



# The Monte Cassino Society

Furthering an interest in the Italian Campaign 1943–1945

NA15141

## Welcome

Autumn 2010

### Aim

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

Welcome to the Autumn edition of our newsletter.

In the Spring of 2005 I was contacted by Suzanne and asked if I would consider joining her and Rosalind in a new venture—to remember and further an interest in the experiences of all who took part in the Italian Campaign. I, obviously, was interested and agreed to join them. Where to start? We were three daughters of veterans with little or no knowledge of our subject, no experience of running an international society and no membership!

With lists of possible members from the recently disbanded Monte Cassino Veterans Association and the Duke of Cornwall Light Infantry Association, together with help from the Italy Star Association, in the Autumn of 2005 we published our first newsletter. The first edition went out to forty veterans and some twenty sons, daughters and relatives.

What started more in hope than expectation is now a thriving association with a membership now nearing three hundred, over one hundred of whom are veterans, the remainder, children and grandchildren, committed to ensuring that the experiences of our Fathers and Grandfathers are not forgotten.

It is very heartening to hear from veterans and their families wishing to join us—in this regard the website has been a useful tool in advertising the society as well as publishing our members' personal experiences and accounts. We are always pleased to receive letters and accounts, so please do keep them coming.

Judith Coote

Daughter of Gerald Soady, 91stLAA, Royal Artillery, 4th British Infantry Div.

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## News

### Annual Remembrance Services in London

The Society will again be represented at the Remembrance Ceremonies in London in November.

The Field of Remembrance in Westminster will be opened by a member of the Royal Family on Thursday 11th November—public admission to the Field is from 9.20 to 10.30 a.m. Our plot is No. 168 and we will be delighted to meet with any members and friends. As usual we have ordered crosses

for our plot and if you would like a dedication, please let us know on the enclosed pro forma.

We have requested passes for the Cenotaph Ceremony and March Past on Sunday 14th and 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. If you would like passes, please let us know on the pro forma.

## News (continued)

### Cassino May 2011

#### 14–21 May 2011

Sufficient interest has been shown in the visit to Cassino next year to make the visit worthwhile. We intend to organize the trip ourselves which will minimise the cost. However, an ABTA recognised travel agent is responsible for booking flights and accommodation.

Those who have travelled with us before will be happy to know that we will be using Flavio while we are in Italy.

There is a BA flight from Manchester to Naples—via Gatwick which means we will all be on the same flight though it also means there will only be two pick-up points. The outward flight departs Manchester at 8.25 arriving in Gatwick at 9.25. The Gatwick to Naples flight leaves at 10.55 arriving in Naples at 14.35. The return flight from Naples leaves at 15.20, arriving in Gatwick at 17.05. The onward flight to Manchester leaves at 18.05, arriving in Manchester at 19.05.

The basic cost for the week will be £625 per person with a £60 supplement for those flying from Manchester. The supplement for a single room will be £70. We will again be staying at the Hotel Serapo in Gaeta on a half board basis. The cost includes coach transfer from the airport, day trips and some lunches.

The itinerary has yet to be confirmed but will be less hectic than our last trip!

Please note you will need to arrange your own travel insurance, Saga or Age Concern specialise in insurance for the more senior of us.

If you are interested in joining, please complete and return the booking form to me at the address on the form, together with a deposit of £250 which we require to enable our agent to book the flights and hotel rooms.

Please note it is vital that the names on the booking form are the same as that on the passports as it may cause problems at the airport.

Paul Taylor

### Notice for War Widows and Widowers

A reminder -

Although the Heroes Return 2 Lottery funding comes to an end in January 2011, the scheme administered by the MOD and the Royal British Legion is still available to eligible war widows and widowers to visit their spouses' grave or memorials overseas. 100% of the cost is covered. The scheme applies to those who lost a husband or wife in service between 1914 and 1967. Those who have since remarried are equally eligible.

### Memorial to Cassino Veterans at the National Memorial Arboretum.

The fund is creeping up, but very slowly. In an effort to publicise it, Harry Launder contacted his local newspaper, the South Wales Evening Post, who wrote the following -

#### VETERAN'S HOPES OF RAISING FUNDS FOR MONUMENT

A veteran who took part in one of the bloodiest battles of the Second World War is calling on businesses to help fund a monument to his fallen comrades.

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

The desperate fighting to capture the Italian

## News (continued)

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.

Now aged 87 and a campaigner for The Monte Cassino Society, Mr. Launder said it was about time the battle had a lasting memorial.

He said: "The fighting was terrible, and there were tremendous casualties. The battle should never be forgotten and we hope a monument will not only honour the dead but also serve as a reminder to future generations."

After the Americans bombed the monastery on February 15, 1944, German soldiers took up defensive positions in the bombed out remains of the building.

Allied troops then launched four major offensives against German troops, suffering casualties of around 45,000.

The last assault was made up of 20 divisions along a 20-mile front.

The site was seen as vital to breaking the Germans' Winter Line and taking Rome.

The Monte Cassino Society is hoping to erect a monument at The National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, and has so far raised £5,000.

Mr. Launder of St. Helen's Road, said the charitable group had a target of £15,000 and was looking for financial help in reaching its target.

By Rob Goodman

## New Members

If you are a new member and would like a complete list of members (name and unit) please contact us.

Mr. Ivor W. Cutler, 5th Battalion, The Northamptonshire Regiment

Mr. Joseph Warden, Lancashire Fusiliers

Mr. Preston, Battle Axe Division, Royal Engineers

Mr. Emlyn M. Rees, 23rd Field Regiment, 6 Army Group R.A.

Mr. John Greetham, son of Lewis Greetham, 14th Anti Tank Regiment

Mr. Elved Cornelius

## In Memorium

BOWLAND Walter James,  
2nd Battalion, Coldstream Guards

Mrs. SOADY Iris, 15th August 2010  
Wife of Gerald, 91st LAA Royal Artiller, 4th British Infantry Division;  
mother of Judith, John and Philip

## News (continued)

### BBC TV 'Who do you think you are?'

Since our last newsletter, the BBC have screened the edition of 'Who do you think you are?' in which Bob Clarke featured prominently in Rupert Penry-Jones' search for his family history. Bob was selected from a list of ex Indian Army veterans supplied by the society.

### Bob writes -

Well, it's all over now bar the showing. The whole thing was very well organised by Wall-to-Wall TV.

They arranged for a car to transport me to Terminal 5 at Heathrow where I was met by one of their researchers, Noa Snowdon, who would be my escort throughout the trip. Noa turned out to be a very attractive young lady, early twenties I guessed, who took charge and arranged everything in connection with the flight and a plentiful supply of coffee prior to boarding. We gelled straight away and I soon became impressed with her cheerful attitude and competence; completely unflappable too!

At Rome airport we were delayed by a series of events which meant that by the time we reached the motorway we found ourselves stuck in the biggest tail-back in which I have found myself in sixty-odd years of driving. I was a little concerned when Noa told me that she had never driven a left-hand drive before—it was also a make of car which she had never driven—and that her driving in Europe hitherto was 'short and sketchy'. But I need not have bothered, like everything else she did, she just got on with it.

The downside was, that instead of arriving at Cassino between 7.30 and 8.00 p.m. It was past 10.00 when we finally arrived. After a short meeting with the Producer/Director we were directed to a restaurant where I enjoyed a lovely meal and, because we were chatting regardless, consumed the best part of a bottle of wine in the process.

All systems go at 8.30 on Friday. We were taken, would you believe, to the restaurant on

Monastery Hill where we had lunch on our trip last year. In fact, Wall-to-Wall had taken it over for the morning as that was where the action would take place. It was intended that part of the filming would take place at the restaurant and, in the afternoon, more at the Rapido but the plan was changed and the shooting involving me all took place at the restaurant.

On arrival I was introduced to the subject of the programme and we seemed to click straight away. He was fully aware of what was intended. The actor and I would sit face-to-face at the table and he would ask me questions which I would try to answer and also explain the significance of a number of photographs. I was not primed regarding the questions but it wasn't too difficult to guess. Nevertheless, it was a bit nerve-racking! Fortunately the actor was very helpful as, being in that profession, he was used to working from cues. Apart from an occasional intervention by the Director, we talked for nearly three hours which is a heck of a long time on camera. Everybody seemed pleased with the way it went. Inevitably we digressed at times so much will depend on the editing, reducing three hours into no more than a few minutes in the actual finished product.

I enjoyed the experience and I loved going back. Everybody was wonderful and my welfare was always a prime consideration. My escort Noa, was an absolute gem and we enjoyed many giggles along the way. I could not have been better looked after—as well as being so capable without any fuss or bother, she was fun to be with.

So thanks to the society, I have been able to do something of considerable interest to me and the family and we are building up a file for the family archives. Who knows?! in three or four generations it might find itself as an historical record on Antiques Roadshow—but not for sale!

Bob Clarke  
3rd Field Regiment, Royal Artillery,

## News (continued)

Following the showing of the programme, Bob's local paper *The Llantwit Major GEM* published the following:

### **Llantwit war veteran is TV's Monte Cassino battle expert**

A Llantwit Major man was featured recently in a popular BBC TV programme—and his contribution brought back memories of one of the most fiercely fought battles of World War Two.

The programme was the popular *Who do you think you are?* where celebrities trace their family history, and the August 16 edition featured the *Spooks* actor, Rupert Penry-Jones.

Bob Clarke from Boverton was the local man who appeared, as the production crews took the actor on a journey through his family history.

Bob was chosen to guide the actor through the part played by his grandfather, who served at Monte Cassino—a bloody campaign where the Allied forces tried to break through heavy German fortifications, as they fought their way from the south of Italy to the north.

The programme had discovered that the actor's grandfather had served as a doctor in the 8th Army Indian Division Medical Corps.

As Bob had served in the campaign, and also because he is a member of the Monte Cassino Society, he was asked to explain the conditions faced by the soldiers to Rupert Penry-Jones.

Monte Cassino has a particular resonance, because the battlefield was dominated by a historic monastery on the summit of Monte Cassino, which Allied troops came to believe was a perfect vantage point for the Germans.

Even to this day, the question of whether the Germans used the monastery to help their campaign is a controversial subject.

Eventually the Allies bombed the monastery, and the arguments over whether this was justified are still not resolved.

Bob Clarke's contribution to the programme, however, centred on what the conditions for soldiers were like, and how on the medical corps would have coped.

He was able to tell Rupert Penry-Jones that his grandfather would have had to exhibit great bravery on a daily basis, as they treated and rescued casualties under the German guns.

However, the filming proved to be long and complicated for Bob, because the first date for filming in Italy was postponed because of the ash cloud.

As a result, it was May before Bob could fly to Italy, and then it was a whistle stop trip, leaving Llantwit Major on Wednesday morning, and then flying from Heathrow to Italy.

After an overnight stay, he was driven to Cassino on the Thursday, and briefed on what would happen on the filming day on Friday. The production company had hired a restaurant overlooking Cassino for the filming which took almost three hours.

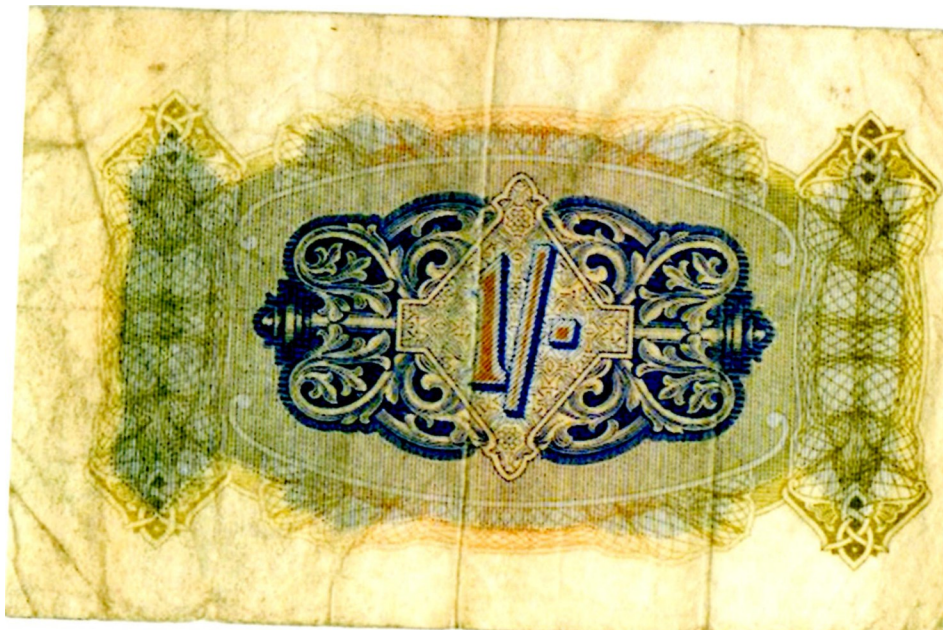
What Bob had not expected was the high temperature. He said: "It was a hot day anyway, but the TV lights made it so much hotter. It was quite staggering".

After the filming, Bob had nothing but praise for the film crew. He said: "The entire crew were fabulous, especially Noa Snowdon, who accompanied me to Italy.

Rupert Penry-Jones made me feel very relaxed in what could have been a very stressful situation."

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## Recollections/letters



### The story behind this 1/- note.

We boarded a troopship called 'The Duchess of Richmond' at Liverpool at the end of October, very early November in 1942. This ship was of some 20,000 tons, with 5,000 troops on board. We went up the coast during the night, and picked up the rest of the convoy around the Glasgow area. It was said then, that this was the largest convoy ever to sail the seas. No-one, of course, knew where we were going, and after so long, we turned sharp left and went down the Atlantic Ocean.

We were all told then that the little bit of English money that we had on us had to be exchanged for what was called BMA money, British Military Authority. No one had too much, I had 10/- (50p) a week when I joined up in June 1941.

## Recollections/Letters (cont.)

This was given back to us in mostly 1/- notes. Now I thought this to be rather a rare occasion, so I kept one and carried it about with me over the next three years.

Now these notes are very rare, and I doubt very much if there are many more in England, or the World. A ship mate of mine came over in the December convoy, but they did not get any.

Ben Spreadbury

2788 Field Sqdrn RAF Regiment

### Mr. Emlyn M. Rees writes -

The attached letter was published in the Daily Mail and two local papers.

I was at Monte Cassino for six weeks, at the observation post of a 25 pounder Field Artillery Regiment.

We were supporting the 2nd New Zealand Division on the first attack and I believe the 56th Division for the second. I was twenty five in the February and I am now ninety one.

### What would I say to them?

In December 1935 I watched the New Zealand rugby team beaten by Wales in Cardiff. I was 16. In January 1944 I watched the New Zealand soldiers being beaten back at the battle of Monte Cassino. I was at the observation post of a field artillery regiment alongside a New Zealand observation party. I teased them by saying how Wales had beaten them in 1905 and 1935, while they had only beaten us in 1925. I don't know how many of that party are still alive, but what would I say to them now, as Wales have only beaten them once since 1935?

### Mrs. Ros Galley writes -

I write to inform you, with great sadness, of the death of my father Walter James Bowland.

The Monte Cassino Society was very dear to his heart, and indeed, in his later years enjoyed a couple of poignant trips back to Monte Cassino. He was wounded in June 1944, at the age of 19, and as an amputee he still had a long and fulfilling life and was passionate for the welfare of World War II veterans. It was inevitable that this was to become his work and he worked as a Welfare Officer for War Pensions in Leeds until his retirement in 1982.

Daughter of Walter Bowland  
2nd Battalion, Coldstream Guards

## Recollections/Letters (cont.)

### **Extract from a letter from John Clarke**

You may be interested in my new venture. This is organising a veterans (and family) reunion in the UK next year.

I canvassed my old friends and they fully support my suggestion to hold a reunion on next year's Armed Forces and Veterans Day event in Blackpool. Why Blackpool? There are several good reasons. Blackpool is one of the few resorts with direct rail links to most major cities in the UK and also has a busy but small airport. Blackpool is known for warm welcome to veterans. For many years there was a council organised 8th Army event with a large parade. Blackpool has started to modernise its structure and beaches and is an ideal place for trips to the Lake District and Windermere. Add to that several major theatres plus many places of entertainment.

I believe it is possible to obtain a lottery grant for veterans to hold a reunion in the UK which would be the icing on the cake, especially if carers were included. I have made contact with the tourists board and council who have promised to keep me in touch as they organise next year's event.

John Clarke  
6th Black Watch

### **Aubrey Evans writes -**

Before Remembrance Day last year, I wrote to my local newspaper to complain my Regiment is never mentioned at Remembrance time and I thought the Neath and Swansea people should be reminded of what the Regiment did during the War. The reporter came to my house and made this report which made me very happy.

#### **Regiment to be proud of**

#### **Veteran tells of Territorials' vital role, home and abroad**

For Neath man Aubrey Evans, World War II took him from defending the beaches of Jersey Marine all the way to North Africa and on to a prisoner of war camp in Austria.

Now he is one of the few members left of a special brand of men who fought together through the war in the 132 (Welsh) Field Regiment of the Royal Welsh Artillery—the Neath and Swansea Territorials.

Mr. Evans was an 18 year old working for Red Dragon Relays when he signed up for the Territorials just months before the outbreak of war.

Soon he found himself defending the coastline of South West Wales from a possible German attack—alongside Swansea boy Harry Secombe.



## Recollections/letters (cont)

And Mr. Evans—who now lives in Dynevor Road, Skewen—said the early days of the Territorials was not unlike the TV sitcom Dad’s Army. “We were very short of equipment and even uniforms,” he said. “We had to requisition vehicles from people and local companies so we could move supplies around.” The gun on Jersey Marine beach was marked ‘for drill only’ but we had to make the Germans believe we were ready.

However, as the tide of war began to turn, the Neath and Swansea Territorials found themselves on the offensive—swapping the sandy beaches of home for the desert of North Africa.

In 1942 the Territorials took part in the landings in Algeria and Tunisia, then moved on to Sicily and Italy, where they fought in the bloody battle of Monte Cassino.

At war’s end they found themselves in Austria, where they released 400 Allied PoWs from a camp—and replaced them with hundreds of German prisoners.

The 88 year old said “There was a wonderful feeling of comradeship—we were all local boys serving together. I am one of the lucky ones, we lost an awful lot of men.”

“The people of Neath and Swansea should be very proud of their Regiment.

By Jason Evans

**From wartime copies of the UNION JACK  
supplied by Mr. K.W.J. Bartlett, 2nd  
Battalion the Hampshire Regiment -**

Friday April 2nd 1944

### **Cassino Ghost Train**

Every night, after dark, a camouflaged truck moves up the line into the Cassino sector, writes Observer Officer K.C. Harvey.

Often the truck runs the gauntlet of shell-fire, and on moonless nights the journey is a nightmare for the driver, who has to “feel” his way along the crater-pitted highway into the war-gashed town.

When the Ghost Truck reaches its destination, shadowy forms emerge from the roadside and a cargo which money couldn’t buy is unloaded—for this wagon is a divisional night canteen, bringing refreshment up to the front-line soldiers.

Freshly baked cakes and steaming hot tea, supplied by the pooled resources of the Y.M.C.A., Church Army and kindred organisations, are distributed.

The Divisional G.O.C. laid down that “Front-line troops must have first priority.”

The Ghost Truck is the answer.

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## 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)

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