

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2202688/Remarkable-photos-capture-Nazis-relaxing-battle.html>

Life through an enemy's lens: Former British commando reveals remarkable photos of Germans relaxing before battle found on camera he STOLE in daring WW2 raid

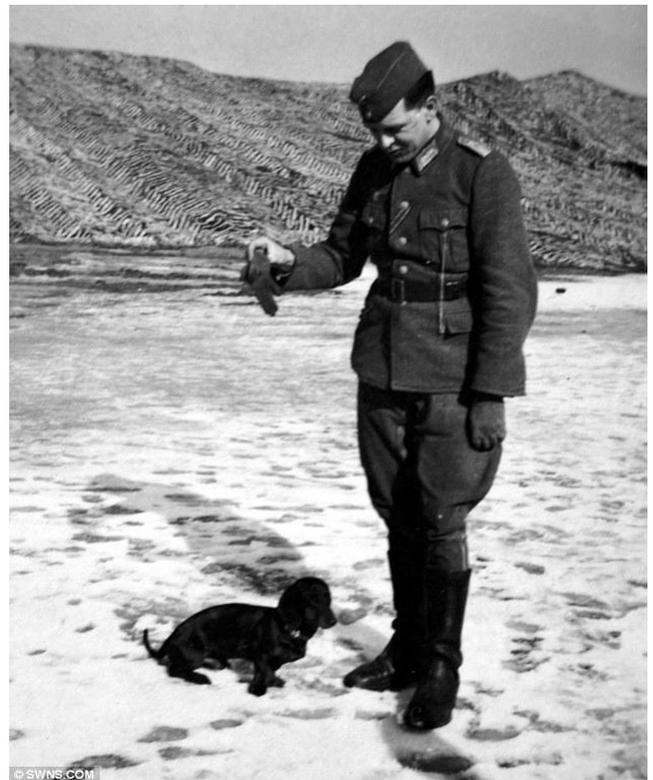
- **Green Beret Arthur Thompson was part of a team raiding the occupied Dutch island of Walcheren in 1944**
- **While inside a German bunker he found a camera and took it**
- **After carrying it around until the end of the war - and taking his own snaps - he had its contents developed**
- **It contained pictures of Germans having fun and the images have been released for the first time today**
- **'I was amazed when I got them developed. I still remember in detail the moment I found the camera,' he said**

By **MARTIN ROBINSON** Published: 15:31 GMT, 13 September 2012 | Updated: 06:35 GMT, 14 September 2012

Smiling, laughing and looking like they were without a care in the world, these photographs of soldiers guarding one of Nazi Germany's key outposts in 1944 were never meant to see the light of day. But this life through a lens on the idyllic Dutch island of Walcheren was grabbed by a British war hero in a daring raid behind enemy lines and its incredible contents have been published for the first time today. Green Beret Arthur Thompson, 89, was part of a 47 Royal Marine Commando smash and grab sortie on November 1 1944 to the island, in an attempt to punch a hole through the enemy's defences.



Incredible: Frolicking in the sunshine, these German soldiers have fun in 1944 while the war rages around them - an image that would never have been seen had a British commando not stolen their camera



Play time: A German officer plays with a dachshund on an idyllic beach on the Dutch island of Walcheren, which was then under Nazi control

Walcheren is an island in the mouth of the river Scheldt, and was a Nazi stronghold that gave German forces the use and control of the vital deep sea port of Antwerp in Belgium.



Hero: Former Royal Marine Commando Arthur Thompson took a camera from a Nazi bunker and revealed its contents nearly 70 years later

Aged just 21 then, Mr Thompson took the camera from a German bunker and carried it with him around Europe until the war was over - and there was even enough film left for him to take some of his own pictures.

As soon as he was back in Britain he took them to be developed - and assuming the film would only contain his snaps - he was amazed at what he found.

The pictures show one unknown German relaxing on the beautiful sand-swept Dutch island prior to the allied invasion.

In one of the photos a German officer can be playing with his cute dachshund in a scene that could not be further away from the brutal war that was raging around him.

In another snap soldiers can be seen sprawled across a grassy dune draped over one another while laughing and joking.

Other pictures show officers attending a military briefing and posing up against a wooden post.

Grandfather-of-six Arthur, who lives in Greenhill, Kent, said he had decided to share the images publicly for the first time after a request from local historians.

'I think the pictures are fascinating. They give a glimpse of war that is rarely ever seen,' he said.

'I was amazed when I got them developed. I still

remember in detail the moment I found the camera.

'We were sweeping the island of Walcheren in Holland, which was riddled with bunkers.



Pinched: The camera taken in the daring raid by Arthur Thompson, in the background, still works to this day



Guarding: The Germans built a series of bunkers on the island, and the one in the background is probably what the commandos raided in 1944



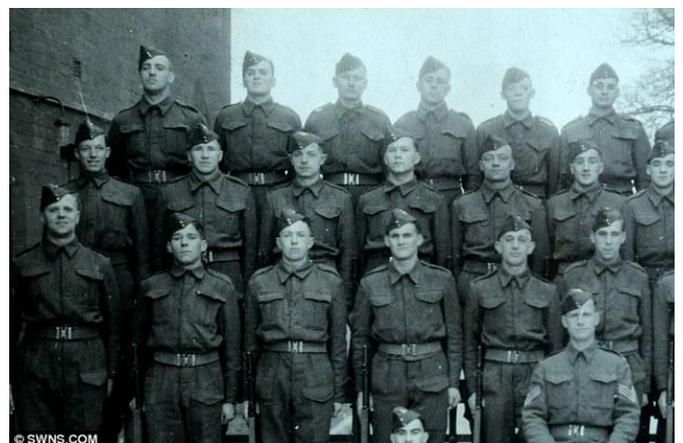
Relaxing: Two unknown soldiers pose on the banks leading down to the island's beaches



Meeting: German troops lounge on chairs outside in the sunshine in 1944 with several more sitting on grassy banks

'It had sand dunes higher than houses. As we were advancing along the dunes we had to check the bunkers. 'I went down one bunker to make sure it was clear. In the corner there was camera in a case: I captured it. In that camera was a film.

'I put in my pocket and kept it with me through the way. I took a few photos on that camera myself.'



Brave: Royal Marine Arthur Thompson, pictured 4th from the left, centre row, was part of a team of heroes who carried out raids all over Europe



Brave: Young commando Mr Thompson, aged 20, took the camera and revealed a never before seen view of life as a German soldier at the height of the war



The 47 Royal Marine Commando he belonged to were an elite fighting force of 420 men who fought some of the toughest battles of WWII.

#### WALCHEREN: THE DUTCH ISLAND KEY TO GERMANY'S DEFENCES



Its strategic position at the mouth of the river leading to Antwerp meant that Walcheren paid a heavy price in the Second World War.

Soon after the Dutch surrender in May 1940 the Germans took it and scarred its landscape with bunkers and guns, making it a constant target for British bombers.

In fact by the end of the war it became one of the most bombed parts of Europe.

After four years of occupation D-Day came on June 6 and the race to take Walcheren was on.

To launch the final attack against Hitler's Third Reich, the Allies badly needed Antwerp to ensure they could bring in ships with equipment.

In early September 1944 the city and its port were taken easily, but Walcheren was still occupied so they could not use the Scheldt river.

To breach Walcheren's defence, rather than invade, they decided to bomb a sea dike, causing a 150 metre breach that flooded the island.

The population had been alerted in advance via a pamphlet drop, but a mistake meant bombs also fell on a town, killing about 200 civilians. Despite the attack the Germans stayed so on November 1 troops invaded and re-took the island in a fierce battle. Arthur and his unit famously captured the strategic port of Port-en-Bessin, in Normandy France after slipping behind enemy lines on D-DAY and completing a 12-mile march through Nazi territory. The heavily fortified port was the vital Normandy terminal of PLUTO, the Pipe Line Under The Ocean, which pumped millions of gallons of fuel under the

Channel to France.

And their capture of it from the crack German unit, the 352 Infantry Division, went down in the history books as 'the most spectacular of all commando exploits during the actual invasion'.

Arthur joined the war effort in 1944 after carrying out over two years of training with the Commandos.

His first taste of action was storming the beaches of Normandy on D-day at the age of just 20.

He stayed in Germany until he was demobbed in 1946 and went back to England to marry his wife June in 1947, who sadly died 10 years ago at the age of 74.

But Arthur, a father of three, spent the rest of his life living in Kent working as a coal miner until he retired at the age of 60 and has modestly played down his achievements.

'I have had a lucky life. I survived the war - we had some pretty difficult task to complete - it was a tough old job,' he said.

'We were a great unit and people have often referred to us as heroes but unfortunately we also lost a lot of great men through out the war.

'But I was lucky enough to survive, marry my beautiful wife and bring up three great kids - who have given me wonderful grandchildren.

'I have often wondered about the lives of the other German soldiers who are in the pictures but I guess I will never now what happened to them - they probably died.

'I'm just grateful that I am still here today.'