

John Snowden, 12th Brigade, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers

John Snowden served with the 12th Brigade, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME) in support of the 6th Black Watch, 1st Royal West Kents and 2nd Royal Fusiliers. He wrote this poem about Cassino.

Goodbye to Cassino, it's our final farewell

To mates in their hundreds who fought there and fell,
Sixty long years ago in Spring '44,
Four battles fought there now famous in lore
Farewell to Cassino and the mountains around,
Goodbye to old pals, now cold bones in the ground.
We shall remember you, brave brothers in arms,
From New Zealand and India and Canada's farms.

Frenchmen and Goumiers and Uncle Sam's boys,
and Poles and Gurkhas, not there for the joys.
And from cities and hamlets throughout the UK,
Final push 11pm on the Eleventh of May.
Many thousands of guns opened the fight,
With a spectacular show of sound and light.

Farewell to rock-strewn Monastery Hill,
The poppies there are blooming still,
Dyed scarlet with the life-blood of men,
Who strove for the summit again and again.
And the infamous Point Five Ninety Three,
Where bodies lay thick like leaves off a tree.
It's safer now to stroll up there,
No Achtung Minen everywhere.

The nebelwerfers no longer scare,
Their moans and screams rent the air,
We no longer hear a mortar's crump,
Or a stick grenade to make men jump,
Nor the crack of an Eighty-eight,
Its burst sealed many a soldier's fate.

The Spandaus' rip is heard no more,
They cut down attackers by the score;
Or the rifle bark of an enemy sniper,
Hidden in the ruins like a deadly viper,
And the pitiful cry of a wounded friend,
Before he drifted to his life's end.

Perhaps his last words under the moon,
Were Cheerio, mate, hope you see home soon.

The Rapido's waters are violent no more,
So many failed to reach the far shore,
The river ran red for many an hour,
'Till a Bailey was built with RE's power.
The San Angelo crossing made under fire,
Success accomplished with deeds that inspire.

John Hannah's pipes no longer lament,
The Flowers o' the Forest, so well kent,
That mournful tune played o'er many graves,
'Till John went to his maker with other braves.

The men who survived the battles and fears,
Will remember their actions for many long years.
As they walk through the cemetery, rows upon rows,
What was it all for? God only knows.
There's the grave of old Charlie, I knew him well,
He was only yards away from me when he fell.

And there's his pal Hughie, they were like twins,
Buried beside him, I remember their grins.
The crows still circle over Hangman's Hill,
But all around the air is quite still.
The Castle's still a ruin, like a toothless skull,
Left looking like that, a stark memorial.

The monastery stands majestic, stone and bricks,
Now risen from destruction, just like the phoenix.
Farewell to Cassino, sad scenes of our youth,
Its indelible mark on our life, testifies to the truth,
Although all we veterans are now aged and grey,
We're still proud to belong to the MCVA.