

# AIRBORNE ASSAULT NORMANDY

Registered Charity 280743

## THE TRUST TO PRESERVE THE HISTORY OF 6 AIRBORNE DIVISION'S ASSAULT INTO NORMANDY

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please reply to:

## **NEWS LETTER 2011**

Another year has passed, while financially there has been little progress every effort has been made to attend to our aims and we have been supported well at our Remembrance Engagement. The managing team send you all Christmas Greetings and hope the New Year will improve.

### **Chairman's Report**

Dear members of Airborne Assault Normandy, another year has inexorably passed by; a year during which we said goodbye to more veterans. It is so sad to have lost both of our Presidents, Lieutenant General Sir Michael Gray and Major Jack Watson, within a few weeks of each other. Both men played a major part in forming Airborne Assault Normandy Trust and achieved so much in the creation of the Memorial Pegasus Museum and the Merville Battery Museum. They built strong and lasting relationships with our French friends in Normandy. They are sorely missed. We are thus reminded of the increasing need to preserve the history of 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division in Normandy and the memory of those extraordinary men who were 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division. Therefore I encourage families to continue to make pilgrimages to Normandy, for as long as the British continue to visit, our French friends will continue their ceremonies.

I am pleased to say that Lieutenant General Sir Hew Pike KCB DSO MBE has agreed to become our President and we extend a very warm welcome to him. On the Board of Trustees we have said goodbye to Mark Worthington, the curator at Memorial Pegasus Museum. I thank Mark for his valuable contribution and am delighted to be able to announce that he will stay on as the Heritage Adviser to the Trust.

The Bar-B-Q lunch with music provided by the Belvedere Concert Band for those attending the 67<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in Normandy was a great success. We owe Ron McCaffery and his team many thanks for all the work they put into achieving this event. It is planned to repeat this function.

One notable success in 2011 was the recovery of the medals of Sgt Wilfred Berridge, which had been misappropriated by a French person masquerading as a bona fide Airborne Museum. The Trust advised and assisted Tony Berridge, son of Wilfred, to write to President Sarkozy (who replied by return). After a long period of twists and turns, requiring much persistence and many letters, I collected the medals from a lawyer in Paris. The medals are now part of the collection in Memorial Pegasus.

Our website at [www.airborneassaultnormandytrust.co.uk](http://www.airborneassaultnormandytrust.co.uk) has been a success and is receiving 3,400 visitors a year. The website is one of the tools we use to increase awareness of the Trust and its work and to communicate with our members. If I may make a plea to help us communicate with you by email and (vice-versa), could you please send an email to [contact@airborneassaultnormandytrust.co.uk](mailto:contact@airborneassaultnormandytrust.co.uk) and include who you are in it; this will enable us to build a database of email contacts. (We will never pass on your email address to third parties.)

I thank the long list of all those who have helped our Trust this year. Again I would particularly like to mention those in Normandy. These include the staff at Memorial Pegasus and the Merville Battery Museums and our friends, the Mayors and people of Bénouville, Ranville Amfréville, Bréville, Bavent, Sallenelles, Merville-Franceville, Gonneville-en-Auge, Putot-en-Auge, Hérouvillette, Sannerville and Troarn. To all those who have not received a direct mention I say their contribution is valuable and is very much appreciated. Finally, and in no small measure, I thank you, the members of Airborne Assault Normandy for your continued support.

I wish you the compliments of the season, a very Happy Christmas and good health in 2012.

Alan Edwards.

### **The Normandy Pilgrimage**

#### **3 June**

The 67<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Normandy was led by Colonel Ben Arkle who in the past has been closely involved with 9 Para. The party was 54 strong with veterans and families for 13 Para with support from RHQ Para led by the its acting Regimental Colonel, Clive Boyner, assisted by Lt Col. Paul Rogers its Regimental Secretary. The majority of people met at the Union Jack club to travel by coach to Portsmouth, then on the Normandy arriving during the evening to settle in a very good hotel, the Mercure, Cabourg. A small party had to stay at the Golf Hotel about half a mile away. Later we were joined by the Colonel Commandant Maj Gen Jonathan Shaw.

#### **4 June**

After breakfast the party, under the command of travel director Jackie Parry went out for a morning bus excursion, viewing some of the beautiful French countryside, returning for lunch at the Mercure.

After lunch the pilgrimage moved to the village of Putot-en-Auge where there was a memorial service for those killed (32) during with break out of Normandy. Wreaths were laid.



After the ceremony the party moved to the very small village hall and the French unveiled a plaque to Major Jack Watson. A lovely tribute to a splendid soldier, who had served in the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion the Parachute Regiment through to the end of the war with Germany. The party then moved to a vin d'honneur given by the Mayor and the people of Putot-en-Auge in the Salle des Fetes. Then back to the hotel for dinner



## 5 June

After breakfast the party moved to Ranville to visit the Memorial Pegasus Museum. The Museum looked very good in all directions. The party then moved to the Golf Hotel for the Bar-B-Q for the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division re-union lunch.





After lunch the party moved to Breville where wreaths were laid on the graves of Capt Hugh Ward of 53 (the Worcester Yeomanry) A/L Regt RA and Private Charles Masters 12<sup>th</sup> (Yorkshire Battalion) the Parachute Regt, followed by a wreath laying ceremony at the memorial of the 12<sup>th</sup> battalion the Devonshire Regt. After the ceremony the congregation gathered behind the Town Hall for a vin d'honneur given by the Mayor. The ceremony was supported by a local band. It was a splendid evening. Then back to the hotel for dinner.





## 6 June

After breakfast, the party moved to the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion memorial at the cross road in Ranville. Speeches were made by the Mayor and our leader, Ben Arkle. During the ceremony the bugle calls were played by Stewart McNair who had retired from the army 27 years ago. He had been a member of 2 Para band. The Mayor said it was a sign of the times that we cannot control our own band. After the ceremony everyone moved up to the parish church for a mass. They were led by a volunteer pipe band. The Church roof has now been repaired and the inside beautifully cleaned. Support for the work had been given to the French from funds supplied by airborne charities and the Airborne Assault Trust.







After the Mass, all of those who had assembled at the Airborne Cross in the cemetery attended a short service conducted by Padre Paul Abram. After the service all moved to the village hall for a vin d'honneur. After the party 500 volunteer pipers marched across Pegasus Bridge, what a sight. Can you find the chap who was having difficulties with his kilt?





Back to dinner which was attended by the various Mayors who had looked after the party. It was a very pleasant evening.

### **7 June**

A very early breakfast then off to the port and embark for the UK. It was a very nice family party. We look forward to next year. Tours International looked after the pilgrims well.

**2<sup>nd</sup> (AIRLANDING) BN. OXF. & BUCKS. L.I. (52<sup>nd</sup>)  
6<sup>th</sup> AIRBORNE 'COUP DE MAIN' GROUP VISIT TO NORMANDY JUNE 2011  
Report by Penny Howard Bates and edited by Colonel John M A Tillett**

Our pilgrimage to Normandy this year at the beginning of June was somewhat marred by inclement weather, which we have not experienced for several years. This was a pity because the 67<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the D-Day landings proved as popular as ever with crowds of tourists and re-enactors, as well as those of us who return each year to commemorate our lost relatives and comrades and to share with our French friends the memory of that night in June 1944 when our gliders landed at the Caen Canal and Orne River bridges, and the invasion of Europe began.

On Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> June 2011, the Mayor and council of Bénouville which includes Pegasus Bridge, had arranged for a parade of no less than 500 Pipers to march down from the Town Hall, over the new bridge and to the Memorial Pegasus Museum on the Ranville side of the Caen canal. There was a convention of Pipers from all nations in Caen at the time, and their presence and music provided a background to the ceremonies this year.

On Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> June, there were French and English ceremonies in the grounds of the Memorial Pegasus Museum held in the late morning. This year we welcomed several newcomers to our group - some sadly as a result of the loss of some familiar faces. Major Freddie Scott MC, who died last April was represented by his son and daughter-in-law Guy and Sue Scott who joined our 'Coup de Main' group for the first time, as did Richard and Jill Clare, who were commemorating Pte. Clare who was in Glider No. 6. Also joining in with our activities for the first time was veteran Pat Turner from Glider No.3 along with his wife Barbara and their niece and her husband. Thus we had the benefit of three veterans present this year – Sgt. 'Titch' Rayner and Pte. Pat Turner from the 'Coup de Main' and Pte. Johnny

Johnson who landed by glider with the Ox & Bucks Regiment later on D-Day. Along with the leadership of General Sir Robert Pascoe late Adjutant General, the 43<sup>rd</sup> and 52<sup>nd</sup> and The Royal Green Jackets Regt., our group numbered about 30 this year, with the addition of a contingent from the Oxfordshire Rifles Cadets. Unfortunately we all got a soaking from the heavy rain during the 5<sup>th</sup> June ceremonies at the Memorial Pegasus Museum this year! But the three veterans all laid wreaths at the Regimental Memorial by the original bridge as the Rifles Cadets played the Last Post.

However, the weather had cleared for a band concert in Bénouville that evening, followed by aperitifs and a dinner generously provided by the community. After that our group attended the Midnight Ceremony down on the Glider Landing Zone by the new bridge at midnight, 0016h being the time of landing on 5/6 June 1944, the first Allied unit to land in occupied France. This was led by me and my husband George and the Mayor of Bénouville, Alain Lepareur. We listened to the 'Talking the Gliders Down' speech made by my father Major John Howard DSO in the same place a quarter of a century ago in 1986, which is recorded on a CD and amplified. The evening ended with a toast to the men of the 'Coup de Main', pipers playing and a wonderful firework display.

On Monday 6<sup>th</sup> June our group met in the morning to lay a wreath on Lt. Den Brotheridge's grave in Ranville Churchyard (the first soldier to die in action on D-Day) – this duty was performed by our veteran Pte. Johnny Johnson. The 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division Ceremony followed in Ranville Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery, and we were back in Bénouville by just after midday for the parade with the bands, council members, cadets, veterans and family members over the bridge to the ceremony held at the War Memorial Stone there. Luckily the rain held off for this and the march that followed of the 'Coup de Main' and 7<sup>th</sup> Para. veterans back over the new bridge. But it began to rain again during the 7<sup>th</sup> Para. Ceremony held at their memorial near the crossroads in Bénouville and we were glad to take shelter at the Mayor's 'Vin d'honneur' held in the Town Reception Hall in Bénouville.

In the afternoon of 6<sup>th</sup> June, our Bn. group and the cadets received the usual warm welcome in the villages of Escoville and Hérouvillette, which were the Bn. objectives for the 7<sup>th</sup> June 1944. The first ceremony was held in Escoville where the Regimental wreath was laid by Johnny Johnson again, and there was an address by the Mayor of Escoville, M. Garnier and then by General Sir Robert Pascoe. At the cemetery in Hérouvillette wreaths were laid by veterans Johnny Johnson and 'Titch' Rayner and the address was made by the Mayor of Hérouvillette M. Bordeau, and in the absence of Colonel John Tillett – unfortunately detained in the UK by illness, General Sir Robert Pascoe once again spoke on behalf of the Regiment. Afterwards in the peace of the cemetery Guy Scott was given permission to spread the ashes of his father Major Freddie Scott MC, and the mayor M. Bordeau has kindly said that a plaque will be placed there in Freddie's memory.

Our pilgrimage to Normandy ended this year with the hospitality given to our Bn. group and the Oxfordshire Rifles cadets who accompany us and play the Last Post each year for all the ceremonies, by the council and communities of Escoville and Hérouvillette. They join us all in raising a glass to the memories of all, both British and French who gave their lives so bravely in the liberation of Normandy in June 1944, and those friends and family members who have died in the years since.

We again thank Mark Worthington, Curator of the Pegasus Memorial Museum and the Director Beatrice Boissee and their staff, who do so much for our 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne members throughout the year, including displaying and safekeeping our Regimental property.

This year we very much missed the presence of Major Jack Watson, 13<sup>th</sup> Para. Bn. who from being a Company Commander in 1944 rose to become President of the Airborne Assault Normandy Trust (AANT) and was still working endlessly for our benefit at the time of his

death early this year aged 94. He did so much for our Regiment alongside me, John Tillett – a fellow Company Commander in 1944.

## **REGIMENTAL UPDATE**

16 Air assault Brigade (2 and 3 PARA) are at present in the United Kingdom.

1 PARA. Continue to serve with the Special Forces support Group.

4 PARA. Continue to support the Regular battalions.

ITC. Continues to produce a high standard of recruits for the Regiment. Unfortunately there is still a shortage of aircraft to give them parachute training. In the meantime they reinforce the battalions.

RHQ. His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales, Colonel in Chief of the Parachute Regiment visited the Regiment during the summer (a very wet day!) and presented the Elizabeth Cross to the next of kin of those who perished in Afghanistan together with the operational medals to those who served in Afghanistan. He was accompanied by the Duchess of Cornwall

The Museum of the Parachute Regiment. The Museum continues to attract many visitors. The move to exhibit some of the items in the hall at HQ 16 Air Assault Bridge is developing.

## **MEMORIAL PEGASUS**

*By Mark Worthington – curator and heritage adviser to AANT*

The 2011 season is coming to an end and despite the difficult economic situation the museum has maintained a high level of visitor numbers. By the end of the year, the figure should be similar to 2010 with 100 000 paying visitors. Very satisfactory, as the advertising budget has been considerably reduced.

Visits by veterans are just as numerous, many returning for the first time since 1944. The majority were present for the annual D-Day Commemorations in June. Unfortunately, due to the inclement weather, the flypast on June 5<sup>th</sup>, by a Chinook helicopter from 18 Squadron RAF, was cancelled. The squadron, which has Pegasus as its crest, hopes to be present for the commemorations in 2012.

The temporary exhibition for 2012 will present the life stories of 11 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division Veterans, selected from the various units serving with the division. All are alive and, will hopefully be present for the inauguration of the exhibition on June 5<sup>th</sup>.

The museum president, Admiral Brac de la Perrière, has suggested that the Memorial Pegasus creates closer ties with the American airborne Museum at St Mere Eglise. For many years the museum management at St Mere had refused to become involved with the other D-Day sites. The appointment of a new director has remedied this problem. Stronger links with the museum at St Mere can be extremely beneficial as advertising costs can be shared. To commence, the Memorial Pegasus will present a display of British equipment, alongside American material.

Rest assured everybody, the Horsa Glider will retain its British markings!

The Memorial Pegasus is one of the most popular D-Day sites along the Norman coast, the 3rd most visited museum. The spacious interior, guided visits and clear concise explanation panels enable the visitor to easily comprehend the role of 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division in Normandy in 1944.



The Museum continues to draw in the visitors. Recently the Museum received the medals of the father of a Mr Tony Berridge, which had been falsely claimed by a French lady and took an appeal to the French President to release the medals which were handed to the Museum.

### **MERVILLE BATTERY**

#### **Report On Progress at The Merville Battery by Neil Barber (AANT delegate to the Anglo-French Committee for the Management of the Merville Battery)**

##### **No 1 Casemate.**

Major Mike Strong has put in a considerable amount of effort in refurbishing the content and appearance of the 'Steiner Room'.

##### **No 2 Casemate.**

An ongoing effort is being made to supplement the 'Rogues Gallery' and the amount of original photos of 9<sup>th</sup> Parachute Battalion men has increased dramatically this year. If any family or friends know of someone who is not yet featured and have a photograph available, please let me know.

##### **No 3 Casemate.**

The film background to the Glider cockpit is to be updated.

##### **No 4 Casemate.**

At the outset of the proposals to convert Nos 3 and 4 casemates to museums, the Anglo-French Committee agreed that No 4 would be a 50/50 split between the Battalions of the 6<sup>th</sup> Airlanding Brigade that were in the area when the Germans withdrew in August 1944. This entailed having sections on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Oxf and Bucks, 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Ulster Rifles, the 12<sup>th</sup> Devons, the Belgian Piron Brigade, and the Dutch Princess Irene Brigade. However, in the interest of getting more Belgian visitors to the Battery, it would appear that the Piron Brigade display has occupied 85% of the interior. There does not seem to be much prospect of redressing this imbalance.

The relevance of the Piron Brigade to the Battery itself is non-existent. However, it was involved as part of the 6<sup>th</sup> Airlanding Brigade's liberation of the Merville-Franceville area.

Regarding the Belgian content, the AANT representatives have provided a list of suggested improvements to the displays with regard to accuracy and also translations into English that are required. These were handed to the Battery Committee in April for action.

### The Dakota.

Quite a number of our veterans and members of the British public have expressed their concern on the aircraft being marked in American markings. The British members of the Merville Committee and also those of the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion Reunion Club have always opposed these markings. Obviously the Battalion was not dropped by the US on D-Day and so it is historically inaccurate and also misleading to anyone visiting the Battery with no knowledge of what occurred there. This has caused quite a bit of friction between the British and French parties, but the Mayor, Olivier Paz, has resisted all such pleas for the markings to be altered. These appeals have come from such people as our Chairman, Tony Lea and Jean Otway. This continues to be a contentious issue.

Some of our French colleagues appear to have an almost mystical adoration for this aircraft, indeed so much so, that the Dakota is now being advertised within French newspapers in its own right, without any mention of The Merville Battery Museum. At the very least, to not advertise the Dakota and the Battery together seems very odd and perhaps highlights the French attitude to the aircraft.

I am not alone in believing that an aircraft marked as such does not have any historical link to the events at the Battery and therefore dilutes the uniqueness of the site. However, there is little prospect of the markings being altered to reflect a historically accurate aircraft.

### French Effort Around the Site.

There are several French people who help throughout the year with various difficult and time-consuming tasks, all unpaid. Also members may not possibly know, that in May each year, there is a volunteers' day when many French locals perform much of the maintenance and improvement of the site. Our continued appreciation goes out to everyone involved.

### Historical Accuracy.

AANT has become concerned about the direction that the Battery is taking. The history of the 9<sup>th</sup> Parachute Battalion at the Battery is gradually being diluted and this needs to be addressed. Although it cannot be proved in itself, the Dakota may well have helped to increase the number of visitors to the site, but this is now being used to justify such decisions as the Dakota's markings and making No 4 a Belgian casemate.

Whereas the increase in visitors is very welcome, and helps to educate more people about the 9<sup>th</sup> Parachute Battalion and its achievements, if they are leaving the Battery with the wrong impression of the events there, it becomes a pointless exercise. The improvements to the site and the influx of visitors has almost inevitably driven the Museum towards becoming a business, and while to some degree this is a necessity, money must never be the reason to override or distort the basic policy that the Battery is the history and sacrifice of members of the 9<sup>th</sup> Parachute Battalion.

Consequently, concerns have been raised with Olivier Paz requesting that any future refurbishment of buildings on the site should deal with the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion's exploits in the remaining months of the Normandy campaign.

Just for reference, it may be useful to know that the Anglo-French Merville Battery Committee was originally composed of four British and four French members. Today it comprises ten French members and four British (represented by members of the Airborne Assault Normandy Trust (AANT)). Therefore, if there is any difference of opinion with regard to what is happening at the Battery, the British are outnumbered in any subsequent vote. The Chairman is the Mayor, Olivier Paz and the Vice-Chairman is Major Mike Strong

### **SALES**

Sales are still available, attached at Annex A in a list.

### **FORTH COMING EVENTS 2012**

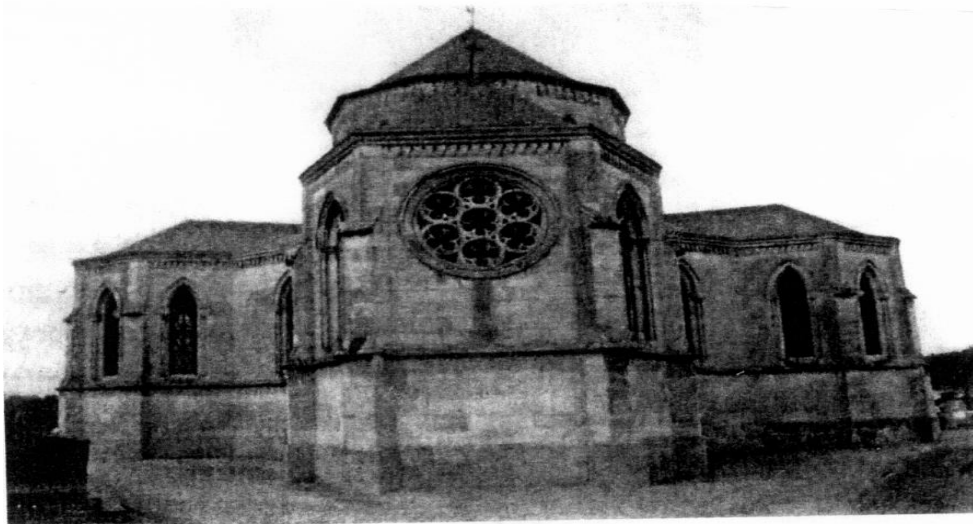
	The Rhine (to be confirmed)	-	Germany
27 – 28 Feb	Bruneval 70 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary	-	Bruneval
4 – 7 Jun	Normandy	-	France
26 May	Queen’s Diamond Jubilee		
22-23 Sept	Arnhem	-	Arnhem, Holland
	(Tours International will not be available for Arnhem).		
11 Nov.	St Pauls & St Lawrence Jewry	-	London

Watch for details in Pegasus.

Enquiries for overseas tours should be made to Tours International Ltd, PO Box No 45, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TW4 9XY. Tel: 01892 515825. Fax: 01892 515515.

### **CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR GREETINGS**

The President and Managing Trustees wish you and your families a Very Happy Christmas and Good Wishes for 2012. We look forward to meeting you throughout the coming year.



Ranville Church (the Paras Church!)

**Please note we have left Aldershot and our new address is on the heading on page 1.**

**Annexes.** A. List of goods for sale.

## ANNEX A TO THE AANT NEWSLETTER 2011

### LIST OF GOODS FOR SALE

To support the Trust, the following items are available and can be ordered from the Secretary AANT,

#### Booklet

“Red Berets into Normandy” £1.80 (incl P&P)

#### “Pegasus Trail”

Taped recording of the Airborne Assault into Normandy including maps etc. £5.00 (incl P&P)