

# 47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

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## **DESPATCH 44** *July 2021*



This issue of Despatch is dedicated to the 64 men of 47 Royal Marine Commando who lost their lives in the Normandy Campaign and whose names are recorded on the British Normandy Memorial overlooking Gold Beach at Ver-sur-Mer.

## The British Normandy Memorial at Ver-sur-Mer

The British Normandy Memorial at Ver-sur-Mer, above Gold Beach, records the names of the 22,442 servicemen and women, from over 30 countries, who were under British command and who lost their lives on D-Day and during the Battle of Normandy. The Memorial was officially opened on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June this year.

The path from the car park leading towards the Memorial has six pillars acting as way markers, telling the story of the Normandy campaign, from D-Day until the end of August 1944.



### 1. The Beaches and the Bridgehead: 6 June to 15 June 1944

It was the greatest amphibious assault in history.

It was 6 June 1944, when British forces played a critical role – alongside forces from the United States, Canada and other Allied nations – in the landings which opened the way to the Liberation of Western Europe and the restoration of peace and freedom.

It was “D-Day” – a day which altered the course of our history, when tens of thousands of Allied troops landed on five beaches in Normandy and in airborne operations inland, to overcome the tyranny which had spread across France and much of Europe from Nazi Germany.

D-Day was just the beginning of the campaign known as Operation Overlord. On 7 June and for weeks beyond that, the Allied fleet continued to rush troops to Normandy while warships offshore continued to provide crucial gunfire support. By mid-June, the Allied land forces under the command of Britain’s General Sir Bernard Montgomery were firmly ashore. But German forces were fighting back. The outcome of one of the most important battles of the twentieth century hung in the balance.

**2. Struggling to Advance: 16 June to 30 June 1944** British and other Allied forces were fighting in the thick vegetation and high hedgerows of Normandy’s “bocage” terrain which the Germans found ideal for defence.

For four days (19-22 June) a major storm hit the English Channel. Rough seas and high winds almost halted the process of unloading troops and supplies.

The British artificial Mulberry Harbour off Arromanches survived the storm: the American Mulberry Harbour at Omaha Beach was destroyed.

The main objective on the British-Canadian sector was to advance towards the city of Caen. Operation Epsom (26-30 June) was a major British attack to the west of Caen but military gains were limited.

Poor weather often restricted support from Allied air forces. British troops reached but could not hold the high point known as Hill 112. British casualties were heavy. By the end of June there were around 400,000 British troops in Normandy.

### **3. Battle for Caen: 1 July to 15 July 1944**

The British attack to the west of Caen had not achieved its full objectives. The Germans made powerful counter-attacks against the ground captured in recent fighting but suffered severe losses.

British and Canadian troops attacked Caen from the north, supported by 450 heavy bomber aircraft (Operation Charnwood, 8-9 July). They liberated the northern part of the city, though it was heavily damaged as a result of weeks of Allied attacks.

British forces then attacked further to the west, seizing an area including the northern part of the critical observation point of Hill 112. In the fierce fighting over the next days, some locations were captured and recaptured several times. Losses on both sides were very high, particularly amongst the infantry.

Overall, the British forces made a gradual advance but at great cost.

### **4. Cauldron of Battle: 16 July to 29 July 1944**

The gruelling struggle continued. Casualty rates mounted but neither side had a decisive advantage.

The next major British offensive was Operation Goodwood (18-20 July).

The attack – at the eastern end of the British-Canadian sector – made use of the high number of tanks operated by British forces supported by nearly 2,000 British and American heavy and medium bombers.

Although Operation Goodwood did not lead to as big an advance as some had hoped, the threat from British-Canadian forces in the Caen area meant that many of the strongest German units were held in that region rather than being sent against the Americans.

The British and Canadians faced more than three times as many German tanks as did their American comrades further west. This aided the American break-out to the south of Saint-Lô that began on 25 July (Operation Cobra).

### **5. The Break-out Begins: 30 July to 15 August 1944**

At the end of July British forces moved to the west of Caen for a major attack, Operation Bluecoat (30 July-7 August).

The objective was Mont Pinçon, the highest point in Normandy. Despite heavy fighting British forces advanced rapidly. By 6 August the summit of Mont Pinçon had been captured. Operation Bluecoat and American advances further west left the German forces in Normandy weakened but still capable of fierce resistance.

To the south of Caen, First Canadian Army launched Operation Totalize (8-10 August) followed by Operation Tractable (14-15 August), both in the direction of Falaise. This Canadian-led force also included British and Polish units. Supported by heavy bombers from the UK and the tactical air forces in Normandy, significant advances were made which would contribute towards the encirclement of the majority of the German forces in the region.



## 6. Victory in Normandy: 16 August to 31 August 1944

Allied forces were advancing along virtually the entire front. The Americans approached from the south, while British, Canadian and Polish forces closed in from the north. As German forces retreated under heavy ground and air attack the Allies closed what became known as the Falaise Gap, preventing further German escape.

American troops reached the River Seine on 19 August. German resistance was fierce. But on 25-26 August the Canadians and then the British crossed the Seine, while Paris was liberated by French and American troops. Fighting continued in many places until, on 30 August, German resistance to the south of the Seine was ended.

On 1 September General Dwight D. Eisenhower took direct command of the Allied armies for the next phase of the fighting. The Battle of Normandy had ended with Allied victory, but at great cost to both sides – and to the French people who inhabited what had become a battlefield.

### The Memorial

The D-Day Wall comprises 12 columns, numbered 1 to 12, with the names, initials, rank and age (where known) of those that fell on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June. The names are in alphabetical order, by service, with the Royal Navy leading. When you walk round the columns and read the ages of those that died, it's their youth that's most shocking. Of the 64 men of 47 RM Cdo, the youngest are just 19 (eight in total). 50 of the 64 men of 47 Cdo are below the age of 25, of which half are just 21 or younger.

Beyond the D-Day wall, the names are inscribed on 160 pillars, with the surname and initials on the front of the pillar, and the rank and age on the side. The men of 47 RM Cdo who died at Port-en-Bessin on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June are on column 15, with one spilling over onto column 16.

### 6 June 1944 – Column 1

BAINBRIDGE C	MNE	23
BEDWORTH H W	MNE	23
BEE E E	SGT	24
BUNYAN K C	MNE	23
FEACEY J R	MAJ	
FELLOWS P B	MNE	19
FEWTRELL C H	MNE	35
FLAHERTY J	MNE	

BAINBRIDGE, Cyril  
BEDWORTH, Horace William  
BEE, Eric Ernest  
BUNYAN, Kenneth Charles  
FEACEY, James Richard  
FELLOWS, Peter Brearley  
FEWTRELL, Charles Henry  
FLAHERTY, John



*Mne Bedworth  
Y-Troop*



*Maj Feacey*



*Mne Flaherty  
S-Troop*

### 6 June 1944 – Column 2

HUGHES D	SGT	24
KINLOCH W C D	MNE	
LUMSDEN J	MNE	19
NORIE G	MNE	27
REDMAN W	MNE	24
SAMBROOK W D	MNE	19
SCOTT F L	MNE	22
SMITH B G	MNE	20
SMITH J	MNE	22

HUGHES, Denis  
LUMSDEN, John  
REDMAN, William  
SCOTT, Frank Leonard  
SMITH, John

KINLOCH, William Charles Doyle  
NORIE, George  
SAMBROOK, Wilfred Dennis  
SMITH, Bernard George

### 6 June 1944 – Column 3

SWEENEY E J	MNE	22
TURNER S H R	MNE	23
WAYGOOD L T	MNE	
WILKINSON R M	MNE	19

SWEENEY, Edward John  
WAYGOOD, Leonard Thomas

TURNER, Stanley Henry Richard  
WILKINSON, Robert Moorelvin

### 6 June 1944 – Column 4

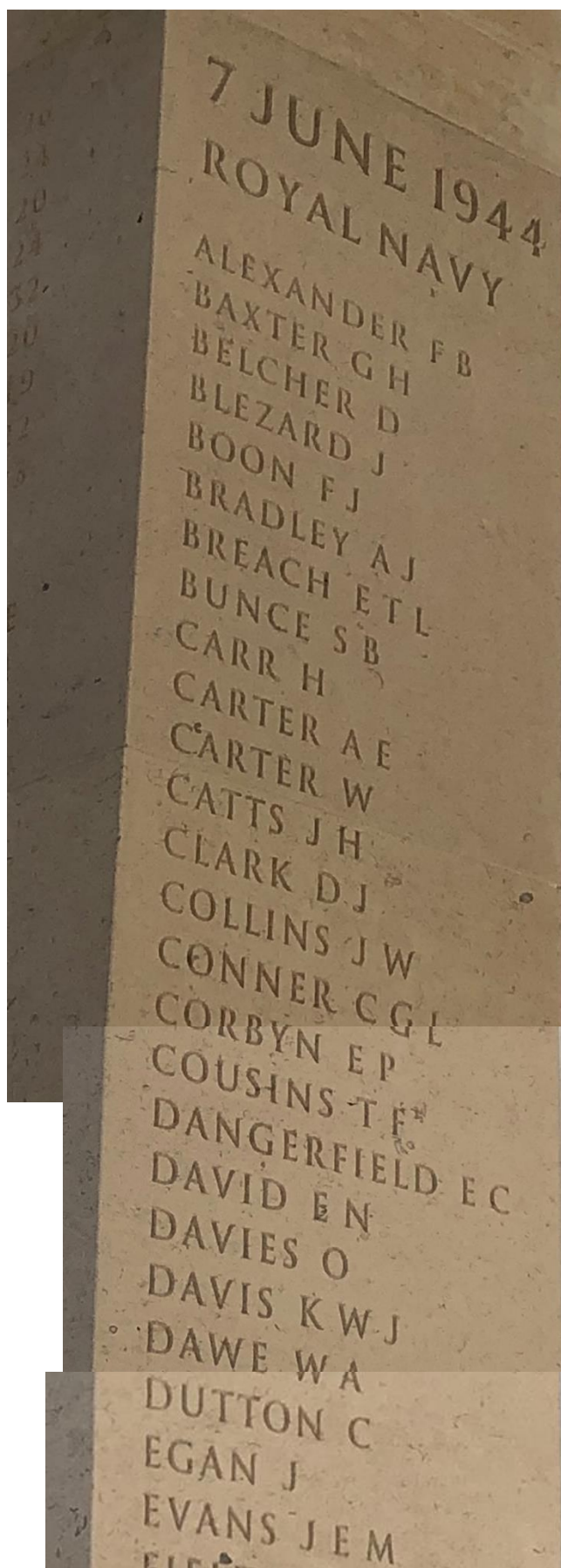
CHATFIELD A J	LCPL	22
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CHATFIELD, Alfred James

### 6 June 1944 – Column 12

WEINBERGER E G	PTE	28
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WEINBERGER, Ernst George (served as WEBSTER, Ernest George)



## 7 June 1944 – Column 15

BAXTER,  
Mne, George Henry, 21

BRADLEY,  
Sgt, Arthur John, 25

BREACH,  
Mne, Ernest Thomas Lloyd, 20

CARTER,  
Mne, Arthur Edward, 24

CATTS,  
LCpl, John Henry, 21



*LCpl Catts Q-Troop*

CLARK,  
Mne, Douglas James, 22

COLLINS,  
Mne, James  
Washington, 21



*Mne Collins A-Troop*

COUSINS,  
Cpt, Terence  
Frederick, 22



*Cpt Cousins A-Troop*

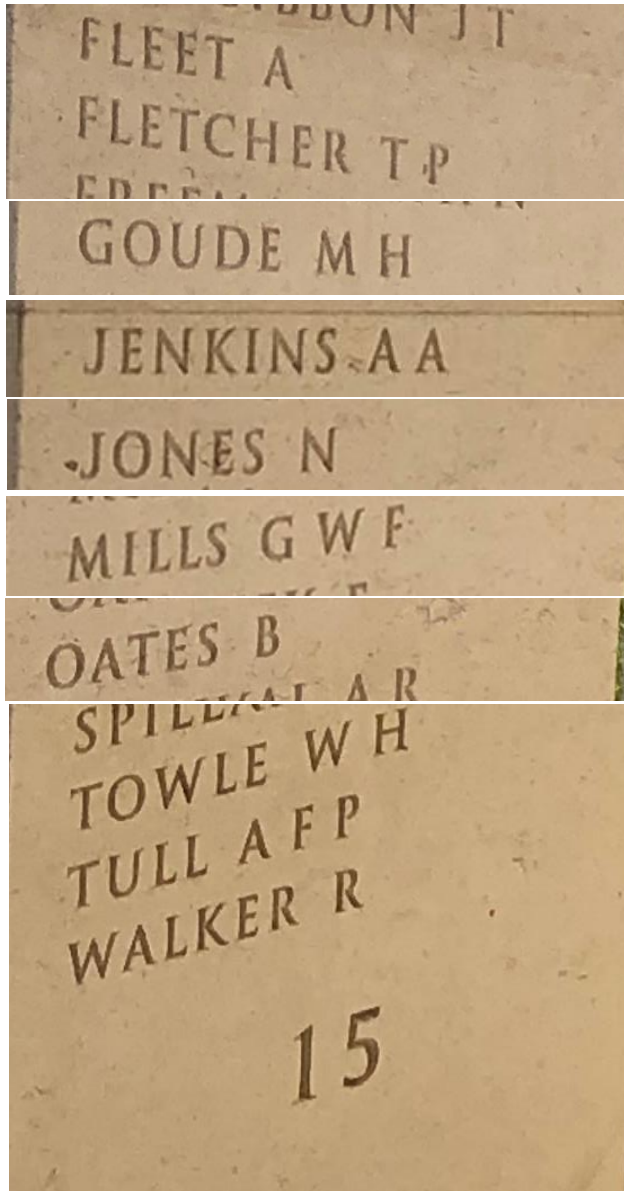
DAVID,  
LCpl, Edward  
Neville, 19

DUTTON,  
Mne, Cyril, 34

EVANS,  
John Edward Morgan,  
DoB believed to be 16 August 1923



## 7 June 1944 – Column 15 continued



FLEET,  
Mne, Arthur,  
DoB believed to be 13 June 1919

FLETCHER,  
Sgt, Teddy Pierce, 22

GOUDE,  
Mne, Michael Herbert, 20

JENKINS,  
Cpl, Alec Arthur, 30

JONES,  
Cpl, Noel, 23

MILLS,  
Mne, George William Frank, 21

OATES,  
Mne, Brian, 20

TOWLE,  
Mne, William Henry, 21

TULL,  
Mne, Arthur Frederick Percival, 22

WALKER,  
Mne, Raymond, 23

## 7 June 1944 – Column 16



WITHINGTON,  
Mne, John Vernon, 19



*Mne Goude*



*Men of A-Troop  
Mne Oates*



*Mne Withington*



### 13 June 1944 – Column 54

KAGERER-STEIN,  
Sgt, Eugen, 30, Served as FULLER, Eugene



### 14 June 1944 – Column 58

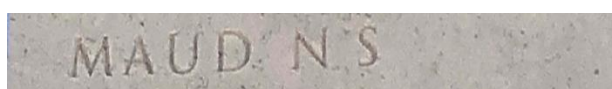
ROBERTSON,  
Cpl, George, 28



TATTON,  
Mne, Norman Yates,  
DoB believed to be 22 August 1923



WALKER,  
Mne, James Clough, 23



### 15 June 1944 – Column 63

MAUD,  
Mne, Norman Smith,  
DoB believed to be 12 September 1921



### 16 June 1944 – Column 66

TULLETT,  
Mne, Dennis Archibald Ronald  
DoB believed to be 4 April 1922



### 18 June 1944 – Column 72

DAVIES,  
Mne, William Neville,  
DoB believed to be 11 June 1916



### 28 June 1944 – Column 106

WHITTAKER,  
Lt, Glyn Bateman, 20



*Cpl Robertson  
Y-Troop*



*Mne Tatton  
Y-Troop*

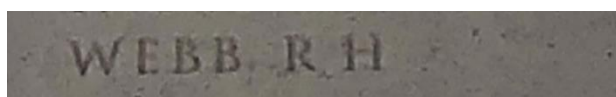


*Mne Tullett  
B-Troop*



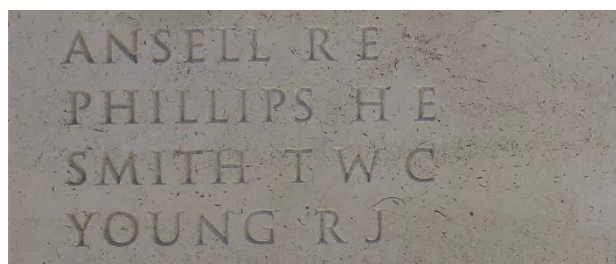
*Lt Whittaker*





**1 July 1944 – Column 122**

WEBB,  
Mne, Ronald Henry, 19



**17 July 1944 – Column 182**

ANSELL,  
Mne, Robert Edwin, 19  
  
SMITH,  
Mne, Thomas William Currie, 22  
  
YOUNG  
LCpl, Robert James, 28



**23 July 1944 – Column 213**

CABLE,  
Mne, Albert Victor, 21



**27 July 1944 – Column 221**

ROWLINSON,  
Mne, Clifford, 20



**11 August 1944 – Column 276**

ARENSTEIN,  
LCpl, Hans, 22, Served as ANDREWS,  
Harry. Date of death incorrect, CWGC &  
headstone state 10 August.



**11 August 1944 – Column 279**

BORNE,  
Lt, Frederick, 20



**20 August 1944 – Column 312**

MORLEY,  
Csgt, Colin Noel, DoB believed to be 25  
December 1920.



**20 August 1944 – Column 314**

KEMP, Mne, John, 21



**25 August 1944 – Column 322**

REYNOLDS,  
Mne, Bartholomew Charles Vice  
Willoughby, 29



*Mne Cable  
X-Troop*



*Mne Rowlinson  
Q-Troop*



*Lt Borne*



*Allen Withington lays our Association wreath at the Normandy Memorial. His uncle, John Vernon Withington, was killed at Port-en-Bessin on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June. Sadly, JV's name is on column 16, not with his fellow marines from A-Troop 47 Cdo, who are all listed on column 15.*

At the Western side of the site is the French Memorial to the estimated 20,000 French civilians who lost their lives in the Normandy Campaign as a result of the bombing and fighting.

The French Memorial quotes General Charles De Gaulle's broadcast of the 6<sup>th</sup> of June: "It is the battle of France and it is France's battle". The inscription beneath reads: "This Memorial stands in solemn remembrance of the many thousands of French citizens who lost their lives on D-Day in the Battle of Normandy and during the Liberation of France.

For the civilian population the joy of liberation was often accompanied by the anguish of

loved ones lost or homes destroyed. They bore their suffering with fortitude.

French men and women served within Allied Units, the Free French Forces and in the French Resistance. All contributed to the Liberation of their country. We will not forget them".

There are few places to sit and rest at the Normandy Memorial, with the exception of the stone benches at the French Memorial. From there you can look out towards the sea and Gold Beach, and to the west the remains of the Mulberry Harbour at Arromanches are clearly visible. A fitting place to rest and contemplate all those young lives that were lost.



*The French Memorial to the estimated 20,000 French Civilian casualties of the Battle of Normandy*



news > Normandy > The Renaissance Bessin > society

## Port-en-Bessin. A bench engraved in memory of the 47 Royal Marine Commando

On Wednesday, March 17, a bench funded by the 47 Royal Marine Commando Association was unveiled in Port-en-Bessin, in the presence of Alexander Wilson, son of Lieutenant Gordon Wilson.



*Funded by the 47 Royal Marine Commando Association, the bench was engraved by the Bournemouth stonemason Sean Stevenson and transported gracefully by Brittany Ferries (©The Renaissance)*

**By Le Bessin Editorial,** Published April 15, 21.

The bench marked a critical location for the liberation of Port-en-Bessin by the men of the 47 Royal Marine Commando on 7 June 1944. At 5pm, the commando's A-Troop sneaked onto the west cliff to storm the bunker at the top of what is now the Garden of Remembrance. The bunker consisted of a 75mm cannon under the casement and several machine-gun nests. The men reached halfway up, when two anti-aircraft vessels, undetected by reconnaissance, entered the fore port. Their quadruple 20mm guns strafe the cliff. Within minutes 11 men are killed and 14 others injured.



This is where George Baxter, the best friend of Mark Packer (and the last veteran of A-Troop still with us), is killed. From this moment on, the 47 RM Commando was split into isolated groups, running out of ammunition and supplies. A critical situation that was reversed the following night when men led by Captain Cousins took the bunker of Mount Castel, east of the harbour, at the cost of his own life.

The bench was unveiled on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021, in the presence of Christophe Van Roye, Mayor of Port-en-Bessin, and Alexander Wilson, son of Lieutenant Gordon Wilson of 47 Royal Marine Commando. As the head of two sections of A-Troop, Lieutenant Wilson was at the heart of the cliff tragedy. He then took part in the assault on the east cliff, after joining Captain Cousins along with some of the survivors of A-Troop.



*Christophe Van Roye, Mayor of Port-en-Bessin (left) and Alex Wilson (right) among those attending the unveiling of the bench.*

“We just had a small installation ceremony because we wanted to send a picture to Mark Packer as soon as possible because he wanted the memorial to the men so much”. A message of affection while waiting for an inauguration in the presence of all the members and friends of the 47 Royal Marine Commando Association, who hope to return as soon as possible.

*Thanks to La Renaissance for this article & photograph.*

Special thanks to Geof Haywood for everything he did in getting the bench across to France despite the travel restrictions and quarantine requirements. Geof, with his network of connections, found a perfect solution which he explained to Andrew Diprose, the Editor of Dorset Biz News. “I initially contacted Malcolm Bradshaw, Senior Harbour Controller for Poole Harbour Commissioners and a former Royal Marine, who put me in touch with Martin Hann, Assistant Duty Operations Manager, Brittany Ferries. Martin immediately offered to transport the bench free of charge which was amazing. They’ve also looked after all the customs arrangements. Once in Cherbourg it will be picked up by the mayor’s team from Port-en-Bessin ready for installation”. (Ed. And that is exactly what happened. Thanks again Geof).



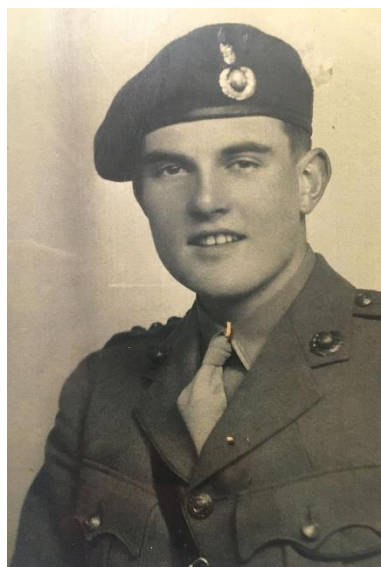
*The view from the bench overlooking the harbour of Port-en-Bessin.*

## Moment that brought D-Day veterans to tears

Paddy O'Connell (as told to the Sunday Times 6<sup>th</sup> June 2021)

"D-Day veterans are grounded today, just as their wish is finally granted for a single British memorial on Gold Beach. When the unveiling is beamed back to the UK, no veterans' boots will be on the ground in France. Covid-19 has done what Hitler could not.

After 77 years, the new Normandy Memorial at Ver-sur-Mer will record the names of the 22,442 servicemen and women under British command who died on June 6, and in the subsequent Battle of Normandy. I've been travelling with veterans and their friends and families for 20 years. In all that time I've always wanted to share the words that brought many of them to tears, uttered by a German man. I do that here for the first time.



*Captain Guy O'Connell landed on Gold Beach*

Jurgen Baas and I have travelled with the same small group of veterans to one small French fishing town: Port-en-Bessin, the dividing line between the American and British beaches in 1944.

We are sons of men on opposite sides. His father was Theodor Baas of the Panzer Lehr Division and was one of those occupying France. Mine was a Royal Marine commando who set sail from Southampton and landed on Gold Beach. Captain Guy O'Connell died when I was a boy and, researching his life, like many others I was adopted by the 47 Royal Marine Commando Association, set up by his comrades. And guess what? So was Jürgen — a retired Nato-era flight lieutenant with the German air force.

Our British men wanted their story told over the years and redoubled their efforts with fabulous French, Dutch and Belgian friends — and Jurgen. I can't remember where we are in the culture war, but I need to tell you that these EU neighbours and

the people of Port-en-Bessin have long done all they can to gladden the hearts and honour the memories of their British liberators.

But this year — like last, and unlike in 1944 — no international travellers are allowed. So, nine French friends and Alex Wilson, another son of a 47 Royal Marine commando, who lives there now, will retrace the commandos' twelve-mile march behind enemy lines to spring an attack on the port from the rear. Today, the flagpoles in the town will carry pictures of the individual servicemen, as they were back then.

For years, hundreds of us have gathered there in June, with our veterans led by Chuck Harris — shot twice in his life, once by the Germans and once by criminals in London, where he became a post-war policeman. With the first injury, he was reaching for his pipe when struck by shrapnel. "I always told you smoking was bad for you, laddie," opined the medical officer, the late John Forfar, who went on to become a distinguished Scottish paediatrician.

Tomorrow, June the 7<sup>th</sup>, on the day the town was liberated, the mayor will lay a wreath at the memorials. A few years ago, we were there in the bar on the harbour wall named after the unit, when the microphone was passed around. The veterans spoke of fallen friends, glad that their comrades' names were being remembered. Family members spoke of their pride. But one man brought us all to silence. It was Jürgen. His father had given him a letter to deliver to our veterans, to explain that he still shuddered at the horror of it all and wanted them to know that since he could not travel, he had sent his son to wish them well instead.

Jürgen looked up at our D-Day veterans. The French bar staff watched with us as he finished his story with these words: "You defeated my father, but you liberated me" ".



## D-Day + 77 Years: the 2021 Commemorations at Port-en-Bessin

Alexander Wilson (son of Lt G.C. Wilson, A Troop)

As always, the weather in Normandy was just perfect, both on the 6<sup>th</sup>, for the 'In the Footsteps of 47' yomp and again on the 7<sup>th</sup> for the official ceremonies. And I am happy to report that both days went well, as some of you may have seen from different photos and press cuttings.

Sadly, of course, this year's events mirrored those of last year in that Covid dictated a low-key tone to the whole affair. No veterans, no family and friends, and far fewer ordinary folk were able to make it to the Normandy coast to create that wonderful buzz of 'normal' years. But making the best of the situation, like last year, everyone involved showed their abiding commitment to honouring the men of 47 and the key role they played here, and the commemorations went ahead with due respect and ceremony. Our special thanks must go out to the new Mayor of Port-en-Bessin and his whole team, but also to the Mayors' of Huppain, Asnelles, Tracy and Commes. Speaking of Commes, the Mayor, M. Poret, presided over a ceremony at the Escures monument on June 5<sup>th</sup>. This was new to the programme and was organised by M. Cairon, whose family sheltered Chuck Harris on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 1944. I laid a wreath on behalf of the Association.

This year, the Yomp consisted of a Covid quota of ten brave souls: myself and American David; a few local guides; Laurence from the Mairie de Tracy and a posse of the Pitel family, assembled at Asnelles where we received the usual warm welcome from the Mayor, M. Scribe and his team. The Roll of Honour of those who died there was read out, wreaths were laid, and a moving silence was observed to the background sound of waves and seagulls. The mayor then accompanied us to the memorial to Kell Ryan for an informal ceremony and wreath-laying.



*M. Cattelain, Mayor of Tracy & Alex Wilson lay wreaths at La Rosière, (Photo: Ouest France)*

The walkers continued cross-country and made impressive time to the Château de Tracy, where François de Bougoing shared historical detail and reminisced warmly about veterans who have visited through the years, but then invited us to help him move surely the biggest table ever made (where were those commandos when you needed them?). Finally, we made it down the road to La Rosière.

M. Cattelain, Mayor of Tracy and, I believe, a new member of our Association, presided over a short ceremony in front of the monument. The new owners of the hotel were also present, showing their eagerness to keep traditions alive; and the whole scene was embellished by the unrolled banners of the photos of the men of 47.

Our next stop was at Longues Abbey, where Jérôme and Isabelle d'Anglejan were as wonderfully welcoming as ever. And it was here that we were joined by Chris Clough, who as former Naval Attaché had attended the official ceremonies in the past but who now, in a private capacity, simply wanted to do the walk.

Reaching the top of Point 72 and taking in its amazing view on the objective, Port-en-Bessin, is always a yomp highlight. It also offers the chance for a quick breather and final historical reminder before hitting the town and enjoying a well-earned drink, this year of course at the Bar de la Criée; thanks again to the Pitel family.





*Taking a breather & admiring the view from Point 72.*

The yomp has become a tradition: it's a beautiful walk, it's fun, and it brings the 47 Cdo D-Day story to life. And while by necessity it was on a small scale again this year, everyone along the way did their part to keep the tradition alive and ready to bounce back bigger and better as soon as events allow. Let's rendez-vous in 2022!

For the official ceremonies on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June, M. Van Roye, Mayor of Port-en-Bessin, and Mme Autin, Mayoress of Huppain, were joined by the local MP, M. Bouyx, and representatives of the French authorities. Captain Mark Southorn, Naval Attaché at the British Embassy in Paris, was present throughout, with his keen interest in 47, his diplomacy and his excellent French. Finally, and in the absence of worthier representatives, I had the honour of representing the Association and laying wreaths on our behalf.

After paying homage to local French victims at the war memorials of Huppain and Port-en-Bessin, we moved on to the main monument on the Western Feature. M. Van Roye spoke movingly, first in French and then more surprisingly in English; he is just so keen to continue the town's strong links with the veterans. Captain Southorn spoke eloquently of the legacy of the men of 47 before the Roll of Honour of all those who died at the beach and during the liberation of Port-en-Bessin was read out. Following the exhortation, wreaths were laid, a minute's silence respected, and the national anthems rang out.

This familiar but always powerful main ceremony was enhanced by the photo-banners again, along with the 47 RMC flag, deftly wielded by Stéphane Pitel. It is also worth noting that while all Covid rules were scrupulously observed, there was an encouragingly substantial group of onlookers who had clearly decided to come along anyway and take up position on the 6<sup>th</sup> green of the golf course.

M. Van Roye went into more historical detail at the Captain Cousins monument, describing the decisive actions on the Eastern feature at nightfall on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1944. Then, following the final wreath-laying on the harbour-front, a small reception was held at the Town Hall. This was the occasion for me to read a message from John Prentis that as ever hit all the right notes. It was a word of thanks, of regret at enforced absence, of remembrance, and of much appreciated advice from Chuck. And the gist of Chuck's advice to the new Mayor is easily summed up: please do not change anything, because Port-en-Bessin is already perfect as it is. So ended the 2021 commemorations in the Port. Another Covid-affected year with everybody's most earnest hope and desire being that of seeing each other in person and being able to commemorate together next year





*Monsieur Van Roye, Mayor of Port-en-Bessin, prepares to speak at the Western Feature.*



*Banners showing the photographs of the men of 47 at the Western Feature.*





*M. Van Roye at the Captain Cousins memorial, describing the decisive actions at nightfall on June 7th, 1944.*



*The final wreath laying at Place Seurat (previously named Place Gaudin).*



## Absent Friends

**Charles Ernest Wheeler, CH/X106990, S-Troop, 11 April 2021, age 98**



*Ernie was just 17 when he joined the Marines. In 2016 he was awarded the Legion d'Honneur*

Charles Ernest "Ernie" Wheeler passed away on Sunday the 11<sup>th</sup> of April. He served in 47 RM Commando S-Troop (Heavy Weapons), and had landed on Gold Beach, on D-Day, then making the 12 mile "Yomp" to attack and Liberate Port-en-Bessin on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June. He remained with 47 as they moved up through France and took part in the landing on Walcheren on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 1944. In the bitterly cold winter of January '45 he took part in the battles along the River Maas as the Unit advanced into Germany.

After the war Ernie returned to Northamptonshire where he was born, and he remained there for the rest of his life. He spent time as a carpenter and for 40 years worked for All Souls College in Oxford where he worked as a handyman.

Ernie kept up the family tradition of canary and finch breeding alongside his brother Colin, something they did all of their lives. Each year buyers would come from overseas just for one of his very fine Norwich Canaries. Ernie was also a keen flower and vegetable gardener. He was a member of his local horticultural society for over 50 years and was well known for his giant specimen vegetables. Each year at the annual show he would win cup after cup. His onions were so good that there was a pretty penny to be had selling his onion seeds.

Ernie was married for 71 years and leaves behind his wife Evelyn who is 93. Evelyn was in the Land Army and loves to tell stories of her time on the farm. [From RMA News from the Corps Family 30/04/21](#)

Our Chairman, John Prentis, asked me to attend the funeral of Ernie Wheeler, the last surviving member of S-Troop; it was a great honour.

Ernie was laid to rest under the same 47 standard that he saw when he'd travelled to the Union Jack Club some years ago to witness it being transferred from Les Pike to our current standard bearer, Lou Sartorel. A new 47 flag, to the same design by Ted Battley, with its campaign highlights, had been delivered to the church and was spread across the altar rail.

Hopefully Ernie's will be the last veteran funeral held under social distancing rules. Thus, there were 30 or so inside the ancient church and the same number of villagers gathered outside in the drizzle and sunlight. After a lifetime spent as a carpenter after the war, Ernie had been a big supporter of his local village: Weedon Lois, winning prizes for his amazing flowers and onions.

During eulogies at the funeral service, it was plain that he'd remained totally committed to telling the tale of his wartime service, at the same time as moving to peaceful pursuits. People travelled from all over the world to buy his home-bred canaries. Ernie was devoted to his

younger brother who passed away just two months ago, and all agreed that this had sent him into a decline.

The music at the service consisted simply of Jerusalem and Vera Lynn with "We'll Meet Again." As this played, he was carried out to his final resting place, and the sun shone brightly on the porch. Standards dipped as his coffin was interred overlooking the valley. Just yards away is the gravestone of Edith Sitwell, the English poet and eccentric. One of her better-known poems was dedicated to the civilians who'd suffered in the Blitz. She'd also been a lifelong confidante of Siegfried Sassoon MC, wounded three times in the First World War - known as poet and critic of the losses at war's close.

Ernie was interred and his coffin was lowered in the corner of this very English churchyard. His family expressed their eternal gratitude for the 47 and RM efforts, saying "he'd have loved his own funeral." [Ernie's funeral, as told by Paddy O'Connell.](#)



*The 47 Standard hangs on the altar rail of the church of St Mary & St Peter, Weedon Lois.*

The Northampton Chronicle & Echo interviewed Ernie in 2019 ahead of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day. He described the landing on Gold Beach, armed with a 21lb Bren light machine gun in his own words:

"I remember it being dark. It was very early morning at least. All you could think about was if you were going to land alright. We didn't know what to expect. We hadn't been told what was happening until only a few days before. They never told you much until you were just about to do it. We had to take the port as soon as possible. The Allies had a pipeline halfway under the channel so they could supply their tanks with petrol during the campaign. But they couldn't finish it without taking Port-en-Bessin.

You wouldn't believe how happy the French civilians were to see us. They were chuffed to bits. I still remember talking to them."

[Ville de Port en Bessin Facebook page](#): The people of Port en Bessin-Huppain, remember that on June 7, 1944, the men of the 47 Royal Marine Commando liberated their town after intense fighting. Thanks to the heroic act of these marines, Port en Bessin-Huppain would become, until the liberation of Cherbourg, the oil terminal of the Landing. On June 7, 2021, the town of Port en Bessin-Huppain held ceremonies to perpetuate the memory of all those who, from different backgrounds, fought, and sometimes died, in the name of freedom.



## From the Chairman

Dear Veterans and friends, I hope you've enjoyed this Normandy Memorial edition of Despatch. For me it certainly brings it all home when you see their names carved in stone. These young men would have been in their prime, they would have been exceptional and well-trained Commandos. They would have shared a joke, had a drink together, toasted friends and family with each other, and most likely toasted victory as well. The men on the memorial never saw that victory, but without them the Victory in Europe would not have been possible. We remember those men in our prayers and services, and every time we raise a glass to 47. I like to think we are sharing a drink with them too. We will remember them.

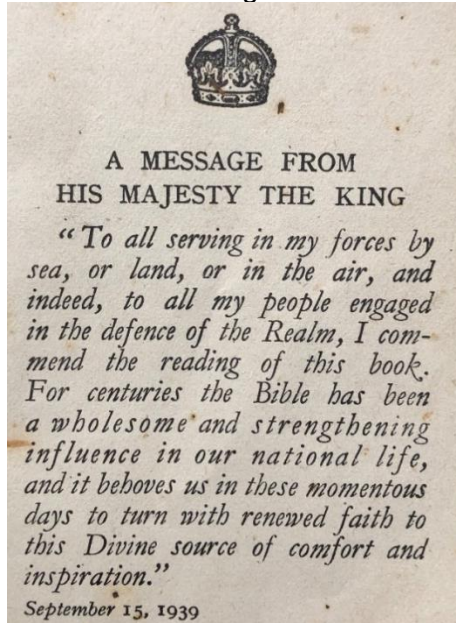
John Prentis, Grandson of Chuck Harris.

## From the Editor



When I saw this cartoon of Red and Rover (Red's the young man and Rover is his dog), I thought it summed up everything we've all felt this year about not being able to attend the commemorations in Normandy.

I'd like to thank Bob Perry for his inspiration for the idea of taking the photographs of the names of the men of 47 the British Normandy Memorial and for his work in identifying the columns and cross checking with the records of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.



Over dinner one evening in France, I got chatting to an American lady on the next table. They say you should never talk about religion or politics, advice which I've always studiously ignored. She asked what I was doing in France, and I explained about the Normandy Memorial and taking the photographs of the names. As the conversation rolled on, I asked her what newspaper she read. She answered that she didn't read a newspaper but read the Bible every day. I explained to her that various organisations and bible societies had provided all Allied troops with a pocket Bible of the New Testament (or the equivalent for different faiths). The forward to the American version was by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the British was by King George VI. When I was stood in front of the Normandy Memorial, looking at the names of those young men that had died on D-Day, my mind went back to the conversation with

the American lady. That was when it occurred to me that the pocket Bible, with its letter from the King, was probably the last book that those young men had read.

**Next Issue:** January 2022. Articles gratefully received by end-November please.

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