

press cutting



Client Patron Capital

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WATCH: Marines complete first Stage of Anniversary expedition



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The serving - and injured - personnel are kayaking and trekking to France

Today (7th December), in Bordeaux, France, a group of around 30 serving and former marines and a team from the Royal Navy - importantly including disabled war veterans - along with one civilian, Keith Breslauer (Trustee of the Royal Marines Charity and Managing Director of Patron Capital), complete the first leg of a gruelling recreation of one of



the Second World War's most daring raids, Operation Frankton, to commemorate its 75th anniversary. In December 1942, ten Royal Marine commandos were launched in their folding canoes (codenamed cockleshells) from the submarine HMS Tuna off the French coast. They then paddled up the Gironde estuary to attack ships moored at the German-occupied French port of Bordeaux before making the 100-mile journey on foot to rendezvous with the French Resistance in Ruffec. The aim of the raid was to destroy blockade-running merchant ships with limpet mines, and six ships were seriously damaged.



Only two of the ten commandos - who were immortalised in the 1955 film, *The Cockleshell Heroes* - survived, with the others succumbing to hypothermia in the freezing waters or being executed by the Germans.

Today marks the completion of the 85-mile paddle up the Gironde estuary in canoes. Tomorrow, a permanent monument commemorating the raid will be unveiled at a memorial service, near the town of Blaye, at the very location where the two survivors – Major Herbert ‘Blondie’ Hasler and Corporal Bill Sparks – scuttled their canoe before starting their escape across land.



Taking part in the raid’s recreation and memorial service are injured Royal Marines from the Hasler Naval Service Recovery Centre, which is named after Major Blondie Hasler. The challenge aims to help them build up their strength and stamina, while also honouring those injured in active service and raising awareness and funds for The Royal Marines Charity, which provides invaluable support for wounded, injured or sick serving and former Royal Marines.

Following the unveiling, the second phase of the Operation Frankton recreation will see the participants running 100 miles over the next three days, following in the footsteps of Sparks’ and Hasler’s journey to Ruffec.

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Keith Breslauer, Managing Director, Patron Capital, said:

“I’m extremely proud to take part in this challenge to support the incredible work of the Royal Marines and raise awareness of injured veterans. Training and taking part in this tough challenge only further deepens my respect for the Cockleshell Heroes and the generations of servicemen following in their footsteps.”

Captain Paul Fleet, expedition leader, said

“The challenge is part of the recovery programme for those taking part as it will help define them by their achievements rather than their injuries.

“This is a really important occasion for us, as Royal Marines, to commemorate what Hasler and his men did in the operation. We are also proud to be unveiling a permanent memorial where Hasler and Sparks, the surviving members, started their overland escape in Blaye, France. There hasn’t been one before, and this is a fitting tribute on such a historic anniversary.”

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