

# 47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

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# DESPATCH 16

## July 2007

## COMMENT

Seeing young Marines leap from their landing craft at Asnelles, wade ashore and advance up the beach towards us was quite a sight. Although one of the highlights of 6th June this year, plenty of other activities went on and an account of our trip appears later in this issue. For now, it seems worth mentioning the immediate rapport between the commandos of today, of all ranks, and those of over sixty years ago.

Many of the Marines who took part had no idea of 47 Commando's crucial role in 1944 until this project got under way. The once rather hush-hush actions of 47 are still not as widely known as they might be but a great deal better covered than before, mainly thanks to the persistence of John Forfar and Peter Winter.



### CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

As ever, I want to express my gratitude for the joint efforts of all members, especially those of our Honorary (and honourable) Secretary, Betty Field in making our visits to Walcheren and Normandy so successful. Sandra Tebbutt and her daughter, Gemma Davison, have taken over the Membership Account and have now collected almost all the subscriptions from our ninety members, a lot of laudable effort. Thank you, girls. The veterans, their wives, families and friends combined to make the Port-en-Bessin visit a great success. Doc Forfar's influence on the serving Corps presence at the Port, the organization by Major Bob Perry, the padre David Devenney, and Mark Bentinck, with all the events laid on by the Royals was second to none.

A special mention also for our patron, Malcolm Ross, and his architect friend, Clifford Kingstone, for the magnificence of the Memorial on the Western Feature at Port-en-Bessin and the new Memorial Garden. I could write pages about the people who combine to make our Association such a success: Lannah for her dedication in producing our newsletters, Peter Spear our Vice Chairman in 'guiding' a somewhat recalcitrant coach driver, Marc de Bolster for his photos and internet expertise.

My sincere thanks to all you members, may your shadows never grow less.

Bless you all,

Chuck

[C.J.Harris]

### HANG ONTO THAT BOOK

In their last newsletter, the Commando Veterans Association enclosed a "commando reading list" and invited additions. I duly wrote out details of *From Omaha to the Scheldt* and decided to check whether the paperback edition was still in print. Online at AmazonUK, I was surprised to find that the hardback edition, published 2000, was now a collector's item offered at anything from around £70 to £90. The 2003 paperback was going for around £16. Good value!

LB

### NORMANDY 2007

*[This account should appear in the next issue of The Globe & Laurel probably with one or two photos which Gemma and Nick Davison sent. Thanks to everyone who emailed photos. They were all good and much appreciated.]*

#### 47 RM Commando Association in Normandy, June 2007

##### RENDEZVOUS AT ASNELLES

The 63rd anniversary of D-Day differed from previous commemorations. A group of serving Royal Marines from the Commando Training Centre and 1 Assault Group undertook a similar landing to 47 Commando's original one at Asnelles, close to Arromanches. True, there were no beach hazards or enemy fire but, as in 1944 the weather was cold, the wind high, the sea rough so they had problems.

Veterans of 47 and their party assembled on the shore and the landing craft arrived spot on time. Maybe not Venus rising from the waves but a lovely sight as the Marines, all smiles, waded ashore to applause and to shake hands with veterans who had done it first time round.

A ceremony with wreath laying held at the 47 Cdo historical marker beside the beach was followed by 'Up Spirits', a welcome respite for the cold and wet. Some veterans, and possibly others, had the same attitude to rum as Oliver Twist had to gruel and it certainly didn't appear to be on ration.

Major Mark Bentinck, the Corps Historian then gave a very succinct account of the

background to the landings and 47's essential role in capturing Port-en-Bessin for the oil pipeline (PLUTO) in 1944. Professor John Forfar, 47's former MO, added to his account and Fred Wildman and Arthur Thompson provided some anecdotes about the hazards they faced getting ashore.



The Marines departed inland on foot, taking the route which 47 had followed to take the Port. Meanwhile, the veterans had been invited to the family home of the de Bourgoing family at Tracy-sur-Mer, a lovely old *manoir* with an impressive frontage and extensive grounds. Baron Philippe de Bourgoing who died recently had always been a great supporter of 47 and now his widow and his son, Francois, had insisted on welcoming us. Everyone was made at home and offered calvados, the local cidre or tea to drink.

Later, we rejoined the Marines on their route at Abbaye Sainte-Marie where they were taking a break from their efforts. The owner, Dr Georges d'Anglejan-Chatillon, made us very welcome as he has on previous occasions. The weather meant that the wonderfully diverse buffet produced by the Royal Marine Chefs was served inside the former abbey refectory with a fire burning in the huge grate and the chance to appreciate the high rafters and ancient walls still showing traces of colourful decoration from medieval times.

Afterwards, the Marines shouldered their packs to continue to Hill 72, known to the French as Mont Cavalier. By the time the veterans rejoined them in the evening, they had established their camp and the Chefs had prepared a great barbecue for Marines, veterans and local people. The local ladies' choir sang popular songs in French and English and were joined by some of our own keen singers. Though the weather remained cool, everyone enjoyed themselves with the opportunity for our veterans to talk with the Commandos of today and plenty of rapport. Once a marine... At dusk a

huge bonfire, giving off a tremendous heat, helped to dry damp socks and boots as well as the company at large.

Next morning the Marines marched down to the town stopping at Escures for a brief service and continuing to the Eastern Feature, one of the two headlands captured by 47 in 1944 at some cost.

Later, everyone gathered at the memorial at the Western Feature for a Service of Remembrance conducted by the Rev David Devenney RN and the Dedication of the new Memorial Garden. Like the monument, this has been funded by our generous benefactor Malcolm Ross. During the service the names on both the civilian and the military Roll of Honour were read out. Lt Col Phil Sampson, CO, CTCRM and Major Bob Perry, 1 Assault Group RM read the lessons. Captain Phil Stonor RN, Naval Attache, British Embassy, Paris, who had done so much in obtaining official sanction for the whole event, spoke the Act of Commitment and the Formal Opening was undertaken by Brigadier Andy Salmon OBE, Commandant, CTCRM. The path to the monument has been named in honour of Peter Winter, the late Chairman of the Association, and this was inaugurated by Lucien Sachet, the Mayor of Port-en-Bessin, together with Carol Winter, Peter's younger daughter.



After some respite at the 'Commando Bar' on the quay, veterans and Marines lined up together at the memorial plaque on the harbour for a brief wreath-laying.

At the Mayor's champagne reception, held in the Salles des Fêtes close by, Brigadier Salmon stressed that the Commando spirit which inspired 47 was still an essential ingredient within the Corps and visits to Port-en-Bessin would become a regular part

of commando instruction.

The veterans had a further day in Normandy, visiting among other places, Bayeux cemetery where so many old comrades lie.

Our rendezvous at Asnelles with the new generation of Commandos and the following events made for an unforgettable trip. Our thanks to our French friends who are always so hospitable and to Major Bob Perry and his group for looking after us so well and, of course, to CSgt Sharky Ward and his team for producing a wonderful array of food in some diverse locations. Not only armies but also veterans march on their stomachs!

LB



#### AS YOU WERE

The Exhibition “Commando Country” at Edinburgh Castle actually runs until February 2008 not as mentioned in *Despatch 14*. To see it you have to pay entry to the Castle and, of course, will have access to all the other areas open to the public. Well worth a visit if in the vicinity.

#### LT COL W P DRURY RMLI

Major Mark Bentinck RM, who is The Royal Marines Historian at the Naval Historical Branch and also a member of our Association, very kindly sent me information about Lt Col W P Drury whose poem appeared in *Despatch 14*. He was a well-known writer of naval and Royal Marine stories and also a playwright in the early part of the 20th century. Searching online for some titles, it became apparent that at one time his work was very popular and judging by the titles rather swashbuckling. Many stories were adapted for the London stage and he had at least one play produced in New York. One particular ripping yarn, *Adventures of a Flag Lieutenant* was also filmed in 1926 with its sequel, *Further Adventures of a Flag Lieutenant* appearing in 1927. Isabel Jeans played the hero's love interest in both. Never heard of her? Before your time? Well, her first stage appearance was in 1909! But she appeared in such films as *Gigi* (1958), in at least one Hitchcock film and with

Peter Sellers in *Heavens Above* (1963). She made her farewell stage appearance in 1971 aged 80. Not a bad run.

The strangest discovery about W P Drury was that, as Intelligence Officer at Plymouth Garrison, Devonport in June 1915 he investigated and reported to the Admiralty on several appearances in the area of an Unidentified Flying Object, a bright light rising and moving in the sky. He was among many other reliable witnesses who saw it but the cause was never discovered and no little green men ever appeared.

#### IN MEMORIAM

We have learned of the death of the following veteran and offer sincere condolences to his family and friends:

William (Bill) MacLennan, 27th March 2007, Glasgow. He will be well remembered by many members from our various trips when he was still able to join them, often accompanied by his pal, the late Gurnos Jones. They first met as young RM recruits. Bill's service with 47 included 'Operation Horse', the tough and almost impossible battle for the island of Kapelsche Veer in the River Maas where so many were killed or wounded.

#### THOSE WERE THE DAYS

##### *PLACID*

'...in the placid naval world of the 1870s, the Navy looked forward to war in much the same way that the Church of England looked forward to the Second Coming; it was the theoretical goal of all its activities, but it scarcely affected its practical life at all...'

*N.A.M.Rodger 'The Dark Ages of the Admiralty, 1869-1885:Part II Change and Decay 1874-1880'*  
Mariner's Mirror, Vol.62, 1976

#### *FLOGGING MEN, BOYS AND A DEAD HORSE*

From *The Times*, Friday August 4 1905:

Mr. Mac Neill (Donegal S.) asked the Secretary to the Admiralty whether the Admiralty authorities were aware that there was no corporal punishment of men or boys in the French navy; and whether, during the time the French ships of war were in British waters, the caning and flogging of boys on board the King's ships would be discontinued.

Mr. Pretyman (Suffolk, Woodbridge). – I have nothing to add to previous answers I have already given on this subject.

Mr. Mac Neill. – I must repeat the question, because I never asked this question before. (Loud laughter)

Mr. Pretyman. – I must repeat my answer because I have been asked it before.

Mr. Mac Neill asked for an answer, yes or no, to the last part of the question.

Mr. Pretyman said it was obvious that the same regulations would continue in force.

Mr. Mac Neill. – Then the flogging will go merrily on. (Laughter.)

*THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS BAD BEER*

Sept. 1785

'Arrived at St. John's, and remained the usual time. We had a brewery on shore which supplied the squadron with spruce beer. I was on shore at this brewery when one of our men unfortunately fell into the boiling coppers and died the same day in a deplorable condition. It was said that the beer was sent off (of course by mistake) to the squadron, and I think some little demur was made about drinking it and it was sent back.'

From: Recollections of James Anthony Gardner (London:NRS, 1906)

*Many thanks to Mark Bentinck for sending me these and other items which you will, no doubt, have the opportunity of seeing in future issues.*

**KAPELSCHE VEER**

The commemoration at Kapelsche Veer was held on 31st January 2007. Association member, Ed Thoden van Velzen attended with a group of other Dutch Commandos and laid the first wreath on behalf of 47 Cdo. There is now an information board erected at the site telling the story of the bloody battle which took place there in 1945. About 75 children from 4 different local schools attended and wreaths were also laid at the grave of Lt Adams at the civilian cemetery at Sprang-Capelle.

About 250 people attended in total despite the weather being extremely cold, which is apparently the norm on this anniversary.

Thanks to Eddy for keeping us informed.

**MONEY MATTERS**

The annual subscription of £10 per head runs annually from January. Those who are lagging behind with payments, please send your cheques made payable to '47 RM Commando Association' to Gemma Davison:

Mrs G Davison  
91 Catherine Street  
Rochester  
Kent ME1 2HL

Of course, she will also be delighted to receive subs for 2008 as well.

**WALCHEREN 2007 and NORMANDY 2008**

It is hoped to have a trip to Walcheren again this year. Please let Secretary, Betty Field, know **as soon as possible** if you wish to go because she will need to book the hotel and coach very shortly. Also include your deposit of £25 per head made payable to '47 RM Commando Association'. It's always a good trip and, the last I heard, a new memorial to 41 Cdo at Domburg is being inaugurated and a Royal Marines Band will be attending.

If you already know that you will be going to Normandy next year, it would also be very useful to have that information before the next issue in January. Like many French hotels, the King is closed during January and cannot be contacted. But of course, you will still be able to book early next year if necessary.

Please send cheques and information to:

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

#### 47 RMC WEBSITE

If you have material to go online it can be sent via email to [m.de.bolster@xs4all.nl](mailto:m.de.bolster@xs4all.nl) or if you have any problem with that address try [Webmaster@47Commando.org.uk](mailto: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 continuing to lavish time, effort and euros on the Association's behalf.

The web address is:

[www.47Commando.org.uk](http://www.47Commando.org.uk)



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