

## 47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

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### DESPATCH 26 July 2012

**Comment** The Association has lost a lot of fine men since the last issue and it grieves me to have to report so many deaths. Those who fought with 47 Commando in 1944 and 1945 are now either over or approaching their 90th year so such losses can be seen, in some respects, as inevitable. There is some consolation in knowing that they made an important contribution in time of war as part of an élite and honourable corps and lived to tell the tale.

It is also good that our Association is thriving and continues to keep alive the memory of both their courage and their achievements. Lannah

### FROM THE CHAIRMAN

I'm delighted to report that the Association is firing on all cylinders. We've attended commemorations at all our key memorials, we've plans for new ways to tell the tale of 47 RM Commando, and the standard has been carried proudly in France, in The Netherlands, and at the funerals in the UK of veterans whose sad loss you can read about in this edition.

In Port en Bessin, we've renewed our contacts with the Hemingway College, re-traced the march from Asnelles, and commissioned a painting of the actions led by Captain Cousins on the Eastern Feature. Faced with the loss of the veterans whose names are recorded here, we remembered them with respect, and sang wartime songs loudly in the Bar de La Marée. I know they would have approved, and urged us to be louder. We cannot be prouder to have known them.

In torrential rain, of the kind normally seen in The Netherlands in November, we managed to lay wreaths at our own and at the French memorials on June 7th, and we relied on a fabulous fleet of Willis jeeps to carry the party. Chuck Harris read the Roll of Honour in the Salles des Fêtes inside in the dry on a microphone when all could hear each name.

We've relied on our hard-working committee members, and I'd like to thank them in print. I hope that this overview shows that we are managing to keep alive the memory and the sacrifices made by 47 Royal Marine Commandos. If you have suggestions or concerns at any stage, I can be reached by phone on 0207 636 3503 or 07940 511751.

With warmest wishes and thanks to all,

Patrick O'Connell

Chairman, and son of Captain Guy O'Connell, HW Troop

### NORMANDY 2012

*This report and photo are due to appear in the Jul/Aug 2012 issue of The Globe and Laurel.*

#### 47 RM Commando Association in Normandy, June 2012

In Normandy on 6th June, the anniversary of D-Day, our party split up with the majority attending the Service of Remembrance at Bayeux Cathedral and an intrepid few undertaking the route which 47 Cdo took on 6th/7th June 1944 to take and liberate the town of Port en

Bessin from the rear.

After the Service, where His Excellency Sir Peter Ricketts GCMG, HM Ambassador to France, read the lesson and laid the wreath, we made our way to the Hôtel du Doyen for a *vin d'honneur* hosted by the Mayor of Bayeux.

After lunch we went to the British Military Cemetery. After taking cover from a heavy and prolonged shower, patience had its reward. Our wreath-laying took place with our staunch veterans on parade, now rather few in number, most being around ninety years of age. They were supported by standard bearer, Les Pike, and former Sgt Major Geof Haywood RM, not carrying his handbag as some suggested but a small recording machine to play the Last Post. With the Diamond Jubilee, Beating the Retreat and a host of other duties, spare RM Buglers were as rare as hens' teeth this year.



*At Bayeux Cemetery*

Among those who opted to go on the "expedition", some returned quite exhausted and heavy-footed. However, with food, drink and plenty of good company in the Bar de la Marée in Port en Bessin that evening, everyone seemed to recover well.

Next morning, a convoy of jeeps laid on by Belgian and French enthusiasts transported veterans and others up the steep zig-zag track to the monument on the Eastern headland. Others made their way on foot. Once at the top, the rain which had long threatened, bucketed down and never ceased. As a result wreaths were laid at the monument to Captain Terence Cousins, who died in the process of taking the heavily defended strongpoint, surrounded by a sea of umbrellas. The jeeps negotiated the descent well. Walkers had to settle for wetter and muddier feet than they had already.

At the monument on the Western headland heavy rain persisted but a slightly shortened commemoration went ahead. The final ceremony took place at the plaque beneath the Vaudan Tower. In the course of this deluge, wreaths were laid by, among others, the Mayor of Port en Bessin, Docteur Pierre-Albert Cavey; Captain Nick Stanley RN, Deputy Defence Attaché at the British Embassy in Paris and Major Nathan Hale, 1 Assault Group RM.

We continued to a champagne reception at the Salle des Fêtes. A row of wet umbrellas accumulated inside the door but, by the rule of Murphy's Law, once inside, the rain stopped. The Mayor, ably translated by his wife, Beatrice, welcomed everyone and spoke of the strong and continuing links with 47 RM Commando. Nick Stanley, on our behalf, thanked the Mayor and people of the town for their never-failing support, friendship and hospitality.

Later, we visited Chateau Tracy where the de Bourgoing family, whose links with 47 go back to the time of the liberation, always make us welcome with snacks, Calvados and much besides plus the opportunity to admire the beautiful building and grounds.

In the evening, Tina Jonkers, one of our Belgian supporters, had arranged to sing popular

WW2 songs for the veterans in the Bar. After some technical hitches, all went well, with everybody joining in. Some French friends performed an excellent version of *Ah le petit vin blanc* and it turned into a very lively and enjoyable evening.

Next day we visited the house in Sallenelles where Prof John Forfar, then MO of 47 Cdo, treated the wounded. Dr Kottler, the present owner, welcomed us, refreshments were served and we were able to see wartime graffiti in the cellar and many items from the war which keep emerging from the gardens. Before leaving we had a wreath-laying ceremony at the monument outside the house.

That evening at la Marée our friends, the proprietors, Natalie and Stephane Pitel laid on a wonderful three course meal before presents were exchanged and then it was a case of *à l'année prochaine*, until next year.

Thanks go to our Secretary, Ingrid Fearne, for the seamless organisation and to Geof Haywood and Chairman, Patrick O'Connell, for their considerable input as well as Marc de Bolster who, as if by magic, increased the use of two or three jeeps and drivers into a magnificent nine.

Finally, here's to our veterans who turn out in all weathers and still retain a great sense of humour. Once a Marine...

LB

### IN MEMORIAM

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

**Hedley J Phillips OBE** August 2011. Captain Phillips, at that time a lieutenant, served with 48 RM Commando and later with 44 RM Cdo. Many of our members will remember him taking parades in Walcheren when 48 Cdo veterans far outnumbered 41 and 47. With his good carrying, not to say stentorian, parade ground voice, he was known even to refuse a microphone at indoor events. Post-war, he joined the Berkshire Constabulary and later became both Deputy Chief Constable and Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire.

**David A Williams** 12th November 2011. An obituary appeared in the Jan/Feb *Globe & Laurel* for Marine David Williams who, as well as serving on several of HM ships also saw service on D-Day with 47 Commando "as a sniper covering the unit radio operator" and as a dispatch rider "carrying bags of blood to the wounded." He was a keen member of Torbay RMA as well as the NVA and RBL but sadly was not a member of our Association and possibly didn't know of its existence.

**William John Marshall** 1st December 2011 in Bristol. Bill was a Sergeant with Y Troop when he took part in the Normandy landings. He had begun an account of his time with 47 RM Commando which recorded how, on 6th June 1944, his landing craft had hit a submerged mined obstacle. Reaching the beach, he realised that men were still aboard the upturned craft. He returned and found several men trapped under the gunwales by their marching order packs. Fortunately, once he released one all the others were helped free and reached the shore safely. He also served in Q Troop and took part in the Walcheren campaign. Bill travelled to Normandy with us on the 65th anniversary of the landings. It was a pleasure to meet him and he will be missed, particularly by his comrades.

**John Tarbin** January 2012 aged 98. John was called up in 1942 to the Royal Marines. Having passed a driving course with flying colours, he was posted to 47 RM Cdo early in 1944 and became "Doc" Forfar's driver. He was instrumental in devising a system whereby wounded could be transported using two stretchers lashed across a jeep. John often helped Captain Forfar and his medical staff in picking up the wounded from the battlefield, himself receiving shrapnel wounds in the process. He also appears in the painting (now in the Imperial War Museum) of John Forfar operating in the basement at Sallenelles. A family man, he returned to Essex on demob. A long time member of the Association, he was unable to travel to functions but he and Chuck Harris always kept in touch.

**John Baker** 15th February 2012 aged 90. John joined the Royal Marines aged 18 in 1939 just before war was declared. He served in many ships including the *King George V* which was among those hunting down the *Bismarck*. The vessel also spent time in the Arctic Circle covering forces raiding the islands of Spitzbergen and Lofoten. John later served on landing craft for both American and British forces during the invasion of Sicily and then for the

Normandy landings, going into Juno Beach. In 1946, he took part in rescuing Dutch nationals from the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) where the Japanese were still in control. John left the Royal Marines in 1951 and joined the London Fire Brigade.

Over the years, John has been a staunch supporter of 47 RM Cdo Association, travelling regularly on trips with a supply of poppies and crosses as well as a hip flask or three. Always cheerful and good company, he will be greatly missed.

**Peter Ford** 29th February 2012 aged 89. Peter joined the Royal Marines at 17 and served in the 9th Battalion until 1943 when he did his Commando training at Achnacarry and joined the newly formed 47 RM Cdo. He became a signaller with B Troop and served right through until 47 was disbanded. After the war he joined the police, serving for 25 years. Retiring at 50 he then taught physical training for 15 years at schools in Harrow, mainly judo and swimming and remained a very fit man despite the passing years. Very much a family man, he had four daughters. Peter joined us at Association events in recent years whenever his health allowed and was always a pleasure to meet, being a kind-hearted, gentle and humorous man. He will be much missed.

**Ronald George Beck** March 2012 aged 90 PLY/X103779 Joining up in May 1941, Ronald, who was known as Joe while in the Marines, subsequently joined 47 Cdo. He served in A Troop and B Troop, taking part in both the Normandy and Walcheren landings. After the war he worked for English China Clay in the quarry at Plymstock in Plymouth where he was a plant operator. "Joe" was married with two daughters and took part in some early 47 reunions in France and, over the years, kept in touch with several of his comrades.

**Arthur Edward "Pat" Plumb** 24th April 2012 aged 90. Pat began his service in the 10th Battalion Royal Marines. He made the grade at Achnacarry and became part of 47 Commando from the very beginning and served in B Troop right through until the unit was disbanded. On leaving the Marines, he worked as a nurseryman and then returned to farming as a herdsman in Hertfordshire. A gentle and unassuming man, he spoke little of his war service until his later years when he began to attend some of the reunions in France and Holland. He was also a man of great humanity. Having survived two opposed landings and the fierce fighting at Sallenelles and Kapelsche Veer, he once said that one of the worst times for him was in Germany with the war all but over. In freezing temperatures and with the civilian population without fuel and starving, they had to protect a trainload of coal trucks with orders to shoot anyone attempting to steal from it. Almost certainly he never fired.

His daughter Jennifer Spencer has made a generous donation to the Association in memory of her father.

**Ernest Staphnill** 2nd May 2012 aged 94. Brought up in the West Midlands, Ernie was in a reserved occupation in Smethwick then Birmingham, at one point working on Rolls Royce Merlin engines. He joined the Home Guard and manned ack-ack guns during air raids before being called up early in 1944 to the 52 Lowland Division Royal Engineers where he learnt to drive all kinds of military transport in all manner of conditions. He and other drivers joined 47 Cdo just outside Caen, helping to replace the considerable casualties which had been taken, then moved on to Fécamp and eventually Antwerp. Subsequently, he took part in the landing on Walcheren driving a Weasel and stayed with 47 Cdo until its disbandment.

Ernie remained active and a keen ballroom dancer into his 90s and supported and enjoyed all the Association events in recent years. His smiling face will be much missed.

**Eric Albert Wood MEB** 27th May 2012 aged 96. Eric Wood enlisted in the Royal Marines in Chatham in 1935 and received the King's Badgeman award in 1936. John Forfar relates how he was recruited as an RSM with 47 Cdo in *From Omaha to the Scheldt* in time for the Walcheren landing and was reported wounded on 1st November 1944 and later that he was killed in action. In fact, he was treated for his wounds within the unit and returned swiftly to his duties and on the surrender of one of the German batteries: "...192 of them... emerged... and under the direction of RSM Wood flung their weapons in a heap." On leaving the service, Eric held the rank of Lieutenant.

**Norman Joseph Nicholls** 24th June 2012 aged 88. Norman, always known as Nobby in the Marines, was brought up in Salford and lied about his age in order to join. He served in various locations overseas and later did his Commando training at Achnacarry, joining 47 Cdo soon after D-Day and served in B Troop. Nobby didn't talk much about his war service and in

later years his memory was poor but he recalled Sallenelles, Walcheren, the River Maas and that in Germany, where the population were starving, he and his comrades gave away their rations. He also remembered that his friend, Sam Greenhalgh (Q Troop), who lived a few streets away was killed in action.

After the war he worked at a council-run cemetery digging graves. To quote his son-in-law, "He worked long hours, never had a day off, fit and strong up to and past retirement. He could cut through crosswords like butter, cook great roast meals, was humble, generous, had a wicked sense of humour, never thinking of himself." His wife, son and daughter as well as several grandchildren and great grandchildren survive him. The family have made a donation to the Association in his memory.

### **NORMANDY 2012 Further news**

**Malcolm Ross** in his usual generous way provided money for drinks for the assembled company at the Corps Dinner on our last night in Normandy. A very big "Thank you" from us all.

**Patrick O'Connell** arranged, with the help of Michel Désérable, to visit the school in Port en Bessin in the hope of strengthening links with the Association. Accompanied by Ken Parker and Alex Wilson as translator it proved to be an encouraging foray. The pupils took great interest in what Ken had to say and it is hoped that further visits may be arranged.

**AGM** The Annual General Meeting was held at the King Hotel on 8th June. If you would like to have a copy of the Minutes please get in touch with Ingrid: [ingrid.fearne@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:ingrid.fearne@blueyonder.co.uk) or phone 0208 2390145. At the end of the meeting our cameraman, Steve Hignett, showed a film of the Walcheren visit which concluded with some last glimpses and something of a tribute to Peter Ford, Ernie Staphnill and John Baker. It brought tears to a lot of eyes, including mine.

**The family** of the late Albert Rutherford (B Troop) were in Normandy and we were pleased that they were able to join us at ceremonies and other events. We also hope that one or more of them might become members.

**Thank you** to all of our Belgian and French jeep drivers and owners for turning out for us in the most appalling weather. One of them, Patrice Lorillu, sent a cutting from the local paper, *Renaissance*, which is reproduced on the back page.

*Veterans at*

*Sallenelles*

*with*

*Dr Kottler*



### **THE LAST FIGHT by GERRY BRENT**

#### **Part Two**

*PREVIOUSLY: With much of Holland still occupied, Gerry was billeted with a hospitable Dutch family, happy to share what little food they had. Having received a "food parcel" from his family in Sydney and with a cake baking on Christmas Eve 1944, he was suddenly recalled to duty.*

The Germans had massed an army, heavily supported by armour with the intention to break through our lines, thinly held by the Yanks in the hills of the Ardennes. The purpose was to



deny us again the use of the port of Antwerp by a pincer movement from the north across the River Maas to cut off 1st Corps in the south of Holland. 47 RM.Cdo (all 349 of us!) had the unenviable distinction of being the only force on the ground between the potential German attack route from the River Maas to Corps HQ in Antwerp. Of course there were other units around, lots of artillery, tanks galore, engineers, a Polish armoured division to our right, but of bodies on the ground only us!

We were therefore very actively engaged to show the Germans on the Northern bank of the river that "our territory", approximately five miles of southern river bank, was heavily defended and patrolled night and day. We also made a few excursions across the river to show our strength and take prisoners.

The New Year of 1945 came with bitterly cold weather, strong winds and news from the Ardennes that the German attack had succeeded in breaking through the American lines and threatened the approaches to Antwerp. If successful, this meant that we in southern Holland would be cut off.

Then disaster struck. The Germans had crossed the Maas and established a bridge-head at Kappelsche Veer, an elongated island in the river opposite the Polish sector. To evict them became a priority and when this proved a nut too hard to crack for the Poles, they asked Corps for assistance. I discovered later that they had tried rather valiantly to dislodge the Germans in several actions with very little success and substantial losses.

Our total air superiority was only theory as the weather was more than lousy and visibility nil. So our Corp Commander General Crocker, an Englishman of First World War standing decided to remove the potential danger to our western flank by utilising 47 RM Cdo. Despite being less than half strength, we would repeat the feat of Walcheren and take care of the German bridge-head.

His plan code-named "Horse", would employ World War 1 tactics: "Hit them with all you have got" and we had plenty. Our artillery was immense, including 25 cm Howitzers with enormous fire-power producing awesome destruction at the receiving end. Close to 200 guns were allocated. All the tanks of the Polish armoured division were to fire solid shot into the dikes surrounding the German position "to make them keep their heads down!". Then a two-pronged attack would follow. I was in the Recce party which surveyed the route of approach the day before the attack. I remembered distinctly the outline of a building which was given to Captain Stickings and Lieutenant Adam's Q troop as their assault target. They with some Norwegian reinforcements were to approach the German position from the East as a diversionary attack, capture the building and then direct flanking fire on the rest of the German position.

The main attack was to come along the dike from the west executed by A, B, X and Y Troops plus some 48 Cdo Troops seconded to us. At this stage it all looked so peaceful. A wintry landscape covered in snow, a little world on its own separated by the dikes from the river and the rest of the war-torn country. There was no indication that this peaceful scene would give way to an inferno that was to kill and wound hundreds in the next few hours. The information collected by Intelligence was that we had to deal only with inferior troops, "base wallahs" who had no will to fight and would be more than happy to surrender. After the bombardment all we had to do was accept the surrender and the Poles could take over again and occupy the ex-German position!

So, the scene was set for an eventful time. A Troop led the night approach through snow to the starting point 200 metres from where the Germans were dug in. We met little resistance. One outlying foxhole was quickly taken and shortly after reaching our starting point the bombardment began!

Unless you have lived through such an experience, so often described in stories of the First World War, it is impossible to imagine the physical impact. The earth starts to quake and groan under the load of exploding shells. Although we were lying prone 200 metres or so from the impact of the shells, the earth beneath moved with each explosion. If one is able to gather one's thoughts in such a situation you sure would not give anybody much chance of survival under the onslaught of such an inferno.

Then, as suddenly as it had begun, the shells stopped coming and it was our turn to walk into the position and accept the German surrender! At least that was what we were told

should happen.

*(The third and final part will be in the next issue.)*

## NEWS

**Major Bob Perry** writes: I was disappointed not to be able to attend the Normandy commemorations at Port-en-Bessin this year. Many of you will know that this was because I am currently serving overseas in the British Indian Ocean Territory.

Bob has written an interesting article about the island of Diego Garcia and what his duties entail which (due to lack of space) will appear next time, probably with a photo of an idyllic tropical beach. Meanwhile, I quote:

As the Executive Officer I am effectively the 2IC of all UK military personnel and the Detachment Commander of the Royal Marines. The Detachment is the lead security organisation responsible for BIOT and territorial waters out to 200nm. In order to maintain the sovereignty of the territory regular patrols are conducted of the outer islands. These military patrols are combined with environmental tasks such as turtle surveys, fishery protection and enforcement of the environmental exclusion zone around BIOT. When I am not hopping in and out of small craft I can be found in the local court acting as either the Magistrate or Chief Prosecutor (BIOT has its own law), in the Territorial Planning Department approving any construction work to occur on the island (including the cutting down of trees) or improving my dinghy sailing in the lagoon!

His article is entitled "Life in Paradise?".

**Lt Col Bob MacDonald MBE** now retired from the service, writes: I visited Gen Pat Kay between Christmas and New Year and delivered a copy of the Commendation that I presented to the people of Walcheren and Westkapelle on behalf of CGRM. Furthermore, I was able to present him with a copy of my CGRM's Commendation which was given to me for my support to RM Veterans in the Netherlands and, in particular, the delivery of the Liberty Bridge. Somehow I now feel that the loop has been closed and whatever happens I will ever feel associated with that proud and professional group of wartime volunteers who were (and still are) Commandos in the true meaning of the word.

Bob hopes he might catch up with us in Walcheren again this year and sends his fondest best wishes to the veterans and all of the "gang".

**Lt Carl Isherwood**, serving RN Commando and grandson of Captain Ken Isherwood, took part in "Rowing the Canal" where the personnel of a ship going through the Suez Canal row the full length (162km/100 miles) courtesy of the rowing machines on board. Participating members taking on 2,000 metres apiece and Carl's time was third fastest, an amazing feat in that he'd rowed the entire length over the previous 4 days, raising funds for Great Ormond Street Hospital. Carl said that it was excellent preparation for the Marathon des Sables, a multi-day endurance race across the Sahara Desert which he plans to take on next year.

**Committee Meeting** On 22nd January 2012 the Committee had a successful meeting via telephone conferencing. It meant that the far-flung members, from Yorkshire to the South Coast and from West Wales to the Netherlands were able to discuss everything on the agenda without stirring from home.

**Portsmouth Reunion** As mentioned in the last issue RMA Portsmouth are organising a big reunion for the unveiling of a monument to the "Cockleshell Heroes" in the grounds of the Royal Marine Museum at Eastney. The date is Friday to Sunday, 2nd to 4th November. Portsmouth RMA have negotiated reduced rates at the Royal Beach Hotel, Portsmouth and the Royal Maritime Club (eg £70 instead of £80 for ensuite double/twin B&B at the RMC) plus special rates for meals for those staying 3 nights. There is a dinner and dance on the Saturday night and the Parade and unveiling on Sunday morning followed by a buffet at RMA Portsmouth at £5 per head.

This date now coincides with our trip to Walcheren but if anyone is interested in attending please ring Polly Thomas, Secretary to Portsmouth RMA on 07977 562663 asap.

**47 Commando resurrected?** We learned of a veteran who died recently (see above) who, though a member of his local RMA, Normandy Veterans Association etc, was not a member of our Association. It seemed possible that he had not known of our existence. Geof Haywood circulated information about us through the RMA in case there were others out there. He had a response from Ronald Chapman who believed he served with 47 Cdo in the 50s. Naturally, everyone thought this was an error on his part. However, Mark Bentinck, our Corps Historian,

**Exhibition at Boué** Laurence Scoupe, a great supporter of the Association and now a member, who usually joins us in Port en Bessin each June, organised an exhibition in her home village of Boué in Picardy, northern France from the 8th to 11th May this year. The date coincided with celebrations of the liberation of France and included material from her own WW2 collection. Much of it related to Commandos and 47 RM Cdo in particular and included uniforms, memorabilia and also on display wartime photos of Terence Cousins, Ernie Staphnill and Arthur Thompson, among others. Unfortunately, plans for some of our veterans to attend proved, in the end, to be impossible to carry out.



**Paul Winter** is interested in writing a book on the exploits of 47 RM Cdo in Normandy. He knows and much admires *From Omaha to the Scheldt* and has already been sent available information from *Despatch* obituaries etc and knows about the website but would still be interested in any further information. His email address is [prjwinter@cantab.net](mailto:prjwinter@cantab.net)

Geof Haywood, 10 Elizabeth Road, Wimborne, Dorset BH21 1AX  
or phone 01202 888194 or email [geofandjillh@btinternet.com](mailto:geofandjillh@btinternet.com)

**Dr Andy Holborn** whose forthcoming book was mentioned in the last issue, wonders if anyone remembers a lone British army signaller being picked up and staying with 47 Commando during D-Day. email [portholb@globalnet.co.uk](mailto:portholb@globalnet.co.uk) or write or ring:  
Dr Andy & Su Holborn, 3 Charlton Terrace, Ivybridge, Devon PL21 0AU 01752 892421

**TV** *Castle Commando* BBC2 Scotland (and later shown in other regions)

Mark Bentinck wrote about the making of this hour-long documentary in the last issue. It tells the story of the training of Commandos from the very beginning with, at first, solely Army Commandos. Set up at Inverailort House, only small numbers were initially inducted into the arts of weaponry, demolition, and “fighting dirty” in unarmed combat and with the now-famed



commando knife. Before long the establishment had moved some 30 miles eastward to Achnacarry Castle and its grounds where men were trained in greater numbers. The surrounding wild countryside was also used, encouraging survival in all conditions but mainly appallingly wet, windy and freezing weather. Probably the most demanding and dangerous military training devised, it also included both day- and night-time opposed landings on the loch, using live ammunition. A very large percentage never made the grade and returned to their units.

47 RM Commando was well represented with Norman Rose telling of his experiences during training as a 17 year old in 1943 and Mark Bentinck giving the historical background. Both came across extremely well. Mark also pointed out that current RM training is very much based on what was devised then and a (naturally) very able squad of serving Royal Marine Commandos demonstrated unarmed combat and speed marching – in the rain, of course. With an informative yet unobtrusive narration by Rory Bremner, this was a well-made fast-moving film with a good mix of talking heads, linking music, archive footage and, of course, some magnificent scenery. Really excellent. In the hope that it will be shown again, highly recommended. LB

### **TV *The Dreams of William Golding* Arena BBC2**

The filming which took place on Walcheren last November was not specifically about the landing but just a small part of an Arena documentary on the novelist William Golding.

Serving as a Royal Navy officer during the war, he commanded a rocket launching ship in support of the landing. Afterwards he felt guilt that in the process he had killed many innocent Dutch civilians, something which haunted him for the rest of his life.

The section about Walcheren includes some quite vivid archive footage of craft converging on Westkapelle which are interwoven throughout the film and also overviews of the town today.

The interviews with veterans did not appear but the ceremony at the Polderhuis Museum on 1st November is covered, showing 47 and other veterans lined up, many in close-up, and some more distant shots of Ted Battley and Lt Col Jerry Slack RM laying wreaths.

For anyone interested in Golding and in particular his most famous novel, *Lord of the Flies*, this was a detailed biography with photos, home movies, references to his daily journal and interviews with his daughter. For those who are not aficionados, at 90 minutes, it was probably a little too long. LB

**BOOK** The book mentioned in the last issue, *Walcheren 1944 – Storming Hitler's Island Fortress* by Richard Brooks has been reviewed by Mark Bentinck for *Despatch*. Apologies, due to lack of space, it will now appear in the next issue.

## **LETTER TO A DAUGHTER**

[Letter from Evelyn Waugh to his daughter, Laura 31st May 1942:](#)

Darling,

It was a great joy to get a letter from you. I thought you had been swallowed up in some Pixton plague.

Do you know Ellwoods address? I wrote to him care Harper – no answer.

Miss Cowles leaves tonight. Everyone except me will be sorry... She wants to be made Colonel in chief of the commando so I have suggested Princess Margaret Rose instead...

So No. 3 Cmdo were very anxious to be chums with Lord Glasgow so they offered to blow up an old tree stump for him and he was very grateful and he said don't spoil the plantation of young trees near it because that is the apple of my eye and they said no of course not we can blow a tree down so that it falls on a sixpence and Lord Glasgow said goodness you are clever and he asked them all to luncheon for the great explosion. So Col. Durnford-Slater D.S.O. said to his subaltern, have you put enough explosive in the tree. Yes, sir, 75 lbs. Is that enough? Yes sir I worked it out by mathematics it is exactly right. Well better put a bit more. Very good sir.

And when Col. D. Slater D.S.O. had had his port he sent for the subaltern and said subaltern better put a bit more explosive in that tree. I don't want to disappoint Lord Glasgow. Very good sir.

Then they all went out to see the explosion and Col. D.S.D.S.O. said you will see that tree fall flat at just that angle where it will hurt no young trees and Lord Glasgow said goodness

you are clever.

So soon the[y] lit the fuse and waited for the explosion and presently the tree, instead of falling quietly sideways, rose 50 feet into the air taking with it ½ acre of soil and the whole of the young plantation.

And the subaltern said Sir I made a mistake, it should have been 7½ lbs not 75.

Lord Glasgow was so upset he walked in dead silence back to his castle and when they came to the turn of the drive in sight of his castle what should they find but that every pane of glass in the building was broken.

So Lord Glasgow gave a little cry & ran to hide his emotion in the lavatory and there when he pulled the plug the entire ceiling, loosened by the explosion, fell on his head.

This is quite true.

(Ellwood had been his butler and Virginia Cowles was an American journalist)

From *The Oxford Book of Letters*, ed Frank & Anita Kermode, OUP 2003

I couldn't trace anything about the Pixton plague! Any offers? A family joke, perhaps?

Many thanks to Mark Bentinck for this.

### MONEY MATTERS

The annual subscription remains at £10 per head and if you've not yet got round to paying this year's sub, now's as good a time as any. Veterans need no longer pay but many still opt to do so. Our Treasurer, Gemma Davison, will be very pleased to receive your contributions.

Cheques should be made payable to '47 RM Commando Association' and sent to:

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

### EVENTS

**Unveiling** It is hoped to have a reunion some time in the autumn for the unveiling of the painting by David Rowlands of the assault on the Eastern Feature at Port en Bessin. The exact date and location have not yet been settled. As this will happen before the next *Despatch*, Committee members and Ingrid, our Secretary, will do everything to let people know in good time.

**Walcheren 2012** It is expected that there will be enough people to justify a coach to Walcheren again this year. The likely date is from around 30th October to 4th November. If you plan to come please let Secretary, Ingrid Fearne know **as soon as possible**, sending a £25 per head deposit to:

Mrs I Fearne, 138 Beauchamp Road, Upper Norwood, London SE19 3DB

Cheques should be made payable to '47 RM Commando Association'.

The coach will pick up (very early) at the Royal Maritime Club, Portsmouth, and at the ferry terminal at Dover. If you wish to stay at the **Royal Maritime Club** please book as soon as possible once the exact dates are known, saying that you are with 47 Cdo, Membership no 4600. (Advance Bookings: 0239 2837681)

Ingrid can also be reached on 0208 2390145 or email: [ingrid.fearne@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:ingrid.fearne@blueyonder.co.uk)

### THROUGH THE WEB

All manner of contacts continue to come through the website, far too numerous to cite them all but here is a brief selection:

**Corporal Robert Dixon** of RMR Merseyside got in touch to ask for help with the presentation he needed to make as part of his Sergeant's exams. He had chosen 47 RM Cdo's capture of Port en Bessin as his topic. The information and material he received must have helped because his presentation was a great success scoring a high A\*. He thanks all involved and we congratulate him on becoming **Acting Sergeant Dixon**, soon to be Sergeant, we believe. Marc de Bolster was also able to learn more about the death of **Marine A W Guymer** who was the CO's driver. Apparently, he was at a cinema, the Ciné Rex, in Antwerp when it was hit by a V2 rocket on 16th December 1944. There was a heavy toll with 296 military personnel and 217 civilians killed and 300 injured. When next in Antwerp, Marc intends to visit his grave. The family of **Eric Wood** (obituary p. 4) also asked for any further information which proved to be fairly easy as he is mentioned (twice) in John Forfar's history of the Commando. It is worth mentioning that **access to personal records** held by the Ministry of Defence is

given only to the individual subject or, if deceased, their next of kin. In the case of RM and RN personnel records, the relevant department is:

Disclosure Cell, MP G-2, Room 48, West Battery, Whale Island, Portsmouth PO2 8DX

Many thanks to Mark Bentinck for this information.

As ever, we are grateful to Marc de Bolster for his expertise and non-stop work on the website, honouring the men of 47 and recording information regarding all aspects of their service. It is also an increasingly important point of contact.

Marc is always looking for material to put on the web and for his collection. Any photos, documents and other material that you think might be of interest can be sent to:

Marc de Bolster

Elzendreef 29, 2272 CG, Voorburg, Netherlands

Or email: [m.de.bolster@xs4all.nl](mailto:m.de.bolster@xs4all.nl) All original photos etc will, of course, be returned safely.

You can access the website at: [www.47Commando.org.uk](http://www.47Commando.org.uk)

### Email

If you have email and don't already get *Despatch* that way, please consider opting to receive your copy by this means. It saves a great deal in both postage and "production". Thanks.





Next issue - Despatch 27: January 2013

RYES

18 JUIN 2012

PORT-EN-BESSIN-HUPPAIN - 68<sup>e</sup> anniversaire du Débarquement

## La commune commémore sa libération



Plusieurs dépôts de gerbes ont marqué cette journée du jeudi 7 juin.

A l'occasion du 68<sup>e</sup> anniversaire du Débarquement, la commune de Port en Bessin Huppain a renouvelé jeudi matin les dépôts de gerbes afin de rendre hommage à ses libérateurs : les membres du 47<sup>e</sup> Royal Marine Commando.

Le 47<sup>e</sup> Royal Marine Com-



Les drapeaux... et les parapluies étaient de sortie.

mando, composé de 420 hommes, débarqua le matin du 6 juin à Asnelles et arriva à Port-en-Bessin après une marche de plus de vingt kilomètres à travers champs.

Après une lutte acharnée de près de quinze heures, il parvint à arracher le port aux

maines de l'armée allemande. La matinée a débuté au pied de la stèle à Commes, puis sur la falaise auprès du monument du capitaine Cousins.

Le groupe des officiels et des vétérans s'est ensuite rendu de l'autre côté de la falaise, dans le jardin du souvenir, pour un hommage et finale-

ment une commémoration a eu lieu sous la Tour Vauban.

L'ensemble des vétérans accueillis depuis de nombreuses années dans la cité portaise a rejoint la salle des fêtes, où le maire, Pierre-Albert Cavey, a réitéré ses chaleureux remerciements aux libérateurs anglais.