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Cockleshell Heroes canoe challenge ends for Royal Navy and Royal Marines team



The Marines and Royal Navy team in the Gironde today

By
STAFF REPORTER
Email

A GROUP of about 30 serving and former marines and a team from the Royal Navy have finished the first leg of recreating Operation Frankton - the Second World War raid carried out by the Cockleshell heroes.

The Cockleshell heroes trained in Portsmouth before heading to Bordeaux to attack German ships moored in the port. The aim was to destroy blockade-running merchant ships with limpet mines, and six were seriously damaged.



After that the plan was to scuttle their canoes and travelled 100 miles on foot to meet up with the French Resistance.

Their daring raid was immortalised in the 1955 film *The Cockleshell Heroes* – only two of the 10 survived the operation.

Today's recreation was to mark the 75th anniversary, as the raid took place in December 1942. This morning the team finished the 85-mile paddle up the Gironde estuary in canoes and will now run 100 miles in three days.

Tomorrow, a permanent monument commemorating the raid will be unveiled at a memorial service, near the town of Blaye, where the two survivors – Major Herbert 'Blondie' Hasler and Corporal Bill Sparks – scuttled their canoe.

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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 support for wounded, injured or sick serving and former Royal Marines.

Captain Paul Fleet, expedition leader, said: ‘The challenge is part of the recovery for those taking part as it will help define them by their achievements rather than their injuries.’

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