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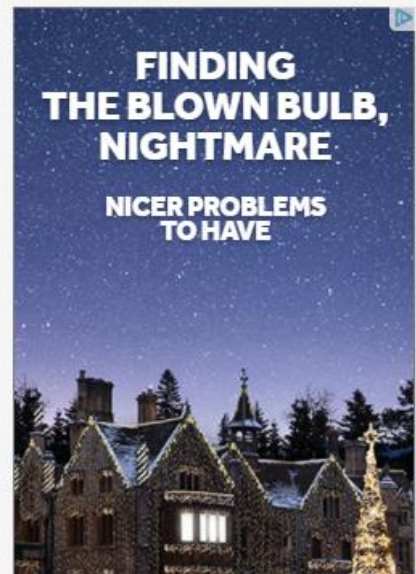
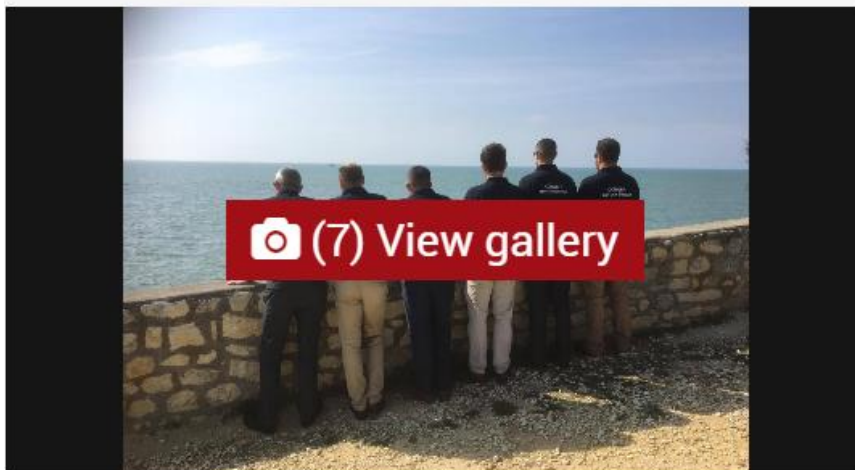
Client Patron Capital

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Marines and sailors recreate first leg of daring Second World War raid

Katie Williams [@DorsetEchoKatie](#)
Trainee reporter



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A group of serving and former Royal Marines and Royal Navy sailors have completed the first leg of their recreation of a famous Second World War raid.

They are bidding to cover the 85-mile canoe and 100-mile escape trek undertaken by the "Cockleshell Heroes" during Operation Frankton which destroyed German shipping in Bordeaux 75 years ago.

Among the 30 personnel taking part are those recovering from long-term physical and psychological issues.

The group have completed the paddle up the Gironde estuary in canoes and on Friday will unveil a permanent monument commemorating the raid during a memorial service.



The service takes place near the town of Blaye at the exact spot where the two survivors - Major Herbert 'Blondie' Hasler and Corporal Bill Sparks - scuttled their canoe before starting their escape across land.

In October, the grandsons of Marine Sparks completed the same punishing mission for **Weldmar** Hospicecare.

Richard and Mike Heard, along with a team of family and friends, endured testing conditions and hampering injuries to retrace the mission in memory of their father, who was looked after by Weldmar before he died in 2009.

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.

Eight of the original 10-strong team died - two succumbing to hypothermia in the freezing waters and six executed by the Germans.

Expedition leader Captain Paul Fleet, of the Royal Marines, 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 Major 'Blondie' Hasler and his men did in the operation.

"We are also proud to be unveiling a permanent memorial where Hasler and Bill 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."

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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Redleaf Polhill Limited, First Floor, 4 London Wall Buildings, London EC2M 5NT
T +44 (0)20 7382 2727 E info@redleafpr.com W redleafpr.com

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