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Friends of The FUSILIERS MUSEUM OF NORTHUMBERLAND

Trustees and staff wish you all a
Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

Battlefield Tour – Italy, May 2019

By Major Bill McDonald BEM

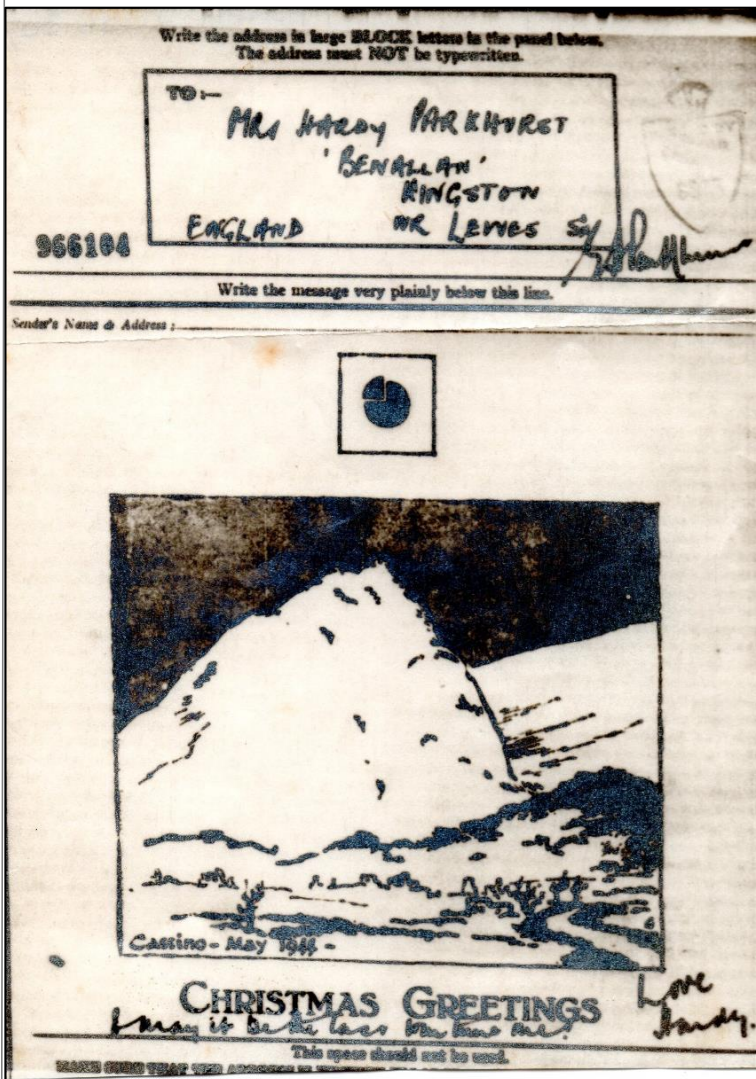
In May, the Regimental Headquarters organised a battlefield tour to Italy to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Cassino. The tour began at the sweeping beaches of Salerno in the south-west, and followed the route of the Allied advance northwards through Italy up to the mountain range which the Germans had strongly fortified: The Gustav Line. This formidable defensive position blocked the road to Rome and incorporated Monte Cassino, crowned with its famous monastery.

I had a particular interest in joining the tour. My father served in the 2nd Battalion Royal Northumberland Fusiliers (2RNF) which was a support weapons battalion equipped with Vickers Machine guns, 4.2 inch mortars and Bofors anti-aircraft guns.

Continued overleaf



Corporal L Honeybun, Fusilier M Quinnin and Fusilier Cherry, 2RNF, operating a 4.2in mortar near the River Gari, Italy, May 1944.



Christmas Card, with a sketch of Monte Cassino, sent by Hardy Parkhurst to his wife, 1944. Major Parkhurst served with 2RNF from 1941 to 1946. His book "Diary of a Soldier" was published in 1993.

At the coal face

The museum is pleased to be working with Woodhorn Museum to present a series of small, annual displays demonstrating the connection between Fusiliers in the north east and Northumberland's mining heritage.

The first display will focus on Sergeant Herbert Coates (centre) who worked at Ellington Pit. He served with the Northumberland Fusiliers in the First World War and was awarded a Military Medal for bravery.



from front page

The Battalion landed in the first waves at Salerno and immediately came into action in the battle for the bridgehead. Subsequently, it fought in every major action, not least at Cassino. In preparation I studied the Unit's war diary lodged in the museum archives, and although the tour was not focused on 2RNF, I was still able, to some extent, to retrace my father's footsteps – a poignant experience.

The Battle of Cassino was, in fact, 4 separate battles starting on 12 January 1944, and concluding when the Germans finally withdrew in the face of a determined and costly attack by the Polish Corps, coinciding with a flanking breakthrough by the French on 18 May 1944.

To climb the mountains is a daunting and strenuous task, but to have done so with an enemy towering above and trying to kill you with machine guns, mortars and artillery would seem impossible. Throughout the winter of 1944 the weather was atrocious with driving winds, rain, sleet and snow. During daylight hours, men sheltered behind basic sangars and in shallow scrapes; movement brought death. Many suffered from hypothermia.

We visited cemeteries of the combatants: German, Polish, British and Commonwealth. Casualties were high: over 55,000 Allied dead and wounded, and approximately half that number of Germans.

Our thanks to Bill McDonald for this article.

"Last summer, Samantha Levy from the Fusiliers Museum visited school, and allowed us to explore some of the artefacts from the museum. We were also honoured to be given a private tour of the museum in October..."

Duchess's Community High School Poetry Club



Soldier turned Surgeon

Joseph Eatough, was born in Preston, Lancashire in 1854. When his father re-married, he and his brother ran away to live with their maternal grandparents, named Holden. At 15 years old Joseph joined the 5th Fusiliers using the alias 'Joseph Smith' and falsifying his age.

He served ten years with the Regiment in India and fought in the Afghan Campaigns of 1878-1880. During his service he gained a First Class Education Certificate.

In his civilian life, Joseph qualified as a Doctor at Aberdeen University and practised in Preston. His army paybook, discharge certificate and a captured Afghan dagger were recently donated to the museum by his late grandson's widow.



Dr Joseph Eatough Holden, Preston's first ambulance surgeon.



Printed in Alnwick

Representatives of Alnwick Castle's Archives, the Fusiliers Museum of Northumberland and Bailiffgate Museum received printer's proofs from the early 1800's, by William Davison (1781-1859), printer and publisher of Alnwick. The papers were purchased at auction and presented by an anonymous donor.

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