



THE MONTE CASSINO SOCIETY

Furthering an interest in the Italian Campaign 1943–1945

NA15141

Winter 2011/2012

Welcome

Welcome to the fall/winter edition of our newsletter.

In spite of our many individual challenges in this past year, it was wonderful to meet up with fellow volunteers and veterans of the Monte Cassino Society at the Annual Service of Remembrance in London on Sunday 13th November 2011.

It is a privilege to be part of the Monte Cassino Volunteers and long many we continue to honour all those who took part in the Italian Campaign.

On behalf of the entire team behind the Monte Cassino Society, we would like to wish everyone, especially our beloved Veterans, continued good health, peace and happiness in 2012.

Suzanne Turk, BScN RN RM

*Daughter of William 'Bill' Turk
51st Royal Tank Regiment—
25th Independent Tank Brigade*

'Fear Naught'

Aim

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

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Members photographed on Horse Guards Parade before the Service of Remembrance in Whitehall and the March Past the Cenotaph

Jim Knox (4th Battalion, 2nd Independent Parachute Brigade laid the wreath on behalf of our members

News

Italy 2012

To date the numbers interested are not sufficient to run a viable trip. We don't have funds to underwrite any loss and fewer numbers would mean a very much more expensive trip for those who make up the party. Regrettably, therefore, we have decided to postpone the pilgrimage for this year but hope to reinstate it next year.

Memorial in the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, Staffordshire

We are almost there!! After two years of fund raising, even though we are short of our target, we have taken the decision to forge ahead and the design and plans for the memorial have been submitted to the Arboretum Trustees for approval. Our sub-committee of Mike Anslow, Doreen Belcher, Stan Pearson and Peter Wain have put in a

News Continued

tremendous amount of time and effort to bring things to fruition. In the last month Elizabeth Traxton has joined them, e-mailing everyone for whom we had an e.mail address—a final push to meet our target. For those for whom we do not have an e.mail address, a copy of Elizabeth’s letter is enclosed.

Doreen has been to considerable lengths to ensure that our submission to the Trustees will be successful and it is hoped that when we get approval from them, and some improvement in the weather, the stonemason will start on the construction in March/April. We are aiming to have a dedication/unveiling of the memorial in late May. We hope there will be a goodly number wishing to attend and, to that end, ask you to indicate on the enclosed pro forma if you wish to attend on the day and also if you would need accommodation. We intend having a lunch at the Arboretum after the ceremony and for those having an overnight stay, an even longer opportunity to meet with new friends and renew old acquaintances. As time is of the essence, an early indication of numbers would be appreciated.

Many have helped with fund raising, either directly by donation, writing to the press, and one I would especially like to mention, Emma Kavanagh who took part in the Admiral Swansea Bay 5k run raising £325 in sponsorship.



Emma Kavanagh with her Certificate

Emma told a local reporter—My Bampi often talks about what happened at the battle. I decided I wanted to do something to help raise money for the memorial. I’m doing my Baden Powell badge at Guides which involves doing fund raising, and I decided to do it for the society after hearing about what happened.

(Emma is the Great Granddaughter of Harry Launder who has been successful in fund raising by writing to his local paper)

Doreen Belcher had the following article published in her local paper and received two responses with a promise of a donation.

THE WAY WE WERE (The Sentinel)



Clockwise from left, Doreen Belcher standing by the air raid shelter at her Sandyford home; a painting of her mum, Agnes; Doreen’s uncle Bill Innes, left, and dad Tom Wain in Italy; Mr Wain, painted in the same country; and in his uniform. All the pictures were photographed or painted in 1944.

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News Continued

Bravery earned a medal 'yet my dad never said'

IT WAS only after her dad died 26 years ago that Doreen Belcher learned of the extent of his bravery during the Second World War.

Her father, Thomas Wain, fought in the Battle of Monte Cassino in Italy while he was a sergeant in the Royal Engineers, known as the Sappers. "We grew up with stories about how my father went to Rome and saw the Pope," says Doreen, aged 75, of Leycett Road, Scot Hay, below, "but he never talked about the fighting at Monte Cassino.

"However, after he died at the age of 76 we found the citation for the Military Medal he was awarded."

The battle was actually a series of four battles fought by the Allies between January and May 1944 in the advance towards Rome.

"My father and his squad were clearing mines so the British tanks

Doreen Belcher tells Colette Warbrook about her father's part in the Allied advance through Italy during the Second World War, and of the campaign to remember those who gave their lives

could get through," explains Doreen, who is married to John, aged 80.

"When his young lieutenant was killed, my father took over because he was the sergeant. The German guns were 50 yards away and the Allies crawled on their bellies to clear a path for the tanks.

"He'd never talked to us about how he got the medal and I couldn't believe he'd been so brave."

Thomas did, however, speak of the lieutenant who was killed - Billy Reid from Glasgow.

"My sister took my father back to Cassino years ago," says Doreen, who grew up in Sandyford.

"They looked for

Billy's grave but discovered he wasn't buried there.

"However, with the help of the internet, we found out where he was buried."

Billy's final resting place is the Sangro River War Cemetery on the Adriatic coast.

"Two years ago we decided to take a wreath to the cemetery," says Doreen, "and we included on it the words, 'He never forgot you, Billy.'"

Doreen is a member of The Monte Cassino Society, which is dedicated to furthering an interest in the experiences of the people from all nations who took part in the Italian Campaign.

"Every year the society takes veterans back to Italy," she says.

"But as they're now in their 90s,

they're becoming frail and the journey is rather onerous."

In 2009, the 65th anniversary of the campaign was marked in Italy with emotional ceremonies attended by veterans from throughout the world, including New Zealand and Britain.

"This year we're trying to raise money for a memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire," continues Doreen, "so that next May we can have a ceremony there instead of journeying to Italy."

The society is planning to build a cairn to represent the mountain.

"I'm sure there are veterans locally who would be interested in joining us or, like us, are the families of veterans," she says. "One of the veterans who joins us every year is Albert Dickinson of Sneyd Green."

■ To make a donation, send a cheque, made payable to The Monte Cassino Society, to Doreen Belcher, Scot Hay House, The Green, Leycett Road, Scot Hay, Newcastle, ST5 6AU.



Annual Remembrance Services

Once again our members represented the Society laying wreaths at services around the country.

Harry Launder and Theo Davies attended the service in Swansea. 'Grey clouds above Swansea Bay didn't stop a huge crowd of military veterans and appreciative members of the public gathering at the seafront where a memorial service took place at the city's cenotaph' - Extract and photographs from the Western Mail



TRIBUTES War veterans Theo Davies and Harry Launder with the wreath they will be laying at the cenotaph in Swansea on behalf of the Monte Cassino society.

SWAH20111109A-005_C

Wreath's battle tribute

TWO Swansea veterans will be laying a wreath on behalf of the Monte Cassino Society today.

Eighty-eight-year-old Harry Launder and Theo Davies are members of the society, which is an organisation which brings together veterans and their families.

"This is the first time we have laid this wreath," said Mr Launder who lives in St Helen's. "We had tried before but we were not successful."

Mr Launder was just 20 years old when he took part in the Monte Cassino campaign.

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.

He said he always pays tribute to the men who died in the war on Remembrance Day

and will be laying the wreath for all those who lost their lives in the Monte Cassino campaign.

"There were 250,000 casualties in four months and quite a lot of them were fatal," he said. "It is important to remember them."

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

News (continued)



Caption read

Harry Launder, who saw action in Italy, and Theo Davies, who was wounded three times, prepare to lay their wreath at the Cenotaph in Swansea yesterday

Western Mail

Saturday 12 November 2011

As in previous years, Dave Mann with the Meridian Chapter Harley Owners Group attended the Chislehurst British Legion Service where there was a good turn out - approx. 500/600 people. Dave always lays a wreath on behalf of our members at this service. The Chapter had the honour of providing the 'Parade Marshal' - Fred Blunden - a Chapter member formerly of the Household Cavalry.

Once again David Gaskin laid a wreath for the Monte Cassino Society at his local British Legion Remembrance Service in Saltash, Cornwall. David spends many hours in the run up to Remembrance Day, often in pretty inclement weather, selling poppies for the British Legion Poppy Appeal.

The Annual Service of Remembrance was held at the Italy Star Association Memorial, Westgate Gardens, Canterbury. A small group attended the service. Wreaths were laid by veteran Tom Gates, Frank Horn and, from his wheelchair, by my father Bill Turk..

Suzanne



News Continued

Field of Remembrance, Westminster

Once again we attended the opening of the Field of Remembrance in Westminster.

Sadly, after acting as our Plot Master for several years, this year Bob Clarke was not well enough to attend.

However, Jack Preston, Royal Engineers, - accompanied by his daughter Diane - stepped into the breach, so we had a veteran on hand to meet with the Duke of Edinburgh. Jack is President of the Chester Branch of the Royal Engineers Association.

I would like to thank Bob Clarke for his unflinching support in all aspects of the Society's Remembrance activities.



Judith

Jack and Diane Preston

25th Anniversary Reunion, Italy Star Association 2012

The annual reunion will be held near Chichester from Friday the 11th to Monday the 14th May 2012. Check in is after 2.00 p.m. on the Friday, dinner is usually at 6.00 p.m. There is evening entertainment or at your own leisure. Sunday 13th participants can arrange to go by coach into Chichester for the service at Chichester Cathedral. Following the service, Veterans are invited to parade outside for a short march through the town, pass the saluting base then back to the coach for a splendid dinner with wine at the camp. Following dinner, everyone is invited to the entertainment area for a social gathering of dancing. The evening will end with a sing song and of course the last song of the evening will be the famous 'D day Dodgers'.

A deposit of £40.50 is required asap. Total cost is £145.50.

For full details please contact Mr. Frank Horn, Chairman of the East Kent Branch, Italy Star Association, 195 Millmead Road, Cliftonville, Kent, CT9 3TL. Tel. 01843 226157

In Memoriam

Mr. Kenneth Copeland—
6th Batt. The Lincolnshire Regiment

Mr. Denis Elliott -
72nd Anti Tank Regiment, 6th British
Armoured Division

Mr. D. Hancock -
Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry

Mr. Joe Joachim -
85th Mountain Regiment, Royal Artillery

Subscriptions/donations

May we remind you that subscriptions are now due for 2012. If you are a family member or friend the yearly subscription is £12. This covers printing and post of the newsletters and any costs related to remembrance—wreaths and our plot at the Field of Remembrance in Westminster. There is no subscription for veterans though donations are always gratefully received.

Cheques payable to The Monte Cassino Society and sent to Judith Coote—address page 8.

Apologies to those who have already paid, or new members who have very recently paid.

Letters

From:

Emma Kavanagh (pictured page 2)

Please find enclosed a cheque for £300 and a postal order for £25. This is as a result of the donations I received after completing my Admiral 5K run on Sunday 25th September 2011.

I am very pleased that I was able to raise this money for such an important cause, that is the Monte Cassino Society. I enjoyed my running experience, as I have never done anything like this before.

Hopefully you will be successful on raising enough money for the memorial in the arboretum. I am very honoured to be associated with the Monte Cassino Society.

Many thanks

Emma Kavanagh

Mr. G. Boakes (6th Bn. Royal West Kents, 78th Division)

..... In Feb. 44 we were around the Monte Cassino area and watched the bombing of the Monastery which the majority of the troops wanted (my opinion).

In the middle of March some of us were taken to Cassino Castle, just below the Monastery, where my mate and I were to spend six days and nights. On the second day Jerry counter attacked us and bullets were flying everywhere. Anyway, it was all over in minutes and we had taken prisoners. A Sergeant I knew well and liked said, 'you two get ready and we will take them down to HQ'. For some reason or other he took two others and all three were killed (I have photos of their graves in Cassino Cemetery).

Our artillery were sending smoke shells over for cover but unfortunately some landed among us. I was thrown up in the air but untouched. Our acting C.O. lost a leg but survived.

We were eventually taken out for a rest but still near the front.

In May, when the Poles took the Monastery, we were ordered to go like hell up Route 6. A shell landed near to me and I could feel blood on my neck. Stretcher bearers carried me back to the First Aid Centre and as I was being looked at I asked the doctor (or surgeon) could it be a boil on my neck had burst. He laughed and said 'You'd better stay here for 48 hours and we will get you back'.

After Termoli and the River Sangro, we still had a long way to go.

I'm still here!!

G. Boakes, Worthing.

Mrs. Hazel Newman

I attach a photo of Monte Cassino which I would like to share with you. I came across your organisation last Sunday when you were marching past the Cenotaph in London.

The picture belonged to my late father who served with the Eighth Army during World War 2.

He never spoke to me or any of my family of the horrors he saw until he was in his final days when he cried and said 'they were too young, they should never have died' and that was all he said. He must have carried the scars of war throughout his life, never being able to speak about what he went through or what he saw.

Anyway, I hope this photo is of interest to you.

Hazel Newman
Sheffield

(Picture opposite page)

As a result of the BBC coverage of the Cenotaph March Past, on my return home I had 16 e-mails/letters from people showing interest, either wishing to trace relatives' war records or wishing to join us. Not only did we get a mention with the Italy Star Association but Cassino was mentioned when the Gurkhas, the Poles and the Canadians passed the Cenotaph.

I would like to thank our Treasurer, Stan Pearson who answers all queries regarding the tracing of records.

Judith

Books

The Battles for Monte Cassino: Then and Now

Jeff Plowman and Perry Rowe

408 pages, over 1,000 colour and B&W illustrations
ISBN 9 781870 067737

Published by *After the Battle*

We have a copy, please contact Paul Taylor—e.mail address on page 8—if you wish to borrow it. A synopsis can be found on our website, www.montecassinociety.org.

Perry is a very good friend of the Society having accompanied us on three pilgrimages to Italy, giving of his time and expertise.

Come Back to Portifino

James Bourhill

Through Italy with the 6th African Armoured Division

Published by *South Publishers Ltd., Johannesburg, S.A. 2011*

Mr. John Hodgson (6th African Armoured Division) has kindly donated a copy to the Society. Please contact Judith—address on page 8—if you wish to borrow it.



Sign reads:

CASSINO

IT IS FORBIDDEN
TO LEAVE ROAD
THROUGH TOWN
ANYWHERE OR TO
STOP YOUR
VEHICLE ON THIS
VITAL ROAD

*The runs are sealed
off*

*They are full of
mines and boobies*

**YOU'VE BEEN
WARNED**

Books continued

The D-Day Dodger

Albert F. Darlington

ISBN 0 9950601 1 5

Published by *Laundry Cottage Books, Shawbirch Road, Aldmaston, Wellington, Shropshire, TF5 0AD*

Albert paints a vivid, humourous, and at times harrowing picture of war as seen through the eyes of a private soldier. The only survivor of his original band of brothers, Albert makes the reader walk beside him through the excitement and the misery, the fun and the sadness. Never being given more than the basic information, the PBI (poor bloody infantry) was expected to take the fight into the face of the enemy. A quick wit, some good luck and infantry skills carried him through the Italian Campaign. Copies are available from Albert, please contact Judith who will put you in touch with him.

(Part of the proceeds from the sale of this book will be donated to the Severn Hospice).

New Members

Michael Beckett, son of Gilbert Beckett, ?Indian Division

Steve Blofeld, Father in Royal Fusiliers, (City of London)

Brian Collings, Father in 8th Army, Royal Artillery

Russell Dawson, Father in Queens Royal Regiment (West Surrey)

Miles Godbold, Father seconded from South African Forces to 2/4 Hampshire Regiment. Killed 14 May 44

Diana Kirkpatrick, daughter of Harry Cummins, 6 LAA R.A. Later 14th LAA West Lothian

Percy Middleton, 237(H) Field Co'y, Royal Engineers

Averil Stephens, daughter of Albert Darlington, 7th Btt. Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry

Frank Sweetman, 319 Heavy Anti Aircraft Regt., 3rd Btt. London Scottish Regt., 97th Anti Aircraft Regiment

And finally From Pat Lucas

There is a list of folks I know, all written in a book,
And every year at Christmas time I go and have a look.
And that is when I realise these names are not a part,
Just of the book they're written in, but of my very heart.
For once you've met somebody, the years cannot erase
The memory of a pleasant word or of a loving face.

Never think my Christmas cards are just a mere routine
Of names upon a Christmas list, forgotten in between.
For be you relative or friend or just someone I've met,
You happen to be one of those I'd rather not forget.
And whether I have known you for many years or few,
In some ways you have had a part in shaping things I do.

So, as you read this message that I send at Christmas time,
Know that I send you all my love while you are on my mind.



The Monte Cassino Society

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