

47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

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Despatches Special 'Return to the Oil Port' Edition

'You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you. In company with our brave Allies and brothers-in-arms on other Fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world'.

The inspiring words of General Eisenhower's eve of D-Day speech to the soldiers, sailors and airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force are familiar to anyone with even the most passing interest in the epic actions that took place in Normandy on the 6th June 1944 and the days that followed. Like most members of the military the events surrounding D-Day and the eventual beginning of the end of Hitler's seemingly unstoppable ambitions have been of enduring interest to me. I had promised myself that I would make a pilgrimage to Normandy 'at some point' in order to pay my respects to the men and women of the Allied Expeditionary Force (AEF) who purchased the peace I enjoy today with blood, sweat, tears and for all too many of them, their lives. However, amidst the rush and hurry of a busy life my ambitions seemed destined to be thwarted until in 2004 I was drafted as Chaplain to the Commando Training Centre Royal Marines.

The current Young Officer Batch was due to embark upon a battlefield tour of Normandy taking in a place called Port-en-Bessin in the company of a 47 Royal Marine Commando veteran Professor John Forfar. To my shame I have to admit that although I had been a Royal Marine for twelve years I had heard of neither. Although not willing to confirm the national stereotype as a good Scot I jumped at the chance of a free trip to France and the opportunity to fulfil a long held ambition. Little did I know then how much that battlefield

tour was to prove to be a turning point for me and others and lead to a series of events that have captured my attention ever since.

To return briefly to Eisenhower's words for a moment though. The General spoke of events that literally thousands had striven towards for many months and yet, at some point at the very beginning of the planning phase someone somewhere put a single pen to a single sheet of paper. I have to confess that the beginnings of the vision of 'Return to the Oil Port' are slightly less epic. In fact I wonder how many great achievements began life in a bar? A micro-brewery bar in Caen in September 2006 to be exact where after a busy day battlefield touring in and around Port-en-Bessin myself and others members of the project team retired to reflect over the days events. Over not a few beers a vision was born for a re-visit that would see us follow as accurately as possible in 47 Royal Marine Commando's footsteps. As we left the bar our heads spun but it wasn't all down to the effects of our over indulgence.

Amazingly, the next morning not only could we still all recollect the details of our conversations the night before but were equally determined to bring the vision into reality.

Many planning meetings on we have come to a point where the return to Port-en-Bessin is fast becoming a reality. The project is now taking shape along these lines:

- A group of around 20-30 serving Royal Marines from the Commando Training Centre and 1 Assault Group will arrive by ferry at Cherbourg.
- At Cherbourg the group will then immediately transfer into at least two Landing Craft Utility (LCU) that will transit along the coast to the landing beach near Asnelles/Les Roquettes.
- On arrival at the beach the group disembark and will (and this is where we need your support, hopefully) be met by 47 RM Cdo veterans. Major Mark Bentinck will then give an overview of the events leading up to 47's arrival on Gold Beach on 6th June 1944.
- After refreshments, the group will then begin the first part of the journey towards Mont Cavalier where, en route they will again stop at various points of interest along the way (Le Rossiere, etc) and again meet with veterans.
- Upon reaching Mont Cavalier the group will enjoy some food and drink before spending a night under canvas.
- On the morning of 7th June the group will move off Mont Cavalier on the final leg towards Port-en-Bessin where under escort they will march through the town and onto the Eastern Feature. Looking towards the Western Feature Mark Bentinck will then tell the story of how 47 RM Cdo completed its aim and captured Port-en-Bessin.

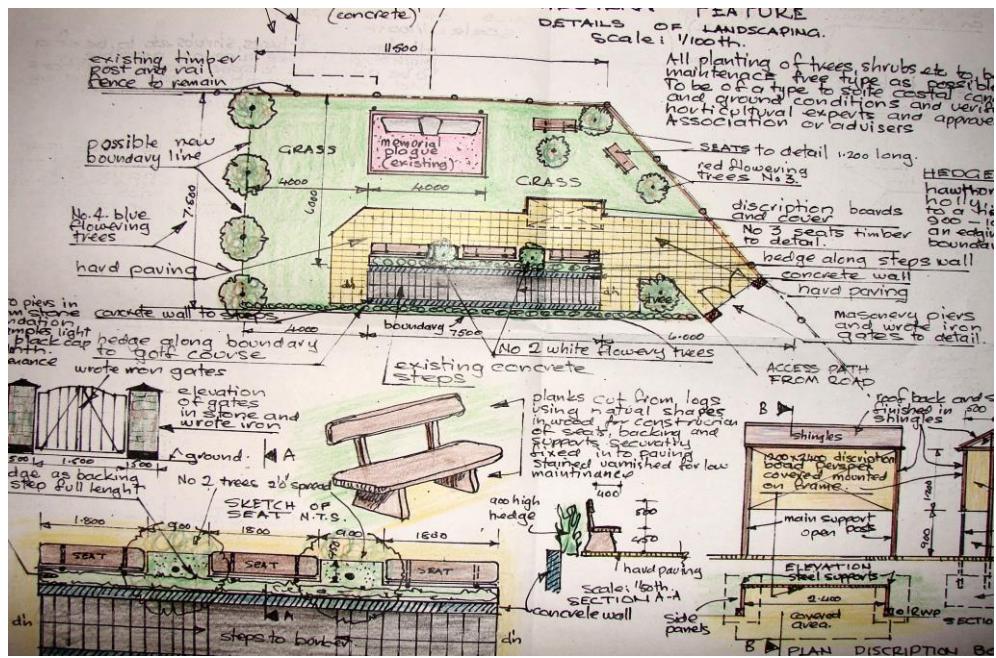
- The final phase will be a Service of Thanksgiving and Remembrance led by Rev Dave Devenney RN on the Western Feature followed by a short dedication service to formally open the 47 RM Cdo Memorial Garden.



Dave Devenney (left) and Bob Perry briefing John Forfar about the project.

Brigadier Andy Salmon RM (Comdt CTCRM) will be in attendance and will commission the Memorial Garden. Capt Phil Stonor RN, our Naval Attaché in Paris will also attend as will Colonel Steve Hartnell RM (CO 1AGRM) and Lieutenant Colonel Phil Sampson RM (CO CTCRM).

I mentioned above the 47 Royal Marine Commando Memorial Garden. On an exercise in Scotland last year I took the opportunity to visit Professor Forfar and outline in broad brush the scope of our aspirations. He was, I think its fair to say, delighted that a new generation of Royal Marines were about to pick up the baton and run with it. During that meeting he mentioned another aspiration namely that of building a memorial garden around the existing site of the memorial upon the Western Feature. He gave me Mr Malcolm Ross's telephone number and encouraged me to call. I explained our plans to Malcolm and was hugely encouraged to learn that he had already drawn up blueprints for a garden. I was further encouraged when he generously insisted that I take a substantial sum across on our forthcoming recce as 'pump-priming' money to encourage the local French authorities to start the project. So, the planning team, along with a fluent French-speaking Royal Marines Major and two experienced Landing Craft Senior NCO's repaired to France. The visit exceeded all of our expectations and it appears that money talks whatever the local language may be. We left with a firm commitment to have the memorial garden in place in good time for the planned events of



The Plan for the proposed Memorial Garden

6/7th June 2007 and having walked the 47 Cdo route on an unforgettably bright and cold January day.

We believe that this project will possibly be the biggest event happening in Normandy this June. We also believe that although we are deliberately aiming high in our aspirations we have the appropriate team, and levels of determination and capability to bring it into reality. Along the way there are many obstacles to overcome, not least in securing planning permission for the memorial garden and have to recognise the possibility that the garden may not be fully complete by 6th/7th June. However, we will endeavour to ensure that come what may both the march and the memorial service on the Western Feature will be a fitting and lasting tribute to the achievements of 47 Royal Marine Commando in those critical first few days of the invasion.

What we desire, perhaps more than anything else is your blessing. From its inception until the day comes in June when we all stand on that high feature overlooking the port this project has been a labour of love for everyone involved. We, a younger generation of Royal Marines, offer our endeavours to the men of 47 Royal Marine Commando as our way of saying 'thank you' to our forefathers in the Commando family whose courage, determination and achievements at Port en Bessin represented in every respect the finest virtues of the Corps and has been a stirring example to every one of us who have been privileged enough to share their story.

Rev Dave Devenney RN
February 2007



Briefing the Mayor of Port-en-Bessin, Lucien Sachet. Pictured with Mark Bentinck (left) and Bob Perry is Dominique Lohier, Maritime Chief of Port-en-Bessin, and Michele Blondy, Secrétaire-Général.

The 'Return to the Oil Port' Project Team

Major V M Bentinck RM (Rtd)

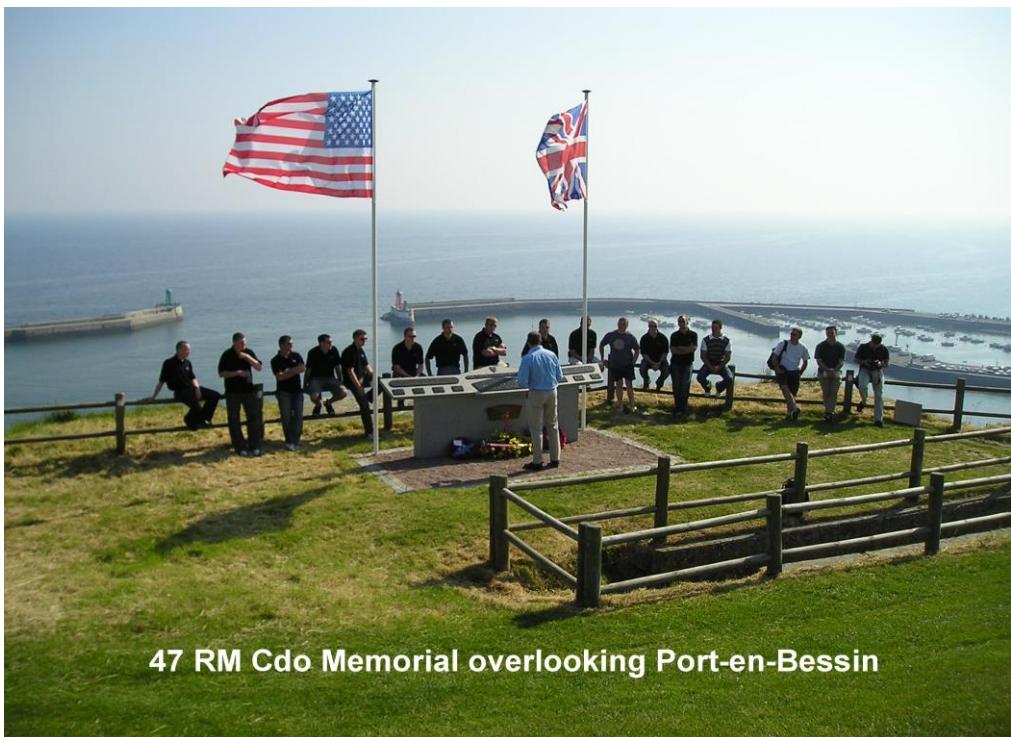
Major Mark Bentinck joined the Royal Marines as a 2Lt in 1963, and saw active service in 45 Commando in Aden in 1965 - 66. Four further Commando Unit postings followed, based in UK, Singapore and Malta, with an operational tour in Northern Ireland, and a 6 months attachment to the Imperial Ethiopian Marines. He qualified as a military parachutist, Forward Air Controller, and Arctic Warfare Instructor. As a Jungle Warfare specialist he instructed in the Army Jungle Warfare School in Brunei 1976 - 1979, returning to a spell in Officer Training at Lympstone, followed by the RN Staff Course at Greenwich, and a posting to MOD. He retired in 1985 with the rank of Major, and in 1992 became the Royal Marines Historian, as a Civil Servant.

Major R W Perry RM

Bob Perry joined the Royal Marines in 1976 as a Junior Marine. He achieved the rank of Sergeant prior to being commissioned as an Acting Lieutenant in 1992 and was promoted to Major in 2000. Throughout his career he has served in a variety of operational commando units and at training establishments. His current appointment is as Adjutant and Group Logistics Officer of 1 Assault Group Royal Marines, based in Dorset. He is a member of the Royal Marines Association Poole & District Branch, 47 Royal Marine Commando Association and the Royal Marines Historical Society.

Rev D J Devenney BD RN

Dave left Strathclyde Police, Glasgow and joined the Royal Marines in January 1980. On passing out in 1981 he joined 42 Cdo RM seeing active service with the unit during the Falklands War. Answering a call to ordained ministry he left the Corps in 1991 with the rank of Sergeant to take a place at St Andrews University in Scotland. With his academics behind him he spent eighteen months as an assistant Minister before becoming Minister of his own church in Aberdeenshire for over six years. In 2003 his past caught up with him and he offered himself for chaplaincy within the Royal Navy. After being short-toured at CTCRM he was chaplain to the SBS for almost two years before returning to Lympstone. He is a member of 47 Royal Marine Commando Association and the Royal Marines Historical Society.



47 RM Cdo Memorial overlooking Port-en-Bessin

If you require any further information from the Project Team do not hesitate to contact Bob Perry on Tel No: (01202) 202280 or Mobile: 07867 861509

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