

# 47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

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## **DESPATCH 43** **January 2021**

### **From the Chairman**

Dear Veterans, Families and Friends, welcome to the latest edition of Despatch. It's my sincerest hope that you have all been keeping well and have managed to carry on in these strange times.

Walcheren this year was certainly different, not at all what we usually do, but our friends in Holland did us proud. On 1<sup>st</sup> November the usual service went ahead at the Polderhuis museum. The rules allowed only 6 people to attend, but there were members of the public walking along the dyke, and Kelly playing the pipes on the bridge, so it made for a fitting and memorable ceremony. A Wreath was also laid at the lighthouse to remember the civilians of Walcheren who were killed. At Dishoek on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, again with very few people allowed, the ceremonies went ahead in good fashion. First at the open-air church, then at the new memorial on the dunes by Whisky 11. The role of honour was read, and wreaths laid, along with a wreath at Erica beach. The men of 47 were remembered well, and I want to thank Ivo van Beekhuizen along with Kelly Heathfield for their tremendous support for the men of 47 and the Association.

As we approach Christmas, our thoughts are guided towards our loved ones. Like much of this year, we may not be able to be with those we care for the most, and we will most probably rely on Zoom to spread the festive cheer. Maybe this is a time to reflect and think back to 1939-45. Men went off to war, no mobile phones and no Zoom, just a couple of grainy photos if they were lucky. No one had any idea how long the war would last; many men became prisoners, and even more were killed. How hard must that have been. Not seeing your son/husband/brother, maybe not even knowing if they were still alive was the harsh reality of the war years, and sadly too many families would never see each other or be together again. The success of D-Day and operation Overlord offered the first signs of light at the end of the tunnel. It was no short tunnel, and the toll for passing through it was high, but pass through it they did. It certainly gives you pause to think.

The light shines for us once again at the end of the tunnel, the Covid tunnel, by way of the news that vaccines will be available soon after Christmas for the most vulnerable. This is such good news and with a fair wind we could look forward to 2021; fingers crossed for Normandy. Some sad news now I'm afraid. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of Ted Hartwell and Ron Thorpe. Many of us will remember Ron in Normandy for D-Day 70, and Ted as our Honorary Vice President, and valued member of the Association for many years. Both men were an inspiration and represented the very best of 47.

It just leaves me to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a healthy New Year. I look forward to seeing you all very soon. **John Prentis, Grandson of Chuck Harris.**

## Commemorating the Liberation of Fécamp

Dave Shorrock (Ed)

In mid-August, I was having a telephone conversation with Betty Quinney, whose late husband Bert had served with Y Troop 47 Cdo, in both Normandy and Walcheren, as well as having been part of a clandestine operation in occupied Norway in October 1943. During the call Betty mentioned that over the years she and Bert had travelled extensively in France and had made numerous visits to Fécamp. Betty knew the Val aux Clercs cemetery and its memorials by heart, including the plaque to Major Walton of 47 Cdo, (Maj Walton was killed on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September '44 when his Jeep ran over a landmine as he was on route to Le Havre). As we continued talking, Betty spoke about how welcoming and generous the French had been to them on their various visits, and her sadness about now being unable to return. It was then that I resolved that despite the restrictions and the 14-day self-isolation when we returned, those of us who could go and join the commemorations, if we were permitted, would. I finished the call by offering to lay a rose on Major Walton's grave on her behalf and Betty gratefully accepted.

We cleared our visit with Pierre Aubry, the Deputy Mayor of Fécamp and confirmed that there were would be just three of us representing 47 RMCA: Alex Wilson, (who lives in Port-en-Bessin), son of Lt Wilson, Allen Withington, nephew of Mn John Withington who was killed at Port-en-Bessin on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June '44, and me. Thanks to Geof Haywood's logistical skills, the necessary wreaths had been shipped to Alex for when we arrived.

At 18:00 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September, 76 years to the day when Fécamp was liberated by 47 Cdo, we started our sombre parade through the cemetery of Val aux Clercs. The parade was of course much smaller than in previous years and all of us were wearing face masks. Our first stop was at the memorials that Betty had remembered; the memorial to the young men that were deported to the work camps and the memorial to the men and women deported to the concentration camps. After the honours and wreath laying, we continued up through the cemetery to the Belgian First World War graves and then on to the British memorial and graves. It was here that Alex laid our wreath at the memorial to Major D.H. Walton, as the plaque describes him: "Our Liberator". I then laid Betty's rose at the foot of Major Walton's headstone.

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, sealing the freedom of the town with a handshake. Photographs over, we walked outside to Square du 47 Royal Marine Commando. Allen laid our wreath at the 47 Commando plaque and Alex and I laid roses on behalf of Betty at the two plaques that had been unveiled in the square last year: to Roland Terrier, who served with the Free French Marine, and Georges Paumier, who had lost his life in the French Resistance.

Our final wreath laying was at the war memorial in Place Charles De Gaulle, where I had the honour of laying our wreath bearing the inscription: "In memory of the civilians and servicemen that gave their lives for the liberation of Fécamp". We then returned to the Town Hall for speeches and presentations.

In the courtyard, the Mayor Marie-Agnès Poussier-Winsback welcomed us and gave a very moving speech. It is difficult for us to imagine how terrible it must have been for the people of Fécamp to live under the Nazi occupation and she reminded us that "we must remember that on September 2nd 1944, almost three months after the Allies landed on the beaches of Normandy, the Fécampois were finally freed. We must pay homage to all these soldiers, our gratitude is infinite, and their courage gave us our freedom today. Keeping the memory of these men alive is our duty".



*Top Left: Major Walton's headstone with Betty's rose laid beneath it. Top Right: Our wreath laid in Square du 47 Royal Marine Commando. Bottom: Mayor Marie-Agnès Poussier-Winsback proudly shows off our gifts.*

Marie-Agnès then addressed the current situation: "the global health crisis that has affected us has reminded us that during a difficult period, national solidarity must be in place and friendship between peoples preserved, so that we can face the invisible enemy that is the virus of COVID-19. Now is the time to remember the courage shown by the population and our liberators. Let us always remember, in times of doubt our young heroes".

Alex replied to the Marie-Agnès on behalf of our Chairman, John Prentis. "I must start by sending you all warm wishes from my grandfather Chuck Harris. He wanted to let you know what a great time he had in Fécamp last year, when you pulled out all the stops to make him feel so welcome. He is keeping well, currently unable to travel far but hopes to see you next year. He also wanted to congratulate the Mayor on her re-election, a very well-deserved result for sure".

"Since we were all together last September things have changed in the world. Many people are unable to visit loved ones, many people are worried about the future, holiday travel is almost impossible, and all of us have had our lives affected in one way or another. But through all of this, one constant remains, the respect we have for our veterans, for each other, our determination to remember the allied servicemen and women who gave their lives to bring about peace, and to remember the civilians of Fécamp who gave their lives during the occupation". The 47 Royal Marine Commando Association is honoured to join you again in this act of remembrance, and to strengthen the bond between us, a bond which has stood strong for 76 years, and a bond of which we are immensely proud".

"In June 1944, the men of 47 landed on Gold Beach, their task was huge, and many battles lay ahead. But fundamentally their role was to protect the people of France". Turning towards the Mayor, Alex continued: "we hope this small gift will continue to protect you". At this, he handed both Marie-Agnès and Pierre Aubry a bottle of 47-branded hand sanitiser, followed by a bottle of whiskey labelled with the painting of veteran Ken Parker, that now hangs in RMR Bristol. The resulting laughter and applause were a fitting end to the evening; not just an act of commemoration, but a celebration of the liberation and the freedoms we now enjoy.

As we made to leave, the rain began. Thanks to the RMA Shop (a timely reminder for those still looking for Christmas gifts), I was able to dash to the car and return with a pair of RM umbrellas to give to Marie-Agnès and Pierre. What could be better proof of what unites us with our friends in Normandy, our weather.



*Pierre Aubry escorts the Mayor to her car underneath an RM umbrella.*



*On the Town Hall steps, recreating the liberation of the town and handshake between the Mayor and Major Walton.*

## Portrait of a Lady

Ryan Dilley

It was an ignominious end for a ship that had played such a vital role in the Allied invasion. Almost 26 years to the day since she'd been part of the vast naval armada of D-Day, the 3,750-ton tanker Batissa collided with an Italian motor vessel in the Panará River, upstream from Buenos Aires. Crippled by fire and explosions, Batissa was run aground and abandoned. The Argentine scrappers eventually descended on her. The ship that Merchant Navy veteran Jim Forbes helped sail to Port-en-Bessin in 1944 was soon no more.

47 Association member Jim has strong memories of his wartime service on MV Empire Russell – as she was then called. During his annual pilgrimage to Normandy, the retired captain is happy to share stories of bringing his cargo of highly flammable aviation fuel to the Allied beachhead.

The courage of those merchant crews was incredible. Jim was just 16 in June 1944, and yet he calmly served aboard what was, in effect, a floating bomb. Laden with fuel, the ship survived enemy air attacks and the chaotic wartime sea traffic. (Indeed, MV Empire Russell clashed with an American landing craft heading to Normandy – requiring Jim to rush on deck to throw shards of hot metal overboard before the tanker caught light).

The work of the merchant sailors and the dangers they faced are often overlooked. So, to mark Jim's part in the D-Day story, professional illustrator Jesse Brown took a commission to produce probably the only painting of MV Empire Russell in existence.

To make Jesse's task harder, very few photographs of the craft remain – with most showing her in her bright post-war livery and civilian configuration. Jim's son, John Forbes, kindly supplied one image of the tanker in her drab wartime paint scheme and complete with her gun batteries and anti-torpedo nets.

Working from all these snapshots, Jesse set about recreating how MV Empire Russell might have looked in June 1944 – when great storms lashed the English Channel. So as not to make the finished painting too grey and gloomy, Jesse included a bold touch of colour borrowed from a famous World War II propaganda poster.



As a dramatic backdrop to the seascape, the artist added a large Red Ensign - the Merchant Navy flag often informally known as the "Red Duster". This composition echoes a wartime government illustration intended to let those on the home front know exactly how important merchant vessels were to the war effort – and underline the dangers they faced from bomb, torpedo, shell and mine.

Jim Forbes needed little reminder of the heavy price civilian sailors paid to keep the nation going. In January 1940, Jim's father was lost at sea when his ship SS Granta struck a mine in the North Sea.

The terrible loss had an immediate effect on the family and set the course of the rest of Jim's working life. With the death of the family breadwinner, Jim and his siblings were sent as

boarders to the Royal Merchant Navy College in Wokingham. From there, Jim began his naval apprenticeship as an officer cadet for the Anglo-Saxon Petroleum Company.

It's hard for us nowadays to comprehend, but Jim was little more than a child when he first sailed on MV Empire Russell. Incredibly the ship's company also included two 14-year-old galley boys. A tanker in peacetime would seem an unsuitable enough place for ones so young – but placing them on a tanker in wartime almost defies belief.

However, Jim now recalls that his youth seems to have worked in his favour. While older and more experienced sailors found the psychological burdens of crewing the ship too much and transferred to other vessels, Jim took the constant risk in his stride and remained aboard.

The MV Empire Russell's task was an important one – she transported aviation fuel from southern England to the beachhead in Normandy. Airfields were springing up across the battlefield and were vital to the Allies' ability to crush German resistance in France.

The special petroleum Jim helped transport could fuel small reconnaissance aircraft or large transport planes evacuating the wounded – but perhaps most importantly it allowed Allied fighter-bombers to cruise the Norman skies waiting to harass any German units unlucky enough to be spotted.

The Germans lived in fear of these "Jabos" swooping out of the sky to knock out their tanks, trucks, trains and troop concentrations. Who knows, Jim's fuel might even have powered the Canadian aircraft that attacked Field Marshal Rommel's staff car that summer – ending the Desert Fox's military career?

MV Empire Russell does have one definite entry in the history books. During the early weeks of the invasion she made her deliveries via Port-en-Bessin – but she later became the first Allied merchant ship to unload at Cherbourg following the liberation of the harbour. No other civilian ship of the United Nations had tied up there since the fall of France, four long years before.

The Red Duster she was flying that day was saved by a crew member for posterity and donated to a museum – The D-Day Story in Portsmouth.

Jesse Brown's painting of MV Empire Russell now hangs in Jim's Herefordshire home – a place about as far away from the brine as a retired sea captain can get in this country. Jim reckons its likeness to his old ship is pretty close – and poring over the details of the craft has given him a richly deserved excuse to retell many of his best seafaring tales.



*Left: Jim Forbes in the port of Sète, France, on VE Day 1945. The pipe was just for effect, he never smoked. Right: Jim and Harry Prescott exchanging stories in the 47 bar in Port-en-Bessin.*

## Walcheren 2020

**Kelly Heathfield**

Well, as the dreaded virus that shall not be named ruined everyone's plans for Normandy in June 2020, we still held hope that we would be able to meet up again on the island of Walcheren in November. As everybody obviously knows our plans were dashed after a long summer of restrictions, (localised) lockdowns, panic buying toilet rolls and endless handwashing

On the 31<sup>st</sup> of October a very sombre ceremony was held at Uncle Beach in Flushing. So sombre in fact that nobody was allowed to attend except for the mayor and a few representatives from the local council.

Thank goodness our dear friends at the Polderhuis museum in Westkapelle managed to organise a small-scale remembrance in the garden, overlooked by the Liberty Bridge.

The ceremony was led by the new master of ceremonies Marcel Adriaanse who has taken over from Leon de Witte. Marcel has always had connections with the 'Foundation of the Liberation of Walcheren' so he seemed a good choice to all involved to take the coveted stick from Leon. Marcel is also the former pipe major of Inter Scaldis Pipes and Drums and has played at the remembrances at both the lighthouse and Erika, so he knows what the gentle Westkapelle sea breeze around the dike feels like 😊

Ivo van Beekhuizen, Ruud Sonius and of course the Mayor of Veere: Rob van de Zwaag, were also present, as were a trumpeter from brass band OKK and yours truly on the bagpipes. Thank goodness the long-standing tradition of 'having a lass standing at the top of the bridge in a kilt' could carry on within the social distancing rules.

Marcel opened the ceremony and read the exhortation. The last post was sounded, and one minutes silence was observed. After the reveille I played during the wreath laying and followed with the lament.

The wreaths laid represented:

- 47 Royal Marine Commando
- 48 Royal Marine Commando
- Mayor of Veere
- Province of Zeeland
- Canadian Embassy
- Norwegian Embassy
- Belgian Embassy
- Delegate of the General of France
- Foundation of the Battle of the Scheldt
- Polderhuis Museum Westkapelle

The whole ceremony was filmed along with the ceremonies at the lighthouse and at Erika and has since been posted on the Polderhuis Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/PolderhuismuseumWestkapelle>

After the Polderhuis remembrance we then went to the lighthouse where the service was held for the civilian casualties. Alongside the wreath laying, flowers were laid on the grave of Mr. Brasser, who was executed by the Germans and at the Commonwealth War Grave of the Unknown Soldier.

Then it was off to everybody's favourite windy spot, the monument at Erika. And believe me, if we thought the other ceremonies were windy this one always manages to top it. The wreaths were laid, and some clever person had thought to have stone ready for holding them down, definitely needed with wind force 7 blowing around you!





*The graves of Jacob Brasser, and the Unknown Soldier at the Lighthouse. Memorial at Erika Beach.*

One of the most poignant moments from the ceremonies for me was the silence. The silence before, during but mostly after the ceremonies. The moment we'd all settle around the picnic table next to Erika and somebody would produce a bottle of Putters Rum and we'd all have a wee nip to warm up. Then of course followed on by a few bevvies and lunch at the Castle pub opposite the Polderhuis Museum.

If I think back on how we were all together last year, with over 300 people at the services to commemorate 75 years I had quite a lump in my throat to see only 4 people standing in the garden. The greater and extended Royal Marine family was hugely missed this year although I know we will all have remembered in our own way. I hope you will all enjoy the photos and the film from the Polderhuis, even though it's not the same as seeing you all over here in Walcheren. I'd just like to thank Jan de Jonge for his permission to use his photos. If you have a chance please check out his website: <https://jandejongefotografie.nl/herdenking> I'd also like to say a huge thank you to Ivo, Ruud and everybody at the Polderhuis who organised the remembrance on behalf of the Association.



Following the commemorations at Westkapelle, I was involved during a short commemoration at the Landing Craft memorial at Uncle Beach in Vlissingen. Clive Porter had asked if we could lay a wreath on behalf of his father Ken Porter. I played a lament as Leon Maljaars laid the wreath as he had arranged with Clive beforehand. A short but none the less heartfelt moment as you can see from the picture above.

### **Memorial March – Allies to Dishoek**

“We must not forget”. Under that motto, the march that is commemorated every year, but which could not take place this year due to the coronavirus, was undertaken by a small group of locals. The ‘yomp’ that allied soldiers had taken from Westkapelle to Dishoek to neutralize an enemy battery there.

“I’m glad it’s raining a bit”, says Tobias van Gent when he looks up at the sky at The Polderhuis in Westkapelle. It’s somewhat similar to the weather of 76 years ago. Together with six others, the Middleburg historian will walk through the dunes from Westkapelle to Dishoek, a trip that was also made in 1944 by the men of 47 Royal Marine Commando during the Battle of the Scheldt.

The Allies had landed at Westkapelle the day before. The battery they had to neutralize controlled the estuary of the Westerchelde with its 15-centimeter guns. Van Gent knows well that those soldiers had a terribly hard time. “We can now walk quietly here. But they were bombarded with everything as well as having to go through minefields”.

Every year that route is still walked by British Marines, family members of the veterans and people from Walcheren, as a tribute to the men who did it 76 years ago. This year, however, the British were not be here due to the coronavirus crisis. That is the reason for a number of Walcherers to make the walk themselves. “Because we must not forget”, says Westkapelle resident Ivo van Beekhuizen. He thinks that even 76 years after the liberation it is still important that we remember what happened here. “That people were willing to risk their lives to ensure

that the Germans were expelled. What happened back then is too important for us to let it pass unnoticed. Even a coronavirus crisis should not change that" says Ivo.

The others think so too. All have something to do with World War II in one way or another. Willen-Bart Niesthoven from Veere not only participates in the walk as a tribute to the commandos, but also to his grandfather Willem Noesthoven. "He was executed on September 11, 1944 in the dunes between Dishoek and Zoutelande because he was involved in the resistance." A cross in the dunes still reminds us of this.

Suzan van de Walle is involved in the Bunker Stories Dishoek Foundation and in recent years has met many veterans who took part in the battle for those bunkers, the bloodiest battles in the unit's history.

Willy Spaeter is involved in Wings to Victory, the organization that specializes in the air war over the south-west of the Netherlands.

For Karel Noorlander it is the first time he has joined the walk. Karel writes about the war and says that there is no reason whatsoever to stop commemorating.

Amateur historian and writer Hans Sakkers rarely, if ever, visits a memorial. "Through my books and my research I commemorate". However, he was here because walking together is a fitting way to commemorate. "This is how we show our solidarity".

*This is an edited version of an article by Emile Calon, published in the newspaper Provinciale Zeeuwse Courant (PZC), 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2020.*

## Dishoek 2020

When the walkers arrived at the Dishoek Memorial, a service of remembrance was held, organised by Karel Noorlander, chairman of the Koudekerke Historical Society (who'd masterminded the new Memorial). Karel had remarked "that there was a stiff wind coming straight from Britain, possibly 6-7 on the Beaufort scale. So, in a way, I suppose you made your presence felt in regretful absence". But unfortunately, the din of the wind was so loud that the Royal Marines Prayer was not completely audible to all present. The Lament was played on the pipes by Kelly and the Wreathes were laid. Once again, a very different and sober atmosphere compared to last year. But most importantly, as Karel said: "the fallen were given the respect they earned with their lives".



## Surprise, surprise!

Reverend Jane Ball

No-one could have been more surprised than me to find myself being asked if I would be willing to become the chaplain for 47 RMCA, but it's clear that Lou Sartorel is responsible. My husband, Jonathan, has been CEO of the RMC for a number of years now and having watched him take part in the Yomp from Winchester to Eastbourne I decided to give it a go last year. Lou was part of the support team and saw me in even increasing stages of exhaustion as I hobbled towards the end. Sadly, injury meant I didn't quite make it but it was an incredible experience made more endurable with a swift sip of Lou's rum.



*Jane and Jonathan at Port-en-Bessin in 2019*

We met again when I was lucky enough to travel to Port-en-Bessin for the commemoration of the landings there. Only once before – when I was serving as Padre with the Army Reserves – did I have the opportunity of leading a service for veterans, when I was asked by their Association to accompany them to Normandy. Remembrance Sunday has always been important to me but even more so when the reality of war was brought home so powerfully listening to the stories of those who had been there. Like a lot of people with no previous knowledge of the Royal Marines, I had never heard of Port-en-Bessin, or of its importance. My time there was made even more memorable by the opportunity to speak with the veterans and their families.

As you will have gathered, I served as Padre for the Royal Wessex Yeomanry, leaving them when I became a school chaplain but taking on the role as Padre with Wiltshire Army Cadet Force. A move to parish ministry in Hampshire in 2014 meant that I hung up my beret. I love parish ministry but that desire to serve has never really left me and I was very pleased to be able to say yes when the possibility of becoming chaplain to 47RMCA came along.

Walcheren, Westkapelle, Domburg, Koudekerke were all places that, again, had meant nothing to me until Jonathan and I arrived at the hotel in Domburg last October. I didn't realise that my first outing for the Association would be quite so big and in the few moments before the service Lou once again managed to provide a sip of something to keep the nerves at bay! What a memorable weekend it was though. Meeting members of the Association, especially the veterans and their families, listening to their memories, leading the service on Saturday and finally blessing the new memorial at Koudekerke will mean that this few days will stand out in my memories for a long time to come.

Thank you for asking me to be your Padre. I'm sorry that our time away this year has been curtailed but I very much look forward to 2021 and the opportunity to get to know you all better and I hope I serve you well. Best wishes, Jane.



*Lou Sartorel leads Jane astray. That's not Communion wine the Rev is drinking!*

## Local War Memorials Project Update

Bob Perry

What is a war memorial? There is no legal definition and people interpret what a war memorial is in many different ways. A simple definition is: 'Any physical object created, erected, adapted or installed to commemorate those involved in or affected by war or conflict.' Examples include stone monuments, crosses, lychgates, plaques, wall tablets or boards, benches, stained glass windows, cottage hospitals, memorial halls, recreation grounds and even fountains and sun dials. In addition, a war memorial can be something more abstract such as a school prize or even a virtual Roll of Honour.

In the July 2018 edition of Despatch I explained that I had recently commenced the research phase of a long-term project to attempt to identify as many local war memorials in the United Kingdom that commemorate the 114 men of 47 Royal Marine Commando who made the ultimate sacrifice. I envisaged that the project would be a rather interesting way to spend a couple of hours during the dark winter nights examining online newspaper archives, ancestry websites, census records and the numerous and highly informative war memorial web pages. However, attempting to research the location of a respective war memorial and background of each of our 114 fallen quickly turned into a fascinating addiction, each individual case a detective investigation and a crossword puzzle wrapped into one. Some examples of this are:

Sergeant Eric Ernest Bee, buried in Bayeux War Cemetery, was the son of Ernest and Helene Bee, of Tetbury, Gloucestershire. The History of Tetbury Society can find no reference to his parents in Tetbury although we did discover that Eric was born in Aston, Birmingham, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 1919. A man of the same name and birth date appears in the 1939 Census for Aldershot Sub District with an occupation listed as Theatrical Business (Travelling). Eric Bee is not commemorated on either the Tetbury or Aldershot war memorials - could this be because he travelled around the country? However, further investigation revealed that he is remembered in the Book of Remembrance in the Birmingham Hall of Memory. More research is now required to find out if he appears on any other war memorial. Also, what I failed to spot before is that Sergeant E E Bee (Service No: PO/X 100001) was probably unique in the Royal Marines because the numerals in his service number and his initials and name read the same backwards!



*Lt Adam's headstone in Sprang-Capelle*

Lieutenant Ian Adam was born in Hove on 25 May 1925, the eldest of three sons of William and Mary Adam of Wivelsfield, Sussex. He was educated at the Whitgift School in Croydon and while at school joined the Home Guard. Not waiting to be called up Ian volunteered in 1943 for service with the Royal Marines and was commissioned in Normandy in July 1944. He was killed at Kapelsche Veer in January 1945 and rests in the sole Commonwealth war grave in Sprang-Capelle General Cemetery in the Netherlands. Unusually, Ian Adam is commemorated on both the Hayward's Heath and Burgess Hill war memorials (these war memorials are only 4 miles apart). He is further commemorated on a memorial board in the local parish church in Hayward's Heath and, as an Old Whitgiftian, appears on the WW2 roll of honour located in the school entrance. His other brothers survived the war and, rather poignantly, Ian's name is inscribed on his parent's headstone at Wivelsfield.

So far, I believe that I have located where over fifty of our fallen are individually commemorated in the UK - details are listed in the supplement to this edition of Despatch. Whenever more

detail is discovered it is hoped to display the information online, perhaps on the Association's webpage.

The men of 47 Royal Marine Commando hailed from all corners of the United Kingdom, very much like our current Association membership. So, how about an army (or Commando!?) of trainee detectives and avid crossword compilers, recruited from the Association, to help find out more about each of our fallen? Can you visit and photograph memorials, perhaps call in the local library to see if there is any mention of the death in the local newspapers archive, even contact the local council or historical society (they are always very keen to help) to see if they hold any additional information? If you are able to help, my contact details are below.

I am very indebted to Les Pike, Paddy O'Connell and, more recently, Ken Cowdery for their help with the project. It is hoped that this work may tie in with the exciting education and learning initiative that Ken is currently working on (see page 17 Operation Salute)- to engage with and encourage young people to research the backgrounds of those whose names appear on their local war memorials. Mail: [bobperry@live.co.uk](mailto:bobperry@live.co.uk) Mobile: 07500 967515.

### **British Normandy Memorial Update**

The Memorial at Ver-sur-Mer had been scheduled to be open this September and we had planned to visit following on from the commemorations in Fécamp. Unfortunately, because of the Covid lockdown in France, all work on site came to a standstill at the end of March and only recommenced at the end of May.



The last stone of gold coloured limestone, from Massagnis in the Bourgogne, was laid on Friday the 18<sup>th</sup> of September. This completed the 160 limestone pillars, engraved by a firm of Irish stonemasons with the names of the 22,442 soldiers, pilots and sailors, of some thirty nationalities, who fell under British command during the Battle of Normandy. The path through the pillars ends at a monument dedicated to the French civilian victims of the battle.

The Normandy Memorial Trust emailed out a 'Remembrance 2020 Construction Update' to coincide with Remembrance Sunday ([www.normandymemorialtrust.org/news](http://www.normandymemorialtrust.org/news)). This contains a video by Nicholas Witchell, one of the Trustees of the Trust and the BBC's Royal Correspondent. In the video he looks ahead to the official opening of the Memorial in June 2021. The exact date has still to be confirmed given the current situation, and discussions are ongoing with the Royal British Legion, the Ministry of Defence, the Spirit of Normandy Trust and other stakeholders.

Sadly, the site will remain closed to visitors throughout autumn and winter as the 60-acre site is landscaped. But if all goes well the memorial park may be open in time for Easter 2021.

## A D-Day Theme Park – For or Against?

Dave (Ed.)

In late-January, French newspapers broke the news of a proposal to create a 'Homage to Heroes' tourist attraction depicting the Normandy landings. The head of the Normandy regional council, Hervé Morin, announced that he wanted to create a permanent site to mark the D-Day landings in time for the 80th anniversary in 2024. Morin said that private investment would fund the €100 million project, and "All that's left is to find building land, not on the D-Day beaches themselves, but very close to Juno, Omaha or Utah".

A final site hasn't yet been secured, although three towns including Bayeux and Carentan have reportedly shown an interest. They each promised to make available the land, up to 35 hectares, necessary for 'the show'. Described as "immersive", Homage to Heroes aims to put the audience in the thick of the action with cutting edge technology, archive footage and live performance. An 800-seat venue will "move between sets" on rails. The co-organizer Régis Lefèvre has described the experience as a "50-minute living documentary" featuring "living paintings" among other spectacles.

Working with promoter Lefèvre are Stéphane Gateau, a TV producer, and Roberto Ciurleo, known for his background in musicals (his most recent production tells the story of Bernadette Soubirous of Lourdes who in 1858 saw a series of 18 apparitions of the Virgin Mary). Also involved is Serge Denoncourt, a director associated with Cirque de Soleil. As of late October, Denoncourt states he hasn't started work on the script yet, and that the show could ultimately "go anywhere in the world" if an agreement isn't reached to host the project in Normandy.

Approximately five million tourists visit Normandy each year to view the historical sites, beaches, cemeteries, monuments and museums. There are already over 50 D-Day themed museums in the Normandy area. But the counter argument is that there is "no single museum that unites all aspects". It's that market the Homage to Heroes team wants to capture with a forecast 600,000 visitors. Ciurleo sees the project as a way of commemorating the past for future generations and will leave "some sort of legacy for our kids".

Some officials have welcomed the idea, with Jean-Marc Lefranc, head of the D-Day Committee, calling it "really wonderful" and offering his association's "support". Patrick Jardin, mayor of Arromanches-les-Bains (Gold beach), has said: "Anything that brings to the fore the landing beaches circuit in the coming years is a good point."

But the prospect of a "show" is not to everyone's taste. Some 30,000 people have signed a petition to President Macron, which nicknames the attraction 'D-Day Land', warning that it could "seriously harm the ecology of the area but also lacks respect for the veterans and the people killed during the Normandy landings and the battle that followed".

Léon Gautier age 98 and Hubert Faure age 106, the only two survivors of the Kieffer commando, the only French commando to have landed on the 6th of June, oppose the project with Gautier calling it "money for history". They are supported by a letter published in Le Monde signed by 154 descendants of Gautier and Faure's comrades, saying that the landings must not be used for "dramatic, festive or commercial" purposes.

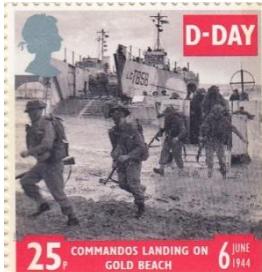
Those views are echoed by Maxie Croze, a former professor at the University of Caen "Everyone is flabbergasted. war, death and suffering are no show. Families are shocked to know that their father or grandfather is being made an actor. I don't want to relive the war in a human picture, it's inhuman. We shouldn't make money on such a thing".

Ironically, this is not the first D-Day project to have sparked a row. Some locals were irked by the proposal for the British Normandy Memorial at Ver-sur-Mer, with residents staging a march to protest its location, saying it was too big and would destroy protected agricultural land.

I'm looking forward to a lively debate about this when we next meet up in the 47 bar!

## The 47 in Stamps – Part 1

Allen Withington



To commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day in 1994 the UK issued a set of five 25p stamps, one of which shows the famous image of the 47 Commando landing at Gold Beach. The photograph was taken by Sgt Norman Midgley of No. 5 Army Film and Photographic Unit who, before joining the AFPU in early 1944, worked for the Daily Express in Manchester. He was also one of the photographers who had the grim task of recording the liberation of Bergen-Belsen.

The photograph of Midgley shown here was taken during the battle for Caen on 24<sup>th</sup> of July 1944. The camera he is holding is his official issue Super Ikonta, maybe the same camera used to take the 47 image. The keen-eyed uniform experts amongst you will notice that he is wearing a special rimless helmet, these were issued to the AFPU so as not to obstruct their cameras.

Midgley took several photographs of 47 landing and these have been used in a number of stamps from around the world including Ascension Island and The Gambia.



Two countries, The Republic of Chad and Antigua & Barbuda, have each issued a pair of stamps featuring the 47 landing. Looking at the two stamps from Chad, the photo on the left was taken first. It shows men of 47 exiting the landing craft LC A2???. Looking at the original image one can also make out that the landing craft bears the name 'Silent Knight' and a second landing craft can be seen approaching; LC A431 which is shown in the second image.

Two states choosing to adopt an artists' impression of the photographs are Jersey and Nauru. The latter, with some artistic license includes a Sherman tank with a chain flayer.



Finally, we have a stamp issued in 2019 from Wallis & Futuna, a 'French Collectivite Territorial' situated in the Pacific, whose

historical accuracy perhaps is somewhat suspect. Note in particular the rather fetching turned-up shorts.

In the next issue of Despatch, I'll look at 47 on First-day covers, including one signed by Vera Lynn.

Whilst writing this article, Allen was accepted as a Member of the Royal Philatelic Society, London.



## 47 Inventory Project throws up new discoveries

Ken Cowdery

As mentioned in the last issue, the Association has started to assemble an inventory of all things 47 related. I have started to create a simple list of everything we know about whether they are wartime artefacts/records, film/audio footage, books, paintings, prints, souvenirs, medals. These are of course not all possessions of the Association, but it is at least very nice to know what exists, where and who does own it.

An unintended but delightful consequence has been some great new discoveries – or ‘re-discoveries’ more likely. For instance, Patrick O’Connell searched back through some of his parents records and stumbled upon a wonderful (mint condition) photo of Heavy Weapons Troop, a moving speech given by Lt John Bennett at his father’s funeral and several other artefacts.

One of the first people to respond was Geof Haywood. Geof mentioned that he had a painting on his wall of HMS ‘Emerald’ that had been gifted to the Association by the artist Lt-Cdr Geoffrey Haskins in Normandy on the 53<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of D-Day in 1998. On the back of the



painting was the artist’s caption “HMS “Emerald”, British 6-inch gun cruiser, moving westward to take up position off Port-en-Bessin, Normandy. She provided support for 47 Royal Marines Commando when they liberated the Port 7-8 June 1944.” An additional note stated that “The amateur artist served as a Midshipman in Emerald at that historic moment in time. The painting is presented on behalf of the Emerald Association.

*Lt.-Cdr. (Ret'd.) Geoffrey Haskins's painting of HMS Emerald.*

After a little online research and a couple of calls, I was delighted to discover that the artist is still alive and well, based in his own quarters at the Royal Alfred Seafarers Society in Banstead, Surrey. I managed to get hold of Geoffrey and had a lovely chat. Despite the Covid restrictions he seemed in great form and his memory was still excellent. In fact, he could even recall seeing from afar the green uniforms on top of Port en Bessin’s headlands during the mission.

It was also wonderful to hear that Geoffrey had been with the 47 contingent in Port-en-Bessin for the 53<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of D-Day in 1998 and took part in the commemorative walk with John Forfar, etc. “It nearly killed me”, he told me. It was that year that he gifted his painting to the Association. In the usual veterans’ self-effacing, tongue-in-cheek way, Geoffrey joked that when asked what he did in the war he simply replies, “I did what I was bloody told to do!”. What an honour and joy it was to speak to him and I am sure we all thank him for everything he did for our freedom; whether he was told to do it or not!

Geoffrey also wrote a book about HMS Emerald “The Irish Flagship” which I am now trying to source on the internet (although there appears to be none in stock anywhere so far, but I’ll keep hunting).

We have only touched the surface so far with the inventory project and hope there are many more discoveries to come. Before too long, we also hope to be able to make the inventory available for members to explore.

## Operation Salute, bringing 47's story to schools

Ken Cowdery

The Association is exploring the idea of creating a suite of learning resources and travel itineraries as part of its ambition to keeping the 47-story alive. Our working title for this project is 'Operation Salute'.

The idea is to create professionally prepared resources suitable for schools, museums, etc, that tell WW2 stories using 47's story as a case study. Our intention is to target schools and communities that have a link to 47 RM Cdo. That way, we would be relating major, internationally historic events at a local, community level.

Our first pilot initiative is likely to be based around 47's D-Day experience and capture of Port-en-Bessin. Our target audience would initially be British pupils/learners studying WW2 history at a Key Stage 3 level (typically age 13–14 years). The resources would also provide cross-curricular opportunities with learning around, for instance: geography, foreign languages, leadership/decision-making and, of course, British values.

Through 47's story, we would hope pupils would not only gain more knowledge and understanding of D-Day but also learn of:

- 47 Commando's epic story of courage and determination in completing their mission – even though so many things went wrong – and despite significant casualties;
- the stories of the young men who volunteered for commando service and took part in the operation;
- the resilience of the local French communities who suffered Nazi occupation and their significant participation in the liberation;
- the involvement with 47 Commando of a number of native German/Austrian Jewish nationals who had escaped Nazi persecution and were now fighting back against their oppressors.
- the value of remembrance and;
- the close bonds that still remain with the local French communities to this day.

With the help of an educational advisor, questionnaires have been recently sent to just five schools in order to establish their likely interest. So far, we have received replies from the schools of Captain STICKINGS (Brentwood School, Essex) and Corporal Peter TERRY (Frensham Heights School, Surrey) as well as a school very close to Marine BREACH's family's wartime home address (Ravens Wood School in Bromley in SE London). All three have been positive about the idea.

Our next step is to consider the various options available and what we can realistically afford or raise funds for. Ideally, we would prepare digital resources including a website, online maps and film/audio archive/footage, interviews with veterans etc. However, as a base option we hope to be able to prepare a loan box including artefacts, copies of maps etc as well as useful lesson plans and handouts for the pupils.

A really exciting outcome would be if we could entice some schools to visit France and Holland to explore the 47 story – and perhaps even join us on one of our commemorative walks. In fact, Steve Hignett has recently uncovered some wonderful vintage video footage from Normandy in 1998, the 53rd Anniversary of D-Day. That year, a number of veterans and Association members followed in the footsteps of 47's D-Day mission accompanied by pupils from the former Ernest Hemingway School in Port-en-Bessin. It was clearly a memorable day for those children, and I am sure they will never forget the men of 47 or their stories.

There is a link to a video of the pupils of the Ernest Hemingway School interviewing the veterans on page 19, 47 YouTube Channel.



## Absent Friends

### **Ted Hartwell, 13 November 2020, age 97**

Ted served in A-Troop and is mentioned several times in John Forfar's book and thanked in the Acknowledgements as a contributor. There are also two photos in the book of Ted near Rue du Phare whilst revisiting Port-en-Bessin.

Ted's landing craft was one of those blown up on D-Day but, even so, he managed to hold onto the Bangalore torpedo entrusted to him and to swim ashore with it. It was his Bangalore that was later used to blow the gap in the barbed wire at the outset of the assault on the Western Feature. Ted also took part in that fateful assault.

A full obituary will appear in the next issue of Despatch.

### **Ron Thorpe PO/X 110165, Q troop 29 November, age 97**



*Right: Ron, grinning from ear-to-ear in a Jeep at the 75th anniversary of D-Day 2014. He said he had never been kissed so much in his life.*

I was really sorry to hear about Ron. He was such a lovely man and always pleased to hear from me when I rang him. He came to the 70th Anniversary with his son, Frank, and had a great time even though his eyesight was so bad. He said that he had never been kissed so much in his life – he was grabbed by lots of ladies as he travelled in the jeep convoy! He loved every minute of that trip but when asked if he would like to come again, he always declined because of his sight. He hated that he could not see all that was going on and found it very frustrating. I am sure that there is a picture of him in the jeep grinning from ear to ear and having the most marvellous time. I am so very glad that he was able to come to the 70th celebrations and meet up with his old comrades, especially Harry Prescott. I remember he was a very happy man on his return to blighty!

Ron last travelled with the Association in 2014 and was an enthusiastic member of the Port-en-Besin party. He travelled from his home to Portsmouth to the Maritime Club and mingled with former comrades who he had not seen for a long time. Ron served in Q Troop along with Harry Prescott and the two men were able to swap tales of old and pay respects for the first time since the war. Ron was injured on 6th June, like Harry, but they had both returned to the unit shortly after.

Thanks to Ingrid Fearne and Paddy O'Connell for these fond memories of Ron.



## Mountbatten Festival of Music

For those of us who were in the Royal Albert Hall in March this year we have fond memories of a great evening. Just a couple of weeks later, the Hall closed with this announcement: *There is a light and it never goes out.*

*Before we left, we switched on our ghost light: a small lamp traditionally left centre stage to illuminate the theatre when empty. We can't wait to be back to turn it off. #StayHomeSaveLives & see you soon.*

Sadly, there is no MFM at the Royal Albert Hall planned for March 2021. But rest assured that if something does become possible later in the year, we will let you know. But the good news is that RM Bands display all year round at different venues around the country, so watch your local press or tourist information for when and where.

## Normandy 2021

During this difficult time, it is impossible to predict whether we will be making the trip to Port-en-Bessin as 47 Association in 2021. However, with an effective vaccine we could well be making the trip together again. If that is the case, we will be broadly following our usual journey plan, travelling from Portsmouth on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June and returning to the UK on the 9<sup>th</sup>. Our programme in France will be modelled on past trips and will include a visit to the new British Normandy Memorial at Ver-sur-Mer.

If you would like to travel with us, either again, or for the first time, please contact our Secretary, Anne-Marie Nicholls, at: [47rmcsec@gmail.com](mailto:47rmcsec@gmail.com) as soon as possible. (If you don't have access to email, please feel free to phone the Editor, details on the back page). When we have an indication of likely numbers, we will be in a position to work out the feasibility, costs etc., and then decide if it is worthwhile to book a coach. The hotel rooms are already provisionally booked, so rest assured there is room at the inn. Obviously at this time an overall cost is difficult to give but prices will be similar to previous trips, (perhaps plus 5% to cover inflation etc.).

Health insurance at this time from most companies will cover normal illness or injury claims but not anything associated with Covid. Hopefully we will all have had a vaccine jab by then so look on the positive side; we will be in Port-en-Bessin next June.

## 47 YouTube Channel

Steve Hignett

At last, we have caught up with technology and have a 47 RMC YouTube channel. Videos that have been filmed over the past 25 years have been digitised and uploaded onto the channel for all to see. These links will eventually be on our new website.

Given Ron Thorpe's passing, I thought I should share with you the video from of our 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary visit to Port-en-Bessin in 2014: <https://youtu.be/dxaOySUEu-I> You will find Ron smiling whilst he's the passenger in the Jeep at Timecode 12 minutes and 30 seconds.

Also on our YouTube channel you will find a series of interviews with our veterans that were conducted by schoolchildren from the Ernest Hemingway School in P-e-B. I hope you'll find them very interesting. <https://youtu.be/QPBHSkDXjKQ>

## 47 Commando Raiding Group Royal Marines Update November 2020

Colonel Chris Haw MC, CO 47 Commando Raiding Group RM

Following the update in July of this year, I thought you might appreciate an update on 47 Cdo RG's activities in the second half of 2020. The tempo at 47 Cdo has continued to be high despite the pandemic and there has been plenty of activity at home and abroad to keep the lads and lasses busy. We of course very much missed the opportunity to pay our respects at Walcheren, which was going to be all the more important having missed Port en Bessin in the summer; but we remembered as a Unit nonetheless.

Elements of 47 Cdo RG have been deployed to the Caribbean on RFA ARGUS, despite 2020 being the 2<sup>nd</sup> most active Atlantic Hurricane season on record, the British Overseas Territories came through relatively unscathed. This resulted in a change of focus for the 539 Coxswains deployment, from Disaster Relief Operations to working with the US Coastguard on Counter Illicit Trafficking Operations. What were they looking for? Small 'go fast' vessels, 18-24ft long, outboard motor/s, simple skiff-like fiber glass construction and usually 3 people onboard. In the common VOI (vessel of interest) there is usually minimal equipment: containers of fuel, fresh water and small amount of food, with contraband usually wrapped in plastic parcels or containers. These vessels, whilst fast, are not suited for long sea transits. The traffickers are always taking a huge risk, enduring rough seas and harsh weather. Through the deployment the 539 Coxswains took part in multiple successful interdictions, intercepting 1000s of kgs of drugs with a street value of 100s of millions of dollars – a job very well done!

Back on the home front 10 Training Squadron delivered Vocational Landing Craft training courses throughout the Summer and 3 courses passed out last week. They also continued to provide amphibious training to recruits from CTCRM and have prepared to support 43 Cdo in providing security for the UK's nuclear capability. 539 Raiding Squadron conducted a Small Craft Gunners Course on the sea-to-land ranges in Wales. Boasting more fire power than a reconnaissance vehicle, the Fire Support Offshore Raiding Craft packs a powerful punch with twin General Purpose Machine Guns and a pair of Heavy Machine Guns each. Operating together or independently, the craft can deliver sufficient and sustained fire to facilitate extractions or directed fire onto coastal positions.

The main overseas deployment in this autumn period was to Cyprus on the Littoral Response Group (Experimentation) deployment as part of an amphibious task group led by HMS ALBION. This deployment provided a vision of the Commando Force operating model conducting operations, partnering high-end forces, conducting experimentation and being on standby for any emerging threats, all supported by shipping. Many elements of 47 Cdo RG were involved including the HQ that commanded all land force elements, the Raiding Squadron who conducted some great training and experimentation in the superb Mediterranean waters, and 11 Amphibious Trials Squadron who led another highly successful trial of drones controlled by Artificial Intelligence, resupplying troops from ships to shore in a futuristic vision of how we will operate. A great success for 3 Commando Brigade and particularly for 47 Cdo RG (and Cyprus is fantastic in October!).

This will be my last update to Dispatch as CO 47 Cdo RG RM as I move on to 3 Cdo Brigade as the Deputy Brigade Commander. I have absolutely relished getting to know the inspiring veterans and many of the families and fine members of the Association; I can genuinely say that the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations at PeB and Walcheren were defining moments in my command time and so very moving and humbling. I wish you all the very best and hope to see you all again in the future. I know that my successor, Col Aran Jess, is very much looking forward to meeting the Association and will endeavour to strengthen and support our valued affiliation. Stay safe, look after each other and a very happy Christmas to you all!



*Counter Illicit Trafficking Operations – This is what we were looking for: small 'go fast' vessels 18-24ft long used for smuggling contraband.*



*539 Raiding Squadron conducted a Small Craft Gunners Course on the sea-to-land ranges in Wales. Each of these Fire Support Offshore Raiding Craft carries twin General Purpose Machine Guns and a pair of Heavy Machine Guns.*

## From the Editor



Just like the last issue of Despatch I didn't know how I was going to sign this one off. But when I saw this Beetle Bailey cartoon, I laughed out loud and thought about how often we end up talking about our back problems. It was then that I hit upon an idea; when we meet up in Normandy next year, if we can find an RM PT Instructor, in exchange for a donation to the RMA and perhaps a tab behind the 47 bar 😊, we could have a professional who can teach us how we should be doing our stretching properly, and making sure we do them every day. We are told that we are living in unprecedented times. We might think that, but as the Mayor of Fécamp reminded us, during this difficult period we must maintain our solidarity and friendship. We should remember the courage of those that lived under the Occupation and the young men of 47 Commando who freed them. In times of doubt, we should remember the example of those young heroes. Our parents, our grandparents, that lived through WWII, suffered hardships that we can barely imagine. Jim Forbes was just 16 on D-Day; it was three and a half years before he returned home. And yet we complain of lockdown.

We are all likely to be having a Christmas that is going to be smaller and quieter than we have enjoyed in the past. But then I heard something that seemed to put everything into perspective. Nick Baines, the Bishop of Leeds said that a pared-down Christmas might help us remember the original Christmas story. *"We talk about there being no room at the inn. We talk about an inhospitable environment and yet the light shines in the darkness and the darkness will not put it out. Christmas didn't begin in Debenhams or Marks and Spencer, but in an obscure part of the Roman empire when life was very cheap".*

Thanks to everyone who submitted articles and photos for this issue of Despatch. Fingers crossed that we will all be able to meet up in Normandy in June, and when we do please remember to bring your exercise mats. Merry Christmas to you all, don't forget the little town of Bethlehem, and best wishes for a healthy and happy New Year. Or as our friends in Port-en-Bessin and Fécamp say (whilst they raise a glass) 'bonne année et bonne santé'.

### Next Issue: July 2021

Please could you send me any contributions by the end of June if possible.

Please feel to call or email me if you would like to discuss any ideas for the next or future issues of Despatch.

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### Postscript:

- (i) Just a reminder, if you would like to join us in Normandy in June, or are thinking of doing so, do please give us notice as soon as you can. [47rmcsec@gmail.com](mailto:47rmcsec@gmail.com);
- (ii) In case you didn't see the flyer in this issue, please can you renew your membership of the Association. As always, veterans and widows are free.
- (iii) Finally, if you want one of those RM umbrellas, (page 4) you'll find them in the RM Shop.