

47 Royal Marine Commando Association

(A Specialist Branch of the RMA - The Royal Marines Charity)

Life President:

Admiral the Right Honourable Lord West of Spithead GCB DSC PC

President:

Colonel W R Norcott
Commanding Officer 47 Commando (Raiding Group) Royal Marines

Executive Committee

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Paddy O'Connell, Vice Chairman
Anne-Marie Nicholls, Secretary
Allen Withington, Treasurer
Geof Haywood BEM, Events



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Sandra Tebbutt
Mariel Van Mierlo
Lou Sartorel
Les Pike
Eric Corlett

Co-opted Members

Lisa Roberts, Membership Secretary
Georgi Nicholls - Despatch Editor
Lou Sartorel - Standard Bearer

Despatch No 50 - January 2025

From the Editor

Hi Everyone,

I'm thrilled to introduce myself as the new Despatch editor for the 47 RM Commando Association. This role feels like a huge honour for me, not just because of what the Association represents, but because of my personal connection to it. My grandad served in B Troop during the war, and hearing stories of his time with 47 RM Commando has always been a source of pride and inspiration for me. Those stories shaped the way I see bravery, camaraderie, and the importance of looking out for one another - values I know are at the heart of this Association.

Taking on this role is a way for me to honour his memory and the sacrifices made by so many. It's also a chance to connect with all of you, to celebrate the history, the friendships, and the ongoing legacy of 47 RM Commando. I've always loved the power of storytelling - whether it's sharing family memories or keeping history alive; I hope to make the Despatch a space where those stories can continue to be told.

I'm new to this, so I'll be learning as I go, but I'm excited to dive in. If you have stories, photos, or ideas you'd like to share, I'd love to hear from you. Together, we can make the Despatch something that reflects everything that makes this Association so special.

Thank you for welcoming me into this role - it's a privilege to be part of this journey with you all.

Warm regards,

Georgi Nicholls

From the Chairman

Dear fellow supporters,

I trust that you, your families and friends had a great festive season and matching New Year. In my Christmas message I was pleased to be able to review the momentous commemorations of 2024.



This bumper edition of *Despatch* includes reports from many of those events and also the amazing contributions of unsung individuals who work hard on our behalf to keep the Four-Seven story alive - my heartfelt thanks to all of you!

The committee is exploring ways to better communicate with our most important asset - the membership! The new website is under advanced construction and will be launched shortly. Added to this there is an aspiration for a condensed digital monthly newsletter alerting members to forthcoming events and important information with meaningful links to the new website. Although we have engaged with a commercial web designer, one area where the association continues to struggle is with 'in-house' webmaster support. If you are able to assist or offer advice in this area then please do not hesitate to contact me - we can arrange training if necessary.

Elsewhere we have continued to strengthen our management team and I am delighted to report that Lisa Roberts (grand daughter of Chuck Harris - HQ Troop) and Georgi Nicholls (grand daughter of Nobby Nicholls - B Troop) have agreed to assume the roles of Membership Secretary and *Despatch* Editor respectively. It is heartening that we have quality people who are willing to step forward and assist when so many other veterans associations and organisations struggle to remain viable due to a lack of volunteer support.

And there is more good news on the personnel front: The 47 RM Commando Association is deeply indebted to Admiral Lord Alan West, a former First Sea Lord, and Colonel Will Norcott who is currently Commanding Officer of the modern 47 Commando, for readily accepting our invitations to become Life President and President respectively. We are fortunate in being able to attract such distinguished individuals to these ceremonial appointments and I know you will join me in welcoming them both to the Association - their biographies are included in the following pages.

Although 2025 is likely to be much quieter on the event commemoration side there is still much to look forward to. On the 31st January the Dutch municipality of Waalwijk will commemorate the battle for Kapelsche Veer that ended 80 years ago on that day. At this years Mountbatten Festival of Music we will be hosting Stéphane and Nathalie Pitel who, as owners of 'Bar de la Criée du 47ème', have always made our veterans, families and friends so welcome over many years and allowed us to use their friendly bistro as 'base camp'. Add in our regular gatherings in Port-en-Bessin in June, Fécamp in September and Walcheren at the beginning of November and you will note that the diary is filling up quickly.

I hope you enjoy reading this milestone 50th edition of *Despatch*. It is your magazine so please let the editor or myself know if you have any ideas, thoughts or any snippet-sized articles for publication.

I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible in the year ahead.

*Best wishes,
Bob*

Life President

Admiral the Right Honourable Lord West of Spithead GCB DSC PC

Admiral the Lord West of Spithead was First Sea Lord and Commander in Chief of the Royal Navy from 2002 until 2006. During the Falklands War, as Commanding Officer of HMS Ardent he was the last to leave his stricken ship before it sank. He was subsequently awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his leadership and led the Victory Parade through the City of London. He was a carrier battle group commander for two years and took the twenty-two ship group to the Far East for the Hong Kong withdrawal.

Lord West joined the Royal Navy in 1965 and spent the majority of his career at sea, serving on fourteen different ships, and commanding three of them. He was knighted in the Millennium New Year's Honours List and promoted to Admiral in November 2000, when he assumed the appointment as Commander-in-Chief Fleet, NATO Commander-in-Chief East Atlantic, and NATO Commander Allied Naval Forces North. He led the United Kingdom's maritime response to 9/11 including the invasion of Afghanistan.



In the 2004 New Year's Honours List he was made a Knight Grand Cross of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath.



Admiral Lord West with Mark Packer MM and Chuck Harris at Walcheren 75th

He retired as First Sea Lord in February 2006 becoming Chairman of QinetiQ Defence Advisory Board. From 2007 until 2010, Lord West served as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Government Spokesperson at the Home Office with responsibility for Security, Counter-terrorism and Police and a security advisor to Prime Minister Gordon Brown. He is also Chancellor of Southampton Solent University and a board

member of the Imperial War Museum. In July 2007 he became a member of the House of Lords with the title Admiral the Lord West of Spithead.

Lord West resides in London with his wife, The Lady 'Rosie' West.

President

Colonel Will Norcott Commanding Officer 47 Commando (Raiding Group) Royal Marines

Colonel Norcott joined the Royal Marines in 2002 and was appointed to 40 Commando as a Troop Commander on completion of training. In this role, he deployed to Iraq prior to being assigned to the Directorate of Naval Recruiting, and in early 2005 deployed to Afghanistan. He then specialised as a Javelin Troop Commander and was appointed back to 40 Commando as the Anti-Tank Troop Commander.



In late 2007, Colonel Norcott was again deployed to Afghanistan, where he served as 40 Commando's Liaison Officer to the Battle Group's Estonian Company. On returning to the UK, he was assigned to the Commando Training Centre responsible for the 2009 RM Officer new entry batch.

Promoted to Major in 2010, he was appointed to various demanding staff roles prior to being selected for sub-unit command in late 2012 and joined MAB 7 as OC F Company in the summer of 2013. During his time there, he deployed back to Afghanistan as OC of a Task Force responsible for mentoring an Afghan National Mission Unit, disrupting insurgent safe havens, and closing its mission at the end of the campaign in late 2014.

On completion of sub-unit command in the summer of 2015, Colonel Norcott was appointed to Navy Command HQ, planning UK amphibious deployments. He was selected for promotion to Lieutenant Colonel in the spring of 2016 and attended the United States Marine Corps (USMC) Command and Staff College from the summer of 2016. He was assigned to the USMC 1st Marine Expeditionary Force HQ where he spent two years as the Deputy Force Development and Future Ops Officer.

Colonel Norcott commanded 30 Commando (Information Exploitation) Group RM from August 2020 to July 2022, which included a series of Naval Special Operations. He took command of 47 Commando (Raiding Group) RM in November 2023.

Right: Colonel Norcott with RSM Matt Hill MBE RM carrying a wreath ashore during the Normandy 80th commemorations



In Remembrance...

The following article appeared in the November/December 2024 edition of the *Globe & Laurel* and is reproduced by kind permission of the editor.

The 80th Anniversary of the Liberation of Fecamp

47 RM Commando Association Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the Liberation of Fecamp

by Geoff Haywood BEM

The French town of Fécamp was liberated by 47 RM Commando at midday on 2 September 1944. In celebration the abbey bells, silent since June 1940, tolled ceremoniously and tricolour flags, also forbidden, were hoisted above the town hall.



Association members at the Liberation exhibition

Following four long years of Nazi oppression scenes of joyous jubilation greeted the men of the Commando when they entered the town centre, each one presented with a bottle of liquor produced in the local Palais Bénédictine distillery!

Our group this year included Elizabeth Walton, daughter of Major Dennis Walton MC and Robert Spencer, the son of Captain Paul Spencer DSO and many other family members of our late veterans.

On arrival on 1 September, we were hosted by Pierre Aubry, Deputy Mayor and retired French Army helicopter pilot, at the Maison du Patrimoine. Here, an amazing display of occupation photos of the town and of 47 RM Commando were on display

In other areas were items from the French Resistance and in the background a specially commissioned video played including an interview with one of our late veterans, Ken Parker, remembering his arrival and numerous visits since 1944, each time being feted like a returning king!

It was then on to the Pêcheries Museum where the history of the town's fishing fleet, the occupation and general history can be seen. During the day on an outdoor stage was dancing and entertainment plus a display of military vehicles along the quay. In the evening, we all met up for a social evening hosted by Mayor David Roussel and his family.

On the morning of 2 September, we were taken on a conducted tour of the German radar station bunkers situated on the highest cliffs between the D-Day landing beaches and Calais. We also visited the underground hospital whilst the less energetic were hosted in the main shopping area before meeting us back at the town hall.

The main liberation ceremonies commenced at the municipal cemetery where respect is paid at three civilian memorials: to those lost as the result of



Robert Spencer pointing at his father, Captain Paul Spencer DSO

deportation to concentration camps and during enforced working parties, where young men were ordered to construct the Atlantic wall bunkers and the underground hospital; at the Belgium Corner where Allied soldiers and refugees are buried and finally, at the town memorial plaque in honour of Major Walton who is buried in the cemetery.

He sadly lost his life when the jeep he was travelling in on 4 September ran over a mine. He was buried two days later with full military honours. It was the first time that his daughter, who was six months old at the time of his death, had visited his grave and laid a wreath in memory of her gallant father. Later, two roads in the town were renamed in honour of Major Walton and 47 RM Commando.

We then joined townsfolk to walk through the town to the Place Charles de Gaulle where 80 years ago the Commando paraded and to pay respects to all the French civilians lost during the two World Wars.

On completion of all ceremonies, we were hosted in the town hall where the Mayor emphasised the importance of remembering the occupation, the liberation and all those who lost their lives during the conflict. Gifts were exchanged and a specially commissioned book honouring 47 RM Commando was presented to each member of our party.

At all events we were joined by Capt P J Wills RN, Naval Attaché at the UK Embassy in Paris and Lt Col Marcus Sharpe and WO1(RSM) Ollie Smith RM, both representing 47 Cdo RG RM.

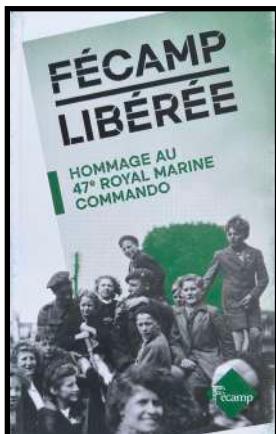
During the past 80 years the people of Fécamp have never forgotten the courage, determination and self-sacrifice of their liberators. Each year on their return to the town, our veterans accompanied by families and friends were enthusiastically welcomed by dignitaries and townsfolk - a bond of enduring friendship and mutual respect that has continued to the present day.



The renaming of a street in honour of 47 RM Commando



Elizabeth Walton paying her respects to her father at the town's memorial plaque. Major Walton's grave is on the left



As part of the 80th anniversary commemorations of the liberation of Fécamp, the town produced a lavishly illustrated hard covered book (the text is in French and English) featuring many photographs of 47 RM Commando in 1944. Many of the subsequent reunions from 1947 to the present day are also covered along with a feature on Major Dennis Walton MC who was killed on 4 September 1944 when the vehicle he was travelling in ran over a mine.

The following article has been submitted to the Globe & Laurel Editor to be considered for publication in the next edition of the magazine.

The 80th Anniversary of Walcheren

by Bob Perry

Operation Infatuate II, the codename for the amphibious landings at Westkapelle, Walcheren, on 1st November 1944 and subsequent battles in the dunes, is a largely forgotten theatre of operations. That is why it is so important that 47 RM Commando Association continues to actively commemorate this Corps Memorable Date. This year it was heartening that the series of 80th anniversary commemorations were strongly supported by a large travelling cohort of the RMA membership under the tutelage of Phil Gilby. They were joined by HM Ambassador to the Netherlands, Joanna Roper CMG; First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Ben Key KCB CBE ADC; NATO SOFCOM Deputy Commander Major General Tony Turner ADC; DA to the Netherlands Colonel Piers Strudwick OBE (late Royal Scots); Lt Col Richard Thurston RM, on exchange duties with the RNLMC, and also Peter Leicester whose father, Brigadier 'Jumbo' Leicester DSO*, was the Brigade Commander in 1944. Also providing sterling support was Colonel Will Norcott, WO1(RSM) Ollie Smith RM and the Revd Tom James RN from 47 Commando (Raiding Group) RM.



The main ceremony of remembrance took place in the grounds of the Polderhuis museum, Westkapelle, at the Liberty Bridge, an impressive wooden structure built in memory of those Royal Marines and other Allied Forces who were killed in action during the assault and subsequent operations. The bridge connects a

Sherman tank on top of the dyke to a landing craft in the museum garden and together they represent a lasting homage to all Allied Forces that participated in this successful, but costly, amphibious operation. The ceremony was followed by the unveiling of seven silhouette figures, each cut in two centimetre thick weathered steel, representing the seven countries involved in the landing at Westkapelle. The UK figure, based on a RM commando charging with a Bren gun, was funded entirely by the RM Charity. We then moved to the lighthouse and laid a wreath at the monument for the civilian victims of Westkapelle; approximately 200 were killed during the bombing of the dyke, subsequent flooding and during the landings. Lunch was taken in a local restaurant and an opportunity for the First Sea Lord to present the medal group of Capt Roger Lloyd RM to Ivo van Beekhauzen, Director of the Polderhuis Museum, where they will be on permanent display. Capt Lloyd, B Troop 47 RM Cdo, was awarded the Dutch Order of the Bronze Lion for his exceptional valour and



leadership at Walcheren.

Following this we all formed up at the Erika beach memorial on the site where the 4th Special Service Brigade landed. Following an historical overview of Op Infatuate II and wreath laying, the Admiral Sir Ben Key and Major General Tony Turner led the large congregation with readings of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Prayers.

Early the next day our 'Rushing to Flushing' walkers set out to follow the route taken by 47 RM Commando from the location of the landings at Westkapelle to Flushing (now called Vlissingen) and the link-up with No 4 Commando (Op Infatuate I). This annual 12-mile yomp along the sand dunes followed the Commando's route taken between 1-3 November 1944. We halted at all of the prominent historical locations including the remains of the

sprawling W11 battery, the Commando's main objective, and a short but fitting service at the 47 RM Cdo memorial in the dunes at Dishoek. The memorial bears the names of all 34 members of the unit who were killed during the operation and bears the following inscription: *'In these dunes between 1st and 3rd November 1944, the men of 47 Royal Marine Commando fought fiercely to capture the heavily defended German battery at Dishoek, codenamed W11. During the battle, which led to the liberation of*

Walcheren, the Commando suffered heavy casualties. The surrender of this battery of 3rd November secured the seaway to Antwerp which was key to the final liberation of the Netherlands.'

It was fitting to end the yomp on the waterfront at Uncle Beach, Flushing, where a wreath was laid at the No 4 Commando memorial and also at the nearby memorial honouring all Landing Craft crews who took part in the operation. During our visit we also laid wreaths at the 41 RM Commando memorial at Domburg and at the 48 RM Commando memorials at Zoutelande and at Serooskerke in honour of the eighteen marines and crew of a Buffalo LVT who were killed when their amphibious vehicle struck a mine.



Our final day was very much one of reflection and further remembrance. At Bergen-op-Zoom War Cemetery, where most of those killed serving with 47 RM Cdo during the Battle of Walcheren and subsequent operations in the River Maas area are laid to rest, the names of our fallen were read out during a short but dignified service of remembrance. It was then on to the memorial at Kapelsche Veer to especially remember the eight men of the Commando who were killed during the futile night raid on enemy positions in mid January 1945. Our last calls were to the individual graves of Lieutenant Ian Adam RM at Sprang-Capelle General Cemetery and Marine William Stovell at Werkendam Protestant Cemetery. After a long day on the road families and friends of our late veterans all looked forward to the traditional last night dinner that lasted well into the early hours!



Prior to our journey back to the UK we were granted special permission to visit the remains of Carmen Battery (W238), located west of Klein Valkenisse. The battery lies within an environmentally sensitive area and is normally strictly out of bounds to all visitors. Carmen Battery was the location where tragically two Q Troop sections were hit by a concentration of accurate enemy mortar fire during the advance to 47 RM Commando's main objective, the W11 bunker complex - eleven marines were killed and many others wounded.

So ended another memorable visit to Walcheren, the scene of the last amphibious assault of the Second World War in Europe. The attack at Westkapelle was such a significant and pivotal engagement that Sir Winston Churchill in his account of the Second World War said: *'Many other notable feats were performed by Commandos during the war, and though other troops and other Services played their full part in this remarkable operation the extreme gallantry of the Royal Marines stands forth'*.



Troop Sergeant Major (later Captain) James 'Jock' England DCM

Regrettably, due to lack of space in this edition, Part II of Bob Perry's 'Orders, Decorations and Medals' article will now appear in the July Despatch. However, on a linked theme with the Walcheren article above, readers may be interested in the letter (left) which appeared in the February 1973 edition of the *Globe & Laurel* (reproduced by kind permission of the editor).

From: Edward R. Mansfield, ARPS
Dear Sir,

CAPT 'JOCK' ENGLAND, DCM

I read with great sorrow the passing of 'Jock' England (Old Comrades Christmas 1972 Edition).

Jock was Troop Sergeant Major of 'B' Troop No 47 (RM) Commando, when I was a Sergeant in this Troop and we fought together during the capture of Walcheren Island, when Jock was quite rightly and justifiably awarded the DCM for his part in this operation.

He was a born leader and whatever we were doing, people always looked to him for leadership and advice, and he, always cool in command was able to give it. He taught me one of the basic attributes of a Senior NCO — how to become a medium between Officers and other ranks and so keep the Unit working smoothly.

Jock being the Continuous Service Rating was the complete professional and although I was Hostilities Only I like to believe some of his professionalism rubbed off on me.

Whenever I saw him on television acting as a boxing referee, that same professionalism always brought memories flooding back.

I enclose a photograph I took at Walcheren after we had linked up with No 4 Commando at the Flushing Gap. It is



Members of 47 Cdo with Jock England on the right relaxing after the Walcheren landings

old, of poor quality, and rather 'mucky' but I hope you will be able to reproduce it.

It is a light-hearted photograph taken during the relaxation that followed four days of solid fighting. It is a number of B Troop lads supposedly 'looting' from a German soldier. They are left to right Cpl George Toms (wearing beret). Mne Harper (dressed as a German soldier). Sgt Ron Cumner (crouching down). Mne Ron Carroll (in braces) and on the extreme right of the photograph, 'Jock' waving a watch in the air.

This period of our lives although hard and uncertain, had its brighter moments.

Yours very sincerely,
Roy Mansfield

Devizes.

The author of the letter is 47 veteran Roy Mansfield who reflects on the personal and professional qualities of B Troop Sergeant Major James 'Jock' England who was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for gallantry in the field at Walcheren.

Jock England enlisted in the RM on 16 October 1933 and served in HM Ships Royal Sovereign, Barham, Glorious and Iron Duke. Promoted to Cpl in 1938 and to Sgt shortly after the outbreak of WW2, he served with 43 RM Cdo in Italy where he was Mentioned in Despatches. He joined 47 in September 1944 prior to being appointed as RSM of 46 RM Cdo in 1946 and was later Commissioned.

He retired from the Royal Marines in 1958 and throughout his busy civilian life he pursued his interest as a referee of the Amateur Boxing Association. In this capacity he was internationally recognised as top of his class. He represented Great Britain as a referee in three Commonwealth Games, four European Championships and at the Mexico and Munich

Olympic Games. It is fitting to record that during a visit to Moscow he was awarded a vase in recognition of being nominated the top European Referee.

Captain James Patterson 'Jock' England DCM RM died at Amersham in 1972 aged 56.

Remembering our Fallen

Members will wish to be aware that for many years on Remembrance Sunday, Pauline Harris (daughter of 47 veteran Bill Field and Betty Field, our former secretary) has laid a wreath at the 47 RM Commando memorial in

the Royal Marines Memorial Garden at the former Eastney Barracks in Southsea. The memorial lists the names of all those who made the ultimate sacrifice. A more detailed photograph of the memorial, that was consecrated in 1999, can be found on page 384 of 'From Omaha to the Scheldt'. In a similar vein, on the eleventh hour on the eleventh day of the eleventh month, our current treasurer Allen Withington (nephew of John Withington who was killed on 7th June 1944),



has laid a wreath at the Royal Marines Graspan Memorial on The Mall in London.

On behalf of the Association thank you Pauline and Allen for your selfless acts of remembrance for our fallen:

We will remember them

Lance Corporal Tommy Cole's Bunker

During our visit to Walcheren we were granted the rare privilege of visiting the remains of Carmen Battery (W238), located west of Klein Valkenisse. The battery lies within a nature reserve and is normally strictly out of bounds to all visitors. Carmen Battery was the location where tragically two Q Troop sections were hit by a concentration of accurate enemy mortar fire during the advance to 47 RM Cdo's main objective, the W11 bunker complex - tragically eleven marines were killed and many more wounded. On a much lighter note, in 'From Omaha to the Scheldt' (page 233) it is described how Lance Corporal Tommy Cole RAMC came across one of the Carmen bunkers from which emerged three female nurses along with some German soldiers who wished to surrender.



On the wall outside this enemy hospital bunker is a plaque describing how Tommy Cole single-handedly 'captured' this enemy position!

Footnote: During the visit we were informed that Sergeant Robert Rackham (B Troop) was killed in the area of the Carmen battery complex and that his remains were never recovered. It was understood that some years ago members of his family visited the site and laid a wreath in the dunes to his memory. Sergeant Rackham, having no known grave, is commemorated on the Chatham Naval Memorial.

Corporal Edward Cox

Your Chairman was recently contacted by Martin Cox, son of 47 veteran Edward (Ted) Cox (Q Troop) who wished to donate to the Association a high quality copy of the map carried by his father on D-Day. Ted Cox was severely wounded during the approach march at La Rosière (see 'From Omaha to the Scheldt' (page 49)) and was eventually invalided out of the RM. The Association was not only pleased to accept the map but also the offer made by Martin, a carpenter by trade, to frame the map with a 47 commemorative coin embedded to the front. The solid oak frame is 'reversible' as the map is encased between two sheets of glass so that the map's legend, printed on the back of the map, can also be read. It is likely that the framed map will be auctioned to the highest bidder or sold with all proceeds going to the Association. Further details of the auction/sale will be circulated in due course.



Left: The solid oak coaster supporting the Chairman's favourite tipple

Centre: Cpl Edward (Ted) Cox

Right: The framed map along with a small quantity of the coasters

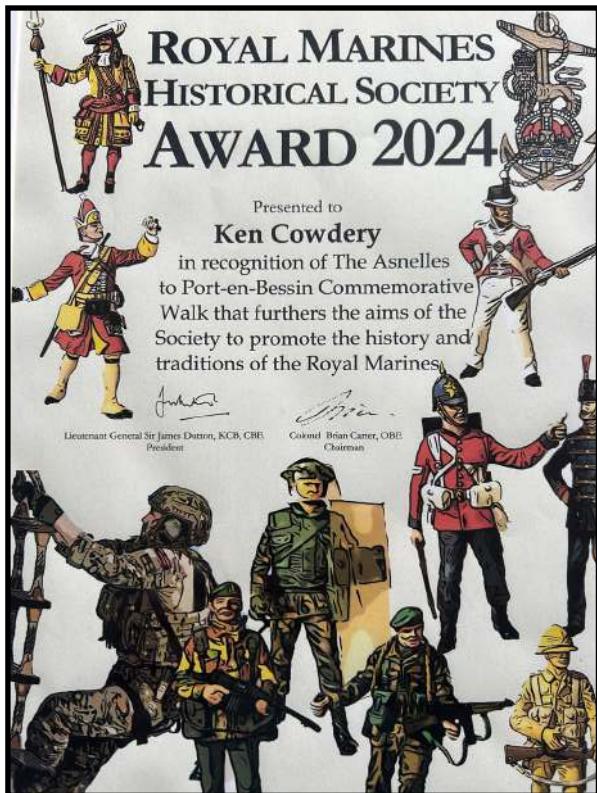
Martin has also crafted a large quantity of solid oak coasters with laser engraved 47 numerals either side of a commando dagger along with the years that the Association was in existence. It is anticipated that coasters will be offered for sale to Association members.

The Association is eternally grateful to Martin and for his unique talent in crafting these products in remembrance of his father.

Ken Cowdery Honoured by the Royal Marines Historical Society

The Association is delighted that Ken Cowdery was awarded the Royal Marines Historical Society Award 2024 for his masterly skills in organising the annual 'In the Footsteps of 47 Commando' march from Asnelles to Port-en-Bessin. His citation reads:

'This award, introduced in 2006, is awarded in recognition of significant work by a non-member that has promoted interest in the history of the Royal Marines. This year, we are delighted to announce that the award will be presented to Ken Cowdery, in recognition of the 47 Commando Asnelles to Port-en-Bessin Commemorative Walk that further the aims of the Society to promote the history and traditions of the Royal Marines. It was decided by the Committee of the 47 RM Commando Association in 2011 that the walk should become an annual event with Association Member Ken Cowdery volunteering to take the lead. The number of event participants steadily increased each year and in 2014, the 70th Anniversary of D-Day, the walk was publicised more widely with more formal agreement and participation sought with the various Mayors and landowners. As a result over 200 walkers participated with Commemorative events in Asnelles and along the route. Between 2015 and 2023 the walk was further enhanced each year. On every walk, the contribution made by French civilians in aiding the Commandos is acknowledged.'



'The 80th Commemoration of D-Day saw a much increased participation with over 400 individuals registered for the event – British and French families, local school children, individuals from Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain and Germany, serving Royal Marines and RMA members. The start of the walk attracted UK national headlines with personnel from 47 Commando (RG) RM wading ashore at Asnelles.'

Ken Cowdery's organisational achievements are all the more impressive when taking into consideration his demanding civilian employment, and that he has no obvious family or other links to 47 RM Commando or the Royal Marines. His vision, drive and enthusiasm have been hugely beneficial to the Corps by keeping the 47 RM Commando story alive and promoting the walk as a shared civilian/Royal Marines event forging closer ties around a shared story of occupation and liberation. This year along 'In the Footsteps of 47 Commando' is on track to raise over £15k in sponsorship for The Royal Marines Charity.'



Our recent milestone anniversary & social events round up...

The Association commemorated its 30th Anniversary on 6 November 2024! Read on for more detail.

A Short History of 47 Royal Marine Commando Association

47 RM Commando Association is a group of Veterans' Widows, families, friends and Royal Marines serving and retired. It has an illustrious history of bringing together people of all ages to remember the sacrifice of those who died serving with the unit. It's an atypical organisation and until recently was independent of the wider Royal Marines Association (RMA). It is useful to divide its history into four chapters.

1946 - 1984

The men of 47 RM Commando were de-mobbed from active service in 1946. The unit was disbanded and most of the men left the forces, to be known as Hostilities Only. Some notable exceptions included the Commanding Officer, Lt Col C F Phillips DSO, who went on to serve as the Commander of 3 Commando Brigade in Malaya 1951-52 where he was mentioned in despatches. He became Chief of Amphibious Warfare in 1954 and retired in 1957 as Major General Sir Farndale Phillips KBE CB DSO.

But in 1946, he was instrumental in asking the men of 47 to stay in touch. He ordered his staff to draw up a list of addresses of those who could easily be mustered. A letter to this effect is still in existence. This typed sheet of names and addresses has in the past been mistaken as a full list of those who served, but in fact it's the best the unit could achieve with the resources of the time. It's thought up to 1000 men served with 47 from 1943-46.

The Veterans exchanged letters and Christmas cards, and held informal reunions. Photographs exist from the 1960s showing some of these meetings in Manchester and London. Where two or more veterans lived in the same area these became more frequent with the more active organisers seeking to achieve larger numbers by holding bigger reunions in the UK. Until 1984 only small numbers made it to informally to France or the Netherlands.

1984 - 2000

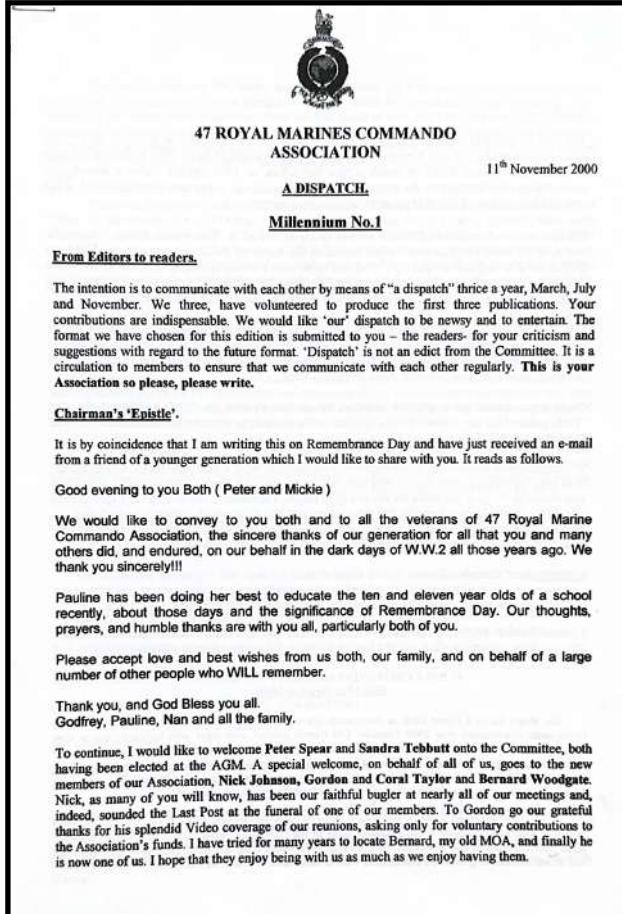
1984 saw the return of hundreds of D-Day veterans from all units to Normandy. HM the Queen attended arriving in the Royal Yacht. In famous scenes on the beaches, President Ronald Reagan addressed the men who'd returned, 'Here the allies stood and fought.' The men of 47 RM Commando with their wives and supporters filled two coaches. It is likely fifty veterans of the unit attended.

The veterans were alarmed to see that many historians had assumed Port-en-Bessin had been liberated by the brave Americans landing at Omaha beach. The men decided more history lessons were needed including for the Corps, and from all this emerged a plan to return every five years or more to France and to the Netherlands and to form up a more formal organisation.

The origins of the present day 47 RM Commando Association can be traced to an in augural meeting held on 6 November 1994 in the Hotel Westduin, Vlissingen, Walcheren, organised by Peter Phillips, son of the wartime commanding officer.

Also, in the 1990s, two school teachers in Port-en-Bessin organised a walk retracing the unit's route from Gold Beach to their town. The schoolchildren formed penpal relationships and the teachers Michel Laulier and Michel Deserable were later made Honorary Vice-Presidents in thanks from the veterans.

The men then mounted two bus trips each year, one to Port-en-Bessin in June and the other to Walcheren in November. The coach would start in Edinburgh picking up Scottish veterans and drive south before heading by ferry to France. Local historians in the Netherlands and in France assisted the men and knowledge of the role of the unit was secured. A biannual newsletter '*Despatch*' was created with every edition sent to the RM archives.



Above left: The first edition of Despatch; prior to this a newsletter was published between 1994 - 1999 and sent to Association members. Copies of all past issues of Despatch and the newsletters can be seen on our new website.

and a true bond of international friendship evolved. 47 was re-born as a fighting unit when 1 Assault Group Royal Marines was renamed as 47 Commando (Raiding Group) RM. The pandemic struck and many veterans would never travel again.

2000 - 2019

The Unit Medical Officer wrote a book of the exploits '*From Omaha to the Scheldt - The Story of 47 Royal Marine Commando*'. Serving members of the Royal Marines, including members Major Bob Perry and recently retired Warrant Officer Geof Haywood began offering muscular assistance for the building of memorials and the involvement of the Corps. A website began under a Dutch supporter Marc de Bolster which began collating information and people researching their family history began to join in new numbers assisted by the internet.

These included family members and new veterans were found who attended near the end of their lives. The Association elected its first non-veteran chairman in recognition of the fragile health of the men. Mayors from France and the Netherlands were invited to the UK in thanks for the years of support

2019 - 2024

The last of the veterans passed away and the Association held meetings via the internet during the pandemic. Gradually emerging from the period of maximum change a new direction began with family members, supporters and members of the Royal Marines. The membership has a reputation for lively and poignant events gaining respect in wide circles for its loyalty and affection with memorials far and wide. The annual walks - *'In the Footsteps of 47 Commando'* in Normandy and *'Rushing to Flushing'* in Walcheren - attract hundreds of people learning about the exploits and bravery of the unit.

The RMA invited the Association to form as a virtual or specialist branch and this has now happened.



The co-editors are indebted to Paddy O'Connell for producing this potted history of the 47 RM Commando Association. If you are able to add any significant information, especially details of past reunions or photographs then do please get in touch.

47 Commando (Raiding Group) RM Regimental Luncheon

An intrepid band of the membership travelled to Plymouth in October in response to an invitation by the Regimental Sergeant Major of the modern day Four-Seven. The day consisted of a brief on the operational and training activities of the unit and a tour of the landing craft real estate in His Majesty's Naval Base Devonport. We were able to clamber over the different types of raiding and landing craft and learn about their operational capabilities. The day was rounded off with a Regimental luncheon in the Sergeants' Mess attended by personnel of the unit along with members from the RMA Cornwall and Landing Craftsman Branches.

As you would expect, not content with just attending the luncheon most of our members decided to stay in Plymouth for a couple of additional nights enjoying the sights and sounds of the historic Barbican area of the city (and its pubs!). We also visited the Naval War Memorial on Plymouth Hoe and paid our respects to Marine Charles Fewtrell who was killed on 6 June 1944 and has no known grave.

In sum, an excellent couple of very 'fluid' days and we look forward to the event being repeated on an annual basis!



John Prentis enlightening all with his new found knowledge of the merits of the Offshore Raiding Craft over the Royal Marines Landing Craft Mark 10...



Top right: Cheers!

Above: WO1 (RSM) Ollie Smith RM with Les Pike and other attendees outside the Sergeants' Mess

Left: The 47 RM Cdo Association gang (Lou and Janet Sartorel are missing from the photo)

The 47 Royal Marine Commando Association is indebted to the Captain of HMS Victory and President of the Senior Rates Mess for graciously granting permission for our members to dine on board HMS Victory. Despite the weather it was a fantastic evening!

Dining on Admiral Lord Nelson's Flagship HMS Victory

by Allen Withington

It was a great honour for the 47 RM Commando Association to have the opportunity to dine on board HMS Victory at Portsmouth Naval Base to both bid farewell to our outgoing chairman, John Prentis, and honour the 360th Anniversary of the founding of the Royal Marines in 1664. A special thanks to Phil Gilby, who is actually a member of the HMS Victory Senior Rates Mess, for helping to make this spectacular event happen.

Most of us met at the Royal Maritime Club for the necessary pre-dinner drinks and it was terrific to see everyone, particularly Christine Hagan and Sue Lord who we have missed from some of our other recent events. Prior to the dinner our Ships Company host Colour Sergeant Steve 'Rasher' Bacon took us on a tour of HMS Victory not only regaling us with the history of the ship but also describing in sometimes graphic detail what it was like to live onboard: Handy tip, *if you can't change your clothes for two years and things are getting itchy then wash them in urine!* We also now know where the common phrases such as: *'if you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours'*, *'who you let the cat out of bag'* and *'you dirty tow rag'* is derived from...Ugh!

The tour of the ship was followed by Mess Beating performed by five members of the RM Band Service dressed in full early 19th Century uniform on the quarter deck. The finale of this was a toast of a tot of rum for both the outgoing and incoming Chairman of the Association - so unusual to see John with a drink in his hand! By this time Storm Bert was raging outside and the sound of the wind and rain beating against the tarpaulin protecting the ship only added to the atmosphere. Close your eyes and you could almost be at sea! Can I hear the boom of French cannon in the distance? No, it was John's stomach anticipating dinner... We then moved off for the formal dinner in what was the officers' wardroom at the Battle of Trafalgar and to see everyone in black tie, full mess kit or glittering evening gown in such atmospheric historical surroundings was a spectacle indeed. The RM Charity made the thoughtful gesture of providing for each place setting a model of the Spean Bridge Commando Memorial for each guest to take away.

Phil Gilby and Bob Perry did a wonderful double act of the necessary speeches between each of the courses. Geof Haywood gave a detailed account of the activities of the 47 RM Commando Association over the past year, what a lot has been achieved! Les Pike gave the toast to the Royal Marines and we all know he was chuffed-to-bits to do it, because he said so!

Geof Haywood, who was awarded the BEM in 2024, and John Prentis were presented a boxed bottle of port by Phil Gilby.

At the end of the evening the waiting and catering staff were summoned and enthusiastically applauded by all, as the food was excellent, the wine flowed and the service was seamless; almost as though they had done it all before. When it was time to leave Storm Bert was still not exhausted with the wind howling and the rain lashing down. We headed back to the hotel but did anyone care? Not one bit, we're made of sterner stuff than that and perhaps the wine, rum and port helped...

I'm eagerly looking forward to a similar event next year!



In the news - the stories making the headlines...

Regimental Sergeant Major Eric Wood BEM

James and Miles Wood contacted the Association seeking information regarding their grandfather Eric Wood who was the RSM of 47 RM Commando from July 1944 (see 'From Omaha to the Scheldt' page 366). Using the letters the RSM sent home to his wife and family, the grandsons' wanted to track his service across France between Sallenelles and Fécamp. The Association was pleased to assist them in their endeavours and their journey ended in Fécamp being hosted by Pierre Aubry at the 80th anniversary exhibition where a photo of their grandfather was on display.



*Left: James and Miles (L&R) with Pierre Aubrey, Deputy Mayor of Fécamp, and Manuel Martin, the town's archivist, at the 80th Anniversary of the Liberation Exhibition
Right: RSM Wood being carried on the shoulders of the townsfolk on 2 September 1944*

Wonder Woman Brenda Cogswell

Not content with an epic 5-day, 70 km kayak across Scotland (during which she celebrated a milestone birthday), our very own Brenda Cogswell along her sister Jackie Bevan have



been at it again! This time it was open water kayaking in rough sea conditions along the Dorset Jurassic Coast. When the Editor finally caught up with her and asked 'Why?' Brenda explained that she was a Marie Curie nurse for five years and most of her patients only talked about the things they had wished they had done in their lives. Most of the items on Brenda's bucket list were outdoor adventurous stuff and so far she has completed four sky-dives (three for charity), whitewater rafting, climbed the UK's highest mountain Ben Nevis (raising £700 for the RM Charity) and canoeed along the Caledonian Canal and Loch Ness, wild camping along the way (that little expedition raised another impressive £1700 for the RM Charity!).



Brenda said that her aim was to go '*completely outside her comfort zone to see 'if she could hack it'*' - after all, she is the daughter of a former Royal Marine!

Brenda added that the most fun she had was taking part in a Bollywood flash mob to raise funds for the WI and posing nude for a calendar!

By the Chairman: Following a lengthy and detailed study of the photographs, the editorial board have concluded that the calendar images are far too risqué to be published in a high quality family magazine such as Despatch...

Kelly Heathfield meets Queen Maxima



It was a special day on 27 August 2024 when Queen Maxima and King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands visited the historical centre of Veere, Walcheren. The skirl of the bagpipes, played by our very own Kelly, greeted the Queen when she visited the Mayor of Veere, Ms Frederick Schouwenaar.

Geof Haywood presented with the British Empire Medal

It was a proud day for the Haywood family on 20 November at County Hall, Dorchester, when the Lord Lieutenant of Dorset, Michael Dooley LVO, invested Geof on behalf of His Majesty The King, with the British Empire Medal. Geof was accompanied at the ceremony by his wife Jill and two of his three daughters; the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Association were also delighted to be able to share the occasion with them.



*Left: Geof being congratulated by the Lord Lieutenant of Dorset
Right: Geof being toasted by Jill and daughters Jennie and Valerie*

Michael Dooley said, *'It is a huge honour and privilege for me to present these awards on behalf of His Majesty and to meet these extraordinary people who have been selfless in their support of others. This is one of the most pleasurable parts of my role which I very much enjoy.'*

Once again, many congratulations to Geof on the award of such a high honour.

The Great '47' Bake Off

Our Membership Secretary, Lisa Roberts (grand daughter of 47 veteran Chuck Harris), along with her work colleagues at Maze Outdoor Garden Furniture (good plug!), recently held a bake off to raise funds for the Association. The event was a huge success and raised £50. Well done Lisa, the cakes and pastries all look scrummy!



Lou Sartorel Victorious in the National Standard Bearer Competition

The Royal Marines Association National Standard Bearer competition took place at the Commando Training Centre Royal Marines on 14 September. The competition demands precision, strength, and an unwavering commitment to upholding military traditions. Other key aspects are: Flag Etiquette and Protocol, Uniform Inspection and Drill Performance. During the competition, Lou's ability to maintain composure under pressure, his attention to detail and overall standout performance were key factors that set him apart from his fellow competitors and secured his victory.

With Lou engaged in RMA national events it was unlikely that the 47 RM Commando Association standard would be paraded at Walcheren. However, Laurence Scoupe stepped forward and readily agreed to act as our standard bearer. Well done both Lou and Laurence!



'Arctic Warriors' - Channel 4 Documentary

Some of you may have watched the Channel 4 documentary regarding Royal Marines training in north Norway. The programme featured Guy Martin, a former motorcycle racer and lorry mechanic turned TV presenter. During part two of the series, Guy mentioned, '*My grandad was a Royal Marine on the beaches of Normandy under 47 Commando*'. The Association is attempting to contact Guy to try and find out more information regarding his grandfather's service in WW2.

NHS South East Coast Ambulance Service in Normandy

Earlier this year members of the Armed Forces Network group working with NHS South Coast Ambulance Service requested assistance with their planning to conduct the Asnelles to Port-en-Bessin 'In the Footsteps of 47 Commando' march. Led by Gareth Williams, the Ambulance Service Ops Manager (who is also a Royal Marines Reserve Colour Sergeant serving with RMR City of London), five members of his team, accompanied by Ken Cowdery and Bob Perry, completed the march on 27 September. Also joining the group was Jamie Pearce, a former Royal Marine and currently a manager with the Military and Protective Services training course at Duchy College, Callington, Cornwall.

Despite the wet and windy weather the event was enjoyable with much banter (one of the group was a former para!) and laughter. Both organisations have vowed to complete the march on an annual basis and as a token of their thanks they each sponsored one of 47 RM Commando fallen whose names are engraved on the recently dedicated memorial wall at Asnelles.



And finally...Is this the inaugural meeting of the North America Branch of the 47 Royal Marine Commando Association?



Dates for your diary...

Kapelsche Veer - The 80th Anniversary commemoration for Kapelsche Veer will take place on Friday 31 January 2025. Further details of the event are available from our secretary at 47rmcsec@gmail.com

Mountbatten Festival of Music (MFM) - The annual MFM, featuring the Massed Bands of His Majesty's Royal Marines, will take place between Friday 21 and Saturday 22 March 2025. The Association have block booked tickets for the 7.30pm performance on the Saturday. Further information is available from Geof Haywood BEM at geofandjillh@btinternet.com

This year we are pleased to welcome Stéphane and Nathalie Pitel as our guests at the concert. You will all know that the couple and their family have supported our late veterans and Association members over many years in Port-en-Bessin.

Port-en-Bessin - Regrettably, as in recent years the Association will not be organising centralised transport for our annual visit to Normandy. The outline programme is:

Friday 6 June - Service at Asnelles and 'In the Footsteps of 47 Commando' march.
Saturday 7 June - Main ceremonies in Port-en-Bessin.
Sunday 8 June - Last night dinner.

More details are available from Geof Haywood BEM at geofandjillh@btinternet.com

Caption Competition



The photo (left) depicts Chairman Bob Perry with Christophe Van Roye, the Mayor of Port-en-Bessin, at Billingsgate Fish Market in London.

Can you come up with something appropriately more witty for this image?

The best answers will be judged by the editorial team and a bottle of the finest vintage 47 RM Cdo Association wine to the lucky winner - be in to win!

The winning caption will be published in the next edition of *Despatch*.

Brenda Cogswell was the winner of the previous caption competition that featured Paddy O'Connell in the rear seat of a 2-seater Spitfire (below left). She submitted multiple entries - only the printable ones are shown below:

'Where's the SatNav, I need the postcode for Broadcasting House'

'Dear BBC, my request was to go SOLO on air!'

'I don't understand, I ordered a Uber!'



Right: Brenda after being presented with her prize at the HMS Victory dinner



Next Issue: July 2025

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