to a happy holiday. Highland and Island folk have inadvertently discovered that Avon's Skin-so-Soft Body Lotion is a brilliant midge repellent that works where conventional insect sprays fail. And what's more, the Royal Marines have ordered a great consignment of it for when they are on exercise up there..." (*Observer* Holiday Section, 07.05.06)

THOSE MILITARY JOKES

Extracts from Murphy's Laws of Combat: -

Friendly fire isn't.

All 7 second grenade fuses burn down in 5.

It's not the one with your name on it, it's the one addressed "to whom it may concern" you've got to worry about.

No combat ready unit has ever passed inspection.

Never draw fire; it irritates everyone around you.

Never share a slit trench with anyone braver than yourself.

If you can keep your head while those around you are losing theirs, you may have misjudged the situation.

WALCHEREN 2006

As there was no group trip to Walcheren last year, we are very keen to get one arranged for 2006. Our Dutch hosts there are always very hospitable and Marc de

Bolster urges both veterans and younger members to visit his country once more and assures me that the people of Walcheren and Kapellsche Veer would love to see 47 again. Our other Dutch members Leen van de Merbel and Ed Thoden van Velzen are also likely to be around to help in any way they can. Betty Field, has already heard from the organisers, who are always well-prepared and very generous in their arrangements, and they need to know the numbers going by the end of August if possible. The trip itself should run from 30th or 31st October to 5th or 6th November and our transport would start and leave from the Royal Sailors Club in Portsmouth but could possibly pick up at other points on the way to Dover. An added incentive is that the Association is able to pay for the coach which will considerably reduce individual costs. At present, I know of nine people who wish to go. If we could get just three more, that would be enough to justify the hire of a mini-bus and driver. If you would like to go please send a deposit of £25 per person to:
 Mrs E A Field, 12 Alfred Road, Stubbington, Fareham, Hants PO14 2QY
 Cheques should be made payable to '47 RM Commando Association'.

MONEY MATTERS

As mentioned above, the Association will foot the bill for coach travel to Walcheren and this will also apply to future Normandy trips.

There will also be a £50 grant available to veterans who go to the Remembrance Day commemorations at Achnacarry (ie Spean Bridge and Fort William).

John Forfar will be handing over the post of Treasurer to Sandra Tebbutt who will be assisted by her daughter, Gemma Davison. However, first, John would like to clear up outstanding matters, including 2006 subscriptions which are still due. The subscription runs from January to December each year and is £10 per person. If yours is still due please send it as soon as possible to:

Professor J O Forfar, 9 Ravelston Heights, Edinburgh EH4 3LX
 making cheques payable to '47 RM Commando Association'.

47 RMC WEBSITE

Marc is still keen to have any relevant photos from members for the website. They would appear in the secure section, available only to Association members via their passwords. Veterans who are not online but would still like photos to be published there can send copies 'snailmail' to:

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

Thanks to Marc for continuing to lavish time and euros on the Association's behalf. The web address is:

www.47Commando.org.uk

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