

# 47 ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

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## DESPATCH ISSUE 48

### August 2023

## Welcome from the Chairman

Dear friends and members of 47 Royal Marine Commando Association, hello and welcome to this addition of Despatch. This year has been another busy year for us in the Association, with the MFM in March and Normandy in June. The Mountbatton Festival was well attended, it was great to see so many members again enjoying another superb performance by the Massed Bands of His Majesty's Royal Marines.

Port-en-Bessin was another cracker, with huge attendance from the RMA, serving personnel from 47 Raiding Group RM, Commando Training Centre and members of the Association. We were made most welcome once again by our French friends in town and by the Mayor's Office during our stay.

Ceremonies will take place in Fecamp on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September, and we will have our usual visit to Walcheren in November.

Thank you to everybody who has helped to keep the Association going during the year, welcome to Bob Perry who has joined the committee, and I hope to see you all soon.

Best wishes to you all, John.

## 47 RM Merchandise

47 Polo shirts, T-shirts or shirts are available with the 47 embroidered logo as shown. There are also warm gear jackets and baseball caps available as well.



Anyone interested in purchasing any of the above please contact Geof Haywood at [geofandjillh@btinternet.com](mailto:geofandjillh@btinternet.com)

## Bill Silvester Memorial

On Saturday 3rd June I attended the Memorial Service on behalf of 47 RMCA. I was accompanied by my son in law, and former RM Richard Berogna. We also met up with Eric Corlett who's father was a 47 Veteran as was my father.

The service was very well attended by people of all ages, 10 RM Cadets, 7 Standards, the Mayor of Portsmouth, many Veterans from the Royal Navy & Royal Marines.

The service was conducted by a Naval Chaplin which lasted 35 minutes. The Last Post was sounded and received with silence.

Bill was a remarkable man, his Eulogy was read for all to hear and be amazed at.



Bill joined the Navy at 14 years old, he lived in Lulworth, Dorset, and was fascinated by the Navy. He joined HMS Ganges at 15. In 1939 he went to HMS Devonport for 3 months, and was then sent to the Isle of Man for 12 months. In 1940 he was sent to Portsmouth, there he trained at the Royal Navy Signals School before his first operational posting to HMS. Berwick, he then served 2 years on Artic Convoys.





He then went on to be a communications specialist, back in Portsmouth he was now in Khaki and sent to Lowestoft to join an American Landing Ship.

Bill landed in Courselles-sur-Mer on D Day at [15.00](#), but told they were not on the list, they were told next day they should be in Port- en- Bessin, it took over 2 days to walk there. They got there on 9th June absolutely exhausted. The village had been secured by 47 Commando after a hard fought battle.

Bills story is very long, but you can read it all on line. He went on to serve in many other places, and after living in France for 18 years returned to Portsmouth. With thanks to SSAFA he was looked after very well to the end of his days earlier this year.

I was very proud to be asked to represent 47 RMCA at this service.

Many thanks,

Nigel Dobson,  
Son of Victor H McGreevy. 47 Veteran.



Thank you, Nigel and Eric for attending Bill's memorial service on behalf of the Association.

# Poetry to our Late Queen

Farewell to a Beautiful Lady

The end of an era has sadly arrived  
Our Queen has slipped away  
Called by the Lord whom she knew so well  
Knew well and loved everyday  
She's left a gaping hole in our lives  
A hole that can never be filled  
But given time the scars will heal  
That today seem so raw and unreal

She was our Queen and we loved her  
Her passing is so hard to bare  
So quick so sudden it came as a shock  
Leaving emptiness pain and despair  
All we can do is say our goodbyes  
Farewell to a beautiful Queen  
We've witnessed a lady so special so kind  
But the bubble has burst like a dream

She's gone to be with her wonderful Prince  
Her journey already begun  
The baton passed so quickly and smoothly  
Onto Charles the Queen's eldest son  
So farewell to a beautiful lady  
Farewell with tears in our eyes  
King Charles the third is waiting to greet us  
Beneath heavens all seeing skies

The end of an era has sadly arrived  
Our Queen has no skipped away  
Called by the Lord whom she knew so well  
To rest in heaven each day

Poem by David K Wilson

Farewell Ma'am  
(Poem by David K Wilson)

The saddest day has come and gone  
Our Queen now laid to rest  
In a place she knew and loved  
Now our memories face the test

Tears shed by one and all  
With barely one dry eye  
Farewell Ma'am we'll meet again  
'Neath God's unending sky

Sleep well my Queen in restful peace  
Sleep well until the dawn  
Jesus called you unto him  
Your soul to be reborn

## **The corps Family Together in Port-en-Bessin**

**By Bob Perry**

Prior to D-Day on 6 June 1944, 47 RM Cdo (420 men) was untried in battle but had been chosen to undertake, virtually on its own, the formidable task of ensuring that the British and Allied armies of over 75,000 men had the supplies of petrol without which they could not operate. The Commando would have to capture Port-en-Bessin, a small Normandy fishing port which would be the vital initial petrol supply point. The Commando suffered heavy losses at the landing on Gold Beach, had to undertake a 12-mile march through enemy held territory and then attack the formidable concrete bunkers, machine gun positions and barbed wire protected trenches and defences of the port sited high on 200ft headlands protecting the harbour. In spite of fierce fighting and a number of serious setbacks the three-day battle was crowned with success.

As an Association we realise how extremely fortunate we are to be supported so well by the Corps Family and our staunch supporters from across Europe at our commemorations each year. This year their support was particularly appreciated and needed as for the first time we were unable to muster on parade any 47 RM Cdo veterans. This sad inevitable march of time was somewhat softened by the attendance of Master Mariner Captain Jim Forbes RFA who in 1944 was a 16-year old apprentice on the MV Empire Russell which was the first ship to discharge aviation and motor fuel at the recently liberated

port. We were also delighted to host Christine Hagan, widow of veteran Pat Hagan who together for many years were avid supporters of our commemorations in Port-en-Bessin.

This year our programme was as busy as ever. 'In the Footsteps of 47 Royal Marine Commando' is now a well established annual commemorative walk on 6 June that retraces the 12-mile route taken by the Commando from Gold Beach to Port-en-Bessin. Serving and former Royal Marines, many British and French friends and families walk the route at a comfortable pace, hearing the story of 47 RM Cdo's mission and actions at specific points along the route. A huge well done to Ken Cowdery and Alex Wilson for their hard work in organising such a successful event.

The liberation of Port-en-Bessin is commemorated on 7 June. The first ceremony was at the 47 RM Cdo Memorial Garden on the Western Feature overlooking the harbour. The service of remembrance was led by RMA Chaplain Monty Montague with Bugler Oliver Poole sounding the 'Last Post' and 'Reveille'. The large gathering including Colonel Chris Haw MC and WO1(RSM) Billy Meldrum RM (Comdt and RSM CTCRM), Colonel Rich Maltby and WO1(RSM) Matt Hill MBE RM (CO and RSM 47 Cdo Raiding Gp RM), Captain Philip Wills RN (Naval Attaché Paris), Jonathon Ball OBE (Chief Executive RMA - The Royal Marines Charity), the RMA Riders Branch a strong contingent of other RMA members expertly marshalled by Phil Gilby MBE and Richie Puttock then transferred to the Captain Cousins Memorial on the Eastern Feature for a similar service. Terence Cousins is recognised as playing the decisive role in the battle of Port-en-Bessin; he was killed as he led his troop in the final assault against a heavily defended German position, which resulted in the surrender of the enemy and the capture of the port. A further ceremony followed at the bunker on the harbour front and an opportunity to also pay tribute to the crews of the French cruisers Montcalm and Georges Leygues, which supported the Allied Landings at Omaha beach. The post ceremonies reception and events were further opportunities to strengthen the warm friendship that has grown between the Association, the veterans' families and friends and the local community.

The following day our visit to Bayeux War Cemetery, the final resting place for forty-two of the 47 RM Cdo fallen, was appropriately marked by the 'Last Post' and wreath laying. This was followed by a memorable few hours wandering around the impressive British Normandy Memorial at Ver-sur-Mer, finding the names of all sixty-four men serving with 47 RM Cdo who perished in that theatre of operations. Our itinerary was rounded off with visits to the newly refurbished D-Day Museum at Arromanches and to La Deliverance (Douvres)

War Cemetery to visit the graves of Mne Cable and Mne Rowlinson. Whilst at the cemetery Association member Mark Smith was for the first time able to visit the grave of his Great Uncle, Private Albert Plank who served with the Royal Berkshire Regiment. Albert was killed in August 44 when the vehicle he was travelling in ran over a mine. Many families experienced heartbreak with the sudden loss of a loved one on active service but the Plank family shed more tears than most; just ten weeks later Albert Plank's younger brother, Harold was killed in the dunes at Dishoek, Walcheren, serving as Company Sergeant Major of A Troop 47 RM Cdo.

Our end of visit traditional Association dinner in our affiliated Bar de la Criée the usual enjoyable and raucous affair that lasted well into the night. It was an opportunity to thank all those who continue to support our Association and proof that the Corps Family remains as strong and supportive as ever. One of the memorable highlights of the evening was the presentation of a RMA President's Commendation to our very own Geof Haywood who celebrated his 80th birthday on the night! Geof not only served a full career in the Corps with the LC specialisation but was also especially honoured for his dedication, loyalty and tireless support to 47 RM Cdo Association and our veterans, RMA Poole & District Branch, raising funds and helping improve the lives of so many people in the community.

So ended another extremely successful visit to Normandy that would not have been possible without the help of so many people: In particular a special thanks to Association members Anne-Marie Nicholls (our excellent Secretary), Geof Haywood (Master of Ceremonies), Lou Sartorel (standard bearer) and finally to our Chairman, John Prentis, for skilfully pulling all the visit threads together. We hope that everyone not only enjoyed their visit to Port-en-Bessin but also learned much about the history of 47 RM Cdo in 1944. The Unit's high achievement was aptly summed up by British Army General Sir Brian Horrocks KCB KBE DSO MC, Commander XXX Corps during the Normandy campaign: 'It is doubtful whether in their long, distinguished history the Royal Marines have ever achieved anything finer.'

Thank you Bob for a great write up on this year's visit to Normandy.



# **Port-en-Bessin - Ex NORMANDY MARAUDER 23**

**5 - 9 Jun 23**

**By Sgt Jinks CTCRM**

Tuesday 6th Jun 2023 marks the 79th anniversary of the D-Day Landings in Normandy, France. No. 47 (Royal Marine) Commando played a key role in securing the town of Port-en-Bessin as part of Operation AUBREY during the D-Day landings in 1944. In recognition of their forebearers exploits 31 ranks from 47 CDO (RG) RM plus 17 ranks from CTCRM travelled to Port-en-Bessin and linked up with the 47 CDO RM Association to take part in commemorative events to mark the anniversary. On completion of the official commemorations the unit then conducted a battlefield tour.

47 CDO (RG) RM has played a leading role in supporting this event having established close ties with the 47 CDO RM Association, the RN/RM Charity and other affiliated veteran groups. This year's commemorations laid the groundwork for what is expected to be a larger RM Corp presence for the 80th anniversary of the D-Day Landings in June 2024.

The week started with an early morning journey from CTCRM to Portsmouth Docks. Having had squared away all our admin in good time days prior to travelling, all we had to rely on was that the Commandant and RSM would arrive on time and not miss the ferry crossing.

Having all successfully loaded onto the ferry, we were then able to liaise with our 47 CDO counterparts. After a nearly 6 hours crossing, we finally arrived in Caen to then continue by vehicle to a football field in Port-en-Bessin which would be our campsite for the next 5 days. Once the lads had remembered how to set up 12x12 and 24x18 tents we finally had tent city fully established.



The first event of the week was to be the remembrance 'walking in the footsteps' of the Marines of 47 CDO. When the men had reached the shores Gold beach on the morning of 6<sup>th</sup> June, those who had survived, were eventually able to form up as many men, weapons and equipment as possible to then carry out their mission of defeating the Germans at Port-en-Bessin which was known to be a well defended, strategic strong hold.

After a very respectful parade on Gold beach and finished off with a lovely visit from around 30 local school kids all showing their respect and gratitude, ranks from 47 CDO, CTCRM, RMA and associated guests set off in land to start what was to be 15 miles of a mix of urban and rural landscapes. The weather was on our side for the 'yomp' and proved to be the perfect conditions for what was a very interesting and eerie walk. With an abundance of facts and figures from attached battlefield tour experts and brilliantly played out interpretations of OC's issuing orders by both of our Units CO's, the yomp also proved to be very enjoyable with very high spirits from all who participated. The yomp finished in Port-en-Bessin with us arriving from the South just as the men of 47 CDO did. This for myself was the best perspective of the entire yomp as this showed the appreciation of the task the men had on that famous day enormously. To appreciate the task of needing to take the West and Eastern features which were held with machine gun positions, was an awe-inspiring envisagement. Spirits stayed very high when after we were drummed into the town, we were greeted with many beers on tap waiting for us at the 47 CDO bar.

There were a few sore heads and blokes green around the gills on the Wednesday morning. After a shower and hearty breakfast which was brilliantly laid on by chefs from CTCRM, all the men were rigged up in lovats and good to go for the day's commemorations. After what were well attended ceremonies on both the West and Eastern features, we were invited into the town hall to be greeted by various dignitaries including the town Mayor. After a generous filling of drinks and canapes the men were let loose to enjoy a well-deserved evening in the bars of Port-en-Bessin.



The plan for Thursday which was to be our last full day in France was to consist of making it around as many battlefield tour sites as we could. Again, the day got off to an early start with many ugly sights to see showing that the lads had definitely made the most of the generosity of the Port-en-Bessin residents. For those of us that had not been to see these locations before, many of us were taken aback by the sheer scale of the American cemetery. The rest of the day then consisted of racing around as many locations as possible including time spent at Sword beach as well as the heavily bombarded defensive stronghold at La Pointe du Hoc. Finishing off with a visit to the German cemetery rounded off what was a hugely informative day.

For the last evening, in standard Bootneck fashion, all the guys from 47 CDO and CTCRM made the effort to get into town once more. It was important to show appreciation to the residents of Port-en-Bessin for being so welcoming, but also a big thank you to the 47 CDO bar for keeping the guys seriously well hydrated through-out the entire week.



The view from above of The American Cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer





The view from above of La Cambe German War Cemetery



A view from the ground of La Cambe German War Cemetery

Thank you Jinxy for your article and great drone photos of the Normandy trip.



## Mark visits his Great Uncle's grave

47 R.M.C.V.A. Visit to Port en Bessin 5<sup>th</sup> June to 9<sup>th</sup> June 2023

After what seemed a very long day getting to Ouistreham I was really looking forward to visiting all the new places and seeing first hand what 47 must have had to go through before they finally managed to take control of the town.

Having looked at the itinerary there was an added bonus in that we would be visiting the cemetery at Douvres to pay our respects to two 47 men buried there and it just so happened that I knew that Albert Plank, the brother of my Great Uncle Harry Plank, who was Troop Sergeant Major of A troop, was buried there so I would probably be the first in the family that I'm aware of to visit his grave and pay my respects to him.



Above: Company Sergeant Major Harold Plank 47 RMC, who fell aged 26 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1944.

Left: The grave of Albert E Plank at Douvres La Deliverance cemetery.



So, on the first full day we started with a visit to Gold beach at Asnelles, where 47 lost so many, for a very chilly and windy, but moving commemoration ceremony involving local school children.

Then on to Douvres cemetery where, after paying our respects to two 47 men there, I was able to track down my Great Uncle Albert Plank's grave and place a cross by it and his photo.

Albert was with the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Royal Berkshire Regiment who landed at Juno beach. Not that far from Gold beach where 47 landed.

Albert was killed on 18<sup>th</sup> August 1944 when the Jeep he was in ran over a mine. We then travelled to Bayeux for lunch and another ceremony at the British cemetery there.

On day 2 we visited the two memorials to 47 at the eastern and western features upon the cliffs above Port en Bessin where I was lucky enough to hitch a lift in a WW2 Jeep. Not for the faint hearted!

After this we went to the memorial next to the harbour where I was given the honour of laying a wreath on behalf of the Association and then to a reception hosted by the Mayor.

Day 3 started with a visit to the new Mulberry harbour museum at Arromanches which is an amazing audio-visual experience which explains in detail how it was all constructed.

From there we visited the very impressive British Normandy memorial at Ver sur Mere where I was also able to find my Great Uncle Albert's name carved into one of the pillars there which was the perfect end to what was one of the best experiences I've had and a trip I would recommend to anyone.

Mark Smith.

**Thank you, Mark for this Article, a moving reminder of the harshness of war when we remember your Great Grandmother's loss at the death of two sons in August and November 1944.**

## Ken visits Sallenelles

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of June this year, Ken Cowdery attended a ceremony at the 4<sup>th</sup> Special Service Brigade Memorial at Sallenelles.

This Memorial remembers 16 men of 47 Commando killed in the area during June, July and August 1944, two of whom were 'X-Troopers' from 10 Inter Allied Commando.



The Memorial at Sallenelles



The Grave of E.G. Webster

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of June Ken visited the Ryes War Cemetery at Bazenville. In the Cemetery is the grave of E.G. Webster (Nee Weinberger, born in Vienna, Austria).

He was also an 'X-Trooper' of 10 Inter Allied Commando attached to 47. All the 'X-Troopers' were given markings of various regiments on their uniforms and different names to disguise their Jewish heritage in case of capture.

# Geof receives the President's Award



## ROYAL MARINES ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT'S COMMENDATION

### Mr Geof Haywood

Geof Haywood joined the Royal Marines in March 1960, completing training in September 1961. Specialising as a landing craft coxswain, a branch in which he spent his entire career, he went on to serve on all the major amphibious platforms of the era. He was promoted to Corporal in January 1964, Sergeant in October 1967 and undertook Gurkha training duties as a Colour Sergeant at HMS Tamar in Hong Kong in 1979-80. As Warrant Officer Class Two, he served with 1 Raiding Squadron RM from 1980-1 and finally at RM Poole where he remained until his discharge in June 1983 as Company Sergeant Major of Landing Craft Training Wing. In this last role he passed on his experience to the next generation of Royal Marines, many of whom used their skills in the recapture of the Falklands Islands. During the campaign Geof was heavily involved as a visiting officer, supporting the families of the injured and fallen.

On leaving the Royal Marines, Geof joined his local RMA branch, serving on its committee for over 25 years. Elected chairman in 2001, a position he held until ill-health forced him to step down in 2014, he initiated and led several ground-breaking projects including: the organisation and establishment of a new dedicated clubhouse within RM Poole, and the erection of a memorial on Emmets Hill in the Dorset cliffs to all Royal Marines killed in action 1945-1990. A member of the independent 47 Royal Marine Commando Association, Geof has led and facilitated annual pilgrimages to Normandy and the Netherlands. In 2013 Geof created an information board explaining the role of 47 Royal Marine Commando in their liberation of the fishing port of Port-en-Bessin and in 2018 he worked with the city of Fécamp on the creation of Square du 47eme Royal Marine Commando, inaugurated on 9 June 2019 in the company of surviving veterans. Additionally, he worked closely with counterparts in the Netherlands, leading the project to create a new memorial above Dishoek beach on Walcheren Island, in recognition of the sacrifice of the 34 Royal Marines who gave their lives to secure the seaway to Antwerp.

During the years of campaigning in Afghanistan Geof attended every Royal Marines repatriation at Royal Wootton Bassett and organised the Christmas Shoe Box collections for troops in theatre. He remains an active and supportive branch member of both Poole and the Landing Craft branches.

Throughout these diverse activities, he had a positive impact on hundreds of people in the community, raising funds and helping to improve lives for the past 40 years. In a field crowded with selfless volunteers, Geof has set the highest example, consistently going further than others and acting as an exceptional role model.

For his dedication, loyalty and tireless support throughout his career and since retirement, Geof Haywood is awarded a Royal Marines Association President's Commendation.

  
General Gavin Jenkins CBE ADC RM

Congratulations Geof, a most deserved award and It was great to see you presented with this in Normandy.

# Normandy Shoreline

A poem by David K Wilson

He's old and he's weary  
But he still makes the journey  
A long drawn out pilgrimage  
By road rail and sea  
Every spring without fail  
In whatever conditions  
However he's feeling  
It just has to be

Every year on the same day  
He re-joins his old friend  
Mates in the regiment  
Friends long before  
Until on single bullet  
One moment of carelessness  
And his best mate was taken  
Out of the war

As he stand's at the graveside  
He's back in the regiment  
Back on the front line  
Back in the war  
His best mate he's stood there  
Right there beside him  
Two grand old soldiers  
One passes long before



He explains to his old friend  
How life has got harder  
His wife she has gone now  
His kids moved away  
He's feeling quite old  
Life is a struggle  
Yet his mate's still as young  
As he was yesterday

He's glad the suns shinning  
And the trees are in blossom  
That the snowdrops and crocus  
Are in the flower once again  
As he makes his way back  
To the Normandy shoreline  
He asks, what made us think?  
It could never happen again



A picture sent in by Eric Corlett, found amongst his father's papers



# **Your Association needs you!**

(in particular a new editor for Despatch)

**47 Royal Marine Commando Association**



## **Walcheren 2023**

**Details will be coming out very shortly on this year's trip to Walcheren.**

**Anyone interested in going please email your interest to our Secretary, Anne-Marie.**

## **Normandy 2024 (the 80<sup>th</sup>)**

**This is not going to be easy, accommodation is already proving extremely difficult.**

**We will of course be making every effort to attend but the best advice is for everyone to source their own accommodation for their stay.**

**We are aiming to provide a bus on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of June once we know the numbers who are coming. Please, please let Anne-Marie know ASAP if you've sorted your own accommodation and you require a seat on the bus.**

## **Acknowledgments**

Thank you to everyone involved in this edition of Despatch, for your articles, your photos and to David K Wilson for the poetry.

And also, Freya Mooney (Great-Granddaughter of Chuck Harris) for putting this edition together.