

47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

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DESPATCH 42 July 2020

From the Chairman

Dear Veterans, Families and Friends, welcome to the Association's latest edition of Despatch. It's hard to know where to start and what to say, although I think it's fair to say that this year hasn't gone entirely to plan. But in the spirit of the men that landed on the beaches 76 years ago, adapt and go to plan B, and I'm delighted to report that plan B hasn't turned out 'alf bad.

In January it was the 75th anniversary commemorations at Kapelsche Veer. Our Standard Bearer Lou Sartorel and I travelled to Holland meeting up with Mariel Van Mierlo, Kelly Heathfield and Jaco Van't Noordende for the ceremony. 47 was well remembered and we were honoured to have Lt. Adams mentioned in the reading.

March saw the return of the massed bands of the Royal Marines to the Royal Albert Hall for the Mountbatten Festival of Music. This was another epic performance and great to see 47 footage again on the big screen.

Our trip to Port-en-Bessin in June had to be cancelled, but with the help of members and friends of 47, all ceremonies that usually take place to remember the men of 47 were conducted as usual, albeit on a smaller scale. The annual walk 'In the footsteps of 47 Commando' also went ahead (see the article on page 4); thanks to all that made that happen.

July was to be the official renaming ceremony of 1 Assault Group Royal Marines to 47 Commando Raiding Group RM. Thank you to CGRM Major General RM Matt Holmes for this honour and allowing a 47 fighting force to continue into the future. An invitation came from Col. Chris Haw for us to attend the renaming ceremony, but unfortunately this became a casualty of Covid. Fingers crossed for an alternative date sometime in the future.

It is with huge personal sadness I have to report the death of Michel Laulier who passed away in February. Michel was a dear friend and Honorary Vice President of our Association and will be missed by us all.

Pierre-Albert Cavey has stepped down as Mayor of Port-en-Bessin and the vote of the 28th June confirmed Christophe Van Roye as his successor. I want to welcome Christophe and thank Pierre-Albert for all that he has done for the 47 RMCA over the years and wish him well for the future.

I want to thank Marc de Bolster, who after many years of hard work, has stepped down from the committee. We all wish Marc good luck at Hurst Castle and with his new WW2 venture. I also want to thank Anne-Marie, Allen, Geof, Ken and Dave for all their support and hard work running the Association, a tremendous effort in challenging times. And finally, I look forward to seeing you all soon, when we can shake off the Covid cobwebs and put the lockdown blues behind us. Take care and keep safe. [John Prentis, Grandson of Chuck Harris.](#)

Mountbatten Festival of Music 2020 – Part I

Geof Haywood

This year's MFM only just happened because it was alarmingly near to "lockdown". We'd been advised to avoid hugs or handshakes, which as MFM is the first of our annual get togethers, has always been the norm. So, in accordance with the rules it was just elbow bumps and blown kisses to all our friends.

Many of the Royal Marine Buglers who have travelled with us over the years, especially our very own Cpl Dave Nevatte RM came to visit us and as always catch up on the latest gossip. Others visitors included Col Chris Haw MC, CO 47 Cdo (RG) RM who was busy hosting, Phil Gilby and his wife Anita, serving RSM's and others who in some way are linked to the Association; it was great to see them all.

For each performance, afternoon and evening, we had 5 Loggia boxes plus 2 stall seats to cover our bookings, plus Allen and Dave hosted Capt. Jim Forbes and his son in seats next to the stage. Box rules slipped at each performance and extra folk could be found sitting on the floor whilst at half time we took over the immediate corridors.

The music as ever reflected the superb skills of the RM Musicians with a wide variety of styles, songs and individual performances. The finale theme this year was "The Future Marine" with a video history which followed the WW2 training through to today and then looked into the future with new skills and equipment in the pipeline. Once again 47 RM Cdo featured with shots of the landing and ceremonies at Port-en-Bessin. Yours truly was featured reading the Citation at the Capt Cousins Memorial. The Saturday evening show over, many of us headed to the UJC for a few drams before, as always, being the last to leave the bar.

The music and the theme of MFM change each year and it is a superb event to meet up and join other Association members for a great afternoon or evening. Next year's dates are scheduled for 5th & 6th March and as always, I ask you to let me know by mid-August if you would like to attend next year. As an association we are privileged to be able to book early via the RM Booking Office, which allocates the demand on a first-come, first-served basis, before the boxes and other seats are released to the general public. So, if you do wish to attend please shoot me an email or give me a call (details on the back page) so we don't miss out from getting the best seats in the house.

MFM - Part II Dave Shorrock (Ed.)

As Geof notes, I prefer being in the stalls because, depending on how the set is constructed for the event, you can be sat on the very edge of the stage, close enough to lean forward and read the music (if only I could). And to be that close to an entire orchestra brings home what the phrase "team work" really means; to see a hundred or more musician's working together with split-second precision is an incredible sight, and something the RM Band Service demonstrates at MFM each year.

Sadly, this year's MFM was one of the final events that Captain General RM, the Duke of Sussex (Prince Harry) was to attend in his official capacity. For the Saturday evening performance, as Harry and Meghan entered the Royal Box, the entire audience stood to give them a standing ovation. After the National Anthem, the audience remained standing to give them a second tremendous round of applause. Harry's gentle acknowledgement of the audience's cheers and applause was quite touching.

But perhaps the most touching event of the entire evening was the performance of Simon & Garfunkel's 'The Sound of Silence' and the accompanying video. We know Harry has spoken out on mental health issues and this was a moving and powerful way to get the message across that none of us should be afraid to seek help.

Being close to the stage means you can see things that others that might miss. For example, I am pretty sure it was Dave Nevatte with his Bass Drum and wearing a tiger skin that I saw on stage (see photo right). I just hope the skin came from Hamleys and not London Zoo.



Port-en-Bessin Commemorations, 6-7 June 2020

Alex Wilson

On Saturday, June 6th, following a full moon, Port-en-Bessin awoke to beautiful blue skies. Sunday, June 7th would, in defiance of the forecasters, be another wonderful day. But there remained of course a hidden Covid cloud over the proceedings: the absence of our veterans, of our amazing veterans and their families and friends. Thankfully, however, a northerly breeze kept bringing us their good vibes across the Channel to Normandy.

C'est la vie, the show must go on, and those of us lucky enough to be able to be present did our best to commemorate the events of 76 years ago in worthy and time-honoured fashion, paying homage to the brave men of 47 and remembering above all, those both British and French, who gave their lives in liberating the Port.

On the morning of June 6th, ten of us (Government restrictions allowing no more) gathered at H-Hour to follow in the footsteps of 47, from Asnelles to Port-en-Bessin. Nathalie and Hugo, formerly of Bar 47 and now La Criée, were at the starting blocks raring to go, as were David and Samuel, whom many will remember from last year. Plus, there was a handful of guides looking to learn more (and hopefully spread the word of 47's accomplishments).

The Mayor of Asnelles, Alain Scribe, as usual did us proud with a moving ceremony at the bunker. The Roll of Honour of the 28 men who lost their lives there was read out and Hugo laid a wreath on behalf of the Association. The walk was now underway, with a first stop to remember Kell Ryan at his beautifully kept monument. Then it was open country and a few unplanned drops of rain. Undaunted, we ploughed on, rewarded by the return of the sun and by the beautiful Normandy countryside, so calm today, in contrast to how perilous in 1944.

At La Rosière, we were welcomed into the Château de Tracy by François de Bourgoing who regaled us with stories of his father and photos of the veterans over the years; merci François. Joined by the new Mayor of Tracy-sur-Mer, Monsieur Cattelain, and by his colleague Laurence Bouclier, the short ceremony at La Rosière took on a whole new dimension with the arrival of Stéphane and his waving of the 47 flag and unfurling of the photo-banners of our veterans.



The ceremony at La Rosière and the unfurling of the banners showing the men of 47 turned a few heads in passing cars

The next stop was the Abbey at Longues. Such a magical place made even more so with bottles of juice and cider in the medieval refectory. The d'Anglejan family treated us not only to refreshments but also to an insider's guide to their wonderful domain. As ever, it was not easy to remember the task at hand, to reassemble and proceed to the objective. But our steely resolve finally won the day and we were back on the road.

Coming out of the woods and brambles at the top of Point 72, the vision of Port-en-Bessin in the distance is arguably the highlight of the walk. There we were able to share some of the

history of the battle for the town, its geography so dramatically in front of our eyes, before a moment of commemoration at Escures, where Samuel laid a wreath.

We arrived at our objective as a group, with morale still high. The absence of delirious locals crowding in to welcome us allowed us to rapidly identify and occupy a forward position, the Café du Port; mission accomplished.

For the Commemorations on the 7th, Monsieur Cavey had taken the excellent and early decision to proceed with all ceremonies this year, albeit with due respect to the restrictions in force. This meant no more than 10 attendees at any event, and I was invited to represent our Association.

The first two ceremonies at Huppain and in front of the church in Port-en-Bessin are held to honour those French citizens who were killed, deported or who lost their lives as fishermen, many of whom were killed by mines. I laid wreaths on behalf of 47 in remembrance of these “morts pour la France”.

The Port-en-Bessin contingent (the Mayor, Pierre-Albert Cavey, and his wife Béatrice ; Mme Autin, Mayoress of Huppain ; Jocelyne Lasnon of the Mairie, helpful and efficient as ever ; Christophe Van Roye, M Cavey's successor ; local Veterans' representatives; Patrice Lorillu, Association member and photographer for the occasion ; and me) were then joined at the Western feature by Minister Matthew Lodge, Deputy Head of Mission at the British Embassy, and Captain Mark Southorn RN, Naval Attaché. They had driven specially from Paris (and would be driving back later) bringing with them gravitas as well as real commitment to, and enthusiasm for, the memory of the men of 47. Many of us will remember Matthew fondly from last year. Mark was here for the first time and hopefully will be back next year.

The ceremony at the Western Feature monument lacked the scale of normal years, of course, and it could never be quite the same without Chuck's voice, the Padre's prayers, Dave's bugle, Lou's standard bearing; but its essence remained. Well-chosen words from Monsieur Cavey and from Minister Lodge were followed by a reading of the names of all the fallen. Captain Southorn then recited the Ode of Remembrance, wreaths were laid, and the minute's silence followed by the national anthems.

The ceremony to Captain Cousins was simple but dignified, with the recital of the action followed by wreaths and silence in remembrance. The monument and photo were truly resplendent in the morning sunlight. At the Place Gaudin (now Place Seurat) another short wreath-laying ceremony was held (albeit in a rather restricted way - a local had moved the barrier to create a new parking space, a rare commodity on a sunny day at the waterfront).

Circumstance meant of course that the commemorations had been lower-key than normal, but they had nevertheless been, as ever, very moving.

The reception laid on at the Salle des Fêtes was very pleasant – what a great view there is from there - but the near-emptiness of the big room was a vivid reminder of absent friends. The latter dominated conversation and the only 'official' moment came when I read out (in English and French) a beautifully written and clearly heartfelt letter from our Chairman John to, I must say, unanimous applause.



Alex & Capt Southorn discuss the harbour of Port-en-Bessin & why the men of 47 had to attack from inland

I would like to end on a couple of more personal notes. Firstly, I felt proud but somewhat inadequate throughout, taking the place of others who should rightfully have been there; in first instance, of course, I'm thinking of Chuck (whose Zoom-singing later that afternoon warmed my cockles). Secondly, my thoughts kept going back to our veterans Ken and to Harry, but also to Michel Laulier who left us so suddenly earlier this year. To absent friends.

Commemorations 7 June, London & Virtual

Dave (Ed.)



On the morning of the 7th of June and, having cleared it in advance with The Royal Parks, we arranged to lay a wreath at the Royal Marines Grasp Memorial on The Mall. The wreath was laid by our Treasurer, Allen Withington, whose uncle, Mne John Vernon Withington of A-Troop, was 19 when he was killed in the action at Port-en-Bessin. The card on our wreath simply read "For the men of 47 RM Commando who now rest in Normandy, In Remembrance".

Just as we were about to leave the Memorial, a couple walking their dog stopped to ask why we were there. As Allen explained the story of 47 and why he was laying a wreath they listened intently. When he finished, they thanked him; they said they passed by every day to take their dog for its walk round St. James's Park and they knew nothing about it, but from now on it will mean something to them.

As we all know, in a normal year the afternoon of the 7th would be an opportunity for us all to meet up in the 47 Bar, perhaps after a spin

round the port in a WW2 vehicle. One of the abiding memories is when you look across the bar, or the tables outside, and see a group of serving RM crowding round someone, and you realise it's one of our veterans they are talking to.

This year, thanks to the miracle of Zoom, over 50 of us, from the UK, France, Belgium and Holland, were able to meet up virtually. As well as our President Chuck Harris, veteran Chad Chadwick was able to join us. We were also privileged to have Col Chris Haw and RSM Dave Young of 47 from Cdo Gp RM.

But before the fun could start we had a small act of remembrance, beginning with introductory words from John, before Kelly Heathfield, who sadly wasn't able to play the pipes because of the danger of upsetting her neighbours, showing a film compilation of photos from our previous visits to Port-en-Bessin with our veterans. The video included those who've since crossed the bar and, courtesy of Zoom, we could see the lumps in the throats and the wiping away of tears. Chuck then read the Roll of Honour, followed by a minute's silence with Cpl Bugler Dave Nevatte from RM Band Service Portsmouth playing the Last Post and Reveille live.

After the solemnity, the recreation of the 47 Bar began in earnest and glasses were raised. Bob Perry had prepared a VE-Day / D-Day quiz, (which is reprinted in the Supplement). In the age of Google, it's amazing no one got all 10 answers correct; perhaps because of the alcohol. Then it was time for the singalong to commence, led by Chuck. If you squinted at the screen, and took another gulp (or two) from your glass, we were all back in Normandy in the 47 Bar. Cheers.

Memorial Bench Port-en-Bessin

Geof Haywood

Following a request from Mark Packer to remember his friend and those lost during the attack on the Western Feature on the 7th June 1944 it was suggested a stone bench be placed beside the road leading to the Western Feature Memorial.

Our friend and Mayor of Port-en-Bessin, Pierre-Albert Cavey was approached, and he selected a spot on Rue de Phare (Lighthouse St), two-thirds of the way up this very steep road. The location is overlooking the harbour, so as visitors walk up the hill it will give them a place to sit and rest. Hopefully, they will have read the Information Board and will, as they catch their breath, better understand the task of attacking up that heavily defended hill and to think about the Commandos who gave their lives for the liberation of the Port.



Location of the bench on Rue de Phare with a fine view overlooking the harbour

Several stone masons were approached for the design and choice of stone for a bench they could produce. After discussion, including with Mark, Excalibur Stone Ltd, stone masons based in Poole and who have done previous work for the Royal Marines was chosen, with the engraving in English and French on fine quality Abbey Grey stone granite.

Needless to say, given the situation, plans have gone on hold, but the bench is now complete and has been collected from the stone masons, courtesy of our Chairman John, ready for shipment to France as soon as permissible.

Once delivered, the Port-en-Bessin Works Department, who have already prepared the site, will assemble it and fix it to the base, ready to be formally unveiled when we can next visit. In the meantime, even without a formal unveiling, it will still offer a place for walkers to rest and be a place of remembrance to the eleven men who made the ultimate sacrifice.



A composite photograph of the inscriptions in both English and French on the back of the bench

We Will Meet Again

Jayne Darling, Artiste

Hello everyone and I hope that you are all keeping well during these difficult times. I know that you are all made of strong stuff. I just wanted to let you all know that I have been thinking about you during the pandemic and how many of you will have been isolating to keep yourselves safe. I can only imagine how trying this must have been at times, but you are all so precious to us, so everyone wants you to keep you well.



Chuck and Jayne preparing to sing a duet

Unfortunately this year all of the re-enactment events, memorials, celebrations and commemorations have been postponed or cancelled completely, but there are still many people who are coming together in an online community to remember the sacrifices that were made and to make sure that this is not forgotten whilst we continue to educate the younger generations. Usually for me, as a singer specialising in 1940's music, I spend every weekend from March to October travelling round the UK to various wartime events and re-enactments, presenting the songs and the stories from the period. I often mention my grandfather (Roy Collins, 1925 - 2006) who was conscripted on his 18th birthday in February 1943 to the Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment), where he was trained to drive a Churchill Crocodile tank (the one with a flamethrower in place of a gun. He landed in Normandy shortly after the D-Day

landings, pursuing the enemy across Europe until it ended, when he found himself in Leer, just across the German border. Fortunately, his unit had found a warehouse full of booze on the last official day of war, so they had to make sure hostilities had definitely ceased before they were allowed to take a tipple. I am lucky that my grandad wrote his memories down towards the end of his life, so we do have a lot of information regarding his life before and during WW2.

The music of the period has always been a driving force in my interest in re-enactment and I have been performing full-time since 2012, in care and residential homes, at events, weddings and various private performances. I have been privileged to meet many veterans and perform for organisations such as the Royal British Legion, the Blind Veteran's Charity, the RAF Association, the Captain Class Frigates Association and many more. It was through Roger Vermeylen and Tina Jonkers that I was honoured to meet the handsome Chuck Harris and his wonderful family down in Margate. Also, by coincidence, when I was performing in Sheffield a couple of years ago, I was introduced to Mark Packer, who knows Chuck very well.

It was hugely disappointing that the VE75 celebrations had to be cancelled; it would have been amazing for the whole country to show our thanks for what all of our Veteran's did. I know that there were many smaller street parties happening so I hope in a small way you were able to enjoy May 8th and reflect. I went and sang for a couple of local care homes before doing a concert on my driveway for my neighbours which was also screened on Facebook. The power of music is amazing as so many people shared stories and memories with me that weekend which I was very grateful for - I was also glad to know that Vera Lynn was still with us for this momentous occasion however I was incredibly saddened to hear of her passing on June 18th.

I am really looking forward to seeing you all when we are over the pandemic but in the meantime I am sending lots of love to you all and in the words of Her Majesty the Queen 'We Will Meet Again'.

Courage and Kindness

Geof Haywood

I was asked by the Cultural Centre in Port-en-Bessin for some information about the veterans that they could use in their publicity for the D-Day Commemorations this year. Whilst trying to think outside the usual reply about the visits made by our veterans, I realised one of the things that links our veterans, the Association and the Port, was the courage and kindness shown by the local civilians to the men of 47. I offered two examples of families that treated their wounds and, in one case, hid them from the Germans.

The Cairon family has a farm at the foot of Mont Cavalier, in the village of Commes. Mont Cavalier, Point 72, is where the 47 Cdo rested overnight on the 6th of June before the assault on Port-en-Bessin on the morning of the 7th. As well as a working farm, the family now also run a B&B. Back in June 2015, a Belgian family was staying with them (more on that later). The farmer/proprietor is now Michel Cairon, who was only a 5-year-old in 1944. Michel told the Belgian guests about a young marine who was injured and had found his way to the farmhouse. He showed them a stain in wood of the kitchen table and said it was blood from when his father, Henri, had cleaned and dressed the young marine's wounds. Henri had used their homemade Calvados as a local anaesthetic to clean the wound as well as giving the marine a drink to ease his pain. He knew the marine's name was 'Chuck' but he'd not seen him since that day back in '44.

When the Belgian family visited the 47 Bar they asked if anybody knew a Chuck (what a silly question - everybody knows Chuck). The introductions were quickly made, and Chuck and family were invited to the farmhouse for a moving reunion with Michel, accompanied by a medicinal glass (or two) of Calvados.

Michel has attended the Commemorations on the 7th of June each year, but because he doesn't speak English, he felt his story might be misinterpreted. His father was a member of the local French Resistance, and it was one of the group that had cut the phone lines before D-Day. Which brings us back to the Belgian family who were staying in the B&B. They had traced one of their family members to that same group of fighters. The reason they were in Port-en-Bessin in June 2015 was for the unveiling of a plaque to the French Resistance at the Chateau Cheneviere. In 1944 the chateau was the local German HQ, but is now a 5 star hotel.

Last year, on the 75th anniversary, Chuck met up again with the Cairon family and presented Michel with a 47 RMCA tie. Michel proudly wore the tie when he was interviewed by the press, with the local newspaper, La Renaissance, printing the photograph and a short story under the heading 'The veteran and the infant'.



L-R: Patricia Roberts, Chuck Harris and Michel Cairon (proudly wearing his 47 RMCA tie) in June last year. Courtesy of La Renaissance-Bessin

Some years back, veteran Mark Packer had met the family that had helped him on the 7th June '44 but unfortunately no one could recall their name. Thankfully, Mark's granddaughter, Tracy, had found a photograph of the reunion and sent a copy to Nathalie Pitel, the former proprietor of the 47 Bar. Nathalie recognised the family 'Langlois' and after the commemorations on the 7th of June this year, introduced Alex Wilson to the granddaughter, Brigitte Langlois. Brigitte kindly provided us with a copy of the Langlois family tree with photographs from '44 (see below).

The courage of the Langlois family goes back generations with their grandfather, Antoine, being presented with the Legion d'Honneur for services in WW1. In WW2, as the Germans crossed the border into France, Antoine took his fishing boat to help with the evacuation of British troops from the beaches of Dunkirk. Antoine's son (also called Antoine) was 18 in June '44 and after D-Day he assisted the troops with the unloading of equipment at the Mulberry Harbours in Arromanches.

In John Forfar's book, 'From Omaha to the Scheldt', chapter 4 'The Battle for Port-en-Bessin – and the Life Blood of an Army', Forfar mentions the Langlois and other families sheltering wounded marines, although in the book Mark is not mentioned by name. Antoine Langlois helped rescue marines, sheltered them, cared for their wounds and in Mark's story hid him under a fishing net in the garden when warned by the next-door neighbours that the Germans were coming.

Had any of the families been seen assisting, even by attending to the wounded, the Germans would probably have shot them. Here we see civilians who had been under strict "lockdown" by the Germans showing extreme courage and kindness. As the "Commando Mindset" taught to Royal Marines says they were the "First to Understand" their Liberators had arrived, the "First to adapt" to now having the British in town, "First to Respond" and help the wounded and the "First to Overcome" as they ignored the German threat and got on with helping in any way they could using the "Commando Spirit" of Courage, Determination, Unselfishness and Cheerfulness.

When we next visit Port-en-Bessin we hope to again meet up with the families, maybe also the others mentioned in the history, and tell their story to others in the Port such that they learn how within their population there are unsung heroes of now 76 years ago. Their actions and stories and those of the other French civilians plus those in other countries is a big part of the Allies victory in Europe. We hear about the courage and achievements of our veterans but let's not forget the courage and kindness of the Cairon and Langlois families.



Antoine senior (L) who helped Mark and who had rescued men from Dunkirk. His son Antoine (R) who after D-Day helped unload equipment at Arromanches.



Maria Langlois (Antoine's wife) in front of the window that the injured Mark Packer climbed through to shelter.

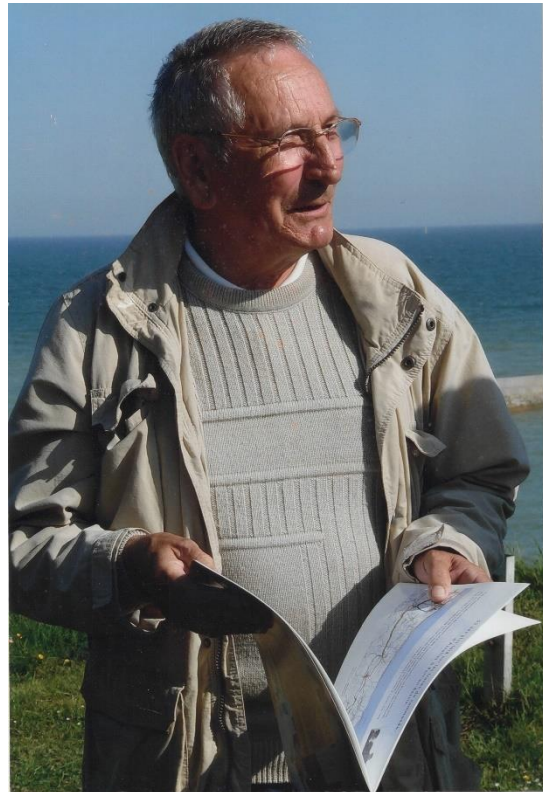
Absent Friends

Michel Laulier, 18th February 2020, aged 81 years

That there were some 200 people present at the funeral service in the church of Saint-André at Port-en-Bessin on the 24th of February demonstrated how well-known and well-loved Michel was. 47 RMCA was represented by me (Alex Wilson) and Paddy O'Connell, who came across for the occasion and whose presence was much appreciated by the family.

I addressed the mourners on behalf of our Chairman, John Prentis, basing what I said (in French) on the text that John had sent through to me:

"I met Michel on my first visit to Port-en-Bessin in June 2011. I had no idea what to expect, I knew very little French, and I didn't know anyone other than my family who I was travelling with. It was the 7th June, the big day in town when we all remember the men of 47. The first ceremony, at the Western Feature, had just finished. I had waited around, looked in the bunker and read the words on the memorial, consequently, I had missed the bus which was taking me to the next ceremony at the Capt Cousins Memorial. I had no idea of the way, and in my mind was trying to retrace on foot the route the bus had taken to get me there. I must have looked like a lost Englishman because a small car stopped next to me, it was Michel.



Somehow, we managed to understand each other just enough and Michel drove me towards the next ceremony. On route I said I was the grandson of Chuck Harris, he turned and said to me he knew Chuck, and the other veterans very well. This was the start of a firm friendship, a friendship that grew each year.

As I became more involved with the 47 Association, it became clear that Michel was a special friend to everyone, and also an important person in the fabric and history of the Association itself. The walk that takes place on the 6th of June and the pen-pals idea of French school children writing to veterans in the UK owes a great deal to Michel and his hard work as a local schoolteacher. It was always a pleasure to see him, an ever-friendly face each time I came to town. God bless, rest in peace my friend"

I also drew on a couple of details in the email Paddy sent me upon hearing the sad news: *"Michel attended the last AGM where I was chairman - he was a Vice President of the Association and he wanted to tell newer members how everything had started. He addressed the room even though he did not speak very good English.*

He came over to London for a fabulous trip five years ago in memory of John Forfar. When John's papers were passed to me, these included letters and working documents mentioning the two Michels', (Michel Laulier and Michel Deserable) as crucial to the steps to cement the modern Association to the town. John really worked with Peter Winter, other veterans and the two Michels' for the establishment of the modern walk - recreating the march from Asnelles to Port-en-Bessin in 1944."

An extraordinary detail which shows how much the 47 RMCA and the title of Honorary Vice President meant to Michel (and therefore his entire family) was that he was wearing the Association tie to his funeral.

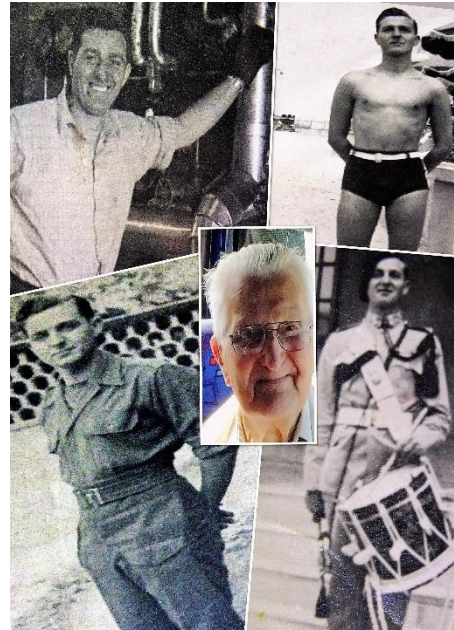
Edwin Frederick Haycock, 18th June 2020, aged 93 years; he would have been 94 on 22nd July

Long-time 47 RMCA member Joyce Stephens has informed us that her father has sadly passed away.

Edwin was called up in 1944 and drafted into the Gordon Highlanders; landing by plane in Normandy on D-Day + 6. He chased the enemy through France, Belgium and Holland, ending up in the German city of Lübeck as the war ended. But instead of returning to civilian life, he signed on and joined the Irish Fusiliers, seeing service in Egypt, Palestine and Cyprus. He'd played the drums before his service and so joined the band of the Fusiliers as a drummer. He was one of the bandsmen who played at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem (which was the HQ of the British Administration) the night before it was bombed by the Irgan on the 22nd of July 1946.

He returned to the UK in 1951 and started work with Shell at their Stanlow Refinery, Ellesmere Port. (It was from here that in 1944 an underground pipe had been laid to the Isle of Wight and then on to France). His sense of duty also saw him sign up for the Liverpool Scottish TA, only stepping down because of the changing shift patterns at Shell and then overseas postings. These included spending 18 months in Durban, South Africa, helping to set up a new oil refinery.

Edwin worked for Shell for 40 years until he retired. He never revisited any of his places of conflict, outside of Cyprus; and like many of his generation, he never really opened up or spoke about his wartime experiences.



British Normandy Memorial Update



The current state of construction of the British Normandy Memorial

The Memorial at Ver-sur-Mer was scheduled to be open this September, first to veterans and family members on the 4th and then to the general public on the 5th. Unfortunately, work had to come to a standstill at the end of March and only recommenced at the end of May. The Normandy Memorial Trust is now working on the assumption that the Memorial will be opened

to the public in the spring or early summer of 2021. The Chairman of Trustees, The Lord Peter Ricketts, visited the site on the 9th of July and described it thus: *"The British Normandy Memorial is really taking shape now. I had the privilege of seeing the site today. It's not open for visiting yet, but when it's finished, it will take your breath away. The overall structure is becoming clearer now that the 8m high Memorial Court is out of scaffolding. And real English turf is being laid. The view is amazing – Pointe du Hoc and the Cotentin peninsula in the background. This must be the most imposing British war memorial built overseas for a long time. Thank you to everyone for the donations that have made it possible to realise the dream."* You can see more and register for updates at: <https://www.normandymemorialtrust.org/news/>

The 47 Charity is here for you

Lou Sartorel, Secretary, 47 Charity

Normally you would find me placed in a prominent position with your Standard during one of the commemorations that the Association attend. On this occasion I am in a prominent position but “in the wings” so to speak. I am writing in the capacity as the Secretary to the 47 Charity, having taken over from Bob Perry when his term ended last year.

The charity was formed in July 2016 from an idea by some members of the 47 RMCA. The initial board of trustees comprised of: Tom Busby, Patrick O’Connell, Bob Perry and Ken Cowdery and soon after were joined by Essie Cousins and Allen Withington. The aims of the charity echoed those of the Association with the addition of raising public awareness of its objectives and to raise funds to support the veterans, or their families in times of need. In those four years much hard work has been done raising funds, promoting the charity, providing financial support to some veterans to improve their homes and to fund some activities of the Association.

Fund raising has, with all charities, been a high priority. There is, broadly speaking, positive public support for our veterans. The main activity to raise funds and highlight the story of 47 has been the annual walk organised by Ken Cowdery from Asnelles to Port-en-Bessin, “In the footsteps of 47”. More recently there has been the walk from Westkapelle to Vlissingen. The participants in these walks have raised thousands of pounds through sponsorship. The charity has also received valuable individual donations. The sale of Doc Forfar’s book “From Omaha to The Scheldt” has also contributed monies to the fund. All of these activities tick the boxes. On behalf of the Charity, thank you.

The Charity has given funds to the Association to support the transport costs for veterans, widows and their families to the commemorations in Port-en-Bessin, Walcheren, Fécamp and Kapelsche Veer.

The trustees have received requests for funds to create wet rooms in veterans’ bathrooms to improve their quality of life. We made a contribution to the monument at Dishoek that was built and unveiled last year (see Despatch 41. The restoration and relocation of the information board in Port-en-Bessin and as Geof describes on page 7, we have funded the Memorial Bench that will shortly be installed on the steep road to the Western Feature. There are also embryonic plans for the restoration and redesign of the memorial garden at the Western Feature.

Given the current situation and the impact the lockdown has had on us all, we became concerned that our veterans and widows may be suffering because of the self-isolation. We hit upon the idea of ‘Operation Shopping Basket’. Contact was made and shopping vouchers to the value of £250, together with a Royal Marines bath towel was given to each veteran and widow to reinforce the message that they are not forgotten and that there is support for them should they choose to accept it.

The 47 Charity is in a strong position at present unlike some others. Many charities have had a significant loss of income, in part because of the huge shift in public support towards the NHS and other ‘health’ charities dealing with the “here and now” of the pandemic which has created a desperate need for cash. Fund-raising activities have also been stymied as a result of the restrictions. However, the 47 Charity cannot be complacent as funds will always be required to achieve its objectives. So, I end with this: charity begins at home, thanks for any contributions.



A Thank you card made by the granddaughter of one of our widows in response to ‘Operation Shopping Basket’.

47 Commando Raiding Group Royal Marines Update

Colonel Chris Haw MC, Commanding Officer 47 Commando (RG) RM

It was superb to see so many of you on the somewhat manic Zoom call on the 7th of June. As we all agreed it was a great shame that we could not all be paying our respects at the Western and Eastern Features and meeting in the 47 Bar in Port-en-Bessin but our feelings were as strong as ever. As I said in my letter to you, I sincerely hope that my Unit will be able to be present at Walcheren, but we will see how the COVID restrictions are at the time. We are working on an opportunity before the end of the year to have some form of event to mark the renaming of 47 Cdo Raiding Group in honour of 47 RM Cdo and I will get details to you as soon as I can.

I thought you might appreciate an update on 47 Cdo RG's activities in the first half of 2020 for interest. It has been remarkably busy despite the pesky virus. A 3-month deployment to Norway, a cutting-edge technology trial to integrate autonomous systems (drones), the continuation of Landing Craft training courses, specialised large vessel boarding training, standing-by to support the NHS and Overseas Territories and much planning for the Autumn term. Life has been somewhat odd since Easter, but I have managed to run the unit by Skype and we are really very much back to normal, with COVID restrictions in place.

January 2020 saw the majority of 539 Raiding Squadron Royal Marines deploy to the coast of Northern Norway for a 3-month Winter Deployment. "You aren't a true Bootneck until you've done a Norway" is the tagline banded around by many within the Corps, and this deployment saw many experienced Royal Marines deploy as well as a significant novice contingent. Those who were new to the ways of Arctic Warfare completed the Cold Weather Warfare Course and ranks from both Raiding Troops worked closely together, conducting Small Boat Ops across the nearby fjords, conducting long sea transits and beach recces for later WADER packages and taskings. The Squadron also worked with the Norwegian Corvette Squadron, developing this relationship throughout the deployment. Overall, it was a resounding success, proving once again that Royal Marines are capable of training and operating in the harshest of environments.

Meanwhile at RM Tamar in Devonport, COVID 19 didn't manage to stop vocational LC training, and since May there has been a LC3 course running. For the 10 individuals on course and their instructional team it has been very much business as usual, including a visit from the First Sea Lord himself! The course will pass out in the middle of August and from September it is hoped that LC training will be back to normal with all 3 vocational courses running through to Christmas.



47 Cdo coxswains & boarders from J Coy 42 Cdo



High Vertical Access boarding

Furthermore, 3 Troop of 539 Raiding Squadron were eager to dust the cobwebs off the PAC 24 sea boats at the end of May and get back on the water to conduct two weeks of Maritime Interdiction Operations (MIOps) training. Training was conducted alongside ranks from J Coy, 42 Cdo, who make up the boarding team element. The main effort over the two weeks was to get all coxswains and boarding team members proficient and confident in the skills required to intercept and board a high sided vessel both in daylight hours and at night. For the training, RFA Tideforce would be acting as the target vessel, located south of Plymouth in the English Channel. Tideforce would prove a challenge for both the coxswains and the boarding teams; the shape of the hull at the stern of the vessel can create testing conditions to get alongside quickly and safely and would test the coxswains, especially in high sea states. The height of TFCE from the water line to flight deck would allow the boarding teams to maximise the climb aboard; pushing the team and their equipment to the limits of their capability. With the risk of skill-fade creeping in due to the lockdown, this training was hugely beneficial to everyone involved and has allowed both 47 Cdo and 42 Cdo to maintain its key MIOps capability, ready to deploy at high readiness when required.

When it comes to development and innovation, 11 Amphibious Trails & Training Squadron, based at RM Instow, comes into its own. Just over 12 months ago NCHQ handed 47 Cdo the job of managing the Autonomous Advanced Force (AAF) series of exercises. In a nutshell we were tasked to challenge industry to supply cutting-edge autonomous equipment not normally available to us and then accelerate it into use. We've also challenged them to operate their equipment outside of what it was designed to do. Since the first exercise which had one remote control gun boat and one drone, we have continually stretched industry outside of their comfort zone to a point recently which saw them deliver multiple autonomous drones controlled from a RN warship in northern Norway. I'm not saying it's been easy, the conversation at NCHQ went a bit like this - "so you want to fly autonomous heavy lift drones that aren't cleared for military use, which work out their own flight path, from the flight-deck of a major warship at the same time as docking an autonomous multi-million pound prototype vessel which we don't own into the dock, again without a pilot. Both using a control system never before installed on an RN ship? And you want to do it in Norway in 6 weeks?". Our answer: yes please!. We proved the sceptics wrong and delivered it all!



The AAF exercises demonstrated cutting-edge autonomous equipment to the MoD

Not sitting back on our laurels, the next iteration of AAF is well into the planning stage and will deliver later this year. This will see us (we hope) prove the system over thousands of miles with the control system remaining in the UK. We will also be tying in a swarm of autonomous Tactical Water Craft developed at Instow, home of 11 Amphibious Trials and Training Squadron RM. This iteration of the exercise will see military operators at both ends of the comms and control links with no doubt some very nervous contractors watching on as their equipment is put through its paces.

This period has been busy, challenging and somewhat different for 47 Cdo RG but we have continued to deliver employing the Commando mindset throughout. I will be deploying to the Mediterranean this Autumn as part of a small Task Group which will be my last hurrah before I hand over the privilege of this incredible command to my (yet to be nominated) successor. I wish you all the very best of health and happiness and look forward to seeing you again soon.

Advance Booking - Mountbatten Festival of Music 2021

Geof Haywood

Next year's dates are scheduled for Friday the 5th of March (evening performance) and Saturday the 6th of March (afternoon and evening performances). If you would like to attend, please can you let me, Geof Haywood, know by Sunday 16th August which day and performance you would like, either by email: geofandjillh@btinternet.com or by phone: +44(0)1202 888194. I appreciate we might be waiting until later in the year before we get final confirmation that MFM will go ahead as planned, but I'm looking for expressions of interest in advance so we can move quickly when priority booking opens courtesy of RM Band Service.

For those who haven't been to MFM before and want to see what you are missing, or those who went and just want to catch up, you can see this year's performance online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WV9YohPS6M> If you have a DVD player but don't have a smart TV you can still watch on the big screen. Contact the Editor (details below) and he will be happy to put a DVD in the post to you.

From the Editor



Given the strange times we find ourselves in I was at a loss as to how to sign off. Then I saw this cartoon and it reminded me that it's our sense of humour that often helps us through difficult times; "better to laugh than cry" as they say. Cartoonists, of course, must be paid like everyone else, so I wrote to the agent for permission and explained what I wanted to use it for. In response, the deal was struck, but I also got this unexpected reply: "*my father was a Commando in Louis Mountbatten's Combined Operations Division. He was on Assault Landing Craft as a coxswain and served around the Med and North Africa during the war. He's still going strong at 96, though he did recently suffer a heart attack, whilst outside chain sawing logs, so he drove himself to the doctors for assistance. They don't build them like that anymore!*". When we think of our veterans, I think we can all agree with that sentiment.

Thanks to everyone who submitted articles and photos for this issue of Despatch. Please keep them coming.

Next Issue: January 2021

Please could you send me your material by the end of December if possible. Feel free to call or email me if you would like to discuss any ideas for the next or any for future issues.

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