



THE MONTE CASSINO SOCIETY

Furthering an interest in the Italian Campaign 1943–1945

NA15141

Autumn/Winter 2014

Aim

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

Welcome

Welcome to the Autumn/Winter newsletter.

We are happy to report that Northleigh House School have obtained Heritage Lottery Funding for a project which for us, amongst other things, would mean upgrading our website, transferring all existing information to a new, up to date site. Our existing website was set up by a professional web designer and only he and one other person have full “administrative rights”. Both of these are no longer affiliated to the Society. This means that very few new items can be added. Newsletters and Recollections can be updated (although it takes a long time to work out how to do it each time), but things such as photos can’t be added—a great shame as some of you have taken wonderful photos of our trips over the years and I think pages of photos would be a great addition.

Judith tells me that we get most of our enquiries from people who have seen the

site. Not all join, but some do, and the more the merrier!! In addition we have been able to help many people trace loved ones and advise on how to start searches for people and for war records.

We think that a website, easier to maintain and with a more colourful Homepage would be more likely to take more than a glance.

*There are some Veterans’ recollections that are, well, take a look for yourself, some of the things they had to do and to endure is beyond belief. (Unfortunately, as it is set up at the moment, and what we cannot correct, is that to read these recollections you need a user name and password. This was to comply with Data Protection legislation. We now get permission for every item before publication). To get on, the user name is **guest** and the password is **cassino**, not too original but easy to remember.*

Phil Soady

*Son of the late Gerald Soady, 91st LAA,
Royal Artillery, 4th British Infantry
Division*

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News

London Remembrance Services

Field of Remembrance, Westminster

The opening ceremony on Thursday morning 6th November attended by a member of the Royal Household, is by ticket only. The Field is open to the general public once the reviewing party has left and is open for one week. We have a limited number of tickets and if you are interested in attending please let us know on the enclosed pro forma. This is a good opportunity to meet with old friends attending other Regimental and Association plots.

Our plot—number 176— is to the left of the path when entering from the west gate.

We have crosses for individual dedications. Will you please let us have your personal dedications on the pro forma. We do not make a charge but please feel free to put a donation in any Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal collecting box as the crosses this year have been donated by one of our members.

Cenotaph Ceremony

We have ordered more tickets for this year’s service and parade in the hope that in this 70th anniversary year we might get a few more able to join the usual stalwarts who regularly turn out to represent the Society at this event.

News (continued)

We have the offer of two wheelchairs for anyone who may feel able to get to Horse Guards but would find standing for so long and then marching back to Horse Guards too strenuous. We certainly have able bodied people only too happy to assist. Anyone interested in taking up this offer, please indicate on the pro forma when ordering tickets.

Heritage Lottery Bid

Northleigh House School has been successful in their Lottery Heritage Fund Bid. The project will compare the bombing of Coventry Cathedral and the Abbey at Monte Cassino. The students will start work immediately on interviews with veterans, mounting an exhibition and assisting with the website. The culmination of the project will be a visit to Cassino in June next year when they will pay all expenses for three veterans and their carers to join a small party of students.

Tobia Bianco is the teacher leading the project. Tobia attended school in Cassino.

Monte Cassino Society Ties & Scarves

Unfortunately we have been unable to find anyone willing to take an order of less than one hundred scarves. As they are quite expensive sadly we don't have the funds to pay for scarves that will certainly remain unsold. We are still looking for a manufacturer who will process a smaller order.

The ties are ordered and we await delivery. Will you please indicate on the pro forma the number you require. There is no need to send money at this stage—we will contact you when we get delivery.

Service of Dedication of Standard

As mentioned in the last newsletter, we have hired the facilities at the National Memorial Arboretum for the afternoon of Saturday 23rd May. It is very expensive to hold an event at the Arboretum and it would be helpful to know approximate numbers as early as possible. We will be making a nominal charge, the balance being paid from Society funds. Will you please indicate on the enclosed pro forma if you think you will be attending.

Although our new standard was blessed by the local priest when we visited Picinisco in May it will be fitting to have the official dedication service beside our memorial in Alrewas.

An exciting—and unexpected development—we have been invited by the Royal British Legion to parade the standard at their Festival of Remembrance in the Albert Hall on Saturday, 8th November.

Many thanks to Mike Anslow who has travelled hundreds of miles already, flying the flag! In August, at the request of the family, he attended the funeral of our dear friend Bill (Nobby) Clarke—it was very much appreciated by the family.



THIS PHOTOGRAPH OF OUR PLOT IN THE ARBORETUM WAS TAKEN BY STAN PEARSON FOLLOWING THE MEMORIAL SERVICE IN MAY 2013

We look forward to meeting friends old and new at the Dedication Service. An opportunity to make new friends and renew acquaintances.

News (continued)

Battlefield Study to Cassino

With the exception of the trip next June organised by Tobia Bianco with students from Northleigh House School, we will not be involved in organising a trip to Cassino in 2015. However, Frank De Planta will be leading a Battlefield Study from 7th to 10th May 2015. It is an intensive tour covering the Rapido River Crossing, San Angelo Bridge, Snakeshead Ridge, Point 593, the Cavendish Road, Monastery Hill, Castle Hill, Amazon Bridge, and Monte Artemisio.

Anyone interested in joining Frank can contact him at f.deplanta@btinternet.com or 01347 811104. Website address is www.cassinobattlefields.co.uk

Letters

The following extract from Diane Preston—daughter of the late Jack Preston, Royal Engineers -

Dear Judith

I thought you might like to see what I had submitted to all the local papers in Chester and Holyhead, all published by them! I was lucky to have a couple of nationals as well. I just felt that I had to mention Monte Cassino. It is amazing isn't it just how many people who don't know about it. I have even spoken to veterans who didn't know there was a war in Italy!

..... I will be wearing Dad's medals and cap this weekend in Holyhead when we shall be having a ceremony to dedicate only the third official Garden of Remembrance in the British Isles.

I am looking forward to November; it really makes you feel British. (I should say makes you "feel proud to be British").

Diane's letter to the press

It was 6 June and I was sitting in front of the television in tears of pride watching events unfold to commemorate the 70th anniversary of D Day.

It was etched on the faces of those heroes as they remembered that dreadful day. Young men who took on the might of the German enemy to liberate Europe, so we could be born free from tyranny. We should never forget as time marches on what these heroes did for us. Seldom will any veteran accept the accolade of hero "we just did what we had to" is the usual reply.

There was another conflict which has not received acknowledgement in fact it seems that it has been forgotten. One of the bloodiest of the War and that was the Battle of Monte Cassino in Italy, where approximately 200,000 men were killed. It is hard for us to comprehend that amount of life lost in one place.

My beloved late father a Sergeant with the Royal Engineers was in the thick of it. We were watching it on television when a bomb hit the monastery with terrific force and my Father simply said "I was there



then" and retreated into his memories. What horrors did he witness? Like all veterans he never went into details. There was a song written about them "The D-Day Dodgers in Sunny Italy" with tongue in cheek that only a soldier could write—and unrepeatable.

During the phoney war he was an instructor and was sent to train the Home Guard. He was apprehensive he was only 22 and he was about to train men the same age as his father, but that faded as they took to him. He always told me of the evenings he spent listening to them reliving their memories. He just sat there in awe of that generation that went through hell in those unbelievably dreadful trenches. After that he often used to say "If I had to be in a war, I'm pleased it was the second".

Now, I wear his medals with immense pride on Remembrance Sunday in London when I lay a wreath in memory of a much-loved father. He was loyal to his regiment to the end, as they say "Once a Sapper always a Sapper". I also have great pride in being an Association Member of the Regiment.

We must make it a mission that we never forget just what these men went through at their fields of conflict during both conflicts.

It is essential that we turn out in force on 1 August to show the high respect we hold the generation that is no longer with us. All those young men who willingly went to the front not knowing the horrors that awaited them.

Yours faithfully
Diane Preston (Miss)
A fiercely proud Sappers daughter

Letters (continued)

On our return from the 70th Anniversary Pilgrimage, we sent the following to HRH Prince Harry

24 May 2014

Your Royal Highness

I enclose a letter from the fourteen veterans we were privileged to take back to Cassino for the 70th anniversary commemorations. Fourteen D Day Dodgers!! They were anxious to thank you for your generosity of time and for the interest you showed in them, especially thrilled that you were so very well aware of the horrendous nature of the fighting they were involved in.

The Italian Campaign veterans have never received the recognition they deserve. This Society, started following the 60th anniversary, has been trying to get that recognition for these elderly gentlemen for almost ten years, with little or no success; and POW! your interest has had the media falling over themselves to interview them! - I thank you from the bottom of my heart. That being the case, and I hope this is not too presumptuous, we wondered if you would honour us with your patronage. The Aim of the Society is *'To remember and further an interest in the experiences of those who took part in the Italian Campaign'* though our prime interest is Cassino.

On behalf of our veterans, widows and their families I thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to spend some time with them. It is very much appreciated.

Yours very sincerely
Judith Coote
Secretary



KENSINGTON PALACE

From: Edward Lane Fox, Esq.,
Private Secretary to HRH Prince Henry of Wales

Private and Confidential

20th August, 2014

Unfortunately the reply was in the negative and as the letter was marked 'Private and Confidential' I have omitted all but the Prince's good wishes. In any event, it was a long shot! He is a very busy young man

Dear Ms. Coote,

Prince Harry has asked me to write and thank you for your kind letter of 24th May, following His Royal Highness's visit to Cassino.

The Prince was delighted to be able to join the veterans for the Cassino Commemorations. His Royal Highness was fascinated by their stories and the unbelievable conditions they faced during the campaign.

Prince Harry sends you and all the veterans, widows and their families his warmest best wishes, and would have me reiterate his sincere thanks for thinking of him in this way.

Yours faithfully,
Edward Lane Fox

Letters (continued)

Another of our members who felt compelled to write to the media was Pat Gudgeon, daughter of Ivor Cutler, 5th Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment

To BBC Audience Services

Dear Sirs

My Father, Ivor Cutler, was one of the Monte Cassino Veterans who were interviewed by Robin Gibson from BBC South East at our hotel in Castelpetroso on Friday and Saturday 16/17 May prior to the service at Cassino to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Battle of Monte Cassino.

This was not shown in our area which is covered by BBC North West, so would it be possible for you to send me a copy of the interviews in full for us to keep as a memento of the visit? Dad rarely talks of what he experienced and we have learned more from listening to the banter between the veterans than we have from Dad himself.

Please can you tell me if, in the future, there will be a programme aired specifically about the Battle of Monte Cassino which was one of the fiercest and bloody battles of WW11. During our last visit to Cassino three years ago we were informed that a crew from BBC along with Dan Snow would like to speak with the veterans at Cassino but unfortunately due to some timing issue the crew were unable to make the appointment.

The Italian Campaign is known as the forgotten campaign, which it shouldn't be as it was integral to the later success in Europe. Prince Harry issued a press release in which he says he has been invited to return to Cassino with the Veterans to learn more from them and if possible would go back.



IVOR CUTLER PICTURED IN CASSINO WAR CEMETERY WITH HIS SON GRAHAM

Much has been made of the D Day Landing which was a huge undertaking by our forces, but nothing has recently been mentioned on the efforts and losses incurred by those who fought so hard in Italy. It would be a marvelous tribute to the veterans who are still with us and the families of those who fell, if a programme could be made to show what they did to help secure our future.

Wherever we go whenever we visit Italy with the Monte Cassino Association our veterans are treated as celebrities with people from all ages and walks of life asking to have their photos taken with them and thanking them for giving them their future.

I look forward to receiving your reply.

Yours faithfully

Patricia Gudgeon

New Members

Christopher Came, son of the late James Oswald Came, 1/4th Essex Regiment

Stephanie Cruse, daughter of Gordon Cruse, 132nd Welsh Field Regiment

David Holmes, son of the late Winston Wilfred Holmes, 4th Indian Division

Mrs C.S. Huxtable, widow of Morton, Royal Corps of Signals

Rick Ladbrook, son of the late Derek, 5th Scottish Para Regiment

Ernie Parker, Veteran

Matthew Parker, Author of *Monte Cassino—The story of the hardest fought battle of World War Two*

Mrs Joan S. Pearce, widow of William Harold Pearce, Royal Artillery

William Simm, veteran—30th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery

Dave Simm, son of William, 30th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery

Letters (cont'd)

Jim Morgan writes -

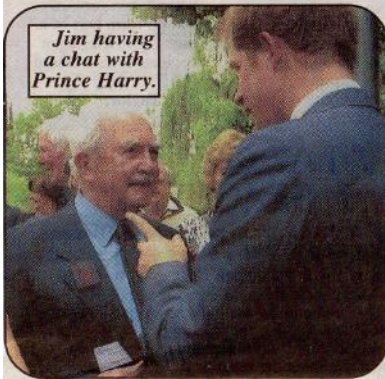
As you know your Welsh contingent try to get together at least once a year and after several false starts for various reasons, we made it last Thursday. Everytime we have done this we have had superb weather so that after our pub lunch we have been able to sit out in the garden for tea and whatever beverage takes our fancy. This year was no exception.

(Joining the lads in the photo are Jim's wife Margaret and Theo's brother Bob)



The following account appeared in Jim Morgan's local paper, *The Llantwit Major Gem*, on September 25th 2014

70 years after their brave actions... MONTE CASSINO VETERANS HOLD A LLANTWIT REUNION



Jim having a chat with Prince Harry.

A group of Welsh World War Two veterans – all members of The Monte Cassino Society – held a reunion recently in Llantwit Major.

Jim Morgan, who lives in the town, said: "Our average age is 92 and we hold the get-together annually.

"All four of us are members of The Monte Cassino Society, who served in various branches of the Army in Italy during the first six months of 1944."

The Battle of Monte Cassino was a series of four assaults by the Allies against the 'Winter Line' in Italy, with the aim of effecting a breakthrough to Rome. The capture of Monte Cassino came at a high price, with the Allies sustaining around 55,000 casualties. The Monte Cassino



ABOVE: The veterans, from left to right – Theo Davies, (Swansea) Aubrey Evans (Neath), Jim Morgan (Llantwit Major) and Bob Clarke (Llantwit Major).

Society comprises veterans and their relatives – the relatives, for understandable reasons, have taken on more of the organisation of the society as the years have passed by. Earlier this year, Jim was among those in the society who made a

journey back to Italy to remember comrades who never made it home. The party numbered 105 and included 14 veterans.

Jim explained: "In May, those who were able, joined a party of veterans which travelled to Cassino to mark the 70th

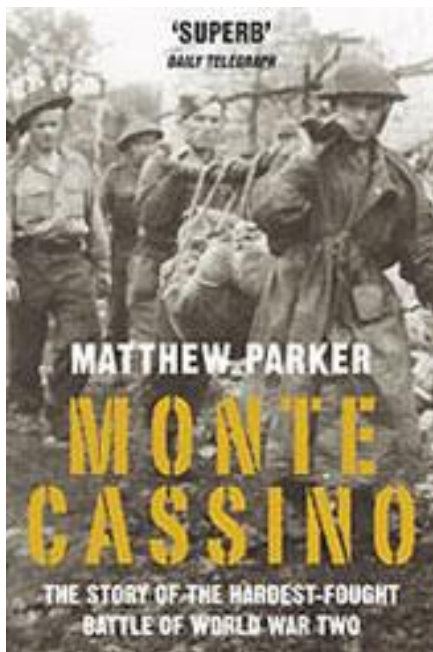
anniversary of the battles. "The pilgrimage was organised by the society and was sponsored by the National Lottery.

"A moving service of commemoration was held in the beautiful cemetery overlooked by the monastery.

"This was attended by several thousand, including Prince Harry, who laid a wreath at the memorial.

"At an informal buffet lunch following the service, the Prince insisted on meeting and talking to veterans individually. Everyone was impressed by his understanding." Jim describes himself playfully as "ninety-one and a half" and says the National Lottery funds trips once every five years with some veterans looking forward optimistically to the next pilgrimage to Italy in 2019.

Books



With nearly four hundred thousand copies in print around the world this is the bestselling and most respected account of the six month battle for Monte Cassino—Britain and America's bitterest and bloodiest encounter with the German army on any front in World War Two.

At the beginning of 1944 Italy was the western Allies' only active front against Nazi-controlled Europe, and their only route to the capital was through the Liri valley. Towering over the entrance to the valley was the medieval monastery of Monte Cassino, a seemingly impenetrable fortress high up in the 'bleak and sinister' mountains. This was where the German commander, Kesselring made his stand.

MONTE CASSINO tells the extraordinary story of ordinary soldiers tested to the limits under conditions reminiscent of the bloodbath of World War One. In a battle that became increasingly political, symbolic and personal as it progressed, more and more men were asked to throw themselves at the virtually impregnable German defences. It is a story of incompetence, hubris and politics redeemed at dreadful cost by the heroism of the soldiers.

Matthew's first book published in 2000 was about the Battle of Britain. Then followed *Monte Cassino*, *Panama Fever*, *The Sugar Barons* and *Golden Eye*. Matthew lives in East London with his wife, three children and an annoying dog.

To view in more detail, including maps etc. visit

www.matthewparker.co.uk/books/Monte_Cassino.php or just www.matthewparker.co.uk.

(On his website Matthew has posted a link to our website)

This photograph of Theo Davies, 6th Battalion, The Queens Own Royal West Kents was received too late to be published in the last newsletter.

Theo was chosen to give the Exhortation at the British Service of Remembrance to commemorate the 70th Anniversary of the Italy Campaign and the Battles of Cassino on Monday 19th May 2014, Cassino Commonwealth War Cemetery.

We were very proud of him, he read it beautifully—no easy task in front of the many thousands attending the service.



In Memoriam

Morton Huxtable, 13 Corps, Royal Corps of Signals
William (Nobby) Clarke, 132nd Field Regiment, Royal
Artillery-
Robert Lister, 7th Field Company, Royal Engineers



Articles for publication in the next newsletter, please submit to Judith Coote, contact details below.

Thank you

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