

47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

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DESPATCH 18 July 2008

COMMENT

An account of another successful trip to Normandy for the Association appears below. Something very noticeable this year was the continuing interest in the events of 1944 from people of differing ages and nationalities. A Danish photographer with wife and friends seemed willing to go to great lengths to get shots of Royal Marines Commando veterans. On several occasions I 'lost' my husband, Ted "Ben" Battley, only to find that he was at the centre of a scrum of young Poles, a group of Italian tourists and various others. His autograph and comments on what actually happened were much in demand and I'm sure it was the same for our other veterans.

It seems right that such important events of the past be made clear by those who were actually there playing their part. As a subject, history is not always greatly valued but, in fact, it's an opportunity to learn from the past and help towards planning a better future. So the human race rarely takes those lessons on board but there's at least the chance! Lannah

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The weather in Port-en-Bessin this year: just right, ideal for parades and other duties. Our coach driver, 'Dutch' Holland, proved to be absolutely A1, just what you'd expect from an ex-Navy man. We were also ably supported by Major Bob Perry and the contingent of serving RM Commandos. I feel sure our excellent Editor will enlarge upon this.

At the Graspan Parade in London earlier this year, 47 Commando had a good representation with Pat and Christine Hagan and myself and son, John Stuart, there. I'm sure I must also have seen Ken Parker. I usually bump into him at every Royal Marines parade or function; a great advocate for 47 Commando.

On 18th May, JS and I attended 48 Commando's Memorial Parade at Gravesend as we do every year.

Our good wishes to Peter Spear, John Tarbin and, of course, the Doc for a speedy recovery from their ills.

Bless you all and thanks for your loyal support. Especial thanks to Betty for her dedication as Secretary and for organising our 'excursions', to Lannah for editing our newsletters and to Mickie O'Brien our Senior Officer who, after a very traumatic year, turned out for Normandy, ably assisted by Samantha.

Hope to see you in Walcheren in November.

Sincerely,

Chuck Harris

NORMANDY 2008

(This account and photo should be in the next issue, July/August, of The Globe & Laurel)

47 RM Commando Association in Normandy, June 2008

A good number of our veterans, considering the passing years, arrived in Port-en-Bessin to commemorate the 64th anniversary of the D-Day landings along with other Association members, family and friends.

On the 6th June we attended a Service of Remembrance in the beautiful Cathedral of Bayeux. Sir Peter Westmacott, HM Ambassador to France read the lesson and also laid the wreath. Captain Philip Stonor RN, Deputy Defence Attaché at the British Embassy, who gave 47 Cdo so much support last year, spoke the Exhortation and the Parachute Regiment Band provided excellent music. The service was followed by *vin d'honneur* at the Hotel de Ville.

After lunch, we continued to the British Military Cemetery in Bayeux, where so many of 47's men lie, to lay a wreath.



Veterans, Marines and Naval Attaché, Port-en-Bessin, 2008

Our afternoon ended at Arromanches, naturally busy on the 6th June, and where we often heard the familiar, 'Hello, Royal!'. On one occasion this proved to be a group of RM commandos from the Naval Personnel Team (RM) based in Portsmouth completing a charity bike ride. The good news, we were able to direct them to the bar round the corner where some of our group were gathered; the bad news, it meant some delay to their trip and they definitely weren't going to break any time records. Their ride ended in Port-en-Bessin where they would be under canvas and take part in the following day's commemorations of the port's liberation. We were also joined by Major Bob Perry RM and colleagues who always provide encouraging support.

The first ceremony took place at the Western feature, a headland hard fought for in 1944. With both the union flag and the tricolour flying above the monument and remembrance gardens, wreaths were laid by the mayors of both Port-en-Bessin and Huppain together with Captain Phil Stonor. Ernie Staphnill laid the wreath on behalf of 47 Commando. Three further ceremonies took place, one at the monument at Huppain, another outside the church

and finally at the plaque beside the harbour. After this we were invited to a reception in the Community Hall where the new Mayor of Port-en-Bessin, M Pierre-Albert Cavey welcomed everyone and thanked the veterans for their succour sixty-four years ago. His wife translated his words very ably into English. Captain Stonor responded on behalf of us all in both English and fluent French.

In the afternoon we visited the American Cemetery at Omaha Beach, the vista of headstones receding in all directions always a sad but stunning sight.

Following that, we travelled to Tracy-sur-Mer where we were once again welcomed to the family home of the de Bourgoing family. Francois, son of the late Baron Philippe de Bourgoing, was just as generous as last year with the wine, Calvados and other beverages and we were able to wander in the lovely grounds and admire the impressive building. Life can be very hard as a bootneck. Having drunk the supplies dry, our marines had just manoevred Francois into bringing more wine from the cellar when, unfortunately, it was time to leave. Our final day provided the opportunity to visit various places on the coast including the battery at Longues-sur-Mer and, further afield, the Merville Battery which had dominated Sword Beach in 1944 until its capture.

Following a pleasant Sunday, disaster! The Brasserie by the quay in Port-en-Bessin, known to many as the Commando Bar, closed at six thirty. Our group had kept them so busy providing food and drink that the proprietress had managed only two hours sleep in several days and they had run out of Heineken. Enough said. Fortunately another bar around the corner provided the chance for a last drink with friends and comrades and to bid everyone farewell until next time.

As usual, there are many people to thank for our successful trip but, in particular, our friends in France who always welcome us so generously and our Secretary, Betty Field, who works so hard and efficiently to organise what are never straightforward arrangements. LB

KAPELSCHE VEER

The heavy fighting and loss of life was once again remembered at Kapelsche Veer in January. Ed Thoden van Velzen attended the ceremony on behalf of 47 RM Cdo together with other former Dutch Commandos, civic dignitaries and local schoolchildren.

The information board at the site is being changed because of several errors which managed to creep into the original. Among these, is the debatable spelling of Kapelsche (Capelsche) Veer (I have trouble myself!). Ed sent me a local newspaper article which Marc de Bolster kindly translated. The military historian who discovered the errors cites one major one where, “The elite unit, 47 Royal Marine Commando, is being described as ‘the 47th Battalion Royal Marines’; in military terms equal to cursing in church.”

The new board will cost around 3000 euros but was expected to be in place by early May when the Dutch commemorate Liberation Day.

IN MEMORIAM

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

Norman William Viner, Birmingham, 24th December 2007

Norman Viner served with 47, losing a leg during the landing in Normandy. Despite this, he 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 was also for many years a Welfare Officer with BLESMA (British Limbless ex-Service Men’s Association) receiving the award of Birmingham’s Citizen of the Year on one occasion in recognition of his outstanding work.

DONATION

The Dutch collector who was in touch with Marc de Bolster re a battledress jacket which may or may not have belonged to a 47 Commando which we publicised in #17 got in touch to say

that he would like to make a donation to the Association. His offer was taken up and we thank him for his thoughtful generosity.

47 RM CDO GRAVES VISITED AND PHOTOGRAPHED

As briefly mentioned in the previous edition of *Despatch*, Major Bob Perry RM has recently completed his project to personally visit all of the 114 graves, or memorials to those who have no known grave, of those men who were killed whilst serving with 47 RM Cdo. The whole project took about 7 months to complete and caused Bob to visit 16 cemeteries and memorials located in the UK, France, Belgium, Holland and Germany. He also photographed each individual headstone

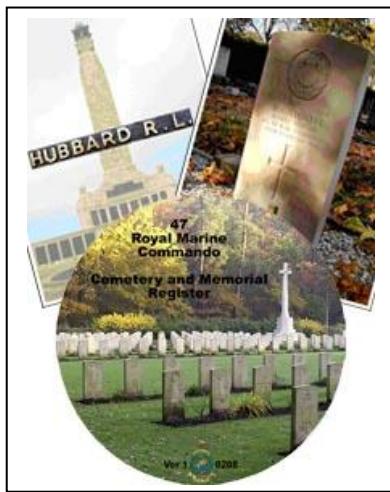
or respective panel on each of the Naval Memorials at Chatham, Portsmouth and Plymouth. The two main purposes of the project were to help perpetuate the memory of those who lost their lives and to provide a photographic record for the surviving generations of relatives.

At cemeteries where either a single or several 47 RM Cdo graves were located a poppy cross was laid at the base of each headstone. At the larger cemeteries at Bayeux, Ranville and Bergen-Op-Zoom a wreath was laid at the Cross of Sacrifice. The project revealed the following information:

- There is an incorrect service number inscribed on the headstone of LCpl Buchanan (Bergen-Op-Zoom Cemetery). This has been reported to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC).
- An incorrect unit (45 RM Cdo) is inscribed on the headstone belonging to Mne W N Davies (Ranville Cemetery). His service documents clearly state that he belonged to 47 RM Cdo. This has been reported to the CWGC.

- The headstone of Mne Flannagan (Bergen-Op-Zoom Cemetery) is inscribed with the words 'Buried Near This Spot'. This means that there is a group of graves in the immediate area but there is uncertainty as to who is buried in which. A second initial (N) is inscribed on the headstone; there is no record of a second forename in his service documents.
- The grave of Mne Nuttall (Brugge Cemetery) has a 47 RM Cdo headstone but his name does not appear on the 47 RM Cdo Memorial in the Garden of Remembrance at the Royal Marines Museum. Research has revealed he was a RM Engineer Cdo whose parent unit was HQ 4 SS Bde. He was temporarily attached to 47 RM Cdo from 21 Sep 44. His headstone makes no reference to his parent unit; the Corps Historian, Maj Mark Bentinck RM, is content that the existing 47 RM Cdo headstone should remain.
- The headstone belonging to Cpl Robertson (Portland Royal Naval Cemetery) is badly chipped at the edges. This has been reported to the CWGC.
- Mne J Smith (Portsmouth Naval Memorial) was killed on land (in France) but has no known grave.
- The grave of Maj Tyndale-Biscoe RM (Dalmahoy Churchyard) is the only one that does not have a CWGC pattern headstone. He was killed as a result of a Road Traffic Accident in the UK on 21 Jan 44. If a serviceman died in his own country the next of kin had the choice of having the deceased buried in either a CWGC plot or in a family plot. If they decided on a site other than a Commission plot, the next of kin retained ownership of the site and could decide on the type of marker.
- The headstone of Maj Walton MC RM (Fecamp Cemetery) is seriously weathered. This has been reported to the CWGC.

All of the photographic images have been displayed on A4 paper along with details of the individual, any epitaph that appears on the headstone, and details of the cemetery in which the grave is located.



Professor John Forfar kindly agreed to write the introduction to the compendium. Only a very limited number of printed copies of the work were produced and these have been presented to surviving veterans, with additional copies lodged with the RM Historical Society and at the RM Museum. However, Marc de Bolster has kindly published the work in the members section of the 47 RM Cdo website and, in addition, the whole project has now been transferred to CD-ROM and copies of the disc may be obtained (free of charge) by writing to:

Major Bob Perry RM, Naval Personnel Team RM, Fleet Headquarters, MP 1-1, West Battery, Whale Island, PORTSMOUTH, PO2 8DX.

Alternatively, by e-mail: bob.perry974@mod.uk

IN THE PRESS

The Globe & Laurel March-April 2008 issue has an interesting article about the Polderhuis Museum in Westkapelle. It mentions the new Landing Craft in the gardens, presented by the Royal Netherlands Navy, the project initiated by Lt Colonel Bob MacDonald MBE RM who many of us met in Holland last year. Although a Dutch LC and smaller and more modern than the originals, the camouflage scheme represents that used on LTC 737, nicknamed 'Bramble' which took part in the assault at Westkapelle in November 1944. The craft is intended as a permanent tribute to all Allied personnel who took part in amphibious operations to dislodge Germany from the Netherlands in 1944.

Those who have been there will know that the Museum also has fascinating material on the way of life and history of Westkapelle including the laborious task of building and maintaining the earliest seawalls.

The Globe & Laurel May-June 2008 records the promotion of Brigadier Andy Salmon OBE to Major General and his appointment as Commander UK Amphibious Forces. Many members will remember him undertaking the formal opening of the memorial gardens on the Western Feature last year as the then Brigadier Andy Salmon, Commandant, CTCRM.

REVIEW

Howard Reid: **Dad's War**, Bantam Books, paperback 2004, £6.99 (*Still in print & available*) Howard Reid's book traces the travails and often exciting adventures of his father, Ian Reid, after his capture, while serving as an officer of the Black Watch, in North Africa in April 1943. Soon after becoming a prisoner in an Italian POW camp, Italy pulled out of the war. As a 'serial escaper', Reid found the majority of Italians helpful and sympathetic, hiding escapers and feeding them despite having little and putting themselves at risk. The son's exploration of his father's various routes is almost a detective story in its own right. Much has since changed in rural Italy but he was still able to find people in the farms and villages who remembered his father. His investigation is interspersed with his father's own journals and gives an insight and adult understanding of what, as a child, were exciting tales. The trauma of having a close comrade killed and the fear of recapture come across clearly, as well as the joy and relief at being accepted by Italian families to share their food, wine and pleasurable company. At the end of his pilgrimage, Howard Reid understands much more about his father's war and the admiration of his childhood is still retained for a decent and courageous man. Recommended.

DVDs

The 'Return to the Oil Port' Port-en-Bessin Project DVD

"If it's worth doing, its worth doing well!" How true. During and after our momentous and memorable visit to Port-en-Bessin last year, from serving and veteran Royal Marines, family and friends alike there was an eagerness to capture the entire record of our journey together on film. From the outset the Royal Marines project planning team recognised this and so "

took two video cameramen with us when we returned to Normandy. Literally hours of footage were captured and on return to the UK the video production team set about examining what they had and began to cut it into shape.

Our problem was that operational demands took priority however the team at Lympstone slowly soldiered on and eventually arrived at a rough cut. I viewed the rough footage and was impressed. Matt, one of the team mentioned that he had approached the Imperial War Museum to enquire if they had any WW2 footage of the Port and of 47 RM Cdo. Fortunately they had both, but it would cost us £150. I asked Malcolm Ross if he could help us and he gladly agreed and the wartime footage was released to us. Over the months and with patient evening and weekend work the video team came to the point where the only thing that was needed was a voice-over. I recorded this in their studio on camp and finally, almost one year on, we were good to go. It's taken a while, but I hope when you see it you'll agree that it was worth the wait.

Veterans will receive a free copy of the DVD in due course and by post. For anyone else wishing to purchase it, the cost will be £5.00 plus £1.50 p&p. It is hoped that this figure will cover production costs and any monies left will be donated to the 'Help for Heroes' charity that seeks to offer support to injured servicemen today.

To order your copy please either: send an email to: davidjdevenney@freeuk.com with your payment and full postal address and contact details. Or write to:

Rev Dave Devenney RN
 Fleet Protection Group Royal Marines
 Gibraltar Building
 HMNB Clyde
 Faslane
 Helensburgh
 G84 8HL

ANOTHER PETITION

Member, Geof Haywood, who is also Chairman of Poole RMA sent me details of a further petition regarding the Ministry of Defence charging forces' charities to hold fund-raising events on military land. One example quoted was the Army Benevolent Fund being charged £7000 for holding a gala at Sandhurst while the likes of Dame Judi Dench gave up time with no charge.

The previous petition regarding Headley Court was successful but one suspects that the MOD won't give up income lightly so this might be a harder one to crack.

EMAIL ADDRESSES

Anyone with an email address who would like their Despatch sent electronically, please let me know. It saves on postal charges. Even if you prefer to receive a Proper Copy through the post, it's still useful to have an email address if you have one, for other information which may arise such as the petition as mentioned above. Email lannabatt@aol.com
 If you send details, please let me know your preference regarding the *Despatch*.

TRACING AND RECORDING THE PAST

D W R Matthews who took part in the Normandy landing passed away in Jan 2006 but his cousin, Mrs M H Arnould, would like to hear from anyone who served in 47 with him. Her request appeared in the Royal British Legion magazine *Legion* so it makes sense to give it some publicity here.

A recent Commando Veterans Association Newsletter listed those seeking information about former commandos. The list included a **George Brooker** of 47 Commando who served in Walcheren. As a Lt Brooker is indexed in John's book as wounded at Kapelsche Veer, I left a message on the website that we could publicise this in the *Despatch* as it seemed likely this was the right person. I have since heard from his daughter. She confirmed that it was her father who, she remembers, had a permanent scar on his back from his wounds. She also told me that following his wounding, he was promoted to Captain. If you have any memories of George Brooker, please get in touch via letter, phone or email (lannabatt@aol.com) and it will be passed on.

Alan Pymm the youngest son of **Cpl Arthur Pymm MM**, MOA to Captain John Forfar MC, has sent photos and cuttings about his father to Marc de Bolster which is now on the website. Relatives of Albert Potterton have also been in touch.

Alan Edwards, whose French wife comes from Langrune and helps in organising visits and translation for 48 RM Commando Association, telephoned asking for help in tracing the painting of John Forfar operating in the cellar of Maison Chevigny at Sallenelles. The new owners have improved the monument beside the road outside and are keen to increase their knowledge of the history of the house. Although Mr Edwards knew that the painting was held by the Imperial War Museum he had been unable to get any further. Thanks to *From Omaha to the Scheldt*, I was able to give him the name of the war artist, Leslie Cole, and the title. *Scene in a Regimental Aid Post in a filthy cellar at Sallenelles after Action* doesn't exactly trip off the tongue. However, it should help in pinning the painting down at the IWM.

MARC'S LETTER

Marc de Bolster handed out this letter to all the veterans present in Port-en-Bessin. As it applies equally to those who couldn't get to Normandy it seems worth publishing it here.

Hollow

Dear friends,

This letter is an ode to you.

Over sixty years ago, a dark age came over Europe and the rest of the world. A period of which in these days most people can hardly imagine what it must have been like. I, being born in Holland over twenty years after the war, can only imagine from what I read in books and from stories (yet to be told). You, as part of the generation that lived those days, know what it was like. Times were grim, the liberation was a time of joy. But still some veterans wonder why people welcome them year after year. Some still feel guilt or feel ashamed for the suffering of people in those days. Saying 'Thank you' may seem hollow words. But these words can never express the true feelings of the nations and the people that were liberated then.

In the early morning of 10 May 1940, my country which was considered neutral, was brutally and without any form of provocation attacked by our neighbouring country: Germany. Only five days later we were considered occupied, which we would remain for several long years. Holland was to come under the control of the feared SS, led by a man called 'Seyss-Inquart'. The head of police was a much hated man called 'Rauter'. Together they spread terror through the country.

Britain had been attacked throughout the war. That also brought fear to your country. People felt they were in danger and feared for their lives. Everyday life had changed, people changed. Draftees and volunteers, like yourself, made a difference.

In Holland, life had changed too. In the beginning there was fear, resentment, anger and hatred. This feeling changed during the war. Life became empty and hollow, meaningless. People were being arrested for no reason, executed in public to set an example not to resist.

Public places were being closed. No cinemas, theatres, swimming pools, or any other form of public entertainment. Not being allowed to move around freely, not allowed to go out on the streets after dark. No petrol for motorized vehicles, these had to be converted to drive on gas, wood, or coal. Rations became smaller, it became a matter of staying alive in a situation where you did not know who to trust. Public radio was controlled by the Germans.

Then there was hope. Hope you brought to the people, which started on 6 June 1944. Early September 1944 the Dutch borders were reached and town after town was liberated. At Arnhem the liberation came to a halt, at the cost of many young lives. We will remember them!

Late October winter came. In the western parts of Holland food got scarce, people started to feel hunger. There was almost no heating, no electricity and no food. Bomber Command started to prepare for the liberation of Walcheren by bombing the dykes and flooding the island. November you participated in their liberation, they were saved.

We do remember the destruction of Arnhem, the civilian casualties on Walcheren, and the accidental bombing at The Hague. Over twenty-thousand died of hunger and starvation from November 1944 to May 1945. But those numbers are nothing compared to the lives lost in the years before. Nothing compared to the number of lives you helped to save. Nothing to what you did for our parents and grandparents. Could you have done more? NO! You made the ultimate sacrifice by taking a risk and offering your lives to save many others you did not even know.

I consider myself to be lucky to be able to meet you, to shake you by the hand, to eat and drink with you.

When we welcome you and say 'Thank you', we do not know how to express our true feeling to you. We want to embrace and honour you, and feel humble in your presence. We will always remember you. You are the pride of the free world, you are heroes!

So with all my heart and soul I say:

THANK YOU!!!

GERMANY CALLING

1. Ernie Staphnill sat drinking a beer with a man in the bar in Port-en-Bessin whose father was a German who had served in the Caen area in 1944. As he left he asked if Ernie would accept a letter from his father who was now too ill to travel to France any longer. Ernie accepted. It is a circular letter to allied veterans showing the other side of the coin. In particular it mentions how at the time they considered themselves to be fighting for their country but afterwards felt that they had been betrayed by their leaders.

The letter will be on the website. Marc also found reference to the father on another website regarding handing out his letter in France during the 55th and 60th anniversary commemorations.

2. Arriving a day ahead of the group, we, that is my brother Fred, his wife Ingrid, Ted and I visited, among other places, the German Cemetery at La Cambe. None of us had visited one before and we found it very striking with its dark granite crosses and flat headstones set into the ground. While there we checked the register for the name of Ingrid's uncle in case it featured. Her father met her mother, also Ingrid, in Germany in 1945 while serving with the Royal Armoured Corps. They came to England and married in 1947. But the older Ingrid's young brother, only 16, had been recruited into the German army as part of Hitler's last fling and was killed in May 1945, a tragedy which hit so many families at that time. We were not too surprised not to find Klaus's name. He was probably still a schoolboy in June 1944 and it is more likely that he fell closer to Berlin.

We also saw photos and information on German military cemeteries around the world

relating to many conflicts from all periods.

As with British military cemeteries, it was well-kept and very peaceful. A touching and interesting experience.

LB

MONEY MATTERS

The annual subscription of £10 per head runs annually from January to December. If you haven't yet paid this year, Gemma will be pleased to receive your cheque made payable to '47 RM Commando Association'. Please send it to:

Mrs G Davison, 91 Catherine Street, Rochester, Kent ME1 2HL

WALCHEREN 2008

We hope to have a party for Walcheren again this year and need to know the numbers going very quickly. With the high price of hiring a coach – and with the cost of oil, it will probably be higher than ever this year – we need as many people as possible to help keep the shared costs down. Bring all your friends and relatives. It's always a good trip, with an excellent hotel and wonderful hospitality from our Dutch hosts. There is also the possibility of a trip to The Hague this year. Please let Secretary, Betty Field, know **as soon as possible** if you wish to go and include your deposit of £25 per head made payable to '47 RM Commando Association'. Please send cheques to:

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

47 RM CDO WEBSITE

At the moment it has been about three years since I started building and hosting the 47 Royal Marine Commando website, to preserve the history of this unique Commando. I very much enjoy my trips meeting the Association, and to document these events in photographic images for the website, so anyone can see what the commemorations are like.

It was only about six months ago that I finished working on the historic pages of the website. Next to my full-time job, it demanded a lot of time to get it all to the state it's in right now. This does not mean I came to a point where no more work has to be done on the website. It is under constant development to make it look as professional as possible, in order to become one of the leading historic websites on the internet. To do so, I not only have to learn 'how to' every day – apart from the course in website programming (PHP) I recently finished – but also depend on input from others.

I know several members and veterans do not have an internet connection or even own a computer, so not everyone knows what the website looks like and what it is about. In short, the website is divided in a public section - containing mainly the history of 47 RM Commando and a selection of photos of commemorations in Normandy, Walcheren and Scotland – and a secure 'members only' section – containing personal members pages, Despatches, Association information and the complete commemorations photo reports. Several veterans and association members have already sent in information, copies of documents and (wartime) photos, for which I am very grateful. In addition, John Forfar has been very helpful in providing names and background information on several wartime photos.

On the recent trip to Normandy, I brought a laptop with me to show bits of the website to some of the veterans who do not have a computer themselves. I noticed they enjoyed looking at the old photos very much, and how they tried to identify the men in them.

But to make the website even more interesting, I need more input. So I would like to call upon all association members, to see if they can add anything, especially individual wartime portrait photos in uniform. Have a good look at the website and see if there is anything missing, or if you can provide missing names with historic images. Make copies of documents and photos and send them to my home address, or digital scans to my e-mail address. It is also possible to send me the originals for me to scan or copy, which I will gladly

return safely to you! But please do not let anything get lost, which concerns 47 RM Commando and/or the association.

If you need more information or want to contact me, use the following:

By e-mail:

m.de.bolster@xs4all.nl

By regular mail:

Marc de Bolster
Elzendreef 29
2272 CG Voorburg
Netherlands

Out of 741 men in total that served in 47 RM Commando, I received copies/scans of photos and documents from five veterans so far. So if you have anything to share with veterans or other members, or simply want to preserve history, please contact me. For without history, there can be no future!

Marc
webmaster

You can access the website at: www.47Commando.org.uk



47 RMCdo Association, Tracy, 2008. Francois de Bourgoing front centre

Next issue: January 2009