



THE MONTE CASSINO SOCIETY

Furthering an interest in the Italian Campaign 1943–1945

NA15141

Autumn 2017

Welcome

Aim

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

Welcome to our Autumn 2017 newsletter. It is incredible to think we are in the final quarter of the year. The years pass so quickly but this year seems to have flown by at an increasing rate!

As you will see later in the News Section, talks have already started regarding really special events to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the ending of the Battles for Cassino. Indeed we have already booked accommodation for the Society in Cassino and with this in mind, we would be grateful to have some idea of likely numbers.



Obviously it is some time away and circumstances will inevitably change but I would be grateful if you would indicate your interest and the probable numbers in your party on the enclosed pro forma and return to me (contact details page 8). I can confirm that there will definitely be funding for veterans, widows and carers either from the Lottery as in the past, or from the LIBOR funds which paid for our veterans to visit Cassino earlier this year.

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Judith Coote

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

News

London Remembrance Services

Field of Remembrance, Westminster

The Opening Service, attended by a member of the Royal Family, is on Thursday, 9th November. Tickets are very limited for this service but the Field is open to the public later in the morning and until Monday 20th November.

We have plot number 235 and have purchased a number of wooden crosses for our members. If you would like a dedication, please contact Judith no later than Thursday, 12th October. If you have requested a dedication in previous years, we still have details on file which we will use.

News (continued)

Cenotaph Ceremony 2017

Sunday 12th November— We have received the allocation of tickets which now, due to heightened security, have to be to named persons only. We hope the BBC outside broadcast give us a mention. In the past, following the Cenotaph Service, we get increased interest when we get a mention.

I would like to thank all those hardy souls who regularly turn up, wait around in Horse Guards for an inordinately long time before going through to Whitehall for yet more standing, then march back around Parliament Square to Horse Guards. It may not be easy, but it is a wonderful experience.

Judith

Italy 2019—75th Anniversary

You may well look at the above heading and say “That’s 18 months away” but we all know how time flies past.

To that end I represented the Society at a meeting in London with the Royal British Legion after they contacted us for our input for the forthcoming celebrations in Italy and here in the UK.

It was a very productive meeting with many ideas put forward. There is not much to report at this stage, the only relevant points at this time are:-

- 1) Saturday, 18th May 2019 Service and Parade at Monte Cassino War Cemetery
- 2) 18 to 20 countries will be present for those who fought at Cassino
- 3) Ministry of Defence to oversee military personnel
- 4) A service will be held in the Arboretum, date to be arranged.

Common sense dictates that the Royal British Legion take the lead in these two events—they have the experience, resources and finance to put together such important events, and that we, the Society, work with them to ensure our wishes are met.

I will, of course, keep you updated with all the relevant details and information as and when I get them.

Mike Anslow

Son of the late D.E.H. Anslow (Sgt) 2nd Battalion Grenadier Guards

In Memoriam

Mrs Lily Dickinson, widow of Albert Dickinson, The Somerset Light Infantry
 John Hodgson, 1st Royal Natal Carbineers, South African 6th Armoured Division
 Percy Morgan, Welsh Guards

Obituary

Mrs Lily Dickinson

Lily and her late husband Albert were members of the Monte Cassino Society from the very beginning, both of them loyal and supportive members.

Lily and Albert had known each other from early days in primary school and married in 1941. They had been married for 71 years when Albert passed away.

At the start of the war Lily was seconded to work at Radway Green ordnance factory where in quality control she had to test shell and bullet cases to ensure they were the correct size. She had a variety of jobs throughout her long life though she said she wished she had been born fifty years later as it would have afforded her many more opportunities.

Among Lily's many leisure activities and interests was her love of music. She was a talented singer who for many years was a member of The Ceramic City Choir, Staffordshire's largest choral society.

Lily loved people and loved to be with people. She loved her family and friends and since Albert's death cherished their visits.

Lily and Albert visited Italy with the Society on many occasions, thoroughly enjoying themselves even though there were sad moments visiting the Commonwealth Grave sites. Lily last went to Italy for the 70th anniversary when perhaps one of the highlights of her life was when she spoke to and shook hands with Prince Harry.

Lily's friendliness and smile will be missed by all our members who have met her over the years and she will certainly not be forgotten.



Doreen Belcher, along with Mike and Lyn Anslow, attended Lily's funeral—Doreen writes -

I thought I would share my fond memories of Albert and Lily Dickinson with you.

The first year we went to Italy after they had got their new motorised scooters was certainly memorable. They now had freedom!

It started in Naples Airport as we were loading the coach. Albert backed his scooter into the path of a taxi. My heart was in my mouth! The taxi driver jumped out and berated Albert in Italian. Albert sat quietly listening then lifted a finger and pointed at the man and said "You should be more respectful to a veteran" and drove off leaving the man speechless.

On the same trip we had had our usual Ceremony at Cassino cemetery. The coach was loaded ready for off but No Albert or Lily. I ran like a lunatic all round the cemetery saying "How can you lose two pensioners on scooters?"

Eventually I could hear Lily's voice behind a huge hedge. They were in the gardeners section trying to talk to them.

(continued overleaf)

The reason I could hear Lily's voice was that she was doing what all Brits do abroad If they don't understand, just say it louder!

On a more serious note. When I was trying to get the Memorial built at Alrewas Albert was a great help. He wrote to everyone he knew for me.

On the day of the Dedication I asked Albert if he was pleased with it and he said it was wonderful.

I asked him how many marks out of ten and he replied "12". It doesn't get much better than that does it.

*Doreen Belcher
Daughter of the late Thomas Wain MM,
214 Field Company, Royal Engineers*



John Hodgson, 1st Royal Natal Carbineers, 6th South African Armoured Division



John was a dedicated veteran member of the Society. His personal account of his time in Italy can be found in the Recollections Section on our website (www.montecassinociety.co.uk). John was a prolific writer throughout his life, although proficient on the computer believed that hand written letters were important. The 350 letters John wrote to his family over a three year period while on active service (from June 1943) were used as the major source of information for James Bourhill's book 'Come back to Portofino, Through Italy with the 6th South African Armoured Division'.

(Previewed in the Books Section on page 6)

John was a past Plot Master at the Monte Cassino Society plot in the Field of Remembrance in Westminster in 2014. He was honoured to have the opportunity to shake Prince Harry's hand, as always John was ready with a quick remark that Prince Harry replied to with characteristic humour. John was never one to miss an opportunity. He joined the parade at the Cenotaph on the following Sunday and represented the Society where he was interviewed by Sophie Raworth at the end of the live television broadcast. He was honoured to attend the celebrations to commemorate VE Day as well as the 70th anniversary service in Westminster Abbey and a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace.



John had the opportunity to return to Italy in 1995 with his wife and two friends and visited most of the cemeteries starting in Florence and ending in Monte Cassino. There John was determined to find Bruce Airey's final resting place in order to pay his respects to the wonderful friend he had lost on his first day in action. The men of the Royal Natal Carbineers' Section 7, 7 Platoon, B Company were returning from their first mission on the night of 10 May 1944 when they set off one of their own booby-traps. Lance-Corporal Bruce Airey was killed and two others were wounded right beside John. At 23, Bruce Airey was a father figure and had played a major role in the lives of his men for almost a year.

On arriving at Monte Cassino John visited the Polish cemetery on the north side of the monastery paying his respects to the gallant men who had made the final assault on the mountain and took the monastery that had dominated the Allies for so long and cost so many lives. Then John went to the Allied cemetery on the lower southern slopes and decided to start at the front row of the western end. The first grave John looked at, the one in the corner, was engraved "Lance Corporal Bruce Airey, 1st Royal Natal Carbineers".

John returned to South Africa after the war where he made an enormous contribution to industry and education.

He was a caring, family man, loved by so many and will be greatly missed. He always retained a bright flame of enthusiasm for everything he embraced in life. John was someone who once met, was never forgotten.

Rosemary Hayward
Daughter of John Hodgson

John Hodgson returned to England from his home in South Africa on many occasions in order to represent the Society at Remembrance and Commemorative events. He will be sorely missed.



JOHN ON HIS RETURN TO SOUTH AFRICA

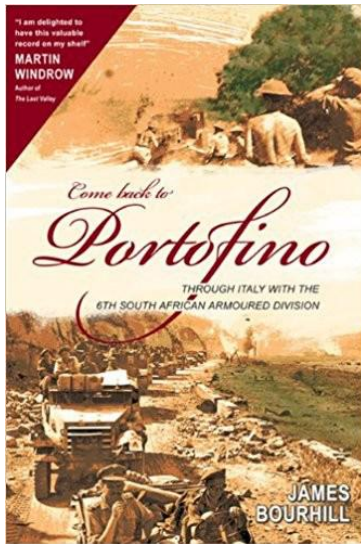


STANDARD BEARER MIKE ANSLOW AND PIPER STEVE BEATTIE
PHOTOGRAPHED PRIOR TO LILY DICKINSON'S FUNERAL



JOHN HODGSON AT THE NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM

Books



By James Bourhill

Using archival sources and private documents recently unearthed, **Come Back to Portofino** chronicles the journey taken by volunteers in the 6th South African Armoured Division. From training camps in Egypt through to the blissful summer of 1945 the 'Div' left its mark on towns and villages across Italy. From Monte Cassino to the outskirts of Venice and the River Po, the campaign lasted exactly twelve months.

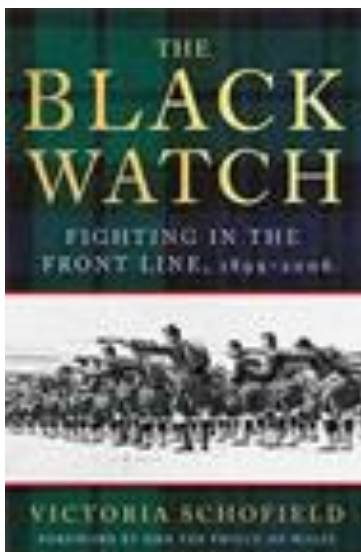
During the advance through Rome up to Florence, it was a case of constant movement and violent contact with the enemy. Experiences which left an enduring impression on returned soldiers included the periods of rest at Sienna and Lucca as well as the four miserable months in the Northern Apennines.

Overall the casualty rate was surprisingly low considering the ideal ambush country and mountain defences which had to be overcome. In the rifle companies however, the rate of attrition was high and replacements were few. Among the South Africans who are buried in Italy, there are those who died in vehicle accidents, from drowning and falling out of windows or from suicide. For the ordinary soldier the most important part of everyday life was contact with home or foraging for food and wine, and even enjoying the company of signorine when operations permitted.

Nevertheless, it was not one long happy camping trip as was often portrayed in the press. The cast is made up of the famous regiments and ordinary South Africans who participated in these epic events.

Published by 30 Degrees South Publishers and available from Amazon.co.uk in paperback and kindle format

The Black Watch: Fighting in the Frontline 1899-2006



By Victoria Schofield

Forward by HRH The Prince of Wales

Originating as a group of men raised to keep "watch" over the Anglo-Scottish border, formed into a regiment in 1739 and named for the dark tartan of its soldiers' kilts, the Black Watch has fought in almost every major conflict of nation and empire between 1745 and the present day. Victoria Schofield recounts the modern history of the Black Watch from the Boer War onwards, tracing its service in two World Wars, the Korean War, Northern Ireland, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

Drawing on diaries, letters, and memoirs, but also on interviews with living veterans, she weaves the multiple strands of the story into an epic narrative of a heroic body of officers and men over a century of history.

*Published by Head of Zeus UK and available from Amazon UK
in hard cover and kindle format*

Victoria Schofield is a historian and commentator on international affairs who has written for the Sunday Telegraph, Times and Independent. She is the author of *Kashmir in Conflict* and *Highland Furies, The Black Watch 1739-1899*

New Members

Ronald Evans, 56 Heavy Regiment, Royal Artillery

Randy Fitzgerald, son of Paul Fitzgerald, 1st Sergeant, US Army, Artillery Division

THE VALLEY OF DEATH, a poem written in the heat of battle by **Henryk Mirzowski**, a soldier in the Polish 2nd Corps and translated by **Alex Kurczaba**

Dusk muddled with fog over the valley
And covered the land with a limy veil.
Down the path walked long tired ranks
To voice their love not by word, but by deed.

Beside the road lay a mule just hit,
Still in agony its hooves shaking
Alongside a tank smashed with a round on target,
Its steel arms raised in a plea.

The stench of rotting bodies of men and mules
Lodged in the mouth with a choking hand.
Over the creek spun a vapor like shade
Covered by a gleaming moonlit shawl.

The earth still shook from deafening strikes,
Yellowish flashes tore the sky,
German mortars plowed the road,
Yet on they went doggedly – on to their positions.

With a wicked cackle overhead there flew
A shell howling like a dog on tether.
From behind the mountain a Spandau clattered shrill
And on they went dogged,
To battle,...to win.

First published in *Goniec karpacki (Carpathian Messenger)*, Pontelandolfo, Italy 12 June 1944. No. 15

Henryk Mirzowski was arrested by the NKVD in 1941. Sent to Siberia. At Monte Cassino, served as a junior officer in a signals unit of the Carpathian Brigade, Polish 2nd Corps. After the war, settled in Great Britain. Died August 2, 1990 in Chelmsford, England.



CASSINO WAR CEMETERY PHOTOGRAPHED BY NICK MCKENDRICK

Keep up to date with us on our Website and facebook page. Phil Soady manages our website and if you have anything you would like added, please get in touch with him, contact details below.



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