



# DESPATCHES

the magazine of the International Guild of Battlefield Guides



## IN THIS ISSUE:

Norfolks at Gallipoli

Back to Monte  
Cassino!

Commission Guide

Lost in Badajoz

## PLUS

Black Poppies

Ortona Street Fight

## AND

The Battery at Mirus

Bomber Command  
Guide

## ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

Field Guides

Events in 2022/23

Book Reviews



# FIELDguides


Cover image: 540 metres to go. Ascending MacLagan's Ridge at Anzac, Gallipoli. (Photo: Steve Chambers)



Buttes Cemetery 'The Silent City - Soldiers on Parade' Sept 2022. Photo: Mike Kelly

## FIRSTcontact:

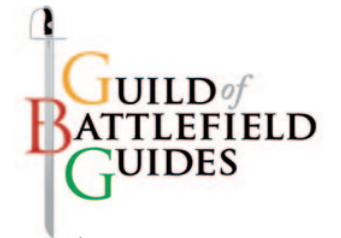
Guild Chair Ian Gumm	Guild Secretary Tim Stoneman	Guild Membership Secretary - Tony Smith
chair@gbg-international.com	secretary@gbg-international.com	mbr.sec@gbg-international.com

 [www.facebook.com/battleguide](https://www.facebook.com/battleguide)  
 [twitter.com/GuildofBG](https://twitter.com/GuildofBG)  
 [www.instagram.com/guild\\_bg](https://www.instagram.com/guild_bg)

Material for publication in the Autumn edition should reach the Editor no later than 1st September 2023. This is a deadline and submissions should be sent as far in advance as possible.

All material should be sent via Guild Secretary Tim Stoneman at: [secretary@gbg-international.com](mailto:secretary@gbg-international.com)

# Contents



- |        |   |        |  |
|--------|---|--------|--|
| P2     | FIELDguides   | P23    | MEDALguide<br><i>The Distinguished Flying Cross</i>          |
| P5-7   | NORFOLKS AT GALLIPOLI   | P24-25 | LINCOLNSHIRE RAF<br><i>Three day tour</i>                    |
| P7     | FIELDguides   | P26-27 | GUILDevent<br><i>Bletchley Park</i>                          |
| P8-9   | RETURN TO MONTE CASSINO<br><i>With the Royal Hospital Chelsea</i> | P28-33 | THE BATTLE OF ORTONA<br><i>1st Canadian Brigade in Italy</i> |
| P10-11 | A CONVERSATION<br><i>...about Researching WW2 Stories</i>         | P34-36 | MIRUS BATTERY - GUERNSEY<br><i>A German fortification</i>    |
| P12    | FIELDguides   | P37-38 | A PERSONAL JOURNEY<br><i>Eugenie and friend in Belgium</i>   |
| P13-14 | INITIAL GUIDE TRAINING  | P38    | EVENTguide   |
| P15-18 | GUILDevent<br><i>Lost in Badjoz</i>                               | P39    | GUIDEbooks   |
| P19-20 | GUIDING FOR CWGC  |        |  |
| P21-22 | BLACK POPPY ROSE  |        |  |

## EDITOR'Sguidelines:

Hello fellow Guild Members, and welcome to the Spring issue of 'Despatches'. It appears that the green shoots of new life are emerging into the sunlight in a more than seasonal sense. Thank you to everybody who has offered up their articles, photographs and comments for this issue of our Guild magazine. The overwhelming tone is positive, members are definitely returning to the battlefields around the world. As a result of this emergence from hibernation, we have once again managed to compile a full and varied 'Despatches' for you this time around.

Our pages include a healthy cross-section of guide related articles and features. Thank you to Eugenie Brooks for submitting a double-whammy in the form of a personal pilgrimage narrative, and a very topical piece by Selena Carty on the Black Poppy Rose Campaign. We have some great battlefield visits featured, Ian Doyle is Lost in Badajoz, and Clive & Julian report after their recent return to the slopes of Monte Cassino with a party of In-Pensioners from the Royal Hospital Chelsea (if you confuse them, the group are in

scarlet). Staying in Italy, David Harrison examines the ferocious fighting during the battle of Ortona, a location that is an increasingly popular Battlefield Study destination.

On the technical front, Marc Raven talks about the benefits of volunteering to guide at CWGC sites. Dudley Giles also joins us to take a wider look at the process of training to be a Battlefield Guide. James Porter also takes a detailed look at the Gun Battery at Mirus on Guernsey.

We also have our regular updates, GBG Events, and features, Canadian Member Rob Woolsey answers our Ten Questions, and Tony Smith takes time to enlighten us all about the Distinguished Flying Cross. While you are learning about the DFC, you could stay in the Air and learn about leading an RAF Bomber Command Tour in Lincolnshire by David Nunn.

All in all, there is a lot packed into your copy of 'Despatches'. Enjoy!



Mike Peters  
Editor



# OPENINGshot:

## A VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

Dear fellow members and Guild Partners, welcome to the Spring 2023 issue of 'Despatches'.

Our Annual Conference in Milton Keynes was very well attended and the feedback received has been very positive. Members attending appreciated its content and the opportunity to socialise with fellow members was clearly welcomed by all.

The first quarter of 2023 has seen many of our members out on the battlefields as the new touring season begins. Despite the predicted downturn in the economy, the attitude of the general public seems to be more pragmatic with them seizing the opportunity to tour while they can, and many, who were unable to tour during the COVID lockdown, are looking to make up for lost time. The strength of the USD against the GBP has led to more Americans wanting to tour in the UK and I have seen an increased interest in the battlefields of Britain. Other than the increased border checks, occasional checks of compliance whilst on tour, and the restriction of 90 days in any 180, touring in the EU post-BREXIT is going on largely unhindered. For most of our membership BREXIT seems to be having little effect. Those of us who toured more often are having to re-evaluate our businesses and how we operate but with some adjustments continuing to work in the post-BREXIT environment is proving to be achievable.



Graeme Cooper has led an excellent recce to Portugal and Spain and those attending have come back with glowing reports, including – “Another stupendous Peninsula War recce ...”, “... Led and guided by Graeme we were in excellent hands. ...”, “... interesting and informative ...”, and not least “... the company was good, and the food and wine made me want to emigrate.” As part of the recce the Guild’s members were given civic receptions in La Albuera and Almeida. At La Albuera, we were welcomed by the Mayor, Mr. Manuel Díaz González and the Mayor of Almeida, Mr. President, Engo, António José Monteiro Machado, presented the badged members with certificates as ‘Amigos do Museu Histórico-Militar de Almeida’ (Friends of the Historical-Military Museum of Almeida). He then presented Graeme Cooper and me with Almeida commemorative plates. Following this reception, the Mayor and I discussed potential partnership under the Guild Partnership Scheme and the idea of Almeida hosting a Guild event in the future. In short, our Spanish and Portuguese hosts treated us like honoured guests.

You may be wondering why I have included details of Graeme Cooper’s recce in this post, I have done so for two reasons:

- To encourage more members to organise Guild recces and others to take part in the fabulous opportunity they present. If you can put together a Guild recce to a battlefield that you think will be of interest to our membership, please contact David Harvey, our Events Director, by emailing [events@gbg-international.com](mailto:events@gbg-international.com).
- To highlight the importance of partnering with civic and official tourist organisations to increase the recognition of the International Guild of Battlefield Guides within the wider tourism community. I urge you all to look out for opportunities of where we can do this as it will ultimately add value to your membership. Please let Tim Stoneman, our Guild Secretary, know of any opportunities you identify, by emailing [secretary@gbg-international.com](mailto:secretary@gbg-international.com).

The future is not as dull as some would believe and opportunities are there for the taking, as the Romans would have said ‘carpe diem’, seize the day.

Ian Gumm  
Chairman

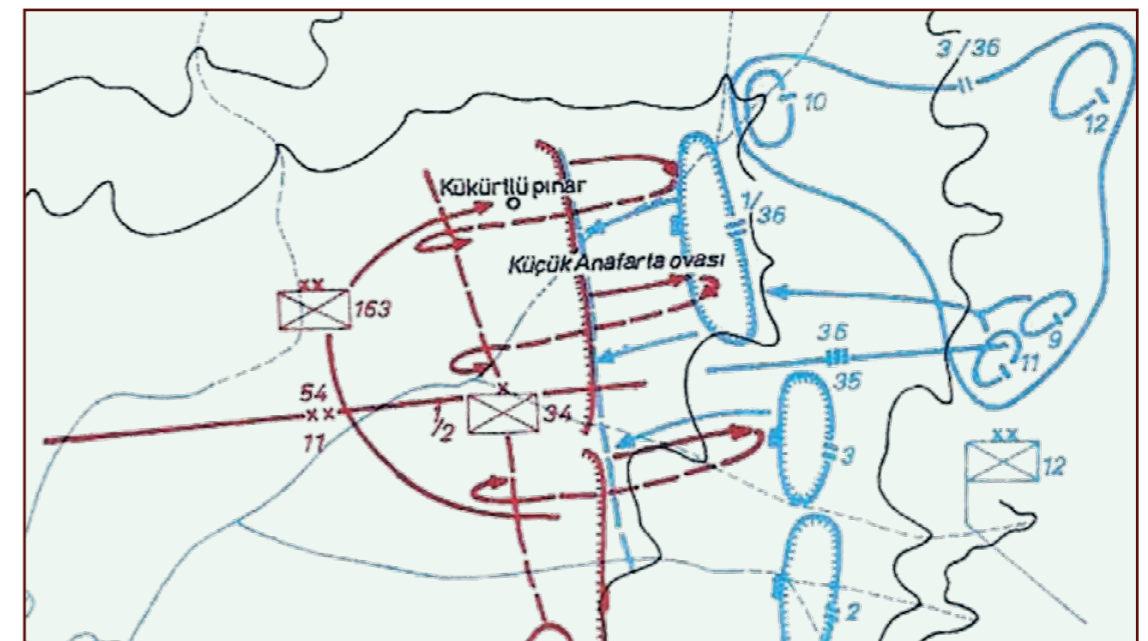


Ready for action - the Netherlands detachment all scrubbed up and set for our Annual Awards Night

# THE NORFOLKS AT GALLIPOLI

Steve Smith

There is a particular story involving a Territorial Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment, relating to an action on 12th August 1915 during their advance towards Kuchuck Anafarta Ova at Gallipoli, that got reported like this, “*But the Colonel, with sixteen officers and 250 men, still kept pushing on, driving the enemy before them. ... Nothing more was ever seen or heard of any of them. They charged into the forest and were lost to sight or sound. Not one of them ever came back.*” Based on this report, it has been the subject of two books, one of which was made into a TV adaption, but none have told the proper story.



The advance made by the 163rd Brigade on 12th August 1915

Due to a number of counter orders and mistakes, we know that a number of the 5th Norfolks managed to advance 1400 yards to a sunken road before stopping and waiting for the rest of the battalion. Second Lieutenant William Fawkes commanded this small group and he was ordered to press on by the C.O. Colonel Horace Proctor-Beauchamp, virtually all of them were taken down when they bunched up in a gap covered by a machine gun.

A small element of the Norfolks managed to reach a small vineyard and another element managed to get to a group of small cottages where they were joined by Colonel Proctor-Beauchamp and the Adjutant. But because they had over extended, other officers managed to take stock of what had happened and Major Walter Barton and Lieutenant Evelyn Beck managed to lead the survivors back to friendly lines when it became dark.

Local papers initially reported the loss of 5th Norfolk officers on 28th August 1915. In September 1915, due to the loss of his estates manager, Captain

Frank Beck, the King enquired about the fate of the 5th Battalion men. But the despatch written by Hamilton wasn’t published until 6th January 1916.

On 7th January 1916 the Eastern Daily Press reported, “*SANDRINGHAM MEN DISAPPEAR.*” The article went on to state that 16 officers and 250 men pushed deep into enemy lines and “*...were lost from sight and sound. None of them ever came back.*” Directly quoting Hamilton’s after-action report.

But, on 15th February 1916, the Lynn News reported that one officer was now recovering from wounds in a hospital as a prisoner of the Turks in Constantinople and further investigation by the press worked out that the official casualty total for the men was 177, with 137 still unaccounted for.

But this total was further reduced when it was ascertained that fifteen men had been captured and a further 25 were confirmed dead or in hospitals. Therefore, the real total of missing men at that time was in fact 97. Accounts from men who were there were



## MEN WHO NEVER CAME BACK.

### LIST OF WOUNDED AND PRISONERS.

On inquiry at the Norwich Headquarters of the Territorial Force Association we learn that according to information there compiled, 177 men were regarded as missing from the 5th Norfolk after their mysterious adventure described by Sir Ian Hamilton in his report on the Dardanelles operations. Sir Ian, it will be remembered, spoke, apparently in round numbers, of 16 officers and 250 men. At Norwich the authorities whose business it is to compile the statistical abstracts could not at the outset make the figure higher than 177. These 137 are still unaccounted for. There thus remains a balance of 40, of whom the following two officers and thirteen men are now known to be prisoners of war in Turkey, while the remaining 25 are dead or in the hospitals of the Allies, or are known to be otherwise safe:—

#### OFFICERS.

Captain A. C. M. Coxon, captured 13th August, wounded in both legs, Nanda Pacha Hospital. (Wounded in NECK)  
 Sub-Lieut. W. G. Fawkes, captured 13th August, Djaal Oglon Red Crescent Hospital.

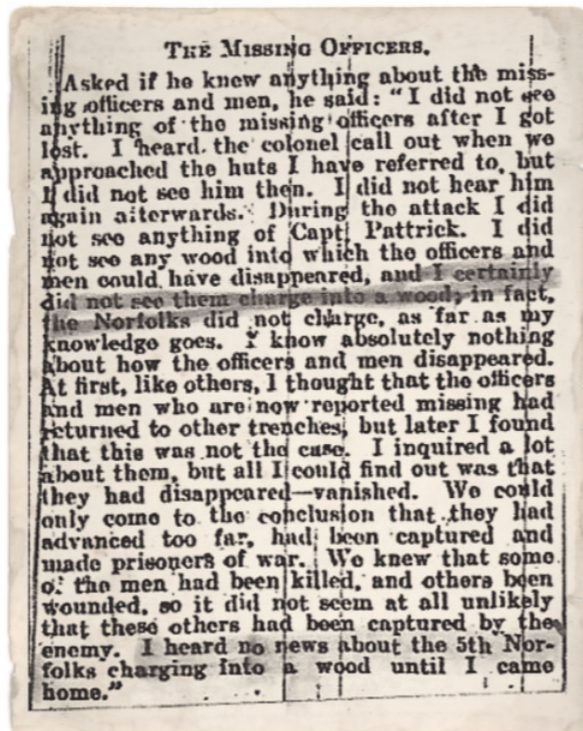
#### MEN.

No. 2558 Jesse Thompson, captured 12th August, wounds back and leg.  
 No. 3043 Private Fred Hooks, captured 12th August, wound above eye.  
 No. 3063 Private A. T. Webber, captured 12th August, wound in head.  
 No. 1870 Sergeant A. Alton, prisoner of war, Turkey, wounded 21st August, at first reported killed.  
 No. 2519 Corporal W. Blott, prisoner of war, Constantinople.  
 No. 3357 Private A. E. Brown, prisoner of war, wounded, Constantinople.  
 No. 1580 Lance-Corporal F. M. Fox, prisoner of war, wounded, Turkey.  
 No. 1585 Lance-Corporal G. C. Fox, ditto.  
 No. 2468 Private H. Nobbs, prisoner of war, wounded, Constantinople.  
 No. 2410 Private A. Reeve, ditto.  
 No. 2120 Drummer D. C. Swann, ditto.  
 No. 3155 Private C. K. Steerman, ditto.  
 No. 2500 Private E. C. Dicker, ditto.

An article that appeared in the Eastern Daily Press on 19th January 1916 listing POWs from the 5th Norfolk

published early in 1916, all pretty much refuted the battalion disappearing into a wood.

What also gets ignored are the interviews made to the Turks who spoke to those that were captured. For instance, this is what 2nd Lieutenant Fawkes said, "When I came around the stars were twinkling in the sky; the Turks who thought I was dead placed their guns on my body and started to shoot. Were I to move, it would have been my end. I passed out again. When I came around the next time, I found myself in the Turkish trenches, which I was trying to seize, full of Turkish sons compassionate faces. They gave me water and food; and took me to a first aid station on their shoulders."



Part of an interview from Private Sidney Pooley refuting original claims made by Sir Ian Hamilton

What is also missed are the records made by the Turkish battalions defending who carried out immediate counter-attacks which pushed the survivors back before two companies of the 3/36th Regiment, held in tactical reserve, pushed forward in what was described as a slashing bayonet pursuit this is said to have accounted for 15 officers and 250 men. (Isn't that weird that those numbers virtually mirror the Norfolk losses!)

Major Munib Bey, the C.O. of the 36th Regiment, wrote of an intense struggle all along the Turkish front, noting that one bayonet attack was stopped and a renewed attack was repulsed and that later that the enemy was defeated. Munib notes the British were pushed back 500-600 metres, the position restored and around 300 enemy dead were recovered at a cost of one officer and 61 men killed and more than 160 officers and men wounded. Munib also reported that 35 men were taken prisoner.

As with countless engagements in the Great War the bodies of the men who fell that day did not have the luxury of a burial detail. In fact, they lay where they fell until 1919 when the battalion's Chaplain, the Reverend Pierrepont Edwards, found them and reported at the time.

We have found the 5th Norfolk – there were 180 in all; 122 Norfolk and a few Hants and Suffolks with 2/4th Cheshires. We could only identify two – Privates Barnaby and Carter. They were scattered over an area of about one square mile, at a distance of at least 800 yards behind the Turkish front line.

And the actual casualty list, recorded between 12th and 31st August 1915, is one hundred & sixteen officers and men killed. Of that total, only one officer and sixteen men were recruited from the Sandringham estate.



Reverend Pierrepont Edwards who located most of the missing men in 1919



Men of the 5th Norfolk on a route march prior to going overseas

This is the reality and not the myth. Further reading on this can be found at: <https://stevesmith1944.wordpress.com>

## FIELDguides



Dudley Hill at Seelow Heights



# RETURNING TO MONTE CASSINO WITH THE ROYAL HOSPITAL CHELSEA

Clive Harris

A highlight of our guiding year is the twice annual tours we provide for the Royal Hospital Chelsea, typically the group consists of a dozen pensioners along with support staff. The tours, extremely popular among the pensioners are always oversubscribed. Tours to Waterloo and Ypres were followed up with a recent visit to Monte Cassino and Rome, special in that we were joined by 101-year-old Italian Campaign veteran Johnnie Morris for part of the tour - more of him later.



Each tour starts with a study morning a month or two before we depart, this gives Jools and I the chance to set the scene with a historical presentation and is open to all in the hospital, usually there are around 40-50 pensioners present, it also gives us the opportunity to meet the lucky dozen who are travelling with us and build any personal requests into the itinerary.

The main body of the group flew into Rome where we met by Julian who had been in Italy for a week prepping for an upcoming tour to Ortona and the Adriatic coast with a group from the RCMP. As with many tours to the Cassino battlefield, our stop on route to the hotel was Mont Trocchio for context as to how the Allies had reached this point and the pointing out the key features of the battlefield ahead from what is an excellent vantage point.

Our base at the Hotel Rocca proved as ever perfect with views from the rooms, the food, drink proving most popular with the group. The excellent models of Amazon Bridge also allowed for an impromptu discussion on bridging across the Italian Campaign.

Our first battlefield days started in the morning by focussing on the 36th Texan Division assault on St Angelo in Theodici, this was compared to the successful 56th (London) Division crossing at Suio closer to the coast and to see what lessons could be learnt. We then

turned our attention to Operation Diadem and the breakout of the Liri Valley, the Amazon Bridge Memorial allowed us to involve the three Sappers among the group, Steve Andrews, Terry Conlan & Trevor Rafferty to extol the role of Royal Engineers to the rest of us amid a barrage of banter, something never far away when with the RHC.

We then went to the tip of the spear to follow through the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers action across the Via Cerro Antico where a Victoria Cross was awarded to Percy Jefferson for knocking out German Armour with a PIAT. Julian and I had been fortunate to visit this location with Lancashire Fusilier veterans nearly 20 years ago, Owen McCarthy MM & Bar along with Alf Heywood and Bill Livesey, (the signaller that reported Jeffersons action over the company net so vividly recalled in Fred Majdalany's superb book 'Cassino'), had walked us through the action and how it differed to the VC citation. A special spot for me, I had used the voice recordings from that day for my 'use of source work' assignment on the path to my badge in 2005, and it was a privilege to revisit once more and share with a military group.

In the afternoon Jools led a walking tour from the Railway Station through to the Sherman Tank Memorial in Cassino Town, this took in a number of fascinating stands including 10 Platoon House and

the Convent as we learnt of the vicious hand to hand nature of urban fighting in conditions that the group compared to more recent events in Mariupol. We ended the day with a visit to the impressive and moving German Cemetery at Caira.

The next day we focussed on the 'Massive' including visits to study the 4th Essex at Castle Hill, 9 Gurkhas at Hangman's Hill, again, previous visits with the Royal Anglian Regiment and the Gurkhas over the years had provided us with a rich array of sources reminding us how key it is to archive notes and maps from previous tours! At the Polish Cemetery and visitors centre we were able to find the relative of RHC Carer Sandra Murawska and hold a brief memorial service in the company of RHC Chaplain Stephen Brookes, a memorable event.

We were then joined by veteran Johnnie Morris who had flown in with a carer to join us for the rest of the tour, at 101, Johnnie was a pre-war Territorial in the Royal Artillery, his baptism to war was during the London Blitz where he worked on a 3.7 Anti-Aircraft Battery across SE London and Kent between 1940-42. His overseas journey began with Operation Torch, unfortunately the ship carrying his unit's guns was sunk on route so he and his comrades found themselves a little helpless on arrival. He was sent on a signaller's course to re-trade, something that would change his career and future. He recalled the fighting around the Kasserine Pass and hearing US Armour only to discover it was being driven by Germans having captured it and had now out flanked behind his position, the panic was clear in his voice and on his face some 80 years on!

It was around this time that he volunteered for the Raiding Support Regiment, a unit he would remain with throughout the war ending in Yugoslavia where he trained and fought with Partisans. The short lived RSR were in Johnnie's own words the fire support for the SAS, he saw action at the Salerno Landings, Amalfi Coast, the Gothic Line and through to the River Po. He had seen the Abbey from Highway 6 when passing in



Looking at the Liri Valley



Johnnie Morris

1944 and had vowed to return. To get him to the Abbey and look down on the Liri Valley and the route he passed was a very moving occasion for everyone in the group.

We ended our stay in Cassino with a very impressive service at the CWGC Cemetery, led by the padre, in scarlets and with the Hospital Piper Mike Shanahan present we met with the CWGC team to thank them for their continuing efforts. A special visit was made to the grave of Major 'Bill' Nangle of the 9 Gurkhas who had fallen at Hangman's Hill, an incredible character, Bill had been representing the regiment in Paris in the early 30s when he got drunk and awoke having joined the Foreign Legion. Have completed his service with them in North Africa where he was decorated, he reported back from years of being AWOL, joined the LRDG before all was forgiven and he was commissioned back into his regiment again. For Johnnie, who is entitled to wear the 'Winged Dagger' of the SAS this was a particularly moving occasion as he led the commemoration and salute to all those who served in the Italian Campaign, even providing us with a few verses of 'D-day Dodgers' as the Abbey disappeared into our rear view mirrors and we headed to Rome.

Our time with the Second World War generation is now extremely limited and the tours where we almost took taking veterans to the battlefield for granted have gone. With the next tour for the Royal Hospital Chelsea planned for the September to Arnhem, it is hoped that we can have one last hurrah with another 101 year old pensioner who is very keen to make his own pilgrimage back, it reminds us what a privileged job we have as Battlefield Guides.



# A CONVERSATION ABOUT RESEARCHING WW2 BATTLEFIELD STORIES

Ian Mitchell

**EDITOR:** One of the challenges for battlefield guides is finding original and unique sources about battlefields they can use to tell amazing stories on Europe's WW2 battlefields. To try and take on this challenge and share the results with our readers I 'volunteered' one of our longer standing members Ian Mitchell to be interviewed on the subject. Ian how do you go about researching a battlefield and finding great stories to tell?

**IAN:** Well as you can't start in a complete vacuum, I am going to ask you for a scenario for a battlefield tour perhaps a US Army one.

**EDITOR:** All right you have been asked to take a group of Americans following in the footsteps of the 2nd Infantry Division across Europe visiting some of the sites of specific actions in Normandy, Brittany and the Ardennes. You have been given a rough itinerary that includes Hill 192 near St Lo, the capture of Brest and the Battle of Rocherath - Krinkelt, What primary and secondary sources are available?

**IAN:** Hopefully in this scenario you have some knowledge of the campaigns in WW2 but if you don't well there is no shame in consulting Wikipedia and the 2nd Infantry Division page. That gives you a start-point, or just do a Google search. However I am going to assume though you do have more than a basic knowledge. Secondary sources are usually the easiest as you start with so a division or Regimental history which makes sense and often you can find them free on line that appeals to me as a Yorkshireman! A free source for US Regimental or Unit histories is the one line collection of would you believe Bangor Library in Maine USA: *World War Regimental Histories | World War Collections | Bangor Public Library (bpl.lib.me.us)*

However personally I usually start by looking at the relevant Official Histories of the US Army in World War II the so called Green Books. You can also find these free on line at the Center of Military History (CMH) website under the heading Research: <https://history.army.mil/html/bookshelves>

In the case of 2nd Infantry Division the 3 relevant histories are *Cross Channel attack, Breakout and Pursuit* and *The Ardennes -the Battle of the Bulge*. Furthermore you are lucky because two specific books are also available that cover the 2nd Division's actions-

Omaha Beachhead and St Lo - 7th to 19th July 1944. The wonderful thing about the CMH site is that all this is free. That allows you to start to learn about the main battles from the official histories and use maps to trace locations and cross check to the draft itinerary.

**EDITOR:** So you have the 'official' historians' view how do you bring the story alive and also as more importantly identify decent stands for say the St Lo part of your tour.

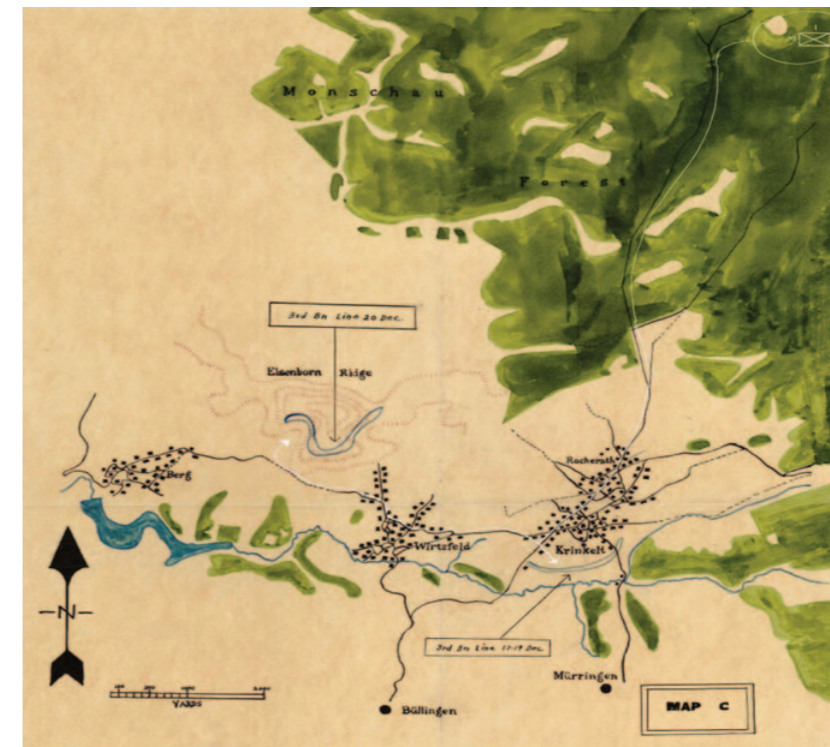
**IAN:** I sort of cheat - actually I look at existing battlefield guides for Normandy and see what they have to offer. I recommend the Battle Zone Normandy series one of their guides is called "*Battle-zone Normandy- Battle of St Lo*" by Peter Yates and that actually has a Tour with stands and stories for Hill 192. I used Yates book when I created and led a Guild recce to St Lo about 7 years ago. The series has 6 books which cover the US Army actions and tours in Normandy very well. Another great battlefield guide book for the Americans is called "*Stand where they fought*" by Carlton Joyce. I gather you can still get it on Amazon. Joyce was supposed to do a second volume on British Battlefields but sadly he never did.

**EDITOR:** So what happens when the client throws a real curve ball at you and they ask you to talk them through the detailed actions of a specific person or battalion? For example you are looking at the capture of Brest.

**IAN:** That's perhaps too easy (Editor - Why?) because I would kind of cheat again and ring my old friend Tony Smith who knows an awful lot about the Battle



*Ike Skelton Library (on line collection) based at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas*



*Map from a report by Captain Hankel - Battle of St Lo*

of Brest. Actually I want to make an important point here, there is a wealth of talent and knowledge in the Guild and I am not sure we really make the most of that in a systematic way. We don't have a formal system for tapping into that pool of knowledge and I believe the Guild should have one. On a more serious note if I want to try and pin down a location or learn more I will probably look for an After Action report (AAR) for a unit by going to the Ike Skelton Combined Arms Digital Library (CARL) at the US Army Command and Staff College at Fort Leavenworth.

This free and on line resource has a reasonable search engine and it provides you with useful documents. For example if you put in 'Battle for Brest' it would give you a list of 135 documents. *Ike Skelton Combined Arms Research Library (CARL) Digital Library - Ike Skelton Combined Arms Research Library (CARL) Digital Library (oclc.org)*

**EDITOR:** So how do you find personal accounts that are contemporary for example for the Ardennes part of your tour?

**IAN:** I usually check if there is divisional association website with veteran's stories as a starter for ten, but I also have another great source. That is the digital archive (the Donovan Collection) at the Manoeuvre Centre of Excellence (MCOE) library at Fort Benning in Georgia. [www.benning.army.mil/Library/Donovanpapers/wwii/index.html](http://www.benning.army.mil/Library/Donovanpapers/wwii/index.html)

It hosts some 600 reports written by officers who were on the Advanced Infantry Course from 1945-1949 who had served in WW2 in all theatres of operations. There are also a set of some 100 reports from Armor officers about WW2. The library has 300

reports from actions in the European and Mediterranean theatre and all free to access though not every report is available on line. You will have to search manually as there is no detailed alphabetical index. So if you check that site you will find that at least five officers who served in the Ardennes wrote their own contemporary unique accounts and with their original sketches. Furthermore there are three reports about the ST LO Battle. This is an example of a map from one of them a report by then Captain Hankel on his company during the battle of Rocherath.

Of course I would also look to use the stories in the iconic book by Charles Macdonald "*Company Commander*". MacDonald endured a traumatic baptism for fire at Jansbach Creek near the village of Rocherath-Krinkelt when his company was overrun and wrote about it. I got to visit that location in 2015 with a group of

Guild members on a recce.

Macdonald later became the Deputy Chief Historian of the US Army. I suppose that brings us almost full circle for this interview but I would mention one final source of value which is the Cornelius Ryan archive at the University of Ohio. Most guides will have heard of Ryan, he

wrote the "*Longest Day*" and the "*Bridge Too Far*" which were later used as the basis of two Hollywood movies. Ryan was meticulous and wide ranging in his research and his archive (which is on line) has all his notes, plus transcripts of over 1000 interviews and questionnaire requests, it is a historian's gold mine of original material.

[www.ohio.edu/library/collections/digital-archives/cornelius-ryan-wwii](http://www.ohio.edu/library/collections/digital-archives/cornelius-ryan-wwii)

Hopefully I have managed to provide some useful tips. Obviously the sources available depend in part on the tour and clients.

**EDITOR:** I agree but thank you so much for your insights, perhaps we should do this again but view it from a different angle and look at how to find out about the German side of the story or learn about sources for the British army battles in World War 2.



*Captain Charles MacDonald*



## FIELDguides



Bob Shaw in Berlin at Treptow Park, explaining Russian military culture and the difference in viewpoint between the Red Army and the German people. Were they 'Occupiers' or 'Liberators'?



Eyes on the prize, Assignment 1 completed! L-R Paul Iverson (UK), Rob Woolsey (Can), Graham Roberts (UK), and Crista Drew-Roy (Can).



All smiles and back on the battlefields, Julian Whippy and Clive Harris returned to Monte Cassino. Clive talks about Castle Hill below.



# INITIAL BATTLEFIELD GUIDE TRAINING

Dudley Giles

For a long time now the Guild has set its face against training battlefield guides. There are perfectly valid reasons for this policy which, although I do not necessarily agree with them, I can both accept and support. Nevertheless, the fact remains that many members join the Guild in the expectation, or at least the hope, that the Guild will provide some form of training. And, of course, it does - in a roundabout sort of way - in the shape of Guild weekends and reces. But nevertheless, the fact remains that, after 20 years of its existence, there is still no formal, structured, Guild training course – and, moreover, no plans to introduce one.

Of course, there is some training provision available outside the Guild for battlefield guides. This is mainly in the form of the in-house training programmes offered to their existing guides by companies like Anglia Tours and Leger. And, of course, there are the generalist guiding courses provided, certainly in the UK, by organisations like the Institute of Tourist Guiding (<https://www.itg.org.uk>). But these courses do not address the fundamental needs of the 'wannabe' guide who is on the cusp of entering the profession or the 'newbie' guide who still lacks practical experience; both are looking for advice, enlightenment, guidance and, yes, *training*.

In 2012 Mike Peters set up a training company - Travel Guide Training & Validation – to address these very issues; and many of the guides reading this article will have been one of his students. For the past 3 years Mike stopped providing his training courses and we were nearly back to square one (although we understand he may be re-entering the market in 2023).<sup>1</sup>

That there is a need for initial battlefield guide training is fully recognised by the Management Board. Indeed, the Director of Validation has recently gone 'on record' in recognising the 'chicken-and-egg' dilemma which faces many of our members who hesitate to put themselves forward for accreditation because, in order to cross that Assignment One threshold, they know full well that they will be asked to provide evidence of their experience. And, sadly, in recent years, thanks to COVID, the opportunities to gain that experience have been few and far between.

There is, of course, no substitute for getting out there on the ground and just guiding. If nothing else, guiding is a practical skill. But learning on the job through making your mistakes as you go along is not necessarily the best way to proceed - and it is certainly not playing fair by your clients.

This is why, earlier last year, Steve Smith (Accredited Member 17) and I decided that we would put together a training course for novice battlefield guides. For want of a better title, we called it "*An Introduction to Battlefield Guiding*". And, to test the concept and help us to develop it, we ran a pilot course for 11 'guinea pig' students. Some of these students had no guiding experience whatsoever whilst others had only limited familiarity with the craft. One of our students was in America, another in Canada and most, although not all, were current members of the Guild.

"*An Introduction to Battlefield Guiding*" is designed to be a two-part course. Part One is delivered entirely online whilst Part Two (which is optional) has been devised as a practical 'hands-on' weekend where students are able to practice their newly acquired skills in a safe and supportive environment. Our promise to our students was to give them: "*The tools and knowledge to send you out onto the battlefields equipped to deliver your first battlefield tours with authority and confidence.*"

Following completion of Part One of the pilot course we were intent on delivering Part Two – the practical phase - in late October 2022; but, for various reasons, this had to be postponed until April 2023.

So how did we deliver the online course and what did we learn from the pilot?

Steve and I thought that it was important to have a solid cohort of students who could progress through the course together. Self-paced online training courses have their place but - and I speak as one who has done many such courses - it is often difficult to sustain momentum and motivation when working entirely by yourself. Besides, as the creators of a pilot course, there was nothing more energising for us, the teachers, than to know that, in terms of preparation, we were only a few weeks ahead of our students!

<sup>1</sup> Accredited Guide Frank Baldwin was – and still is – another member of the Guild who has been attempting to fulfil this need and details of his training offering can be found here: (<https://frankbaldwin.co.uk/battlefield-guide-training>).



Between us Steve and I have over 50 years of practical guiding experience, so we were confident in our own knowledge and skills. Additionally, both of us have experience and formal teaching qualifications in the Adult Learning sector. Steve is a qualified A1 NVQ Assessor and although - for entirely practical financial reasons - we are unable to offer a formal training qualification to our students, this has meant that our assessment models meet current best practice in the educational sector.

Our aim from the outset was to deliver self-paced learning but with defined deadlines. In effect this meant that we divided the course into twelve modules which we then drip fed to our students over a ten-week period. Each module required, on average, about an hour or two of private study and then, every 7 days or so, we would meet (online) to review the previous learning and preview the module(s) to come. Although we never achieved a full house of students at any one of these online meetings, there was always a large enough quorum to make them interesting and stimulating and indeed these often led to us going back and revising some of the previous course content. (All of these live sessions were recorded for the benefit of the students who could not attend.)

Our intention was also not to overburden our students who all had busy lives and careers to pursue. But, to ensure that they remained engaged in the course, we did set them three mini-assignments to complete. We also gave them bonus material in the form of interviews conducted with working guides (most, but not all of whom, were members of the Guild). We considered this to be important; guiding is not 'black and white' and our students, we believed, benefitted from hearing the perspectives of others as a counter-balance to the 'Gospels of Dudley and Steve'!<sup>2</sup>

All in all, the online course involved about 15 hours of self-paced study, nine hours of contact time and three written assignments. We made it very clear from the outset that the aim of our course was to provide foundational training; An Introduction to Battlefield Guiding is NOT a course designed to prepare students for the Guild's validation



Dudley Hill at Kustrin Fortress

process. Having said that, we believe that it is a course which can benefit not just those students who at the moment are merely considering becoming guides but it is also a course which will benefit those guides who already have some experience but lack the confidence, at the moment, to put themselves forward for accreditation.

At the time you read this article we will already have completed the first of this year's courses. We intend to run the course three times a year and already have a number of students expressing an interest in attending the next iteration which will begin in May. If it is something that might interest you, please reach out to either myself or Steve and we will gladly answer any questions you might have. Or, of course, you could simply ask any one of our pilot course guinea pigs for their views!

**Our website is here: [www.battlefieldguidetraining.com](http://www.battlefieldguidetraining.com)**

## GUILDEvent

### Lost in Badjoz

Ian Doyle

The recent Guild Recce to Spain, *"Following in Wellington's Footsteps"* was an awesome experience. Hats off to Graeme Cooper and Cooper's Waterloo Tours for organising the event and leading us around the battlefields of Talavera, Fuentes d'Onoro and Salamanca as well as some cracking minor actions and sieges. One of the sieges we investigated was the Siege of Badajoz (1812).

The Badajoz Tourist Office had organised for the group to visit the Museo 'Luis de Morales'. The museum is dedicated to the full history of the city of Badajoz and had a creditable display of the Napoleonic period, covering elements of the Siege and of the nearby Battle of Albuera.

Unfortunately, there was a mix-up in the address given for the museum. We had climbed the outer escarpment, following in the footsteps of Thomas Picton's 3rd Division who had made a successful escalade over the Castle Walls in 1812. We then walked down the hill towards the Plaza de San Atón which was the location where we had been told we would find the museum.

Alas, that information was wrong. Having searched for the correct location for the museum, we began the long climb back up the hill towards the Castle. It had been around the corner from where we had stopped for a coffee after climbing into the Castle. Drinks all round in the bar courtesy of Graeme that evening!

During our perambulations, we encountered the Estatua de Manuel Godoy (the Statue of Manuel Godoy); a piece of modern art, erected in 2008 to



Recce members at the site of the Santa Maria Breach where the Light Division assaulted the walls, Badajoz, 2023



Model of the assault on the Santa Maria Breach in 1812 (Museo 'Luis de Morales')

commemorate the contribution of Manuel Godoy to the city. The city council had taken 201 years to act on the decision it had made on 26th January 1807 to commemorate this individual.

I must confess, I was surprised to see such a statue as it had been my impression that Manuel Godoy was one of the most hated men in Spain from the Napoleonic Era.

*"He was an historical character whose ignorance seems proportional to his importance. Traditionally considered one of the most disastrous rulers in Spanish*

<sup>2</sup> Our thanks in this respect go to Eugenie Brooks, Paul Colbourne, Ian Gumm, Sue King, Matt Menneke, Beth Moore, Susie Rotherforth, Bob Shaw, and Sophie Shrubsole for stepping up and giving us the benefit of their views. Hint: we still want to conduct a few more of these interviews so if you would like to be involved please reach out to us!





Map of the Siege of Badajoz of 1812, created by Jakednd 25 Apr 2011

history; his depraved ambition was responsible for the invasion of Napoleon.” (Emilio La Parra Lopez, 2002) <sup>1</sup>

Manuel Godoy was of obscure hidalgo heritage. The son of an impoverished aristocratic family with an illustrious history, sufficient for him to bear four surnames in his full Spanish name, each commemorating one of the branches from which he was descended. He was born in Badajoz, hence the presence of a statue to him here. Indeed, the Plaza de San Atón was the location of the seminary where he had studied as a boy. His statue dominates the little roundabout which now marks the location where the seminary stood.

He went to Madrid when he was 17 years old to join the Guardias de Corps (the Royal Guard) consistent with many of his class living in similar economically constrained circumstances.

A fall from his horse brought him to the attention of the Queen, Maria Luisa of Parma, who took a liking to the young caballero and invited him to her bedchamber. Thus, his meteoric rise through the military and political ranks of the Spanish court.

By 1792, the 25-year-old Godoy was Secretary of State. He advised the rather incompetent Spanish King, Charles IV, to join the First Coalition in declaring war on

Republican France. The outcome was disastrous for Spain.

Republican armies invaded Spain and Godoy was forced to negotiate a peace treaty with France. In fairness, the terms of the treaty seemed quite generous bearing in mind that Spain was losing the war. The French agreed to withdraw from northern Spain in 1795 and respect historic borders. Godoy was applauded for his diplomatic skills and was given the title ‘Prince of Peace.’

In 1796, fearful that Spain would not be able to protect her colonies from Britain, Godoy advised the King to ally with France. In the War of the Second Coalition, the Pact of San Ildefonso saw the Spanish in conflict with the British at sea - and not doing very well. The Spanish fleet was defeated at the Battle of Cape St Vincent in 1797 and Menorca was occupied by the British and used as their main Mediterranean Naval base. Godoy was removed from power in 1798 but he remained on good terms with both the King, and with the Queen, with whom he continued to be one of her many lovers.

In 1800, he had worked his way back into Government and in 1801 he became President of the Cabinet (Prime Minister) as



Manuel Godoy, as a young man in the Guardias de Corps, 1788 (Oil painting by Fransisco Folch de Cardona)

well as Commander-in-Chief of Spain’s Armies. The outcome of his invasion of Portugal in 1801 was the transfer of the town of Olivenza and its surrounding villages to Spain, redefining the border between the two countries along the River Guadiana.

Godoy’s political power was increasingly challenged by the Crown Prince, Ferdinand (the future King Ferdinand VII). Supporters of the Prince sought to discredit Godoy’s achievements emphasising that Godoy’s only claim to fame was that he was one of the Queen’s lovers.

The Peace of Amiens ended the War of the Second Coalition against Britain in 1802 and brought a temporary reprieve for Spain. Trade with her South American and Far Eastern colonies resumed uninterrupted – for 2 years.

The Action of 5th October 1804 when Captain Graham Moore of the Royal Navy intercepted a Spanish bullion convoy forced Godoy’s hand. The convoy was carrying 4,286,508 Spanish dollars in silver and gold along with 150,000 ingots of gold, 75 sacks of wool, 1,666 bars of tin, 571 pigs of copper, seal skins and oil. It would be the last such bullion convoy to traverse the Atlantic from the Spanish colonies to Cadiz.

The British Government had received intelligence that a secret clause of the Treaty of San Ildefonso was still active. If Spain did not actively engage in war with Britain, she would subsidise France financially. Britain felt that this financial lifeline must be cut. Captain Moore was ordered to attack.

In 1805, unable to meet the financial penalty for absencing herself from the battlefield in support of Napoleon’s France, Spain found herself again providing naval support to France in the War of the Third Coalition. Nelson’s victory at Trafalgar smashed Spain’s dominant naval position for ever.

By 1807, notwithstanding the political machinations of the Crown Prince and his supporters, Godoy was still Prime Minister. He signed a new treaty with France, the Treaty of Fontainebleau, which allowed the French army right of passage to cross Spanish territory and invade Portugal. Article 2 of the treaty made provision for Portugal to be struck off the list of nations and divided into three. One third would be occupied by France. One third would be ceded to Spain. The other third, the southern portion of Portugal, would become an independent Principality, the Principality of the Algarve with Godoy himself appointed as the ruling Prince.

In accordance with the terms of the Treaty of Fontainebleau, General Jean-Androche Junot, led the 25,000-strong Army of the Gironde into Spain in December 1807 with the aim of

marching across the country to invade Portugal. Article 3 of the Treaty stated that the Spanish King would make provision for supplies to be made available for the French troops as they crossed the country.<sup>2</sup>

No such arrangements had been made.

Initially, when the French soldiers arrived, the Spanish people were curious. Some even admired them and dismissed the stories circulating that the French were no better than thieves and looters or worse. (Emilio de Diego Garcia, 2002) <sup>3</sup>

When French soldiers arrived in a Spanish town as they marched towards Portugal, they demanded provisions and accommodation. Some of the local town councils and citizens, having no knowledge of the terms of Article 3 initially refused. Spain was suffering from food shortages. As a result of their defeat at Trafalgar, the Spanish were encountering difficulties in trading with their overseas colonies and with other neutral powers (e.g., the United States). They did not always have sufficient food to feed themselves. French commanders ordered their men to take what had been promised to them. In some instances, some of the Spanish resisted and violence broke out. On occasion,



Statue of Manuel Godoy in the roundabout of the Plaza San Atón, Badajoz

<sup>1</sup> Emilio La Parra Lopez, Professor of History, University of Alicante: Manuel Godoy; The Adventure of Power (Tusquets) 2002 (my computer-assisted translation)

<sup>2</sup> Paolo Polumbo, Member of Military Historical Society (London): Spain 1808 – the birth of the guerrilla war. (Sofrep Online Military Journal)

<sup>3</sup> Emilio de Diego Garcia, Professor of Contemporary History, University of Madrid: Madrid Journal of Art, Geography and History (Community of Madrid Virtual Library) 2007 (my computer-assisted translation)



some Spanish citizens were killed and on occasion some French soldiers were wounded.

The supply system of the French army meant that they had no choice but to take from the Spanish. Their doctrine was for the army to live off the land. The French had been told that when they marched into Spain, provisions would be made available to them. When such was not the case, they had no option but to take.

Initially, the acts of defiance were local and uncoordinated. The principal aim was that local citizens simply sought to defend their own property from what they saw as French looters. The French, feeling that the Spanish were reneging on their part of the bargain that Godoy had agreed for them, took what they felt was theirs by right.

Supporters of the Crown Prince spread the rumour that Godoy had sold Spain to France. They tapped into the deep religious feeling of the population making much that in doing so, he had made an alliance with an atheist country which did not respect the religious sentiments of its allies.

Tensions thickened. Incidences of violence were increasing. Deaths of Spanish citizens and of French soldiers began to mount. News reached the royal court that a French Army was on its way to Madrid. Contrary to the terms of the Treaty of Fontainebleau, San Sebastian and Barcelona had already been occupied by French troops. Godoy ordered that the Royal Court flee. They set out from Madrid bound for Cadiz where they would take passage to New Spain (Mexico).

On 17th March 1808, at the town of Aranjuez, about 30 miles south of Madrid, a mob stormed the residence in which the Royal Family were staying. They demanded that the King dismiss Godoy. After an extensive search of the grounds, Godoy was found hiding under some mats in the attic of the house. The King, horrified that his wife's favourite would likely be lynched by the mob, asked that the Crown Prince take him into custody. The Royal Guard arrested Godoy and were ordered to protect him from the crowd who threw stones and tried to break through the cordon to beat him with sticks or stab him with their knives and swords. It is unclear quite how many members of the Royal Guard were wounded whilst defending Godoy or indeed how many wounds were inflicted upon Godoy himself during this incident known as the 'Tumult of Aranjuez'.

Two days later, King Charles IV was forced to abdicate in favour of his son, Ferdinand. Four days



*Tumult of Aranjuez, 1808. The Fall and imprisonment of the Prince of Peace. Sketch made by Zacharias Velasquez, subsequently printed by Francisco de Paula Marti, 1814*

later, Marshal Murat arrived in Madrid with orders from Napoleon: "... to curtail the violence of his soldiers to avoid further exacerbating the situation – at least until such time as the moment was more opportune or favourable for the French." (Emilio La Parra Lopez, 2002 - my translation)

Godoy was released from prison by Murat. He was seen as a Friend of France. He was escorted to France with other members of the Spanish Royal Family before Napoleon appointed his brother Joseph as King of Spain, thereby igniting the guerrilla war in earnest that was to plague his forces for the next 6 years.

Godoy never returned to Spain. He lived out the rest of his days in France and then Italy before returning to France where he died in Paris in 1851.

The Badajoz City Council have noted that "following his fall into disgrace, he (Godoy) was slandered and blamed for almost everything."<sup>4</sup>

Revisionist historians are salvaging his reputation. Badajoz city council have commented that: "... his loyalty to the Monarchy was commendable and his devotion to work unquestionable. During his term of office, he encouraged primary education and supported the building of factories and roads. He always kept excellent relations with the city, and he was presented with awards and honours in recognition of the respect in which he was held by the citizens at that time. Indeed, in 1803, when the owners of the present-day Godoy Palace learned that he wished to buy a house in the city, they immediately volunteered to vacate their residence as a gift to the 'Prince of Peace'".

On 26th January 1807, the council voted to raise a statue in his honour; but events overtook themselves as outlined above. It was not until 2008 that the statue was put up and unveiled.

# GUIDING FOR THE COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION



Marc L Raven

## It was a good decision to answer the call for Volunteer Guides at the CWGC!

It was thanks to the Guild who alerted me to the chance to Guide for the Commonwealth War graves Commission (CWGC) who had sent out the bugle call for Volunteers who might be interested in showing members of the Public around selected Commonwealth cemeteries around the country during the summer.

Having (rather apprehensively) put my name down, as a guide, the professional approach by the CWGC team tasked with this rather herculean task of selection and handling the (inevitable) paperwork and red tape associated with the project allayed my fears.



*The Cross of Sacrifice at St Albans features a Sword of Honour on the face. A useful point to meet as you can't miss it!*

## COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES

We were given a choice to select any of the Cemeteries the Commission had chosen, but the obvious one geographically for me, was in St Albans at a large 'civilian' cemetery which included 147 CWG, most buried in a separate CWGC plot of 93 WW1 and 79 WW2 in another separate area. The remainder are scattered randomly around the 30000 odd graves which had a few interesting occupants including the founder of the Ryder Cup and a female poisoner hanged for her sins!

This presented some interesting challenges guiding about the cemetery and trying to get the balance right with the time we were advised to take, of roughly 60-80 minutes.

There were briefings online by the commission, going through reporting procedures, how the 'ticketing' would work and a briefing document of points that the Commission would like us to make about the work they do. No issues from my point of view and no pressure to conform to a script. In truth it felt like the Commission were feeling their way through the whole concept of promoting the work they do in such a dynamic and proactive way. I was left to my own devices which was perfect.

The Commission did supply a useful range of clothing to wear and even a very official looking tabard so I certainly couldn't be missed by the public when they arrived. Personally, the branded polo shirt was fine as only a Battlefield Guide holds a large foolscap folder full of paper and a beige Expedition hat in a Graveyard - don't they?

I was given free range on the dates I wanted to do through the summer, but the start was during CWG Week in May. It was difficult to know how many people would attend locally so I opted for 2 days a

<sup>4</sup> City of Badajoz Tourist Website (English version) [accessed on-line 2023]



month and see how it goes.

I felt it politically astute to make contact with the Cemetery Manager, Katherine to explain what I was up to in advance, and she could not have been more helpful with access to the cemetery and its records and keeping the toilets open! She even showed me an old wooden cross of a German POW who had been buried in the cemetery but whose body was returned to Germany in the 60's leaving this rather poignant memento of his 'time' in St Albans Road Cemetery.

Obviously, I could write a separate article on the research I had to do, and the individual stories of the service men and women buried in the graveyard. I found myself concentrating on the WW1 burials as that has (in my opinion) stronger links to the Commission from a historical point of view and many of the service men and women were originally treated in the local hospital called Napsbury.

Telling the story of how the Commission started and the work of Sir Fabian Ware, the meaning of the headstones, shape and layout of the plot and the Cross of Sacrifice which looms over the graves is a key part of the brief, so it needs some rigour and order to present this in a (hopefully) interesting way.

In my small plot I had some wonderful stories to tell from a young Nurse who worked at Napsbury and then fell foul to Flu in 1918, a sixteen year old Drummer boy who I suspect had the same fate, sad stories from Australian servicemen who never returned home and the sheer bravery and in one case suffering of Military Medal winners and an 'ordinary' Private whose family lived a few streets away and buried their son with full Military Honours.

During the summer I had some great groups but found 8-10 was the optimum, as on one occasion 18 turned up, which tested the voice! It was so rewarding to tell these stories about the lives of what would have been 'forgotten' heroes, right in the centre of St Albans, and it was great to hear locals tell me that this was their first visit to the Cemetery and were glad they now knew more about how these service men and women got to be buried. I guess that is the whole point of the exercise in the first place. Of course, locals



*A group that attended during Commonwealth War Graves week in May 22, applied for tickets via the CWGC*

have great local knowledge, so I was constantly adding to the presentation as I learned more about the area and how the wars affected it.

I am already booked in to guide for the CWGC in 2023, as they are expanding the project after the many thousands of new visitors who heard first hand from the guides at the 30 specially selected sites across the country. The processes to book tickets and the information on the CWGC website is enhanced this year, so if you fancy a guided visit at a local CWGC cemetery near you – hopefully you won't be disappointed.

Big thanks too, to the Guild for the referral to be a volunteer guide, it's been interesting and great fun....



*Alexei Sayle (the comic) was a celebrity guest on the tour*

# BLACKPOPPYROSE

Eugenie Brooks

**Selena Carty, from Brixton in South London founded the BlackPoppyRose Campaign in 2010.**



I first met her when I was volunteer guiding for the CWGC at the Air Forces Memorial Runnymede about 2 years ago. I led a tour of Asian and Black ladies around the Memorial telling the stories of the brave men and women and focused on the many Black and Asian casualties listed on its walls.

I was struck by her utter passion and drive to ensure that the contribution to world history globally by African, Black, West Indian, Caribbean, Pacific Islands and Indigenous communities should be highlighted, recognised and celebrated. BlackPoppyRose fully supports the legacy of the red poppy from the Royal British Legion and works alongside them to ensure the future remembrance of the Fallen.

The BlackPoppyRose is a symbol to remember not only the soldiers, but the peoples mentioned earlier who contributed in any way for the several War efforts since the sixteenth century. England has an excellent archive of the country's/empires' historic achievements. These are documented and celebrated via monuments, statues and plaques, documentaries, books, articles, and magazines. However, Selena felt that there was a severe lack of representation and visibility with displaying the full picture of history including all its contributors.

Selena says "African/Black/West Indian/ Caribbean/Pacific Islands and Indigenous communities have consistently contributed to civilisation, even in the face of adversity and despite mankind's most abhorrent treatment and atrocities against us. Throughout history, many of our generations have been displaced; our memories, our pain, our traumas, and our losses are universal. Whilst we do not wish to solely focus on negative aspects of history, we feel that it is important that our ancestors are recognised for their dues, of which many lost their lives in the process."

Selena has formed BlackPoppyRose to ensure that the future generations of all communities are educated and empowered with this knowledge. Working and researching throughout Europe (UK, France, Belgium & Spain), West Africa (Sierra Leone, Liberia & Ghana), North America (Canada, USA, & Jamaica). Whilst working with organisations such as

Activision, The Royal British Legion, The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, The National Army Museum, Jamaica's Military Museum, Ghana's Military Museums, The Black Cultural Archives and several UK based Primary and Secondary schools, colleges and universities. All to expand the accessibility to oral narratives and archival materials world-wide.

BlackPoppyRose wreaths and remembrance pins, are available all year around via the [www.blackpoppyrose.org](http://www.blackpoppyrose.org) website and this coming year (2023) there is going to be an official book launch for her new publication called 'Our Ancestors Served...'

More details can be found on the website. I feel it's an important addition to the wide range of facilities available for us battlefields guide to utilise, support, refer to and work with.







Men who served in World War I



Dinah Salifou  
Guinea - France



King Mankong of  
Cameroon - Germany



Alhaji Grushi  
Gold Coast - Britain

Women at War - North America World War II



Women's Army Corps  
WAC 6888th Central Postal Battalion

MEDALguide

The Distinguished Flying Cross

The Distinguished Flying Cross was instituted in June 1918 shortly after the formation of the Royal Air Force and was originally awarded to officers and warrant officers for acts of valour whilst flying in active operations against the enemy.

The medal was designed by Edward Carter Preston who was also responsible for the design of the 'Death Penny', presented to the families of British servicemen and women who died during the First World War. The design features an aeroplane propeller with wings superimposed. The reverse of the medal has the Royal Cypher and the date 1918. The recipients name was not initially inscribed, although some individuals had their names engraved privately. Since 1939, however, the date of the award has been officially engraved on the reverse and since 1984 the recipients name has also been engraved.

Between 1918 and 1920 some 1,100 Crosses were awarded and in the period between 1920 and 1936 some 130. The Second World War saw the majority awarded with around 20,300 Crosses being awarded.

The Second War also saw eligibility being extended to Naval Officers of the Fleet Air Arm and in 1942 it was further extended to Army Officers including Royal Artillery Officers attached to the RAF as pilot/artillery observers. Up until 1979 it was not awarded posthumously.

In the post war period between 1946 and 1979 678 Crosses were awarded and in the period 1980 to 2017 a further 80 for action in the Falklands, the Gulf, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Further acts of gallantry would lead to the award of a bar which is worn on the medal ribbon. During the Second War some 1,550 second award bars were awarded and 42 third award bars.

The ribbon originally had horizontal white and deep purple stripes but in June 1919 this was changed to alternate diagonal stripes.



The Distinguished Flying Cross - front and reverse



DFC showing second award bar



# LINCOLNSHIRE RAF TOUR OVER THREE DAYS

David Nunn

I recently guided a three-day World War Two Bomber Command tour to Lincolnshire. As there were 27 operational BC stations across the county (with plenty of evidence surviving), this is a vast subject. To ensure representation but avoid superficiality, I decided upon three visits per day with two or three stories per visit whilst presenting a reasonable grasp of the contributions made by each station. Everybody working in this field will have their favourites and in no way is my itinerary claimed to be definitive.



Faldingworth School mural depicting 300 Sqn's contribution to Operation Manna

On Day One, we visited the International Bomber Command Centre in Lincoln, the site of RAF Faldingworth plus the local parish church and finished with RAF Bardney.

Day Two focused on 55 Base taking in the sites of RAF Strubby, Spilsby and finally East Kirkby, now the home of the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Trust where we spent the afternoon.

Day Three began at the Petwood Hotel (where we stayed) with an account of Operation Chastise by the bouncing bomb relic in the garden, followed by the



The Group at the Petwood Hotel



Neglected memorial on the site of former RAF Faldingworth



Stained glass window at All Saints, Faldingworth

site of RAF Wickenby (good lunches) and finally the cemetery at St John the Baptist Church at Scampton.

The highlight for most of us was Faldingworth, once home to 1667 HCU and later 300 (Polish) Squadron. The sadly neglected memorial and almost overgrown family tributes located at the end of what was the main runway, hardly do justice to the memory of over 260 brave men. The site is in urgent need of restoration. It is on land now owned by Skydock (I think they test missiles) who were fine with our visit but requested in advance a list of attendees.

Many thanks to the Reverend Bryan Dixon for allowing us into All Saints Church, Faldingworth to view some wonderful memorabilia of 300 Squadron's service locally and testimony to enduring friendship between Polish airmen and the village – ties broken only by advancing age and the passing of a remarkable generation.

During an earlier research visit, Faldingworth primary school's head teacher allowed me to photograph their mural depicting 300 Sqn's late war contribution to Operation Manna – the feeding from the air of starving Dutch civilians.



# GUILDevent Bletchley Park Visit

David Harvey

On Friday 27th January this year's Conference and Annual General Meeting weekend began with a visit to Bletchley Park near Milton Keynes.

Bletchley Park was the epicentre of World War Two codebreaking and the British wartime intelligence hub. Forty six members and guests gathered at lunchtime to receive a warm welcome and introduction to the site by GBG member and Park CEO Iain Standen.

From there, the party were hosted by top guide and historian Dr. David Kenyon. David began with the history of the development of British intelligence centres through the 1930's until Bletchley was established and expanded through to 1945.



Our first stop around the site was outside the mansion which originally housed all operations. David described the gathering of a team of extraordinary, brilliant, determined and dedicated people. He gave an outline of some of the key roles and the personnel who came to serve. Wandering around



D-Day and Ultra presented in the cinema for members and guests

the grounds, members had the chance to visit huts laid out pretty much as they had been in operation through the 1940's. In these huts we viewed the cutting-edge technology that the intelligence team had to draw upon. We also saw some of the enemies capture cypher machines and the invented 'computer' responses the allies were compelled to build. We came to understand the complex and time consuming processes that distilled into the intelligence messages of 'Ultra'.

One of the latest developments at Bletchley has been the display area and cinema dedicated to telling the story of the impact of Ultra driven actions on the preparation and execution of D-Day. We were able to look at the displayed information and then sit in the theatre for a short film about Bletchley Park's role in D-Day.

Our passed patron Richard Holmes declared *"The work at Bletchley Park was utterly fundamental to the survival of Britain. I'm not actually sure that I can think of very many other places where I could say something as unequivocal as that. This is sacred ground."*

It seems incredible that such a massive sustained undertaking could have been kept secret throughout the war years and until its role was revealed in 1974.



Statue to code-breaker Alan Turing

Graciously, David Kenyon gave nearly two and a half hours' explanation of the site. Members were then invited to tour around those huts which most attracted them before setting off for the conference weekend hotel in Milton Keynes.



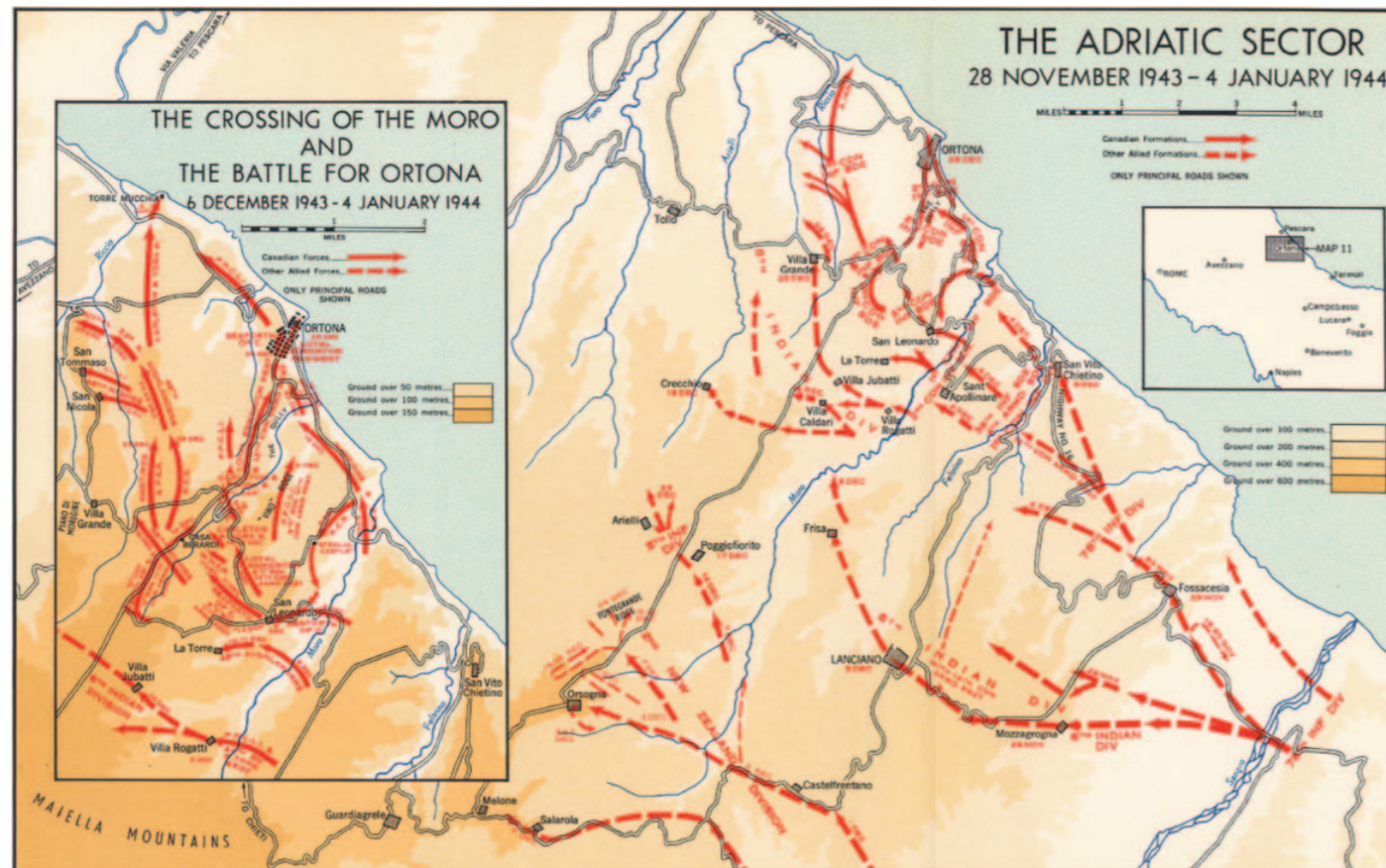
Photographs courtesy of Willem Kleijn



# BATTLE OF ORTONA 1943

David Harrison

The Battle of Ortona was the concluding part of the 1st Canadian Division's offensive operation in the Adriatic Sector of Italy. It began with the crossing of the Moro River in late November 1943. Once the capture of the all-important port at Ortona was complete, the 8th Army advance was halted for the winter due to appalling weather and the degradation of its forces by the Germans. The Canadian Division had picked up the advance along the east coast from the 78th Infantry Division and had mounted a set piece attack with 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade (1 CIB) launching the first assault at the mouth of the river designed as a deception measure. 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade (2 CIB) then attacked towards the key villages of Villa Rogatti and San Leonardo.



The Adriatic Sector, the Crossing of the Moro and the Battle for Ortona reproduced from the Official History of the Canadian Army in World War Two, Vol II, the Canadians in Italy 1943-45

Once these objectives were captured, the advance slowed as determined German resistance prevented the forward brigades from reaching the road that ran along the ridge between Orsogna and Ortona. Fierce fighting was undertaken by the Royal 22e Regiment to capture Casa Berardi and by Royal Canadian Regiment to seize 'Cider Crossroads'. With these features secure the 2 CIB was then able to advance

towards the town. The Loyal Edmonton Regiment achieved the break-in, however Commander 2 CIB (Brigadier Hoffmeister) realised the capture of the town would be beyond the capability of a single battalion and ordered the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada into the town as well. There then followed 5 days of urban operations to clear the Germans from the town. Concurrently 3rd Canadian Infantry

Brigade (3 CIB), which was delayed in re-joining the Division due to operations in the Upper Sangro Valley, was ordered to cut off the German withdrawal routes from the town.

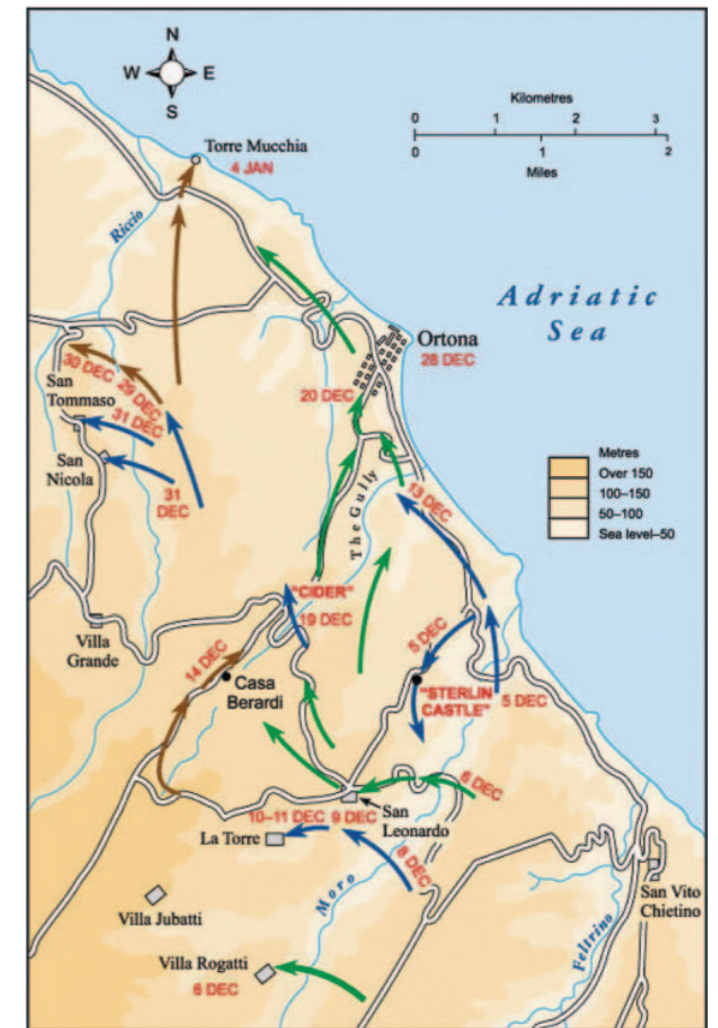
North of the Moro River the Germans had constructed a series of defensive positions to the West of Ortona which connected up with the town. With Ortona located on the Adriatic protecting the German East flank, this series of interlocking defended positions made it hard to bypass Ortona to the West. The Canadians faced elements of the 90th Panzergrenadier Division (90 Pz Gren Div) and the renowned 1st Parachute Division (1 Para Div). These soldiers were battle-hardened after many years of war and defended doggedly. The German High Command was aware that if they allowed the 8th Army to reach Pescara to the North it would allow the latter to swing West towards Rome, thus outflanking the Gustav Line.

Progress beyond the Moro River by 1 CIB and 2 CIB proved slow and was costly in men and materiel, so the Canadian Divisional Commander, Major General Vokes, decided to commit his reserve the 3 CIB. After unsuccessful frontal attacks by both the West Nova Scotia Regiment and the Carlton and York Regiment, the Royal 22e Régiment was ordered to undertake a left flanking attack with armour. At first light on 14 December the 'Van Doos' with C Squadron the Ontario Regiment attacked from the South West along the axis of the ridge road - C Company on the left and D Company on the right. Both forward companies had FOOs as artillery support was seen as fundamental to the success of the operation. Seven Sherman tanks had been mustered to support the attack. The Canadian Division was aware 90 Pz Gren Div had by this stage suffered significant losses and was significantly reduced as a fighting force. The war diary of 76 Corps recorded on the 13 December:

*"A great fighting value can no longer be ascribed to the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division. The units have become badly mixed, and the troops are exhausted. The fighting value of at least two battalions has been used up. The present positions can only be held by bringing in new battalions ...."*

76 Corps brought elements of the 3rd Parachute Regiment into the Ortona sector to reinforce 90 Pz Gren Div and elements of the 3rd Battalion moved into defend Casa Berardi.

By 1030hrs the Van Doos had a foothold on the road and OC C Coy (Capt Triquet) called up the Sherman tanks to support his advance, destroying a German tank in the process. D Coy on the right had fared less well in more complex terrain and according to the Official Canadian History<sup>1</sup> 'had straggled into the West Novas's area'. The History goes on to give



The Moro River and Ortona  
5 December 1943 - 4 January 1944

← 1ST INFANTRY BRIGADE  
← 2ND INFANTRY BRIGADE  
← 3RD INFANTRY BRIGADE  
(INFANTRY BRIGADES SUPPORTED BY ELEMENTS OF 1ST ARMOURD BRIGADE)

the following account of the capture of Casa Berardi:

*"After a week's air and artillery bombardment, the approach to the crossroads was a wasteland of trees with split limbs, burnt out vehicles, dead animals and cracked shells of houses. Now every skeleton tree and building was defended by machine-gunners backed by tanks and self-propelled guns, and paratroop snipers lurked in every fold of the ground. Against this formidable resistance our armour and infantry co-operated well. The Shermans blasted the stronger positions, while the Royal 22e cleaned out what remained. Two more German tanks were knocked out and a third put to flight. A heavy barrage caught the infantry company and reduced its strength to only 50; Triquet was the sole surviving officer. He reorganized the remnants of his force into two platoons under the two remaining sergeants and spurred them forward."*

Triquet has gone on record as saying, 'there are enemy in front of us, behind us and on our flanks,

<sup>1</sup> Lt Col GWL Nicholson, *The Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, Volume II The Canadians in Italy 1943-45*, (Edmond Cloutier, Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, Ottawa 1956).





The Sites of the Battle of Ortona reproduced from information provided by the Museo della Battaglia di Ortona

there is only one safe place that is on the objective'. By mid-afternoon they had secured the house and reorganised to wait for the inevitable counter-attack, however the enemy appeared too weak to re-capture the position. By nightfall B Coy had joined what was left of C Coy and in the early hours of the following morning the remainder of the depleted Battalion had secured the vital feature, which they proceeded to hold for the 48 hours it would take to prepare for the attack on the next objective, Cider Crossroads. Paul Triquet was the first of three Canadians to win VCs during the Italian Campaign. His citation reads as follows:

*“On 14 December 1943 during the attack on Casa Berardi, Italy, when all the other officers and half the men of his company had been killed or wounded, Captain Triquet dashed forward and, with the remaining men, broke through the enemy resistance. He then forced his way on with his small force – now reduced to two sergeants and 15 men – into a position on the outskirts of Casa Berardi.*

*They held out against attacks from overwhelming numbers until the remainder of the battalion relieved them, the next day. Throughout the action Captain Triquet's utter disregard for danger and his cheerful encouragement were an inspiration to his men.”*

The capture of the important Cider Crossroads took a couple more days but by 19 December 2 CIB's Loyal Edmonton Regiment was prepared for an attack the following day from the South West into Ortona using the SS538 as its axis. Concurrently the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada advanced up the coast road using the southern crest of the prominent gully as their start line. D Coy crossed the gully first behind a light screen of artillery fire and assaulted the high ground, scaling a steep embankment in order to establish a foothold on Ortona's outskirts. They took heavy small arms fire from German positions around the Church of Santa Maria Costantinopoli (see Town Map point 7). They took cover, returned fire and as planned focused German attention away from C Coy,

who crossed the gully second and forced the Germans to withdraw back into the main part of the town. By nightfall the Seaforth scouts had made contact on the edge of the town with the Edmontons which meant Brigadier Hoffmeister had elements of his two forward battalions on the edge of the town and his third battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI), in reserve.

The Canadian Division's assault on Ortona started with a joint attack by the Edmontons and Seaforths supported by artillery and tanks from the Three Rivers Regiment. The Edmontons went into the attack from Piazza Porta Caldari (see Town Map point 8) advancing 2 companies up, with D Coy left and B Coy right of the main street and with C Coy following up. D Coy commanded by Major Stone<sup>2</sup>, advanced in line across an open field and immediately took fire from the paratroopers hidden in trenches in front of the buildings and snipers in the roofs. Men fell in droves and the company was forced to withdraw. They tried again with the same result. The company had started the attack approximately 100 strong and after the second attempt were down to only 17 rifleman still on their feet. Stone then divided what remained of the company into 3 groups. He commanded one, his remaining officer Lieutenant Dougan another and the third his CSM, WO2 Bowen. The company faced the prospect of another suicidal attack over open ground, however Dougan noticed a small ditch running from the Edmontons' positions to a large house on the edge of the main built up area. They decided to take a risk and run up the ditch. This unexpected approach was not covered by the Germans and throwing caution to the wind, Dougan and his group bolted down the ditch and emerged by the walls of the large house. Stone quickly followed. Having got into the house unopposed they found themselves looking down on the German positions. The Canadians fired from the windows onto the Germans. The battle now raged to clear buildings and link up with B Coy on the right.

The tanks were unable to advance up the side streets due to rubble piles and routes laced with mines prepared by the Germans. All open spaces were covered by fire making it particularly dangerous for Infantry movement. It was clear the paratroopers were not going to give up Ortona easily and that it was impossible to outflank enemy strong points by moving around them down the side streets, which were blocked with rubble piles and covered by fire. By the evening of the 21 December all the Seaforths were in Ortona. They were given the task of relieving Major Stone's left flank, enabling the Edmontons to concentrate their attack down the Corso Vittorio Emanuele. During the night both sides artillery and mortars were at work. The Edmontons held the

buildings either side of the Corso Vittorio Emanuele and were within 75m of Piazza della Repubblica (see Town Map point 9). They could see a pile of rubble reported to be approximately 15ft high that the Germans had created by demolishing buildings to block the Canadian advance. Overnight the tanks withdrew to the outskirts of the town as they were too vulnerable to being destroyed by German raiding parties.

Major Stone was determined to try a different tactic the following day. He envisaged the Germans falling back to prepared positions as they gradually were forced to give up individual buildings. He therefore sought to break through and cut off the German withdrawal. He persuaded the tank commander at first light to drive straight down the street towards the rubble with sirens going, firing main armament at buildings to their front and their machine guns into buildings to the sides. Infantry would accompany the tanks on their flanks. The troop commander was not keen because armoured doctrine of the day stated that tanks had limited value in built up areas and were vulnerable to enemy anti-tank weapons but was persuaded by Stone. The tanks moved down the street in single file creating noise, confusion and initially uncertainty in the minds of the defenders. As the tanks approached the pile of rubble Stone urged the tanks to drive over it but the lead tank paused causing the others to stop. Momentum was lost and the German defence sprang into life with small arms cracking along the street. An anti-tank weapon, which because of the German siting of the weapon the tank could not engage, began to engage the lead tank. Stone recognising the problem threw a smoke grenade to cover his approach, rushed towards the weapon, threw a fragmentation grenade over the armoured shield and took shelter behind it as the grenade exploded killing the crew. Stone was awarded the MC. The attack had, however, faltered and the three German machine guns covering the killing ground ensured the Canadians had to revert to house-to-house clearance.

From the German perspective Obergefreiter Bayerlein<sup>3</sup> was in the thick of the fighting around the Piazza. He had spent the night laying mines and carrying out demolitions before taking up a position on the roof of one of the buildings to snipe at any enemy movement he saw by the light of the fires that were burning. At first light with a couple of colleagues he found himself on the roof of the small church firing rifle grenades down on top of the tanks. They attracted the attention of the tanks but managed to escape just before they were engaged by the tank's main armament. They withdrew to the basement of the building which served as their billet. When interviewed after the war he stated that the single German battalion that was holding the town

<sup>2</sup> An interview with Major Stone (inter alia) is available through the British Army Documentaries Urban Warfare WW2 FIBUA Documentary Part 2 at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrnEc4XQ2Qg>  
<sup>3</sup> Mark Zuehlke, Ortona (Douglas and McIntyre Ltd, 2013), 267.



was able to keep only 100 men or so in the line at night, allowing the others to rest in the railway tunnel below the Castello Aragonese.

The Seaforths conducted a slow, costly advance through the narrow streets of the town's old quarter. The Germans maintained the initiative with paratroopers dominating roof tops with sniper fire, machine guns controlled the streets and many buildings were heavily booby trapped. At night paratroopers infiltrated back into previously cleared positions. The Germans were veterans who had fought in Stalingrad, and employed their knowledge, skill and experience with ruthless efficiency. To advance out in the street was suicidal and the Canadians quickly learnt to work their way through the buildings using the mouse holing technique that they had developed. This involved using Beehive charges, or the many abandoned Teller anti-tank mines to blow holes in walls and quickly assault through the hole and clear the building from top to bottom. It was a dangerous, bloody and remorseless procedure, but proved effective. The Canadians noticed that when they cleared a house on one side of the street, the Germans abandoned the one on the other side thus saving the Canadians having to clear the whole street. At this stage the rate of casualties had reduced the rifle companies in the battalions engaged in the town to fewer than 30 men. The Edmontons and Seaforths were now less battalions than rifle companies, and the companies little more than platoons.

By the night of 24/25 December the Edmontons had reached the southern end of Piazza Plebiscita (*see Town Map point 11*) and were approaching Piazza San Tommaso (*see Town Map point 12*) from the South. They had maintained an axis of advance along the edge of the town although they did not expect the Germans to fall back on the Castello Aragonese as there was no withdrawal route from that location. After the battle for Dead Horse Square (*see Town Map point 10*) the Seaforths advanced north towards the coast road, leaving this section of the town to the Edmontons. It was anticipated that the German final bastion was likely to be the Cathedral in Piazza San Tommaso. Fighting continued until the night 27/28 December when under the cover of darkness what remained of the German Parachute Battalion left the town and disappeared North along the coast road.

In their efforts to advance the Infantry received support from their anti-tank guns, which were better suited than the Artillery for shooting at short ranges. The Battalion 6 pounders and the 17 pounders of the Anti-Tank Battery were employed with good effect against enemy-occupied buildings. In the early stages of the fighting two 6 pounders covered the advance of the Infantry and tanks along the Corso Vittorio

Emanuele, each firing high-explosive shells into the windows along either side of the street immediately ahead of the leading troops. When enemy fire prevented the Engineers from demolishing the barricades of rubble which blocked the streets, the same guns blew the crests off the piles, enabling tanks to mount them. As resistance in the streets stiffened, and the Infantrymen had to battle their way forward house by house, anti-tank gunners were called on to smash a way through. They obtained particularly effective results by first penetrating an obstructing wall with an armour piercing round fired at close range, and then sending a high explosive shell through the breach to burst inside. German snipers on the tops of buildings were forced back by a round from the 6 pounder which would blast a tile roof to pieces. From the ridge South East of the town two 17 pounders, firing at a range of 1500 yards, was able to rip apart buildings indicated by the Infantry.

Maintaining situational awareness at Brigade and Battalion HQ was very difficult. Indeed Brigadier Hoffmeister found it very challenging to exert any control over the battle. HQ 2 CIB was to the South of the town and to make his presence felt, and in his eyes to bolster morale, he would go into the town a couple of times a day. He would visit the Battalion HQ of both units and then move further forward to get a look at the battle's progress and to be seen to be doing so by the soldiers under his command. One does not hear much of the CO of the Edmontons in the accounts of the battle and one is left with the impression that he left much of the coordination of the battle in the capable hands of Major Stone. The Seaforths's CO seems more personally in evidence and there are reports of him in Dead Horse Square during the battle. He also must take the credit for agreeing to the organisation of a Christmas Dinner in the Santa Maria Costantinopoli churchyard and agreeing the rotation of the companies in and out of the line. The order of march was C Coy, A Coy, B Coy and D Coy – it must have taken a bit of organising! There is no doubt, however, that the fighting was controlled by company, platoon and section commanders, most of whom were filling a position above their rank due to the high level of casualties, however it must also be factored in that size of the companies was small.

The departure of the Germans from the town of Ortona was perhaps in the main part due to the operations conducted by 1 CIB named Operation Morning Glory. Whilst 2 CIB was fighting through the streets of the town, the 1 CIB battalions were forcing their way onto the high ground to the West of Ortona with the intention of exploiting to the River Riccio and seizing Torre Mucchia on the coast. Initially 1 CIB was ordered to capture San Niccolò

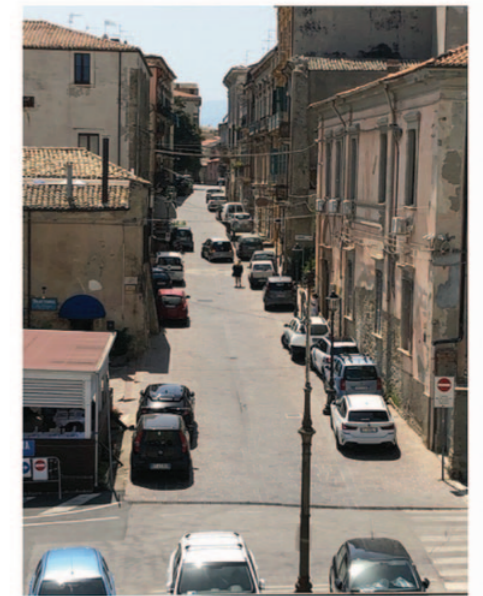
and San Tommaso to the North West of Cider Crossroads. The 48th Highlanders eventually captured these towns on New Year's Eve which enabled the Carleton & York Regiment to take Torre Mucchia on 4 January 1944. The Germans had resisted fiercely throughout as Torre Mucchia was key to maintaining access along the coast road. The Allied offensive ceased at this point due to the determined resistance of the Germans, bad weather and the culmination of the Canadian Division. The Canadian Official History reports:

*"For the Canadian Division, the transition from its first long period of intensive fighting to the less exacting conditions of static warfare came none too soon. Heavy casualties had left it temporarily unfit for further offensive action. On 3 January General Vokes reported to General Allfrey, the G.O.C. 5th Corps, that the month-long advance from the Moro to the Riccio had cost his Division casualties of 176 officers and 2163 other ranks killed, wounded or missing. An unusually high incidence of sickness had further depleted his strength by 1617 all ranks. The arrival of reinforcements amounting to 150 officers and 2258 other ranks partly met these deficiencies, which were further reduced by the return to duty of many of the sick. On 31 December, however, the 1st Division was still about 1050 below strength. In spite of replacements the G.O.C. found it no longer possible to maintain what he termed "the sharp fighting edge." Every one of his infantry battalions had suffered 50% casualties in its rifle companies; and it was by the rifle strength of its battalions that the condition of the Division had to be judged. Units in contact with the enemy could not readily absorb large numbers of reinforcements, no matter how well trained. "Without a pause for reorganisation", declared Vokes, "... the offensive power of an infantry division is bound to become spent, not for lack of offensive spirit, but simply because the quality of offensive team play within the rifle companies had deteriorated."*

The contribution made by Canadian troops was summarised as follows by Major General Vokes in his report on the Ortona offensive:

*"We smashed the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division and we gave the 1st German Parachute Division a mauling which it will long remember."*

After the War, the significance of the Battle of Ortona was minimised by others, perhaps because it did not have a significant impact on the Italian Campaign. What is clear from visiting Ortona is that a close bond of friendship was established between the people of Ortona and their liberators that has endured. The town museum and the Canadian memorials demonstrate the perpetuation of the links, as do the excellent descriptions that are provided on the town signs at the key points of the battle. The beautifully maintained Commonwealth War Graves Commission Moro River Cemetery provides the resting place for 1,375 Canadian servicemen. All these factors combine to make Ortona an excellent battlefield tour location.



*The streets of Ortona today*



# MIRUS BATTERY ON GUERNSEY

James Porter

Most people are aware that the self-governing Crown Dependencies of the Channel Islands were occupied by the Germans soon after the fall of France in 1940. Furthermore, most people are aware that the islands were heavily fortified by the occupying German troops and that some of the fortifications still exist and may be visited by tourists. However, few people are aware of the fascinating story behind one particular German gun battery on Guernsey – ‘Batterie Mirus’.



The story of Batterie Mirus began when, with planning far advanced for Operation Barbarossa – the invasion of Soviet Russia in June 1941. Hitler declared that the Channel Islands would remain forever under German control – even after any agreed peace with Britain - and that they should be fortified to withstand any British attacks while Germany concentrated its forces against Russia. Plans were drawn up for the provision of long-range artillery batteries for Guernsey, Jersey and Alderney, with calibres up to 38cm (or 15" - essentially battleship guns). The intention was to prevent an invasion of the Channel Islands, prevent any British naval incursion into the Bay of St Malo and protect the coastal convoy route between Cherbourg and Brest. However, no 15" guns were available – current production being used for the battleships Bismarck and Tirpitz, and as spares. New construction of such guns would take years, and so the Kriegsmarine looked for an alternative. On the 18th October 1941 they reported to Hitler that they would be able to send to the Channel Islands four 30.5 cm (12") guns with a supply of one thousand rounds of ammunition. Top priority was to be given to constructing a battery on Guernsey which was to house the 12" guns and it was expected that this would take 14 months to construct.

But.....where were these massive guns to come from?.....and here I need to take you back in time, and halfway across a continent, to Imperial Russia in 1911. At the Nikolaieff Yard on the Black Sea in August of that year, the battleship *Imperator Aleksandr III* was laid down. She was completed in June 1917, displaced 22,600 tons and mounted 12 x 30.5cm (12") guns, in 4 triple turrets. The ship was taken over and operated

in the Black Sea by White Russian forces until their defeat, eventually fleeing to Bizerta in French North Africa, where she arrived in February 1921, and was abandoned. The Soviets demanded her return, but the French government decided to retain her in lieu of unpaid French loans to the Tsarist government. Years passed before she was finally scrapped in 1935. But her heavy guns were saved from scrapping and later sold to Finland in Sep 1939 on the outbreak of the Russo-Finnish Winter War. Three Finnish cargo ships departed Bizerta in January and February 1940 with four guns each, bound for Helsinki. The first two ships reached their destination safely. The third ship, ‘Nina’, however, arrived in Norway on the 11th of March 1941, two days before the signing of the treaty which ended the Russo-Finnish War. Not surprisingly, the Finns’ interest in the guns evaporated, and the ‘Nina’



*Imperator Aleksandr III - The battleship the guns came from*

languished in Bergen where she was caught up in the German invasion of Norway.

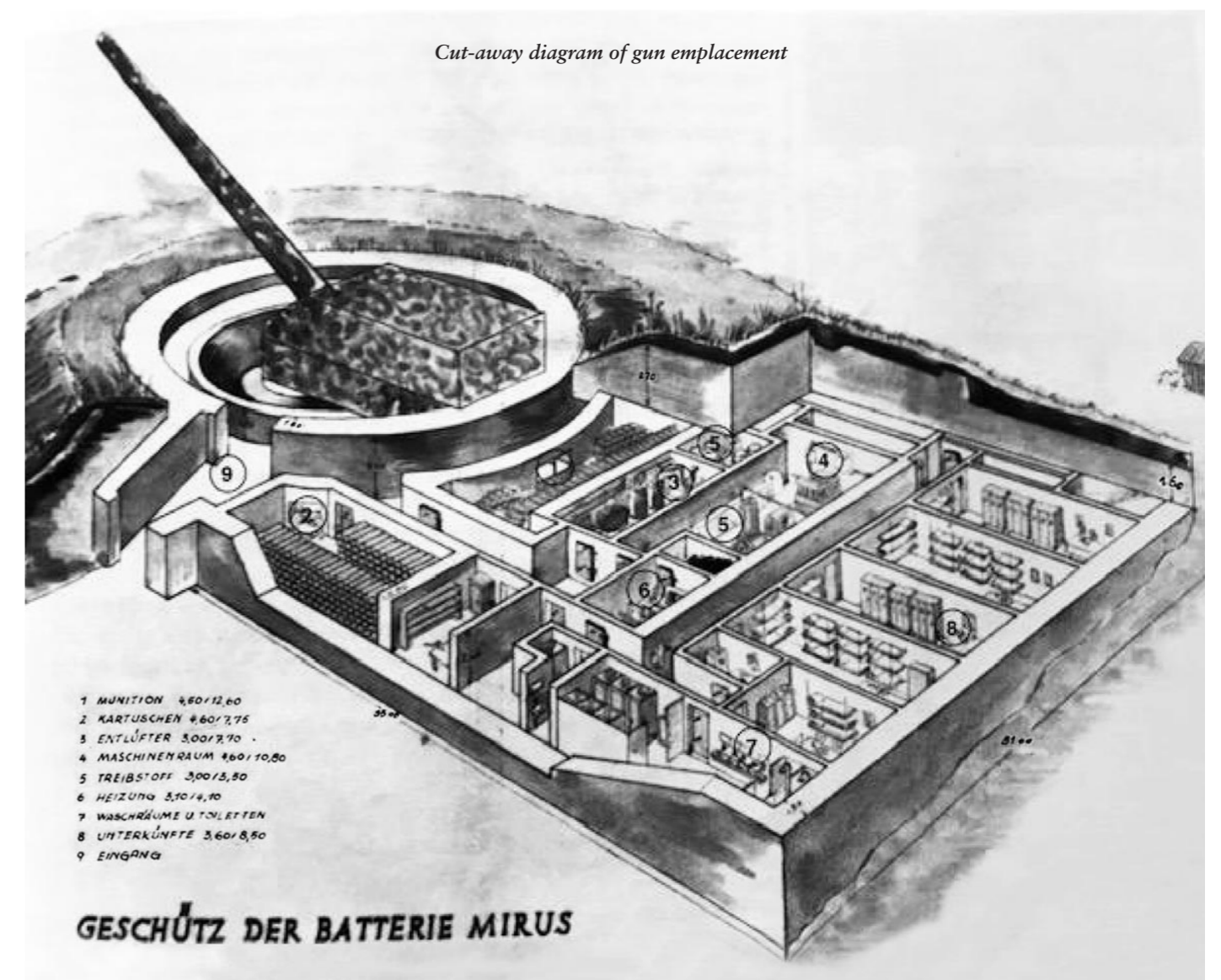
The Germans sent the four guns to Krupps of Essen where four single turrets were constructed for the guns which were brought up to modern standards: elevation was increased from 15 to 48 degrees – thereby greatly increasing maximum range to 38 kms or 23 miles. Rate of fire was 1.5 rounds per minute. Hand rather than power ramming was employed, and a door to the rear of the turret had to be opened in order to use the very long hand ramrod.

Once Krupps had completed modernising the guns and manufacturing the mountings, the four guns were sent to Guernsey. But transporting these 15-meter-long guns, each weighing 52,000 kgs (or over 50 tons), from the Ruhr to Guernsey was no simple task! They arrived by rail in St Malo in December 1941 under conditions of great secrecy. In the meantime, much preparatory work had been started. Because the harbour cranes in St Peter Port, Guernsey, were incapable of lifting the gun barrels, a 100-ton capacity Dutch floating crane was towed by tug, first to Cherbourg, and then to

Guernsey – arriving on 29th November 1941. The guns themselves were transported by a flat-bottomed river barge which made 4 return trips in February and March 1942, in absolute secrecy, between St Malo and Guernsey without incident.

Once each gun was alongside in St Peter Port harbour, lifting cables were attached and the wooden travel bracing chocks removed prior to it being lifted off the barge by the floating crane and transferred to an awaiting vehicle. This vehicle had been specially built and consisted of a box girder platform fitted with no less than 24 pairs of steerable wheels. It was pulled by four 12-ton semi-tracked prime movers along a carefully selected route at walking pace. One or more of the journeys was photographed by an official German photographer (as well as at least one clandestine photo by a local civilian) and so the route may be accurately followed.

At the site overlooking the western coast of the island chosen for the siting of Batterie Mirus, the building work was so extensive that it could not have been hidden from aerial view – and, indeed, it was





regularly photographed by British aircraft. Nevertheless, once completed the guns were camouflaged. Two were heavily draped with camouflage netting, and two had a fake bungalow built over the turret.

The first gun to be completed was test-fired on 13th April 1942, and, by 29th June all four were capable of a limited manual operation. By August all electrical power systems were on-line and the guns were formally declared operational. The name of 'Mirus', chosen for the battery, came from the name of a German Kriegsmarine officer who was killed in an RAF strafing attack while en route by ship from Guernsey to Alderney. The operation of transporting and emplacing the guns had been completed in only 6 months.....a major achievement! The construction project was enormous: much land had been confiscated, hundreds of foreign labourers were brought over from France to work on the site, and a total of some 47,000 cubic metres of concrete consumed.

So, after all this work, what was the outcome....how did Batterie Mirus affect the Second World War? The answer is: very little. Occasionally, Allied naval units probed the Channel Islands' defences to try to establish the maximum range of the defending guns... .but the Germans would hold fire at longer ranges in an effort to conceal this. Another reason for German reluctance to fire at longer ranges was because the guns were prone to damage to the recoil system if fired near maximum elevation. This was borne out on the night of 8th June 1943 when fire was opened on a target detected by radar. After 2 rounds Gun Number 4 broke its trunnion rings. One round later the same thing happened to Gun Number 3. Gun Number 1 also became damaged. Engineers from the firm Krupps had to be brought in to mend the guns, achieving this within 3 weeks.

In the early hours of 2nd November 1943, a target was detected by radar approaching from the north. Batterie Mirus and 7 other batteries opened fire. Batterie Mirus fired 8 rounds, with other batteries firing a further 521! The target continued to approach Guernsey until, at a range of only 7 kilometres, it was visually identified as a collapsed British barrage balloon, floating on the sea, with another balloon attached to it by a cable, and hovering above!

After the Liberation of the Channel islands, The States of Guernsey – the island government – decided against retaining any German fortifications for historical or tourism purposes.....believing that interest would be



One gun lifted off the barge in St Peter Port



Camouflaged as a bungalow!



Firing!

short-lived! And so, most of the German heavy weapons and equipment were dumped at sea in the Hurd Deep off Alderney. Batterie Mirus itself was dismantled, the range finders removed to England for examination, while the guns were eventually cut up in 1951 for scrap. The massive concrete gun pits and associated underground ammunition and machinery bunkers are still there – one converted into a school outdoor theatre, one into a sunken garden and one is a paintball combat zone!

# A PERSONAL JOURNEY

Eugenie Brooks

**My great friend and retired Metropolitan Police colleague Helen Capstick has been asking me for ages to take her and her 16 year old daughter Katie on a short battlefield trip to Belgium.**

We eventually managed to find suitable dates between school terms and drove over to Ypres for a long weekend. We visited the standard sites but I'd also researched casualties buried/commemorated in the area with the surname Capstick and we visited several of them.

We are both happily retired Metropolitan Police officers and served together in the 1980s at Kensington. We decided to visit a fellow Met Officer who lies at rest in Underhill Farm, Belgium just at the back of the Ploegstreet Memorial to the Missing.

He was PC Francis Horwood Vercoe, born in Hemel Hempstead, Herts in 1889. He joined the Met Police on 12th January 1914, warrant number 103596. He served on B Division (which covered Kensington where Helen and I served) and had the



Eugenie, Kate and Helen at the Menin Gate

shoulder number 842. He also served at South Fulham before transferring to Woolwich in late 1914.

On the 7th June 1915, he enlisted into the Royal Garrison Artillery and served with the 145th Siege Battery. He first served overseas on the 13th July 1915. On the 14th Feb 1916 he was wounded by shell fire in the side, hand and right leg but returned to the front within a month.

On the 26 April 1916 he suffered an accidental fracture to his right fibula. This injury allowed him some home leave. He eventually rejoined his unit in August 1916.

Francis was killed in action on the 4th June 1917 and he now lies at rest in Underhill Farm Cemetery, Belgium.

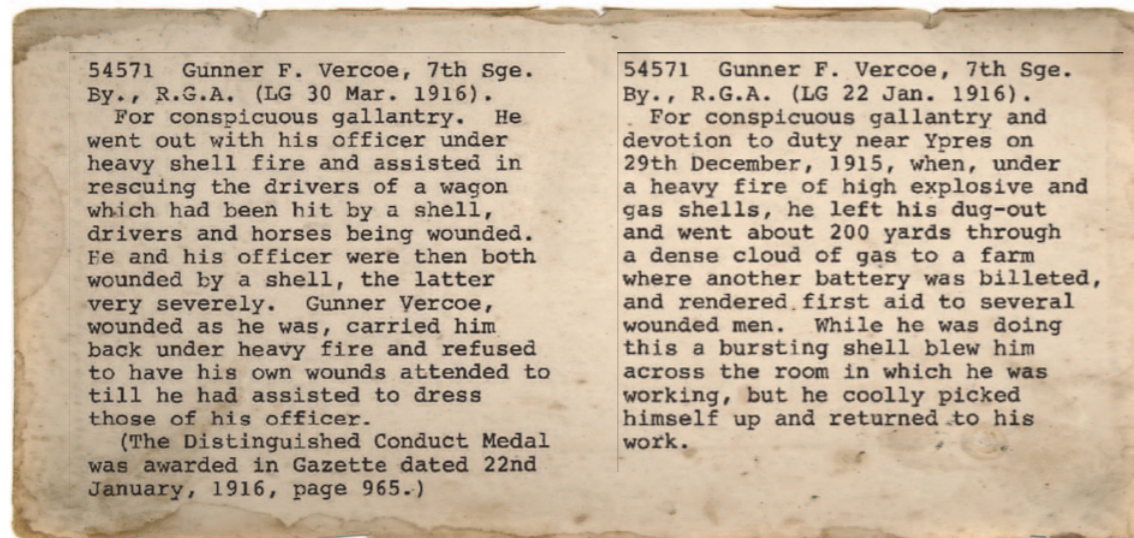
Twice during his short service, he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct medal for bravery. A copy of the citations are on the next page.

For us, visiting a fellow Metropolitan police officer who had patrolled the same streets as us was a very moving experience. He was an extremely brave young man who deserves to be remembered by us all



PC Francis Horwood Vercoe





The Distinguished Conduct Award citation



- we both think him as 'one of Ours'. We attended the Menin Gate ceremony that evening and placed a poppy wreath in memory of the Police Officers of all Forces who are named on the Gate and buried in nearby cemeteries. Helen was very honoured to be chosen to read the Exhortation which was the icing on the cake for us all.

## GUIDEbooks:



### BLOODY VERRIERES The I. SS-Panzerkorps's Defence of the Verrières-Bourguébus Ridges - Volume II

By Arthur W Gullachsen

When we guide in Normandy many of us do not get the chance to venture far from the beaches and DZs of D Day. If however, you have cause to venture inland to look at the Verrières and Bourguébus ridges then you could do much worse than to examine the two volumes of Bloody Verrières by Arthur Gullachsen. The two volumes make up a highly detailed tactical and operational analysis of a relatively slender slice of the Normandy campaign concentrating on the actions of I SS Panzerkorps. The author is a Canadian Army officer and academic and the effort features heavily on the Allied side. The detailed maps aid understanding as do the useful appendices and the end notes demonstrate the level of research that has gone into this book. While not a battlefield guide book these two volumes will provide excellent context before setting out to explore the Verrières and Bourguébus ridges.

Review by John Greenacre

Published by Casemate  
RRP £34.95  
paperback, pp272



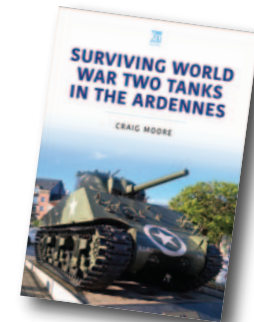
### HITLER'S AIR BRIDGES The Luftwaffe's Supply Operations of the Second World War

By Dmitry Degtev and Dmitry Zubov

Although primarily focused on the Eastern Front this book does have a lot to offer to guides working in NW Europe. However, it's not an easy read, the translation from Russian is a little clunky in places, and it is academic in its tone. That said, the authors have produced a comprehensive reference source that charts the rise and fall of the German airlift capability using transports and gliders of all types. Ideal if you want to understand the operational use of Luftwaffe Air Transport.

Review by Mike Peters

Published by Pen & Sword Ltd  
RRP £25.00  
hardback, pp265



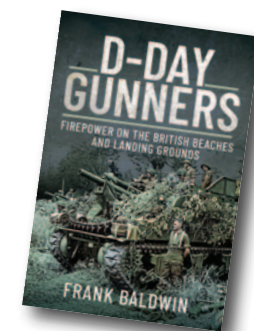
### SURVIVING WORLD WAR TWO TANKS IN THE ARDENNES

By Craig Moore

This is the latest in the Key Books series on surviving armoured vehicles. The format is straightforward, detailed, and well-illustrated. Each entry includes sat nav directions, a physical description of each vehicle or memorial, and importantly from a guide's perspective, general historical notes on the vehicle type supported with the individual vehicle's own back-story. There are over 40 vehicles listed in this volume, a simple reference source that will add additional depth to any itinerary.

Review by Mike Peters

Published by Key Books  
RRP £15.99  
paperback, pp112



### D-DAY GUNNERS Firepower on the British Beaches and Landing Grounds

By Frank Baldwin

Nothing surprises me about this book. Founded on research by the legendary Will Townend, and then taken forward by another Gunner Guru, Frank Baldwin, it is excellent. It's a really well-balanced mix of Artillery history, battlefield guidebook and a superb narrative account. You won't go far wrong if you invest in a copy of what is an ideal introduction to the role of artillery in the Normandy campaign. An ideal source for tour planning, and for dipping into when actually roaming the battlefields. Boom! Boom! Boom!

Review by Mike Peters

Published by Pen & Sword  
RRP £25.00  
hardback, pp272

## EVENTguide 2023/24

- 19-21 May Guild Event – Jersey Weekend - For further information see Guild website or contact Marc Yates on: [governance@gbg-international.com](mailto:governance@gbg-international.com)
- 11 Aug Guild Golf Championships - For further information please e-mail Graeme Cooper: [graeme@corporatebattlefields.com](mailto:graeme@corporatebattlefields.com)
- 18 Aug Badged Guides Dinner - For further information please e-mail Graeme Cooper: [graeme@corporatebattlefields.com](mailto:graeme@corporatebattlefields.com)
- 13-17 Sep Berlin Cold War Recce - For further information please e-mail Bob Shaw: [rtshaw@hotmail.com](mailto:rtshaw@hotmail.com)
- 3-5 Nov Normandy Recce - For further information please contact Simon Burgess: [sfb22@hotmail.com](mailto:sfb22@hotmail.com)
- 1 Dec Christmas Lunch 2023 - For further information please contact Bob Darby [bobdarby@btinternet.com](mailto:bobdarby@btinternet.com)
- 26-28 Jan '24 Guild Annual Conference and AGM - The venue will be the Doubletree Hotel, Lincoln; more details will follow in due course.
- 11-15 Mar '24 GBG Ypres Recce. - Interested members please contact John Cotterill: [john.cotterill@btinternet.com](mailto:john.cotterill@btinternet.com)

Whilst there is a full programme of events planned for next year, we are still encouraging members to organise localised events. Help in planning any event is available from  
David Harvey [events@gbg-international.com](mailto:events@gbg-international.com)



# 10 Questions:

Name: Rob Woolsey



Age: 49

Nationality: Canadian

Home Location: Geilenkirchen,  
Germany & Wasaga Beach, Ontario  
Canada

Sole Trader: Woolsey's War Walks

Validating: Yes



In each edition of 'Despatches', we will be introducing a member of the Guild. In this edition, it is Rob Woolsey.

- 1. How long have you been interested in battlefields and what was it that initially attracted your interest?** I have been interested in battlefields from a very young age and I was attracted because of my love of military history. The more I read, researched, and learned, the more I wanted to tell the stories of the people and the events that happened.
  - 2. Have any experiences stood out?** The experience that stands out is the first time I took a participant on Canada's First World War Tour to their ancestor's grave marker. She was the first family member to ever visit, and the family had very little knowledge other than his name and that he had fallen. I did the research into his service and where he was commemorated, and luckily it was at La Targette British Cemetery, on the way to the hotel. We made a stop at the cemetery just for her and walking with her to the grave was very moving and honour.
  - 3. What do you enjoy the most about battlefield guiding?** I enjoy telling the story. The discovery of the people who fought, what they did, and their life tied to the actions that took place and bringing them to life for the participants. If I am lucky, I can help families discover their ancestor's story and make it part of the of a stand.
  - 4. What is your favourite stand, location or battlefield and why?** My favourite stand is the 13th (Royal Highlanders of Canada) Battalion at St Julien. I tell this story from the Brooding Soldier as you can see where most of the action occurred. It is my favourite because the officers in the battle were the elite of Canada at the time, men who only knew how to be successful as many of them were millionaire businessmen, bilingual, and long serving soldiers.
- They were the Canadian myth personified and their actions helped slow the German advance.
- 5. Which battlefield would you like to visit in the future?** I would really like to visit Sicily and follow the 1st Canadian Division during Operation Husky. It is an interesting battle to me as it was the first campaign for the Canadians of the Second World War, and the only one I have not been to yet in Europe from either war.
  - 6. What have you enjoyed the most about being a member of the Guild?** I have most enjoyed the Guild Recces which have helped me develop as a guide as well as introduce me to some of the most amazing people. The first one I attended was on the Somme in 2021 and I felt welcomed by everyone. I learned so much from all the other guides it made me want to attend and do more guiding and events.
  - 7. If there was a fire and you could only save one battlefield-related book or prop, what would you save and why?** If I had to save only one book or prop, I think it would probably be my copy of the 24th (Victoria Rifles of Canada) Battalion Official History. I am connected to this battalion as my Great Grandfather served in the battalion and is mentioned in it. I was always drawn to Courcellette and could not explain why until I was going through my Great Grandfather's service record and I notice a line for the first time, that had him posted to the 24th Battalion in August 1916. I decided to go online and find a copy, which I was able to do, and read it cover to cover, and realised that I had been where he had been when fighting in and around Courcellette.
  - 8. What type of group do you think is the most challenging to lead on a tour?** For me the most challenging group is a Canadian military group, as they understand the military but mostly know the myths and legends of their regiments or corps and not the real story.
  - 9. What's the best tip, story or nugget of information you have been given by a fellow battlefield guide?** The best tip I ever got from a fellow battlefield guide was about how to present, and he told me to gesture more as I pointed out things. Best tip ever.
  - 10. What is the funniest or most dramatic thing you have seen on tour?** The funniest thing that I have seen on a tour was the 'Toast Tradition', where participants toast the fallen at cemeteries we visit. The day starts strong but I do not know how much they will remember by the end of the day.

## NEWmembers:

William Anderson  
David Barker  
Phillip Baxter  
David Brown

Christopher Dorman-  
O'Gowan  
Marcus Evans  
Ben Godfrey

Hugh Mackay  
Elliot Metcalfe  
Matthew Mockford  
Lawrence Nicholls

John Petteit  
Jordan Strate  
David Vassallo  
Arnold Wever

New members who have been welcomed to the Guild between the AGM 2023 and the date of publication.