



THE MONTE CASSINO SOCIETY

Furthering an interest in the Italian Campaign 1943–1945

NA15141

Winter 2018

Aim

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

Welcome

Welcome to our Winter newsletter.

On Saturday 19th May we will be holding our annual Memorial Service at the Arboretum. It will be the seventh time we have held this service since the dedication of the Memorial. It is a wonderful opportunity to meet with friends old and new and we hope as many as possible will join us. Next year, 2019, the Royal British Legion will be staging a memorial service at the Arboretum to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the end of the battles for Cassino. There will also be an international service in Cassino War Cemetery the following week. Given we will not be taking a party to Italy this year I hope as many as are able will join us



There are some veteran members who have not written of their experiences in WW2. Each one has a story to tell, the terrible experience of battle alongside light hearted anecdotes and comradeship. Some have no wish to recall those times but others may be willing to recount their memories but don't know how to go about it. Can I please urge those of you who have not already done so to seriously think about it? We will help in any way we can—taking recordings, typing up scribbled notes. To date we have 40 personal accounts in the Recollections section of our website www.montecassinossociety.co.uk (many written by veterans who have since passed away). The majority of accounts have been read between 700 and 900 times, with three over 1,000. History is often 'rewritten' by future generations but these accurate, personal accounts from those actually involved will be available for generations to come.

Judith Coote

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

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News

Annual Memorial Service at the National Memorial Arboretum

We are holding our Annual Memorial Service on the afternoon of Saturday 19th May 2018 at the National Memorial Arboretum in Alrewas, Staffordshire. It will follow the same pattern as previous years—a cup of tea/coffee and biscuits on arrival, the service by the Memorial (weather permitting!) followed by afternoon tea in the marquee. Should we

have inclement weather—and it was touch and go last year—we will hold the service in the marquee. We have made a provisional booking but need to know the numbers likely to attend earlier than the date of the next newsletter in April. If you are interested, will you please complete and return the enclosed pro forma to Judith - contact details on page 8. We do not need final numbers at this stage but it is helpful to know how many we may have to cater for.

News (continued)

We will be joined, as in previous years by the Pipes and Drums of the Stoke on Trent Black Watch Association.

We hope as many as possible will be able to join us. We will not be taking a party to Italy in May so this will be the only occasion this year when we can meet socially.

We will hold a short AGM during tea so any comments, recommendations or ideas as to how we go forward can be discussed then.



SERVICE OF DEDICATION OF THE MEMORIAL, MAY 2012

Remembrance Services 2017

We were represented by our members at services all over the country; each year an increasing number of wreaths being laid at local war memorials. Once again Dave Mann attended the service in Chislehurst with the Meridian Chapter. Dave has sent in the following report.



As often for this event the day started with rain and this year was no exception! That being said the sun rarely fails to appear at the appropriate time and pleasingly, by the time we were passing Brands Hatch on the M20, the rain had subsided as London appeared in the distance, things were looking hopeful!

The forecourt of 'The Queens Head' quickly filled up with bikes from Meridian Chapter members, and as with previous years, by members from the Kent Branch Honda Owners Club. The Queens Head pub kindly opened up just after 09:00 this year allowing bikers the use of their premises as a helmet park and also to serve teas and coffees to those looking for a 'lighter' start to the day.

The Pub forecourt also serves as a gathering point for local community groups including Beavers, Cubs, Brownies and Scouts who had their usual range of cakes and refreshments for sale in order to raise some additional funds.

Once again Chapter Member Fred Blunden was Parade Marshal, Steve Uffindell was RBL Standard Bearer and they were also joined at the front this year by Barry Masters.

Meridian Chapter members took their place in the parade further back and, as ordered, the group of several hundred departed through Chislehurst and over the Common to the Cenotaph to join other local groups for the ceremony.

This year again saw a large number of people attending, not just for the ceremony but the parade itself, this stretched almost the entire distance from the Cenotaph back to the common.

After around 15 minutes the parade arrived at the Cenotaph. It took a while to accommodate all those attending, but once settled we all stood shoulder to shoulder as equals and in solemn remembrance of those who gave so much.



As usual there was a very dignified 2 minutes silence, giving a moment to pause in the bright sunlight to remember those many millions who gave so much for our continued freedom and way of life over the years in conflicts past and present.

Wreaths were laid on behalf of Meridian Chapter Members and 'The Monte Casino Society' by Bernie Cresswell and 'Shiny Tiny'.

The Ceremony ended with the evocative Kohima Epitaph:

'When You Go Home, Tell Them Of Us And Say,
For Your Tomorrow, We Gave Our Today

At the end of the ceremony the parade headed back to Chislehurst and the Queens Head for refreshments before a quick gather up of those who wished to extend the day for a ride to 'The Royal British Legion village' and their Garden of Honour in Kent. About 10 gathered for the trip down to Aylesford. There we spent a few minutes wandering around the gardens in quiet thought of both the day and all who gave....We will Remember Them.

*Dave Mann son of the late Harold Mann,
31st Field Regt. Royal Artillery*



Dedication reads "Remembering All who gave On behalf of the Monte Cassino Society"

Field of Remembrance, Westminster

We had our usual plot, and this year Tony Cullin and Diane Soady joined Diane Preston, Maureen Stringer and Susan Deadman representing the Society (these three ladies never fail to attend). Phil Soady was again on hand to set out the plot with our dedicated crosses and once again Jim Knox was our plot master though sadly on this occasion Prince Harry didn't stop for a few words. A big thank you to all but especially to veteran Jim for once again braving the weather and standing for a long time during the service and until the Royal party left the Field—no mean feat!



Remembrance Sunday, Cenotaph Service

This year's event was very well supported by the Society despite the difficulties in getting tickets due to enhanced security as was borne out by Jim Aston's experience, and documented in the extract from the *Daily Mail* the following day! When the Mail heard that despite our best efforts Jim was not permitted to march, Robert Hardman was on the case and despite Jim having left home in Dudley and my not knowing his hotel in London, they tracked him down within the hour. Even with the help of the Mail, Jim did not make it to our contingent but fortunately joined another group and fulfilled his wish to join the march. Another of our group arrived without a ticket but was ushered to our group waiting in Whitehall. Our contingent ranged in age from 14 to 93 with Phil Soady i/c proceedings. At the end of the BBC's broadcast, reporter Sophie Rayworth interviewed Rosemary Hayward and veterans Jim Knox and Ron Evans. The Mail had previously interviewed Hannah and James at home.



HOW I SEE IT by Robert Hardman

Among the youngest on parade were Hannah Greetham, 14, and her brother, James, 17, both marching with the Monte Cassino Association in memory of their late grandfather, Lewis Greetham of the Royal Artillery.

He had come through the Battle of El Alamein with Monty in the North African desert.

He was fighting his way up through Italy when his unit came under attack while crossing a swollen river below the bloodbath that was Monte Cassino in 1944.

Gunner Lewis dived in to save two wounded comrades while under enemy fire, was himself injured and was later awarded the Military Medal. Two of his comrades were on parade yesterday. A third, however, was denied entry to

'The longest nine seconds of my life'

the Cenotaph because he had not applied weeks in advance.

Jim Aston, 93, from Dudley, who served with the Royal Signals at Monte Cassino, had already been invited by the Royal British Legion to the Royal Albert Hall for Saturday night's event.

He had hoped to attend the Cenotaph parade for the first and possibly last time in his life. However, although his association had saved a place for him in the parade and he had his passport with him, the police said that he lacked the requisite security clearance.

Following the last-minute intervention of the Mail, Mr Aston was wheeled through an x-ray machine and on to parade by his grandson, Richard, just in time. I gather that a number of other Second World War veterans were refused.

Note to organisers: We won't have the wartime generation forever. Next year, if a few nonagenarians turn up with medals, ID and a heartfelt wish to pay their respects one last time, could someone show a bit of common sense?



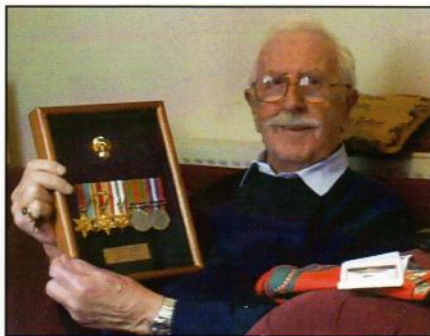
PHOTOS BY LIZ LONGMAN

In Memoriam

Mrs Pat Beardsall, widow of the late Allen, 2nd Btn. The Coldstream Guards
 Frederick Donnington
 Thomas Wigley, 3rd Btn. The Grenadier Guards

Thomas Richard Wigley

27th September 1919 – 8th November 2017



'Old Tom' as he latterly referred to himself, was a founder member of the Society and was an enthusiastic supporter until mobility problems prevented him from doing so.

He was a friendly, mild mannered, humble man with a very strong sense of duty. He enlisted with the Grenadiers as a very young man when he was forced to leave the tied cottage, his home he shared with his parents, before their untimely death.

Tom's personal account can be found under the recollections section of the website—www.montecassinociety.co.uk. It has had well over seven hundred 'hits' to date.

New Members

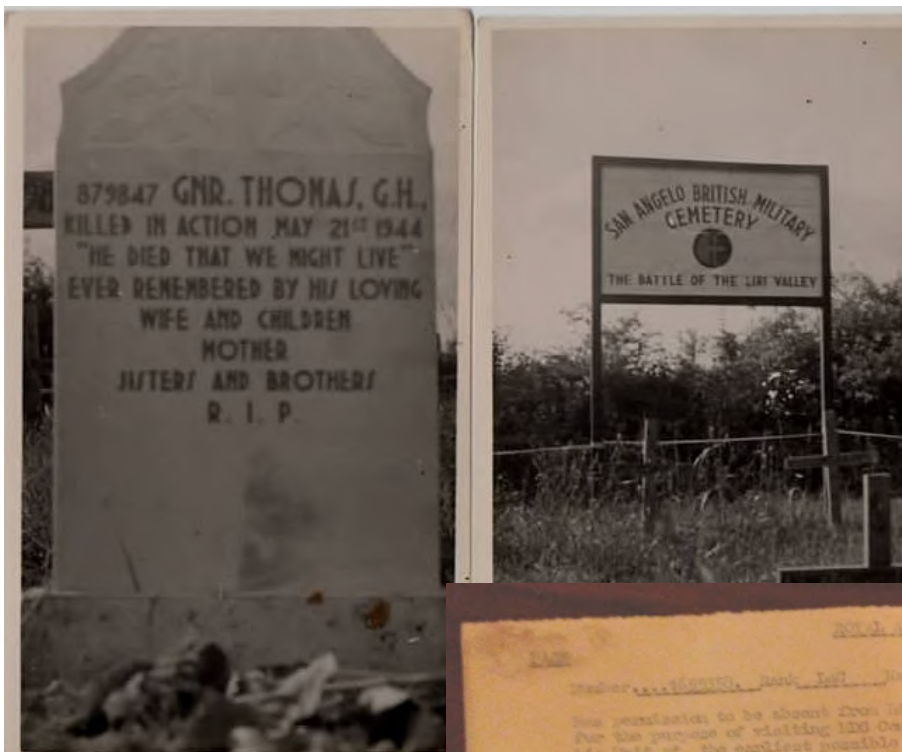
Roger Chandler, son of the late Alec Chandler, 36 Infantry Brigade the BUFFS
 Peter Cox, veteran 70th Med Reg. Royal Artillery, 78th Division
 Graham Hewitt, nephew of Dennis James Charles, 3rd Btn, Parachute Regiment,
 KIA Operation Husky Sicily

David Homer, veteran X111 corps 46th Infantry Division
 Lorna Muir, daughter of the late Kenneth Edward Muir, 10th Indian Division, Royal Corps of Signals
 Iain O'Hara, (the late Kenneth Muir, as above)

Letters

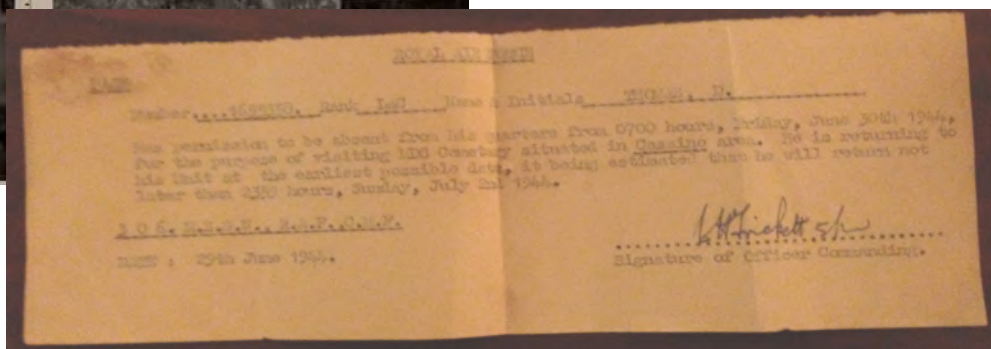
Martyn Thomas, son of Gnr. George Henry Thomas, Royal Artillery, writes—

I wonder whether any of our members would be able to help me? Below are copies of two photographs of my Father's original grave in Italy after his death on May 21st 1944. These were taken by his brother Edward (Ted) Thomas shortly afterwards and as Ted could sell fridges to Eskimos, he managed to get a white marble headstone for my Dad's grave. How he managed this in the general mess of battle I do not know; however, as you can see from the photos, he did!



What I do not know is where "The San Angelo Cemetery" was in relation to the CWG Cemetery at Cassino. If we can find out then we would like to visit the area when we are next there. Any help would be much appreciated.

Uncle Ted's 72 hour pass which enabled him to find my Father's grave and get the headstone made.



The pass reads -

LAC Thomas E

Has permission to be absent from his quarters from 0700 hours, Friday, June 30th 1944 for the purpose of visiting MDS Cemetery situated in the Cassino area. He is returning to his Unit at the earliest possible date, it being estimated that he will return not later than 2359 hours, Sunday, July 2nd 1944.

29th June 1944

Signed by Officer Commanding

Internet Links

Three members have shared their posts with us -

George Cowie, formerly of 7 Field Squadron, RE runs a website www.shiney7.co.uk where there are several pages and videos of Cassino battles. At the foot of the home page there are links to George's videos.

John Strafford has made a film about the Battle of Monte Natale and the crossing of the Garigliano in January 1944. It is a personal contribution and can be seen on his Youtube channel at <https://youtu.be/qXGCNMohrDg>

John A Walker has released a new novel—*The Girl with the Tartan Scarf*—can be viewed at www.cosmos-original-productions.co.uk or bought direct from walker.john@talk21.com

May 1944 Mary is on her way back from work in a factory in the Gorbals, Glasgow. This trip is to prove different from any other. While heading back into the city centre, she innocently finds a white envelope on the tram. This leads her into a world of espionage, spies and strange agents.

We have had an enquiry from a Mr Dougie Roy, Programme Director at Capernwray Hall, Lancashire. He asks if there are any in the Society who knew Maj Ian Thomas DSO who served at Monte Cassino.

Major Thomas, a keen Christian and his wife bought a vacant manor house (Capernwray Hall) in 1946. In fact Maj Thomas was in occupied Germany at the time of the auction and sent his young wife to bid for the property! Their vision was to have a location for young people to learn more of Jesus Christ in a practical and relevant way. This work continues today—with a network of 25 centres worldwide—all spawned from that first purchase. I would like to know more of the character of Maj Thomas and would appreciate any memories any would have of serving with Maj W Ian Thomas. A brief history of the young couple's vision can be found on the organisation's website: <http://www.capernwray.org/the-hall/>

Any who served and are able to visit Capernwray Hall would be given a warm welcome, endless cups of tea at a beautiful location in the NW of England.

Dougie can be contacted by email: dougie@capernwray.org.uk

The Abbey of Montecassino was written by Carol Burns, daughter of the late Lionel Nathanson, Royal Corps of Signals. Carol was one of the party that visited Cassino in May 2017 and wrote this after visiting the Abbey

THE ABBEY OF MONTECASSINO

This time I walk alone. I sink into a world that is private to me. I'll soar upwards into cotton wool clouds that hide another life. I'll pull the ripcord and bang my head. I'll somersault backwards into childhood. I'll land inside the monastery square and gape at white doves swishing their tails. They flutter in and out of arches built of stone. I'll bow my head in silence and peep at pilgrims flocking to its cloisters. A washed out sailor's blue, so pale—so gentle, painted by an artist's hand, hides walls that once told a different tale

The smell of rotting flesh

A bombing of an Abbey

I'll chuck out questions and stand in honour to all who were there.



Entrance to Cassino War Cemetery



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