

# 47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

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*Chuck Harris, President  
Patrick (Paddy) O'Connell, Chairman  
Mrs Ingrid Fearne, Secretary  
Allen Withington, Treasurer  
Ken Cowdery  
Marc de Bolster  
Geof Haywood  
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Les Pike  
Eric Corlett  
Michel Deserable  
Michel Laulier*

## DESPATCH 39 January 2019

### From the Chairman

Dear Veterans, Families and Friends,

Happy New Year. As we prepare to commemorate 75 years since D-Day and Operation Infatuate, we've heard from many Veterans of all Troops of 47 Royal Marine Commando and are delighted to report that at least 15 men are alive and thriving. Some are active in the allotment, others in the garden, and some in the pub. All have told us of the great joy and satisfaction there is in knowing of the work being done by younger members and by friends in France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and of course in the serving Royal Marines.

It is sad to report that two of our Veterans have crossed the bar in December. Eric Vaughan and Harry Prescott fought the whole war with 47 RM Commando, and their obituaries follow. Harry was with us in November when we assembled once more beneath the 47 standard in Westkapelle and paid tribute to the men who fought and died on Walcheren.

We hope to persuade as many Veterans as possible to join HM Queen in Normandy and any Veteran who wants to travel can do so, with their carer, free of charge door-to-door and please contact Ingrid Fearne or John Prentis.

This year we plan new memorials in Walcheren and Port-en-Bessin and we are active with social plans in London, France and more. 47 will once again go under canvas as a new Camp 47 is planned in Port-en-Bessin in June and a separate report follows.

This is also the last full-year for me as the Chairman and Ingrid as the Secretary as we are both due to stand down in November. It's quite possible we will all need to plan a simpler structure to keep going as strongly as we currently are and I'm sure this can be done.

I'd like to thank the amazing committee and Charity Trustees as well as the Standard Bearer, Padre, and the Editor of Despatch. But all members play a great role in keeping the story alive and honouring the young men who did not return from war, and their comrades who are still alive.

Warmest wishes, Patrick O'Connell. Son Capt Guy O'Connell HW Troop.

## Royal Marines Association Riders Branch

**Lou Sartorel**

Over the past year the Riders Branch of the Royal Marines Association has collected donations from members of the public in order to take injured Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel on holiday to Normandy in June and July 2018. The event was entitled "Commando Pillion" and when the call went out for volunteers, I duly answered, not knowing the full details of what might be required of me.

The plan was to take two groups of service personnel, for a week at a time, to Calvados. The base for the trips would be Port-en-Bessin from Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> June to Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July. The participants from the Branch together with the "pillions" would camp in tents within the grounds of Camping Port'land, just along the road from the Western Feature Memorial Garden. The "pillions" would choose one of the branch members motorbikes to sit on whilst being taken on a day long predetermined route. During the stay the riders had an opportunity to visit some of the other sites where Royal Marines saw action in the Battle of Normandy in June 1944. I must add it was not a battlefields tour per se, but an opportunity to ride through some of the stunning Calvados countryside and taste some of the local produce that the region has to offer its visitors. It was also an opportunity for the "Old Corps" to interact with the "New Corps" in a positive manner. The routes taken were interesting and memorable to all concerned. Places visited were, for many, only names they had read in a book or heard in a film or on TV.

The daily routine was breakfast, prepare to go out on a ride with a pillion passenger; similar to musical mobile chairs! On return from the ride the group would freshen-up and have dinner together, with the food prepared by a former Royal Marine chef. After which the "dits" would begin and reminiscences exchanged, fed by some more French red or white medicine.



*Lou with the standard at 41 Cdo Memorial, Saint-Aubin-sur-Mer.*

Visits and simple commemorations were made in Port-en-Bessin, Saint-Aubin-sur-Mer, Franceville-Merville and Lion-su-Mer; all places (for those who remember their Corps history) where commando units of the Royal Marines saw action around D-Day. At each of the commemorations, yours truly paraded our standard.

The entire event was a resounding success and a good time was had by one and all. So much so that the Riders Branch is planning a similar event for this year, venue to be decided, and after the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary commemorations are over, and Normandy is a little quieter.

The Riders Branch and Commando Pillion can be found at: <http://www.rma-riders.uk/> and <https://www.facebook.com/Commando-Pillion-RMA-Riders-Event-Page-1096721027141109/>

## Hurst Castle Exhibition

Marc de Bolster

Hurst Castle is a coastal defence fort dating from the time of Henry VIII and is situated at the seaward end of the shingle spit that extends a mile and a half from Milford-On-Sea. The end of the spit is only three-quarters of a mile from the Isle of Wight. Over the centuries the castle has seen many changes, the most recent being during World War II when it was equipped with coastal gun batteries and searchlights.

Hurst Castle is now owned by English Heritage, managed by Hurst Marine, a local family business that has been associated with the castle for more than three generations, and is open to the public. It houses several exhibitions including the including the Trinity House Lighthouse Museum.

In early 2018 I was able to get my private collection of World War II memorabilia over to Hurst Castle and set up a permanent display in their "WWII Room". The collection shows a huge variety of authentic World War II objects from bandages to SOE (Special Operations Executive) sabotage timer pencils.



*Authentic items from bandages to SOE timer pencils!*

Part of my display is dedicated to 47 Royal Marine Commando and includes two mannequins dressed as 47 Cdo and a Commando Medical Orderly. (The museum already had an information board mentioning the Commando and the liberation of Port-en-Bessin).



*Eric Corlet (left) & Marc de Bolster (right)*

On Saturday the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 2018 a small delegation of Association members came to visit Hurst Castle and see the collection. As it was nearing the end of the season, I had agreed with the management to set up an extra display in the yard with a replica WWII British officers' tent and camp kit as was used in those days. This drew a lot of attention and I got a huge amount of interaction from children and adults alike. In all it was a great day which was enjoyed by many.

The museum is open from 1<sup>st</sup> April until the end of October each year. For information how to get there visit their website on [www.hurstcastle.co.uk](http://www.hurstcastle.co.uk)

[Ed: For those that don't already know, as well as being our webmaster, Marc is author of '47

Royal Marine Commando: An Inside Story 1943-1946', which tells the story of 47 Commando based on the personal accounts of the veterans. Available on Amazon].

## Royal Marines Association Highland Region Annual Commemoration - Spean Bridge 2018

Lou Sartorel

The RMA Highland Region Annual Commemoration was held over the weekend of the 20<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 2018 at Fort William, Scotland. The weekend of social activities included a commemorative service at the Commando Memorial, Spean Bridge. (For those who are unfamiliar, the Memorial is dedicated to the original British Commando Forces raised during WWII and overlooks the training areas of the Commando Training Depot established in 1942 at Achnacarry Castle).

Harry Prescott was taken by yours truly and, to break the long 470-mile journey from Swindon to Fort William, we stopped for an overnight stay at Anne-Marie Nichols home in Rossendale. This provided a welcome break which was much appreciated; thank you Anne-Marie.

The following day we continued the drive North, through stunning scenery from Glasgow and to Fort William, arriving on Friday evening. Saturday morning, we set off to Achnacarry where we met other former Royal Marines that had come to visit the old training establishment and grounds. Unfortunately, it's now a private estate so we were unable to see much of it.

Harry told us that it brought back memories of the six weeks training there. He said "it was always cold. Our uniforms got wet. We had to try and get them dry without much success; then go out training again the following day. We were training for seven days a week". When asked if he was able to go out at night into Fort William, he told us that you had to draw lots for the privilege. But Harry had never won a ticket for the liberty boat.

At the function on the Saturday evening Harry made new friends. He had a dance with a couple of former unaccompanied members of the women's Royal Navy service who thought he was lovely.

The commemoration parade was held at the Commando Memorial on the Sunday morning. It was attended by the Brigade Commander, the Brigade Regimental Sgt Maj, the Regimental Sgt Maj of 43 Commando Royal Marines, together with a detachment from that unit.

On this occasion I paraded the standard of the Royal Marines Association, Windsor Branch. The chief executive of the RMA, Brigadier Richard Spencer (Rtd) CBE and the chairman of the RMA, Mr Ronald Bel Marine were present, and they invited Harry to read on behalf of the RMA at the memorial.

The event was rounded off by lunch at the Ben Nevis Hotel and Spa in Fort William. During our stay Harry was interviewed by Cameron Poole who was recording the entire weekend for a promotional video commissioned by the RMA: <https://vimeo.com/282507829>

Both Harry and I enjoyed the weekend immensely. He told me he couldn't wait to do it again next year. Sadly, Harry passed away on the 27<sup>th</sup> December. His obituary is on page 14.

## Fécamp 2018 - I Could Have Danced All Night

Dave Shorrock (Ed.)

In his book 'Omaha to the Scheldt' John Forfar describes the route that 47 Commando took from the 18th of August 1944 when they left the Sannerville area in pursuit of the retreating Wermacht, to when they reached Fécamp, (100 miles away) and liberated the city on the 2nd September: *"The reception which the Cdo received on entering Fécamp ... looked as if every inhabitant... had turned out into the street and a large crowd blocked the City Square, la Place Thiers. The enthusiasm of the crowd knew no bounds. Cheers greeted every vehicle which appeared, girls threw kisses or achieved them in a more natural way, flowers were thrown, bottles of wine appeared, children climbed over the trucks and Jeeps as soon as they stopped. Every bell in the town was ringing".*

The affection and enthusiasm of the Fécampois for their liberator's lives on, and once again we were welcomed back for the commemorations. Our party comprised: veteran Harry Prescott, standard bearer Lou Sartorel, Allen Withington and me.

We all met up on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> September at Hotel Le Grand Pavois (the French word 'Pavois' translates as 'Bulwark' – an appropriate name for a warship I hear you say). We had all been given rooms at the front of the hotel, with balconies overlooking the harbour. As Harry walked into his room and took in the view he remarked "Bloody Hell". He was right, the view of the harbour is impressive.

The commemorations began at 11:00 on the Sunday, beginning at the Cimetière du Val aux Clercs. As none of us have good conversational French, Lou had wisely arranged for one of his friends, Tony Harris, to join us. Tony is ex-RM, is fluent in French, and lives in France with his wife who is ex-Légion étrangère. Tony soon got an opportunity to demonstrate his linguistic skills as we waited for the official party to arrive. Maurice, one of the French standard bearers, approached Harry to thank him and tell his story. Maurice was just 11-years old in September 1944 but still remembers the 47 entering the town. He was one of the children climbing over the trucks and Jeeps that Forfar had described.

With the arrival of the Mayoress, Marie-Agnes Pussier-Winsback and the First Deputy Mayor, Pierre Aubry, we joined with the other dignitaries for our sombre parade through the cemetery, with Lou carrying our standard. We began at the memorial to those that had been deported



*Pierre Aubry & Harry lay a wreath & salute the memorial to 'Our Liberator, Major DH Walton'.*

Leaving the cemetery, we returned to the town centre and to the Mast of the Liberation in front of the Town Hall. After a short ceremony, we moved as a parade to the war memorial in Place

and died in the concentration camps, moving to the memorial to all wars, and then to the memorial to those that had been deported and died in the work camps. We continued through the cemetery to the Belgian First World War graves, and then to the British memorial and graves. Harry laid our 47 wreath at the tablet to "Our Liberator" Major D.H. Walton of 47 Commando. The tablet had been laid by the Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur (the French Resistance), in memory of Major Walton who was killed on the 4th September when his Jeep ran over a landmine.

Charles De Gaulle, where Harry again laid a 47 wreath. The parade then returned to the Town Hall for photographs on the steps, recreating the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 1944 when Major Walton had greeted the Mayor. Photographs over, we went inside for the speeches and presentations, with Tony giving a simultaneous translation.



*Harry stands between Agnes Canayer, Senator of the Seine-Maritime (left) and the Mayoress of Fécamp.*

As well as welcoming Harry as one of their liberators, the Mayoress gave thanks to his fellow veteran Ken Parker and we observed a minute's silence in his memory. After the silence the Mayoress gave a very powerful and moving speech. Let me give a brief summary of her words:

*"After five years of occupation the city was in ruins, the port destroyed, the fishing fleet dispersed, little means of transport, and a population reduced from 18,000 (before the war) to 14,000. Today, Fécamp has a population of 19,800 and the destroyed port has been reconstructed in splendour.*

*It is fraternity that has brought the free peoples closer together; it is the millions of free men and women who have lived through the pain of war and the effort of reconstruction. It is thanks to this fraternity, beyond political convictions, that France has been able to be reborn. It is a fraternity that we commemorate today. To quote Malraux (the French novelist and statesman) "let us be united by a fraternal future even more than by a common past".*

*To commemorate is a necessity, but we must remain vigilant as anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia and populism are on the rise. We must be brave like those men and women who took risks for us to be free. Seventy-four years later, it seems imperative for me to always defend our fundamentals, those of our Republic.*

*Long live free Fécamp, long live the Republic, long live France".*

After the applause and the wiping away of tears came the presentations. The Mayoress presented Harry with a framed painting of the port of Fécamp (much like the view from our hotel window). In return we gave Pierre Aubry a framed first-day cover of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day with the stamp that depicts 47 Commando landing on Gold beach. To the Mayoress, we gave a framed copy of the Punch cartoon, published on the 19<sup>th</sup> July '44, of the two Tommies wading ashore, one saying to the other "Now you know why I always went Calais-Dover". So as to share in the joke, we made sure everyone in the audience was given a postcard sized copy of the cartoon. Ending with a laugh and a smile was the signal for the bar to open.

By the time we left the Town Hall it was gone 14:00 and we were ready for lunch. Based on the tremendous welcome we had last year, we headed straight for the beach front restaurant, Le Redroic, for lunch on their terrace. We were joined by Pierre Aubry, who as Deputy Mayor is responsible for Veterans Affairs. This was the perfect opportunity for Harry to present the owner of the restaurant, Eddie Fontaine, with the 47 crest. Eddie and Pierre quickly slipped inside to fasten the crest above the bar.

Whether it was the green berets, the medals, or the now empty bottle of 20-year old Calvados, all the young ladies on the adjacent tables began to join us. As the afternoon turned to evening, Harry took the opportunity to show off his ballroom skills, dancing with each and every one of them. He danced all night; well until just gone 23:00 when we finally took our leave.



*I could have danced all night, I could have danced all night, And still have begged for more.  
I could have spread my wings, And done a thousand things, I've never done before.*

## 47 Commando meet RM Boxing Squad

Dave (Ed.)

Two of our veterans, Harry Prescott and Norman Rose were boxers in their youth. At school, Harry wasn't good at either football or cricket and took up boxing instead. He boxed from the age of 8 until he went to work in the shipyards of Sunderland when he was 15. He learned his skills at Jack 'Cast Iron' Casey's boxing school in Sunderland.

After WWII, Norman boxed with amongst others, Randolph Turpin, who went on to become Middleweight Champion of the World. Norman was 22 when they first met, and Randolph was a 16-year old sea cook. In the first contest, Norman went the distance, but Randolph won on points. But at their second meet, Norman was knocked out in the first round and took that as a sign to retire from the sport.

Seeing the phenomenal success of the RM Boxing Squad, with Mne George Crotty being crowned Great Britain Elite Champion 2017 and Mne Jack Stringer winning the English Middleweight title belt, we hit upon the idea of getting Harry and Norman to meet up with the RM Squad. Maj Tommy McPhee, at CTCRM, and the point of contact for RM Boxing, kindly offered to host us at an upcoming event. We chose the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Lympstone Amateur Boxing Club, at the Exmouth Pavillion, not least because the first bouts of the evening were juniors of Harry's age when he first took to the sport.

We had been warned by the Chairman of Lympstone ABC that given the steep steps, we wouldn't be able to take photographs with Harry and Norman in the ring. (Un)fortunately, that message hadn't got through to the RM Squad and their trainers, who quietly assembled in the ring and then called Harry and Norman up. They were out of their seats like a shot, and with a bit of help they were through the ropes and lined up with the Squad. (By a bit of help, we mean four marines picked Harry up like a parcel and slid him through the ropes).

Before the bouts started, the MC introduced Harry and Norman. They were greeted with tremendous applause from the audience, and their glasses were replenished all evening. Harry and Norman enjoyed the evening immensely, despite not being able to agree on the winner of any of the bouts bar one.



*Norman & Harry in the ring with the RM Boxing Squad.*

Thanks to all those that made this happen: Maj Tommy McPhee RM; WO1 (RSM) Lee Drinkwater; Mike Kitchen, Chairman Lymestone ABC; and the RM Boxing Squad. Special thanks to Darren 'Taff' Roberts of RMA Wales and Lou (this time without the standard) for escorting Norman and Harry respectively. Finally, thanks to the Association members who supported the event: Janet Sartorel, Anne-Marie Nicholls, Geof Haywood and Allen Withington.

## **Operation Infatuate, 74th Anniversary Commemoration, Eastney**

**Ken Cowdery (47 Charity Trustee)**

Whilst the main Association party was enjoying some good weather in Walcheren, a party of about 50 former Royal Marines, including Association stalwarts Les Pike and Tom Busby, attended a commemorative ceremony on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November at the Royal Marines Memorial Gardens, Eastney in windy Portsmouth.

The 11am ceremony, organised by the Portsmouth Branch of Royal Marines Association, was conducted by Reverend Colin Noyce RN accompanied by a bugler and 10 standard bearers. A number of family members, descendants of the wartime Royal Marines units, and other dignitaries were also present.

Following a very smart, well organised ceremony, the former 'bootnecks' congregated on the steps of the former Royal Marines Museum (now closed but to be relocated to the Royal Dockyards in a few years' time) for a group photo. This was not the first time – a photo on display in the nearby RMA clubhouse shows a group from the Royal Marines Artillery when Eastney was their barracks in 1902. In fact, the party soon headed to the clubhouse to warm up and enjoy some welcome refreshments and a bit of chatter amongst old friends. Some of us were then treated to an excellent talk by battlefield guide Mike Mizzen. Accompanied by

slides and a huge map (nearly the size of the club's billiard table) Mike gave an excellent summary of Operation Infatuate and the build up to it. Mike highlighted the strategic



*Boots on the steps of the RM Museum (now closed), the former RM Artillery barracks in 1902*

significance of the operation - the freeing up of the Scheldt to allow access to the port of Antwerp - and the difficulty of the task with little time for planning. Many historians believe that Monty should never have gone ahead with Operation Market Garden in September without having first secured access to the port.

Mike also emphasised the significant parts played by the Canadian and British Army forces, the RAF and, notably, the Royal Naval and Royal Marines personnel manning the landing craft. There were high casualties amongst these crews as they not only helped with getting men, supplies and equipment ashore but also drew fire from the German shore batteries in their lightly armoured converted landing craft. Anyone who has seen the Pathe News footage of the landings will have some sense of how terrifying it must have been for them and how brave they were.

The commemorations were to remember the bravery and sacrifice of the commando units from No.4 Special Service Brigade: 41, 47 and 48 (Royal Marine) Commandoes, No.10 (Inter Allied) Commando and No.4 (Army) Commando. I have heard several of the veterans say that Operation Infatuate was even tougher than D-Day. We were also to remember the suffering of the local Dutch community, during both the occupation by the Germans and the operation itself. Our thanks to them all.

The Portsmouth Branch of the RMA hopes to make the commemorations at Eastney an annual event. So, if you can't make it to Walcheren on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November this year, I would recommend a trip down to Pompey as an alternative.

## **Remembering Walcheren**

*Bob Perry (Executive Secretary 47 Charity)*

Three months after the D-Day landings in Normandy, Arnhem had failed, and the Allies were running out of vital supplies. The vital deep-water port of Antwerp, already in Allied hands, would have to be brought into use but the enemy guns on Walcheren were denying shipping access to it. A costly opposed landing at Westkapelle on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1944 was followed by fierce fighting along sand dunes to destroy formidable enemy coastal batteries surrounded by machine gun and mortar positions. The 4th Special Service Brigade comprising three Royal

Marine Commandos, 41, 47 and 48 along with No. 4 (Army) Cdo were involved and their successes against overwhelming enemy forces resulted in a free waterway to the liberated city and port of Antwerp, which was key to the final liberation of the Netherlands. In three days of heavy fighting 47 RM Cdo captured the final six miles leading from Zoutelande to Flushing (now known as Vlissingen).

As in previous years, 47 RM Cdo Association's annual visit to the Netherlands to commemorate the 74<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assault on Walcheren was a strongly supported affair. Starting out from the Royal Maritime Club in Portsmouth we were pleased to be joined on the coach by 47 RM Cdo Walcheren veterans, Norman Rose and Harry Prescott, as well as Ted Owen, who served with 41 RM Cdo.

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 of Walcheren, for the main ceremony and wreath laying with Corporal Bugler Dave Nevatte

sounding the Last Post and Reveille. This was followed by a short ceremony at the lighthouse to remember those civilian victims who were killed during the landings and from the flooding that followed the bombing of the dyke by the RAF at Westkapelle.



*Harry Prescott (left), Ted Owen (seated centre) and Norman Rose (right), with the Mayor of Westkapelle at Erika beach*

Following this we all formed up at the Erika beach memorial on the site where the 4th Special Service Brigade landed. At all ceremonies we were joined by Lt Col Jerry Slack RM and CSgt Pat Jennings, both currently on exchange duties with the RNLMC, and Peter Leicester whose father, Brigadier 'Jumbo' Leicester DSO, had been the Brigade Commander in 1944.

Concurrent activity was the order for the next day when our walkers set out early to follow the route taken by 47 RM Cdo from the location of the landings at Westkapelle to Flushing and the link-up with No 4 Cdo. This annual sponsored 11 miles yomp along the sand dunes followed the Commando's route taken between 1-3 November 1944. We halted at all of the prominent historical locations including the remains of the sprawling W11 battery, the Commando's main objective. Refreshments were taken at Dishoek tourist church where we met up with our veterans and other Association members to lay a wreath at the 47 RM Cdo plaque which bears the names of all 34 members of the unit who were killed during the landings and assault on W11. It is recognised by our veterans and Association members that 47 RM Cdo did not single-handedly win the battle of Walcheren as many other units performed heroically serving alongside or in support of Four-Seven. It was therefore fitting to end the walk on the sea-front at Uncle Beach, Flushing, where a wreath was laid at the No 4 Cdo memorial and also at the nearby memorial honouring all Landing Craft crews who took part in the landings. During our visit we also laid wreaths at the 41 RM Cdo memorial at Domburg and at the Serooskerke memorial in honour of 48 RM Cdo who liberated the town on the 8<sup>th</sup>

November 1944 and to the 18 marines and crew of a Buffalo LVT who were killed when their assault vehicle struck a mine

Prior to our journey back to the UK we visited the recently refurbished memorial at Kapelsche Veer complete with a new stone plaque outlining 47 RM Cdo operations in the River Maas area in early 1945. Our last call was at Bergen-op-Zoom War Cemetery where most of those killed serving with 47 RM Cdo during the Battle of Walcheren and subsequent operations in the River Maas area are laid to rest.

Operation Infatuate II, the codename for the landings at Westkapelle, and subsequent battles in the dunes, appear to be a largely forgotten theatre of operations; that is why it is so important that 47 RM Cdo Association continues to actively commemorate this Corps Memorable Date of which Winston Churchill so aptly described: '*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*'.

### **Walcheren Extras: Respects to Lt Ian Adam RM, 'Q Troop' (Ed.)**

So as not to miss the ferry, after the visit to Kapelsche Veer, the coach sped off to the Bergen-op-Zoom Cemetery. But as Harry was travelling with Lou, not on the coach, and were only 10km from Sprang-Capelle, we took the opportunity to pay our respects at the grave of Lt Ian Adam, Harry's Troop Commander. Lt Adam, 19 at the time, had been wounded and wandered off in the snow and blizzard. When the snow melted his body was found by the Dutch authorities, identified by his landlady and interred at the Capelle General Cemetery. The landlady's family still tend his grave to this day.

Lou Sartorel led the way with Harry in the passenger seat, and Allen Withington and I following in our car. After we had paid our respects, we had to catch up with the coach. Lou, having passed his Police Driving course, shot off, with us desperately trying to keep up. Despite being some 30 minutes behind the coach, we arrived at Bergen-op-Zoom 10 minutes ahead of it. We'd kept our fingers crossed that Lou still carries his Warrant Card in case we'd been caught in a speed trap.



*Harry pays his respects at the grave of Lt Ian Adam*

### **The 47 Royal Marine Commando Memorial at Dishoek**

*Bob Perry*

It has been a long-time ambition of surviving veterans and the 47 Royal Marine Commando Association for a permanent memorial to honour the heroic exploits of the Commando and to the 34 men who were killed during the amphibious assault of Walcheren and subsequent battle of Dishoek in early November 1944.

The ambition will be realised in 2019 when a new 47 Royal Marine Commando memorial will be dedicated. The memorial, based on a design by the late Clifford Kingston Dip Arch RIBA, will be crafted in stone with the following inscription in both English and Dutch: '*In these dunes, between 1 and 3 November 1944, the men of 47 Royal Marine Commando fought fiercely to*

capture the heavily defended German battery at Dishoek, code name W11. During the battle, which led to the liberation of Walcheren, the Commando suffered heavy casualties. The surrender of the battery on 3<sup>rd</sup> November secured the seaway to Antwerp which was key to the final liberation of the Netherlands'.

The memorial will also list individually the name, rank, age and date of death of all 34 men along with a map of Walcheren detailing the route taken by the Commando from the landings at Westkapelle to the link up with No 4 (Army) Commando at Flushing (now Vlissingen).

The memorial will stand on the apex of the dunes overlooking the Scheldt Estuary adjacent to the remains of the W11 bunker complex, at the junction of a popular long-distance walking path and roadway leading from Dishoek Square to a beach restaurant. An information board, detailing the Commando's action will be unveiled in Dishoek Square prior to the dedication on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 2019, the 75th anniversary of the commencement of the assault on W11.



*Site of the Dishoek Memorial overlooking the Scheldt Estuary*



*47 RMCA presents a cheque for €6,600 to the Municipality and the Historical Study Group Koudekerke*

We are indebted to the many organisations and individuals for their enthusiastic support and financial contributions without which this project would not have been possible. In particular, special thanks in the Netherlands to the Provincial State of Zeeland, Municipality of Veere, and Historical Study Group Koudekerke; and in the UK the Royal Marines Charity and the 47 Charity for their very generous grants; and to a private benefactor for a very substantial financial contribution.

## The 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Armistice

For those with a keen eye watching the commemorations at the Cenotaph on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, you might have seen Association member Jaco van 't Noordende marching past, wearing the 47 tie. Jaco was with the Bond van Wapenbroeders (Bond of Brothers in Arms, the Dutch veteran's association). Click on the link and watch from 1 h 02 min 30 sec onward and you will see him pass. Jaco advises not to listen to the commentator because he doesn't know what he's talking about. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C\\_9B-lyyqbw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_9B-lyyqbw)

## Absent Friends

**Eric Vaughan, 19<sup>th</sup> December 2018, aged 95 years, HQ-Troop, PO/X114049**



*Eric Vaughan in Tripoli, 1943*

Eric was born at Bryn Mor Cottage in Bodelwyddan, son to proud parents John and Marion and big brother to his sister Iris. Growing up in Bodelwyddan, whilst Eric was still at school, he began working in the local village shop. He left school at 14 and began working for E.B. Jones delivering groceries.

In 1942, when he was 19, Eric volunteered for the Royal Marines. He was offered Landing Craft but decided he didn't want to spend all his time at sea and so volunteered for Commando training. In July '43, assigned to 41 Commando, he sailed out from Liverpool to North Africa where he was involved in the battles to push the Germans and Italians out, which they did, then following them over to Sicily to do the same, before being called back to Britain in May '44 to prepare for the landings in Normandy.

Eric landed in Normandy on D-Day+14, driving a 3-ton truck. Landing on a deserted beach, with no one to guide them and not knowing where to go, Eric and another driver parked up in a field and put camouflage over their vehicles to spend what was a very scary night. Fortunately they met up with their troop the following day.

At some time, he was assigned to 47 Commando and was with them when they liberated Fécamp on the 2<sup>nd</sup> September '44. He then continued pursuing the Germans back through France, to Belgium and on into Holland. He made it into Germany at the war's end and was eventually demobbed in 1946.

Upon returning home, Eric began working as a civilian for the Ministry of Defence at the Kinmel Camp. His first role was supervising German prisoners of war, dismantling the concrete beach defences from Talacre to Llanduddno. He worked at the camp for 28 years, until it closed in 1975. He then started work at the Egatube (electrical conduit) factory at St Asaph; working there for 11 years until he retired when he was 64.

Eric was an early member of our Association, but somehow, we lost touch. It was only when John Wasley, our eagle-eyed Padre, spotted an article in the Daily Telegraph in August, and saw that Eric was wearing a 47 RMCA tie, that we were able to reconnect. Sadly, Eric with his wife Beryl, was making his first visit back to Normandy since the war but had to cut the trip short because their home had been burgled. As soon as this terrible news broke, the RMA stepped in to provide support and Neil and Joyce Stephens from the Association visited to lend our support.

Sadly, in the burglary, Eric's two Rotary watches had been stolen. On hearing this news, Rotary presented Eric with one of their limited-edition Poppy watches commemorating the end of the First World War. You can see the video interview with Eric at: <https://www.dailypost.co.uk/news/north-wales-news/rotary-presented-broken-hearted-d-15421065>



### **Henry 'Harry' Prescott, 27<sup>th</sup> December 2018, aged 96 years, Q-Troop, PO/X120446**

Harry was born in Canada in 1922 to English parents who sailed back across the Atlantic to the North East of England when he was three years old. He thought he was a Geordie until, at the age of 93, Lou Sartorel, our standard bearer, told him that as he came from Sunderland, he was a Mackem. This new-found information both bemused and delighted him, and he embraced it, in the same way that the 47 Royal Marine Commando Association embraced him.

At school he wasn't good at either football or cricket, but at the age of eight he took up boxing and trained under 'Cast Iron Casey'. Casey was a legend of the boxing ring; he could take a punch and never fall down. Harry laughed as he said "they hit him time and again and he wouldn't go down. His jaw was made of cast iron".

Age 15, Harry went to work in the shipyards of Sunderland. In a 'reserved occupation' which meant he was exempt from call-up. But as the war dragged on, he could stand it no longer and volunteered for the Royal Marines. A boxer, who'd worked in the shipyards, Harry was a perfect pick for one of Churchill's first Commandos. He

was assigned to 47 Cdo and did his arduous Commando training at Achnacarry in December 1943. On completion in January 1944 he joined Q Troop.

Prior to D-Day the Cdo moved to Herne Bay in Kent where training continued, particularly on landing craft drills, before they moved to their departure port of Southampton on the 25<sup>th</sup> May 1944. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> June they embarked, packed into two ships: the RN Princess Josephine and the SS Victoria an old merchant Navy tramp steamer. A storm put D-Day back to the 6<sup>th</sup> June so the troops had to stay in their ships as they rode out the storm until they sailed for France on the 5<sup>th</sup>.

At 0800 on the 6<sup>th</sup> June, 14 Landing Craft Assault (LCA's) headed to the beach through a heavy swell. As they approached, shells began to fall in the water and the craft Harry was in was hit. Of the 36 men onboard, 11 including Maj. Feacy were killed and 14 others wounded.

Harry always said "he was lucky" and was picked up by a craft returning from the beach, taken back to the ship and then rejoined the Cdo in the now liberated Port-en-Bessin a few days later.

The next location was at Sallenelles where during the period 12<sup>th</sup> June – 18<sup>th</sup> Aug the Cdo suffered 117 casualties including 14 killed, but Harry's luck continued. The Cdo, fighting as it went, liberated towns such as Fécamp, whilst pursuing the Germans back through France, to Belgium and on into Holland.

Sailing from Ostend on the 1<sup>st</sup> November they landed on the island of Walcheren under heavy fire to attack the heavily fortified German bunkers. The fighting was at close-quarters and continued day and night. Harry recalled a mortar shell landing nearby that killed or wounded half of his troop as they moved forward to capture the bunker.

January 1945, moving towards Germany on the banks of the River Maas in the snow and bitter cold frozen polders the Cdo attacked a heavily defended German location but were beaten back. Harry's Troop Commander, Lt Ian Adam died as a result of that action and each time he visited the area Harry paid his respects at his grave, as he did to those of his other comrades who lie in France or Holland. His memories were always reflected by the look on his face at each of these locations.

When Harry joined the 47 RMCA and I introduced myself his only response was his name: "Prescott"! On that first trip

Harry had a new Canadian Passport and when we reached Border Control at Calais as we were coming home a Mr Jobsworth noted he didn't have a copy of, or a current Visa, to enter the UK. The coach was held until Higher Powers decided as a WW2 Veteran who had also holidayed in Spain every year, that possibly he could be let back in.

Harry very much became a part of our visits. He loved to dance in the cafes and happily told his story to the young RM personnel of today, stories that were even better after a wee dram!

One evening the Marines who had just cycled across France were buying Harry that wee dram. Harry looked at the first glass and said, "you've been seen off, it's short measure, take it back". No amount of explaining that it was a good measure in a very thick glass was accepted so it was taken back and turned secretly into a double. Peace was restored.

Harry was awarded the Legion d'Honneur which was presented to him in Port-en-Bessin, a town of so many happy memories. To the French, Belgians and Dutch, Harry was one of their Liberators and the local people took him and the other Veterans as one of their Family, their English Grandads.



*"What's all the fuss about like?"*



*Col. Tim Young, Canadian Defence Attaché to the Netherlands presents Harry with a Coin of Honour, Walcheren, 1st Nov 2018*

Faced recently with an end-of-life diagnosis, Harry came with us in November for the commemorations in the Netherlands. When he got back, he went on holiday, twice. He was on holiday more times than Thomas Cook. Without him, I fear for the local economy in the Canaries, Fuerteventura and Barcelona.

I wonder if his love of life was explained not just by his character but by cheating death. Blown up on D-Day, shot at and shelled for two years, others of his comrades killed or drowned



*Harry boxing at age 8*

alongside him. Working in construction before Health and Safety was ever thought of. His first cancer diagnosis twenty years ago.

If life was a sponge, Harry squeezed every last drop out of it. To witness a life so long and rich as this is to remind you what the young men who joined up with him but died gave up. He helped me and many others in many countries understand those famous words: 'we will remember them'.

Whether Harry was dancing, drinking, watching football or boxing, or going on his frequent holidays with his dear friend and carer Sheila, he lived life to the full. He often said, "he was a lucky man" and what a blessing that luck has been for us to enjoy his company, his stories and to be with such a very special and unassuming WWII Royal Marine Commando veteran. Life threw him to the canvas many times. But he got up and he lifted the belt.

Harry's obituary is compiled from eulogies given by Anne-Marie Nicolls, Geof Haywood and Paddy O'Connell. A video of Harry's funeral cortege, accompanied by the RMA Riders Branch, can be found at: [https://youtu.be/tAG\\_84dO20s](https://youtu.be/tAG_84dO20s)

Lou Sartorel interviewed Harry when they were in Spean Bridge together. The video, made by Cameron Poole, can be found at: <https://www.facebook.com/100025989799632/videos/290673865142271/>

## **Normandy 2019 – 75th Anniversary of D-Day**

The full programme of events and timings for the 75<sup>th</sup> D-Day Commemorations has not yet been published. According to the Ministry of Defence Ceremonial, Events and Commemorations Team (as of 28<sup>th</sup> January), they are still waiting on the Élysée Palace to confirm the arrangements for the 'International Event' which will host the Heads of State, Royalty, etc.

From what information that has been released, the events on the 6<sup>th</sup> June will include:

- An Inauguration Ceremony of the British Normandy Memorial at Vur-sur-Mer;
- A Service of Remembrance at Bayeux Cathedral;
- Remembrance Ceremony and wreath laying at the British Cemetery in Bayeux.

As soon as the full programme is released, we can decide which events to participate in.

As in previous years, Ken Cowdery is organising the "In the Footsteps of 47" walk from Asnelles to Port-en-Bessin (details below) so we are planning to go to the start of the walk at the memorial at Asnelles for a short ceremony and wreath laying before the walkers set off.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of June our main focus will be the ceremonies that will take place in Port-en-Bessin. This year we will have the Band of Her Majesty's Royal Marines Portsmouth (35 strong). The commemorations in the town will take place in the morning as usual. In the afternoon, around 1500 (timing depending on the swing bridge opening and closing to let the fishing vessels leave the port on the high-tide) the RM Band will march from the Town Hall to Place Gaudin, ahead of the Vehicle Parade organised by Marc de Bolster. In the evening at 1900 the RM Band will give a "Beat Retreat and Sunset" display on Place Gaudin.

As well as the Band, the planned RM participation includes the Commandant General (CGRM), the Corps Regimental Sergeant Major (CRSM), 1 Assault Group (1AGRM), RM Poole, Hasler Company (marines and naval personnel in long-term recovery), the RMA and some 40 bikers from the RMA Riders Branch, so it looks like being a very memorable few days.

As well as organising the vehicle parade, Marc has supplied photos of our Veterans to the Cultural Centre in Port-en-Bessin which, like other Normandy towns they will produce poster size copies to be displayed along the 80km of what have been termed 'Normandie Memoire' routes.

## **Normandy 2019 - Travel Arrangements & Event Passes**

**Ingrid Fearne**

Although we do not have the full programme of events yet, we do know that with VIPs attending, security will be very strict and there are likely to be secure areas requiring passes for access.

To help with the initial planning can you please let me know the following:

- Are you intending to come and how many will be in your party – names please?
- How are you travelling – coach or independently? We need to know numbers, so we know what size coach is required.
- Even if you are travelling independently, would you like to attend events travelling on the coach (€10 per day per person). This will give me an indication if a larger coach is required. On the 70th anniversary in 2014, access to the events in Bayeux on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June was only by coach (or other accredited vehicles).
- Do you wish to attend the "Last Supper" in the 47 Bar on the 8th of June?
- I have only been able to get very limited hotel accommodation (due to the fact that the Americans have block-booked all hotels in the area). Hotel accommodation will be initially be for veterans and families. Therefore, please let me know if you have made your own accommodation reservations and, if so, where - so others can be directed there if possible. I can be reached on: +44(0)20 8239 0145 or email: [ingrid.fearne@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:ingrid.fearne@blueyonder.co.uk);
- Steve Hignett has organized 'Camp 47', a campsite where you can stay under your own canvas, bring your caravan or RV. Camp 47 will be open for camping from Monday the 3<sup>rd</sup> June until Sunday the 9<sup>th</sup> and is situated 3km south of Port-en-Bessin. Facilities for 100 people will include: continental breakfast, a bar, dance floor, showers and toilets. Transport will be available to and from Port-en-Bessin throughout the period. For more information or to book your place please contact: [steve.hignett@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:steve.hignett@hotmail.co.uk)

As soon as we have the forms to get the relevant security passes for those attending, we will forward them to you if you have told us you are coming. So please don't forget to call or email me: +44(0)20 8239 0145 or: [ingrid.fearne@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:ingrid.fearne@blueyonder.co.uk) And please check your passports are in date.

## **Normandy 2019 – In the Footsteps of 47**

You are warmly invited to join the annual walk from Asnelles to Port en Bessin. This retraces the actual route taken by the men of 47 who were able to muster on the beach on the morning of D-Day.

The walk, which is open to all, is led by Ken Cowdery and Alex Wilson with help from the three local mayors and farmers along the route, Association members and both serving and retired Royal Marines.

Approximate times (to be confirmed) are:

- 0845 Assemble at Asnelles sea front;
- 0900 Commemorative Ceremony with Mayor of Asnelles;
- 0930 Set off;
- 1130 La Rosiere - short commemorative ceremony;
- 1400 Picnic lunch (bring your own) at the beautiful Abbey; and
- 1800 Finish in Port-en-Bessin.

Further details on the timing will be issued in due course

Also, if you would like to join the many who use the walk to seek sponsorship, you can raise money for the 47 Charity [www.47charity.org](http://www.47charity.org). In the past walkers have raised around £10,000. Ken will be sharing more information about this in due course.

Please circulate this to those who may be interested: walkers who take early advantage of this notice can book both a seat on the coach from Port-en-Bessin to Asnelles and a rare camping spot at 'Camp 47' near Port-en-Bessin.

Register your interest for walking/transport with Ken Cowdery ([ken.cowdery@47charity.org](mailto:ken.cowdery@47charity.org) or tel: +44 (0)7710 724627), Alex Wilson ([lesgensduphare@live.fr](mailto:lesgensduphare@live.fr) or tel: +33 6 86 26 76 39) or for camping with Steve Hignett (as above).

## The Normandy Memorial

The Normandy Memorial will be inaugurated on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June this year. The site is overlooking Gold Beach at Ver-sur-Mer, and when completed, the memorial will contain the



*The British Normandy Memorial brochure - now with the correct caption for 47 Commando*

names of the 22,254 British servicemen and women as well as those from the civilian services who lost their lives during D-Day and the Normandy Campaign (between 5<sup>th</sup> June and 31<sup>st</sup> August 1944).

The details of the Memorial and the background can be found on the Normandy Memorial Trust's website at <http://www.normandymemorialtrust.org/the-memorial/>. Here you will find a digital version of a fine 44-page brochure in either English or French.

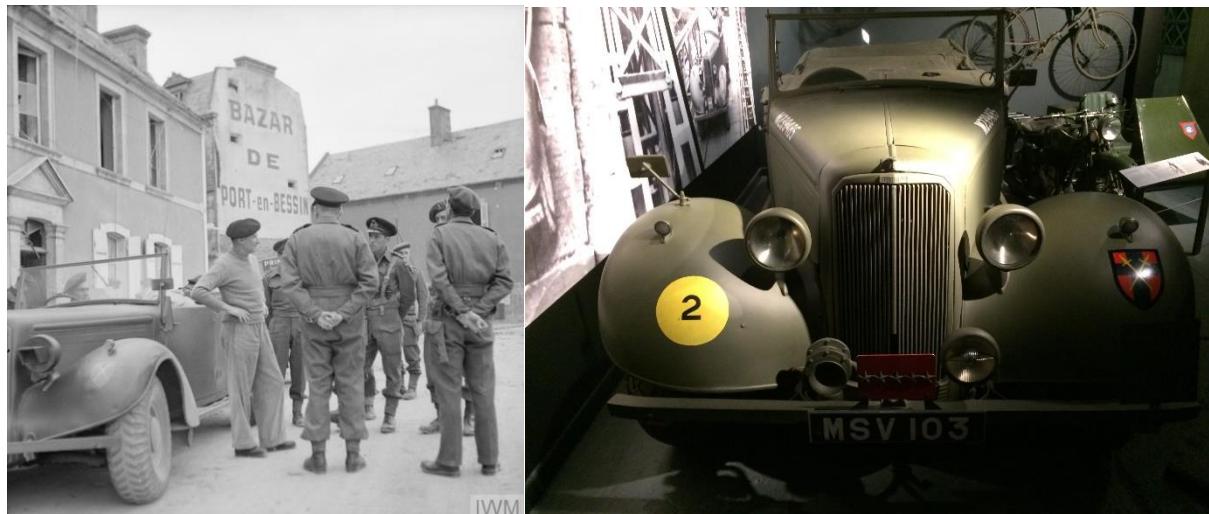
You might have seen the headlines just before New Year: "Royal Mail apologises for D-Day stamp 'shambles' after £1.25 collectable showed US troops in the Pacific rather than British soldiers in Normandy". Unfortunately, the Normandy Memorial Trust had dropped a similar clanger, perhaps not quite as bad as the Post Office, but very personal to us. On page 38 of the glossy brochure, there is the picture from the Imperial War Museum archives showing 47 Commando coming ashore from landing craft. Our keen-eyed Treasurer, Allen Withington, immediately recognised the photo, but then saw that the caption was wrong. It read "Men from the 50<sup>th</sup> (Northumberland) Infantry coming ashore on Gold Beach on D-day". After a couple of phone calls and emails to the IWM and the Trust, the caption was corrected. Sadly, the brochure had already gone to press, so if you see a copy, you'll have to put your hand over the bottom of the page.

### Monty's Staff Car

Our 47 RMCA Chairman Paddy has family connections to Coventry and has a more than passing interest in the Coventry Transport Museum (which is home to the largest publicly owned collection of British vehicles in the world). Aware that one of Monty's Humber Snipe Staff Car's resides in the Museum and knowing that Monty, having landed on D-Day, paid a visit to Port-en-Bessin of the 10<sup>th</sup> of June '44, he started thinking how we might get Monty's car back to Normandy for the commemorations this year.

Actually, Monty had a number of Humber Snipe Staff Cars throughout the war, but there are only now two in existence: one from the campaigns in North Africa "Old Faithful", which is in the Imperial War Museum and "The Victory Car" in Coventry.

Throughout last year, Paddy had discussions with the Curator of the Museum which were non-committal. In November, we (Paddy and Dave (Ed.)) decided to have a concerted push. We did some digging and discovered that the car is on loan to the Museum from Peugeot (Peugeot-Citroen having acquired the Rootes Group, which owned Humber, back in 1978).



*General Sir Bernard Montgomery accompanied by army and naval officers inspects the harbour facilities in Port-en-Bessin, 10 June 1944, (left). Montgomery's staff car "VICTORY CAR" as it is today in the Coventry Transport Museum (right)*

On the side of the car is a brass plaque that reads: "THE VICTORY CAR". This Humber Staff Car No. M239405, was used by Field Marshall the Rt. Hon. The Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, K.G., G.C.B., D.S.O. from Normandy to Berlin June 6<sup>th</sup> 1944 – August 25<sup>th</sup> 1945. It was returned by the War Office from Germany July 28<sup>th</sup> 1947 in order that it should take its place beside the Field Marshall's other famous Staff Car "OLD FAITHFUL" No. M239459 which had already been presented to the Rootes Group as gratitude to the service given by Humber cars on all war fronts.

We met Peugeot and the Curator at the Museum in November and had a very useful discussion around whether or not it could be taken to Normandy. The car is roadworthy, but it is 'embalmed' to preserve it, and would take a week or more to bring it back to full working condition. Bringing to working condition, shipping it on secure transport, with mechanics and a professional driver, and then embalming it on its return would cost in the region of £30,000 to £50,000. Peugeot have gone away to think about it. We're keeping our fingers crossed.

## Acknowledgements

Our trips to Fécamp and Walcheren and the donation for the Dishoek memorial were supported by grants from the Royal Marines Charity, the Royal Marines Association and the 47 Charity. Thanks to the Daily Press (Wales) and Cameroon Poole for links to their videos. Special thanks to Tony Harris who was our Francophone translator on our trip to Fécamp and to Darren 'Taff' Roberts, who escorted Norman to Exmouth. And finally, thanks again to all who submitted articles and photos to this issue of Despatch. Please keep up the good work

## From the Editor

When I volunteered to be Editor of Despatch, no one warned me what an emotional roller coaster it would be. I've had something in my eye most of the time I've been putting this issue together. But the most moving thing for me since the July issue was the trip to Exmouth for the boxing. We had the Saturday morning free, so Taff Roberts volunteered to give us a



Norman Rose (left), Harry Prescott (centre) & Taff Roberts (right) at the Memorial Wall CTCRM

### Next Issue: July 2019

If you could please send me your articles and photos by the end of June I'd be grateful. And please feel to email or call me if you would like to discuss any ideas for future issues.

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