



The Monte Cassino Society

Furthering an interest in the Italian Campaign 1943—1945

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Welcome to the Autumn/Winter 2019 newsletter.

I write this having watched a fair bit of BBC television footage in recent days; the annual Festival of Remembrance at the Albert Hall, the Remembrance Day service in Whitehall, and the programme “My Grandad’s War” presented by Gary Lineker.

The spectacular Albert Hall Festival was particularly special this year, for featuring a tribute to the Italian campaign and the battles for Monte Cassino, which included among others, interviews with Jim Knox and Otton Hulacki. Jim is one of our esteemed veterans with whom many of you will be familiar, most recently as a member of the group who went out to Cassino in 2019 for the 75th Anniversary, and Otton is a Polish 11 Corps veteran who took part in the march past the following day .

It was good to see the Monte Cassino Society represented on 10th November by a group of our members and others, proudly marching past the Cenotaph at the Remembrance Day service. Like those members dotted around the country who attended services and laid wreaths on behalf of the Society at 8 of our local war memorials, I was glad of the respite from the endless rain of previous days when Sunday 10th November dawned bright and sunny, even if it was cold and there was snow on the tops. Maybe the weather helped, but I was struck by the huge number of people of all ages attending the service in even our small Welsh town, and how many wreaths were laid, a scene repeated countless times throughout the country. As a first-time wreath layer, it was interesting that this prompted a few people to ask me after the service about the Italian campaign - they had never heard of it before, so it was good to have the opportunity to tell a little of the story.

“My Grandad’s War” picked up this theme, with television celebrity Gary Lineker opening by admitting he knew nothing of his grandfather’s time in Italy. The programme followed the progress of his discovery and gave a fair, if inevitably sketchy account of the true horror of the Italian campaign and battles for Monte Cassino.

Of the two televised national Remembrance services, the most poignant moments are always those when individual memories are recalled, and recorded for posterity. The Society is committed to recording the experiences of veterans and civilians who remember the Italian campaign, and we have accounts from these two as-



Aim

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

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* photograph courtesy of the imperial War Museum, London, England

pects of the conflict. Please continue to send in your memories and stories for the newsletter and website "Recollections" archive - all are uniquely personal and valuable in their own way.

In the Summer newsletter we published the letter which Judith sent to the Ministry of Defence about the minimal support given for the 75th Monte Cassino commemoration events. In this issue we publish the reply she received from an unnamed person in the Ministry, and a letter Judith has sent in with her comments on that reply, which is self-explanatory. I think you will agree that the two together make interesting reading.

While sadly we have to say goodbye to some of our older members and veterans, we are pleased to welcome new members to the Society. Membership fees are now due, but are waived for veterans and their spouses. We enclose the membership renewal form in this issue.

The next gathering of the Society will be at the Monte Cassino memorial in the National Memorial Arboretum on Saturday 2nd May 2020, when we will remember all who took part in the campaign and commemorate the 75th anniversary of its end in 1945. As well as being a very moving occasion, this is a wonderful opportunity to meet old friends and new, all with an interest in the Italian campaign. Please see full details on the enclosed application form.

We look forward to seeing you there.

Helen James, November 2019

National Memorial Arboretum 2020

As you will see from the enclosed application form, this year's Service at the National Memorial Arboretum will take place on Saturday 2nd May, rather than a fortnight later as would be the normal date. The committee have taken the decision to bring it forward so that we can mark the 75th Anniversary of the end of the war in Italy (2nd May 1945) and to be a part of the wider events leading up to the VE Day 75 commemorations the following Friday, whilst still marking the 76th Anniversary of the Battle itself.

That said, the service will take its usual form. We have arranged for tea and coffee to be available in our designated marquee from 12.00 noon, before assembling outside 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. These timings allow a little more flexibility for travelling and also give everyone an opportunity to look around the site (weather permitting). Once again, the Stoke on Trent Black Watch Association Pipes and Drums Band will accompany us.

The NMA at 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). We are also intending to meet together for a pub meal on Saturday evening at a venue near to the Premier Inn. If you are interested in joining us, please indicate this on the form.

We hope you will join us at the Arboretum on Saturday 2nd May, and look forward to meeting all who are able to attend. Please ensure that you return the completed application forms (along with your Donations) to Lesley Teasdale (address on the form) by the end of February.

Remembrance Sunday November 2019

Report by Kate and Jim Goldsmith – Son of Gunner William John (Jack) Goldsmith 31st Field Regiment, Royal Artillery – died 1 September 1973

and nephew of Gunner John (Jack) Heptonstall, 31st Field Regiment, Royal Artillery – died 28 February 1944, age 19, and buried at Cassino War Cemetery

A crisp, sunny day, November 10th 2019, Remembrance Sunday and London ablaze with Autumn colouring. Lining up on Horse Guards Parade with hundreds of veterans and their families, waiting together to pay their respects to the fallen. Men and women in uniform, medals polished and proudly worn, partners, family members including young children, supporting veterans and representing those who had delivered the ultimate sacrifice.

Meeting up with the Monte Cassino Society members was so special, it almost feels like we are part of one family, each of us with a connection to the battle and a joint aim to remember all who took part in the Italian Campaign.



We walked from Horse Guards Parade along Whitehall where we waited in line for the ceremony to begin. We lined up just in front of the Polish contingent and had the honour of meeting Otton Hulacki, who spoke movingly at the Festival of Remembrance of his experiences and the horrors they faced at Monte Cassino.

Large screens were erected to enable the marchers and the watching public to take part in the service. As Big Ben struck 11am, total silence fell upon those present. Prayers were offered up by the Lord Bishop of London and the hymn, "O God, Our help in ages past" was sung by all. The Lord's prayer and the National Anthem ended the ceremony.

Headed by the stirring British regimental bands, we then began the slow procession past the war memorial where Judith passed the Society's wreath to an attendant to lay at the Cenotaph. We continued on past the crowds, back towards Horse Guards Parade, honoured to have had the opportunity of paying our respects to those fallen in all wars but particularly, in this, the year of the 75th anniversary of the end of the campaign, to those who had fought at Monte Cassino.

Meridian Chapter Harley Owners Group



For millions of people Remembrance Sunday marks a very special time of the year, this of course includes Meridian Chapter members and other Chislehurst community groups, 2019 being no exception. Pleasingly after a long and seemingly endless period of rain throughout October and early November the clouds finally drifted away to produce reasonably clear skies for the 2019 parade and service of remembrance.

Once again it was well attended by all, including around 30 Chapter members helping to swell the combined numbers to around 300 - Meridian Chapter Road Crew member and Parade Marshal Fred Blundell was sure to have his work cut out! Unfortunately, this was not made any easier by local Metropolitan Police Senior officers' decision to scale back support for events this year.

That said, always up for the Challenge, Fred called the parade into line and headed by Road Captain and RBL Standard bearer Steve Uffendel, the group proceeded towards the War memorial. This year Road Captains Enzo Orsi and Nick Franklin were nominated for the honour of laying wreaths on behalf of both Meridian Chapter and 'The Monte Casino Society', both Enzo and Nick flanked the Standard bearer at the march head.

For safety reasons, the service of remembrance this year was held on an area of Chislehurst Common adjacent to the War Memorial due to the presence of passing traffic, but in all, the event took place smoothly and safely under the careful stewardship of our Parade Marshal, this includes the march back to our gathering point at 'The Queens Head'.

In all another successful event and as with previous years it was an honour for the Chapter to play a significant part in this important event including laying wreaths in memory of those who gave.

We Will Remember Them.

Dave Mann

Assistant Director and Charter Member



Meridian Chapter Harley Owners Group

Our thanks go to Liz Longman for organising our members' attendance at the London ceremonies. Liz, whose uncle Lance Serjeant William John Donaldson of the London Irish Rifles was killed in action on 16th May 1944 and is buried at Cassino, sent us these pictures of herself meeting Prince Harry and Meghan at the Field of Remembrance.

She writes: "As the representative for the Monte Cassino Society plot at the Field of Remembrance, I was fortunate to meet Prince Harry. He asked who I was representing and if I had a family member at Cassino, and he mentioned he recalled visiting Cassino himself. I said I was honoured to be there on behalf of the Society and those unable to be there. The Duchess of Sussex also came across to speak to me, saying how pleased she was to be at the side of Prince Harry at this occasion."



Amazon Bridge Memorial

We mentioned the memorial in the Summer newsletter, and understand that the work on this is proposed to take place for it to be completed near the anniversary on May 13th 2020. The memorial will be near the existing Beds and Herts memorial, on the road to St Angelo just outside Cassino, and it will be erected by present day units of those who built the original Bailey bridge.

Although there is no plan for an official Society visit to Cassino in 2020, a small number of members may want to go there for the Memorial commemoration, so please contact John Leach or Paul Taylor (see last page) if you are interested. Members are also welcome to join the engineers' group. The contact is George Cowie of the Sappers association the Shiny 7, who sent this note:

"At this moment there is no guarantee the memorial will be completed on time, however, a small group of us will be at Cassino, as usual, a couple of days either side of the anniversary date, 13 May. We will be onsite regardless to commemorate the anniversary, followed by a visit to the CWGC cemetery and the Abbey. On the 12th May, we will be visiting the bridge sites and relevant areas around Monte Trocchio. Everyone is welcome to join us; we are a very friendly and welcoming group."

For more information, please contact George at georgecowie103@yahoo.co.uk

Wilfred Burt B.E.M.

Congratulations to Wilfred Burt, who was awarded the British Empire Medal in the 2019 Queen's Birthday Honours list. Wilfred, now aged 91, is known to many of our members as the builder of our Monte Cassino memorial at the National Arboretum. He worked closely with Doreen Belcher on the construction of the memorial. Wilfred has been awarded the B.E.M. for services to scouting, young people and the community in Stoke-on-Trent. He has been involved with the scouting organisation for over 80 years, having joined Hanford Scouts at the age of 10. After a period in National Service Wilfred joined Trentham Scouts as the leader in 1954, and travelled widely at home and abroad to scouting events, often passing on his woodcarving skills at scout camps. He joined Longton scouts and was with them for 50 years, eventually becoming the president of Three Towns scouts and vice-president of the County Scouts in the 2000's. In recognition of his long service to scouting, Wilfred has also been awarded the Silver Wolf, scouting's highest honour, and the Chief Scout's award for 60 years' unbroken service.

Dear Helen

I attach the reply I received from an unnamed person at the Ministry of Defence in reply to my letter, a copy of which you published in our last newsletter. As I am aware of everything contained in it, I didn't deem it worthy of a reply!

However, had I replied, and with reference to the final paragraph, I would have explained that the Monte Cassino Society were involved from the outset in organising the Service at the National Memorial Arboretum in May. Indeed, Mr. Blakely Nixon of the Royal British Legion Events Team attended our memorial service in May 2018 to get some ideas and to see how we organized our service.

From the first planning session Mike Anslow travelled from his home in Warwickshire to London to attend every meeting with the British Legion. I was able to supply names and addresses of veterans and we put an alert in our Spring newsletter and on the website, hoping to reach as many veterans as possible. It was Mike's insistence that the event should concentrate on veterans, not local and national bigwigs.

Sadly there was no mention in the letter of anything to mark the 75th anniversary of the end of the Italian Campaign (in 2020) and I suppose I can understand that, being only a week before VE Day - it is only to be expected and I do not have a problem with that. As a matter of fact, anyone who saw the Cenotaph Marchpast on Remembrance Sunday was told by David Dimbleby that it was 75 years since the end of the Italian Campaign. He may have got his wires crossed, but I was thrilled to see the BBC did show the Monte Cassino contingent for several seconds. Out of 10,000 marchers we had more than our fair share!!

My very best wishes

Judith



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Ms Judith Coote
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25 July 2019

Dear Ms Coote,

Thank you for your letter of 4 June to the Rt Hon Tobias Ellwood MP, Minister for Defence People and Veterans, regarding the 75th anniversary of the end of the battles for Cassino. Your letter has been passed to the Defence People Secretariat in the Ministry of Defence and I apologise for the time it has taken to reply.

The Monte Cassino campaign, from January to May 1944 was amongst the hardest-fought battles of the Second World War. The service and sacrifice of the brave troops secured freedom and democracy in Italy and prevented the German Army from transferring more fighting men to France.

It may be helpful if I explain that £1.5 million of LIBOR funding was given to the Royal British Legion in 2017. This money was specifically allocated to organise commemorations of the 100th anniversary of the raid on Zeebrugge, the 50th anniversary of the start of Operation Banner, the 50th anniversary of the cessation of the Berlin blockade and the 75th anniversary of the Monte Cassino campaign. The funding was entirely separate and additional to the D-Day 75 commemorative money that they also received.

You may be interested to learn that on Saturday 11 May 2019, 40 Italian Campaign veterans, 400 VIP guests, and hundreds of members of the public gathered at the National Memorial Arboretum for a commemorative event remembering the heroism, courage and collaboration of the over 200,000 Allied and Commonwealth forces who came from all corners of the globe to fight in the battles of Monte Cassino. The Department also provided ceremonial support, musicians and a chaplain for this event.

I hope this information is helpful and thank you for taking the time to write.

Yours sincerely,

Defence People Secretariat

Monte Cassino 75 Years On by Jim Goldsmith

This story begins with my Dad, William John Goldsmith, born 15 March 1917 in North London. His mother died when he was 18 months old and life for the young Jack (as he was only ever known) was tough. His father remarried and Jack was brought up by a friend of his mother's and at 16 served with the merchant navy where he travelled to far-away places such as New Zealand, Canada and the USA.



In August 1938 with the prospect of war brewing, Jack enlisted with the Royal Artillery, proceeding overseas in September 1939. He was sent to the Middle East and Cyprus and in 1942 joined the 31st Field Regiment, part of Montgomery's 8th Army, the Desert Rats of North Africa. Following those battles, he was part of the invasion of Sicily in August 1943 and then landing in Italy, finding himself at Cassino. There he met and struck up a friendship with another Jack, who hailed from Lancashire. This younger Jack, formally known as John Heptonstall, noticed his corporal didn't write home to anyone and finding there wasn't anyone for him to do so, suggested he write to his sister, Margaret Heptonstall, which he did, in January 1944. His first letter to introduce himself, the second less than two months later, to say how very sorry he was at the loss of her brother. Jack Heptonstall was just nineteen years old. He is buried at Cassino War Cemetery which the Abbey, the pinnacle of those Cassino battles, prominently overlooks.

My Dad continued to write to Margaret throughout the rest of the war until he returned home in November 1945 whereupon he headed up to Blackburn to meet her in person. They were married in June 1947, the same year as the future Queen, Princess Elizabeth to Philip Mountbatten. Jack and Margaret Goldsmith stayed in her hometown of Blackburn and went on to have eleven children, six boys and five girls, of which I am the tenth.

I had the privilege, along with two of my sisters, to attend the 75th anniversary of the battle for Monte Cassino with the Society this May, and we stood at the grave of our Uncle Jack and gave personal thanks to him for the young man he was and the sacrifice he made. Those young brave men who gave their tomorrows for our today, without whom, many of us would not be here. It was never truer than in our case.

Our Dad sadly died from lung cancer in September 1973 so we know little about his war but being a part of the Monte Cassino Society has helped to change that. Having the opportunity to meet and talk to the four veterans; Alex Sutton, Jim Knox, Gordon Cruse and Ken Seagar and also to Vera Stephens (who met her future husband, a British soldier, when Rome was liberated). To see Cassino through their stories and those of many of the members of the society we met on that trip has been a true privilege. We shall be forever grateful. We would urge anyone who hasn't been to Cassino to go. We will definitely return to learn more and will pass the stories onto the next generation, our children.

We will remember them.

In memory of

Gunner John (Jack) Heptonstall 14321644 31st Field Regiment, Royal Artillery died 28 February 1944 and Gunner William John (Jack) Goldsmith 884740 31st Field Regiment, Royal Artillery died 1 September 1973



Jim Goldsmith and sisters at the grave of Jack Heptonstall in
Cassino CWGC Cemetery, May 2019



This photograph was sent in by Irene Dobson whose father, George M Standon was in the Grenadier Guards. The caption on the photograph reads "The day Monte Cassino fell, May 1944", and Irene's father is standing on the back row, 4th from left. Irene is trying to find out more about her father's war, and the role of the Grenadier Guards in the Italian campaign and battles for Cassino, so she would very much like to hear from anyone with any additional information.

VE & VJ Day 75th Anniversary Events.

In 2020 The Royal British Legion will be asking the nation to remember the impact that leaving, missing and returning home has on service men and women and their loved ones – then and now. The commemorations for both VE and VJ Day will be the central part of our national remembrance and will bring home the scale of service and sacrifice made by men and women of the Second World War generation.

In support of this, the Legion has asked the Society (along with all other Veteran Groups & associations) to pass the following on to our Members, to ensure that all Veterans of the 2nd World War are made aware of what is planned and to give them the opportunity to take part should they wish to;

VE Day

A special programme of events marking VE 75 will take place over the Early May Bank Holiday 2020 in Central London and has been designed to be of particular interest to all from the Second World War generation who served at home and overseas across the European theatre. Similar commemorations are expected to be reflected in communities across the nation.

We are particularly pleased to announce that we plan to host 750 veterans from across the UK, each accompanied by a nominated companion, to attend the VE 75 events programme in Central London over the period 8-9 May 2020. Our invitation includes a fully funded plan for transport, meals and accommodation; veterans will travel to London courtesy of the National Rail Group on Thursday 7 May 2020 and return home on Sunday 10 May 2020.

We encourage applications from all of those who contributed to victory in Europe 75 years ago, including spouses and civilians from reserved occupations across the UK and Commonwealth.

Should they wish to apply, then the RBL website has all of the details at:

<https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/remembrance/remembrance-events/ve-day-75>.

VJ Day

In partnership with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) and Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League (RCEL) we will be funding the travel and accommodation costs for a series of tours for veterans of the Asia-Pacific campaign, as defined below, to key commemorative, and CWGC sites, across South and South East Asia. Descendants of veterans are welcome to also come on these tours but will need to fund their own travel and accommodation.

As part of this package travel and accommodation will also be provided for a nominated companion to accompany each veteran, and a comprehensive Legion care support package will be in place throughout the event programme to support veterans.

For those veterans who want to be part of activities in the UK, the Legion and the National Memorial Arboretum (NMA) will be running a three-day series of activities from the 14-16 August, which will include a national service of Remembrance. Travel and accommodation will be provided by the Legion for all veterans who wish to attend – the same qualifying criteria applies for veterans wishing to go on an overseas tour or requiring travel and accommodation for the three days of activities at the NMA. We also very much welcome and encourage the attendance of veterans' descendants at any or all of the three days at the NMA.

Again, should they wish to apply, then the RBL website has all of the details at:

<https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/remembrance/remembrance-events/vj-day-75>

If anyone is unsure of anything or requires help with an application, then please contact Lesley Teasdale (Hon Secretary).

When looking at individual experiences of war, our thoughts usually go to those of the soldiers involved. Sometimes it seems that little attention is paid to the civilians and refugees caught up in the same conflict, and what life was like for them.

I first met Tony Pittaccio on a battlefield tour of Cassino in 2019 and later, over tea with him and his wife Jackie at their home in Felixstowe, he told me his story. His account gives a unique insight into the plight of the civilians caught up in the Italian campaign of World War 2 and is a fascinating tale of a young boy's experience of the war.

Note: The full transcript of Tony's interview fills 11 pages, so only a few selected quotes have been used in this article. The document contains many stories and anecdotes and can be found in the Recollections section of the Monte Cassino Society website.



TONY'S STORY

Tony Pittaccio was born in Cassino in 1929. Although the Pittaccio family had settled in England in 1901 when his father opened a hairdresser's shop in Bermondsey, Tony's parents were also natives of Cassino, his father having dual Anglo-Italian nationality. During the summer of August 1939, ten-year-old Tony, his mother and two sisters were staying with relatives in Cassino. He describes the journey there as long and tedious, involving a ferry from Southampton and two days spent on trains crossing France and then south through Italy.

Events rapidly overtook them after Germany invaded Poland on 1st September and Britain declared war on Germany two days later. The frontiers were closed and Tony, his mother and sisters found themselves stuck in Cassino. They stayed with their family on the Pasquale Road, and Tony enrolled at the local school where he learned Italian (as opposed to the ancient Oscan dialect of his mother, which was spoken in the Cassino area at the time). Occasionally he would visit the Monastery via the cable car which passed over the rocky outcrop below the summit (this later became known as Hangman's Hill during the fighting). It was the Monastery that gave the

town its status, as at that time the Abbey of Monte Cassino was the centre of the Benedictine movement and therefore of huge significance to Catholics all over the world.

At first, life in this “elegant” provincial town continued peacefully despite the events unfolding in Europe. Although people knew that Tony’s father was Anglo-Italian and still in England, he says there was no discrimination against him or his family, nor against other local people who were Jewish, American or British. **“School friends were more interested in hearing about life in England”**. They thought at first that the war would not last too long, and that with luck their part of Italy would be relatively unaffected.

Normal channels of communication were no longer open, but remarkably the family in Cassino were able to get word to and from Tony’s father in England via the Monastery and the wider Benedictine network in Europe. **“I remember my mother did write a brief note (to let him know that she and the children were safe) which was given to the monastery, and it was months later that we got a reply (by word of mouth) that he had received it and was all right”**. By this means also, they were able to ascertain that Tony’s father had not been detained as an alien, and that the Italian part of his dual nationality had prevented him from being able to join any of the military services. **“He loved the sea, and when we hadn’t heard from him we began to wonder if he had joined the navy or something, but they (the British authorities) knew his family was in Italy and they thought that if the Italians found out he had joined the British military, the family would be in trouble”**.



As the war in Europe escalated, the family’s situation became more uncomfortable as German soldiers moved into the area and shortages and restrictions began to take effect on the civilian population. Pressure on the population increased as men of military service age were conscripted into the Italian army, and after the Italian surrender some were pressed into service by the Germans. **“They forced men to work for them, including my uncle. He managed to escape – he fought in the first world war and realised what the military situation was going to be. It was he who said (we must leave and) move further back”**.

The Allies landed in Sicily in July 1943, then the Italian mainland in September, and when Italy surrendered after the invasion of Sicily, the attitude of the German occupiers hardened towards the local people. **“When the fighting reached Cassino there was no infrastructure for the civilian population at all. We had to bury our own dead, treat our own wounded, search for our own food and water, and we only had one lot of clothing on for 6 months”**.

Some initial Allied bombing of the town was carried out on 10th September 1943, and Tony’s mother sustained a shrapnel injury to the foot. There were no medical facilities by this time, and

she was unable to get adequate treatment for the wound, so what started as a minor injury led to eventual amputation of the foot on her return to England at the end of the war.

As the fighting got nearer in the winter of 1943 to 44, Cassino inevitably assumed great strategic importance to the Germans, positioned as it was in the middle of the Gustav defensive line and covering Route 6 to Rome. But even then, people thought the conflict would pass through quickly – this was a devoutly Catholic area and they had a great sense of being spiritually protected by the mighty Monastery high above the town. ***“We didn’t realise it was going to be that serious. We thought OK, a couple of weeks and it will all be over, it will all be through. We didn’t have provisions for 5 or 6 months”.***

Tony’s school was soon commandeered by the Germans for a First Aid post, ***“We saw convoys of ambulances and vehicles full of wounded Germans coming into the school. I have to say we felt very sorry for them.”***, and he remembers the sound of the heavy fighting at St Pietro Infine and the Mignano Gap. Very soon after the battle on the Volturno in October 1943, the Germans ordered all civilians still in the town to leave. ***“They started to demand that people left the town because Cassino was going to be part of the Winter Line and they wanted to put up lots of defences and fortifications”.*** Having nowhere particular to go, Tony’s family and many others just had to find shelter where they could, preferably on the Allied side of the lines. ***“We thought we should evacuate to a place further away from Cassino, and we didn’t bring a lot with us, and that was the situation”.*** The family moved from one bombed house to another, thinking themselves lucky if the roof was intact and they could scrape together the makings of a meal. ***“At one time there were 25 of us sheltering in one room”.*** Having faith that the Monastery was invincible, some civilians even sought shelter there. ***“The Germans didn’t care where people went, they just had to go. A lot of people went to the Monastery. Another uncle of mine, his family went there. He also realised it wasn’t as safe a place as it seemed, so they left there before it was bombed.”***

Tony witnessed all four battles of Cassino, and clearly remembers the bombing of the monastery on 15th February 1944 with great sadness. ***“Oh God, we were devastated. Because, you know, the only sense of hope we had as civilians was that Monastery. We would pray to it every evening, facing it. We felt that the Monastery was still there taking care of us.”*** The opposite was true for the Allied soldiers, for whom the Monastery became a malign and brooding presence they grew to hate for what it represented in terms of futile fighting and loss of life.

Tony has many anecdotes of things that happened to him during this time, and many demonstrate amazing courage and the best of humanity. People had so little, but were still willing to share with their fellow refugees. The same kindness was often shown by the Allied soldiers towards the local people, and as more Allied troops moved into the area around Cassino, the starving civilians often found themselves reliant on handouts of food from any soldiers or cookhouse personnel kind enough to save leftovers for them. In the spring of 1944, the family were sheltering near the camp of the 23rd New Zealand Battalion, who were generous with food handouts, and Tony and his friend would help by organising orderly queues to ensure fair distribution. By now 14 years of age, he had the advantage of being a fluent English speaker, so he acted as interpreter between the civilians and the soldiers. As a bit of fun, the soldiers rewarded the boys with armbands stating “KP” (Kitchen Police).

After the 4th battle of Cassino, the New Zealand troops prepared to pack up and move on. Tony, now aged 15 had become well acquainted with the soldiers, and asked if he could join them as an interpreter - to his surprise they said “yes”. ***“I went to my family and said, “Look I’m in a***

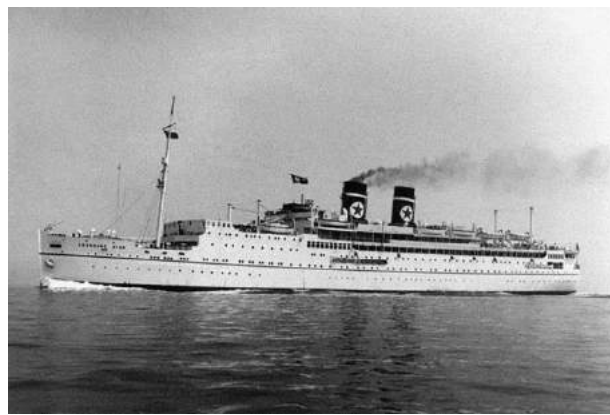
hurry, I'm not coming back because I am going to join the New Zealand army", and they said "Yes, of course you are, good luck son"! They thought I was having a joke.... Then when I didn't turn up they realised it was true." He was issued with a uniform and moved out with the battalion.

Tony stayed with the 23rd Battalion as they fought northwards through Italy, and he describes some amusing and hair-raising incidents along the way. ***"the Battalion disbanded in early December 1945....I joined the NZ Royal Army Service Corps for a few months, then the NZ Graves Registration Unit. I was with them for about 4 months. They then went off to Austria in October 1946 and I decided to come back home to England. I went back to Cassino first because I had to get passports and tickets and everything, and then came back home."***

"My father met me at Victoria Station. He knew what I had been up to because he was writing to me by then, as communication had got a bit easier with me being with the New Zealanders."

It is worth remembering that even when his war came to an end in 1946, and despite all his experiences and adventures both civilian and military, at 16 Tony was still technically underage for any military service. With the help of evening classes, he completed his education and eventually made a successful career using his language skills and knowledge of Europe, in the tourism and import/export industries.

The SS Arandora Star



Some of you who went to Picinisco would have heard of the Arandora Star and the fateful journey of the 'enemy aliens' who were being sent to Canada. Launched in 1927, she had been a cargo ship and then a passenger liner before the war. In 1939 she was requisitioned by the government and turned into a troop ship, and she took part in many evacuations from France in the early days of the war.

On 1 July 1940 the Arandora Star sailed from Liverpool with over 1500 people on board, at least half of these being Italian detainees. There were also German detainees, and German prisoners guarded by British soldiers. The next day she was torpedoed by a German U-boat north of Ire-

land. The U-boat was returning to base and had one torpedo left, which was thought to be faulty. However, Gunther Prien, the U-boat captain ordered the firing of the torpedo and it hit the Arandora Star and exploded. There was a lot of confusion on board, as the ship was overloaded and the torpedo had hit the generator, and therefore there were no lights or communications. Nearly half of the people on board were killed or drowned including many British soldiers, but the majority were Italian civilians.

Afterwards, there were three Citations. The Captain of the Arandora Star, Captain Moulton was posthumously awarded the Lloyd's War Medal for Bravery at Sea, a German officer, Captain Burfeind was posthumously cited for his heroism in organising the evacuation, and the Canadian commander Harry DeWolf was cited for his heroism in rescuing many men.

For some time after the sinking, bodies were washed up on the shores of Ireland and buried in cemeteries close to where they were found. As the largest number of the Italian Internees had come from Scotland, a memorial garden was created at St Andrew's Cathedral, Glasgow in 2011.

By Des James

There is a lot more information on the Internet, including interviews with survivors at www.warhillsproject.com/stories/tragedy-of-the-arandora-star/ and a detailed model of the Arandora Star has recently been restored by the Liverpool Maritime Museum.

NOTICES

We reported the deaths of Ivor and Jessie Cutler in our Summer newsletter. Many thanks to their daughter Pat and family, for the generous donation to the Society in their memory of £306.25.

Dr. Alex Kurczaba has requested that we give the web address of his website: "The 4th Battle of Monte Cassino in Words and Images" www.thecn.com/ak755

NEW MEMBER

Pat Abernethy, daughter of Jack Watson, 75th Medium regiment, Shropshire Yeomanry.

IN MEMORIAM

Benjamin Causer, 5th Northamptonshire Regiment, 28/10/1923 - 4/7/2019

His son, Tony Causer writes: "It was my pleasure and honour to travel with him to Italy to take part in the 70th Anniversary visit. The memory will be with me for ever."

Betty Craske, widow of Russell – The Hertford & Bedfordshire Regiment, mother of Nigel & Lou. Betty was always very supportive of the society, and she joined us on many occasions and was known to many.

Ron Evans, 56th Heavy Regiment, Royal Artillery. Ron attended the Cenotaph service for many years, accompanied by his son Robert

Crystal Sonia Huxtable, widow of Morton Desmond Huxtable, 119 Line Maintenance Section, Royal Corps of Signals

Daphne Hazel Wright (Beth), Partner of AHA Keeping, The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment

Haydn Theo Davies BEM, 6th Battalion, the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment
Theo was wounded in the hand and leg at Cassino, but recovered and returned to active service afterwards; he did however carry shell splinters in his hand for the rest of his life.

Post war he returned to his native South Wales and civilian life, eventually marrying and having a family. An active member of his local Baptist Church, Theo was awarded the British Empire Medal in the 1988 New Year's Honours List for his untiring work in support of the West Glamorgan Muscular Dystrophy Branch.

Theo was an active member of our Society for many years and a close friend of Jim Morgan, Phil Soady & Paul Taylor, who were able to honour his memory by representing the Monte Cassino Society at his funeral in September.

Phil writes; "Every year, Theo laid a wreath at Swansea War Memorial on behalf of the Society, as well as one for his brother who died in Germany. He was interviewed by the local newspaper several times about Monte Cassino to try and raise awareness. Theo and his brother Bob were regulars at the Arboretum and on Pilgrimages to Cassino, until his ill-health prevented it.

My best memory of Theo is listening to him sing "The D-Day Dodgers" in the bar of the Edra Palace Hotel, Cassino. He was a true gentleman, and the Society and the world in general is a poorer place without him."

Greg Flynn, friend of the Society and regular visitor to Cassino. Greg is pictured here on the right with his friend Chris Clarke on Remembrance Sunday 2019.



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