



# The Monte Cassino Society

Furthering an interest in the Italian Campaign 1943–1945

NA15141

## Welcome

Spring/Summer 2011

Welcome to the Spring/Summer edition of our newsletter.

We continue to attract new members, either by word of mouth or the website. It is pleasing and surprising to note that many enquiries come from veterans.

As Secretary, I am the initial contact for the Society, but behind the scenes there is a team of willing volunteers - or maybe they were press ganged - I am not sure! Without them we could not function. Stan Pearson, our Treasurer since the Society was founded; Suzanne Turk, who in the background is a tremendous support. Philip Soady who has now been joined by Perry Rowe, and together they are updating and overseeing the Website. Paul Taylor and John Leach who organised our very successful trip to Italy this year. Stan Pearson has now joined Peter Wain, Doreen Belcher and Mike Anslow in seeing the memorial project through to fruition. They all give freely of their time and never accept refund for their expenses. I wish to thank them for their support in what for me has been a very difficult year.

Finally, my apologies for the delay in publishing this newsletter due to family commitments.

Judith Coote

Daughter of the late Gerald Soady,

91st LAA, Royal Artillery, 4th British Infantry Division

### Aim

To remember and further an interest in the experiences of all who took part in the Italian Campaign.

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## News

### Annual Remembrance Services

#### Cenotaph Ceremony 2011

This year the Cenotaph Ceremony and March Past on is on Sunday 13th November and we would urge you to join us if possible. We do appreciate it does involve much standing around, often in inclement weather, but if there are any hardy souls able to make it this year, we will be pleased to see you.

Naturally, each year fewer and fewer

veterans are able to attend. In addition to travelling to London, the wait in Horse Guards and then in Whitehall is arduous.

Unfortunately, the British Legion insist on veterans attending—albeit with carers—so without veterans we will be unable to participate. So, if any veterans can make it - on scooters, wheelchairs, whatever, we have plenty of carers to help.

If you would like tickets, please indicate on the enclosed pro forma.

## News (continued)

### Field of Remembrance 2011

The Field of Remembrance will be opened by a senior member of the Royal Household on Thursday, 10th November. In an effort to reduce attendance to manageable numbers, admission to the Opening Service is by ticket only. The Field will be open to the general public following the service (from 1.00 p.m.) and will close on Sunday 20th November.

As in previous years, we have purchased a plot - No. 178 - and a number of crosses for individual dedications. Will you please let us have your personal dedications on the enclosed pro forma.

In previous years this has been an opportunity to meet with old friends and if you do wish to attend the Opening Service, please indicate that you require a ticket to the Field on the pro forma.

### Proposed Memorial in the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, Staffordshire

A small sub committee is meeting at the Arboretum on 20th September to further plans for the memorial. The design has to be submitted to the Trustees when they next meet, on 25th October.

To date we have raised £7,500, most of which has come from our membership. We are still some way from our objective and we need to make one last push.

Requests to Regimental Associations from the Secretary did not prove over successful; from thirty five contacted we received only six replies, three apologizing for being unable to contribute and three sending donations. The Grenadier Guards Association, the RASC & RCT Association and the Royal Sussex Regimental Association contributed a total of £500. Perhaps members contacting their respective

Regimental Associations may have more effect and possibly a positive result.

Another possibility - local newspapers (see below). Harry Launder contacted his local paper, the South Wales Evening Post, which resulted in a donation of £500 from the widow of a Cassino veteran.

Thank you to all those who have already contributed - we do appreciate your support. Thanks also, to Pat Lucas who once again ran the Bingo on our trip to raise funds for the memorial.

The National Memorial Arboretum has an extensive website—[www.thenma.org.co.uk](http://www.thenma.org.co.uk)

(Extract from *The South Wales Evening Post*)

#### WW2 veteran's battle fund fight

A Swansea veteran is urging people to back a fundraising drive to build a memorial to one of the Second World War's bloodiest episodes.

Harry Launder spent his 21st birthday under fire in the battle for Monte Cassino.

The desperate fighting to capture the Italian hilltop monastery in 1944 has been described by military historians as similar to the horrific scenes of trench warfare seen in the First World War.

Eighty eight year old Mr. Launder, who lives in St. Helens, is now a member of the Monte Cassino Society, an organization which brings together veterans and their families.

The society is aiming to raise £17,000 to build a memorial to the campaign at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire.

Mr. Launder said "I really hope we can raise the money we need - we owe it to our comrades who fell during the battle.

Americans, Poles, Canadians, Indians, North African French, Kiwis and Gurkhas, as well as the Brits were involved in the bloody fighting for the monastery, which lay on the road to Rome.

## News (continued)

### Cassino 2011

Once again we had a very successful trip to Italy. Our party numbered forty six and we had a very full week, in fine weather. Many old friends were reunited and by the end of the week those who were travelling with us for the first time had become firm friends. We were one big, happy family!

As we arranged this trip ourselves and were not using an agent in Italy, we were able to have the services of Flavio and his coach. He went out of his way to accommodate us - nothing was too much trouble for him - patience personified!! He also organised a splendid day for us in his home village of Picinisco. We were warmly welcomed and after a short speech by the Mayor, the laying of wreaths and exchange of gifts, the primary school children entertained us - they were an absolute joy. Our visit ended with a buffet lunch in the town square. It was a wonderful occasion.

This year Perry Rowe and his wife Judi joined us. As well as leading a specific battlefield tour, Perry was on hand to point out various points of interest whenever we were travelling in the coach.

In the past we have always timed our visit to coincide with the British Legion's Southern Italy Tour, ensuring that we are in Cassino for the annual Service of Remembrance at Cassino Cemetery, organised by them. This year, as usual, we used the dates advertised on their website. A few weeks before we were due to leave we learnt that Poppy Travel were no longer organising tours and that the company taking over from them would be visiting the Cassino area the following week. We contacted the British Embassy in Rome who, at short notice, arranged for



Hadyn Davies (6th Batt. The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment) exchanging gifts with the Mayor of Picinisco



Bill Clarke (132 Welsh Field Regiment RA) who laid our wreath at Picinisco

The Naval Attache, Commander Richard Brooksbank, a lady Padre, Mary Styles and a bugler from the Italian Ministry of Defence to attend. It was a very personal, dignified service.

Sincere thanks to all those who worked hard to ensure we had an enjoyable week.

If you are interested in a trip to Italy in 2012 - and it will very much depend on numbers - please indicate on the enclosed pro forma.

News (continued)



Bob Clarke  
(3rd Field Regiment, RA,  
8th Indian Division)  
gave the Exhortation  
and his daughter Liz  
read the Prayers  
Jim Knox  
(4th Battalion, 2nd  
Independent Parachute  
Brigade)  
laid our wreath

ANZIO BEACHHEAD CEMETERY

Jim Knox  
with  
George & Robbie White  
(4th Battalion, the Parachute Regiment)



Our Bugler, Garth Wright  
(153/52 LAA, Royal Artillery)



## News (continued)

Jim Knox is a member of The Parachute Regimental Association and on a recent visit to the French Paras in Paris was asked by the Parade General to lay the wreath at the Arc De Triomphe. Mass in the Cathedral of Saint-Louis Des Invalides was followed by lunch in the Rotunda and march and inspection lasting two hours.



The children of the local primary school made the Italian flag in three parts

### PICINISCO



## Recollections/letters etc.

Sent in by Nuala Donoghue

### THE TORCH OF SAINT BENEDICT : SYMBOL OF UNITED EUROPE

In 1964, when St. Benedict was proclaimed Patron of Europe, it was decided that the Lighting of a torch would take place to represent European unity. The Torch is now known simply as the Torch of Saint Benedict. Since 1992, the year of the Maastricht Treaty and the European Union, it has also become a symbol of peace.

St. Benedict, with his motto 'Ora Labora et Lege' (work, study but most of all pray) was proclaimed co-Patron of Europe to testify to the common Christian cultural roots which the twenty-seven European countries share. The lighting of the Torch represents the light of Christ revealed in the life of St. Benedict, a light which travels through Europe bringing peace, fraternity, and friendship.

Since 1980, the 1500th anniversary of the birth of St. Benedict, the Torch has retraced the path of Benedictine spirituality through many parts of Europe, starting from the city chosen to light the Torch and going all the way to St. Benedict's tomb at Montecassino. The message of peace, hope, and fraternity symbolised by the Torch of St. Benedict has also reached cities further afield including Jerusalem and New York. The latter was of crucial importance to strengthen the Benedictine message of peace, after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001.

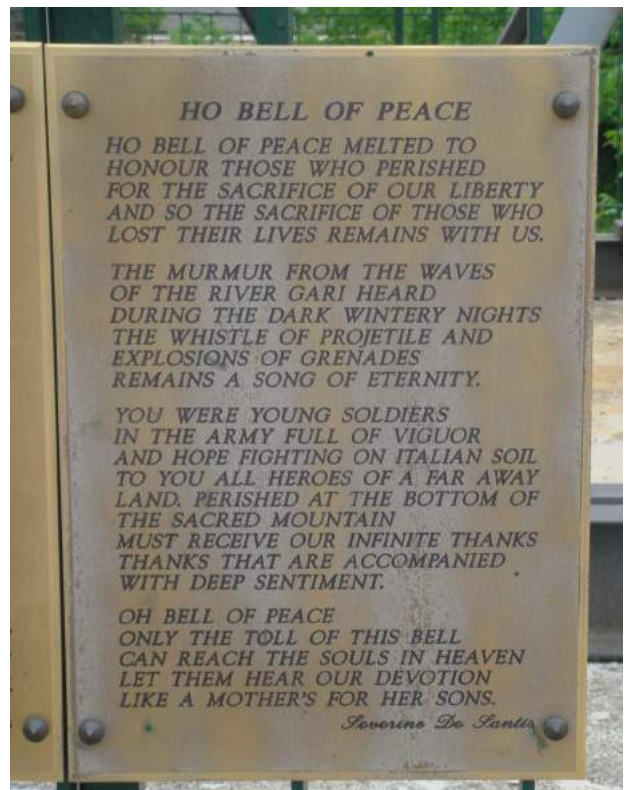
This year it was decided to light the Torch in London at Westminster Abbey, a Benedictine monastery for 600 years until the mid-sixteenth century, and a secular Collegiate Church since 1560. The rhythm of prayer and praise, psalmody and petition has continued throughout this time, as the *opus Dei* continues to be celebrated by those who live and work here. Tomorrow the Torch of St. Benedict will be transferred to Westminster Cathedral where a mass will be celebrated for Italian immigrants by the Archbishop of Westminster.

On the way back from the United Kingdom the Torch will be received and blessed by Pope Benedict XVI on 16th March, finally reaching its destination of St. Benedict's tomb on the vigil of his Feast Day, 20th March.



### S. ANGELO

The Bell and English Translation of the Inscription on the Monument on the bank of the river



### Recollections/Letters (cont.)



#### Casino war cemetery

Commander Richard Brooksbank laid the wreath on behalf of HM Government, Harry Launder on behalf of the Monte Cassino Society and John Leach for the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry . The Exhortation was given by Eric Durban (Royal Artillery)

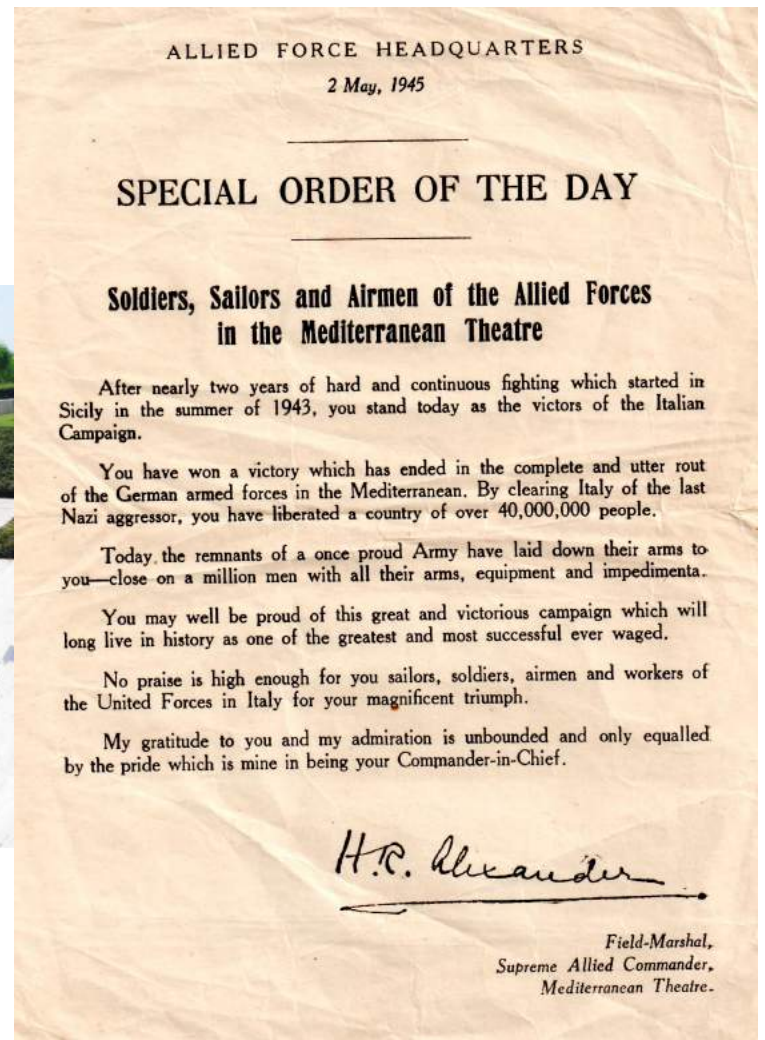
Wooden crosses were placed on graves of our members' loved ones at Anzio, Minturno and Cassino



Harry Launder (Royal Corps of Signals)



Special Order of the Day found in the effects of the late Gerald Soady, 91st LAA, RA



ALLIED FORCE HEADQUARTERS

2 May, 1945

### SPECIAL ORDER OF THE DAY

#### Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Forces in the Mediterranean Theatre

After nearly two years of hard and continuous fighting which started in Sicily in the summer of 1943, you stand today as the victors of the Italian Campaign.

You have won a victory which has ended in the complete and utter rout of the German armed forces in the Mediterranean. By clearing Italy of the last Nazi aggressor, you have liberated a country of over 40,000,000 people.

Today the remnants of a once proud Army have laid down their arms to you—close on a million men with all their arms, equipment and impedimenta.

You may well be proud of this great and victorious campaign which will long live in history as one of the greatest and most successful ever waged.

No praise is high enough for you sailors, soldiers, airmen and workers of the United Forces in Italy for your magnificent triumph.

My gratitude to you and my admiration is unbounded and only equalled by the pride which is mine in being your Commander-in-Chief.

*H.R. Alexander*

Field-Marshal,  
Supreme Allied Commander,  
Mediterranean Theatre.

## Annual Subscription

Thank you to those who have already paid this year's subscription. If for any reason you have not yet done so, please send your £12 subscription to Judith Coote at the address below.

Thank you.



The Monte Cassino Society

NA15141

### Contact Us

Michael Anslow

[anslow9@hotmail.com](mailto:anslow9@hotmail.com)

Judith Coote

Secretary

[jude@whlooe.eclipse.co.uk](mailto:jude@whlooe.eclipse.co.uk)

White Horses, Meadway, East Looe, Cornwall. UK PL13 1JT

Stan Pearson

Treasurer

[stanley.pearson@talktalk.net](mailto:stanley.pearson@talktalk.net)

Paul Taylor

[p-a-taylor@supanet.com](mailto:p-a-taylor@supanet.com)

Suzanne Turk

[stfrigate@yahoo.ca](mailto:stfrigate@yahoo.ca)

Philip Soady

[phil.soady@ntlworld.com](mailto:phil.soady@ntlworld.com)