



The Monte Cassino Society

Furthering an interest in the Italian Campaign 1943—

NA15141

Spring 2016

Aim

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

Welcome

Welcome to the Spring 2016 edition of our newsletter. I, for one, am happy to see the end of a very wet, grey winter and look forward to some warm spring weather.

I am also looking forward to a successful pilgrimage to Italy and an equally successful annual Memorial Service at the National Memorial Arboretum, both in May. These are occasions of comradeship and friendship; past meetings have been memorable.

Looking through photographs, taken in Italy and at the Arboretum, I was saddened to see how many veteran members are no longer with us. All happy and smiling, it was a bitter sweet moment for me.

I hope, therefore, that as many as are



able will join us for our annual Memorial Service, remembering all those who fought for the capture of Monte Cassino during the Italian Campaign.

Judith Coote

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

Inside this issue:

Welcome	1
News	1
In Memoriam	3
Letters	5
New Members	8

News

Annual Memorial Service

The service on Saturday 21st May at the National Memorial Arboretum will take the usual form. We have arranged for tea and coffee to be available in our designated marquee from 12.00 noon, assembling in the marquee from 2.00 p.m. ready to process to the Memorial for a 2.30 p.m. start to the service; followed by afternoon tea and an opportunity to meet with friends old and new. This gives a little more flexibility for travelling and also gives an opportunity to look around the site—weather permitting! There is extensive work presently being undertaken at the

Arboretum to construct a new Remembrance Centre which will be opened in Autumn 2016. We have been assured this will not impinge on our arrangements. Some areas are temporarily closed to the public, notably the Armed Forces Memorial.

The NMA in Alrewas is on the A38 midway between Burton on Trent and Lichfield.

For those requiring overnight accommodation we are recommending the Premier Inn in Lichfield City Centre. (There are two Premier Inns in Lichfield, the City Centre is the larger, newer one).

News (continued)

With increasing costs we regret to have to ask for an increased donation this year. We suggest £12 per head instead of the previous £10. This, of course, is not representative of the actual cost, the shortfall coming from Society funds.

Will you please indicate on the enclosed pro forma the numbers attending and return to Mike Anslow at the address on the pro forma, enclosing cheques made payable to *The Monte Cassino Society*.

We are also intending to meet together for a pub meal on Saturday evening. If you are interested in joining us, please indicate on the pro forma. Last year several of us finished the day with a pleasant meal in convivial company!

We hope you will join us at the Arboretum on Saturday 21st May and look forward to meeting as many as are able to attend. Once again the Stoke on Trent Black Watch Association Pipes and Drums Band will accompany us.

WEBSITE AND FACEBOOK PAGE

By now, I know that you have all visited our new website and Facebook page. You HAVEN'T?? OK, I'll let you off. The website is now up to date. All the recollections have been transferred, and a lot of newsletters are available. What is needed now are more recollections. So I would like to ask all our veteran members to see if they can give us something. It doesn't matter how big or small it is, it will be of interest. An American chap discovered us through Facebook and found one of the recollections relevant to a book he is writing!

Which brings me to Facebook. Social media will be a great way to reach more people, but only if the page has good content. I have posted some of my pictures and also some taken by Judy Uden. A few other people have posted, including the aforementioned American chap. What we need is more of you to post pictures, videos or articles. If you post them yourself they will appear under "Visitor Posts". If you would like to see your post in the timeline, you can email them to me (my email address is on the back page of this newsletter). Alternatively, if you are going to Italy or the Arboretum in May, you can bring them on a USB stick, flash drive, CD etc., and I will transfer them to the Society Laptop. I can then post them on your behalf.

Those of us who use Facebook have Facebook friends, and those friends have friends and so on. To spread the word, please ask your friends to visit and "like" [Facebook.com/montecassinociety](https://www.facebook.com/montecassinociety). As part of our aim is to "encourage access to the accounts, memoirs, recollections and associated information about the campaign in the hopes that the experiences are remembered by future generations", help make more people aware of what happened all those years ago in Italy. Let's keep the memory of the sacrifice of so many alive.

Don't forget the website address, www.montecassinociety.co.uk. you can link to Facebook from the Home page. Go and have a look – NOW!!

Phil Soady

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

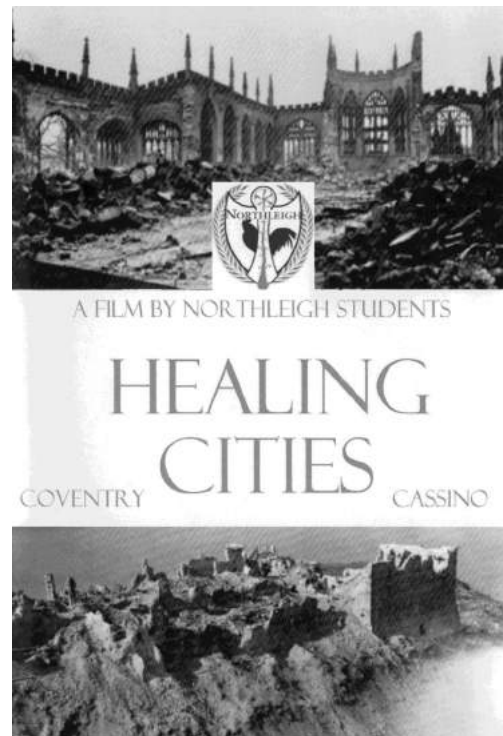
News (continued)

HEALING CITIES

The pupils of Northleigh School have produced a DVD—Healing Cities—as part of their Lottery Heritage funded project. It was made in collaboration with the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum and the Monte Cassino Society—some of our veteran members were interviewed and also videoed when they were accompanied by a party of students and staff of the school on a visit to Cassino.

It is a very professional and thought provoking account of the events of over 70 years ago when Coventry and Cassino experienced the madness of war and the destruction of their places of worship, Coventry Cathedral and Montecassino Abbey.

The DVDs will be available at our Memorial Service at the National Memorial Arboretum on May 21st. If you are unable to attend the Service and wish to have a copy, please contact Judith (contact details on back page)



We are grateful to the students and staff of Northleigh School for donating copies of their DVD free of charge

In Memoriam

Tommy Lancaster REME 78th division

Robert (Bob) Clarke, 132nd Welsh Field Regiment, R.A.



Our very good friend Bob Clarke

Bob Clarke, 132nd Welsh Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, 8th Indian Division was a stalwart veteran member of the society from the outset. He was a past Plot Master at the Monte Cassino Society plot in the Field of Remembrance in Westminster and, with his family, wholeheartedly supported the Society for many years.

This photograph was taken on one of several trips he took to Italy.

He will be sadly missed by all his Monte Cassino Society family.

Accounts

UNION JACK

No. 184 Two Lire
Monday, May 15, 1944

FOR THE BRITISH FIGHTING FORCES

STOP PRESS

GERMAN PLANES BOMBED
NAPLES YESTERDAY, SAYS
AMERICAN RADIO REPORT.
NO DETAILS HAVE BEEN
GIVEN.

This is the Task . . .

THE tough job confronting the Fifth and Eighth Armies is shown by the fact that the Germans built their Gustav Line in country which has been known as the "perfect defensive position" in Italy for centuries.

The heavily defended fortifications extend from the ruined town of Cassino southward along the Rapido and the Garigliano Rivers, across the eastern end of the broad Liri Valley, along which runs one of the principal road and rail routes to Rome.

At its lower end the Gustav Line follows the crests of a series of high hill positions west of the Garigliano River.

The series of concrete and steel pillboxes, dug-in artillery and mortar positions, and mine and wire fields stretch across 30 miles of the coastal approaches to Rome, and guard enfrances to the Liri and Sacco River Valleys to the west, along which the highway and railway line run.

The Advantage

Because of the advantage gained by the heights on which the German defensive works have been built over a period of eight or nine months, previous Allied attempts to pierce this formidable barrier failed.

Even the most intense concentration of air and artillery bombardment ever employed in the Italian campaign failed to drive the German defenders completely from the town of Cassino,

where every house has been turned into a strongpoint.

Ancient tunnel systems enable the Nazis to move supplies into these forward blockhouses without observation, while the German observation posts, situated on the crest of Monte Cassino, or Abbey Hill, command all Allied movement as it approaches the forward lines.

More Defences

Powerful as these German positions are, the enemy has been hurriedly constructing a secondary line of defences behind this forward defensive belt.

This secondary line is known as the Adolf Hitler Line, and lies from three to eight miles behind the positions now under attack.

Its known strongpoints are Mount Cairo, north-east of Monte Cassino, Piedimonte, San Germano, both to the north of the Rome road, and Pontecorvo, located in the centre of the Liri Valley itself.

The difficulty of the task facing the Allied armies now undertaking to smash through these massive defensive works is indicated by the elaborate regrouping of Allied forces for the attack.

We have various copies of the UNION JACK dating from November 1943 to September 1944. They were donated by Mr K Bartlett, 2nd Btn The Hampshire Regiment.

NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM—NEW REMEMBRANCE CENTRE

The new Remembrance Centre , opening Autumn 2016 will feature an exhibition on Remembrance and what it means to us as individuals, as families and as a society. It will include a work of art by artist Helen Marshall created from thousands of individual photographs.

The exhibit will be approx. 4 metres wide will comprise around 5,000 individual digital photographs, many of which will be taken from their archives but they are also asking members of the public to send photographs for consideration. We have many photographs taken at the Arboretum and it would be good if we could be featured. Anyone interested, log on to the NMA website for details and follow ‘What’s the story behind your picture?’ to submit photographs.

The Managing Director at the Arboretum said “With more than 299 memorials set in 150 acres the Arboretum is a wonderful, visual tribute to those who have served and continue to serve our nation. It is, however, people and their memories and associations that make the Arboretum such a special place. It is this that we hope to convey through this extraordinary artwork, which will tell thousands of stories”.

We’ve got a few pretty good photographers—do please give it a go. How wonderful to see some of our veterans and widows - no longer with us— as part of this artwork?

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND DONATIONS

Thank you for subscriptions and donations received. Please accept this as our thanks—due to the cost of postage we no longer send acknowledgements unless requested to do so.

Letters

Received from Diane Preston—(daughter of the late Jack Preston, Royal Engineers)

..... I wanted you to know what my friend has just given me. She went to Manchester with another friend, walking for so long and worn out they went into a church just to sit down in somewhere quiet.

They bought a gift for me, the medal crucifix, not knowing anything about it except they knew I’d love it.

When I opened it and read the small leaflet explaining what it is—it’s “The Cross of Holy Father Benedict from the Holy Mount Cassino (1850)” What’s the odds???

Neither friend read the info so it was just chance they picked this one. I’m thrilled with it!



Medal of the Cross of St Benedict (1850) struck only at the Abbey of Monte Cassino



Patron Her Majesty The Queen

The Royal British Legion

The Royal British Legion
199 Borough High Street
London SE1 1AA

britishlegion.org.uk

Legion Contact Centre

0808 802 8080

Registered Charity Number: 219279

Mrs Judith Coote
Honorary Secretary
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01 February 2016

Dear Mrs Coote

The Cenotaph Ceremony 2016

The Royal British Legion remains hugely grateful for the enthusiastic participation of all Regimental Associations and Veterans' Groups and their participating members each year at the National Service of Remembrance at The Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday. The Legion very much recognises that it is the poignant act of military veterans marching past the Cenotaph and paying their respects to those that went before, which guarantees that the event endures and makes it so compelling to the watching public.

In light of this, I regret that it falls to me to highlight a discernible reduction in the standard of turnout and bearing of some of those participating in the parade. Both suggest a lack of respect for either the occasion or the senior guests attending, and neither, as I am sure you agree, are acceptable. Whilst I am sure that there has been no commission behind this decline, and that no one participating wishes to appear anything less than impressive or professional in the eyes of their contemporaries or the watching public, the fact remains that educated observers who witnessed the various components of the parade in November have raised concerns that need to be addressed. In terms of dress, a collar and tie should be the agreed minimum standard for male participants. Moreover, some formed bodies need perhaps to reflect on the solemnity of the occasion as they march and the recent innovation of taking photographs whilst saluting the dais is entirely unacceptable.

Please accept that these comments do not apply to all; it is the exceptions that catch the eye. Furthermore, whilst the Remembrance Sunday event falls within the organisational bailiwick of the Department of Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), to the watching public and those around the world watching on television, it is the Serving, the Veterans and The Royal British Legion whose reputations are most at stake. I therefore ask for your support in recalibrating standards to a level we would all recognise and with which we would all be more content

I very much accept that last minute plans emanating from Haig House make life administratively difficult for Associations needing to coordinate the complex movement plans of their members. Over the coming weeks, The Royal British Legion will be finalising plans for this year's event with the intent of providing you with timely and accurate information. We will also seek the guidance of the Garrison Sergeant Major regarding the forming up process to reduce both confusion and time-delay as the parade sets off. Arrangements will also be



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made for additional wheelchairs to be on hand so that our more venerable Veterans can continue to participate fully in the March Past without feeling under strain to maintain the pace of the March Past alongside their younger contemporaries. This year, Remembrance Sunday is on 13 November.

The challenge of an increased demand for representative space on the parade by Regimental and ex-Service Associations that may not have not participated on the parade in recent times will need to be addressed; our aim must be to have as broad a church of ex-Service organisations on parade as is possible. Conversely, as demand for participation increases, so the need for careful scrutiny increases to ensure that the composition of the parade is appropriate. The Legion will seek the advice of COBSEO in that regard. I will keep you informed of developments once I have sought the direction of DCMS and the counsel of HQ London District.

The National Service of Remembrance ensures that no-one is forgotten as the nation unites to honour all who have suffered or died in war. It falls to The Royal British Legion and the veteran community representing the Armed Forces, Fishing Fleets and Merchant Air and Navy to maintain the standards that the nation expects. I trust that I can count on your support in this endeavour.

Bob Gamble OBE
Assistant Director of Engagement

I received the above a few weeks ago. Although addressed to me it has obviously been sent to secretaries of all organisations who regularly attend the Cenotaph Ceremony—see para 3, *Please accept that these comments do not apply to all;*

My concern is the penultimate paragraph—*The challenge of an increased demand.....* I trust this isn't giving prior warning that we may be denied tickets for this year, especially as numbers attending are on the increase. I await further correspondence!

New Members

- Thomas Robb, veteran, Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry
- John Slater, son in law of Thomas Robb
- Alex Kurczaba, nephew of the late Wladyslaw Kurczaba 2nd Corps, 5th Borderland Division



Entrance to Cassino War Cemetery



THE MONTE CASSINO SOCIETY

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