

47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

Committee

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COMMENT

The 47 Commando website, thanks to Marc de Bolster, has been going for three to four years and has proved to be especially valuable in maintaining and reforging links. Marc has sent me some 'statistics' which appear towards the end of this issue and the response has been very impressive. In a way, it is a great pity that the website and the internet in general was not more generally available some years ago because, with the passing of time, for many people it has come too late. However that cannot detract from the great service the website provides, not only linking people but also keeping the achievements of 47 RM Commando in the public domain. Long may it continue.

Lannah

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

For those who could make it, the trip to Normandy earlier in the year was a great success. Betty Field, as usual, did us proud. Since then, the escalating cost of fuel meant, unfortunately, that the high price of coach hire made it impossible for our visit to Walcheren to go ahead, to the disappointment of those involved. I sent letters to other associations trying to drum up support but they all wanted to ascertain the cost. This was impossible to say exactly, except that the more people who attended, the cheaper the individual cost would be. Let us hope we can resolve this for 2009, the 65th anniversary for both Normandy and the Netherlands.

News received: Doc Forfar has had a pacemaker fitted which I believe has enabled him to get around more. The last time I phoned him, his dear lady told me he was out shopping. We all send our regards, Doc, and our best wishes. The last time I spoke to Peter Spear he was slowly improving and had gone back to work. Frank Makings keeps going but is more or less house bound and Ted Battley is waiting for a cataract operation. Good for you, Ted. Mine was a great improvement. We are all getting older, naturally. My telephone number is 01787 469876 if anyone should wish to contact me.

Thanks to Betty for her sterling efforts as Secretary and to Lannah regarding the *Despatch*.

With regards to all,

Chuck (C J Harris)

WALCHEREN 2008

Yet another good trip to Walcheren, arriving on Friday 31 October. Mariel and I entered the hotel Arneville in Middelburg, which felt strange knowing no other members of the association were to be there. I quickly got into my suit for the reception at City Hall, and

went down to the hotel bar for a quick drink. We were welcomed there by a young lady with the words: "Haven't I seen you here last year?" and "Where are the kind old men?".

The reception was planned for 1900 hrs, and we arrived there about ten minutes before, being welcomed by one of the board members of the foundation. Looking down the hall, we spotted three familiar faces: John Baker, Ken Porter and his son Clive. Because of the small number of seven vets that were expected, the reception was in a smaller room on the ground floor. But instead the foundation was surprised to have twenty vets of different associations there. A short speech was given by the mayor, and as always we had drinks and snacks presented to us. In the meantime John Baker was approached by a young lady who is involved in making a documentary about the battle for the Scheldt River, which is due in October/November 2009 and will be shown in various museums.

Saturday started with a rainy ceremony at Sloedam, where the monuments had been re-arranged and the whole place has had a make-over. They did a splendid job there, and the site is now looking very tidy and new. First up to lay a wreath was John Baker, on behalf of 47 RM Commando. After the ceremony we ran into the Military Attaché Col. Jerry Heal, who also laid a wreath at the memorial.



John Baker, Col. Heal RM, Marc & Mariel at Vlissingen

We then were invited for lunch in Arnemuiden with the familiar soup and sandwiches. In the afternoon we took John Baker down to Domburg, where he was invited by Col. Heal to lay a wreath at the memorial for 41 RM Commando. It was another good ceremony but quite cold with wind and rain, but as usual we had the chance to warm up at the Schuttershof with the famous Dutch Jenever gin.

Sunday we had the day off, and because it was a beautiful day with a lot of sunshine and no wind, we went down to the cemetery at Bergen op Zoom together with Ken Porter.

On Monday we started with a ceremony at the Commando memorial in Vlissingen, a bit chilly but fortunately no rain. There we were accompanied by the British Ambassador Mr. Lyn Parker. Afterwards we decided to have the group photo in front of the monument, although the group consisted of only four: John Baker, Col. Heal, Mariel and myself.

Unfortunately Ken Porter had already left for the UK, because he did not know up front what was to happen over the days.

The foundation had again arranged for all that were invited, to have a cup of coffee and some pastry at the Arsenaal in Vlissingen.

In the afternoon there was a ceremony at Erica in Westkapelle, where John Baker laid a second wreath on behalf of 47 RM Commando. The second ceremony at the lighthouse in Westkapelle was also very good, although somehow it always starts to get freezing cold there. After the ceremony we unfortunately had to head back home, so we said goodbye to John Baker and Col. Heal.

Overall it has been a good four days on Walcheren, and everyone there is looking forward to seeing a larger party of 47 RM Commando next year.

Marc de Bolster

IN MEMORIAM

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

Ian Watson: 11th August 2008. Ian joined the Marines on 1st April 1941 and served with 47 RM Commando throughout the European Campaign, landing with B Troop in Normandy and later at Walcheren. His family say he spoke little of his wartime service so the details have been pieced together thanks to John Forfar's personal medical records.

Norman Brangwin: 27th August 2008, aged 88. Norman volunteered at the age of 19 and subsequently spent much of his war on HMS Bewick on the freezing Russian convoys. His service with 47 RM Commando included both France and Holland and he was on the brink of being posted to Japan before the situation changed. A family man, Norman leaves a son, daughter and four grandchildren.

Albert Rutherford Gateshead, 28th December 2008. Corporal Albert Rutherford served with 47 RM Commando, in B Troop, from its inception to its disbandment. Always in the thick of it, he it was who pulled a badly wounded "Ben" Battley from the water on the Walcheren landing and helped place him in a shell-hole to await attention and lit him a cigarette. Albert took enormous pride in the Royal Marines Commandos and 47's wartime actions in particular. He has requested that his ashes be scattered on Walcheren. Always a pleasure to meet and talk with, he will be missed by all who knew him.

BIRTHS

Morgana Freya Fay Davison, 26th August 2008. A sister for Brisen. Congratulations to all concerned!

THE MARCH

The incursion behind coastal defences by 47 RM Commando on D-Day 1944 is, for want of a better word, often referred to as 'the march'. Indeed, the recent re-enactment by serving Marines used the term, though well aware that originally we did not advance in columns of three. Of course few can believe that is how it was but might, without first-hand evidence, wonder at its true nature. Here, then, some sixty-four years on, is a personal recollection, from one of its participants.

To begin with, it was nothing like the trek to relieve Mafeking. Nor did it have any resemblance to the Royals' yomp in the Falklands. It was a much more cautious affair. The very wet and bedraggled survivors of the landing gathered just off the beach to dry out, clean weapons, magazines etc before making towards the Hampshire's front line. The break-out came without hesitation or opposition. The Commando was on its own. Led by Captain Ken Isherwood, a platoon from B Troop spearheaded the advance. Among others at the sharp end were Sergeant Lofty Gardiner, Corporal Toms, Marine Ted ("Ben") Battley (bren), Mne Roy Emsley MM (his No 2), Mne Fred Lanyon MM, Mne Pat Plumb (mortar), and Cpl Albert Rutherford.

Avoiding roads where possible, Captain Isherwood hugged the hedgerows, one eye on his compass, the other searching for potential hazards. It wasn't long before one occurred.

Moving along a hedge, a sustained burst of automatic fire whipped overhead, much too close for comfort, then a pause and another long burst but Marine Battley had spotted the culprit and, with just two single shots with the bren, silenced him. The Spandau fires at a rate of 1500 rounds per minute so about 250-300 rounds were fired at the platoon with not a single hit. Passing through the machine gunner's position, evidence showed that he had not been alone and, since he was not going to use it again, Battley and Emsley collected his gun along with a few belts of ammo. The advance continued uninterrupted for a couple of miles until the platoon went to ground to allow a German military convoy to pass on a road 200 yards ahead.

Resuming a cautious trudge the Commando unavoidably encountered an open road. The leading section were about 100 yards along when a shot rang out. All dove into the field beside the road. Another shot revealed the source as a small copse in the next field beyond the intervening hedge. Although it was obviously not very heavily defended, it needed to be sorted before the Commando could proceed. One section dashed for the hedge and covered for another to join them. Nothing was fired at them but, while preparing for the final assault, a single shot came and hit the ammunition pouch of a marine, shattering a grenade which, fortunately, wasn't primed. This writer has a clear visual memory of the incident, seeing his comrade scoop handfuls of shrapnel and powder from his pouch but, unfortunately, cannot remember who it was.



B Troop veterans, Normandy 1989. l to r: Harry Horsfield(?), Albert Rutherford, Roy Mansfield, "Ben" Battley, Freddie Lanyon, Ray Gasson, Pat Plumb, Fred Kent(?)

That proved to be the last defiant gesture from the copse. Ten minutes later it was overrun. The place was deserted with not a soul in sight except for a magnificent shire horse, no doubt employed to pull the anti-aircraft early warning contraption hidden among the trees. The horse was passed back along the column where, eventually, it was "got rid of" by order of Colonel Phillips.

The advance continued with stops, starts and little deviations until later in the afternoon the leading section spotted a slit trench lying across its path about 150 yards ahead. The trench contained three not very alert Germans.

Fearing this could be part of a larger defensive position, Captain Isherwood decided on a softly-softly approach. Keeping to the fringes of a wooded area, Sgt Gardner and Cpl Toms, closely followed by Battley, Emsley *et al*, crept to within 25 feet of the unwary Germans and with a shout of '*Hände hoch!*' the Sergeant and Corporal jumped out of the thicket and charged the trench. The Germans reached for the sky but the middle one, whether intentionally or from shock, let off a shot in the air before dropping his rifle and scrambling out of the trench with the other two.

While standing in a small group as the German interpreter from 10/IA Commando interrogated the three prisoners, another German soldier came hurtling down the hill towards us, ignoring cries of stop, halt, *stillgestanden!* halt, halt! Captain Isherwood gave the order, stop him, shoot him and so it was. The German weapons were destroyed and the prisoners passed back down the line where they were pressed into service as stretcher bearers.

The interrogation revealed that nearby was a small enclave of Germans which meant another diversion. And so it went on for another hour or two, moving forward, stopping, getting down, getting up, moving on again. Those behind the leaders must have been fairly

cheesed off with the slow progress. At one point Colonel Phillips, accompanied by Major Vincent, came to the front briefly to chivvy. He made a disparaging remark about Emsley's Spandau and disappeared back down the line.

It had taken about six hours to cover the eleven miles as the crow flies but the actual distance travelled was much further.

By the time the Commando reached Point 72, the launch pad for the following day's attack on the port, it was evening with a hint of dusk and this tricky stage of the operation had been successfully accomplished.

Up on the hill dug outs were scraped from shallow topsoil, emergency ration packs opened and the first gasper of the day lit. It had been a very long day's journey. Not so much a march, more like a meander in a minefield. ELB

SALESMAN EXTRAORDINAIRE

From John Forfar: Looking out from the deck of the ferry as we arrived at Ouistreham on the occasion of the visit celebrating the 60th Anniversary of D-Day it was evident, to our surprise, that on the jetty below a Royal Marine Band was playing and that arrangements had been made for the arriving veterans to march between two ranks of Royal Marines. On arrival on the jetty accompanying relatives and camp followers were moved aside while 47 veterans duly formed up and proceeded along the RM corridor. As they reached its end they were being received by a naval officer, clearly of high rank from the breadth of the gold bands on his sleeve, only just fleetingly visible and impossible to enumerate due to the press of those around him.

On ceremonial occasions such as this, as an army officer rather than a naval one, I always placed myself at the rear of any 47 RM Commando column, a position particularly suitable on this occasion as my beret was among my baggage elsewhere.

Reaching the doyen of the Royal Navy I was asked, "What do you do?" If you have been retired for some time it is often quite difficult to define exactly what you do but having recently completed *From Omaha to the Scheldt: the Story of 47 Royal Marine Commando* I was not at a loss. That task immediately came to mind and the prompt response was, "I have written the history of 47 Royal Marine Commando," adding then with a surge of author bravado and perhaps an inappropriate wave of the finger, "Have you read it?" The Naval doyen hesitated for a moment, a little nonplussed, and then responded with some vigour, "No, but you must be the first man who has tried to flog a book on the First Sea Lord in the middle of a parade." The higher ranks of the Navy – in the form of First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Alan West – were not to be nonplussed for long – and in due course he received a complimentary copy of the book which he graciously accepted.



Coming across this photo reminded John of this occasion and he's not sure who took it and, afterwards, very kindly sent it to him. Maybe somebody could own up? LB

MEMORIAL TO CAPTAIN TERENCE COUSINS RM

Association members will be pleased to learn that a memorial stone honouring the exploits of Captain Terence Cousins RM during the battle for Port-en-Bessin has been completed and delivered to Port-en-Bessin. Commissioned in 2008 by our generous benefactor, Malcolm Ross, the memorial, weighing approximately one tonne, consists of a single piece of rough hewn Lakeland slate, with a smooth angled top that is engraved with the Royal Marines regimental crest and the following words in gold letting:

47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO
In recognition of the outstanding action
of Captain Terence Cousins which led to
the capture of this vital bunker
and the whole of the eastern headland beyond

The engraving is complemented by a large brass plate that describes the action on the Eastern Feature. The memorial is based on a design by Cliff Kingstone with the sculpturing work completed by Andrew Irvine of Stonecraft Design at his workshop in Bowness-on-Windermere. The Commandant General Royal Marines, Major General Garry Robison, was pleased to learn that the memorial had been completed and authorised the use of Corps Funds to cover the cost of transporting it to France. This task was duly undertaken by Major Bob Perry RM and the memorial was formally handed over to the Mayor of Port-en-Bessin, Doctor Pierre-Albert Cavey on 18 November. The Mayor has readily agreed to complete the necessary ground works on the Eastern Feature and position the memorial adjacent to the fortified bunker at the top of the zig-zag path in time for it to be dedicated on 7 June 2009.

RWP



Malcolm Ross being interviewed by a reporter from BBC Radio Cumbria, keen to learn about the exploits of 47 RM Cdo. The interview was broadcast in the Cumbria area on 7 November. Also in the picture, Alan Marsh of Cooper Engraving who coordinated the project.

IN THE PRESS

The photo which appeared with our article about the Normandy visit in the July/August issue of *The Globe and Laurel* was actually different to the one indicated in the last issue. That one

was used with an article about the serving Marines who accompanied us. The editor obviously realised the duplication and the Marines must have supplied another photo of some of our veterans. It was captioned as in Port-en-Bessin but one can tell that it was actually taken outside Bayeux Cathedral and all those present are looking good.

REVIEW

DVD All 47 veterans should by now have received the DVD about the landing of 1st Assault Group marines at Asnelles in June 2007. This was kindly sent out by the Rev Dave Devenney RN who was also much involved in the coordination of the whole event. The DVD is very well-produced with excellent coverage of the unexpectedly “wet” landing of the serving marines as well as details of 47 RM Cdo’s landing in 1944 with the historical background provided by Major Mark Bentinck RM, the Corps Historian. There were also starring parts for Fred Wildman and Arthur Thompson. For me, it would have brought back the trip even more if it had shown the huge, visually exciting bonfire (and the socks drying) at the barbecue and also the serving of the rum, using the traditional barrel and ladle, immediately after the landing. However, this is just carping on my part about what was an excellent piece of filming. The DVD is also available to non-veterans at a nominal price via Rev Devenney, as mentioned in the last issue. LB

TRACING AND RECORDING THE PAST

Eric Crawford was a First Lieutenant on HMS *Princess Josephine Charlotte* from 1943/45 which landed 47 RM Cdo on D-Day. Beforehand, he trained with 47 off the west coast of Scotland and the islands and recalls being at Falmouth with them and then, of course, prior to embarkation for the invasion. Eric is now 95 and his memory no longer sharp but his son-in-law, John Reynolds, wonders if anybody remembers him or any interesting events from that time and would be very grateful for any information on behalf of both of them.

Norman Nicholls also served with 47 Cdo and, unfortunately, his memory is failing, too. His friend, Phil Chappell, has over a period of time coaxed some recollections from him and would be extremely grateful if anybody remembers him and can fill in other events. What has emerged is that, prior to joining 47, he served with 10th Battalion RM, travelling at some point to India and Burma via the Suez Canal. Once with the Commando, he is pretty certain that he served with B Troop.



Memory of Normandy is vague but Norman has definite recall of Walcheren and training in Belgium. The names Bergen-op-Zoom and Kapelsche Veer also bring a response and he remembers being in a village in Germany where the civilians were starving and he and his

friends gave their sandwiches away. He was in Germany at the war's end. Norman is top right in the photo (others unknown) which was taken back home soon after the war ended.

TRACING AND RECORDING THE PAST: RESPONSE!

It's always good to get a response to these items. **Gerry Brent**, 47 veteran and Association member living in Australia, remembers **George Brooker** who featured in the last issue and this is from the first email received from him:

I'm Gerry Brent, outpost of 47 RMC "downunder".

With regards to George Brooker, he joined my efforts to distract the Germans when "Q" troop lodged their attack. We were positioned on the land side of the dyke that separated us from the Germans who were in position on the river side of Kapelsche Veer.

I was sent by our troop commander, Captain John Woods of "A" troop to reinforce the attack on the German position. Our enthusiastic flame-throw operator managed to ignite the undergrowth above the snow which, unfortunately served to silhouette our attack like a shooting gallery. We barely reached the top of the dyke when we met heavy machine gun fire and Lieutenant George Brooker, who joined us, got shot in the shoulder.

We withdrew within seconds after suffering severe casualties including a corporal who got shot in the head just above the eye, who we carried and dragged over to our side to safety.

This was a very abortive affair, for which we paid heavily in dead and wounded.

I'm happy to throw more light on the situation if you think it is of interest to anybody.

A further email says that Lt Brooker, following a hail of German bullets, was the first to be hit, shot in the shoulder from an acute angle and the scar on his back probably resulted from the exit wound.

Needless to say, George Brooker's daughter, Jackie Armor, who lives in America was delighted to learn of somebody who remembers her father and she and Gerry have been in touch via email.

OTHER FEEDBACK

Gerry Brent also emailed regarding his son-in-law, Bill O'Toole, visiting Normandy from Australia on business. He wondered if anybody would be able to show him around. I put him in touch with Michel Laulier and Bill made the trip in the autumn. Michel sent an account of the visit. He apparently packed in the British Cemetery at Bayeux, the beach at Asnelles, La Rosière, Point 72, Commes, the Eastern and Western features and other monuments in the town. Quite the grand tour! Afterwards they went back to Michel's for a beer before retuning to Bayeux Station. Bill took a great interest in everything and spoke quite a bit about his father-in-law. Gerry also reported back that it was a great success. Many thanks to Michel for, as ever, doing 47 Cdo proud.

Lt Col I R MacDonald MBE Bob McDonald who many of us met in Walcheren in November 07 was in Normandy at the same time as us in June. He was organising a trip there for a number of Dutch and allied staff officers and at some point laid a wreath at the monument on the Western feature. Bob was also one of the many saying "hello Royal" at Arromanches but, unfortunately, never came across any of our group. Maybe next time.

EMAIL ADDRESSES

As mentioned before, anyone with an email address who would like their *Despatch* sent electronically, please let me know at lannabatt@aol.com. It saves both time and money.

MONEY MATTERS

The annual subscription of £10 per head runs annually from January to December. Our Treasurer, Gemma Davison, will be very pleased to receive your subs for this year plus any

arrears should that be the case. Cheque should be made payable to “47 RM Commando Association” and sent to:

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

NORMANDY 2009

June 2009 is the 65th anniversary of the invasion. As all the hotels in the vicinity of Port-en-Bessin have been completely booked up since the autumn, we gather that the French are laying on something a bit special and certainly Port-en-Bessin are in the process of finalising a considerable number of events. Fortunately, we have some rooms booked at the King Hotel but to acquire one please let Betty know just **as soon as possible** if you wish to go. As usual, please send a deposit of £25 per head, cheques made payable to “47 RM Commando Association” to:

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

Rooms at the King are booked from the night of Friday, 5th June through to the 8th June, returning on the ferry to Portsmouth on 9th June.

Don't forget to book overnight at the Royal Maritime Club in Portsmouth for the 4th June in good time if you need to, as this date could well get booked up in advance.

If you already know that you plan to travel to Walcheren for that 65th anniversary, it would be very helpful to let Betty know that as well.

47 RM CDO WEBSITE

Our webmaster, Marc, forwarded some rather impressive statistics. Since June 2007 he has been contacted by email as a result of visiting the website by 28 different people. Of these:

9 were looking for information re 47 Commando relatives

5 applied for membership

2 were collectors searching for info re obtained 47 Cdo items

12 sought access codes to the Members Section (details checked before given).

So far only one unauthorised person has tried to obtain access codes but appears to have been “scared off” when Marc asked for details to verify with the Committee.

Don't forget to send anything that might add to the website which might fill in some of the gaps. Also, please don't throw away anything relating to 47 and your service but instead bequeath it to Marc. Recently he has felt extremely jealous of a rival collector who acquired an item relating to 47 (shoulder flash and apparently hard to come by) which had been discarded after a veteran's death. – One man's tat is another man's treasure!

Documents and photos can be emailed to Marc at m.de.bolster@xs4all.nl or sent by regular mail to: Marc de Bolster

Elzendreef 29

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Netherlands

All originals will be returned safely.

Marc has also found out some of the details for the 65th commemorations in Walcheren and they can be seen on the web.

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

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Next issue: July 2009