

## 47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

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## DESPATCH 35 January 2017

### From the Editor

I've changed country again, now being resident in Bonnie Scotland, so please note my change of address and new phone number. My email address is unchanged. I'm very happy to be here and to have welcomed in the New Year at Hogmanay but there are lots of things I'll miss, especially my wonderful friends and neighbours, in Wales.

Best wishes to everyone, hoping you have a happy, healthy and successful 2017

Lannah

### FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Dear Veterans, friends, families, and Association members far and wide,

Happy New Year!

2017 begins with all surviving veterans of 47 Royal Marine Commando awarded "Legion d'Honneur" by the Republic of France. Some chose to receive their award privately by post, others in person in the UK and still more in France. Being the highest award for gallantry in France, it cannot be awarded twice, so we never saw a parade of ALL 47 Veterans, but we are all very proud to know that they have been awarded. (Reading this if you are a Veteran who has not received yours, please do contact Geof Haywood as soon as you can!)

After the war, 47 Veterans felt that their part in the D Day history had been forgotten. When George Amos visited Port en Bessin in the late 1980s he found the pillbox on the Western Feature was about to be demolished and that many local people thought they had been liberated by the Americans! (The "King Hotel" in P en B has just been renamed the "Eisenhower," so we still have work to do!!)

So to know that the men of 47 have been recognised with the Legion d'Honneur medal - with help of our family members and fabulous committee - is an amazing turnaround in this long history. Even Jerry Brent received his in Australia just weeks before he died.

It is sad to think that many men died since the war without knowing this was coming, but we can be sure that this was the sort of reason the Association was formed - to keep alive the story of what had been achieved.

In the Netherlands in November, a small band of us arrived by coach and car feeling that our numbers were low. But we were reminded that in one year only one WW2 Veteran and Member of the Association - John Baker - was there to represent us all. He was not in 47 RM Commando but he had been on the Arctic Convoys and had served off the coast of Normandy during D Day. As the week wore on, our coach became fuller and fuller and the 47 Standard fluttered proudly with the RM bugler beside. The little church at Dishoek was full with local faces and a warm welcome.

We are contacted all the time by new family members or historians keen to get to meet our Veterans and so the story of 47 goes on. We will all meet again at the Royal Albert Hall in the spring, if you'd like to come along liaise with Geof about booking your own ticket when the rest of us are there ... his allocation has run out already.

I'd like to thank all our Veterans for allowing us to join with you in person or in spirit, and our fabulous committee, standard bearer, padre, buglers, Corps Members, and Association members of all kinds in all countries who make everything possible. The Mayor of Port en Bessin his wife and staff and all the kind people in Fécamp and in Westkapelle do everything they can and Lannah's *Despatch* continues even though she's just moved house from Wales to Scotland, and thanks to her as well.

Best wishes

Patrick O'Connell  
Chairman, Son of Captain Guy O'Connell, HW Troop

PS: We have now established a 47 Charity to help with donations and with legacies - it is a more tax efficient system for the future. – If they wish, Association members can obtain the 47 Charity's Constitution and Grant Making Policy from the Charity Treasurer, Tom Busby, [tombusby@onetel.com](mailto:tombusby@onetel.com) or via Ingrid our secretary. The Charity is there to support the Association and to help us get our affairs in more modern order. More details to follow at the AGM which has now moved to June.

## WALCHEREN 2016

*This article by Major Bob Perry RM is due to appear in the next Globe and Laurel, Jan/Feb 2017*

### 47 Royal Marine Commando Association Return to Walcheren

*For those readers a little shy on Corps history, Walcheren is a saucer-shaped island rimmed by high sand-dunes which prevents the sea from flooding the central plain. The island dominates the River Scheldt estuary, which in the Second World War the German Army heavily fortified to prevent the allies gaining access to the vital deep water port of Antwerp. This classic commando sea-borne assault on 1 November 1944 involving 4<sup>th</sup> Special Service Brigade (41 RM Cdo, 47 RM Cdo, 48 RM Cdo and No 4 Cdo) to destroy the formidable enemy coastal batteries was precluded by the RAF bombing the dyke at Westkapelle to flood the interior of the island and deny the enemy freedom of movement. After a hard fought battle along the narrow strip of sand dunes, the island was secured on 8 November.*

Our numbers were as strong as ever when we paraded early but not so bright eyed on a dark but mild autumn morning at the Royal Maritime Club in Portsmouth. After roll-call, expertly overseen by our own highly efficient 'Sergeant Major', Ingrid Fearne (Association Secretary), the thoughts of an uncomfortable and long coach journey were quickly dispelled by the friendly banter, plentiful refreshment and the 'dit' spinning that frequently occurs between the stalwart travelling supporters of the Association and our Second World War veterans, on this occasion represented by Ken Parker, Harry Prescott and Ken Porter.

The historical tone for the visit was further set when we arrived at Calais: a modern day heavily defended coast complete with formidable obstacles, miles and miles of substantial double fences and rows of razor sharp concertina wire. It was commented by our veterans (some of the few to have assaulted Hitler's 'Atlantic Wall' on two occasions in Normandy and at Walcheren) that the European coastline didn't appear to have changed much from 72 years ago! On arrival at the Arneville Hotel in Middleburg, our comfortable patrol base for the 5-day visit, we were enthusiastically welcomed by the staff, along with many of our French, Belgian and Dutch supporters, most of whom had also travelled long distances to be with us to commemorate this special Corps memorable date. During dinner that evening we were joined by Captain Tom Bloor RM and Colour Sergeant Steve Trout, both serving on exchange duties with the RNLMC and who would be formally representing the Corps at the main commemorative ceremonies.

The following day, on 1 November, at the Polderhuis Museum, Westkapelle, we were welcomed by Dr Leon de Witte OBE, President of the Foundation to Support the Liberation



*At the Polderhuis Museum*

of Walcheren, for the main ceremony and wreath laying at the Liberty Bridge, an impressive wooden structure built by volunteers of the museum in memory of those Royal Marines, attached personnel and other Allied Forces, who were killed in action during the assault and subsequent operations. The bridge connects a Sherman tank on top of the dyke to a landing craft in the museum garden. It represents a lasting homage to all Allied Forces that participated in this successful amphibious operation and the strong links between the Royal Marines and the people of Westkapelle and Walcheren. We then moved to the lighthouse and laid a wreath at the monument for the civil victims of Westkapelle; approximately 200 civilians were killed during the bombing of the dyke, subsequent flooding and during the landings. Following this we all formed up at the Erika beach memorial on the site where No.4 Special Service Brigade landed. At all three ceremonies we were joined by Sir Geoffrey Adams, British Ambassador to the Netherlands, along with senior military and ministerial representatives from France, Belgium, the Netherlands and South Africa. The 47 RM Cdo

Association standard, carried by Lou Sartorel took a prominent position at each ceremony alongside that of the RMA Guildford and District Branch, carried by Tony Davie. The Last Post and Reveille was majestically sounded by Bugler Ross Tomkins from the RM Band Portsmouth.

The next morning we travelled to Dishoek, location of the formidable W11 battery, the main objective of 47 RM Cdo. Much of the sprawling complex was demolished in the 1980s to make way for flood defence improvements. However, in the one the remaining support bunker, a local historian, 'Bunker John' Daane, had built a scale model of the original complex which consisted of four large calibre guns in concrete casements, three anti-aircraft guns, sandbagged machine gun and mortar posts, trenches and nine pillboxes spread out over 600m along the dunes. The chaplain at the local tourist church, Rene Heinric, is the custodian of the 47 RM Cdo memorial plaque listing by name the 34 men who were killed during the amphibious landing and assault on W11. A strong supporter of the Association and especially our veterans, Rene and his team of church helpers always warmly welcome us each year. As a measure of our appreciation, the Association Chaplain, Reverend John Wasley RNR, presented a wooden cross, masterfully crafted from a piece of English Oak, as a token of our everlasting and mutual friendship.

Later that afternoon we visited Flushing, and a long awaited opportunity for 47 RM Cdo Association member Ken Porter, an RN veteran who served with 501 LCA Flotilla at



***Our veterans with the Ambassador and senior serving Marines***

Wasley we read out all of the names of those serving with the Commando who were killed at Walcheren and subsequent operations on the River Maas area of operations. We also visited the grave of Lt Ian Adam RM, the sole Commonwealth war grave in the civilian cemetery in Sprang Capelle.

Our last night dinner was a strongly supported affair under our compère and Chairman, the BBC broadcaster and presenter, Paddy O'Connell. It was an opportunity to thank all those who continue to support our veterans and proof that 47 RM Cdo Association remains as strong as ever.

Walcheren was the last major opposed amphibious landing of the Second World War and rightly remains a Corps memorable date. In this often forgotten theatre of operations, the amphibious landings at Westkapelle and subsequent operations around the Western Scheldt and River Maas that saw much desperate hand to hand fighting in awful weather conditions, were the battleground for a free waterway to the liberated city and port of Antwerp and key to

Normandy and Walcheren, to lay a wreath at the recently rededicated Landing Craft memorial at Uncle Beach. We also paid our formal respects at the No 4 Commando memorial.  
 Bergen-op-Zoom War Cemetery contains 1284 Commonwealth burials and commemorations of the Second World War, many of the casualties are as a result of the Battle of Walcheren and where most of those killed serving with 47 RM Cdo are laid to rest. During a solemn service conducted by John

the final liberation of the Netherlands. Winston Churchill, in his account of the Second World War (1954) exulted about Walcheren:

*'Many other notable feats were performed by Commandos during the war, and though other troops and other Services played their full part in this remarkable operation the extreme gallantry of the Royal Marines stands forth, The Commando idea was once again triumphant.'*

### Walcheren Extras

**Marine Guymer** One evening in the hotel, 47 RM Cdo Association historian, Marc de Bolster, told of the tragic death of Marine Arthur Guymer, one of the 114 men who were killed whilst serving with the Commando. Having survived the Normandy landings and action at Walcheren he was killed in Antwerp on 16 December 1944, during a 48-hour leave, when a V-2 rocket landed on the roof of the Cine Rex cinema. There were around 1100 people in the cinema and the explosion killed 567 of them including 296 Allied servicemen (a further 194 service personnel were injured). It was the highest death toll from a single rocket attack during the war. After Marc's presentation, and as our own tribute to Mne Guymer, we watched the entire showing of '*The Plainsman*', a 1936 US Western starring Gary Cooper and Jean Arthur, which was being shown in the cinema when the rocket hit.

**Zeeland Liberation Museum** On our way back to the hotel, an unexpected opportunity arose to visit the Zeeland Liberation Museum which has the Battle for the River Scheldt as its main theme. We were able to view and get hands-on many of the type of amphibious craft that were used at Walcheren.

**Marine Williams** While in the Sprang Capelle area we were also keen to pay our respects at the grave of Mne David Williams, 41 RM Cdo, whose remains were discovered in 2010 in a



shallow grave a few miles NW of Waalwijk, an area which 41 RM Cdo were responsible for in early 1945. In 2015, a definite identification was made by DNA testing and earlier this year Mne Williams was finally laid to rest in Waspik Protestant Cemetery. Our

bugler, Ross Tomkins, who coincidentally sounded Last Post and Reveille at his funeral service in June, laid a wreath on behalf of 47 RM Cdo Association.

### IN MEMORIAM

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

**Gerald Brent** 31<sup>st</sup> July 2016, Point Piper, New South Wales, Australia, aged 95.

Gerry was born Gunter Harry Berendt in Berlin in 1920. He managed to get away from Germany to England in 1938 but when war was declared in 1939 he became an "enemy alien" and was interned first in Canada and then on the Isle of Wight. Later he was able to

join the Royal Welch Fusiliers as a Lieutenant. With his fluent German as an asset he transferred to 47 RM Commando. He was instructed to change his name so that he could not be identified as German so he became Gerry Brent. He joined 47 soon after the Walcheren landing but by no means was it all over. He took part in the horrendous battle at Kapelsche Veer and lived to tell the tale. Indeed, his personal account of that time and the barrage, the courage and the loss of life appeared over three issues of *Despatch*. Gerry transferred to No.6 Army Commando and later returned briefly to the Royal Welch. After that regiment's disbandment he was posted to the Rhine Army Headquarters as a Staff Officer with the rank of Captain.

Later, Gerry returned to Australia and ran his own business. Last August, just before his 95<sup>th</sup> birthday, Gerry's son-in-law Bill got in touch, saying he'd like a voice message from me. It seemed a good idea for the Chairman to do the same and Bill phoned us to record our messages and good wishes from all the Association. It was a huge surprise for Gerry at his party and he was thrilled. Almost until the end, he was dealing with emails and other things related to his business.

Gerry will be missed by his friends and family: wife Patricia, children, grandchildren and great grandchildren and, of course, by us.

LB

(A more detailed obituary for Gerry appeared in the Sep/Oct issue of the *Globe & Laurel*)

**Leo Kelly** (PO/X105285) 27<sup>th</sup> November 2016, Adelaide, South Australia, aged 95.

Leo was a Corporal in Heavy Weapons Troop with 47 RM Cdo and took part in the Normandy landings. He also landed at Walcheren and often spoke of it because he lost his best mate Jimmy Day as they fought their way ashore. (Marine J E Day, killed in action, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1944).

In 1966 Leo emigrated to South Australia from Liverpool with his wife Marie, who survives him, and four sons. He also leaves eight grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

In 2005 Leo contributed a poem, "From Gold Beach to Walcheren", to the BBC's 'WW2 People's War' archive. It's reproduced later in this issue.

**Arthur George Baptist** (CH/X 110780) actually died in February 1994 but his son Kenneth recently emailed Marc de Bolster after his mother found various photos and documents.

Arthur served with both 41 and 47 RM Commando up to July 1946. He said that as a signaller he had a side arm rather than a rifle. Earlier, he probably trained with 418 Squad at Lympstone as he had a group photo dated September 1942.

He possibly remained in some arm of the services as he travelled a lot between Holland and Germany until 1950. Arthur was hugely proud to have served as a Commando and missed his friends who never came home. Our thanks to Ken for getting in touch.

**Kell Ryan** Sad to report that Kell, who was a regular walker with Ken Cowdery's group, died recently. Major Bob Perry RM and Geof Haywood will be attending his funeral in Cambridge on 30<sup>th</sup> January. **If you wish to attend or send condolences or any other tribute, please contact Geof at [geofandjillh@btinternet.com](mailto:geofandjillh@btinternet.com)**

### EASTNEY MEMORIALS

Things remain as before. Mark Bentinck and Bob Bruce, the RM Advisor to the National Museum of the Royal Navy which now incorporates the RM Museum, will keep us informed. Bob has assured us that our monument and those of other units in the Memorial Gardens at Eastney will certainly not be abandoned and the Trustees intend that the Gardens and all the memorials in it should remain in situ and be maintained in perpetuity.

Final decisions cannot be made until plans for the disposal and development of the site are agreed but the wider Corps Family and all the interested parties will be involved as things develop.

The Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £13.87 million will enable the RM Museum to move to the Historic Dockyard in Portsmouth (just a step from the Royal Maritime Club) and should open early in 2019.

### **VE DAY DINNER May 2017**

**John Prentis**, grandson of our President Chuck Harris, organised a VE Day Dinner last May. It was a great success and so he plans to do it all over again this year. John sent the following details:

**This year's event will take place on Saturday, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2017 at the Winter Gardens, Margate, Kent.**

**It will be an evening to commemorate VE Day and to honour those who made it possible.**

**Entertainment will be by our very own Tina Jonkers.**

**All from 47 RM Cdo Association are most welcome to come along.**

**Tickets are priced at £25 per person but free to all Veterans (plus one guest).**

**For more information or to book tickets contact John on 07931504383 or [john@jprentis.co.uk](mailto:john@jprentis.co.uk)**

### **FROM GOLD BEACH TO WALCHEREN**

*by Leo Kelly*

We sailed at midnight spirits high  
 Although we knew that some would die.  
 The sea was choppy, in fact was rough.  
 We knew this exercise was tough.  
 We manned the craft, we knew the drill  
 From now on it's all uphill.  
 A sudden bang and in a blink we were landed in the drink.  
 Shells were banging, bullets whining  
 All around us mates were dying.  
 I've heard the shot and smelled the smoke  
 And I realised it was no joke.  
 I lost my mate of many months.  
 After all this time it still brings tears.  
 I fought my way through the whole campaign and still I wonder why  
 All those men of yesteryear, brave yet fearful had to die.  
 Now my age is 84 and still some countries still at war.  
 Will this madness never end.  
 I pray to God it will my friends.

### **OTHER NEWS**

**Jaco Van 'tNoordende** Our Dutch member, Jaco, was selected to jump from a WW2 Dakota at the Arnhem annual commemorations on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> September. He made a few jumps during his military service but not enough to gain his 'wings'. In the past few years Jaco has made up for that so that now he is a qualified para. He made a successful jump dressed as a

WW2 British paratrooper (with some help from Marc de Bolster). Congratulations to Jaco and thanks to Marc for keeping us informed.

**Ron Thorpe** Ron's son Frank was in touch with Ingrid. He said that Ron was doing quite well for his age and had been invited to the Royal Marines Reserve annual dinner in Nottingham in September. Frank also attached a photo of Ron, looking in fine form, taken at Woollaton Park, Nottingham with Royal Marines Reserves. It's good to hear news of our veterans. Sons, daughters, friends and families, please send more!



**Lou and Superman** Lou Sartorel acted as a Marshal on the Commando Challenge held on Woodbury Common in October. The actor Henry Cavill who plays Superman took part in the Challenge which followed the same course as that which aspiring Commandos undertake to acquire their green berets. Lou caught out the 'Man of Steel' in a little deception. "He told me a fib," says Lou, "so I picturised him with mud!" This was picked up by a camera man who asked who Lou was and filmed it. The Challenge was in aid of the Royal Marines Charity and the Devon Air Ambulance Trust. There was a feature in the next day's Daily Telegraph with plenty of photos involving a lot of good red Devon mud:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/films/2016/10/09/superman-actor-henry-cavill-gets-muddy-taking-on-royal-marines-c/> (you may have to press Control and click for this link to work)

Lying down for a rest, 'Superman' was plastered (!), head to toe.

Cavill is to be congratulated on taking it on to raise money for two good causes. The article makes clear that he is an Ambassador for the Royal Marine Charity and his brother is a serving Marine, Lt Col Nik Cavill MBE. However, Lou won out!

There's also an article on the Royal Marines Commando Challenge in the current *Globe & Laurel* November-December 2016.

**Bill Harvey** sent Christmas greetings to the Association. Some members will have met him in Walcheren. His father, who served with the Army, was killed during the liberation of the Island.

### Walking in Normandy

Ken Cowdery is again organising the walk from Asnelles to Port en Bessin on the anniversary of 47's landing, Tuesday, 6<sup>th</sup> June 2017. He will contact previous walkers but those that have not been before should contact him [ken.cowdery@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:ken.cowdery@tiscali.co.uk) to receive details prior to the event.

Walkers have the opportunity to fundraise for the 47 Charity and Ken will be in touch soon in regard to this. Details for booking a place on the Normandy trip follow.

## NORMANDY 2017 BOOKING

This year's trip to Port en Bessin will be from 5th to 9th June. If you intend to travel please let the 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

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

The coach will pick up (very early) at the Royal Maritime Club, Portsmouth, on the 5th. If you stay there you need, of course, to book overnight on the 4th. The coach will also pick up at the Portsmouth Ferry Terminal. If you plan to stay at the **Royal Maritime Club** it is worth booking as soon as possible particularly as 4th June is a Sunday and the Club may be busy. (Advance Bookings: 0239 2837681). Say that you are with 47 Cdo (Association Membership No 4600) to obtain a slightly better tariff and order a packed lunch at the time of booking as we leave long before breakfast is served!

Due to the increasingly high cost of coach travel, people travelling out separately from the coach will need to make some contribution if they use it while in France.

If you have any queries, please ring Ingrid on:

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

## MONEY MATTERS

**THE ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION** of £15 per annum is now due for 2017.

Please make cheques payable to '47 RM Commando Association' and send to the Treasurer: Mrs G Davison, 91 Catherine Street, Rochester, Kent ME1 2HL

Veterans have free membership.

There are still lots of people on our listings who haven't paid. It's unfair to those who do pay and so cover our expenses on your behalf.

and

**MANY THANKS TO THOSE WHO PAY PROMPTLY AND REGULARLY**

## GEOF'S BARGAIN BOX

Geof has the following wares available:

RM Crested Mugs £5

47-plaque crested coasters £2 each

WW2 RM Commando figurine - £21 – limited stock and a Special Purchase

"From Omaha to the Scheldt" John Forfar, new edition - £20.

"From Gold to Omaha" - £12

47 RM Cdo Plaques - £26

47 RM Cdo Baseball Caps - £8.

47 Table Flags - £8

"The Capture of Port en Bessin" prints: Unsigned £20. Signed by artist David Rowlands £35

All items plus postage:

He also has free of charge, p & p only:

Copies of booklets by French schoolchildren with questions sent to 5 veterans, their answers, 4 interviews, photos and other work. Mainly in French but some in translation.

Copies of '47 RM Cdo, Cemetery and Memorial Register'. A comprehensive record, with photos, compiled by Major Bob Perry RM. Bob received an award from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission for this.

Plus 2 copies of the Bessin local paper “Renaissance” with photos of our veterans Chuck, Harry and Ken.

All from:

Geof Haywood, 10 Elizabeth Road, Wimborne. BH21 1AX

0044 (0)1202 888194 [geofandjillh@btinternet.com](mailto:geofandjillh@btinternet.com)

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

Our thanks are due, as ever, to Marc de Bolster for his time and expertise in administering and maintaining the website. People from far and wide are able to find us and get in touch, join the Association if they so wish and get answers to all manner of queries. The website provides a huge amount of information on the history of 47 RM Commando and its personnel as well as Association events. It also provides an extensive photographic record.

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



*At Dishoek  
Members, parishioners, one dog and artistic shadows*

***Next issue – Despatch 36: July 2017***