



# THE MONTE CASSINO SOCIETY

Furthering an interest in the Italian Campaign 1943–1945

NA15141

## Summer 2017

### Aim

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

## Welcome

Welcome to our Summer 2017 newsletter.

It has been a joy to meet with so many of our members this year, at the Arboretum and in Italy, especially our veterans. Although many are now no longer able to travel to our Memorial Services and Pilgrimages, we are happy so many can join us.

Looking to the future, we have already booked the 19th May at the National Memorial Arboretum for our Memorial Service in 2018.

We have also provisionally booked hotel rooms in Cassino for what I hope will be a special commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the end of the battles for Cassino in 2019. I will shortly be prompting the powers that be that we will be expecting an extra special day. It grieves me that it is necessary to do this. In 2014 nothing had been planned to commemorate the 70th anniversary, despite elaborate plans for D Day. Indeed, had we not asked, there would have been nothing at all to remember the Italian Campaign. I watch closely what is being done for D Day veterans and then go cap in hand and ask for the same for veterans of the Italian Campaign. I learnt from my local TV station that veterans were getting funding to return to Normandy and fortunately, when I asked, the scheme was extended to Cassino veterans.

We will again be represented at the Field of Remembrance and the Cenotaph and I very much hope to meet up again then.



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*Judith Coote*

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

## News

### London Remembrance Services

We have not yet received details of the Opening of the Field of Remembrance in Westminster but assume it will be Thursday, 9th November, the Thursday before Remembrance Sunday.

Remembrance Sunday this year falls on the 12th. The Royal British Legion have

asked for names and details of those wishing to attend by **13th July**. We have already contacted those who were present last year but others wishing to attend, please contact Judith asap as tickets are named and not negotiable. (Contact details on page 12).

# News Cont

## Memorial Service—National Memorial Arboretum 20th May 2017

When we arrived the sky was overcast and the intermittent showers were heavy and spiteful. Fortunately we hire a marquee and there was tea and coffee available, much needed as it was not particularly warm—certainly not what we would have expected in late May.

As we neared the time for the service, it wasn't raining but it threatened a downpour. Once again we were fortunate in having the Pipes and Drums of the Stoke on Trent Black Watch Association Band and they had been tuning up in the adjacent marquee. We had to make the decision whether to march to the memorial for the service or remain in the marquee. It was put to the vote and the decision was to chance it!! A correct decision, as it was dry for the duration of the service and we even had short glimpses of the sun.



As in previous years, Mike Anslow was MC for the afternoon and the service was taken by Rev Tony Wood who has taken our Memorial Services since the memorial was dedicated.

PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN BY SUE DOWLEY-WALKER AND PHIL & DI SOADY



Doreen Belcher read a short bible reading and Phil Soady read the roll of honour which this year, sadly, was the longest yet. Lyn Anslow recited a moving and evocative poem by Canadian Stan Scislawski.

The Monte Cassino Society wreath was laid by Jim Morgan and Jim Knox; followed by members laying personal wreaths and crosses.

Albert Darlington read the Exhortation and Standard Bearers were John Leach and Tony Cullin.



We organised a buggy for those of us no longer able to run to escape the rain but fortunately it remained dry the whole time, until we returned to the marquee when the heavens opened.

Eighty of us sat down to afternoon tea which was followed by an ad hoc Annual General Meeting.

Thank you to all those who contributed to making the Service so special and to our members who attended. A extra special thank you, from all of us, to Mike and Doreen for organising it for us.



## Pilgrimage to Italy May 2017

A party of thirty five, which included eight veterans, spent six days in Cassino staying at the Edra Palace Hotel. Many were 'old timers' but there were some new faces. One new member wrote— The group was quite amazing. To not know anyone and in such a short time, feel as if I've known people for years, was quite special. The sense of humour that wound its way around the tragedies of a horrific battle, a horrific war, was inspirational.



This was our first visit without our dear friend Flavio Capocci who passed away just six weeks earlier. However his son Adriano was excellent despite his lack of English. This was compensated for by Paul's grasp of Italian!

The itinerary for the first day was changed due to the Military Attache from the Rome Embassy being unable to attend through sickness. There had been rain overnight with rain forecast throughout the day, so we postponed the Remembrance Service to the next day. (It is a very long way from the entrance to the Cemetery to the Cross of Sacrifice on wet grass for people not in the first flush of youth!). In fact the day turned out fine and we had a splendid lunch at Settimo Ciela and the afternoon at the Abbey.



The next day we had our service in Cassino War Cemetery. With no Padre Judith took the service, assisted by Theo Davies, and bugler Garth Wright. Gordon Cruse and Dennis Curry laid wreaths. While at the Cemetery we laid wreaths and crosses either personally or as we had been requested by those unable to be with us.

During the week visits were made to the Museum Historale, the King of Naples's Palace in Caserta, St Pietro Infine and a tour of the Liri Valley guided by Damiano Parravano of the Gustav Line Association.

We also went over to the East Coast, to Sangro River War Cemetery. It is a long way from Cassino over the mountains but we had ex Paras in our party and there are many of their comrades buried there. Alex Sutton laid the Society's wreath and Jim Knox gave the Exhortation. Garth again played the Last Post and Reveille. Carol Nathason read a poignant poem written by a soldier serving in North Africa.



Our final day was spent in Picinisco. Flavio's family said he would have wished us to carry on as usual and, as in previous visits, we were entertained by the children and a delicious buffet lunch was provided by the ladies of the village. Our wreath today was laid by Ken Seager and our standard bearer was Garth Wright. Jim Aston handed over the pounds and pounds of sweets we took for the children!!

There are many photographs and videos on our facebook page and on our website - [www.montecassinossociety.co.uk](http://www.montecassinossociety.co.uk).

I would like to thank John and Paul for organising this trip, Phil for his help and the many miles he travelled making personal visits and to Di and Barbara who raised £570 for Society funds by raffling spectacular prizes! Finally, my heartfelt thanks to all who accompanied us on this trip. You were amazingly good company, Geoff and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS ON THIS PAGE ARE COURTESY OF  
NICK MCKENDRICK GRANDSON OF KEN SEAGER,  
6TH BATTALION, ROYAL WEST KENTS

The following is Pat McGeever's account of her visits to Italy.

May 2016 was a very special month for me, I was able to accompany the Monte Cassino Society to Cassino, to visit my father's grave for the first time. On the first day there, we visited the cemetery and I felt excited, apprehensive and very emotional. My father was killed on 23rd May 1944 and I was born on 28th March, we never got the opportunity to meet, so my visit was a long time coming.

This year, I returned once again and was accompanied by my husband Tommy. He was very impressed with the Veterans, the history and the trip to the Monastery and especially the organization, he is looking forward to another visit possibly in 2019.



One of the special highlights of our visit was the trip to Picinisco to attend the ceremony and greet the delightful village children. I feel sure the local dentist will be thrilled with the amount of sweets we took for them. I also had the privilege of meeting Flavio's wife, who plied us with her husband's delicious wine. There were many wonderful days out and we both thoroughly enjoyed the lunch at Settimo Cielo

Before leaving Cassino, we had another opportunity to visit the cemetery. Nearby was a gardener working so I took the opportunity to thank him for keeping the grounds in such pristine condition. He asked me if there was anyone I knew buried there, so I told him my father. He asked to see the grave and he told me he would take particular care of him. His English was perfect so I asked him how come, he then told me he used to live in Leeds, West Yorkshire, we were both taken back when I told him that's where my father and I were both from. What a coincidence.

Tommy and I would like to take this opportunity to give thanks to Judith, John, Paul, Phil, Diane and Barbara for all their hard work in planning and their organization of a marvellous trip, who, without their dedication the Monte Cassino Association wouldn't exist. It also gave us the chance to meet a fantastically brave group of veterans. Looking forward to our next visit.

Patricia McGeever

Daughter of: James Harold Howe DALE, Lance Corporal, 51st (The Leeds Rifles) Royal Tank Regiment R.A.C. Service No: 7895801.



VETERANS IN CASSINO WAR CEMETERY



MEMORIES OF PICINISCO



THE CLASS OF 2017

## New Members

Keith Amos son of John Simon Amos, 8th Army, 70th Div. Royal Artillery— Gunner/Wireless Operator  
 Mike Lemmon, son of George Lemmon, Royal Fusiliers 1st & 2nd Battalion City of London Regiment  
 Sheil Wurr, daughter of Victor Twist, 156 Parachute Battalion, 4th Brigade

\* \* \* \* \*

## Accommodation in France

Iain Gordon (iaingordon11@yahoo.co.uk) writes -

If members, families of friends would like to visit the tranquil countryside of Limoges we have renovated a 2/3 bed (sleep up to six persons) house for guests. A discount will apply. Thus, £250 per week. There are lakes with beaches for swimming and others for fishing. Plenty of safe cycling or walking routes. A great deal of history, with many Chateaux or Castles eg Richard the Lion Heart died at Chalus castle which is 8 miles from the village. There is an aquarium in Limoges the famous pottery city and Zoo park not far away.

The beautiful town of Brantome is about an hours drive and most of our visitors include it in the itinerary. Other activities horse riding, canoeing/kayaking, clay pigeon shoots. Sunday boot sales can offer a range of quality antiques or practical items and is a good way of visiting new areas.

There are no traffic jams in the Limousin even in August when the whole of France is on holiday!

Fly to Limoges from Stansted by Ryan Air or by train to Limoges or Angouleme can be collected from either location or car hire available or by car various can avoid boring motorways to see rural France and take photos of ancient towns, villages countryside, birds and animals.

*For further information please contact Iain—e.mail above—or 29 Cressingham Road, London, SE13 5AQ*

## Accounts

### My memories of Ivor Gaskill.

A Company, 2/4 The Hampshire Regiment.

By Susan Deadman

It is always with great sadness that we hear of any of our veterans passing, as it was this May at the Arboretum when informed that Ivor was no longer with us.

I first met Ivor 4 years ago when I first attended the Remembrance service in Whitehall, there was an instant bond with him.

He was a typical old soldier who loved a drink and a smoke, but he loved life and attending the Remembrance service every November. Below is a group photo taken in muster ground before the Remembrance service.



And this is one of his funny moments before the serious side of the day began.



Like all our veterans Ivor was extremely humble about the role he played in giving us our freedom, he did not perceive himself as a hero!

It was in the muster ground whilst he was having a smoke that he started telling me about the war days and the friends he lost.

Ivor lived whilst his friends died and he told me he felt guilty about that. I suppose a lot of our veterans feel like this.

In the muster ground the atmosphere is always very jolly with old friends meeting before the service starts. As soon as we get out onto Whitehall the atmosphere changes and you can see the pride and the sadness that the veterans have. It is difficult to imagine the thoughts and memories they have. After the march past the Cenotaph we march back round to the muster ground. On the way round you hear everyone shouting out thank you, Ivor used to smile and do a victory salute, this will be a lasting memory for me. Ivor asked why they are thanking him! He said "I'm not a hero my friends that died are the heroes" to this Maureen and I replied "Ivor you fought for us, so anyone that can put their life in danger for others are definitely heroes!"



When the day's events were over and we all started leaving the area we came across a police woman and the picture below shows Ivor's cheekiness coming out again.



All of us in the Monte Cassino Society will miss you dearly and thank you with all our hearts for your Bravery, support and friendship.

God bless you our friend.

*“lest we forget”*

*“They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old,  
Age shall not weary them nor the years condemn,  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,  
We shall remember them”*



## Letters

*I received the following letter from one of our more recent members. I was very touched by it and asked if I could publish extracts from it but Sue gave permission to print it in its entirety. In the world as it is today, with all the dreadful things we see and hear in the media, it is refreshing to read of such loyalty and love.*

Dear Judith,

If you have a moment, I will tell you the connection between Doug and my brother Alan and myself.

My Mum, Marjorie Joan Hensby as she was then, got engaged to Doug Forrester on his 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday and waved him off from Manor Park Station.

She was never to see him again as he was killed in action on 14<sup>th</sup> May.

My Aunty was at my Mums house when she received the news of Doug's death. She remembers Mum just walking to the end of the garden and sitting there on her own, my aunty was only 10 at the time and didn't fully understand what was going on. Doug's parents, Ellen and William Forrester came round shortly after and my Aunty was asked to go home early.

Doug's best friend Stan Dowley was one of the gang of girls and boys that went around together, both Stan and Doug were only children and they formed a bond nothing short of brotherhood as children, forming a musical band that quite a few were in, so Stan was equally devastated by the loss. My mum was friends with Stan and gradually over the course of 5 years their friendship and mutual love of Doug brought them together, they married in 1950 on 18<sup>th</sup> March.

Ellen and William (known to us as aunty and uncle Forrester) remained in our lives until they died. They were like our surrogate Grandparents and were so very kind and loving towards us. My Mum and Dad looked upon them as parents. I share Doug's birthday and often wonder how they felt about that. We had a wonderful childhood with them and were lucky enough to have Uncle Forrester until late 1970's. Aunty Forrester saw me get married to a man she thought was lovely, she died the following February, 1981. Although our family had little money aunty and uncle bought a caravan for them to use in the week and for us to use at weekends, my first visit was in a carrycot at 6 weeks old. Both my brother and I have fond memories of St Lawrence Bay in Essex where we spent every available moment, escaping from East London with my Mum and Dad. We were so fortunate to have these 2 very people in our lives for so very long.

My Dad Stan died in September 1997. A few weeks later both Mum and I were going through some items in their bedroom, I picked up the photo of Doug that had always been on show throughout their married life and we started talking about Doug a little and what he and my Dad had meant to her. Doug was the love of her life but she loved my Dad very dearly. I asked her if she would like to go to Cassino to visit Doug's grave, she said that she would. Sadly, she died in the December just 3 months after Dad and we weren't able to make that journey. Mum always loved yellow roses, both Doug and then my Dad would always get them for her on birthdays etc and her coffin tribute was covered in them.

My brother and I visited Cassino recently and spent quite some time there reflecting on his and my Mum and Dad's life. Needless to say, we laid yellow roses on the grave on behalf of Mum, Ellen and William and of course, his best friend Stan.

We would like to know more about Doug's time in Cassino and the circumstances of his death and wonder if there is any documentation available.

Thank you so much for everything you do, I am sorry if I have waffled on too long, just wanted to tell the story. My daughter, niece and great niece each have an item of jewellery with one of the 3 diamonds from Mums original engagement ring, given on their 21<sup>st</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> and christening in that order. Their memory lives on with endless stories and wonderful memories.

Kind regards

Susan Dowley-Walker

## In Memoriam

Leonard Collins, 2nd Medium Regiment, Royal Artillery  
Julian Rybarczyk, Polish 2nd Corps

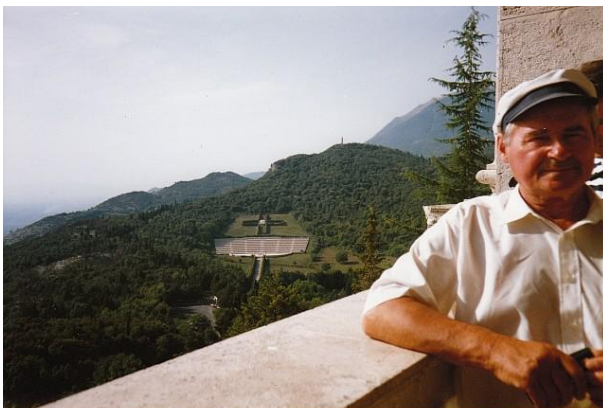
### JULIAN RYBARCZYK

Julian Rybarczyk was born in 1921 and lived in the north-eastern region of Poland, close to the Russian border. His father worked as a Deputy Station Master on the railway while his mother worked hard raising the four children of the family. Julian was keen on sport and often skied to school in the winter. He frequently fished, swam and skated on the nearby river Uzsa. He was the youngest and was still attending school when Germany invaded Poland in 1939. A short time later, Russia marched into Poland from the east and soon his hometown of Mołodeczno was under the control of the Red Army.

On Christmas Eve, 1939, Russian soldiers arrived at their home carrying rifles with fixed bayonets. They searched the house and arrested Julian's father who was later deported to a forced labour camp in northern Siberia although at the time Julian had no idea where his father had been taken to.

A few weeks later, at 5am one morning, Russian soldiers again arrived at the door and informed the remaining members of the family to immediately gather belongings as they were to be moved "elsewhere". In fact they were packed into cattle wagons and taken by train to a remote part of Kazakhstan, a distance of some 2,500 miles. The journey took two weeks to complete with little provisions and no sanitation. The family spent two years in a Kolkhoz (a type of impoverished communal farm) where food was extremely scarce and the only means of heating during the harsh Siberian winter was a stove fuelled by dried dung and straw. Many taken here did not survive.

Following Stalin's so-called "Amnesty", Polish deportees were given the opportunity to join the Polish Army although they had to make the long journey to recruitment stations themselves. Eventually, Julian's family was reunited with their father who had by chance found out where they all were and had organised travel to a Polish camp in Tashkent for them. Julian joined the 3<sup>rd</sup> Carpathian Division of the Polish army and after completing training in Palestine, he was sent to fight in Italy. He kept up his interest in sport while in the army and became an accomplished volleyball player. He took part in the Battle of Monte Cassino serving under General Anders where he was seriously wounded by shrapnel.



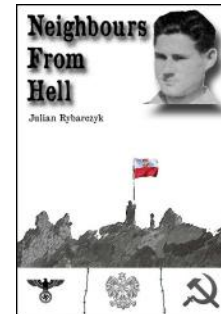
PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN FROM THE ABBEY

After some time in a Polish military hospital in Italy, he was moved to Taymouth Castle in Scotland which was also a Polish military hospital with Polish doctors and nurses.

At the end of the war, Julian was again reunited with his family. All had survived and made their way to Britain by various routes which was no small miracle. Poland however, had been left under the control of Stalin's communist regime and was no longer a free country. Julian's family had no home to return to and they certainly were not going to put themselves at the mercy of a Communist Party again. They all decided to remain in Britain. Julian found work with Templetons carpet factory in Glasgow, married a Scottish girl and had three children.

He became a Driving Instructor in the late 1950s and ran a highly successful one man business in Glasgow which he aptly named "The Allied School of Motoring" until he retired in 1993 at the age of 72. He regularly went skiing in the Scottish mountains and enjoyed playing beach volleyball when on holiday well into his eighties. He always kept in touch with his many Polish friends through the two Polish Clubs conveniently located near to his home. He never visited Poland again but he did return to Monte Cassino to visit the Polish cemetery where over a thousand Polish soldiers now rest.

He also wrote a short memoir of his wartime experiences which is available in kindle format from <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Neighbours-Hell-Julian-Rybarczyk-ebook/dp/B006M3XM4K> and may be of interest to your readers.



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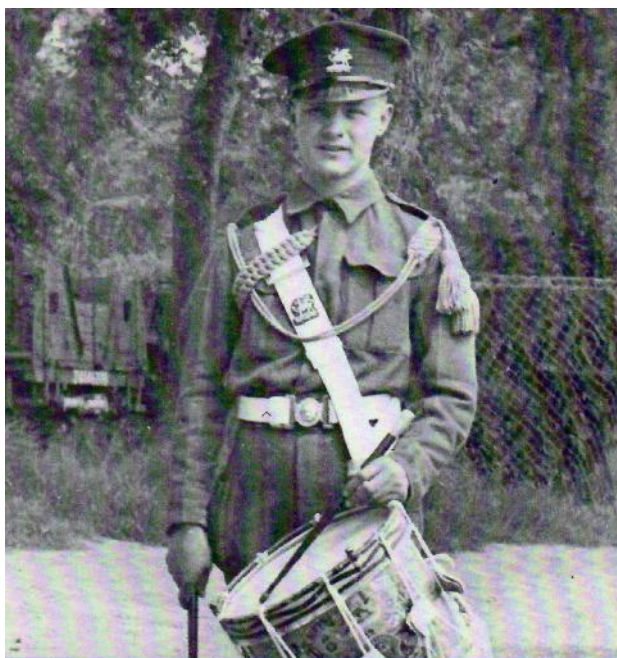
## Videos on Youtube

George Cowie has made a series of videos on youtube. He writes -

I have made a new video on the Shiny 7th, 59th Fd Coy and 225 Fd Coy of their time preparing for the assault on the Gustav line at Cassino April-May 1944. Hope you find it interesting. More follow ups coming shortly to tell the complete story of their part in one of the most important battles of WW2, breaking into the Liri Valley May 1944.

*(Google Youtube Geordie 103 where you will find George's videos)*

***And Finally—I couldn't resist this one!***



Our very own Jim Knox— A 16 year old drummer boy and how many years later??  
Photographed by Stan Pearson at the National Memorial Arboretum in May.



JOHN LEACH WITH STANDARD  
KEN SEAGER, ALEX SUTTON, DENIS CURRY, GORDON CRUSE  
GARTH WRIGHT, JIM KNOX, JIM ASTON, THEO DAVIES



CASSINO WAR CEMETERY PHOTOGRAPHED BY NICK McKENDRICK OUR VISIT IN MAY



THE MONTE CASSINO SOCIETY

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