

47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

Committee

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COMMENT

No pain, no gain, it's said and this perhaps applies, on occasion, to our reunion trips. In Walcheren this year, our first ceremony at Domburg required the indomitable to stand in a howling gale with torrents of cold, horizontal rain drenching their backs. By the end, I know of at least one person whose teeth were chattering. The weather managed to be unkind at other times but ranged against this was the pleasure of the warm hospitality and friendship of our Dutch hosts, not to mention the beverages to reach those parts which had been numbed. The other pleasure was to see old comrades' enjoyment in each other's company and that of the rest of the group, able to talk and share jokes in the comfort of a warm bar.

The ceremonies at Fort William and Spean Bridge followed hard upon Walcheren and, as ever, the weather at the Commando Monument had no problem in equalling or even surpassing anything Holland could provide. And the same pleasures applied. It was also impressive to see so many men in green berets, the majority of whom had not served for over sixty years, marching proudly and still able to withstand whatever the elements might throw at them. A case of, "Once a commando..."? Certainly and congratulations to all concerned.

Recently we had our first ever Birth Announcement and in this issue we announce a wedding. Another exciting landmark!

Lannah

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Having written a longer account of events at Spean Bridge this year, which appears later in this Despatch, my report as Chairman will be very short.

The Association had good representation at both Port-en-Bessin and at Walcheren this year. Thanks, as ever, to our Secretary Betty Field for all the work and organization, to Lannah for the onerous task of the bi-annual newsletter, to Sandra Tebbutt and her daughter Gemma Davison, our new Treasurer, and to 'Doc' Forfar, without whom we would have submerged years ago. He has not been at all well, nor his good lady. Also other members of his family have been poorly in recent times. God grant them all a speedy recovery.

My thanks to all of you loyal members for your support and all the best for Christmas and the New Year. Sincerely,

C.J. "Chuck" Harris

JOINT COMMEMORATION SERVICE, PORT-EN-BESSIN

Chuck Harris in his account of commemorations at Port-en-Bessin on 7th June 2006 in Despatch 13, mentioned the Padre with a group of young RM officers. He is the Reverend David Devenney, Chaplain to Commando Training Centre RM at Portsmouth, and is now a member of 47 RM Commando Association. He hopes to be at Port-en-Bessin again on the 7th with this year's group on the battlefield tour so that a joint commemoration can be held. This sounds an excellent idea and perhaps will give some of our members an extra incentive to travel with the chance of meeting a few of the new generation of Royal Marines.

MAJOR GENERAL G S ROBISON

News appeared in the *Globe and Laurel* of the appointment of Garry Robison as Commandant General Royal Marines and Commander UK Amphibious Forces following his promotion to Major General.

Many members will remember him as Brigadier Robison, then Commandant of the Commando Training Centre RM, who unveiled our new monuments in Port-en-Bessin on 7th June 2004, the 60th anniversary of its liberation.

John Forfar wrote to Major General Robison on behalf of the Association to congratulate him on his new appointment and received a charming letter back. The Major General said he was pleased that, "the outstanding exploits of 47 Commando are receiving an increasing focus of attention as part of the battlefield tour programmes of Royal Marines Young Officers and Recruits, and... to see such excellent coverage of the Port-en-Bessin memorial in recent *Globe and Laurel* articles." He also praised the generosity of Malcolm Ross and hoped that plans to add a memorial garden to the area surrounding the Western Feature monument will come to fruition.

Finally, he asked for his very best wishes to be passed on to all members of the Association.

WALCHEREN 2006

If space allows the following account should appear in the next issue of *The Globe & Laurel* together with a photo of our group at Bergen op Zoom and possibly one of the Commando Monument at Vlissingen:

47 RM Commando Association in Holland

On 31st October, 47 RM Commando Association members gathered from far and wide to travel to Middelburg on the island of Walcheren in the Netherlands. They were there to commemorate the bloody, heroic and largely forgotten landings to liberate the island, undertaken in difficult conditions on 1st November 1944.

The first reception and ceremony of the trip took place at Domburg. Refreshments were served before an indoor event where, in the presence of the Norwegian Ambassador, a Monument to Norwegian servicemen who lost their lives was adopted by the local school. Then it was, hey, for the great outdoors where a bit of a storm was brewing. At the first stop a wreath was laid in honour of the eleven French soldiers who fell in 1940 in the defence of Walcheren. The long slow procession then stopped at the Norwegian and Belgian monuments before the final ceremony at the main war memorial beside the windswept beach. As the service progressed the rain and the wind from the sea increased. Standard-bearers struggled but succeeded to keep their burdens upright and the schoolchildren, who always accompany the wreath layers in Holland, withstood the onslaught extremely well. The young bugler of the local "Apollo" band was also to be admired for her excellent rendering of the Last Post,

fingers still nimble in the wet and icy blast. At the close everyone returned to the reception hall for well-deserved geneva, whisky, coffee or tea to restore warmth to some of the frozen parts.

Next day we had time to explore the weekly market in Middelburg's main square and later attended a reception in the lofty Burgerzaal of the lovingly restored, medieval Town Hall which dominates it. The veterans were welcomed and thanked for their courage and persistence back in 1944 and the Mayor also brought to mind those not able to attend for whatever reason.

On the 3rd we were pleased to welcome into our midst RM Bugler Matthew Abbott, well known to many of us from previous occasions and also an Association member. Our first commemoration of the day was at the Vlissingen (Flushing) landing beach beside the striking commando monument. Our Chairman, Chuck Harris, laid a wreath on behalf of all Commandos and spoke the exhortation.

Afterwards, a generous lunch and a choice of wine, spirits, tea or coffee were served before everybody set out for the Erica Landing beach at Westkapelle close to where 47 Commando landed. Amidst more lashing wind and rain, a similar service was held with Matt Abbott sounding the last post and a piper of the Scaldis Pipes and Drums of Flushing playing the lament. Ken Parker laid the wreath on behalf of 47 Commando accompanied, as ever, by two schoolchildren.

A further ceremony was held at the civilian cemetery beside the Lighthouse which commemorates the tragic death of local people, ranging from babies to the very old, as a result of the RAF bombing the dikes in advance of the landing. Although warning leaflets were dropped, they believed that their solidly-built mill would withstand the ensuing flood but, sadly, that was not the case.

Our last full day began with a ceremony at Sloedam near Arnemuiden in crisp sunshine followed by another substantial lunch provided by our generous Dutch hosts. The final ceremony of our trip took us to the British War Cemetery at Bergen op Zoom. Two of our Dutch members, Marc de Bolster and Mariel van Mierlo laid flowers at the grave of Sergeant Major Spear, father of an Association member. As with previous ceremonies, Dr Leon A De Witte OBE, the President of the Foundation supporting the Walcheren liberators, conducted the proceedings. The Assistant Defence Attaché from the British Embassy was among the wreath layers as well as Arthur Thompson who laid 47 Commando's wreath.

In 1944 the Royal Marines of 4th Special Service (Commando) Brigade achieved their objective, liberating the people of Walcheren and allowing the passage of vital shipping along the River Scheldt to Antwerp, already in allied hands. Their setbacks were enormous but ours were just some wind and rain, though it must be said that our veterans, no longer young, must be congratulated on their steadfastness in difficult conditions. In any case, any difficulties were totally compensated for by the warmth and hospitality of the Dutch. Our sincere thanks to them and, of course, to Secretary, Betty Field, for the time and effort expended in organizing the trip for us. LB

IN THE PRESS

Mickie O'Brien MC is mentioned (more than once) in an article headed “The Royal Marines Climbing Family” in the current (Nov/Dec 06) *Globe and Laurel*. Mickie was at one time Instructor and Adjutant at St Ives in Cornwall where the reunion was held. It sounds as if a good time was had by one and all with good food and copious drafts. Naturally, a few songs were sung and Mickie’s daughter Sammie, in her professional capacity, sang her own inimitable versions of some “Bootneck ditties”. During the day some climbing went on. The group also had a ceremony unveiling a

new plaque to the people of St Ives for their support and hospitality to commandos who were billeted and trained in the area from 1943 onwards. I suspect most of our veterans will recall being there and participating in a bit of derring-do as part of their training. The article had a lot of initials unknown to me and I must ask Mickie what they mean when the opportunity arises but the above certainly gives you the drift.

John Forfar featured in an article in the *Edinburgh Evening News* on 9th October which was publicizing a new exhibition called Commando Country at the National War Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh Castle. The exhibition is on until February 2007. Both the article and the exhibition highlight the part that Scotland played in the development and training of the Commandos and other elite troops and how the extremes of the terrain around Achtnacarry and other centres suited the toughness of their intense training.

Naturally, John has mentioned the important part which 47 played in Normandy and Walcheren in the article and there is a splendid photo of him with green beret and medals including his MC.

I received a cutting of this thanks to my daughter and her husband, also Edinburgh residents.

LB

WALCHEREN 2006

[It seemed too good an opportunity not to publish somebody else's perspective of Walcheren, particularly as it comes from one of our Dutch members. If it were an exam paper "compare and contrast" would be in order. Congratulations to Marc de Bolster on his excellent English. I've amended nothing and am just a bit miffed that his writing's better than mine. Ed.]

Walcheren 2006 for me started by arriving at the hotel in Middelburg, just 20 minutes after the veterans on 31st October. The welcome I received from a few members who were sitting in the lounge was again very warm. Going up to my room walking down the hall, I ran into John Harris. After I had changed into my suit, I went back down to the hotel bar. Several minutes later I was joined by Chuck Harris, Arthur Thompson, Ernie Staphnill and John Baker. At that moment the first small disaster had struck, when Arthur told me he had lost his beret probably at the ferry terminal in Dover or in Portsmouth. Luckily, I brought two berets I have in my collection, in case someone needed one. So Arthur could wear one after all. Arthur then surprised me by showing me a photo album he brought over, for me to copy some of the contents to put on display on the 47 Cdo website (which I did). Apart from some great photos, he also has some very interesting and rare original documents. So after the images sent to me by Ernie Staphnill and Moira Doherty, Arthur became the third contributor for the website.

In the hotel bar, we all soon became friends with the young lady working there, by the name of Jeanine. At dinner that evening, it soon became clear that this young lady had some difficulties translating the Dutch menu to English, so she came up to me for assistance. So for the rest of our stay there, I became her regular interpreter.

Ceremonies started the next day at Domburg, with a reception at "Schuttershof". There some local collectors had set up a nice museum like display, containing several military and civilian items in display cases, and several mannequins dressed in RM Commando uniforms and battle gear. After the reception, we went outside to a memorial for the local citizens that were killed during the war. There it slowly started to rain. At the memorial of Schagen, the weather started to worsen. Heavy winds from the sea and heavy showers caused me to return to "Schuttershof", for I had left my winter coat on the coach. My suit was soaked, but luckily I was able to have a small

glass of Jenever to get warm again.

After dinner that night, I was able to set up a meeting with Mr. Adriaan Eggebeen, who lives in the town of Goes. Adriaan is the only living member, of the family where Ernie Staphnill was billeted in 1944/1945. I had promised Ernie to take him there and be his interpreter as well. Accompanied by Arthur Thompson, it turned out to be a very successful and special meet.

Thursday the program was limited to a small reception in the evening at the beautiful City Hall of Middelburg, where a band of Pipes & Drums played some great tunes. During the day we had all the time to ourselves, so the coach driver Clive offered to drive up and down the city centre, so anyone that wanted to stroll through the centre would be able to get a ride. Unfortunately the coach broke down, so some had to wait a while for a mechanic to fix the problem. In the meantime we used our car to drive some members into town. At night in the hotel bar we were joined by bugler Matt, who was flown in that morning from London to Eindhoven, and came down to Middelburg by train.

Friday we started with a ceremony in Flushing, followed by a lunch and a ceremony at the landing beach at Westkapelle. As soon as the bugler started to play, it started raining again. And although this time I did wear my coat, I again got soaked and fled the scene to find shelter. Next time I'll have to bring my umbrella! Next stop was the Lighthouse in Westkapelle, for a ceremony at the cemetery.

Saturday turned out to be a perfect day with a lot of sunshine. First we drove to Sloedam for a big ceremony with wreath laying at the memorials of France, Great Britain & Scotland, Canada and the Netherlands. A large number of historical military vehicles of the Dutch organisation 'Keep them Rolling' were parked at the side of the road, there was even a very nice preserved Weasel. After this ceremony we went on to the British Military Cemetery at Bergen op Zoom, where we laid flowers on the grave of Bill Spear. Because of the perfect weather, we were able to make another great group photo.

In between activities we all had lots of fun, but as always all good things come to an end. So Sunday morning after breakfast we had to say goodbye again to our British friends, hoping to see them again in 2007!

For people wanting to see what this week has been like, images are available on the website. Hopefully more members will be joining us when we go to Normandy and Walcheren or perhaps Scotland again.

Marc de Bolster

IN MEMORIAM

Alice MacLennan, April, 2006, peacefully in hospital in Glasgow. We offer sincere condolences to all her family and friends. Alice was the wife of William (Bill) MacLennan. They had been married for fifty years. Bill is at present in a care home in East Kilbride, Glasgow. If anybody wishes to contact him please write, phone or email to be put in touch with his daughter, Rhona.

WEDDING

Catherine Robinson and Martyn Parker plan to tie the knot on 19th January 2007. A rather elite wedding party will attend at a lovely moated hall, location unknown but guesswork suggests somewhere in Norfolk. Congratulations and best wishes from all our members.

[For those who have not met them, members Catherine and Martyn have travelled to France with the Association on several occasions. Martyn's late father was a signaller attached to B Troop and landed with 47 in Normandy and Walcheren.]

THE DEAD MARINES

Fill the glasses with ruby wine in honour to the Queen
 Take away the empty bottle that is now a dead Marine!
 'Tis an emblem of a soldier who has spent his loyal breath
 And whose life-blood in the fight has been decanted off by death.

For their drums two hundred years and more have thundered on the quay
 At the grand old Regiment marching by detachments to the sea:
 Ocean soldiers who have hammered long to forge the golden chain
 Of victories that link us to the Merry Monarch's reign.

Yes, the crimson dawn is gleaming in the eyes of many there,
 Who in quaint three cornered hat and plume and freshly powdered hair
 Are in stately cadence moving to their final musket drill
 On the waves off Cape St Vincent and the slopes of Bunker's Hill

Dead marines who strew the track where'er the flag has been unfurled:
 Empty bottles flung aside upon the dustheaps of the world!
 Lone stragglers from the columns who have fallen by the way.
 God rest you till the trumpets sound on Resurrection Day.

Lt Col W P Drury CBE RM

Many thanks to Chuck Harris for sending me this. Its provenance is something of a mystery. He received it through the post years ago without any explanation. The only person Chuck can recall named Drury, joined at the same time as him and trained for about six weeks before disappearing possibly for Officer Training. It would be interesting to hear from anybody who knows of Lt Col Drury or has any theories about why the poem was sent.

ANNUAL PILGRIMAGE TO SPEAN BRIDGE

Son, John Stuart, and I arrived at Fort William on Friday, 10th November and after the evening meal at the Alexandra Hotel we met in the bar Ted and Lannah Battley, their daughter and son-in-law plus Peter Spear and John Wiggelsworth and his lady. John had 'rescued' Peter and Frank Makings when they were travelling back from Walcheren in 2004. Peter's car had broken down and John gave them a lift to their homes during which Peter recounted the story of 47 Royal Marines Commando. The result of this was that John Wiggelsworth, at his own expense, had a memorial plaque made and inscribed to the memory of the members of 47 who trained at Achnacarry. He planted this in the Garden of Remembrance at the Commando Memorial after the service on 12th November. In conference with our members present, I offered him Associate membership of our Association which he gladly accepted.

The weather on Saturday, 11th November was dreadful but in company with the Commando Veterans Association and other groups such as our own, we braved the elements and had a short service at the Commando Memorial. The wind was so fierce that it was impossible to lay wreaths. However, on Sunday, 12th November, the weather improved a little. At the service and parade in Fort William at 1100 hours, I laid a wreath for the Association. The RM Gunners fired the minute guns prior to and after the two minute silence. The Reverend Donald MacQuarrie conducted the service. Some went into the church afterward but others, including myself, did not. It would have been very difficult because of the number of people.

At 3 pm we all assembled again at the Commando Memorial. A large contingent of

veterans and others accomplished the short march under the command of the Parade Marshal, J L Quarrie BEM, ex-RSM 9 Commando, a fine man. The minister and the lady Convenor (equivalent of Mayor) of Lochaber, Alwyn MacDonald both thanked RSM Alistair MacGill RM of the Fleet Protection Unit, Clyde and his men for their outstanding work in constructing a wall around the Garden of Remembrance and a general refurbishment of the area surrounding the Memorial. During the ceremony, Ted Battley laid the wreath for 47 Commando.

As the service ended, the rain came pelting down so a lot of us made tracks for the Commando Bar in Spean Bridge village but we were unable to get in, just too many bodies, so we went to the Lockie pub instead on the way back to Fort William and had a dram or two.

To conclude, the Army Commando Association has disbanded and some members formed the Commando Veterans Association in its place. This is open to all commandos: Army, Royal Marines, International, Navy, all who served or are serving plus family members as Associates. You can contact them through either Lannah or myself.

Chuck Harris

KAPELSCHE VEER

The commemoration at Kapelsche Veer will be on 27th January 2007. Association member, Ed Thoden van Velzen will be attending with a group of other Dutch Commandos and will lay a wreath on behalf of 47 Cdo. A wreath will also be laid at the grave of Lt Adams at the nearby civilian cemetery. School children from Sprang-Kapelle will also be attending.

The new 47 plaque is ready but will not be put in place until the surrounding wall is rebuilt. A parking area opposite the monument is also planned. Thanks to Eddy for keeping us informed and also congratulations on his appointment at the Commando Barracks at Roosendaal where, apparently, they manage to keep him very busy.

NO MILITARY JOKE

this issue BUT thought, as it also involves great discipline, mention might be made of the young woman who became a nun and joined an abbey where there was a vow of silence. (No, no, not *that* sort of joke!) The nuns were allowed to speak just once every ten years and even then only two words. On the first occasion, the nun in question stood before the Abbess and said, "Bed hard!" The Abbess merely inclined her head and the nun returned to her austere life. After another ten years had passed the nun looked pleadingly at the Abbess and said, "Food bad!" Again the Abbess nodded but said nothing and another ten years passed. The third time, the nun steeled herself and said, "I'm off!" and the Abbess replied, "Thank Heavens for that! You've done nothing but complain from the moment you got here."

MONEY MATTERS

The annual subscription of £10 per head runs annually from January so 2007 subs are now due plus any arrears.

John Forfar has now handed over responsibility to Sandra Tebbutt and her daughter Gemma Davison who will act as Joint Treasurers.

Please send your cheques made payable to '47 RM Commando Association' to:

Mrs G Davison
91 Catherine Street
Rochester
Kent ME1 2HL

NORMANDY 2007

It is hoped to have a trip to Normandy this June with the usual pick-up in Portsmouth early on 5th June. Please let Secretary, Betty Field know just as soon as possible if you wish to go because she will need to book the coach very shortly and if there are not enough people to make it viable, the trip will not be able to go ahead.

To book now, please send a deposit of £25 per head to:

Mrs E A Field
 12 Alfred Road
 Stubbington
 Fareham
 Hants PO14 2QY

Some people may plan to travel independently. Again, it would be useful to let Betty know as she will probably receive an itinerary for 7th June from the Mairie at Port-en-Bessin and will be able to keep you informed about any other planned events.

LATE NEWS

Unfortunately, member Pat Plumb, who served in B Troop, had a stroke before Christmas and ended up in hospital. The good news is that he is having physiotherapy and making progress and may be able to return home in the next week or two. Best wishes, Pat, for a good recovery from all the members and many thanks to Millie Lanyon, widow of Fred Lanyon (also B Troop), for keeping us informed.

47 RMC WEBSITE

Marc de Bolster still lavishes time, effort and money on our website. If you have material to go online it can be sent via email to m.de.bolster@xs4all.nl or if you have any problem with that address try Webmaster@47Commando.org.uk Otherwise material may be sent by post to: - Marc de Bolster, Elzendreef 29, 2272 CG, Voorburg, Netherlands. Photos etc would appear in the secure section, available only to Association members via their passwords.

Thanks to Marc for his continuing efforts on the Association's behalf.
 The web address is:

www.47Commando.org.uk

Editor's note: Although Chuck Harris has suggested my task is onerous, it is not really so. I've always taken pleasure in writing and though it's not unknown for me to waffle on about the time involved, the truth is, I enjoy editing the Despatch on behalf of members. Please keep those contributions (written not monetary) rolling in.

Happy New Year!

Next issue: June 2007