



The Monte Cassino Society

Furthering an interest in the Italian Campaign 1943—

NA15141

Summer 2016

Aim

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

Welcome

It seems like only yesterday that Judith and I were in the middle of arranging our day at the Arboretum and John Leach, Paul Taylor and Phil Soady were doing the same for the trip to Italy. Well, they've both been and gone, how time flies.

I think both events went well, especially as five veterans went to Italy and ten came to the Arboretum, after such a sad year when we lost so many. They will not be forgotten.

Despite our fear of a wet day at the Arboretum Him upstairs was kind to us and it stayed dry for the service, again led by Tony Wood. Thanks to Doreen Belcher, Lyn Anslow and Phil Soady for their part in the service.

So far the £50 that I gave out has increased to £165—keep the money flowing please. The feedback Judith and I have received regarding the cost of the day's event is that instead of asking for donations we should set a fixed sum per member attending. This year it worked out at £17.50 per person.



Fortunately, thanks to your kind generosity, the total cost has been covered with a slight balance towards next year.

On a personal note I wish to thank all of those who came up to me afterwards and said what a great day they had had, so please make a note in your diary for next year, Saturday 20th May 2017.

Mike Anslow

*Son of the late DEH Anslow
2nd Battalion Grenadier Guards*

Inside this issue:

Welcome	1
News	1
Accounts	4
Books	8
New Members	12
In Memoriam	12

News

London Remembrance Services Field of Remembrance, Westminster

We have not yet received details of this year's Opening Ceremony, normally held on the Thursday prior to the Cenotaph Service and Parade, which this year falls on 13th November. Anyone interested in attending, please indicate on the enclosed pro forma. Tickets are very limited but the field is open to the general public once the reviewing party has left and is open for a week. The ceremony is short but we are required to be in situ in

good time so it does involve a fair amount of standing but if there is a veteran able and prepared to act as Plot Master and front our plot we would be grateful to hear from you. Prince Harry has opened the Field of Remembrance for the past two years, and on both occasions has stopped to have a word. Last year he told Diane Preston how much he appreciated talking with our veterans on his visit to Cassino for the seventieth anniversary commemorations and hoped to return to Cassino..

News (continued)

Remembrance Parade, Sunday 13 November 2016

We have been allocated the number of tickets we requested. That's the good news, the bad, however is that the British Legion are applying more stringent criteria this year and we have to submit a names and details of those wishing to attend which has to be returned to them by 16 September.

A security requirement has been imposed by the Metropolitan Police as they will need to conduct individual security checks on all participants.

Therefore basic personal information will need to be provided in advance.

The need for security is understandable but will mean that we need to know in good time. Please indicate on the pro forma if you wish to attend and Judith will get back to you to ask for the information required.

As in previous years, we do have wheelchairs if required - and manpower!!

ANNUAL REMEMBRANCE SERVICE AT THE NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM - 21 MAY 2016

As Mike said in his welcome letter, we had a very successful afternoon at the Arboretum. About 85 sat down to tea following the service during which we had an unofficial AGM. The only item on the Agenda, whether we should continue with the Remembrance Service in the same vein due to the ever increasing cost. The general consensus was that we should keep the status quo. On the day we raised £485 in donations with additional cash donations received later in the post. Many thanks to Maureen Stringer who made and donated greetings cards.

One of our members offered a 'constructive suggestion' that we might detail what we are charged for, in addition to the buffet tea—Nothing is without cost—Hire of marquee for the afternoon, chairs & PA system by the Memorial, mic in the marquee, fee for Minister & bugler when Garth is not available and, of course, we serve tea and biscuits from mid-day for those travelling long distances. It costs in excess of £2,250 to put on. One of the reasons for the memorial was to have a focal point, mid country, where we could meet. Maybe we could dispense with some of the periphery but I am anxious that we have an event worthy of our veterans—and those we meet to remember.

Very many thanks to Mike for organising the afternoon and to the Pipes and Drums of the Stoke on Trent Black Watch Association who once again added that 'little bit extra'. Thank you.

Judith



News (continued)



Continuing with the theme of Remembrance -

The Royal British Legion invited us to participate in the commemorations to mark the centenary anniversary of the Somme Offensive held in Manchester. Our Standard was one of 50+ on parade.

Mike and Lyn Anslow travelled to Manchester the previous day in order to meet at the E Max Centre the following morning. The parade formed up outside the Midland Hotel and marched through the centre of the city, past the saluting base at City Hall and on to the Cathedral for the Service. The majority of standards were from British Legion branches, only five or six were veteran association standards. We are very fortunate that Mike is prepared to travel, often considerable distances, to “fly the flag” for us.

And

One day in mid April Geoff and I were privileged to be on a cruise ship off the coast of Anzac Beach, Gallipoli. At that hour one hundred and one years earlier, the first wave of Australian and New Zealand troops were going ashore. Most passengers that day were from Australia—this was the opening to their Memorial Gathering -

On this day, above all days, we remember those Australian and New Zealand men and women who died or suffered in the great tragedy of war.

On the morning of April 25th, 1915, Australian and New Zealand troops landed under fire at Gallipoli, and it was then and in the violent campaign which followed, that the ANZAC tradition was forged. The elements of that tradition have inspired and offered an enduring example to later generations of Australians and New Zealanders.

Each year we pay homage not only to those original ANZACS, but to all who died or were disabled in their service to their country. They enrich each nation’s history. Their hope was for the freedom of mankind and we remember with pride their courage, their compassion and their comradeship. They served on land and sea and in the air, in many places throughout the world. Not only do we honour the memory of those who have fallen in battle, we share the sorrow of those who have mourned them and of all who have been victims of armed conflict

Accounts

PILGRIMAGE TO ITALY 2016

Forty members, ably led by John, Paul and Phil spent six very busy days in Cassino. The following is Phil's account of their time there.

MONDAY 9 MAY: The advance party arrived at the Edra Palace Hotel, Cassino at about 1530 and made sure everything was ready. The main body arrived about 1830—safe, if a little tired. An early dinner was taken, followed by an early night—an important day coming up!

TUESDAY 10 : We had beautiful weather for our service at Cassino cemetery. We all had a wander around the cemetery before the service, some looking for a particular grave to remember a loved one, others, especially those of us for whom this was the first visit, looking in wonder and some sadness at the sight of those 4000 graves and eight huge monuments to the missing. At about 1050 our guests, Colonel Lindsay MacDuff and The Reverend Canon Jonathan Boardman arrived, and we made our way to the base of the steps by the cross of Sacrifice. Jonathan took the service which included two hymns, a scripture reading, the Exhortation, read by veteran Theo Davies, the Last Post and Reveille, played by veteran Garth Wright and wreaths were laid by Colonel Lindsay, veterans Gordon Cruise and Kenneth Seagar. John Leach was our standard bearer and I apologise to the other standard bearer because I have forgotten his name.

Next it was up to Ristorante Settimo Cielo (translates as Seventh Heaven) for lunch—halfway up the hill to the monastery. We were seated outside under awnings and it was wonderful. Blue skies and sunshine, a lovely view across the valley, excellent company and VERY good



THEO DAVIS AT POINT 593



food!! The only problem - Jonathan and Colonel Lindsay couldn't stay for all the courses. Unfortunately, because Jonathan had a 'plane to catch' they could not stay for dessert. There just being time for a big thank you, a round of applause, a few handshakes and they were gone. We finished our meal and then moved on for the rest of the afternoon's programme. For almost everyone this meant a visit to the Abbey but for four of us, a trip up to point 593 with another guest who had just arrived, Damiano Parravano. Damiano is a member of the Gustav Line Association, which is trying, as we are, to keep alive the memory of what happened all those years ago. He is also quite an expert and from the vantage point that is Point 593 gave us a most informative talk on the battles. Our day's entertainment over, we went back to the hotel, a swift drink, shower, change and ready for dinner. In the bar later

the raffle was drawn, tickets having been sold during dinner so that no-one could escape, several fabulous (!!) prizes were quickly claimed.

WEDNESDAY 11 : Panic this morning when we woke to find dark clouds and heavy rain!! Oh no!! 40 people soaked to the skin! But wait! Breakfast over and the weather is looking up. In fact, the Cassino Gods have looked favourably on us and there is sunshine as we board the coach. Today we go to the Italian Cemetery at Mignano and San Pietro Infine. Although in a beautiful setting surrounded by hills and forests, the cemetery is on a steep hill and, like the Polish cemetery near the monastery, it is almost all concrete. Some of the party chose to wander around the vehicle museum there.



On to San Pietro Infine. This village has been left as it was when the village was liberated by the Americans in 1944 (although for some reason they are restoring the church). Some went to the museum while others sat and had a coffee and looked out over “Purple Heart Valley” as the attacking American soldiers named it. Time for a wander around the ruins and the caves where the villagers lived during the occupation and then back on the coach for the hotel. The late evening took a similar shape to Tuesday, with more wonderful (!!) raffle prizes to be won.



THURSDAY 12 : As I didn't go with the main party, I can only report on what was said to me. With the aforementioned Damiano Parravano as guide, the day consisted of a visit to Sant' Angelo, The Castle and a tour of the Liri Valley. Everyone I spoke to said they had had a good day and that Damiano's talk through the day was very informative. Diane, Barbara and I went to the American cemetery at Nettuno near Anzio to take some photos for an American Facebook friend of the Society, Heydon Buchanan. By now I'm sure you can guess what happened after dinner!

FRIDAY 13 : Picinisco!!! It is the home village of Flavio who owns the coach company we use and today is almost as important as the service in Cassino. Those of you who have been will know how wonderful the day is. The little children came with their flags to greet us, we had a service taken by the local priest, veteran Alex Sutton laid a wreath and veteran Garth Wright played The Last Post and Reville. The ladies of the village laid on food and drink for us.



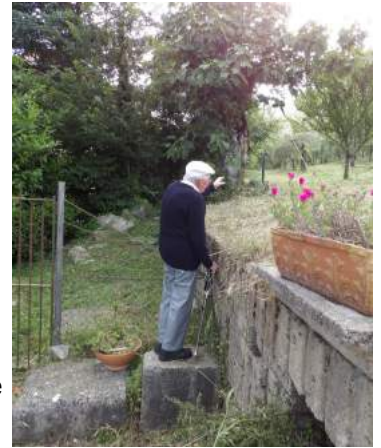
When Flavio was asked why the food and drink (his home brew and, I am told, it's good stuff) was under gazebos, he replied “My wife said it will start raining at 12 o'clock”. She was, unfortunately, correct, but by that time we had had the service and had enough to eat and drink. However, it was absolutely throwing it down, complete with a wind behind it and thunder! Because of this we sadly left the village earlier than anticipated. There was a plus to this for some, (no names, no pack drill) in as much as the bar was open when we got back to the hotel,



FRIDAY 13 MAY cont.

I did have a couple more things to do before dinner, and the first was for Gordon Cruse. Gordon was stationed behind Mount Trocchio at one time and he asked me to take him to try and find the spot. We jumped in the car and headed off down route 6 in search of a turning that Gordon was sure would take us to the right spot. After a little while driving around, we found said turning. It led to another turning and another and THERE! Up to a farmer's house, an explanation by way of hand gestures and arm waving, and Gordon was on almost the exact spot 72 years on!! If he is half as pleased to find it as I am to be able to get him there, he'll be a very happy man.

The second thing was far more energetic as I had agreed to walk (!!) up to Point 593 with Rob. The drive up to the Polish cemetery car park was easy, but the hike from there up to 593 was a bit tough. I tried to remember what Damiano had said on Tuesday, to give Rob some idea of what happened in 1944 and I hope he enjoyed himself. Back to the hotel, soak feet, bar, dinner, bar, raffle



SATURDAY 14 : We took a decision the previous night not to visit Ninfa Gardens due to time constraints. This disappointed at least three people who were looking forward to it. It proved a good decision however, as on Saturday it absolutely bucketed down! We spent three and a half enjoyable hours at the Piana Del Orme Museum. It is an agricultural, toy and war museum with literally thousands of exhibits. It has everything from a 1920s threshing machine to a fighter 'plane recovered from the sea off Anzio to Airfix model ships and 'planes, to dolls and model soldiers. It also has a nice, clean, reasonably priced cafe with hot and cold food. I could have spent all day there and this was my second visit! And so, back to the coach for the hotel to start packing. The last dinner of our stay followed by a group photo and the bar. No raffle because all the SUPER!! prizes had been won.

SUNDAY 15 :Breakfast, then in the lobby at 1015 for the coach at 1030. After handshakes, hugs and kisses, the main party boarded the coach for the airport and heads were counted—several times!! Everyone accounted for and the coach set off. The rearguard then set off down the autostrada to Naples airport and the flight home.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank John and Paul for all their hard work in arranging this trip—without them I wouldn't have had to write this novel! I would also like to thank Barbara and Diane for providing the stupendous (!) raffle prizes and Diane for selling the raffle tickets at Dinner. My thanks also to Damiano Parravano for giving up his time and sharing his knowledge. Most of all I want to thank everyone else for being so understanding when things did not go according to plan, and for parting with their hard earned cash, whether for a DVD, a tie or for some ridiculous raffle prizes. Once changed back into sterling you raised £385 for a very good cause.

Phil Soady, son of the late Gerald Soady, 91st LAA RA

Dear Phil

I just wanted to say what a privilege it was to have been invited to take part in your trip! I thought it was an excellent service that Father Jonathan put together. The standard bearers were very professional and executed their drill movements very smartly! I thought Garth's bugling was the biggest highlight of the day for me! It isn't often that you are able to witness a 96 year old veteran of Cassino playing the Last Post and Reveille in the beautiful setting of the cemetery. It was very evocative and I wondered whether he had any comrades who are resident there—I am sure they would have been very touched that it was him playing the bugle! It was a great effort!

Thank you too for inviting us to join your team for lunch!
What a beautiful spot you found! And the food was

excellent. I am only sorry that we had to rush off before we had a chance to finish the feast!

Finally, thank you very much for surrounding Jonathan and me with the veterans. It was such an honour to hear their incredible stories which were almost nonchalantly retold! There is no doubt that the power of personal testimony is the strongest way for new generations to connect with the almost incomprehensible challenges that the veterans faced.

I hope that you enjoy the rest of the trip!

Thank you again for inviting me to take part.

Kind regards

(signed) Lindsay MacDuff
DA Rome

Letter from Pat Harris, her Father George Lance, a Grenadier Guard is one of the four thousand buried in Cassino Cemetery

Dear Judith

Dawn and I had a great time. Everyone was so friendly and the veterans had so many stories to tell.

The trip was well organised and the hotel could not be faulted.

I knew the Cassino Cemetery was big but did not know the enormity of it until we arrived. It was an emotional time for me seeing my Father's grave as it is something I have wanted to see for such a long time.

Sorry you were not able to make the trip. Hope you are feeling much better now.

Take care.

Best wishes

(signed) Pat



We are considering taking a party to Italy in May 2017. It will very much depend on numbers and if we have a viable number we can start making arrangements soon. The itinerary would not differ greatly from that described by Phil in his 'novel'. If you are interested, please let us know on the enclosed performa—this is not a definite booking.

The following, sent in by Debbie Hogan, daughter of the late David Galloway, 2nd Btn. The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, appeared in her local newspaper

Veteran greets visitors 74 years after first signing up

A veteran who joined the parachute regiment in Romford 74 years ago welcomed back 4PARA to its home base.

Jim Knox, 82, of Upminster, enrolled in the regular Army based in Romford in 1941, aged just 16, with the Second World War still raging.

The teenager had lived with his parents in Poplar, east London, but the family had to relocate to Roneo Corner after his house was bombed during the Blitz.

"It was quite a dangerous position, because Hornchurch airfield was only two miles away

and the target for German bombardiers," he said.

With nothing much left for him to do, Mr Knox pretended to be 18 and enrolled in the army in Romford.

First a soldier in the infantry, by 1942 he had joined 4PARA, with which he fought in North Africa, Italy, Palestine and at the Battle of Monte Cassino, southern France, which saw the loss of thousands of lives. His service ended in May 1946.

After the war, Mr Knox became a structural engineer and worked in London and Canada.

Back in the recruiting centre,

London Road, the veteran said he was delighted about the regiment's return to Romford.

He told the *Recorder*: "It made me feel very proud to come back.

"There are lots of young people and the athletic type in Romford and that will give them a great opportunity.

"It's the best thing they can do. They will learn discipline and respect and they are going to go through a very rigorous training. It will stand them up for the rest of their lives."

A father-of-one, with two grandchildren and four great-

grandchildren, Mr Knox considers himself "very lucky" to have survived the Second World War and was only injured once in France.

He explained that joining the 4PARA enabled him to have double pay and double rations, compared to a standard infantry soldier.

"It was a strenuous regiment, we were training continuously."

Mr Knox flew back to the Gustav Line, Italy, yesterday to celebrate the opening of a museum dedicated to the Romford-based 4PARA regiment and its role in the Battle of Monte Cassino.



■ Veteran Jim Knox

Books



A HOMELAND DENIED

A Homeland Denied: In the footsteps of a Polish Soldier is written by Irena Kossakowski, published by Whittles Publishing and will be available in November.

A Homeland Denied, follows the harrowing journey of a young Warsaw University student whose peaceful life was changed dramatically and with far reaching consequences that fateful day of September 1, 1939.

From imprisonment in the notorious Kozelsk prison to the forced labour camp in the Siberian Arctic Circle, the story pulls the reader into a world of suffering and brutality it would be impossible to imagine yet compels you to read on. Forced to dig runways in temperatures reaching as low as minus 50c while under constant threat from sadistic guards, it was an indescribable living hell with death the only companion. Enduring and witnessing atrocities which haunt him for the rest of his life...so many friends murdered or frozen to death in the unforgiving cruelty that is Siberia.



Warsaw University 1937

But fate once again intervened and the icy wasteland was replaced by the blistering heat and dry deserts of the Middle East, where the student who had never picked up a gun was taught to fight...and fight he did, in the Italian campaign, at Monte Cassino, Ancona and Bologna. Yet the desire to return to his homeland never left him and only memories of the idyllic life before the war with the intense yearning to return sustained him when he sank to the lowest depths of despair.

Yet how could he know of the terrible suffering of his family or the sacrifices of his countrymen as they fought so desperately to keep Warsaw, only to be denied their homeland in the cruellest way imaginable. For though ultimately the victors, they lost everything. Their home, their loves, their country and nothing would ever be the same again.



Tatiszewo 1941

In a country now governed by Communist Russia and controlled by their secret police, it was impossible to return under fear of imprisonment or death and no knowledge of the achievements and bravery of the Pole's was allowed to be known. No one was safe under the Stalinist reign of terror. Everything was strictly censored or destroyed and with the

passage of time few were left alive to tell their story. Only in 1989 did Poland truly break free from the Russian yoke and it's people gain the freedom they had fought so valiantly for.

A dramatic yet poignant story based on the memories of Waclaw Kossakowski told in such vivid detail by his daughter Irena Kossakowski, you will never want to complain about anything ever again, yet with an insight into a life that has been lost forever. His story and the story of so many unrecognised Pole's should not be forgotten, yet how can we remember what we do not know...

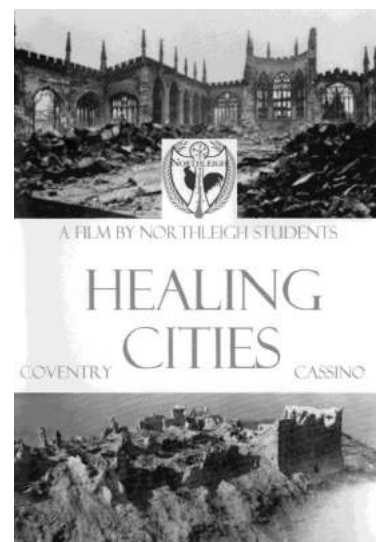
For further information visit the website www.ahomelanddenied.com

HEALING CITIES

We still have some copies of the DVD—Healing Cities—produced by the pupils of Northleigh School in Warwickshire, in collaboration with the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum and the Monte Cassino Society.

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.

If you wish to have a copy, please contact John Leach (contact details on back page)



Subscriptions and Donations

We have been asked on several occasions whether it is possible to pay monies directly into our bank account or to set up a direct debit. We think this is the way forward, especially with so many bank branches closing and more and more people banking on line. Obviously this is in addition to cheques. We will mention this again when next year's subs are due!!

If you do wish to set up a direct debit or make a BACS transfer, please contact our Treasurer Stan Pearson, or Judith Coote (contact details on page 12)

Thank you to John Clarke (6th Btn. The Black Watch) for submitting this account —and a further selection for later publication— as a result of Phil's request for personal accounts and experiences.

December 1944

When a Sniper took a shot at Winston

In December 1944, the Campaign in Italy had ground to a halt because of the terrible weather, rain, mud and high winds.

Trouble was brewing in nearby Greece, the Germans had departed, and the two rival partisan groups, Communist ELAS and the Royalists, were both marching on Athens to set up a Government. Field Marshal Alexander, the officer commanding all the British forces in the Mediterranean area, saw the danger if the ELAS were successful, it would mean that the Russians who had supported ELAS as a fighting unit, would be able to open bases in Greece. This would give them a foothold in the Mediterranean. This was also Churchill's view on an iron curtain. So, 75,000 military personnel were sent to Greece to support the Royalists from Italy. My battalion, a member of the 4th British Infantry division landed in Piraeus, the port for Athens (7 miles north), in early December 1944 and made its way towards Athens. There was stiff resistance from the ELAS, many of whom were regular Greek soldiers, but civilians during daylight.

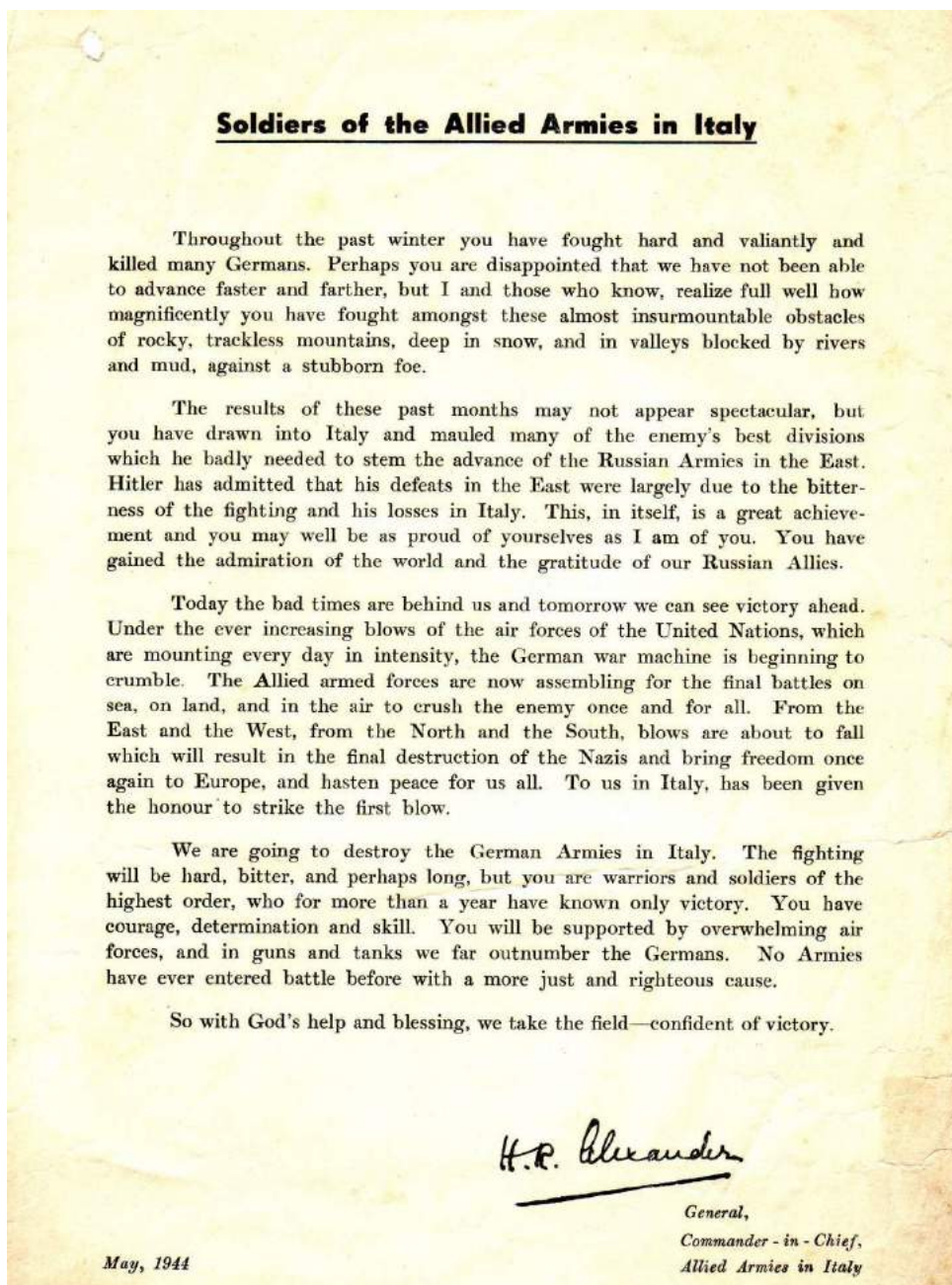
By December 23rd we were billeted in a factory near to the Acropolis. The ELAS, believing we would be celebrating Christmas Eve, attacked the factory in strength, blowing down a wall, and pouring into the factory. They were met by A Company, and a battle took place which lasted into Christmas Day. The ELAS were defeated, not realising that the Jocks do not celebrate Christmas Eve, only New Year's Eve.

On the next day (Boxing Day), as senior stretcher-bearer, I escorted a number of our wounded to the British field hospital, the 12th Field in Athens. Once our men were taken in, I received an order to join a party of VIPs who were gathering to hold a special meeting. I made contact near to the town square. The party turned out to be headed by Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden along with the Archbishop of Greece, with numerous MPs.

As we walked along the business area, a shot rang out, a bullet flashed before my eyes, and I heard the familiar sound of a bullet hitting flesh. The lady behind me fell to the ground, dead, there was nothing I could do. Her name was Erula, an interpreter aged around 40. The shot had been meant for Winston Churchill, he was laying on the ground, surrounded by his escort. Soon afterwards, the sniper was caught, it turned out to be a Bulgarian girl aged about 19.

The Greek Campaign was the most brutal I had taken part in. Amazingly, the Attlee Government, in order not to offend the Russians after the war, did not issue a campaign medal to those who had taken part. Instead, they officially awarded the Italy Star, which all those involved had already won before being sent to Greece. This was not a campaign against the Germans, the Italy Star was.

The following from John Percy, son of the late John Robert Percy, RASC 36th Infantry Brigade, 78th Division



From Frank de Planta -

If any of your members are interested, I am running a battlefield study to Cassino on 8—11 June 2017.

For more details contact f.deplanta@btinternet.com

And finally -

I would like to reiterate what Col Lindsay MacDuff wrote when thanking us for inviting him to our Cassino War Cemetery service -

There is no doubt that the power of personal testimony is the strongest way for new generations to connect with the almost incomprehensible challenges that the veterans faced.

PLEASE veterans, if you have not already done so, write down your experiences so we can publish them on the website. Under 'Recollections' we have almost 40 personal accounts, many of which have had more than 250 hits—i.e. been read by that many people! www.montecassinociety.co.uk

New Members

Bruce Arnold, Author and Researcher

Irena Kossakowski , Daughter of Waclaw Kassakowski, 2 Polish Army Corps

Percy Morgan, veteran, Welsh Guards

John Percy, son of John Robert Percy, RASC 36th Infantry Brigade, 78th Division

In Memoriam

Mr R. Aubrey Evans, 132nd Welsh Field Regiment, Royal Artillery,
78th Infantry Division

Aubrey Evans was one of the first to join the Society when it was founded in 2005 and took an active interest until failing health prevented him from doing so.

He will be sadly missed by the greater Monte Cassino family, especially the "South Wales lads"



Entrance to Cassino War Cemetery



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