

Commemoration of the "Frankton Mission"



HRH the Duke of Kent, Countess Mountbatten of Burma, and Nicolas Gailly, Managing Director of B&G



Nicolas Gailly (Managing Director of B&G), HRH the Duke of Kent, and His Excellency the British Ambassador to France, Mr John Holmes

...as the ou...
...e generations.
...ception afterwards was certainly amazingly well attended.
...nk showed people's interest in the occasion. We particularly
...e delicious small lunch party afterwards which was a very
...relaxing occasion.
...very interesting to hear about the whole big wine business
...ou run and it is really good to know that the bunker beside the
...hich was the site of the cruel execution of Sergeant Wallaces
...sine Ewart after the Frankton raid is so well cared for and looked
...I know my father would have been very pleased to know that.
...th many thanks for your kind hospitality and my best wishes.
*Yours sincerely
Patricia Mountbatten of Burma*

Thank you letter from Countess Mountbatten of Burma



On December 12th 2002, Château Magnol welcomed a number of VIPs to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Frankton Mission. Guests included HRH the Duke of Kent (representing his cousin, the Queen of England), Countess Patricia Mountbatten of Burma (daughter of the famous General Lord Mountbatten), and His Excellency John Holmes (the British Ambassador to France). There was also a delegation from the British Consulate in Bordeaux and the Royal Marine, as well as regional political and military representatives. The ceremony was all the more moving as the last surviving hero of the Frankton Mission, Royal Marine William Sparks, had passed away just a few days before the event.

The little-known story of the Frankton Mission has become much clearer thanks to recent access to German archives. It is an extraordinary story, forever engraved on the wall of an underground bunker poking through the lawn at Château Magnol. The heroic mission was carried out by the Royal Marine while Bordeaux was under German occupation in 1942.

BLOCKING THE SUPPLY AND ARMS ROUTE

During the night of December 11th 1942, four ships anchored on the left bank of the Port of Bordeaux and two on the other side of the river were seriously damaged by mines placed under their hulls. The attack targeted boats used by the German army to transport raw materials and to take arms and munitions to Japan. This especially daring mission was commanded by Winston Churchill and Lord Louis Mountbatten, Chief of Combined Operations, in order to avoid the aerial bombing of the port, which would have cost too many lives.

1982: Colonel Hasler and Royal Marine Sparks in front of the underground blockhouse at Château Magnol

BY SUBMARINE AND KAYAK

Leaving England on December 1st 1942, the submarine HMS Tuna reached the Médoc coast, across from Montalivet. Twelve men in 6 kayaks were assigned to the mission. One of the kayaks was damaged as soon as it hit the water, and could not be used. Two of the 5 remaining boats soon ran into major difficulties. One disappeared in the rough waters at the entrance to the estuary. The other, carrying Samuel Wallace and Robert Ewart, capsized. Both men made it safely back to shore, but were then captured by the Germans. Originally taken to Royan, they were later transferred to Château du Dehez – now Château Magnol – in Blanquefort, headquarters of Admiral Raeder, and executed on December 12th in front of the blockhouse.

6 DAYS TO REACH BORDEAUX

The three remaining kayaks, including the one carrying Colonel Hasler and Royal Marine Sparks, embarked on a perilous journey up the estuary. One of them was lost and never heard from again. Hiding during the day, the two remaining crews could only continue under cover of night and at high tide. On the morning of December 11th, they finally arrived in Bordeaux and hid until the evening. They positioned their mines between 9 and 10 p.m., and quickly moved away. This left them only a few hours to sink their kayaks and escape. Meanwhile, six German ships burned in the Port of Bordeaux...



ONLY TWO SURVIVORS

Having arrived on the outskirts of Blaye, Hasler and Sparks, helped by the French Resistance, succeeded in reaching Ruffec in the Charente. From there, they were taken to Lyon, and then to London via Spain. The other team was stopped in the southern part of the Charente-Maritime, transferred to Paris, and executed by a firing squad.

It is with a great deal of emotion that Barton & Guestier is proud to pay tribute every year to the sacrifice of these heroic Royal Marines.

