

## 47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

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### Committee

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### DESPATCH 29 January 2014

#### COMMENT

Among the many anniversaries this year, the most important ones for us are the seventy years since the Normandy invasion and the landings on Walcheren. Naturally, we shall commemorate those who died and celebrate the liberation of those who were occupied. It also seems fitting that we should remember how the people who were liberated and their families and compatriots have made us welcome over the many years since with great friendship and generous hospitality. They, also, seem never to forget.

Lannah

#### FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Dear 47 Veterans, Friends and Family Members,  
"My most brilliant achievement" - wrote Winston Churchill "was my ability to persuade my wife to marry me." This sort of remark would have made our friend and comrade Professor John Forfar smile. When John died last year at the grand old age of 96 his family paid tribute to his lifelong devotion to Isobel, whom he'd met before the war and married in 1942. John was also devoted to telling the story of 47 Royal Marine Commando the veterans he'd cared for as Medical Officer, and those who he had buried too. So in this, the 70th year of the Battle Honours of 47 RM Commando at Port en Bessin and Walcheren, we've decided to hold a celebration of his life. There will be music, readings, tributes from our Veterans and a dinner in the evening. Can I ask you to keep the date of March 8th free and to contact Dan Holbrough - grandson of Albert Rutherford - for details nearer the time. It will be held at the Union Jack Club with all costs met for veterans of travel, food and accommodation. We hope as many veterans as possible reading this will be able to come. We will then also be able to give full details of the trip to Port en Bessin in June where a memorial will be unveiled to 47. Many events are planned involving our Government and Royal Family during this time to which we are invited. Veterans and one family member can both travel to France for free. (It was free when you went in 1944, so it seems right this time too!!) We have been contacted by two veterans who had lost touch since 1945 they are Harry Prescott and Ben "Jack" Brooks. Harry came with us to Walcheren where we had 28 of us remembering 47's deeds and also the dead. Sales of John Forfar's book

are going well, and we also have prints for sale of David Rowlands painting unveiled last year. Please think about buying one or selling one to interested parties where you live! Thank you for reading, and thanks to our fabulous committee, and to the serving Royal Marines who have done so much for us. I'm delighted to say that Chuck Harris has kindly agreed to take over as President, and when you next meet him, as well as saluting, you may now need to bow or curtsey, or both. Happy New Year, and I hope we can all meet in a few weeks and toast old friends, new friends and of course, absent friends too.

Patrick O'Connell

**REUNION Saturday, 8th March, 2014**  
**This will be held at the Union Jack Club to celebrate the life of**  
**Professor John Forfar.**

All members are invited to this celebration which will begin around Saturday lunch time. In the evening there will be a buffet meal. The cost of this will depend on the numbers attending. An overnight stay is possible for those who need it and accommodation at the club can also be booked for Friday, 7th March, for those who otherwise would be unable to reach Waterloo by lunchtime.

It is hoped that as many veterans as possible will attend and their costs for the occasion will be met by the Association.

The event is being organised by member, Daniel Holbrough.

Please get in touch with him **as soon as possible** if you are planning to attend.

The UJC will need to know the total numbers fairly soon.

You can contact Dan by email **[d\\_42\\_uk@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:d_42_uk@yahoo.co.uk)**

OR telephone 07540650384

By post: 9 Halston Cottages, Plealey Road, Lea Cross,  
 Shrewsbury SY5 8HS

Following the evening buffet there will be plenty of time to socialise and chat with old and new friends.

***There will, of course, be nothing gloomy about the event***

**WACHEREN 2013**

*This report and photo are due to appear in the Jan/Feb issue of The Globe & Laurel.*

**47 RM Commando Association in Holland 2013**

We arrived on the island of Walcheren with a larger group than usual including some welcome new members and, once there, numbers were boosted to over thirty by the arrival of several of our Dutch and Belgian friends and supporters.

On 1st November 2013 at the Polderhuis Museum in Westkapelle our veterans were seated at the front for the ceremony marking the difficult landing on the beach close by exactly 69 years ago. In remembrance of the fallen, many laid wreaths at the stone near the foot of the Liberty Bridge, including the local Mayor and Lt Col Jerry Slack RM who liaises with the Dutch Commandos. Local schoolchildren placed individual blooms and RM Bugler Callam Gordon sounded the Last Post.

Further ceremonies took place at the civilian 'Lighthouse' cemetery and at Erica Beach. With a stiff breeze off the North Sea, most tributes had to be anchored down and, as last year, Chairman Patrick O'Connell, released the rum ration to restore warmth to the extremities when we returned to the coach. Nobody seemed to object. Next day, our first stop was at the church at Dishoek where there is a plaque outside

to the men of 47 RM Commando who fell in the liberation of the island. Normally shut during the winter months, last year we were astonished to find that inside it was an "open-air" church. This year we had a further pleasant surprise when, on arrival, we were seated in the "cloistered" area of the church and served coffee, cakes and other delicacies by members of the congregation. Afterwards, they joined us for our ceremony at the plaque outside.

We continued to the German bunker W11 where we were welcomed by John Daane and his wife Suzan. John has an extensive collection of WW2 memorabilia, uniforms, weapons and much more, housed in a part of the battery. Suzan provided us with a wonderful lunch and then those of us who were able to slither up and down steep and muddy banks followed John and discovered the wide extent of the massive emplacement. It was easy to understand how it had held up 47 Commando in 1944 at the expense of many casualties.



*Veterans & vintage motorcycle below the sea-wall, Westkapelle*

At Flushing (Vlissingen), our final destination for the day, we held a ceremony at the Commando Monument followed by one at the Landing Craft Stone close to the beach. This meant a bit of a walk and climbing the sea-wall via steep steps. Nevertheless many made it over and a couple of wheelchairs and their users were transported too. A bendy-bus approached along the promenade beside the beach and we suddenly discovered that our Chairman could not only sprint but also wave his arms about at the same time. The bus driver stopped and agreed to wait while we had a brief wreath-laying. The hi-jacked bus then took our wheelchair-users and several others on its circular route of the town and eventually back to the Commando Monument. Like so many of the Dutch, he treated our veterans as VIPs and refused to take any fares for the ride.

Our final day began with a longer trip off the island to Sprang-Capelle where we were joined by Dutch Commando veterans to honour Lt Ian Adam whose grave is isolated from his comrades, being at the civil cemetery in the town. For many years the grave was tended by local people. The Dutch veterans also joined us at the memorial at Kapelsche Veer close to the River Maas where Lt Adam, among others, had fought

valiantly against insurmountable odds.

Next, we travelled to the British Military Cemetery at Bergen-op-Zoom where thirty-four men of 47 Cdo lie. Callum, our excellent bugler, sounded his final Last Post for this trip and the remainder of our wreaths were laid.

Evenings at the hotel had provided great opportunities for members to mix and enjoy each other's company and the Corps dinner that night proved to be no different. After the pleasure of catching up with old friends and making new ones, we departed with thoughts of meeting again next year for several important 70th anniversaries which will, of course, include remembrance of the liberation of Walcheren. LB

## WALCHEREN Extras

**Grandchildren** It's always good to welcome new members and even more so when they have strong connections to 47 and bring their grandchildren.

Harry Prescott couldn't have a stronger link. He served in Q Troop and, though he had never been in touch before, soon became a part of the group, blending in with the other veterans. Harry was accompanied by his grandson, Kevin.

Mary Nicholls, the widow of Marine "Nobby" Nicholls who served in B Troop, joined us for the first time with her daughter, Anne-Marie and her granddaughter, Gabby. Everyone appeared to thoroughly enjoy the experience.

### We were pleased to see:

Leen van de Merbel our member resident in Middelburg though, unfortunately, only briefly because a friend of his was very ill in hospital. The place he recommended for lunch at Bergen op Zoom (called La Place) proved to be a winner.

Also Bob MacDonald (Lt Col, RM, now retired) who attended the ceremonies at Westkapelle wearing the MacDonald tartan with a *skean dhu* in his sock. So it was better not to ask what he wore under the kilt.

**Callum** On our last evening a conveniently placed keyboard allowed Callum Gordon to show us that he was a talented pianist as well as a bugler by playing a very fast ragtime number to cheers and great applause.

**BBC Recording** On the coach, Patrick played the November 1944 BBC recording made on Walcheren. The voices of the men on the spot, including his own father, Captain Guy O'Connell, make for a graphic account of the action and it was apt to hear it again beside the now peaceful beaches and sea-walls.

## IN MEMORIAM

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

**Albert E Potterton** 7th August 2013 Hitchin, Herts Aged 90 Albert joined the Royal Marines in 1942 and later trained at Achnacarry, becoming a member of the new 47 RM Cdo in 1943. As a Corporal in Y Troop he landed in Normandy and at Walcheren



*"There's a hole in my bunker"*  
Gabby explores the far reaches of W11

and remained with 47 until their disbandment. He remained fit until quite recently, able to walk long distances which he put down to his commando training as a young man.

**Professor John Oldroyd Forfar** 14th August 2013 Edinburgh Aged 96 Obituaries appeared in *The Times* (reproduced on p 10), *The Globe & Laurel* (written by Mark Bentinck and with an excellent photo) and *The Scotsman*. *The Daily Telegraph* had a very detailed obituary by Peter Hore and included a reproduction of the painting of John operating in the cellar at Sallenelles.

Emailing the news to all online members produced a huge response, many mentioning his patience and kindness when they had enquired about relatives' service with 47.

Among many others, the Mayor of Port en Bessin sent a letter of condolence.

**George Skinner** 18th December 2013 Edinburgh Aged 92 George served with 47 RM Commando until its disbandment in 1946. At one time he and his wife Mima attended many reunions with the Association including the one and only trip to Fécamp on the 50th anniversary. He remained fit throughout his life, walking every day, and continued to work until 6 years ago. It was only in the last few months that his health deteriorated. His wife has made a very generous donation to the Association in his memory.

## NEWS

**St George's School, Ascot** The girls from St George's who were in Normandy last June all sent hand-written letters of thanks to Chairman, Patrick, for the presentation. Their teacher, Lydia Jackson, also wrote thanking Marc de Bolster. Both our Association and the school are keen to maintain the link already forged. Their group is not staying in the Port this year and they return to the UK from Normandy on 6th June so we may not see them this time.

**The Spectator** An article by James Delingpole on Normandy appeared on 20th July 2013. He included a good deal about Port en Bessin and a glowing account of 47 RM Commando's capture of the port. James knows us well and has written a variety of other pieces about 47. It would be no surprise if he had articles on the 70th anniversary later this year with further references to 47 Commando's valour.

**Peace Day** 25th September 2013 was marked in Normandy by 9,000 silhouettes of fallen soldiers being etched into the beaches at Arromanches as a reminder of German and Allied forces and civilians who died during the D-Day landings.

*Many thanks to Ken Cowdery for sending the link.*

Further striking photos at :

<http://www.thiscolossal.com/2013/09/the-fallen-9000/>



**Liberation Celebrations** In September, Marc de Bolster attended events in Mechelen, Belgium, supporting Tina & Roger Vermeylen in their home town and they also took part in the celebrations for the 69th anniversary of the liberation of Antwerp. Marc has also been invited by the Dutch Commando veterans we met in November to attend the official commemoration at Kapelsche Veer on 2nd February.

**“From Omaha to the Scheldt...”** There was an excellent review of the updated edition in the Nov/Dec issue of *The Globe & Laurel* written by General Julian Thompson (“signed” JHAT).

**Committee Meetings** were held at the Arneville Hotel, Middelburg on 1st November and by telephone conferencing on 4th January. Most items were regarding the

arrangements for the 70th anniversary in Normandy.

**Remembrance Sunday** Betty Field, our former Secretary, together with her daughters Pauline and Jane laid a wreath at 47's Memorial Stone in the Garden of Remembrance at the Royal Marines Museum at Eastney. The Royal Marines Band was in attendance and there was an excellent turn-out for the ceremony.

**The RMA Magazine** December 2013 had an article on our 70th anniversary reunion last March by Philip Day, RMA Roving Reporter. It included a good reproduction of the David Rowland painting and mentioned that Les Pike would be making a copy available for auction on behalf of the RM Charitable Trust.

**Standard Bearers** Peter Spear, for many years our standard bearer, has been unable to attend functions for quite a while due to work commitments and, more recently, ill health. We all hope that he gets well soon. In the meantime, Les Pike has taken over and worked tirelessly at the job. He has travelled up and down the land to various events and 47 veteran funerals, including "Doc" Forfar's in Edinburgh. His sterling service has been much appreciated but now Les would like to "retire" before too long. (He's much older than he looks!) In Walcheren, Lou Sartorel took over from Les for some of the ceremonies and it all looked very good.

**Greetings** and good wishes to veterans and members were received over the holiday period from several people.

Juergen Baas, the German who we meet in Normandy and who is a great supporter of 47 and friend of the late Arthur Thompson and Ernie Staphnill sent best wishes to all via Geof Haywood.

Bill Harvey, who we often meet in Walcheren (his father, serving in the Royal Artillery, was killed there on 1st Nov 44), emailed a card of the Commando Monument and surrounding area in snow with Christmas and new year greetings in Scots Gaelic as well as English. (Fortunately, my Gaelic's pretty good.)

Captain John Hillier, Editor of *The Globe & Laurel*, also sent greetings to all members.

**Major Bob Perry RM** Bob returned to the UK in October after 16 months serving in Diego Garcia. Following leave and some mission specific training, he travelled to South Sudan at the end of December. He writes, "I work as a military adviser to the United Nations who are there to consolidate peace and security in the newest and one of the most war torn and poverty stricken countries in the world. More to follow in the next edition..." He sends his regards to all.

### THE LIZÉ DIARY

Henri Lizé's diary covers the 5th June to 14th July 1944. He lived on Rue Nationale, Port en Bessin and later became Mayor. On the 40th anniversary of D-Day, the late Bert Quinney (Y Troop) and his wife Betty were "bilked" with the family. Betty was given a copy of the diary but only recently has she translated it into English with help from her daughter, Ruth Goudie, and Sheila Sutton, a fluent French speaker, now in her 90s, who served with SOE.

In translation, there are eleven A4 pages but I hope that the following gives some idea of the style and content.

When we are made so welcome in the Port, it's easy to believe that after the liberation everything was fine for the people of the town. However, many basic commodities were in short supply or unobtainable. Further, the Allies were still struggling to advance, particularly in the Caen area, only 27 miles away. People worried about friends and relatives living there. All kinds of rumours circulated.

Some of the Diary may have been written in retrospect. It's doubtful that the Captain of the Georges Leygues came ashore at 11 am on 7th June as it states. Two German flak ships were still in the harbour and neither headland had been secured. All the

same, the entries are a valuable insight into how people survived following D-Day. The diary begins on the night of the [5th/6th June](#) with the Allied bombardment. The family go downstairs to shelter beneath stone stairs and feel in danger of their lives. Early afternoon they venture outside and, finding neighbouring buildings in ruins, count themselves lucky.

On the [7th](#) Lizé records that at 4 pm the English Commandos made their appearance on the Rue Nationale “hugging the walls”. Somebody wounded on the arm is treated by an English medical attendant (but possibly Scots). Throughout, anything British is referred to as English.

Despite their liberation, the war continues to rage nearby and they hear firing, at first as close as Huppain. Mostly they sleep downstairs on mattresses on the floor and the British anti-aircraft guns boom out disturbing their sleep.

Eventually all routes to the quays are closed. However, [late June](#) they reach the top of a cliff and can see Arromanches: “Under... black and stormy clouds an infinity of boats arrive from England looking like an Impressionist painting”. Below them an anti-aircraft cannon is getting ready to fire.

He writes: “The German planes are without doubt aiming at the convoys of oil which are continually leaving the Port for the front.

Their bombs will be falling on the surrounding area...

The Pipelines which were brought ashore by the English directly feed the expeditionary force... The enormous convoys follow without interruption along Rue Nationale arriving empty and leaving full of petrol... Great labour!!”

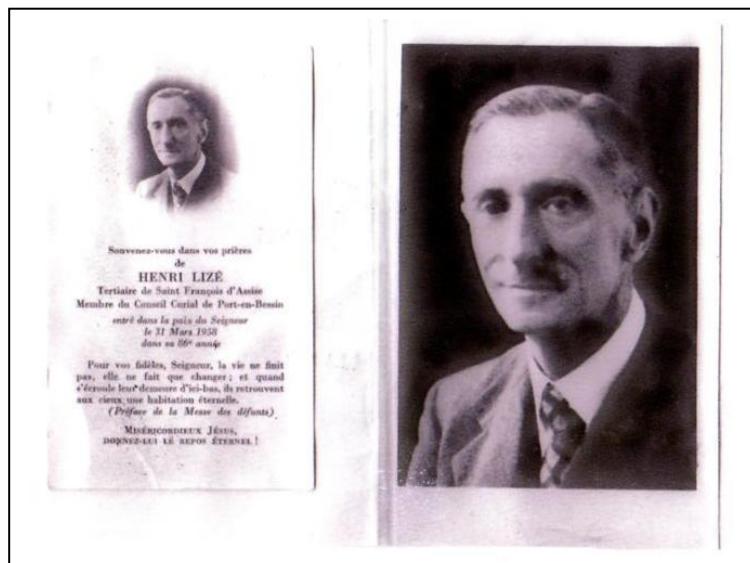
The irony is that, despite petrol flowing through the town, no citizens have access to any. Lizé, on several occasions, cadges lifts from British officers to reach Bayeux. There is a great deal of damage to buildings: “The Tower Vauban... gutted but... standing” and “Stop at... the Chateau de Sully now in ruins, visit the field of batteries. Heavy German guns intact. English aircraft shot down. Everywhere there is debris of fuselage and many engines...”

Later, walking to Huppain he sees a neighbour’s house totally demolished. Nearly everyone has damage to roofs and missing window panes. The June weather is not kind, cold with rain and gales.

On the [26th](#) when a storm breaks: “...we would not have believed that our roof was so poor. It is even raining in our attics... broken glass also lets in the wind and the rain... None of the panes [have] been replaced. Scarcely enough cardboard. No roofers and no slates... And nearly all are in this state. We need tarpaulins but where will we find them?”

Nor is food abundant but people help each other and there is distribution of produce from the Mairie. The British military administration help as much as they can and Lizé has nothing but praise for them and their generosity.

On [2nd July](#), a wireless system is set up in a field beside the church. There is no electricity. People can hear reports from London at set times as they did before the landing, though presumably that was more clandestine.



On 9th July, over a month after the landings, they learn that Caen is at last in the hands of the Allies.

On the 13th preparations begin for the next day's ceremonies; garlands, flowers, ribbons and banners are prepared.

14th July Bastille Day. By 6 am, "English soldiers are climbing ladders to hang garlands...which zig-zag across the Rue Nationale, making a triumphal avenue from one end to the other."

Early fog lifts: "All day long a clear... sun is going to shine to give the right atmosphere to these flags, these flowers and these ruins!"

Detachments of Allied servicemen and an improvised band assemble. There are speeches, the laying of flowers and a minute's silence. Schoolchildren sing the national anthems and the church bells peel for the first time since 1939. Everyone walks to the cemetery. In the meadow nearby lie the 17 commandos, killed during the liberation of the Port. He writes, "In a magnificent panorama, bounded by cliffs, the woods of Bosq and Mont Cavalier, a poignant emotion runs through all who were watching..."

It seems appropriate to end with the solemn interment of the seventeen fallen commandos of 47 who, according to the final words of Commandant de Villefosse, though "fallen far from their fathers and mothers, now repose nevertheless among brothers."

LB

### **FROM OMAHA TO THE SCHELDT**

As 2013 draws to a close, I'm delighted to say that we have sold over 300 copies of the updated edition of *From Omaha to the Scheldt* (including paperbacks, ebooks and Kindle borrows). We've had sales throughout the UK and Europe, as well as the US, South Africa and even New Zealand (and not someone I know, either!).

Most readers don't appear to have a family connection, so it's clear that 47's story is finding a new audience, keen to know more of its exploits. The book was recently reviewed by Maj General Julian Thompson in the *Globe & Laurel*, where he described it as both 'a superb account' and as 'highly recommended'.

Particular thanks to those who generously donated towards the costs of publishing this new edition, and then equally generously refused to be reimbursed when we were in a position to do so. And special thanks to Ken Parker, who has trudged tirelessly to the post office to post the orders. I have received a number of delighted customer comments about the fact that their copy was sent by a veteran.

We have now sold through our first prinrun and have reprinted, so are set up for all the interest that I hope the 70th Anniversary of D-Day will bring, with the proceeds going into Association funds.

Essie Cousins

### **NORMANDY 2014 NEWS**

**Information Board** Some very generous donations were received from members to further the work on the board. It is now ready to be installed in the area below the Vauban Tower. There will also be a town information board in the vicinity together with the Oil Port Memorial Stone, paths and seating.

**The Cousins Memorial** After some delay, the new bilingual plaque is now in place on

the existing plinth. Some other work is needed and will probably be done at Easter in good time for the June ceremony.

**Bar de la Marée** Well, people often called it the "Commando Bar"... Natalie and Stephane want to change the name to "Bar le 47eme RM Commando" (or something very similar). When consulted, veterans and Committee members thought it a huge honour and a great compliment. At present, enquiries are being made to see if it will be in order for them to display a Royal Marines crest outside along with the name.

### FOR SALE

**From Omaha to the Scheldt, updated edition** available through the Association for £20 plus £3 p&p from:

Ken Parker, 45 Hawthorn Close, Pucklechurch, Bristol BS16 9SZ.  
Make cheques payable to "47 RM Cdo Media".

Also in bookshops and online at Amazon for £22 plus £2.80 UK delivery.

Also as an ebook. The Kindle edition on Amazon is available at £8.04.

**The Capture of Port-en-Bessin, 7th June 1944** Prints of David Rowlands' oil painting are available unsigned at £25, signed by David at £40. Large postcards are £5, small £1, all available from Geof Haywood. Cheques payable to "47 RM Cdo Media". Please get in touch with Geof regarding current postal charges:  
[geofandgillh@btinternet.com](mailto:geofandgillh@btinternet.com) or 01202 888194.

Geof also has:

**RM Commando beach/bath towels**

59" x 32" £15 including P&P

**47 RM Commando plaques** £26 plus P&P



**Auction** To celebrate 350 years of the Royal Marines (1664-2014), a limited edition of 350 each of port and whisky has been produced. The Association has acquired number 47 in each batch. Patrick will be auctioning them, probably in June. They are of prime interest to specialist collectors as well as RM people so bidding will open at £200.

**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". Many thanks.



## SUBSCRIPTIONS

### Important information

The annual subscription, running from January to December, remains at £10 per annum and is now due. This provides much needed income to the Association. The majority of members pay and pay promptly but, really, they are subsidizing those who don't. If you haven't paid last year's (2013) sub, please could you combine it with this year's? It would be much appreciated by all concerned. This doesn't apply to veterans. They have free membership.

Please send cheques, made payable to "47 RM Commando Association", to our Treasurer:

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

### NORMANDY 2014 The 70th anniversary of D-Day

#### Essentials if you're travelling

Our Secretary, Ingrid Fearne, already has a full list of people who wish to travel and has a 53-seater coach booked. You may still add your name to the list in case anybody cancels. In all cases priority is being given to veterans and their families and families of former 47 RM commandos.

Places are at such a premium that we suggest you send the usual deposit of £25 per head **as soon as possible** but by the end of February at the very latest to:

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

Please make cheques payable to '47 RM Commando Association'.

– Also make sure that your subscription is up-to-date.

The trip to Port en Bessin will be from **5th to 9th June**.

The coach will pick up (very early) at the Royal Maritime Club, Portsmouth, and at the ferry terminal.

If you plan to stay at the **Royal Maritime Club** please book as soon as possible. (Advance Bookings: 0239 2837681). **Say that you are with 47 Cdo Association,**

**Membership No 4600** or you may be charged at a higher tariff. Also please order a packed lunch at time of booking as we leave long before breakfast is served!

Those who are not on Ingrid's current list may have the option to stay at a nearby gite which the Association has booked. This sleeps 10 which means sharing with other members. This could only be booked by the week so our booking is from 31st May to 14th June. Therefore, it would be possible to arrive earlier or to extend your stay beyond 9th June or both. There may be other accommodation available but in all of these cases you will need to use your **own transport**.

**If you're travelling under your own steam** to a gite or something similar please book your **ferry** or make any other travel arrangements you need **as soon as possible**. On previous form for this type of event, everything gets booked up!

**Heroes Return 2 Fund** Ingrid will be in touch by phone very shortly with veterans and veterans' widows who intend to travel to either Normandy or Walcheren. She will need to compile the necessary veteran details (service number, date of birth etc) so that she can fill out the form to apply for these grants.

If you have any queries about any of the above, please ring Ingrid on:

0208 2390145 or email: [ingrid.fearne@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:ingrid.fearne@blueyonder.co.uk)



*At the Polderhuis  
Museum  
Westkapelle*



*Liberty Bridge  
1st November 2013*



*Lieutenant Adam's grave  
Sprang Capelle*

#### **47 RM COMMANDO WEBSITE**

As ever, thanks are due to Marc de Bolster for his time and skills in administering and maintaining the website. It has become a very important part of the Association, being the first port of call for hosts of queries and contacts from long-lost veterans, their families and many others. It also provides information on 47 Commando's history, its personnel and Association events with plenty of photos and much more besides.

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



*At the Commando Monument, Flushing*

*Happy New Year  
Next issue - Despatch 30: July 2014*