



The Monte Cassino Society

Furthering an interest in the Italian Campaign 1943—1945

*

Aim

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

Welcome to our newsletter for Winter 2021.

Watching the spectacular and emotional British Legion 100th Anniversary Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall, with no social distancing and only the odd face mask in sight, it was tempting to think that life was creeping back to normal after the upheavals of the last two years. We did not know then that the Omicron variant was waiting in the wings, and how things have changed in the weeks since.



So Covid is still very much a part of everyday life, and it was with some anticipation of last-minute cancellations that we waited to hear whether the Service of Remembrance at the Cenotaph would still go ahead, along with all those planned for hundreds of cities, towns, and villages up and down the country. Fortunately, in 2021 the news was positive, and we report on some of those acts of Remembrance attended by members of the Society in this issue.

There was also considerable television coverage of Remembrance activities at the re-opened National Memorial Arboretum, which looked magnificent in all its autumn colours. The Arboretum is well worth a visit at any time of year and, after all the delays our planned gathering there on 14th May 2022 to commemorate the 78th anniversary of the Battle for Monte Cassino in 1944 and the ending of the Italian Campaign in 1945, will be a special one. With luck the event will go ahead, and we look forward to meeting you there.

In addition, we have articles from members and others, including accounts of men who served at Cassino, a light-hearted Christmas story, and news of tributes to the Amazon Bridge - the memorial, triumphantly completed in Cassino after many setbacks, and models of the Bridge and the Sherman tank which pushed it into place on that awful night in May 1944.

As ever, I am very grateful to receive them all. Please keep them coming.

I wish you all happy reading, and a peaceful and healthy 2022,

Helen James,

Editor,

December 2021

Inside this issue:

Editorial	1
Remembrance Events	2-5
Recollections	6-14
Amazon Bridge	14-18
Snippets	18
New Members	19
In Memoriam	19-20
Contacts	20

Membership

Our annual Membership fees are due of £15.00 (these are waived for Veterans and their spouses). Fees can be paid either by cheque (payable to The Monte Cassino Society), cash (sent to myself in Plymouth) or by Bank Transfer. If you pay by Bank Transfer, please contact Diane Soady directly to obtain the Society's bank details. Both our contact details can be found at the end of the newsletter.

Thank you, Lesley

Remembrance Sunday, 14th November, 2021

Maybe it was the enforced absences of 2020 which made so many people determined to be there in London in 2021, maybe it was because this year marks the Centenary of the Royal British Legion, but it was certainly a memorable experience to arrive and become part of the massed ranks of 10,000 personnel assembled by Admiralty Arch on Remembrance Sunday, all waiting patiently in line for security checks before proceeding to Horse Guards Parade. There were so many different uniforms, so many rows of medals, and (easy eavesdropping on) happy conversations as old comrades found each other in the queue. People of all ages, veterans both ambulant and wheelchair-bound, retired and serving servicemen and women, Scouts and Brownies, civilians, all there with the common purpose to represent countless organisations, and to remember the sacrifice of so many in countless conflicts. We passed the time exchanging stories with an army chaplain, about 'our' Monte Cassino Cross and his time in the Falklands.

Eventually we all cleared security and found our meeting point on Horse Guards Parade. Despite sadness that our veteran Jim Knox was unable to be there as planned, it was good to meet old and new friends alike after the two years' enforced break, as we 18 members of the Monte Cassino Society took our allotted places for the march and proceeded to Whitehall. There we waited for some time, grateful for no rain, until all were in position and the service of Remembrance could begin. This was, as ever, solemn and dignified, with the two-minute silence observed by the huge throng of military personnel, dignitaries, and members of the crowd in addition to the 10,000 marchers. When our turn came, we marched past the Cenotaph to the music of military bands. It was moving and unforgettable, and we were proud to be there to represent those who served and gave so much in the Italian Campaign.

Back on Horse Guards Parade, all were dismissed after the salute taken by HRH The Duke of Cambridge, and we were able to send Jim our best wishes via iPhone video, while warming up with a much-appreciated coffee, courtesy of the Royal British Legion, (and tot of something stronger, courtesy of Liz Longman, who once again seems to have thought of everything). Thanks Liz, for your efficient efforts on behalf of us all, and to those members of the Society who were able to attend.

Later we would visit the vast Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey, where among the thousands of small crosses, it was touching to see that several new ones had been added to our Monte Cassino plot by members of the public - a poignant reminder that so many still do care, and remember.

Helen James, November 2021



Field of Remembrance 2021

I am very pleased to report that the 93rd Field of Remembrance went ahead this year. Unfortunately, due to building works at Westminster Abbey the number of allocated tickets to the opening event was greatly reduced. Our thanks go to Susan Deadman, Sharon Shaw and Maureen Stringer for laying out our plot and representing the Society. HRH The Duchess of Cornwall, the Patron of the Poppy Factory attended the opening ceremony. All dedications from Society Members were placed in our plot. I visited on Saturday 13th November, and it was lovely to see members of the public stop by the Monte Cassino Plot and then go and place their own cross.



Lesley Teasdale, Hon Secretary

Blackhall St Columba's Parish Church, Edinburgh

The Rev Fergus Cook held a short service of Remembrance on Thursday 11th November and one of our members, Michael Wilson, laid a wreath on behalf of the Monte Cassino Society.

Fergus did a wonderful service this morning with the extra blessing of a beautiful sunny day, blue skies and gorgeous colours of the leaves. There were 40 plus people in attendance. He had to speak very loudly to combat the sound of the traffic from Queensferry Road - quite a major route. It was in some ways good to have the noise of the traffic indicating normality and life, which I guess is what was achieved by the sacrifices of everybody that died, was injured or suffered through all the wars. His words and prayers were so comforting, and just what was needed for the world today.

Dr Michael Wilson



Sunday 14 November 2021 – Remembrance Sunday service at Blackhall St. Columba's church, Edinburgh.

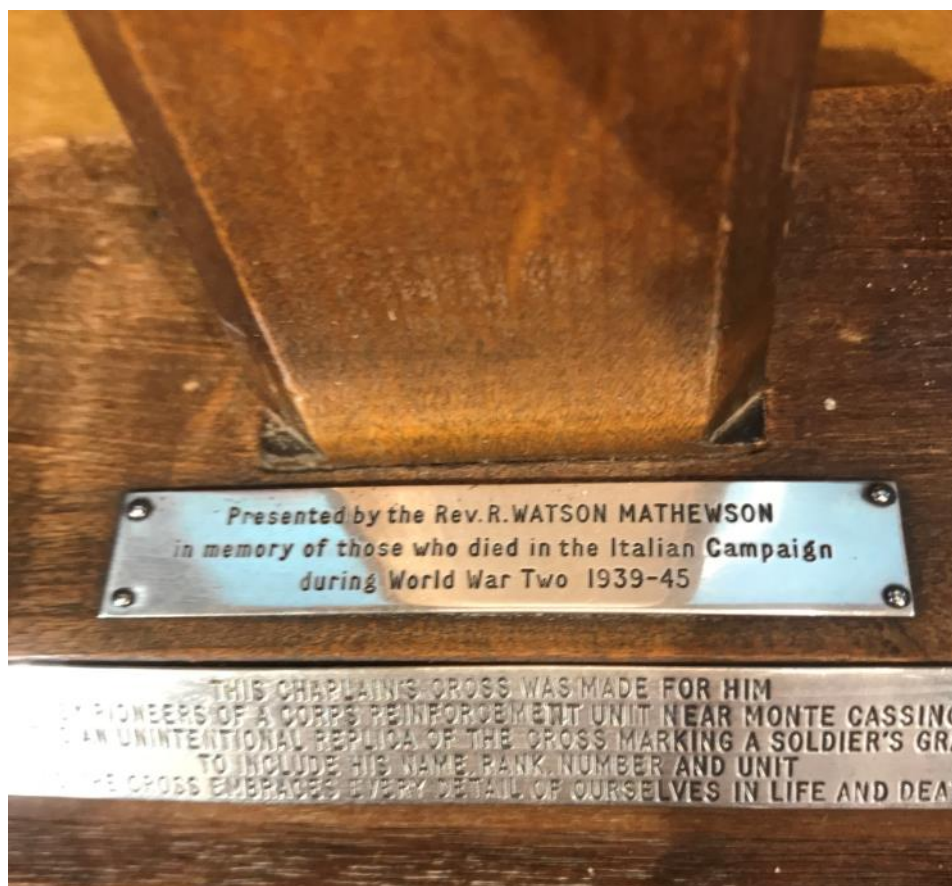
We visit Edinburgh fairly regularly and I had intended to find St. Columba's church and see the Monte Cassino Cross at the next opportunity since reading about it in the Summer newsletter and 'attending' virtually the memorial service held at St. Columba's by the Rev. Cook in May. It was therefore a bonus to actually be in Edinburgh on Remembrance Sunday and able to attend the service.

Our first impressions of the Church were very positive – it is evidently a local community hub, and the service was very well attended by parishioners of all ages and a troupe of Scouts. Very impressive use was made of innovative modern technology with a screen over the altar displaying information, images of poppies appropriate to the occasion and the words of the hymns writ large – much easier than following a traditional hymn book. The mandatory mask wearing proved no barrier to singing hymns!

The Monte Cassino Cross was the focus of attention in the centre of the altar and the Rev. Cook drew particular attention to it and the reason for it being there in his very moving sermon. Poppy wreaths were laid in front of the altar and cross, including one from the Monte Cassino Society, represented on this occasion by a lady who is also much involved in the Edinburgh Polish Association. She recalled being told about the cross as a child by the Rev. Mathewson and when she went home and related this to her parents learning for the first time from her own father that he was at Monte Cassino. After the service, the wreaths were laid outside the church where they could be seen by passers-by.

It was evident that the Monte Cassino cross is very much a part of the history of St. Columba's, thanks to the Rev. Mathewson and Rev. Cook who, since its re-discovery, has restored it as a proud and prominent feature of his church and Remembrance services in May and November.

Pauline Glover



“Never Lose Hope”

MCS Member Sheila Wurr lives near to St Columba's Church in Edinburgh, and she emailed me in July after visiting to see the cross, with these thoughts and recollections:

“The story of the cross is just another example of history being unearthed quite unexpectedly, having lain forgotten for many years. In fact, only in September 2019 did I get my father's POW tag, complete with string, three USA military badges and a 10Pf coin from my cousin who rescued it from an old tin full of rubbish my uncle had stashed in his shed and forgotten all about. Only sheer luck prevented it from being put on the tip during a clear out!! If only I had this information sooner. The point is, never lose hope and preserve history whenever and however you can.



German Graveyard



Grave, Italy WW2

Alec Sutton and I had a good conversation one year about his time on the Abdiel* when it hit a mine. I tried the following year when following dad's footsteps 151/156 Battalion Parachute Regiment from Taranto to the Airfield at San Gioia del Colle, (little known but if you look at the map it is directly opposite the beaches at Salerno and in line to Foggia which was their ultimate goal, but they were pulled back as the main landing force was quicker at arriving than expected) to go across to the island where there is a memorial for the Abdiel. Unfortunately the ferry wasn't running at the time so it is something I will try to do on another visit. I did visit the War Cemetery at Bari where many lie including nurses, seamen from many countries, Czech, Poland, Greece, Paratroopers ...very poignant and at that time rarely visited. I also visited the Polish cemetery. Speaking of Italy, if you look closely at the pavements of each town you will see different pictures on the manhole covers. During the war this indicated whether the town was with or against the Regime.

I have attached some photos from Italy which readers may find of interest. They belonged to a friend's father-in-law who served in Italy, and came into my possession last year. They appear to be original. They are representative of the reality that was war, and life away from home. I have no specific details yet of exactly where in Italy they were taken. You will see how things really were, before more constructed and thought-out burial sites were made, for all sides, and the logistical nightmare it was. The men praying could well have had a makeshift cross like the Cassino one. I have a few more I could share.”



Group photo, Italy WW2

**Ed. Note: HMS Abdiel was a Fast Cruiser Minelayer, built in 1938 and deployed in the Mediterranean from 1941 until it hit a mine soon after entering the harbour at Taranto on 10th September 1943. The ship sank within minutes, with 168 killed and 126 wounded.*



Italy, scene of destruction WW2



On the move (in North Africa)



Italy WW2



Praying under fire (in N. Africa)

National Memorial Arboretum Ceremony 2022

This will now take place on Saturday 14th May; however at this time we have no information with regards to cost and timings. If you can let Lesley know if you are interested in attending, she will get back in touch once she has more information.

Discussions are also in progress regarding a Battle of Monte Cassino Memorial Service 2022 at Blackhall St. Columba's Church in Edinburgh. When Lesley has more information she will email and write. Once again it will be available to watch via the live stream service.

Gordon Cruse sent in his story of a memorable Christmas 1944

Putting a sparkle into Christmas 1944 while in the Northern Apennines.

We were near a place called Sassaleone, near the small village of Castel del Rio. It was an awful winter, raining all the time, mud up to your ankles.

We were in some farm buildings. It was quite a good farm for the area (a dairy farm) and there were quite a few chickens still about (surprisingly). I noticed that the cockerel used to roost at the top of a tree at the back of the buildings.

I put an idea to a couple of other lads, and they thought it was a good one. I suggested I should catch the cockerel and we should have it roasted for Christmas, not knowing what we would be getting otherwise. All agreed.

On the end of the farmhouse was a shed where the cows had once been milked. We set about cleaning it out, and we got some scrim netting and we put that over the top of the collapsible tables where we were going to eat, and hung some bits of coloured rags on the netting. We got hold of the Medical Orderly (Jack Lawrence) and asked him to get us half-a-dozen Durex. We blew them up and hung them up as well.

Now it was time to get the cockerel to prepare for the feast. I waited until he had gone to roost, then I climbed the tree and caught hold of his legs, and I had my prize. I handed him down to one of the lads, and from there I did the necessary. And so we had roast chicken for Christmas. We had a few bottles of beer come from the Naafi.

Twelve of us sat down to Christmas dinner, and the Colonel and RSM came in and congratulated us on our efforts.

It put a sparkle in our lives at an awful time!

Remember Cassino? Patricia Rigg

Well, did you ask him? I did. So what did he say? Nothing. Nothing? That's right, he said nothing. Well, almost nothing. He's not the only one, you know, who didn't want to talk about Cassino.

Ask the families of the men who were there. They'll tell you. He never said a word. Wouldn't speak of it. Tell his story? No way. He really didn't want to say.

Maybe, inside his head, he said, "You'd never believe it. You just wouldn't. I was there and I can hardly believe it. Best forgotten. Best not talked about."

It's not hard to understand why, in that beautiful, distant land, so many men tried to leave their memories behind.

My husband was at Cassino and he didn't talk about it too often. Just sometimes. Bits and pieces. Snippets. The odd remark. Even jokes.

Whenever friends enthused about their sunshine holidays in Italy, he would smile wryly and say, "They should have been there, in the mountains, in the winter."

Once, after watching a television programme about Monte Cassino, while visibly moved, his only comment, "The noise; the noise was terrible."

There were two men Brian did talk with about the events of 1944. One lived in the Lincolnshire village of Scotter, our home for over thirty years. The pair would chat together about their time in Italy, laughing and calling themselves a couple of D-Day Dodgers.

Then, there was the stationmaster in the north German coastal town, a place where we also once lived. He, too, had been at Cassino. He, too, had witnessed carnage. Whenever the two men met, they would be deep in conversation. Their memories were never shared.

In May 1940, when Brian enlisted to fight for his country, I was not yet born.

We were both war-babies. Just different wars. WW1 met WW2. Age gap? Different generations? Not a problem.

In the early days of our marriage, we drove down to southern Italy, heading for Otranto and a ferry across to Greece. We followed some of the route of the 4th Indian Division, after Cassino, when they were pushing north. Our journey was in reverse. My husband was revisiting places from his past. I was enjoying Italy. Campari and Soda? Bologna? Assisi? San Marino? Yes! But Urbino and Chieti? They are lost to me.

So, what do I remember? A small dusty town, somewhere in the Abruzzo, where you could trace, on old, stone walls, the scars of war.

The spot, on a bend of a twisting road, where a young Gurkha fought so bravely, he was awarded the Victoria Cross. Posthumously. *

If only I'd kept a diaryif only I could find the map of Italy on which Brian marked our route south and his route north. If onlyif only

I did, before my husband died in 2009, start to ask the questions which should have been asked years before. After all, my husband had been right there, at Monte Cassino, in the thick of it all. It was too late.

"Yes, I was at Cassino. Why do you want to know? I really can't remember. It's all so long ago. Winter in Italy. A world at war. Winter in the mountains. 1944. Italy without sunshine. Blizzards, rain, snow. Desperate conditions. You don't want to know. I signed the Official Secrets Act, before I joined the fray. I was in Intelligence. That means I can't say. Mind you, a day in February, I clearly recall, when, high upon the mountain, the bombs began to fall. Mentioned in Despatches? For gallantry? Me? Maybe for the day I made the early morning tea. Services to Italy? Only wish I knew. In The London Gazette? Well, then, it must be true. Yes, I was at Cassino. You don't want to know and I can't remember.

It's all so long ago."

* (*The Republic of San Marino have now erected a memorial to Rifleman Sherbahadur Thapa from 1/9 GR on the spot of the incident.*)



Ed. note: I have recently been reading "The Polish Few" by Peter Sikora, which documents the story of Polish airmen in Britain during WW2. Among detailed accounts of many individuals, the book highlights the tortuous and dangerous routes by which Polish men and women reached this country in the first place, the experience of battle that they brought with them, and the subsequent trials and insults to which they were subjected by the Establishment before being grudgingly acknowledged as seriously valuable allies in the fight against the Nazis. Theirs was a legendary and vital contribution not only to the famous Battle of Britain in 1940, but throughout the war in other theatres, notably (the not-so-famous) Monte Cassino in 1944, and should never be forgotten.

Although all these years later we still want to record the stories of those who fought in the Italian campaign before they are lost forever, it is totally understandable, when reading of such harrowing experiences, why the people involved chose never to speak of them. I am therefore grateful to Steve Deput, who I met on a battlefield tour of Cassino in 2015. After extensive research, he was there to find where Jan, his Polish father had been in 1944, and I remember our small group looking for foxholes Jan may have occupied in the area of Madras Circus on Snakeshead Ridge. Steve recently sent me this account.

"One day, everybody dies"

My father never talked about his past. He came to Britain after the war, and he came from a place called Poland. That was about all.

He gave the odd bit away as we looked through my mother's old family photos. One was of Dad in an army uniform. He'd been in Italy during the war. He laughingly remembered giving cigarettes to an Italian boy in exchange for a pair of boots. The soles, made of cardboard soaked in vinegar and baked, fell apart in a day. He remembered the Germans. "You could see through binoculars, shells and shells exploding on 'em. Dug into the rock. Never touched 'em. Just sat drinking tea or whatever, watching us through binoculars." I could never understand how he came to be in Italy and piecing together his story took years.

Everyone knows the war started when the Nazis invaded Poland in September 1939. What gets overlooked is their Soviet allies also invaded Poland that month. My father's village, on the River San, lay on a new border between Nazi and Soviet territory. A few months later the Soviets began deporting hundreds of thousands of families to Siberia. Jan Deput's was among them. Woken in the early hours of a winter morning, they were charged with being 'enemies of the people', given thirty minutes to pack and herded into cattle wagons. They were never heard of again. The only one to escape that morning was fifteen-year-old Jan.

Trapped between the Soviets and Nazis, there was no way out. He hid in the forests, surviving on rats and grass. Over a year later he was still there as the Nazis launched Operation Barbarossa. Free from the Soviets, he fell into the hands of the Nazis. Like millions of Poles and Ukrainians he was used as slave labour. Sent to Romania he'd have been worked to death, but was given a choice - join the Wehrmacht or go to Auschwitz. In Yugoslavia he found himself in a savage guerrilla war before his company was transferred to Italy, where he was captured. When his allied interrogators learned Jan Deput was a Pole,

he was transferred to II Polish Corps. This was made up of survivors from the gulag. Thousands of their companions had perished in captivity, or succumbed to disease and starvation on a tortuous journey to freedom.

Jan went with them to a place called Monte Cassino. He didn't talk about it. "I was a cook in the army." He tried to leave it at that, but as a child I pestered him. "What happened in the war?" "Not a lot," he replied wearily, "then one day everybody dies." It was an accurate description of the Poles' assault on the Monastery.

With the Germans dug into impregnable defensive positions, the first Polish attack ended in slaughter. In the second assault, positions were taken and retaken in hand-to-hand fighting. The Poles took Point 593, the crucial height above the monastery, but across on Colle Sant' Angelo leading companies were cut off and out of ammunition. One survivor recalled:

"The Poles, deprived of their weapons, unable to move back, crouched beneath the German bunkers. They threw themselves flat and dare not change position or move at all. They could not even bend their elbows, move their heads, or straighten their cramped legs, as the Germans had a perfect view of everything that was going on below. Minute by minute, hour by hour, casualties mounted. It was more than nerves could stand, and mass hysteria began to grip the men. And then incredibly, someone begins to sing the Polish national anthem: 'Poland will not surrender, not yet...' All soldiers join in the chorus, on the summit of Colle Sant' Angelo, the mountain of death." In desperation, artillerymen, drivers and cooks were assembled and sent forward.

My father didn't need to talk. He told me everything when I was very small. It was on the day I wandered into the kitchen where he was talking to a Polish friend. Without warning, Jan went into a sudden convulsion. Trembling, eyes shut, hands clamped to his ears, he cried out in pain.

"Thousands of guns! Day and night!
Thousands! Thousands!"

The trigger was one word from his friend.

"Cassino."

Jan Deput b. Dobra, Poland 1925. d.
Barnsley, England 2002.



This piece was written by Miles Mackie Godbold, son of Lt John Ralph Mackie Godbold MC, D Coy, 2/4th Hampshire, who commanded Y Crossing of the Gari River on the night of 11-12th May 1944 at Cassino.

Probably one of your few South African members, my attention has been drawn in the Summer 2021 Newsletter of the Society to a reference to Pte Thomas Stuart Worthington, B Coy, 2/4th Hampshire, wounded at Cassino. I noticed too that his daughter Judy Johnson is welcomed as a new member. It aroused my interest immediately as I will try to explain.

In September last year I published a family memoir which has been received with fairly generous acclaim. Called *Knowing my Father*, it deals with my own father's early life and my search to discover his small role in the break-through of the Gustav Line, of which Monte Cassino formed the lynchpin. He was one of more than 400 South African officers seconded to the British Army in late 1943 as replacements for battle casualties in Italy. Things were not going well for the Allies and the lifespan for junior officers in an infantry Rifle Company was rated at that stage at less than three months. This resulted in more than a fair sprinkling of South African officers in British infantry battalions in Italy, but also later in North West Europe and the Far East.

My father and two fellow officers were posted to 2/4th Hampshire two months prior to the final battle for Cassino and allocated to D Coy. A brother officer was Capt. Richard Wakeford whose heroics in the coming battle were to win him a Victoria Cross. Pte Thomas Stuart Worthington served in B Coy of 2/4th Hampshire which was commanded by Wakeford himself, hence my interest.

It was several personal wartime letters to my father from two VC winners, his fellow South African 'Toys' Norton who had been posted to 1/4th Hampshire, and Wakeford, which I discovered amongst his papers in an old trunk after his death in 1995 that ignited my determination to record his story. It's an epic tale of which I knew very little when I began to research the book some 15 years ago and, starting out with the stories I remember him telling me, the bare bones were fleshed out over time, much study, and two visits to the battlefield to actually walk the ground he covered. In all this a great deal of assistance was received from Frank de Planta who is a Cassino battlefield guide of extraordinary ability and knowledge and no doubt known to many members of the Society.

The opening of the final battle, the night of 11-12th May 1944, found my father Lt John Mackie Godbold and fellow-South African Lt John Rorich, commanding the two crossing points X and Y of the Gari River, the springboard for the assault by 28th Infantry Brigade. Making the assault in that sector were 2 Somerset Light Infantry and 2 Kings (Liverpool). 2/4th Hampshire were in reserve, except for D Coy which had been designated as the ferry company to man the canvas boats transporting the assaulting troops across the Gari. That night crossing was a shambles with the assaulting battalions arriving 45 minutes late; the artillery barrage had lifted and moved on and the enemy had become aware of the attackers' intentions. Their response was heavy shelling, mortar bombing and streams of tracer bullets.

Casualties mounted as boats, paddles useless, were swept away to sink in the swift-flowing icy current and others were shot through with shrapnel and bullets, overturning their occupants into the water to drown weighed down by heavy equipment. Both the South African officers commanding the crossings were awarded MCs that night after swimming the river several times to set ropes into the opposite bank to haul the boats across. And with chaos taking place in the rear much persuasion and coercion needed to be

applied to get troops into the craft. The two and a half companies which did make it across and over the top of the bank were mixed up, incomplete and without working radios. Forced into a tight bridgehead, unable to advance from the killing zone and cut to pieces by tight German defences of wire, minefields and blizzards of machinegun fire it was a disaster. At dawn the crossing was called off, the casualty rate so severe that neither 2 Somerset LI nor 2 Kings could take any further part in the battle which raged for the next two days.

After resting on 12th May 1944, the day after the aborted river crossing, 2/4th Hampshires marched in column upstream during the night to where Amazon Bridge was being constructed, planning to cross at dawn. Early the next day, under sporadic shellfire and smoke, a massive traffic jam of troops and armoured vehicles developed at the bridge to slow plans, but the battalion crossed soon after midday in brilliant sunshine and went to ground on the enemy bank to await orders. At 1430 the Hampshires were unleashed following an artillery bombardment of the German defences, their orders being for A and C Coys to sweep down the enemy bank, clearing the bunkers and trenches of the defenders and to relieve the beleaguered men of the decimated 2 Somerset LI and 2 Kings companies in the tiny bridgehead opposite X and Y crossings. The survivors had been lying out for nearly two days under fire without water or support of any kind. B Coy and a depleted D Coy were to swing slightly inland to attack the German defences from the flank, and reach the same objective of Brown Line the Brigade had failed to do on the night of the crossing. My own research unearthed fascinating accounts of the attack which followed a whistle blast, and many historians have stressed the unbelievable vigour and dash of the leading companies advancing with fixed bayonets, Bren gunners firing from their hips as they skirmished forward. A stirring sight. Their tails were up and now was their moment of vengeance, which moved me to write:

“On and on they went with a recklessness born of confidence, bombing the bunkers and neutralising any resistance at the point of their bayonets, sweeping the enemy bank as far downstream as Point 46 and almost to San’Angelo.”

With the battalion having reached all its objectives and beyond on 13th May 1944, they dug in and waited orders for the next move forward. Not long in coming, in the small hours of 14th May a silent night advance was unopposed by enemy forces which had melted back to consolidate their defences on a hamlet called Massa Vertechì. Before dawn the battalion halted and dug in on a reverse slope overlooking the Piopetto stream and the long rising gradient to the collection of farm buildings comprising the hamlet and the German defences. To take this objective it was to be a conventional battalion attack following a 15-minute onslaught by artillery. On that warm summer evening at 1800 they set off following their barrage and, descending the forward slope to the stream, a sudden firestorm of German defensive shellfire fell amongst the leading companies, salvo after salvo, and within two minutes over one hundred men were dead or wounded, my father among them. Superb and courageous leadership by the Commanding Officer, who descended from his armoured command vehicle and rallied his men on foot, got the survivors up and moving and by his example and the outstanding bravery of men like Capt. Wakeford and many others, ensured the objective of Massa Vertechì was taken and held.

The 2/4th Hampshires lost 149 men that day alone, and the Battalion War Diary reveals a Casualty Return of names for the period 6-16th May that filled three tightly typed foolscap sheets, over 200 men. Among

them is that of Pte Thomas Worthington from B Coy, mentioned as Wounded in Action on 14th May 1944, who was either bracketed in the fearful artillery response from the German gunners, as was my father, or who was wounded in the advance and the ferocious fighting to take the objective. Massa Vertechi was awarded to the Regiment as a Battle Honour, their matchless performance being reflected too in the slew of awards garnered by the 2/4th Hampshires, headed by Wakeford's incomparable VC and the DSO of their Commanding Officer, Lt Col JP Fowler Esson.

For my father it was the end of his war, coming close as he did to losing his leg but leaving him partially disabled for the rest of his life. For the 2/4th Hampshires the war had another 12 months to go and they played their part until the very end, chasing the German forces up the length of Italy until victory was attained. The cost they paid was great – so heavy were their losses that year of 1944 that of the 34 officers serving in the battalion in February, only one was still on strength in December.

Pte Thomas Worthington's name comes back to mind in this respect. It will be remembered that B and C Coys had been involved in bitter fighting as they struck out inland from Amazon Bridge on the afternoon of 13th May 1944. The efforts of Capt. Wakeford, his company commander, were what kept up the momentum of their attack on several occasions when dogged resistance from German strongpoints threatened to return the initiative to the enemy. As a soldier in B Coy Worthington would have been there, possibly to witness his officer's extraordinary bravery in overcoming not one but two of these defended positions in a series of single-handed actions. This is clear from the fact that he was wounded in action on the following evening in the attack on Massa Vertechi.

There is little doubt in my mind that the wound my father suffered at Cassino probably saved his life. With the heavy fighting he had seen and for what lay ahead perhaps the same was true for Pte Thomas Stuart Worthington.

Miles Mackie Godbold, 26th June 2021



The Amazon Bridge Memorial – at last.

"Just a quickie to let you know we have finally completed the Amazon Bridge Memorial. It was completed today. Absolutely marvellous. More on this later. Please see attached photo."

This was the message I received from a delighted George Cowie on 26th October 2021.

After years of setbacks, the determination of George and his colleagues has been rewarded with the completion of not only the Amazon Bridge Memorial, but also one nearby to the 1/6 East Surreys.

Congratulations from the Monte Cassino Society to all involved.

In George's own words:

"More pictures of the AB memorial and a photo of the 1/6 East Surreys' memorial we built on Point 36 (now Cassino Adventure). 1/6 East Surreys captured Point 36 in the early hours on 12 May 1944. It was their first objective.

For the Amazon Bridge Memorial we received funding from the Royal Engineers Association Headquarters, and the 1/6 East Surreys' memorial was funded by the Area Headquarters, The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment.

An aerial photo of early 1944 is attached to help put everything in perspective. At the 'Rhine' crossing the four Rifle Companies of the 1/6 East Surreys crossed the river in assault boats, followed by four Rifle Companies of the 2 Beds & Herts and then three Rifle Companies of 2 DCLI. The 2 DCLI were meant to cross at the 'Orinoco' crossing but only got one company crossed before having to abandon the attempt due to extreme enemy fire on the crossing site.

A huge thanks go out to the 'Cassino Adventure' owners who were extremely helpful and without whom we may not have been able to complete the project.

Below is a link to Cassino Adventure. You can take a trip down the river and see all the crossing and bridging sites."

[AdventureLand – Rafting nel Lazio, Paintball, Tiro con l'arco, sport all'aperto e divertimento](#)



"We are taking you to the construction site. Be careful not to trip over any bricks or construction materials. Some still and video clips were taken during the construction of the memorials. Hope you enjoy it.

Please note the opening ceremony will be on 13 May 2022.

See you there. Take care.

Best wishes

George and the team. Chris, Ian, and Ron "

[Construction of the Amazon Bridge Memorial 11- 27 October 2021](#)



Continuing with the commemoration of the Amazon Bridge, a 1/6th size model of the bridge and 'complementary' Sherman tank have recently been donated to the Hotel Rocca in Cassino, and are now a feature of the small museum there. The model of the Bailey Bridge was rescued from 71 Engineer Regiment, driven to Cassino and erected by Mike O'Reilly, a former Sapper in 7 Field Squadron RE. The tank is an exact replica of the Sherman commanded by Lt Michael Wayne from the 17/21 Lancers who pushed the Amazon bridge into place on the morning of 13th May 1944. Author and model maker, Robert Desourdis donated the vehicle to the Rocca having shipped it at considerable expense from his workshop in America. Both pieces were clearly a labour of love, paying faithful attention to detail, and are a fitting tribute to the memory of a historic event.



Robert has written about his work, and how this led to his interest in the Italian campaign and the need to conserve many neglected WW2 sites in Italy:

National Battlefield Parks and Historic Sites in Italy

Although I am a radio engineer, I began writing when invited to contribute to a book on using ionized meteor trails in the upper atmosphere for long-range digital communications, which was published in 1993. I wrote several radio books through the years, and when writing one about communications interoperability (technical systems being able to effectively intercommunicate) I studied the 25

"administrative deficiencies" for the 1946 congressional investigation of the 1941 Pearl Harbour attack. I found the same documented human collaboration failures in the 9/11, Katrina, VA Tech Shootings and Deepwater Horizon reports. The recent two books just completed on the Covid-19 disaster, in which I also covered the two US Space Shuttle Disasters, demonstrate the same human failures to work together, yet again. It was in writing the 2017 book on human collaboration in homeland security, that I began to write memoirs for WWII vets (see "Ed Bearss" on Google, for whom I helped create a three-book memoir) and Barney Nolan's memoir, including his time at Lavenham for the 8th Air Force.



Currently, I am working on the fourth Italy book covering WWII in Rome and from Rome to Bologna, drawn from our 2021 three-week Frank de Planta Salerno-to-Bologna tour. When I was on Frank's Italy tour in 2014 I captured all on video, and in 2020 I brought his great work into three books by NOVA Science Publishers under "commemoration" as their Homeland Security and Safety Series Editor. Having done the 2021 tour, I came to want to add WWII Battlefield Parks or Historic Sites to Italy's Cultural and historic sites under government control (and sponsorship). I believe it can add significantly to Italian tourism, with economic benefit to the country. I am building a team of people both interested in doing so and, if we get the work, interested in part time employment to help this effort. Of course, Cassino would be one of the significant battlefield sites to enhance for this reason.

I am searching for the funds to get started. I have significant background from the "Making American History" book on Ed Bearss US National Park Service career in how to do feasibility studies and bring parts/sites to fruition.

I am looking for people who might be able to help. I need Italian government cultural agency contacts, funding sources, and people willing to get paid to help add WWII sites to the Italian official cultural sites. I know this will take a shift in public enthusiasm in their WWII heritage, but if it can be done masterfully--as I believe has been done in Germany - it can be done in Italy.

The Amazon Crossing Diorama

At the outset of the books "A Walking Tour of Italy's WWII Battlefields", and in line with my model-building for veterans I asked Frank "What model would you like?" Frank said Lt. Michael Wayne's tank at the Amazon Crossing at Cassino. As I learned about the Amazon Crossing, and with my previous river-based dioramas (see photos of USS Cairo sinking and Suicide Creek wounding site, both for Ed Bearss - see Google previous page) I decided to build the whole scene in 1/35th scale based on Cuneo's famous painting. The hard part would be getting the diorama from Olympia, Washington on the US West Coast, to Frank in northeast England.

During development of the Amazon diorama I was given the names of two retired Royal Engineers, George Cowie and Michael O'Reilly. I wrote to them and learned what I needed to know about uniforms and Bailey Bridge details. George gave me great information as a guru in this domain.

As my wife and I were attending my youngest daughter's wedding at Eastwell Manor June 8th, I had an opportunity to bring it to Rochester, next to Chatham where the Royal Engineers barracks is located. I built the diorama in sections that I could transport by air (one carryon and two in luggage cases) with the intention of finalizing during our five-day mandatory Covid-19 quarantine in Rochester. Michael had agreed to pick up the diorama and get it to Frank, which he did.

Bob Desourdis

Olympia, Washington, December 2021

robert.desourdis@gmail.com



Snippets

Frank Pleszak wrote of his interviews with Polish veterans of Monte Cassino:

“Regarding interviews, you may be interested in the two short extracts from interviews I did with Polish veterans. I have filmed a whole interview with each, but I found these two snippets particularly interesting”:

Tadeusz Mastalski: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5Uy-HyvdtY&t=2s>

3DSK Polish veteran of the Battle of Monte Cassino who was at the front for the entire battle describes his only injuries occurred 12 years later when he re-traced his steps and was scratched by thorns on his way to the Abbey

Józef Królczyk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RFamUiuNMU&t=130s>

5KDP Polish artillery veteran of the Battle of Monte Cassino describes the start of the 4th Battle

Pink Snow in the Apennines

In our summer 2021 newsletter, E W L Keymer wrote of pink snow falling in the Apennines, as they crossed en route to the front at Cassino. Bill's daughter, Alison sent in this link to an article in the Times, detailing recent research on the phenomenon of pink snow:

Adam Sage, Paris Tuesday 15th June 2021, 12.01am, The Times <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/mysterious-pink-snow-in-alps-sends-a-red-alert-over-climate-change-wgctdsvsm>

New Members

Jim Bilsborough, son of Joseph Bilsborough, C Troop, 102 Medium Battery, 75 Medium Regiment Royal Artillery, Shropshire Yeomanry

John Archer, son of Sgt James Archer of the Derbyshire Yeomanry

In Memoriam

Albert Darlington, Veteran, 7th Battalion, The Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry

Ann & Tony Cullin, son and daughter in law of Frank Cullin, Royal Fusiliers

Nigel Craske, son of Private Russell Frank Craske, The Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire Regiment

Jim Morgan, Veteran, Royal Corps of Signals attached to 4th Indian Division

James Knox, 4th Battalion Parachute Regiment

Jim Knox was an inspiring man, with an indomitable spirit and zest for life. Always with a smile, his enthusiasm was infectious.

In 1941, aged just 16, he managed to persuade a Recruiting Sergeant in Romford that he was 18 and was subsequently sent to Canterbury for basic training with The Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment). He volunteered and was accepted for the newly formed Parachute Regiment and in January 1942 was transferred to the 4th Battalion (4 PARA) who were part of 2 Independent Parachute Brigade.

In July 1944, as part of 1 Airborne Division, 2 Independent Brigade were allocated to secure the port at Augusta during Op HUSKY in Sicily but had to be left in Tunisia for lack of transport aircraft, so his first taste of Italy was via Taranto on Op SLAPSTICK in September 1944. After spells under command of 2 New Zealand and then 8 Indian Division on the Adriatic front, the Brigade finally reached Cassino in April 1944 where 2 Independent Parachute Brigade were assigned to 78 Infantry Division and given responsibility for holding the line in Cassino town. It was here that Jim joined patrols capturing German soldiers, bringing them in for interrogation. The Brigade was withdrawn before the Fourth Battle and in August 1944, 4 PARA parachuted into Le Muy, as part of Op DRAGOON, the Allied airborne and amphibious assault into Southern France. In 2005, Jim and his comrades were made Chevaliers of the Legion d'honneur *à titre militaire* in recognition of their part in the liberation of Southern France. Jim returned to France every year with the Parachute Association, where they still receive a very warm welcome.

October 1944 found Jim in Greece where as well as harassing the German forces, 4 PARA were involved in street fighting against the Greek People's Liberation Army: a Communist insurgency that sprang up following the withdrawal of German forces and the creation of a vacuum in Greek politics.

Jim was among the first veterans to join the Society when it was founded in 2004 and was the most loyal supporter – right up to November 2021 when ill health prevented his intended attendance at the Cenotaph Remembrance Parade and the Opening of the Field of Remembrance in Westminster. Jim





Jim as a sixteen year old drummer boy with The Buffs

always attended the London Remembrance weekend services, often laying the wreath at the Cenotaph and on several occasions fronted our plot in the Field of Remembrance as Plot Master, on each occasion HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, and latterly HRH The Prince Harry, stopped to have a word with him. He always took an active part in our memorial services at the National Memorial Arboretum and accompanied us on all our Pilgrimages to Cassino, always with family or friends from the Parachute Association.

In 2014, on the 70th anniversary of the Battles for Cassino, our veterans were funded by the National Lottery Heroes Return Scheme. Jim was selected 'Poster Boy' which afforded the Society considerable

publicity! He was also very much involved in the Royal British Legion Festival of

Remembrance in the 75th anniversary year, when he was one of only two Cassino veterans to be interviewed, the interviews screened during the service at the Royal Albert Hall.

Jim was a loyal, dependable man who served the Monte Cassino Society wholeheartedly and with good grace for many, many years. I am sad to say goodbye to a wonderful man who I am proud to have called my friend.

RIP Jim,

Judith Coote



Jim with the Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Peter Wall KCB CBE ADC Gen.

Contact us:

Lesley Teasdale, Hon. Secretary : lesandjezte@talktalk.net

Rockstone, Rocky Park Ave, Plymouth, Devon, PL9 7DJ. 01752 492799

Diane Soady, Treasurer : dianesoady@gmail.com ; 01760 722590

Helen James, Newsletter : helenconrad@btconnect.com

Doreen Belcher : dorbel36@hotmail.com

John Leach : johnleachportloe@gmail.com

Phillip Soady, Web Administrator : filfishtank4@gmail.com

Paul Taylor : paul_taylor17@yahoo.co.uk

Photo credits:

Lesley Teasdale, Pauline Glover, George Cowie, Frank de Planta, Robert Desourdis, Liz Longman