

47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

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DESPATCH 41 January 2020

From the Chairman

Dear Veterans, Families and Friends, Happy New Year to you all and welcome to the latest edition of Despatch. As I look back over 2019 I can't help thinking what a great year we had. The Association continues to grow, our trips and visits are a huge success, the Men of 47 are remembered and the veterans who travelled with us have had a wonderful time.

Since the last edition we've kept up the pace and made new friends along the way. In July Dave Nevatte organised VIP seating for veterans and their families at the annual RM concert in Deal. It was an amazing day with the RM Bands of Portsmouth and Collingwood at their finest. Lt. Col. Jon Ridley read out Grandad's (Chuck Harris) name during the performance to which he received a standing ovation by some 15,000 people, a rather special moment for all of us I have to say. This event may well become an annual invitation, watch this space!

In September we had a trip to Fécamp, marking the 75th anniversary of the Towns liberation by 47 Royal Marine Commando. Once again, the town looked after us superbly, with an emotional ceremony at the grave of Maj. Dennis Walton of 47 RMC, and also remembered men and women of the French resistance buried in the same cemetery. This is a trip I would urge you all to do if you can, it's a beautiful town with great places to eat and stay, and with lovely scenery and walks in and around the town.

In November our trip to Walcheren was a huge success. We had the awesome duo of Chuck Harris and Mark Packer and it was lovely to see Lannah Battley and Christine Hagan who also joined us on the trip. This trip marked the 75th anniversary of the Liberation of Walcheren and the people of the island turned out to greet us and thank the veterans personally. We unveiled a new memorial at Disheok which tells the story of the Landings made by 47 in November 1944, and is well placed on a busy walking route through the dunes so I'm sure it will be seen and read by a great number of people.

We were fortunate again to have the RM Band service present throughout the trip, they gave a most memorable concert in Middelburg and marched superbly in Disheok. We were also joined by the CGRM, Co's from 1 Assault Group and many from the RMA. This all made for a great atmosphere and a trip we'll all remember.

With sadder news, in October we heard that Rose Wildman had passed away. Many of us will remember Rose along with Fred, with fond memories I'm sure, especially of their love for music and dancing. Our thoughts and prayers go out to Tony and the Wildman family.

2020 will be another busy year for the association, we have lots in the pipeline and I want to thank all those who make it possible, especially those on the committee who work hard putting it all together and above all have to put up with me!

Hopefully see you soon, warmest wishes to you all. John Prentis, Grandson of Chuck Harris.

Famous Royal Marines Commando Name Revived

Colonel C E Haw MC, Commanding Officer, 47 Commando Raiding Group Royal Marines

Dear 47 Royal Marine Commando Association Members,

It is with great pleasure that I write to you for the first time as the Commanding Officer of the newly renamed 47 Commando Raiding Group Royal Marines. This re-naming, in honour of 47 Royal Marine Commando, is a source of great pride to both me personally and for all members of my unit. I thought that it would be worth explaining the rationale for the change and in future to keep you updated about the general activities of the unit through these excellent bulletins.

In September 2019, 1 Assault Group Royal Marines (1 AGRM) was re-subordinated under command of 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines (3 Cdo Bde RM) to reflect the increased operational focus of the unit, maintaining its high readiness output but with the addition of Maritime Interdiction (Boarding) operations and a significant increase in Short Term Training Teams. This presented an opportunity to bring the unit's name in line with all other 'Commando' units in 3 Cdo Bde RM.

Therefore, on 4 November 2019, at the request of the Commandant General, the Secretary of State for Defence approved the renaming of 1 AGRM to 47 Commando Raiding Group Royal Marines (47 Cdo (RG) RM). This renaming was intended to reinvigorate a unit name that not only gives a nod to the past but also to the future of 3 Cdo Bde. The tactical action carried out by 47 (Royal Marine) Commando to secure Port-en-Bessin and deliver the strategically important Pipe Line Under the Ocean (PLUTO) is indeed synonymous with the current concept for the Future Commando Force (FCF) so sets out that intent. As you know, 1 AGRM has had long standing links with 47 (RM) Cdo Association and were present at the 75th anniversary of D-Day and Walcheren last year, making the name change even more poignant and relevant.

It is my intention to hold a formal re-naming ceremony here in Plymouth at RM TAMAR in early July of this year. I will of course inform the Association of the date when it has been decided and will be extending an invite to all association members and their families at this time.

I look forward to seeing many of you later in the year, both in Normandy and here in Plymouth, and I look forward to growing our affiliation as the months and years progress. We stand on the shoulders of giants and will take 47 Cdo RG forward into the FCF era with pride and motivation from our forefathers.



Col Chris Haw presents an RM sporrans to Kelly Heathfield ahead of the commemorations in Westkapelle



L-R: Col Haw, Mark Packer, Maj Gen Matt Holmes CGRM, Chuck Harris, Rob van der Zwaag the Mayor of Municipality of Veere.& Dave Mason CRSM, at the unveiling of the memorial at Dishoek

Ken Parker Unveiled

Geof Haywood



The Royal Marines has commissioned six paintings to represent the Corp over several generations and ranks. Ken Parker was chosen to represent the WW2 Commandos and a “photo shoot” took place so that the artist Marianne Gibson, who has done other RM and Military paintings (including HRH Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh when he was Captain General RM), could have something to work from. She met Ken at the photo shoot and through chatting with him was able to pick up aspects of his character which she could build into her painting.

The Royal Marines Family weekend was held at CTCRM Lympstone on the 14th and 15th of September. The weekend is an opportunity for the “Royal Marine Family” of both serving and retired Marines and their families to enjoy the military displays, sports events (1AGRM who come with us to Port-en-Bessin won the inter unit ‘Tug ‘O War’ - BZ to them), children’s features, fun fair, various Charity displays, sales tables, bar and food counters.

Marianne Gibson’s portrait of Ken

It was on the Saturday during the presentation of prizes, preceded by the Corps of Drums, that the unveiling took place by the CGRM Maj Gen Matt Holmes CBE DSO, in front of hundreds of people many of whom had had the pleasure of meeting Ken. Present was Ken’s son and daughter in-law David and Denise with their daughter Amy, all able to proudly join CGRM for the unveil. Also, there with me was Jill, Clive Porter, Justine and Shaun Isherwood and their son Ocean, all to represent Ken’s 47 Family.

David was given a print of the painting at the unveil by CGRM and extra copies were to be forwarded for his sister and Ken’s grandson Tom, who had spent so much time with him.

The painting was passed to the CO RMR Bristol with a request it hangs alongside the “Capture of PeB” painting that Ken had unveiled in the Units main social area.

Having visited all the stands plus being well fed and watered the day ended with a Marching and Sunset display by the CTCRM RM Band which as always was magic. It was a perfect ending to a perfect day out and the opportunity to spread the 47 story.



L-R: Marianne Gibson (artist), CO RMR Bristol, CRSM, David (holding the picture), CGRM, David’s daughter Amy and his wife Denise

Smiles and Tears, the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Fécamp

Dave Shorrock (Ed.)

We have a standing invitation to return to Fécamp in September each year to commemorate the liberation of the town by 47 Cdo. For 2019, the 75th anniversary of the liberation we were accompanied by our President of 47RMCA, Chuck Harris (formerly of HQ -Troop, 47 Commando) along with a number of his family members including our Chairman John Prentis. We were also accompanied, thanks to the CO, by four gentlemen from 1AGRM.

We all assembled in Fécamp on the evening of the 1st of September. Once again, the town had kindly arranged for us to be accommodated at the four-star hotel Le Grand Pavois, with its stunning views over the harbour. We were met on the 2nd by Pierre Aubrey, the Deputy Mayor responsible for Veterans Affairs, who hosted us for lunch on the seafront terrace of the restaurant Redroic. To work off the fine lunch Pierre had arranged for us to have a guided tour of the new Musée des Pêcheries (Museum of Fisheries), which tells the long history of fishing in Fécamp and in Normandy. The tour over, we returned to the hotel to change for the formal part of the day.

The commemorations began at 17:00 at the Cimetière du Val aux Clercs, which lies on a hillside. After the townspeople had taken many photographs of our party, we eventually lined up behind the standards, with Lou Sartorel proudly bearing our standard. We then began our sombre parade up through the cemetery, stopping first at the graves of two Frenchmen: Roland Terrier and Georges Paumier.

Roland Terrier came from a family of sailors and started work at age 15 on a trawler. He'd joined the French Navy in 1938 but was imprisoned when France fell. In July 1940, age 23, he managed to escape from prison and join General de Gaulle's Free French Forces in London where he was assigned to the 1st Battalion Marine Fusiliers. He saw action on D-Day and beyond and was awarded many honours including the Croix de Guerre with 5 citations.

When France was occupied, Georges Paumier refused to join the Service du travail obligatoire (STO), the compulsory work service that would have seen him deported to the workcamps in Nazi Germany. Leaving his parents and two sisters behind, he fled to Brittany to join the resistance, the second battalion of the 4th Regiment of Brittany. On the 4th of July 1944, when



Pierre Aubrey and John Prentis lay the town's wreath at the memorial to "Our Liberator"

they were surrounded by the enemy, Georges was one of seven who stayed behind so that his comrades could escape. He was 20 years old when his life ended under a hail of enemy bullets. He was returned to his family in Fécamp in November 1948.

After the presentation of honours and wreath laying at these two graves, we continued our progress up the cemetery, stopping first at the Belgian First World War graves and then on to the British memorial and graves. The Deputy Mayor Pierre Aubry and John Prentis jointly laid the town's wreath at the memorial to "Our Liberator" Major D.H. Walton of 47 Commando, who died on the 4th September '44 when his Jeep ran over a landmine. Our Association wreath was then laid by Jacqui Hearn on behalf of Chuck. As Chuck wiped away a tear, he said quietly "I wish he was standing here instead of me". Those of us who were close enough to hear what he'd said were quickly putting a hanky to our eyes.

The parade then turned back down through the cemetery to the memorials that bring home the true horror of the Occupation; the memorial to the 8 young men that were deported to the work camps and never returned, and the memorial to the 11 (3 women and 8 men, including a husband and wife) that were deported to the concentration camps, never to return.

From the cemetery, we made our way to the courtyard of the Town Hall to recreate the photograph of Major Walton greeting the Mayor on the steps on the 2nd September 1944. Photographs over, we walked outside to Square du 47 Royal Marine Commando. Here were laid wreaths for 47 Commando, the French Resistance, and on two plaques that were unveiled to Roland Terrier and Georges Paumier.

Our final wreath laying was at the war memorial in Place Charles De Gaulle, before we returned to the Town Hall for speeches and presentations.

The Mayor of Fécamp, Marie-Agnès Poussier-Winsback welcomed us with these words: “Seventy-five years ago, on the 2nd of September 1944, the Allied troops and you, Mr. Harris, liberated Fécamp, welcomed by a cheering population. And for the second time this year, it is with a lot of emotion I have the pleasure to welcome you, dear Chuck Harris. You, one of the liberators of our city, you who belong to the 47 Royal Marine Commando. Your presence honours us all. Thank you very much”.

The Mayor’s speech had a moving conclusion, which I’ll try to summarise: “It would have been difficult, if not impossible, to bring together Roland Terrier and Georges Paumier in ‘44 because of their different political ideas and commitments, and yet what has united these men who fought for France is the very essence of resistance (strength). We must maintain our duty to remember them. We must never forget the names, faces, lives of these French and English heroes who must be part of our lives as free citizens, because without them we would not be free. We must never forget that, whatever the disagreements, at the great moments of our history we have been able to reconcile ourselves in order to advance. Long live the Republic, long live France and long live Fécamp”.

With the speeches over, the Mayor presented Chuck with a bottle of Benedictine and a book of photographs of the liberation produced from the town archives. In return, Chuck presented the mayor with a Commando figurine (which I’m reliably informed now has pride of place on her desk). Presentations over, it was time for the bar to open.

Once again, the town of Fécamp welcomed us with friendship, generosity and affection. And I think the depth of that affection is well demonstrated by Pierre Aubrey and his partner asking to join us again this year at the Mountbatten of Festival of Music.



The Mayor admires the Commando figurine gift from Chuck, that now sits proudly on her desk

Finally, I’d like to thank: Csgt Pete Hardie, Sgt Ian Barnes, AB Daniel Snowdon and AB Samuel Walker, of 1AGRM for supporting us. I’d told them I wasn’t blaming them for delaying the start of the commemorations, it was clearly the fault of half of Fécamp wanting to take photographs of them, so smartly dressed in their uniforms. So, gentlemen thank you. Now say ‘cheese’.

A version of this article was published in the November-December issue of the Globe & Laurel.

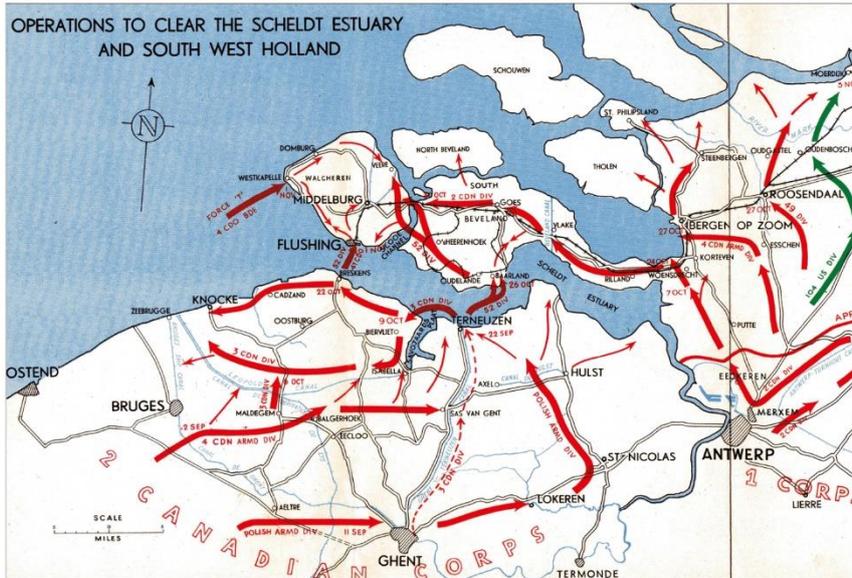
If you are interested in attending the commemorations in Fécamp in September this year, please let our Secretary know.

75th Anniversary of the Assault on Walcheren (Part I)

Lt Col G.A. Gelder RM (Retd), Corp Historian

'Nowhere else in Europe was an attack made on the coast where opposition was encountered both from casemated coast guns and strong beach defences' Army Operational Research Group Memorandum No 580.

Searching through the pages of the *Globe & Laurel* for information on Operation *Infatuate* will reward the reader with narratives from wide-ranging sources; participants, authors and commentators, each of whom has presented the event from a slightly different viewpoint, and in doing so, together created a multi-dimensional lens through which we can judge the operation. At 75 years distance there is possibly little more to add, but the narrative below is not well known and offers an objective judgement from a Royal Marines' perspective. The source is a Royal Marines Office publication produced in 1945 called *'Royal Marines Business'*. The purpose of this publication was to provide insight and information for officers to assist in the training of their men. This first instalment focuses on the context, forces involved and the activities of the Support Squadron Eastern Flank (SSEF) and Force T, which together provided the maritime fire support for the operation.



Operations to clear the Scheldt Estuary and south west Holland

Antwerp was captured by the 11 Arm Div on 4 September 1944 as the climax to a remarkable advance from the Seine. The enemy attempted to cover up the effects of this victory by a very stubborn defence of the positions that commanded the entrance to the main Scheldt channel. The clearance of the estuary became the primary task of the Canadian Army. Fighting in the very difficult 'Polder' country, they first cleared the south bank in the region of Breskens and then the narrow peninsula of South Beveland. This left the formidably defended island of Walcheren, where there were estimated to be some 9,000 to 10,000 German troops, together with a large number driven over the causeway linking Walcheren to South Beveland.

A large number of powerful batteries were located on the island, capable of denying the Scheldt to RN Minesweepers and shipping. The first blow at Walcheren

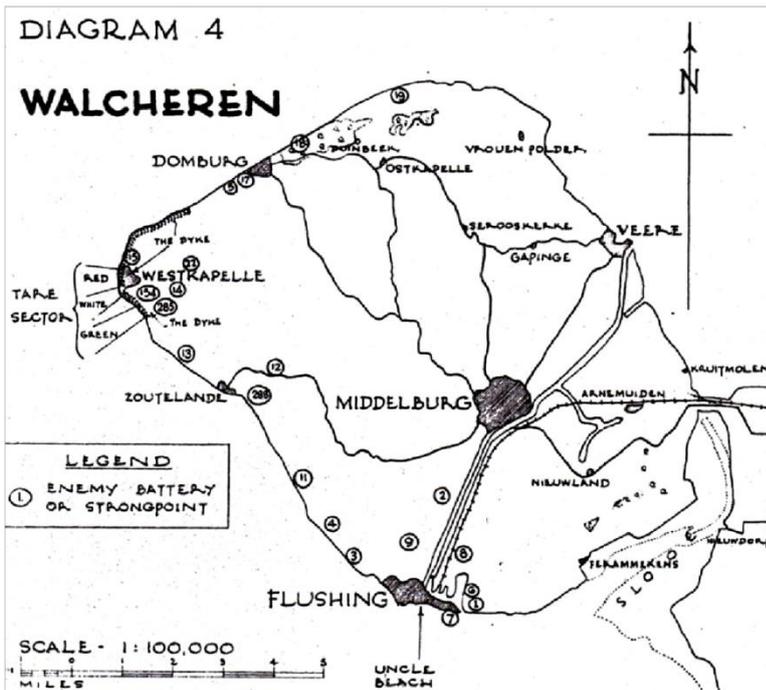
was struck by the RAF. On 3 October a strong force of Lancasters in daylight, breached the Westkapelle dyke and flooded the interior of the island. A second breach was also blown in the dyke just north of Flushing. There were hopes that the effect of bombing plus flooding would force the Germans to evacuate or at least offer only token resistance. However, the most formidable batteries located in the Westkapelle dyke itself, remained well above the level of the floods. How much their fighting efficiency was affected by air attack and the administrative inconvenience was not known until the assault was launched. The final plan was for a three-point attack. 52 (Lowland) Div was to attack east across the Walcheren-South Beveland causeway; 4 Cdo was to land and assault Flushing across the estuary from Breskens, followed by 155(Lowland) Bde. A combined assault was then launched from the sea on to Westkapelle, the extreme west tip of the island. It was with this attack that the Royal Marines were mainly concerned.

The Naval Commander Force 'T' (Capt A F Pugsley DSO RN) had at his disposal: *HMS Warspite*, HM Monitors *Erebus and Roberts*; Support Squadron Eastern Flank (Cdr K Sellar DSC RN) consisting of six Landing Craft Gun (Large) - LCG(L), two landing Craft Gun (Medium) - LCG(M), six Landing Craft Support (large) - LCS(L), six landing Craft Flak - LCF and five Landing Craft Tank (Rocket) - LCT(R). The Gunnery Officers of the squadron were Capt LWB Fisher RM and Capt GHR Madden RM. The craft carried a total of 567 Royal Marines (all ranks). The Military Commander, Brig B W Leicester (Comd 4 SS Bde) disposed three RM Cdos (Nos 41, 47 and 48), troops of 10(IA) Cdo, A Sqn 1 Lothians (AVRE and tank), 5 Assault RE (manning Landing Vehicles Tracked), 509 and 510 Field Coys RE, 9 GHQ Tps RE, 17 Canadian Field Ambulance, 10 Canadian Field Dressing Station, and 144 Pioneer Coy. The Naval Beach Party was commanded by Cdr R M Prior DSO, DSC, RN.

4 Cdo, after landing at Flushing and clearing the town was to push north, returning to command of 4 SS Bde when



Westkapelle and the Gap



Battery positions on Walcheren

island, leaving a narrow strip in the region of the dyke like a rim round a saucer. Between Zoutelande and Domburg this rim was not more than 250 yards wide from sea to floods. Between the gaps were two large batteries, W11 and W13, each of four 150mm guns (approx 6 inches), and a number of smaller batteries and supporting positions. At Westkapelle (W15) there was a battery of four 150mm guns, and at Domburg (W17) a battery of four 220 mm (approx 9 inches), with supporting positions, while beyond Domburg to the NE were further big coastal batteries, W18 and W19. Just inland from Westkapelle was Battery W14, which was apparently flooded but whether or not it was out of action was not known. An initial reconnaissance of the Westkapelle Gap was carried out by 'Keepforce', which included personnel of RM Engr Cdo. Three visits were paid to the Gap by night from MTB and the enemy was found to be sensitive and alert in that area.

Forty-eight hours of preliminary bombing was planned but adverse weather conditions prevented the full execution of this programme. The naval programme was for a preliminary bombardment by HMS *Warspite* and the Monitors on the batteries in the immediate neighbourhood of Westkapelle, lifting to the flanks (Domburg and South of Zoutelande). The Support Squadron was divided into two wings, SSEF (N) and (S) each of three LCG(L), one LCG(M), three LCS(L), three LCF and two or three LCT(R). The two LCG(L) groups were to engage W15 and W13, the remainder of the craft concentrating on drenching the defences of these batteries and the Gap. One LCG(M) was allocated a pillbox immediately north of the Gap, the other a similar target to the south. It was the first time that this type of craft had been employed operationally. Covered by this fire, B, P and S Troops of 41 Cdo were to land at 0945 hrs from LCI(S) on the north shoulder of the Gap to cover the main landings by clearing that area of the dyke and the west edge of Westkapelle village. The remainder of the Cdo and two Tps of 10(IA) Cdo would land in tracked amphibious craft, launched from LCT, clear Westkapelle and Battery W14, subsequently pushing north. 48 Cdo was to land south of the Gap in LVT and Weasels from LCT, pushing south as far as Zoutelande. 47 Cdo in similar craft were also landing south of the Gap to push on beyond Zoutelande till meeting with 4 Cdo from Flushing. A great deal of artillery was available for support from the mainland (Breskens area) on call by FOO, while a representative of Corps Commander Royal Artillery (CCRA) was attached to Bde HQ. Support by Typhoons was obtainable by the ASSU tentacle to a Forward Control Post (FCP) in Breskens. Tanks and AVRE were landing at H Hour with the first flight of 41 Cdo to support the clearance of Westkapelle and subsequently to support 48 Cdo against W13.

The weather conditions for a combined operation in the North Sea in November were

effective contact was made. Each Commando was allocated a FOO with a call on AGRA (Army Group Royal Artillery) and two Forward Observers Bombardment (FOB), FOB(1) for contact with the Support Squadron (SSEF) and FOB(2) for contact with *Warspite* and the Monitors. Two Air Support Signals Units (ASSU) tentacles were also allotted to 4 SS Bde for communications with Tactical Air Forces (TAF) with a call on two Wings of Typhoons.

The foundation of the Westkapelle dyke, reputed to be the finest example of its type of engineering in the Netherlands, is a massive structure of unmortared blocks of basalt on enormous wooden piles. On top of the dyke, sand dunes had piled up to a height of 40 to 50 feet. These dunes were on average about 100 to 150 yards wide. The German batteries with which the operation was concerned were built into the sand dunes in massive concrete emplacements, protected on the landward side by minefields and smaller emplacements, which formed an almost continuous series of fortifications from Flushing to the extreme north of the island. The RAF's two breaches in the dyke were immediately south of Westkapelle and about a mile NW of Flushing. Through these gaps the sea had flooded the



Battery B15 Command Post



Battery W15 Gun Emplacement

not expected to be ideal. For example, a calm sea would most likely be accompanied by conditions that would negate maximum air effort. This actually proved to be the case and, though 420 sorties of Typhoons were flown in difficult conditions, the RAF had to advise that reliance could not be placed on air support. The prevailing sea conditions off the island were not suitable for small craft and had precluded the use of LCA which the Military Commander would have preferred to LCI(S) for the initial landing. The Naval Commander appreciated that wind in excess of Force 3 would make any landing impossible. The final decision to proceed was left to the Naval and Military Commanders on the spot and was not taken until 2200hrs on 31 October, when it was decided to

accept the risk of assaulting without air support. Force T sailed from Ostend at 0315hrs on 1 November. At 0700hrs the lighthouse tower of Westkapelle was sighted. First deployment was carried out at 0730hrs in conditions of comparative calm, with a light NW breeze, fair visibility and low cloud ceiling. *Warspite*, *Erebus* and *Roberts* opened fire at about 0700hrs and shortly afterwards the German batteries north and south of Westkapelle began to reply by firing on the SSEF and the landing craft. At 0815hrs the LCG(L) opened fire on W15 at about 10,000 yards, though at first their fire was not very effective. The enemy made smoke to cover W15 and the lighthouse tower, but this was only effective for a short period.



A 15 inch shell lands on the dyke at Westkapelle

Final deployment for the assault took place at 0840hrs, when the two wings of the SSEF closed up to their respective targets, the Germans holding their fire in the meanwhile until the ranges were closed. At between 3,000 and 4,000 yards W15 and W13 opened very accurate fire. The LCG(L) opened up with radar ranges and was ordered to spot to bring their fire on the target. This they did, finding their targets and holding them subsequently with great resolution. As H Hour (0945) approached, LCG(L) 1 and 2 and 17 (RM Gunnery Officers Lts I D Birdseye, L D Sanders and W W Wallace) closed to 2,000 yards of W15, which was especially active, running on a northerly course parallel to the beach and firing as hard as possible. They then turned to starboard on the reverse course, closing to 800 yards and bringing the bridge Oerlikons into action as well as the main armament. In similar style, LCG(L) 9, 10 and 11 (RM Gunnery Officers Lts J W Harvie, J A L Harding and R J Carter) tackled W13. The LCS(L), LCF and LCT(R) then went in to attack the beach defences. They were received with a very heavy fire of all calibres. The first salvo of rockets on W15 fell slightly short of the target, but was effective, but the next craft to release her salvoes was well astern of station and unfortunately covered LCG 42 (RM Gunnery Officers R D Hale and P Bayly-Jones), setting her on fire.



Landing Craft Flak

All the LCF were heavily engaged from the shore before they themselves could close sufficiently to reply with effect, but they kept firmly on their course. LCF 37 (RM GOs Lts P G Cowper and D A Leage) was hit on the waterline by a shell from W15, but the damage control party blocked the hole with hammocks. At 0945hrs she came under very accurate fire from W13. She made smoke and went full astern, a near miss filled her bridge and upper deck with water, two hits forward blew away her bows and the forward magazine and finally, at 0950hrs, she received a direct hit in the main magazine, which blew up approximately 100,000 rounds of 2 pdr and Oerlikon ammunition. Most of the personnel were blown into the sea. There were 29 survivors. The enemy fired on their rafts and floats at about 1,500 yards range so they paddled away from the beach and were picked up 45 minutes later by LCI(S). The final salvo of rockets covered the village of Westkapelle and Typhoons also strafed the beach with their rockets.



Curtain Wall of Bunker engaged by LCG(M)101

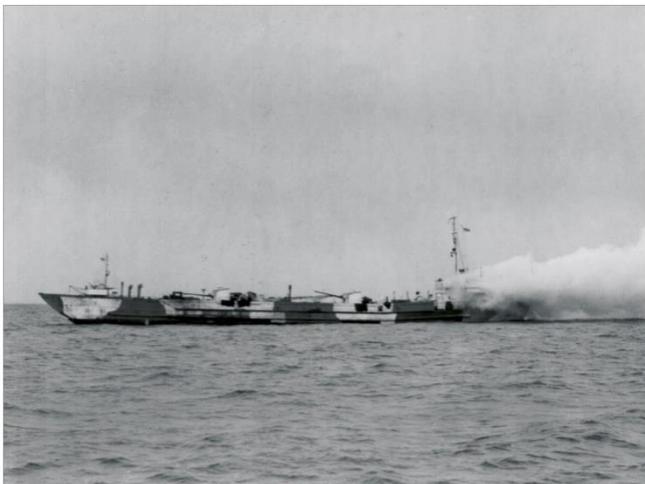
craft from broaching to as the tide ran at about 6 knots parallel to the beach which had a gradient of 1 in 10. The craft kept up a hot fire for the next 20 minutes until both turrets were out of action, owing to small arms fire through the Layers and Trainers sighting ports. As far as could be seen no penetration of the pillbox, which had no slits facing seaward, was achieved, but it was definitely neutralised while the first flight got ashore. Meanwhile the craft was hit in several places with shells of various calibres from 150mm to 20mm, mostly astern, as she was so close in that the German guns could only just train on her. She retracted about 1000hrs and, when about 800 yards offshore, sank by the stern in deep water. Casualties were extraordinarily light, one officer and one rating being killed, four wounded. Little is known of LCG(M) 102 (RM GO WW layman). She was last seen ablaze on the beach and no survivors were picked up.



LCG(M)101 sinking by the stern

Throughout these events the LCG(L) of both wings kept up a steady fire on the big batteries while *Warspite* engaged the Domburg battery and the Monitors target's south of the Gap. The enemy fire on the craft was backed up by AA batteries firing unpleasant low airburst. Most of the fire, though not all, was drawn off the LCI(S) and the LCT on their way into the beach. The touchdown of the LCI(S) was delayed 27 minutes by avoiding action taken on two occasions. Two LCI(S) were hit but the landing took place without undue casualties. The LCT carrying the tanks and AVRE attracted more attention and had a difficult time. One AVRE was destroyed and the craft had to turn out and beach again. However, they succeeded in getting in. By 1500hrs, when SSEF reviewed its situation, it was found that out of 25 craft only two LCG(L), which had been ordered out to re-ammunition, two LCF and two LCS(L) remained fit for action, and this total was subsequently reduced by the two LCF which developed engine and flooding troubles. This closed the contribution of SSEF to the assault on Westkapelle. From the engagements described above it is clear that they carried out a formidable task with the utmost resolution and tenacity. SSEF had a total casualty roll of 172 officers and men killed and 210 wounded. After this engagement, *Warspite* and the Monitors remained the only effective naval bombardment force.

In the 21 Army Group Report on the operation the performance of SSEF included these comments:
 'It was abundantly clear to the Support Squadron that their task, therefore, was to draw the fire of, engage and if possible, destroy any of the batteries or strongpoints found to be active. The success of the landings at Westkapelle was largely due to the determination of the Support Squadron to ensure that the Commandos should arrive safely on the beach, and receive the maximum support. The Squadron put up a magnificent fight against formidable defences, and suffered severely, but they drew the fire of the enemy batteries and thus enabled the troop carrying craft to go in with relatively few casualties.'



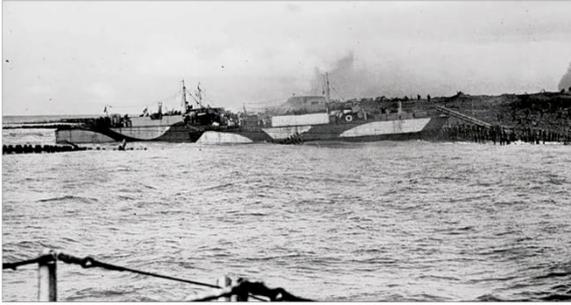
LCG(L) on fire aft

75th Anniversary of the Assault on Walcheren (Part II)

Lt Col G.A. Gelder RM (Retd), Corp Historian

Part one of this narrative concluded with the contribution of the SSEE to the assault by 4 Special Service Brigade. The second part focuses on the activities of the Commando Units on Walcheren.

The touchdown of the LCI(S) carrying the leading Troops of 41 RM Cdo (Lt Col E C E Palmer RM) was 27 minutes late so that the first



LCI(S) of 41 RM Cdo's First Wave on Red Beach

flights of 41, north of the Gap and 48 RM Cdo south of the Gap landed at almost exactly the same time. The craft followed LCG(M) 101 into the beach and were shelled en route, two LCI(S) being hit. The touchdown took place at 1012hrs just north of the beginning of the Gap itself. There was no infantry opposition. B Tp took up position on the edge of the dyke covering the west edge of Westkapelle while P Tp moved north to seize a covering position on the north edge of the village facing battery W15, which was engaged with Small Arms (SA) fire. S Tp established MMG on the edge of the dyke to fire along the southern fringe of the village should fire be opened from there on the landing of 48 RM Cdo on the other side of the Gap. A Tp, Cdo HQ and X Tp landed at 1018hrs in LVT and Weasels from a pair of LCT, touching down just south of the LCI(S). On dismounting from their amphibians the troops made for the

near edge of the village. A Tp then advanced down the southern fringe with supporting fire from the MMG. No resistance was encountered until fire was opened from the dominating lighthouse tower at the eastern edge of the village. This fire was returned by SA and PIAT, and tanks of 1 Lothians engaged from positions on top of the dyke on to the tower, which was set on fire. A Tp then attacked and the enemy holding the position surrendered. By 1115hrs the village was cleared, but P Tp reported heavy SA fire from the local defences of W15 which was holding them up. After the CO had recce'd the position, it was decided to send Y Tp round the inland flank where a practicable route of approach was discovered from where they could attack under fire and smoke from P Tp. The attack was launched at noon, and in half an hour's sharp fighting the battery was captured along with 120 prisoners. Y Troop backed up by P, exploited vigorously and took a further series of enemy positions beyond the battery, reaching a lighthouse on the dyke about a mile north of the Gap where they were ordered to stop.

At 1205 hrs Bde Tac HQ landed north of the Gap. The Bde Comd ordered 41 to halt on the line gained until further instructions. From about 1050 hrs onwards, the village and the Gap had been subjected to heavy shelling from W17, the Domburg battery of 220mm guns. This continued until Typhoons were called at 1300hrs to deliver an attack that silenced the battery for a time. Domburg was also subjected to bombardment by HMS *Warspite*. The two Tps of 10(IA) Cdo were disposed across the northern approach to Westkapelle. When at 1500hrs, the Brigadier gave permission for the advance to continue towards Domburg, A and S Tps of 41 RM Cdo were left under command 10(IA) Cdo to defend the village. 41 RM Cdo advanced NE along the sand dunes of the dyke, Y Tp leading, followed by HQ, P, B and X Tps. As Domburg was approached this order was changed, X Tp continuing along the dunes with P Tp astride the road followed by B and Y Tps. In the gathering darkness every effort was made to maintain the speed of the advance but the Cdo was hindered by large bodies of potentially hostile Germans coming out of their bunkers to surrender.



A Tp 41 RM Cdo in Westkapelle

W17 and a small battery, immediately inland of it, surrendered with little fight, B Tp being left to search the position thoroughly and mop up. By 1815hrs, in darkness, save for the lurid light of blazing houses set on fire by the bombardment of *Warspite* during the afternoon, the main crossroads in Domburg was reached. According to a POW, who was on the rangefinder of the battery, it was the effect of *Warspite's* 15-inch shells rather than the air attacks that completed the demoralisation of the garrison and silenced the battery. P Tp was sent forward with the 2IC, Major Wood RM, to establish contact with the enemy and reconnoitre, but the country NE of the village was thickly wooded and further exploitation in the darkness was deemed inadvisable. P Tp was established in the centre of the village with Y Tp covering the right flank as far as the edge of the floods and B Tp in reserve further back. Meanwhile X Tp on the dunes had been held up by determined resistance from an enemy party established in a high and commanding sand dune just NW of the village. Major P K Brind-Sheridan RM who was leading his troop at the time was wounded, together with a marine. When the Tp withdrew to cover in the face of heavy enemy fire, their absence was not noticed. Later two patrols were sent forward to locate the wounded, but had no success. At 2100hrs B Tp was warned to seal off this pocket of resistance from the SE. At 0300hrs the CO and a small party recce'd the strongpoint to see if further attempts could be made to rescue the wounded, but the Germans were behind a broad barbed wire fence and had lit a large fire, preventing anything further being done. A Tp was called forward from Westkapelle at 0330hrs, arriving three hours later. At about 0800hrs the enemy withdrew from the strongpoint and B Tp entered the strongpoint to find the wounded marine alive, but Maj Brind-Sheridan dead. At 1100hrs orders were received from Bde to hand over to 10(IA) Cdo in Domburg and return across the Gap to support the attack of 47 RM Cdo next day. The position was turned over to 10(IA) Cdo by 1815hrs, B Tp and X Tps being left under command as enemy activity appeared to be on the increase.

The first flight of 48 RM Cdo (Lt Col J L Mouton DSO RM) in three LCT consisted of B, X and Y Tps, the CO, Adjt and the three inch Mortars in LVT and Weasels. B Tp's first objective, a number of low concrete pillboxes on the shoulder of the Gap, was found to be unoccupied. By 1020hrs, X Tp had passed through and attacked the Radar Station, which was also unoccupied but covered by small arms fire from other positions. X Tp cleared the area rapidly, taking a few prisoners, then pushing on to the next strongpoint, which they captured without difficulty, together with a further dozen prisoners. The second flight (A and Z Tps, MMG and 2ic) were ordered in, touching down at 1028hrs. Shelling both on the run-in and on the beach had increased considerably and was steady on to the



LCT and LVT landing on White Beach Battery

Blunt RA) had his two wireless operators hit, but he carried his SCR 610 set forward and worked it himself. However, SSEF(S) with whom he was in touch, had been hit so hard by W13 that no craft were available to assist at this stage. The FOB(2) (Capt A D Davis RA) went forward to direct the fire of HMS *Roberts* on to W13, but after two salvos had been fired, he and both his operators were killed by a mortar bomb. The FOO (Capt Skelton RCA) had lost his 19 set, which had been drowned and could only contact his regiment through CCRA's representative on the Bde 'A' Wave. The tanks of 1 Lothians were in difficulties in the flooded ruins of Westkapelle, while trying to find a position from which to support the Cdo against W13. To make matters worse the Cdo's rear link Weasel was stuck on the beach and the 68P set was temporarily out of touch with Bde owing to screening. The only way left to organise a fireplan was for the CO to go back to Bde himself, which he did. Contact was made with the Arty and with Air via the ASSU tentacle. Z Tp was briefed for the attack, but the Tp Cdr's O Gp was caught by mortar fire with which the Germans were searching the dunes, and all were killed or wounded. Consequently, Z Tp was replaced by B Tp. From 1545hrs to 1600hrs W13 was engaged by the whole resources of 2 Cdn AGRA (five regiments of Heavy, Medium and Field Artillery), followed up by a Typhoon strike from 1600 to 1605. At 1610 B Tp attacked and penetrated the battery, capturing the Command Post, silencing the guns and taking about 30 prisoners. Some rifle and Oerlikon fire continued from the far end of the battery. Naval fire was requested to cut off the enemy retreating through Zoutelande, but could not be given as it was growing too dark. B Tp pushing on captured the Battery Cdr, his 2IC and about 70 prisoners. In the gathering darkness Y Tp recce'd forward to find the remainder of the battery unoccupied but for the Oerlikon position at the far end which was still held. One casemate of the main battery had received a direct hit from a Typhoon rocket which killed all the crew at their stations. The remaining casemates had been blown up by the retreating Germans.

Transport and supply were causing serious difficulties. Of 20 Weasels landed, four had been knocked out on the beach by shellfire and four drowned moving in the Gap area. Of the LVT, only eight out of 20 remained serviceable, many having been knocked out by shellfire which had destroyed a large part of the reserve ammunition. There was no road between the Gap area and W13, the track inland of the dyke being flooded and the ground was heavily cratered. However, beyond W13 a cobbled road emerged from the floods and continued into Zoutelande. By noon six Weasels were running a ferry service as far as the Radar station, from where stores were manhandled forward. By 0200hrs a track had been marked out along the beach to the forward HQ by which the FOO and FOB Weasels came forward and the other four brought food and ammunition. Beyond this point ammunition still had to be manhandled forward across the steep dunes over loose sand. In any case, food was short as one LCT carrying supplies had struck a mine and sunk, while the other two had so far been unable to beach owing to shellfire. The night was quiet enough but for a single ATk gun firing HE and tracer into the beach area while our Medium Artillery from the mainland fired a harassing programme on a strongpoint beyond W113, finishing up with five minute intense at 0700hrs (2 November). At first light the Oerlikon position was found to be evacuated. A Tp pushed forward and encountered light opposition in the strongpoints between the battery and Zoutelande. HMS *Erebus* opened fire on Zoutelande, later shifting to W11. By 1100hrs A Tp reached Zoutelande and after a short fire fight, the garrison of 150 surrendered. A Tp pressed on and secured the high dunes on the far side of the village. Attempts to bring up supplies by Weasel over the beach were frustrated by shellfire, but at 1400hrs, a track had been marked and prepared on the inland side of the dunes as far as Zoutelande. At 1248hrs the first Tps of 47 RM Cdo came up to Zoutelande and passed through.



Battery W13 - Destroyed gun in casemate

target area. One LCT sustained a direct hit, the shell striking the armoured front of the LVT carrying the MMG. Casualties were light, but the vehicle could not be disembarked and while the machine-gunners were trying to manhandle their weapons off the LCT, the LCT withdrew, striking a mine while putting alongside a hospital ship, but sustaining no further casualties. A LVT from this flight was stuck in the best beach exit. Bomb craters and mines hindered movement while shelling was constant, several LVT and Weasels being knocked out. Meanwhile the advance continued, another strongpoint being occupied bringing the leading Tps into contact with the defences of W13, which was doing considerable damage to the shipping. Y Tp launched an immediate attack on the battery without additional fire support, but it had to be broken off in the face of intense MG fire, the Tp Cdr, Maj de Stacpoole RM, being killed and most of the assaulting sub-section wounded.

There was no option but to launch a Deliberate Attack on the battery. The organisation of a fire-plan presented difficulties as the FOB(1) (Capt



W13 - Post Strike Aerial Photograph

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47 RM Cdo (Lt Col C F Phillips DSO RM) began to land shortly after 1100hrs, the Gap being still under heavy shellfire. Owing to a misunderstanding three of the LCT carrying the Cdo and their amphibians beached north instead of south of the Gap. One LCT beached correctly, but was hit, three LVT and one Weasel being destroyed by fire and a number of casualties sustained by B Tp. A ferry service

was instituted across the Gap, through which the tide was now running strongly, making the crossing somewhat hazardous for the Weasels especially. By about 1500hrs the Cdo was assembled under a high sand dune about 300 yards south of the Radar Station. Seventeen out of 20 LVT were in working order, but only three out of 20 Weasels, some of which had been left on the north side. Among these were all the wireless Weasels, every one of which was either sunk or out of action ashore. Casualties were however, comparatively light. One or two further casualties were suffered in the Assembly Area where the Cdo spent the night. 47's mortars stood by to assist 48 RM Cdo's attack on W13, but were not required.

At 0715hrs a Recce Gp went forward and made contact with 48 RM Cdo. The Cdo was called forward, passed through 48 in Zoutelande and by noon occupied the German positions on the dunes beyond the village without opposition. Enemy opposition was first encountered behind the ATK ditch and dragons teeth that covered Klein Valkenisse and the dune immediately to the west of that village. This ATK obstacle was part of the perimeter defence that encircled Flushing. A fire plan was organised with Arty and air support. The Cdo Signals Officer had provided FOO and FOB with radio sets, their own having been destroyed, and with these, effective communication was established. Typhoons however were not forthcoming owing to adverse weather conditions.

At 1700hrs Q and Z Tps attacked the positions beyond the Atk ditch while A and Y Tps, supported by B attacked across the dunes with W11 as their final objective. Q and Z Tps both crossed the ditch but were caught in the open by extremely heavy and accurate mortar fire. Q Tp Cdr, Maj J T E Vincent RM was wounded and other casualties suffered including about 12 killed in Q Tp. The attack along the dunes made good progress, the leading elements of A and Y reaching the fringe of the W11 positions, but here they were heavily mortared, Capts M G Y Dobson RM, R T Flower RM and J D Moore RM all being wounded. Owing to a strong pocket of enemy resistance in rear of these forward elements, it was impossible to reinforce these Tps. The light was failing and situation very obscure.



Anti-Tank obstacle at Kleine Valkenisse

area launched a counter-attack on the Adjutant's position, calling on the Marines to surrender. This attack was driven off. At 0815hrs (3 November) the CO went forward to organise a renewed attack on W11, while the 2IC, Maj Donnell, with Q and Y Tps and one MMG moved up the left flank to cover this attack from interference from the enemy in the Klein Valkenisse positions. However, of these 45 surrendered voluntarily and 15 were captured with little opposition. A Tp of 48 RM Cdo (Capt D Flunder RM) then came up and moved along a line of dunes inland and parallel to the main dunes on the dyke to take up fire positions whence they could support 47 onto W11. Their advance was opposed by spasmodic and inaccurate MG fire and another 12 prisoners gave themselves up.

At about 0900hrs A and B Tps under the Adjutant with a Dutch Tp of 10(IA) Cdo attacked the first gun position of W11 from the seaward side with Arty support from the Breskens area and LMG and smoke from A Tp 48 RM Cdo on the left flank. The enemy seemed unaware of these marines on his left for he exposed himself to them while carefully keeping under cover from the front. After a sharp battle the first gun position of the main battery was captured. A Tp, under the CO, followed up and A and B with the Dutch Tp pressed on into the battery. The Arty support had been devastating. Many prisoners taken were half crazed, their pupils dilated till the whites of their eyes almost disappeared. About 1230hrs the German resistance began to crack and about 160 prisoners gave themselves up. German officers from among this haul of prisoners were induced to call upon enemy in deep bunkers to lay down their arms. X Tp cleared the low ground to the left of the dunes, Y Tp remained in reserve while Q Tp searched all positions and organised the increasing mass of prisoners in the wake of the advance.

Further opposition was encountered beyond W11 from a battery in the neighbourhood of Zwanenburg, just north of the Flushing Gap. A captured officer was sent forward to summon the garrison to surrender and returned with the Oberleutnant in command. He was told that if he did not surrender, he would be subjected to an overwhelming air



47 RM Cdo approach the Gap

The 2IC, Major Donnell RM took X Tp forward to clear up the enemy pocket and tidy up the position. In the face of this attack, the enemy in the pocket surrendered at 1900hrs, but some of their troops withdrew to prepared positions in low wooded ground immediately behind the ATK ditch.

The Adjutant, Capt R Spencer RM, went forward to take command of the isolated troops and reorganise their position. Y Tp was withdrawn and X Tp went forward to reinforce Capt Spencer's position while Q Tp pulled in to defend the HQ established in a German searchlight post. Vehicles could not be brought beyond the Atk ditch and road block established on the track between Zoutelande and Klein Valkenisse, but as much food, water and ammunition was manhandled forward across the dunes in the darkness from the LVT harbour in the rear. Communications were difficult as many wireless sets were casualties, only three sets being available. These were organised into 'F' Gp forward with the Adjutant, Command Gp at HQ and Rear HQ one and a half miles back with the transport and stores in the LVT harbour. During the night the enemy in Klein Valkenisse



Battery W11 and the approach from Westkapelle



W11 casemated gun

destroyed part of the Cdos' provisions of food and ammunition. The LCT, which were expected to beach at highwater on D-Day, about 1230hrs, came under shellfire as they approached the beach and they were ordered out. Two LCT attempted to beach early on D plus 2, with one beaching successfully. The Pioneers manhandled the stores ashore. Unloading was difficult and slow and but for the use of POW labour, which was plentiful and surprisingly willing, progress would have been very slow. Throughout D plus 2 the wind quickly gathered force until it was blowing a gale. The beached LCT broached to in the heavy seas and much of the stores were lost. Fortunately, the capture of enemy rations by the Cdos tided the Force over its difficulties. On D plus 4 supplies were dropped from the air in the region of Zoutelande. The same evening one LCT stores and two loaded with Weasels and Bulldozers were beached. One of these craft returned to Ostend with wounded and a number of POW through a full gale which imposed great hardship on the wounded. Earlier that day a large contingent of 800 POWs were moved by march route to Flushing. The remainder were afterwards concentrated under guard of 47 RM Cdo in the Klein Valkenisse area.

Although the sea channel up the Scheldt was now open, a formidable mopping up operation remained to be completed in the north of the island, where the batteries W18 and W19, together with a large number of troops in the wooded area NW of Domburg, were still holding out. 41 RM Cdo returned to Domburg on 4 November when 10(IA) Cdo and B Tp 41 RM Cdo, supported by tanks put in an attack towards W18. Slight progress was made, and 60 prisoners taken, but B Tp was enfiladed by heavy LMG fire from the woods on the right, pinned down and forced to withdraw. A new effort was planned for 5 November with A and Y Tps attacking along the dunes and the Norwegians of 10(IA) Cdo clearing the woods on the flank. With Arty, tank and AVRE support, A and Y successfully assaulted W18 and mopping up in the position was complete by 1615hrs. Transport difficulties were acute in this area, the tracks being poor and heavily mined, but during 6 November, RE were able to open up a direct route for vehicles to W18 and stores began to come through by 1230hrs. The Belgian Tp of 10(IA) were ordered to clear the woods on the flank as far as the first bound of the next day's attack. This they carried out in brilliant style, mopping up all objectives for the next day, taking 30 POW in the process.

On 7 November a successful attack was launched by 41 RM Cdo on a position between W18 and W19 known as the 'Black Hut'. P Tp led, with B on the left and A on the right, supported by tanks. Little opposition was encountered and the position was occupied by noon. Further progress was handicapped by an AVRE running on to a mine and blocking the only track. A route around the damaged vehicle was not completed until dusk. A and B Tps exploited further towards W19 but encountered a minefield. While trying to find a way through they came under a heavy and accurate mortar fire which obliged them to withdraw. Before dawn next day the attack was resumed with 4 Cdo also attacking on the inland flank. In darkness, HQ, B and P troops of 41 RM Cdo pushed forward to reach a position between the inland scrub and battery W19 by 0715hrs. Supported by fire from P Tp, B Tp attacked. Some time was taken in finding a way through the minefield and, when the assault went in at 0750 hrs, it was broad daylight. Nevertheless, the enemy was taken completely by surprise and gave in. 4 Cdo's advance on the right was completely successful and at about 1000hrs, CO 4 Cdo reported the complete surrender of the Germans was being arranged. By 1315hrs, 4 Cdo reported the unconditional surrender of the remainder of the German forces, consisting of 35 officers and 900 other ranks. The total POW taken in the operation was approximately 2,900 all ranks.



10(IA) Cdo with supporting AVRE in Domburg

and artillery bombardment followed by an attack in force. The Oberleutnant asked for ten minutes to think it over and then returned to surrender, bringing in two officers and 180 other prisoners. 47 RM Cdo then pushed on to the Flushing Gap and established contact with 4 Cdo, who had landed in Flushing on 1 November, capturing the larger part of the town after a brilliant action. This link up meant that the seaway to Antwerp was now open to RN Minesweepers, which were seen making their way up the estuary a short while later. It still remained however, to capture W18 and destroy the Germans in the wooded country north of Domburg.

From D-Day onwards supply had been a problem. Apart from the stores carried by the Commandos themselves in their amphibians, sufficient for 48 hours, three LCT had been loaded with approximately seven days' supply of all items, including water as local supplies could not be relied on owing to the flooding. Casualties to LVT and Weasels



Pioneers unloading a LCT on Green Beach

destroyed part of the Cdos' provisions of food and ammunition. The LCT, which were expected to beach at highwater on D-Day, about 1230hrs, came under shellfire as they approached the beach and they were ordered out. Two LCT attempted to beach early on D plus 2, with one beaching successfully. The Pioneers manhandled the stores ashore. Unloading was difficult and slow and but for the use of POW labour, which was plentiful and surprisingly willing, progress would have been very slow. Throughout D plus 2 the wind quickly gathered force until it was blowing a gale. The beached LCT broached to in the heavy seas and much of the stores were lost. Fortunately, the capture of enemy rations by the Cdos tided the Force over its difficulties. On D plus 4 supplies were dropped from the air in the region of Zoutelande. The same evening one LCT stores and two loaded with Weasels and Bulldozers were beached. One of these craft returned to Ostend with wounded and a number of POW through a full gale which imposed great hardship on the wounded. Earlier that day a large contingent of 800 POWs were moved by march route to Flushing. The remainder were afterwards concentrated under guard of 47 RM Cdo in the Klein Valkenisse area.

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In the days that followed, Operation *Calendar*, the mine clearance operation of the Scheldt Estuary sought to provide a clear route through from the sea approaches, along the river to the Port of Antwerp. It was 'one of the most difficult and dangerous minesweeping operations of the war'. The first sea-going convoy reached Antwerp on 28 November 1944, 25 days after the start of the sweeping operation. By the end of December, the daily tonnage unloaded in Antwerp reached 23,000 tons and in doing so totally transformed the supply situation for the Allies on the Continent, helping set the conditions for the successful assault on Germany.

“It is all about Antwerp”

Ben Schoenmaker, Director of the Netherlands Institute of Military History

In November 1944 operation Calendar was in full swing. An Anglo-Dutch flotilla of minesweepers were very busy clearing the Scheldt estuary of mines. This naval operation was the final stage of a difficult and costly campaign to open up the port of Antwerp. It all began on the 4th of September, when a British division captured this city and its port by surprise. The Germans had left in such a hurry that they had not been able to destroy the docks, quays, cranes and warehouses. As a result, the British troops found the harbour completely intact and ready for use. The ‘only’ thing that still had to be done, was to drive the Germans from the south and north banks of the Scheldt river. A task that proved far more difficult to accomplish than the military planners had anticipated. But finally, after the completion of operation Calendar, at the end of November, the first convoy of ships sailed into Antwerp, starting a precious new supply line for the Allied armies.

The Germans recognized the vital importance of Antwerp and did everything in their power to sever or at least disrupt the supply line running through this city. Torpedo boats and small submarines tried to attack Allied ships to and from this port, without much success by the way. After London, Antwerp became the prime target of V1 flying bombs and the even more terrifying V2 rockets, terrorizing the population of the city, but these attacks could not seriously hurt the logistical efforts of the Allies. From Adolf Hitler’s perspective the logical choice for the ultimate objective of the Ardennes offensive, that started on the 16th of December, was – again – the port of Antwerp. For if the Germans would succeed in retaking that city, General Eisenhower’s expeditionary force would be in serious trouble. Luckily however, the German army did not even come close to Antwerp. The city was to remain safely in British hands.

That Antwerp played such a pivotal role during this phase of the war, would probably not have come as a surprise to older, 19th century, military thinkers, both from Britain and the Netherlands, since they had always been aware of the strategic importance of this city and its port, taking into account that on the territory of present-day Belgium many of Europe’s most important battles had been fought. With Waterloo as the best-known example; during the campaign of 1815 Antwerp was a vital link in the line of communication of Wellington’s army, guaranteeing a safe retreat to England, if it became necessary.

The Belgian secession from the Kingdom of the Netherlands, in the 1830s, complicated the position of Antwerp, since its route of entry – its connection to the sea – was on foreign (Dutch) territory. All parties concerned instantly recognized that this unlucky but insoluble consequence of the Belgian-Dutch separation was a source of potential trouble. For the Dutch this meant that in their military planning, whether they liked it or not, they could not ignore the strategic importance of Antwerp, particularly for Britain. Therefore the Dutch continued to think and worry about Antwerp, even after 1874, the year in which the government decided to concentrate its system of defence on the western part of the Netherlands – the so-called Fortress Holland, leaving, one might conclude, the rest of the country undefended, including the province of Zeeland and the approach to Antwerp.

In the nineteenth century the Dutch government also opted for a policy of neutrality. Now neutrality may appear, at first glance, to be a passive policy, for its only goal seems to be to lay low and avoid getting involved in external conflict. In reality, however, neutrality brought with it many obligations, that had to be actively complied with. One of the most important duties of a neutral state was to show a credible willingness and preparedness to defend all of its territory against outside aggression. This duty was problematic for the Dutch government for it clashed – or at least it appeared to clash – with the principle of concentrated defence, that might convey the message to the rest Europe that the Dutch were not going to seriously defend for instance the outlying province of Zeeland. So, what would happen if war would break out

between Germany on the one hand and France, Belgium and Great Britain on the other, which was not an altogether unlikely scenario at the end of nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century? The British Royal Navy might decide to use the port of Antwerp to quickly bring over troops and supplies to the Continent, forcing its way into the Scheldt river. The Germans would of course not tolerate this violation of Dutch neutrality and would probably invade the Netherlands.

The Dutch government clearly saw the danger of Antwerp to its policy of neutrality. But what to do about it? Well, the Dutch would somehow have to make clear that, in wartime, they would actively deny use of the Scheldt river to all belligerents. For that reason, the Ministry of War came up with a plan to build a strong fortress, just outside Flushing, that – with its guns – could effectively close off the Scheldt. As you will understand, the German government was pleased with this plan, whereas the authorities in London were quite annoyed, seeing it almost as a hostile act by the Dutch. This issue of the Flushing fortress – whether it should be built or not – lingered on for a number of years and it made clear that, already in time of peace, the policy of neutrality was a difficult balancing act, especially between the conflicting interests of Germany and Britain. In 1913 the Dutch finally started to build the fort, but it was never completed, which was mainly due to the outbreak of the First World War. The plan had been to name the fort after admiral De Ruyter, Flushing's most famous son.

During this war the complex geopolitical situation – with the port of Antwerp only being accessible across Dutch territory – did not seriously endanger the neutrality of the Netherlands, simply because Antwerp, despite its extensive fortifications, was conquered by the German army early in the war. Subsequently, the static position of the front line dictated that for more than four years the British had to use the French Channel ports in their traffic and transport to and from the trenches in Flanders and northern France. The Dutch at the same time were very fortunate to be able to stay out of the war.

The Netherlands wasn't that lucky during the Second World War. In May 1940 Hitler's Wehrmacht rapidly overran Belgium and the Netherlands, as a result of which both Antwerp and Flushing were now firmly in German hands. The Dutch government, that had escaped to London, acknowledged the failure of its policy of neutrality and now became a member of the anti-Axis coalition. With the loss of the Netherlands-Indies to Japan and with the entry of the Soviet Union and the United States into the war, the role of the Netherlands in this coalition dwindled in importance. To argue that the position of the Dutch within the alliance had become that of a junior partner, is still an overstatement. The government, led by prime minister Pieter Sjoerds Gerbrandy, had no say whatsoever in Allied decision making. Neither were Queen Wilhelmina or the ministers consulted or informed beforehand of any major decisions. This position of 'close to zero' influence did not change for the better after September 1944, when the Allies started their, what turned out to be difficult, step-by-step liberation of the Netherlands.

During the Scheldt campaign the Dutch authorities-in-exile experienced for the first time the frustration of having no influence, no control, even over events involving their own country and countrymen. Of course, they were grateful for the Allied efforts to defeat Nazi-Germany, but at the same time they could not always understand or agree with the decisions made by General Eisenhower and his subordinate commanders. One decision in particular shocked them, and that was the decision to flood the island of Walcheren by bombing its dykes. Before taking a closer look at their response to this drastic measure, I'd like to explain why the order to bomb the dykes was given and how it was executed.

The task to conquer the Scheldt estuary was assigned to the First Canadian Army. The acting commander, General Simonds, realised that the capture of Walcheren was probably going to

be the hardest part of this task. The only overland approach was by the Sloedam, a 1,200-metre-long and 45-metre-wide causeway, that was just east of the village of Arnemuiden. The coastline, as part of the Atlantic Wall, was heavily fortified. Simonds' planning staff weighed a number of options. The possibility of an airborne operation against Walcheren was studied but quickly dropped, because it was considered too risky. The planners then came up with the idea to have the Royal Air Force bomb the dykes and inundate a large part of the island. They expected – or at least hoped – that the flooding would weaken and demoralise the enemy in no small degree, saving the lives of many of their own soldiers, sailors and airmen. At the same time, the planners were fully aware of the fact that the bombings might cost the lives of many civilians. That would then be an unfortunate but unavoidable side-effect of the necessary use of force.



After Eisenhower had given the go-ahead, the operation to sink Walcheren began on October the 3rd. That day, 252 Lancaster bombers dropped 1,270 tons of explosives on the dyke near Westkapelle, destroying a large part of the village and killing 157 inhabitants. Because the breach that had been blown in the seawall did not have the desired result, three more raids were carried out, east and west of Flushing, near Veere and again at Westkapelle. This ultimately did have the effect of flooding almost the entire island. An important side benefit of the bombings at Westkapelle was that new beaches had been created there. Beaches that were used during the amphibious assault on the island that started on November the 1st. Special forces and Royal Marine Commandos simultaneously came ashore in Vlissingen and Westkapelle and after that it took them roughly a week to round up all the German positions on the island, including the big coastal guns in the dunes.

When Prime Minister Gerbrandy heard that Walcheren had been deliberately flooded, he was stunned. He could not believe that such a brutal method had really been necessary. His Minister of Foreign Affairs, Eelco van Kleffens, agreed and called it a 'senseless destruction'. Both men were also annoyed that the Dutch government had been completely left out of the decision-making process. Gerbrandy was able to arrange an appointment with Churchill, which was no small achievement in itself, and during this short meeting he politely complained

to his British colleague that he found it utterly unacceptable that he had been left completely in the dark. He also stated that drowning an island within the borders of an allied country simply was too blunt an instrument of war, all the more so because the salt sea water would probably have a long-lasting negative impact on the fertility of the soil. Churchill was sympathetic, but at the same time he made it clear to Gerbrandy that he could do nothing for him. The decision to flood Walcheren, he said, had not been made by him but by Eisenhower, so the Dutch should direct their complaints at the Supreme Commander. Gerbrandy actually tried to do this, but at Eisenhower's headquarters he came up against a brick wall as well. He felt powerless and frustrated that he could not protect his fellow-countrymen from what he saw as excessive violence.

Altogether, the price for opening the port of Antwerp was high for the Allied soldiers and the civilian population. Besides Walcheren, the western part of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen had been hit particularly hard. Breskens, Oostburg and other towns were almost completely destroyed. A scenario that had been considered so often in peace time – foreign powers fighting a battle over the access to Antwerp on Dutch soil – had become a harsh reality. The casualties and destruction were as bad as they were, but for the Dutch government it was extra painful that it had not been able to exert any influence whatsoever on the way the Allies had conducted this campaign. And there was more to come in this respect, for Eisenhower would, in the winter of 1944-1945, turn down requests by Queen Wilhelmina and Gerbrandy to launch a separate military operation to liberate the western part of the Netherlands because of the serious shortage of food in this part of the country. Eisenhower replied that such an operation would be too risky and would detract from the main task of defeating Nazi Germany.

In May 1945, after the Germans had finally surrendered, the Dutch celebrated the end of five years of occupation and brutal oppression, expressing a heartfelt gratitude towards the Allies for liberating them. But the liberation and the way it had come about, had also been a sobering experience particularly for the Dutch authorities, for time and again they had learnt that on the global stage their voices went unheard. Psychologically it was very difficult for them to realise that the Netherlands had become a small, uninfluential power. They still clung to illusions of the Netherlands being perhaps not a great power, but certainly a middle power. This



overestimation of their own position in the world, that was seriously bruised but not fully done away with during the Second World War, also helps to explain why the Dutch had such hard time to let go of their colonial possessions in Asia, fighting a long, four-year war against the Republic of Indonesia. The 'loss' of Indonesia did in the end, however, made the Dutch realise that their future laid in Europe and the newly created Atlantic community, turning them into dedicated partners both in NATO and in what would later become the European Union. And from the Dutch perspective, I would say, these organisations are still indispensable alliances.

This speech was given at the Nelson-De Ruyter talk, an evening of contemplation, dedication and celebration of 75 years of freedom in the Netherlands, held at the Dutch Centre in London, on the 19th of November 2019. Guest of Honour and veteran of the Battle of the Scheldt was Roy Maxwell of 4 Cdo, shown here being presented with the Dutch National Commemoration Medal by the Defence Attaché of the Embassy of the Netherlands.

47 RMCA Commemorations at Walcheren

Bob Perry

As in previous years our coach journey started from the Royal Maritime Club in Portsmouth which provided a welcome opportunity to share a tale or two with our 47 RMCA WW2 veterans, Chuck Harris and Mark Packer MM. We were also delighted to be joined by the former First Sea Lord, Admiral the Rt Hon Lord Alan West of Spithead GCB DSC PC and his charming wife Lady Rosie. On arrival at our hotels in Domburg, our comfortable base for the 5-day visit, we were enthusiastically welcomed by many of our French, Belgian and Dutch supporters, most of whom had also travelled long distances to be with us to commemorate this special occasion and Corps memorable date.

For our first day of commemoration on the 1st of 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 75th Anniversary ceremony and wreath laying at the Liberty Bridge, an impressive wooden structure built as a lasting homage to all Allied Forces that participated in this successful amphibious operation. We then moved to



Lord Alan West (centre) with veterans Mark Packer MM (L) and Chuck Harris (R) at the Polderhuis Museum, Westkapelle

the lighthouse and laid a wreath at the monument to the civilian victims of Westkapelle; approximately 200 local inhabitants were killed during the bombing of the dyke and subsequent flooding. Following this we all formed up at the Erika beach memorial on the site where the majority of the 4th Special Service Brigade landed. At all ceremonies we were joined by Col Mark Maddick, Defence Attaché at the British Embassy in The Hague, the Corps RSM along with the CO and RSM of 1AGRM (now 47 Cdo R Gp RM) and a strong RMA contingent. Our veterans were especially pleased that Peter and Hubert Leicester, whose father Brigadier 'Jumbo' Leicester DSO was the Brigade Commander in 1944, were able to join us and fully participate in the commemorations. The Band of HM Royal Marines Plymouth provided sterling musical support throughout all the events and later that evening performed a mesmerising concert in Middelburg Concert Hall. During the performance we were proud to witness Association member Kelly Heathfield playing her bagpipes alongside the band and dazzling the audience with a stirring rendition of 'Highland Cathedral.'

It had been a long-time ambition of surviving veterans and the Association for a permanent memorial to honour the heroic exploits of the Commando and to the 34 men killed during the assault and subsequent battle for the bunker 'W11. On the 2nd of November this ambition was finally realised when a new 47 RM Cdo memorial was dedicated by the Reverend Jane Ball and unveiled by CGRM and the Mayor of Municipality of Veere. The memorial is 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, codename W11. During the battle, which led to the liberation of Walcheren, the Commando suffered heavy casualties. The surrender of the battery on 3rd November secured the seaway to Antwerp which was key to the final liberation of the Netherlands.'* The memorial lists the names of all 34 men along with a map detailing the

route taken by the Commando from the landings at Westkapelle to the link up with No 4 (Army) Cdo at Flushing. The memorial stands 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



"At this point you will see the seaway to Antwerp and the coast to Westkapelle" reads the Information Board for the Dishoek memorial

distance walking path and roadway leading from a beach restaurant to Dishoek Square where an information board, detailing the Cdo's action, was also unveiled. The 47 RMCA is deeply 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. It was particularly fitting that our travelling veteran Mark Packer was able to be with us close to the exact location where he won the Military Medal for gallantry and leadership by single-handedly charging a concrete fire control position during the assault on W11. Despite being wounded during the action he pressed on suppressing the enemy with sub-machine gun fire and throwing a grenade which effectively silenced the occupants of the position.

Elsewhere, 'Rushing to Flushing' is now a well-established annual event that retraces the route taken by the Commando from Westkapelle to Flushing. Serving and former Royal Marines, along with many friends and families participate at a comfortable pace, hearing the story of 47 RM Cdo's mission and actions at specific points along the route. A huge BZ to all those who participated in the walk and to our very generous sponsors. Later that afternoon we RV'd with the walkers and RMA contingent at Flushing to lay a wreath at the Landing Craft memorial at Uncle Beach and at the adjacent No 4 (Army) Cdo memorial. The evening social event was an opportunity to let our hair down to celebrate a significant birthday milestone of previously mentioned Kelly Heathfield. A good night was had by all and it was reported that even the Admiral was seen to do a rather good impression of the Bootneck Shuffle!

A quieter day of reflection on Sunday the 3rd of November was an opportunity for Association members and our veterans to visit Bergen-Op-Zoom War Cemetery, the final resting place for many of the Commando killed during the assault and subsequent battle for W11. Later, we also visited the grave of Lt Ian Adam RM at Spang-Capelle General Cemetery and the impressive memorial at Kapelsche Veer complete with a new stone plaque outlining 47 RM Cdo's operations in the River Maas area in early 1945. After a long day on the road veterans, families and friends all looked forward to the traditional last night dinner which was a well-supported raucous affair under the direction of our Chairman John Prentis. It was an opportunity to thank all those who continue to support our surviving veterans and firmly demonstrated that the 47 RM Cdo Association and closely aligned 47 Charity remain strong and admired organisations working hard to keep the 47 RM Cdo story alive.

Walcheren was the last amphibious assault of the Second World War in Europe and rightly remains a Corps memorable date. In this often forgotten theatre of operations the attack on Westkapelle was such a significant and pivotal engagement that Sir Winston Churchill remarked: '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'.

A version of this article has been submitted to the Globe & Laurel.

If you are interested in attending the commemorations in Walcheren in November this year, please let our Secretary know.

My Grandfather

Stefano Provoost

Dear Mr. Haywood, as I won't be here when you leave tomorrow, I would like to leave you a little letter.

My grandfather, who was born in 1929, always told me a lot of stories about his childhood and the experiences he had during the war; he was very open about this. About the complete darkness outside as light was forbidden, about the curfew that was getting stricter, about catching small sparrows to sell for one cent so he could buy something at the black market that had formed in the village, and of course listening to illegal radios to get some information from England. He lived all of his life in Domburg and even during the war his family never left. He was here when the occupiers came in May of 1940 and he was here when Domburg was liberated on the 3rd of November 1944.

A lot of the stories he told are hard to imagine and very touching at times. But it was the stories he didn't tell that were the most moving, which came to light after his passing a few years ago. When it turned out that in his final years, my grandfather, who was already sick at the time, had written down in detail everything about his childhood, before and during the war. With the purpose that these stories and experiences were not lost to later generations.



My grandfather in his early twenties, just after the war.

What I remember the most is the sparkle in his eyes and the emotion when he talked about the campaign to liberate Walcheren, and his Domburg, from the occupation and how special it was for him and his family.

The opportunity to meet and talk to some of the same men he praised all his life is a privilege and an honour.

I don't think my grandfather ever had the chance to personally thank his liberators, as he often called them, so on behalf of my grandfather and myself, thank you for your service. Your deeds and sacrifices from 75 years ago will not be forgotten.

Stefano Provoost, Your receptionist,
Hotel 'Bosch & Zee', Domburg

As well as this moving letter, Geof Haywood reports that when we were visiting the cemetery at Sprang-Capelle, a young man approached him and asked if we were visiting the grave of Lt Ian Adams. As a schoolboy, the young man and his class visited on the 5th of May each year to pay their respects and to hear the story.

Thanks to one lonely veteran

Paddy O'Connell

Veterans of 47 RM Commando and RN Landing Craft veterans paraded with the Commandant General beneath the standard. Among the company, Admiral Lord West, last man off his stricken ship in the Falklands. The Royal Marine band played, and a new memorial was unveiled in the dunes at Dishoek. It was hard, as I watched the crowds and the marching musicians in their splendour to think that just a few short years ago just one solitary WW2 Veteran had represented 47 RM Commando in Walcheren.

John Baker had travelled there by train from his home in Kent. He stood to attention to honour the fallen and the survivors alike. He saluted the fallen from other units, and the brave Dutch civilians, some of whom had drowned in the arms of every member of their family. And then he caught the train back to England.

More remarkable still, John was never himself a member of 47 RM Commando. In fact, he did not serve on land at all. John was a Royal Navy veteran whose service had taken him across the seven seas including action in Normandy. When he learnt of the bravery and untold story of 47 RM Commando, he asked Chuck Harris if he could join our Association and travel on the coach.

John and Chuck became firm friends and we all learnt to love his daughters, his style, and his hip flask, which was the largest in history. John had served in the Arctic Convoys and would sometimes wear his white beret, seen - like the green - as one of the hardest-won in military history.

John's laughter and memory was in my mind as I was asked to read the words of my own father - recorded in 1944 - before the crowds in Dishoek at the unveiling of the new memorial timed for the 75th Anniversary of Operation Infatuate. In front of me were 47 Veterans, RN Veterans, serving members of the Royal Marines, Dutch friends, French friends and more.



Safety warning: trombonist in action, please stand well back to avoid the slide!

Later, the crowds were so close to the band, I had to lean back to avoid a trombone slide travelling not up the brass instrument for which it was intended, but up my nose instead. What a result. What a proud moment for the new committee and the trip led by John Prentis and Anne-Marie Nichols, and the plans of the ever-vigilant Geof Haywood.

The unveiling of the memorial in the dunes was a moment to recall the personal papers of John Forfar MC. In the 1990s, the MO had worked hard with Peter Winter, Ted Hartnell (VP) and others to install a roll of honour on the side of the tourist church at Dishoek. Now, here was a permanent structure facing the sea, where lives were lost, and terrible injuries endured.

For the first time, 47 Association had decamped from Middelburg to stay by the sea itself. Back in 1944, the small streets of Domburg had in fact been liberated by 41 RM Commando whose mission was to head north, when 47 and 48 headed south. In this way, members were

able to feel the sea breeze at all times. The cafes and bustle of the town owe their energy to the first Commandos, of whom 47 were a famous founding part.

Our piper Kelly Heathfield, whose first daughter was adopted as a Dutch friend by the same John Baker, was star attraction at a concert in Middelburg hours after the award of RM tartan at the Polderhuis Museum in Westkapelle. Once again, people could be heard asking, why does 47 RM Commando - a disbanded unit - have all this amazing support?



Piper Kelly Heathfield joins the RM band to play 'Highland Cathedral' at the concert in Middelburg

An answer came a few weeks later when 1 Assault Group announced it would rebadge to 47 Commando (Raiding Group) Royal Marines. The men of the unit formed in Dorchester in 1943, de-mobbed in 1946, had once feared its history and its bravery was forgotten. John Baker, the RN friend and Arctic Convoy Veteran, felt the same. Instead, in front of hundreds, including Admiral Lord West, Falklands veteran, travelling on a full coach of 55, accompanied by a full marching band, with veterans beneath the standard, a permanent memorial was left standing in the sand. Thanks to the committee and fund-raisers for years of hard work. Thanks to the veterans of 47 RM Commando, to their fallen friends, to the serving corps, the RM Charity and Members, and yes, to the memory of that solitary RN Veteran, John Baker flying the flag for us all, on his own, years ago. Per Mare, Per Terram.

Memories of the fighting here - Capt Guy O'Connell RM

Read by Paddy O'Connell at the unveiling of the memorial at Dishoek

Very like 48 RM Cdo we'd been heavily shelled and mortared and at four pm, with three quarters of the Commando left, we began our attack across nearly a mile of steep sand hills, studded with mines and wire to the first defences of Whisky 11. Under fire from enemy mortars and machine guns the whole way the leading troops reached the edges of the battery. Our losses were so heavy we could go no further and a pocket of the enemy was holding out behind us.

All the Troop Commanders were casualties, so were many of their men, and most of our radio sets were out of action. Night was falling, ammunition was very short, and the Adjutant went forward to reorganize the isolated forward troops. By midnight we had one position with fifty men, a quarter of a mile from the battery and another group back on a German searchlight

position. Everyone was very weary. We had had little food since we landed and the going over the loose sand was very heavy. Rations and ammunition was manhandled and the wounded carried back.

A cold wind was blowing so the sand was blown into our eyes, our ears and worst of all into our weapons. Then Germans launched a counterattack from some woods on the inshore side of the dunes. They came at us calling on the Royal Marines to surrender. Well, by way of a reply we gave them all we had got, drove them off and except for being shelled we weren't troubled for the rest of the night.

Next day a plan was made to attack Whisky 11 which was shelled by the guns from Breskens, our own mortars, machine guns and covered by smoke we captured Whisky 11 taking many prisoners.

One thing I remember is pushing on and taking three or four more positions down to the Flushing Gap, where we were able to see No 4 Commando about four hundred metres from us on the other side of the gap so making the link up with them complete.

The crucial last amphibious landing of the war

Letters, Daily Telegraph, 8th November 2019

Sir, I have just returned from a commemoration weekend with veterans and next of kin remembering the last amphibious assault of the Second World War in Europe.

The battle took place 75 years ago and was crucial to opening up the port of Antwerp to Allied shipping, thus supplying the Allied armies with fuel, ammunition and food. Without a new supply base, any offensive in 1945 by the Allies would have faltered.

The approaches to Antwerp up the Scheldt river were heavily mined and covered by German forces on the island of Walcheren, a fortification bristling with guns of every calibre. Their capture involved 4 Commando and three Royal Marine Commandos (41, 47 and 48) and 10 Commando, made up of international allies.

A Royal Naval support squadron bombarded the German defences with everything at their disposal, including the 15-inch guns of HMS Warspite.

Part of the support squadron engaged the German shore-based batteries with conspicuous gallantry, but with very heavy casualties. Its aim of drawing enemy fire from the landing craft



Admiral Lord West speaking at the commemorations at Westkapelle

that were making the primary assault succeeded, but at a high cost. Thirty craft were sunk, and more than 300 men killed in action. Once ashore, heavy fighting, often from gun emplacement to gun emplacement, went on for six days.

On November 9 at 08:15, after some negotiation, 40,000 Germans surrendered. By the end of November, after a massive minesweeping operation of the Scheldt, the first cargoes were unloaded at Antwerp.

Seventy-five years on, it is time that the significance to winning the war of the capture of Walcheren and the bravery of those involved was recognised and remembered.

Admiral Lord West of Spithead (Lab)

Walcheren in Pictures





75th Anniversary of the Liberation of Schouwen-Duiveland

Marc de Bolster

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the island of Schouwen-Duiveland in the Netherlands by 47 RM Commando.

Although the Netherlands as a country was officially liberated on the 5th of May 1945, on 7th of May, six LCA containing men of 47 RM Commando and 10 IA Commando sailed from Colijnsplaat on the Dutch island of North-Beveland, to the island of Schouwen in order to accept the capitulation of the German forces occupying the island.

This commando force was led by Capt. Paul Spencer (HQ); three LCA went to the town of Zierikzee and the other three to Burghsluis. In Zierikzee a delegation of 47 RM Commando, led by Mne. Alec Adkins (X-Troop) who carried a white flag, marched to the German Commander's villa to accept his surrender.



Liberation of Zierikzee: Allies on their way to the German Commander



The 'Free House' of the German Commander, after his surrender

Volunteers are preparing an exhibition in a network of five museums on the island. The opening of the network-exhibition "De Bevrijding van Schouwen-Duiveland" (The Liberation of Schouwen-Duiveland) is on the 18th of April in the wharf of the Museumhaven in Zierikzee. This will take place at approx. 14.00 hrs. After this the other museums will be visited by WWII Jeeps to open their exhibitions.

The museums are:

- The Museumhaven Zeeland, Visserdijk 2, 4301 ND Zierikzee;
- The Brusea, Oude straat 23, 4311 AV Bruinisse;
- The Streek-en landbouw Museum, Goemanszorg, Molenweg 3, 4315 CE Dreischor;
- The Brouws Museum, Haven Zuidzijde 15, 4318 AH Brouwershaven; and
- The Museum Burghse Schoole, Kerkstraat 3, 4328 LH Burgh-Haamstede.

As part of the Dutch National Liberation Day celebrations on the 5th of May, amongst a host of festivities the council of Schouwen-Duiveland is organising breakfast with people who lived throughout the war on the island and other invitees. The breakfast will be in the open-air in front of the Nieuwe Kerk, Kerkplein 1, 4301 EE Zierikzee, and starts approximately 9.30am. Veterans of 47 RM Commando are more than welcome to join these celebrations and the council is prepared to send an official invitation.

If you are interested in attending, then please email our Secretary: 47rmcsec@gmail.com

Normandy 2020 - Booking for June 5th – 9th

Our coach will leave early on the 5th of June from outside the Royal Maritime Club, Portsmouth to catch the 08:15 crossing from Portsmouth to Caen (Ouistreham). The draft itinerary is:

- 5th - Ferry crossing and arrival at Port-en-Bessin 16:30 approx;
- 6th - Commemorations in Bayeux at the CWGC Cemetery or the walk 'In the Footsteps of 47
- 7th - Commemorations in Port-en-Bessin;
- 8th - Visit to Sallenelles memorial / Ranville Cemetery, return via Arromanches followed by Final Night Dinner in Le 47^{ème} Brasserie;
- 9th - Return sailing Caen to Portsmouth.

If you wish to attend or have any queries please contact our Secretary, Anne-Marie Nicholls 47rmcsec@gmail.com or telephone +44(0)7480213013, letting her know if you want to travel on the coach, require hotel accommodation in Port-en-Bessin and/or if you would like to attend the Final Night Dinner.

If you require overnight accommodation on the 4th, please can you make your own booking with the Royal Maritime Club (tel: 023 9282 4231) and say you are a member of the of the Association in order to get the membership rate.

Normandy 2020 – In the Footsteps of 47

Once again, on the 6th June, you are warmly invited to join the annual walk from Asnelles to Port-en-Bessin, retracing the 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, will this year be led by wit, raconteur and broadcaster Paddy O'Connell. He will be ably assisted by Alex Wilson along with support from the three local mayors and farmers along the route, other Association members and both serving and retired Royal Marines.

Approximate times (to be confirmed closer to the date) 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 at Longues sur Mer; and
- 1800 (latest) Finish in Port-en-Bessin.



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. Last year the 200 plus walkers raised some £17,000 for the charity.

Walkers who take early advantage of this notice can book a seat on the coach from Port-en-Bessin to Asnelles. Please register your interest for walking and transport with Ken Cowdery or Alex Wilson:

Green Lids somehow complete the walk before everyone else!

Ken Cowdery: ken.cowdery@47charity.org tel:+44(0)7710724627

Alex Wilson: lesgensduphare@live.fr tel:+33 6 86 26 76 39

From the Editor

Walcheren was described as a “Cinderella Operation” by the author Gerard Rawling and was the title of his book. I think it’s fair to say that many of us are unfamiliar with much of the detail; I certainly am, which is why in this issue I’ve taken the opportunity to share some recently published articles with you. I’d like to thank the RM Corps Historian George Gelder and The Globe & Laurel, for permission to reprint the two articles describing Operations Infatuate I and II in such detail.

Thanks also to Ben Schoenmaker, Director of the Netherlands Institute of Military History (part of the Dutch Ministry of Defence) for permission to print his paper, which gives a (rarely heard?) Dutch perspective on the operation.

Once again, our brilliant photo-journalist Joyce Stephens has documented our trip to Walcheren. You can find a treasure trove of some 490 photos covering the entire trip via this link: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ny7d52bnq9n4cnv/AACdzGX08_5Bd1erDk8flUaga?dl=0

If you are interested in visiting Walcheren in November this year, or Fécamp in September, please can you email our Secretary Anne-Marie 47rmcsec@gmail.com so as to give us an early indication of likely numbers.



Flowers are laid by children at each of the graves of the civilian casualties

My abiding memory of our visit to Walcheren will always be the commemorations at the cemetery at the Lighthouse in Westkapelle. The children laying flowers at each of the graves of the civilian casualties was a sobering reminder of the horrors of war.

And finally, if any of you overheard my joke in Walcheren about the Rugby World Cup Final, please accept my apologies. But who’d have known that Allen, our Treasurer, went to school at Durban High?

If I don’t see you at the Mountbatten Festival of Music ^{*}, I hope we meet up in Normandy.

Next Issue: July 2020

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

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^{*}There are still some tickets available for the Choir seats – preferable to being up in the Circle, on both Friday & Saturday nights. If you want to go, then please phone the Royal Albert Hall Box Office now!