

The Monte Cassino Society

Stan Pearson

*This is the first instalment of Stan Pearson's account of his research into the death of his father, **Sergeant John Pearson** of the **Lincolnshire Regiment**, on 5th January 1944.*

My first childhood recollection was sitting on my dad's knee. It must have been in 1946--- I would have been four years old and my dad



Sgt John Pearson, his wife Peggy and his son Stanley

was in army uniform. From that first recollection until the day he died, I honestly cannot recall one single moment when he was not just 'a brilliant dad'. Additionally he was a wonderful husband, grandfather, father-in-law, uncle and

friend---in fact, I do not know any one who had met him who did not respect and admire him---all who knew him well, loved Hugh Sharples dearly.

I can't remember when I first learned that I had another dad, John Pearson, who had been killed in World War 2 and that my

mother had been remarried after the war to Sergeant Hugh Sharples. My family dealt with this so naturally that I don't think there was a particular day when I was told.

Having two dads who both loved me dearly now presents me with a difficulty in that some people may not understand which 'dad' I am referring to and therefore I shall refer to 'Dad Sharples' as 'dad' and 'Dad Pearson' as 'father'.

Whenever my dad talked to me about my father, he always did so sensitively and had great respect for him. My mother had given me all father's letters, photographs, postcards and other memorabilia for safekeeping and asked me if I wanted to go to Italy to see his grave. Although I was sure that if I went to see father's grave, I would not offend dad, I loved dad so much I was not prepared to take the risk and declined.

Regrettably, dad died on the 17th February 2001 and it was only the following year that I felt comfortable enough to go and see my father's grave.

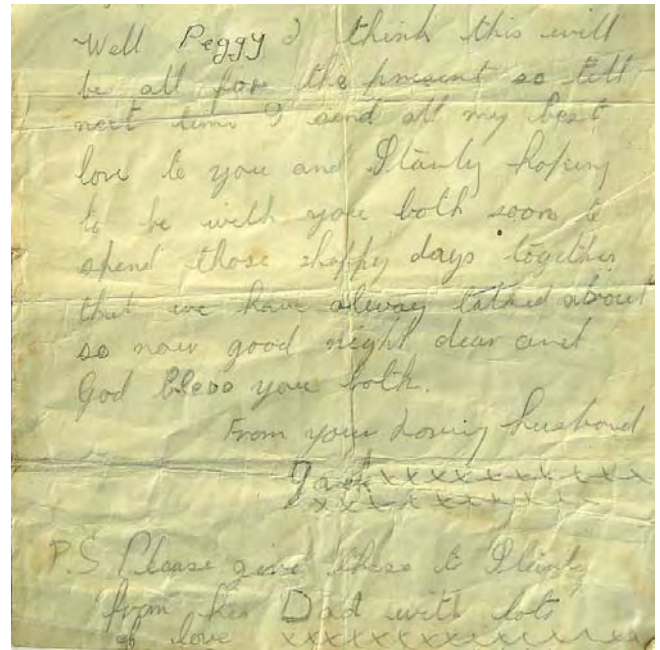
Preparation for my first visit to Italy, March to May 2002

My father was originally in the East Lancashire Regiment but was subsequently transferred to the Lincolnshire Regiment. As I mentioned, mother had given me my father's entire memorabilia including letters, photographs, postcards etc. The letters, some of which are not dated, were all sent to my mother during the war. I retrieved the memorabilia from my attic where they had been kept for decades and emotionally read the letters, etc. With permission of my mother, some of this memorabilia is copied in this account. My mother had also given me a copy of the booklet '1939-1945 The War Dead of the British Commonwealth and Empire, Cassino War Cemetery'. This booklet identifies that my father was killed in action on 5th January 1944 and buried in Plot 7, Row F, Grave 15.

I had always assumed that my father had been killed in the battle of Monte Cassino. However, a late friend of my father, Lance Morris, who served in the same regiment, told me that he thought my father had been killed in a village called Castle Forte. I searched on the internet for this village but had no success.

Visit to Italy 10th to 13th of May 2002

Armed with this elementary information, my 82 year old mother Peggy, my wife Margaret and I visited Italy from the 10th to the 13th of May 2002. We immediately went to the Cassino War Cemetery and said prayers beside my father's grave. The cemetery contains the graves of 4265 allied soldiers and a memorial to a further 4000 soldiers who gave their lives and have no known graves. The cemetery is simply stunning.



My father's last letter



My father's last Christmas card

We stayed in the Forum Palace hotel, in Cassino and whilst there I purchased a book called 'foto di guerra' (photo of war). This book contains graphic and harrowing photographs of the Second World War in and

No. *D113/CAS/LMS*
(If replying, please quote above No.)

Army Form B. 104—82a.

Infantry
York

Record Office,
24.1.1944.

Dear Madam,

It is my painful duty to inform you that a report has been received from the War Office notifying the death of:—
(No.) *3390202* (Rank) *Sgt.*
(Name) *PEARSON John*
(Regiment) *6th Battalion Lincolnshire Regiment*
which occurred *while serving with the Central Postal Directory*
on the *5th of January 1944*
The report is to the effect that he *was killed in action*

I am to express the sympathy and regret of the Army Council at the soldier's death in his Country's service.

I am,
Madam,
Your obedient servant,
T. R. R. R.
for Major
for Officer in Charge of Records (F.T.O.)

(75030) 20220—50m 9/39 M&C Ltd. T96 Form B. 104—82a/6

PEARSON.—In memory of my dear husband, killed in action, January 5th, 1944.
I have lost my sole companion,
A life linked with my own;
Day by day I sadly miss him
As I wander on alone:
I who loved him, love him yet,
He's mine to remember when others forget.
Always happy, always content,
Loved and respected wherever he went.
To a beautiful life came a sudden end.
He dies as he lived, everyone's friend.
From his loving wife, Peggy.
—J. Alfred's Court, Chorley.
Jenna, bless my daddy.
—From Stanley.

Extract from Chorley Guardian, 4th February 1944

The information that devastated my mother

around Cassino. On page 11 of this book is a photograph of a village badly damaged by the fighting and called Castelforte. I realised immediately that this was the village that Lance Morris had referred to, but I had put the English spelling into the internet and hence could find no match. We visited Castelforte and said prayers in the church with a curious mixture of sadness and relief

that we had found the village where my father had been killed.

We made numerous visits to the Cassino War Cemetery. On one visit we noted that there were seventeen other soldiers buried adjacent to my father, all killed on 5th January 1944 and all from the Lincolnshire Regiment. My mother recorded the details of these soldiers in her diary, information which later would prove to be invaluable.

The next instalment of Stan's account will appear in the supplement to our Winter newsletter.

Stan Pearson

Research: June 2002 to April 2004

This is the second instalment of Stan Pearson's account of his research into the death of his father, Sergeant John Pearson of the Lincolnshire Regiment, on 5th January 1944. The first instalment appeared in the supplement to the Fall 2006 newsletter.

I was so impressed by my visit to Italy that I decided to carry out some research to try and find out exactly where my father was killed. I wanted to know which 'street corner' he was killed on in Castelforte so that at some future date I could return to the exact location, lay a wreath there and say some prayers. I realised that as some 60 years had elapsed since his death this would be an extremely difficult, if not an impossible task.

I sat down and thought 'where do I go from here - Internet, Ministry of Defence, Library, Lincolnshire Regiment, Imperial War Museum, Public Records Office, Commonwealth War Graves Commission?' etc. etc.

After some deliberation, I logged on to the Internet and searched for 'Commonwealth War Graves Commission'. Their website had very little information that would help with my research, but I was able to download a certificate commemorating my father's death.

Next, I searched the Internet for 'Lincolnshire Regiment'. After 275 years of service, the Lincolnshire Regiment had, in 1960, been amalgamated with the Northamptonshire Regiment. The Northampton Regiment (along with numerous other regiments) had subsequently been amalgamated with the Royal Anglian Regiment. Needless to say, the Royal Anglian Regiment had no records of Sergeant John Pearson. A rather inauspicious start!

However, the Internet did provide a very useful lead, which was The Museum of Lincolnshire Life, which had a section on the Lincolnshire Regiment. I contacted the Principal Keeper at the museum who advised that we should first contact the Ministry of Defence Records Office and request them to provide the Service Record

of Sergeant John Pearson. We contacted the MoD and received a reply.

From the information obtained from father's memorabilia, my mother and the MoD, I was able to construct the following chronological table:

Sergeant John Pearson (Information in Italics obtained from MoD)

16/02/16	Born Trafalgar St, Chorley
16/05/40	Called up - East Lancashire Regiment - Blackpool, Squires Gate Reception Camp. <i>Deemed to have been enlisted into the East Lancashire Regiment embodied Territorial Army as a Private and posted to the Infantry Training Regiment.</i>
21/06/40	Bury, Wharf Mill (internment camp). <i>Posted to 6 (Holding and Depot) Battalion</i>
29/06/1940	Married
13/09/40	<i>Appointed paid acting Lance Corporal</i>
August 1940	Eccles, Manchester
27/01/41	<i>Appointed paid acting Corporal</i>
01/04/41	<i>Appointed paid Lance Sergeant</i>
09/04/41	<i>Appointed paid Sergeant</i>
17/04/41	<i>Granted war substantive rank of Corporal</i>
30/06/41	His son Stan was born
August 1941	Blackburn
16/10/41	<i>Granted war substantive rank of Sergeant</i>
12/11/42	<i>Posted to 44 Primary Training Wing</i>
20/02/43	Bodmin Moor, Cornwall <i>Posted to 19 Infantry Training Centre</i>
March 1943	Great Yarmouth
April 1943	Depart from Liverpool by sea
14/04/43	Tunisia/Algeria
29/04/43	<i>Transferred to the Lincolnshire Regiment and posted to 6 Battalion 'A' Company, 7th Platoon.</i>
09/09/43	Lands at Salerno, Italy
05 January 44	<i>Killed in action Italy</i>
16/05/40 - 05/01/44	<i>Service with Colours. Medals Issued: 1939-45 Star, Africa Star with 1st Army Clasp, Italy Star, Defence Medal, War Medal 1939-45</i>

Buried in Cassino War Cemetery - Plot V11. Row F. Grave 15.

The Principal Keeper at the Museum of Lincolnshire Life also referred me to the book 'The History of the Tenth Foot 1919 - 1950' by LC Gates, published in 1953. This book covers the history of the Lincolnshire Regiment from 1919 to 1950. When I started to read the book, it was evident that it provided an accurate chronological history of the Lincolnshire Regiment, compiled mainly from official War Diaries. I read the sections in the book that covered the period 29th April 1943 (the date my father was transferred to the Lincolnshire Regiment) to the 5th January 1944 (the date of my father's death). This enabled me to trace the Regiment's (and hence my father's) footsteps through North Africa, Sicily, the Salerno Landings and up through Italy.

I then read the section that referred to Castelforte and to my dismay, it demonstrated that my father could not have been killed there, as the Regiment did not reach this village until some weeks after my father's death. I now had the sad task of telling my mother that we had not been at the place where father was killed when we emotionally said our prayers in the church at Castelforte.

I also felt frustrated because I was now even further away from achieving the distant goal of finding the exact position at which my father had been killed. However, my research was about to take a leap in the right direction. Page 180 and

181 of the book 'The History of the Tenth Foot 1919 - 1950' is headed 'The Action of the River Peccia' and covers the date that my father was killed (5th January 1944). An extract from the text follows:

The action of the River Peccia

At the end of December 1943, the 6th Battalion, Lincolnshire Regiment again went into the line, relieving the York and Lancasters for four days on the River Peccia between the Montes Maggiore and Lunga. The weather was bitterly cold; snow and rain fell frequently, and there was no cover from the elements.

On the 3rd January 1944 preparations were made for an attack across the Peccia on the night of 4th /5th January. In this operation, the Brigade had the task of protecting the left flank of the 6th United States Armoured Infantry, who were to capture an isolated hill - Monte Porchia - covering the approaches to Cassino. The York and Lancasters were on the right and the 6th Lincolnshires were on the left. The enemy was known to occupy strong localities next to the river and to be extremely sensitive to any aggressive move. The country was comparatively flat and thickly wooded. The river was only 25 feet wide and in the dry season would present no difficulty to infantry; but in the winter, swollen by rain and snow from the mountains, it became a formidable obstacle. Two fords had, however, been found and these were to be used by "B" Company and Battle Patrol, who would capture a small bridgehead upon which "A" Company would pass through to the final objective.

"B" Company, Commanded by Major Glenny got across the river in the moonlight without difficulty and after a heavy concentration of artillery, quickly captured a group of farms, which was their objective.

The Battle Patrol was not so lucky and was unable to get across the river at the second ford. The enemy was raining down shells and mortar bombs on the river line. It was quite the heaviest artillery fire so far encountered and casualties began to mount up. The Battle Patrol, searching for a crossing place was caught in a heavy concentration from a Nebelwerfer. The Regimental Aid Post received a direct hit and both the Doctor Capt Lart and the Padre Rev. CRW Ellis were killed.

As soon as information was received of "B" Company's success, "A" Company was ordered to cross the river and pass through. Unfortunately, the moon had by this time gone down and progress was very slow. Just as the company was crossing the river, they were caught in a gully in a particularly heavy artillery concentration. Cover was practically negligible, and the company had soon suffered 50% casualties. These included Major Higgins"

From the memorabilia I had established that father was in A Company and as the above account was the only reference in the book to casualties on the 5th January 1944, I felt reasonably confident that my father had been killed in 'The action of the River Peccia' and was one of the 50% casualties suffered by A Company. My next step was to obtain the names from mothers diary of the seventeen other Lincolnshire Regiment soldiers killed on the 5th January and buried adjacent to father. These are as follows:

	GRAVE
Pte Thomas Balmer Robson, 20	V11.F.1
Pte Walter Starbuck, 28	V11.F.2
L/Cpl Steven Aubrey Whitton, 23	V11.F.3
Pte Reginald West, 34	V11.F.4
Pte Thomas Charles Reader, 35	V11.F.5
Pte Arthur Charles Downer, 38	V11.F.6
Pte Steven Osborne, 27	V11.F.7
Pte Frank Comley, 34	V11.F.8
Pte Alfred Buxton, 27	V11.F.9
Pte Harry William Houlden, 26	V11.F.10
Pte Richard Granville Thick, 21	V11.F.11
L./Cpl Bradshaw Leonard Thorp	V11.F.12
Sgt Charles Frederick Rudkin, M.M., 43	V11.F.13
Pte Albert William Walker, 20	V11.F.14
<i>Sgt John Pearson, 28</i>	V11.F.15
T./Major Michael Christopher Comyn Higgins, 29	V11.F.16
Rev. Cecil Robert William Ellis	V11.F.17
Capt John Floyer Vincet Lart, R.A.M.C. (Doctor), 40	V11.F.18

As can be seen Major Higgins, the Rev CRW Ellis and Capt Lart who are buried next to my father were all killed in 'The Action of the River Peccia'. It was almost certain that the above eighteen soldiers, including my father, were killed in this action. Furthermore, the map on Page 176 of the book 'The History of the Tenth Foot' gave me the location of the River Peccia. However, the river is about two miles long and it was obvious that I needed to do a lot more research to determine the exact location where my father was killed.

I decided to obtain detailed maps (preferably 1/25 000 with topographical features) of the two-mile stretch of the River Peccia. Regrettably, topographical maps at this scale for this part of Italy are not for sale and despite extensive searches on the Internet and map shops, I could not purchase a suitable map. My research was beginning to falter at this stage and I was unable to 'zoom in' to the exact spot on the River Peccia where my father was killed.

Whilst pondering my next move, my next-door neighbour, who was aware of my research, brought me an article from the Lancashire Evening Post. An extract from the article is as follows:

"I am researching a book on the Monte Cassino battles of January to May 1944. I am keen to contact and interview veterans who took part in the battles or anyone who has diaries, letters or photographs from that time. Matthew Parker, Telephone ..."

I contacted Matthew and he came to see me in August 2002. Very quickly, Matthew established that father had been killed before the first battle of Monte Cassino and advised that the material I had was not appropriate for his book. However Matthew was, as you would expect, very knowledgeable and suggested I obtain a copy of the

acknowledged authoritative book "Cassino the Hollow Victory", by John Ellis. During my research, I had come across the terms, Battalion, Brigade, Company, Division, Regiment etc. Not understanding the British Army structure was confusing and was hindering my research. Although the book did not address the battle of the River Peccia, it did clarify the army structure and provided confirmation of how my father's unit fitted into this structure.

From the books and memorabilia I have referred to so far I was able to establish that my father, Sgt John Pearson, was in the 7th Platoon, A Company, 6th Battalion, Lincolnshire Regiment, 138th Infantry Brigade, 46th Infantry Division, 10th British Corps, US 5th Army.

Next, I decided to visit the Imperial War Museum, London with my daughter, Georgina. We consulted the following documents:

- After the Battle
- The History of the Tenth Foot
- The History of the Sixth Battalion - Lincolnshire Regiment
- The Royal Lincolnshire Regiment - Roll of Honour
- Short History of The Royal Lincolnshire Regiment
- Lincolnshire Regiment - 6th Battalion
- '1939-1945 The War Dead of the British Commonwealth and Empire, Cassino War Cemetery'

Whilst in London, Georgina and I visited the British Library, Map Section, on the off chance that they may have a topographical map of the area near the River Peccia at a scale of 1/25000. To our amazement, the librarian asked us which edition we required! We responded "1943/44", within minutes the map was produced, and we were then able to take a copy. This was a military map with its own military grid.

None of the documents consulted at the Imperial War Museum provided any significant additional information regarding the exact spot where my father was killed. However, I was confident that Major Higgins was my father's commanding officer and if I could find out exactly where he was killed then I would probably be close to the spot where my father was killed. Georgina recorded the following information from the above documents.

"Major Michael Christopher Comyn Higgins, Son of John Comyn and Elsie Higgins - Husband of Mary E Higgins - Weymouth, Dorset. Grave V11 F 16". When I returned home, I considered trying to contact Major Higgins' widow, Mary, by placing an advertisement in the Dorset Echo. However, after careful consideration, I decided an advertisement was too insensitive and I did not proceed.

In November 2002, I approached the Royal Anglian Regiment and was put in contact with Mr George Boss, the Regimental Attendant. I explained to George that my father served in the Lincolnshire Regiment (which had been incorporated along with many others into the Royal Anglian Regiment) and that I was trying to find out how and exactly where he was killed. George put me in touch with Captain John Lee who appeared to be the sole person administering the Lincolnshire Regimental Association. Captain Lee put me in touch with Mr Ken Bramley the Chairman of the Lincolnshire Regiment annual reunion. Ken in turn put me in touch with Oliver Hardy.

Contacting Oliver was the breakthrough I had been looking for. He had been the secretary of the 6th Battalion, Lincolnshire Regiment World War 2 Veterans Annual Reunion since 1946. At the first reunion, which is held every year in Grantham, approximately 650 veterans attended. At the last reunion in September 2002, the ravages of time had reduced this number to 24. Although Oliver did not know my father, he served in the same 6th Battalion in Italy during the war and was in the vicinity of the River Peccia when my father was killed.

Oliver had also written a book called 'The Seven Lean Years Incorporating the History of the 6th Battalion, Lincolnshire Regiment 1939 - 1946'. This book is similar to "The History of the Tenth Foot 1919 - 1950" but has more detail on certain aspects. Unfortunately, Oliver paid the publisher to print and bind his book, but the publisher went into voluntary liquidation before any books were printed and Oliver lost a large sum of money. Hence, the book was never published but is kept in the Lincolnshire Library.

On page 345 is a Citation for the Military Cross awarded to Major Glenny which reads "On the 4th /5th January 1944, Major Glenny was commanding 'B' Company, 6th Battalion Lincolnshire Regiment, which was ordered to cross the River Peccia and capture a group of farms at 918 132" It suddenly occurred to me that the number 918 132 was a grid reference. When I applied this grid reference to the military map Georgina and I had obtained from the British Library, it showed the farm buildings that Major Glenny captured. Quite honestly, the hairs stood up on my back. This was a major breakthrough because it identified to within, say, half a mile, where the action had taken place near the River Peccia in which my father had been killed.

Oliver had kindly volunteered to speak to some remaining veterans to see if any one could help with my research. More good news was to follow; Oliver telephoned me to say that he had spoken to a Major Thorman who incredibly had found my fathers body along side Major Higgins hours after they had been killed. Whether Major Thorman could remember the exact location after 60 years remained to be seen. Oliver told me that Major Thorman was awaiting a telephone call from me so that he could provide me with further details.

I telephoned Major Thorman on the 25/11/02. He answered the telephone "THORMAN". He sounded a very intimidating character! However, after a few minutes, we seemed to establish a good rapport and I summarised my research to date. I also told him that my father was buried next to a Major Higgins and that I had considered contacting his widow, Mary, via the Dorset Echo. Incredibly, he said 'you do not need to try and contact her; she is stood here by the side of the telephone!' He then explained that he and Major Higgins had been great friends, having passed through Sandhurst together and served in Africa and Italy together. After the war, he had returned to England and had married Mary, his best friend's widow.

Major Thorman then briefly explained how he had found the bodies of Major Higgins, my father and other soldiers by the side of the River Peccia. Furthermore, because Major Higgins was his closest friend he had made a note of the military grid reference of the place where he was killed, which was 926 136. I could now identify the place where my father was killed to within, say; 100 yards. I promised to

write to Major Thorman and provide him with details of my research and copies of maps so that he could pinpoint the exact place where my father was killed. I had by this stage, with the help of my son, Neill, obtained a 1/25000 road map from Multimap on the Internet. Alarming, a new motorway had been constructed and it looked as though there was a possibility that it had been constructed over the very place my father had lost his life.

Major Thorman's reply was hand written and for convenience, I have typed out extracts as follows:

Sometime after dark on the 4th Jan, De Broe Ferguson (D Company) and I (C Company) were called to Battalion HQ, the heavens were open! B Company (Glenny) had already been despatched across the river. It was while here (in a tent) that Pte Burt, the Padre's batman, arrived suddenly to tell us the fate of the Regimental Aid Post. A direct hit killed the doctor, the Padre and Sgt Rudkin M.M., the shelling was intense. This all further disturbed Major Higgins, the one of us who had a real job to do. The main target was obvious, the river line. We dispersed and I returned to my Company's Italian Farmhouse. After drying out, I had a few hours sleep.

At first light, I went outside. Soldiers singly and in small groups were scuttling past, obviously in panic and from A Company. I stopped Major Higgins' batman who said "Major Higgins 'as 'ad it" but could offer no more information.

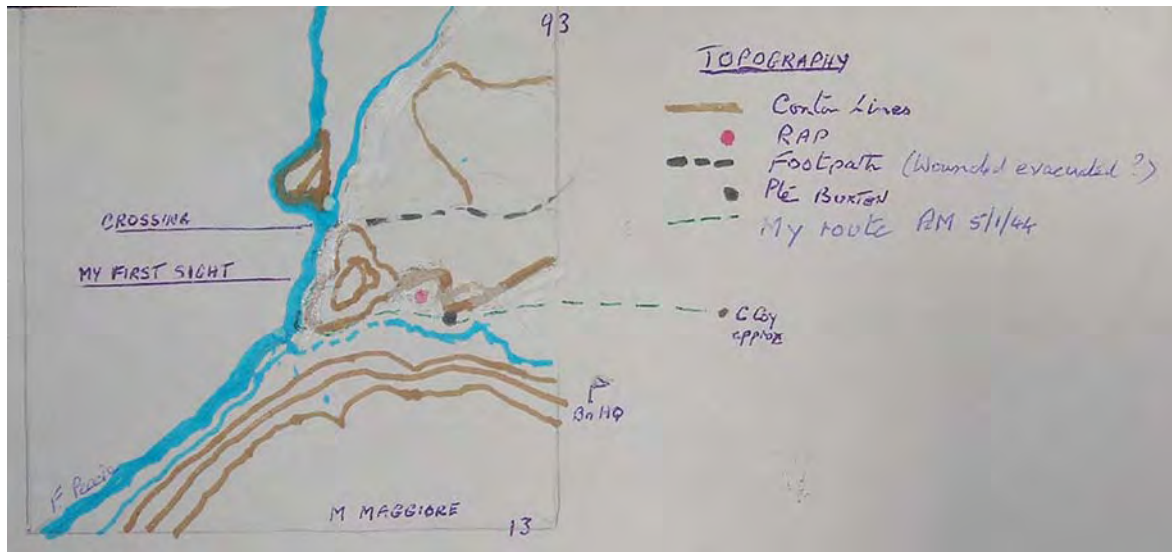
I decided to find out for myself and set off with my batman - a very rugged Irishman. I have marked the path. The shelling and the rain had stopped; there was an eerie silence. I found a lone body whom I identified as Pte Buxton, then saw the bodies on my right, the Regimental Aid Post, could identify the Doctor, a bit bald. I went over a "saddle" turned right round the hill and shortly saw this quite horrendous site, some 25 dead along the defile in about as many yards. First, I saw the Company wireless set on the right with a dead signaller, also a body lying on his face (Major Higgins), at the end a dead German and in about the middle I recognised Sgt Pearson whom I knew slightly, enough to recognise. Germans made me nervous and a dead one indicated there could be others nearby. I could contribute nothing so I left.

On my return to the Company, I spoke to the Commanding Officer on the field telephone. He wanted identifications; I declined, so he instructed me to send Lt AH Bell. It was a pointless order and after 59 years, I still think so. Tony Bell died last year ... Anything that came back about Sgt Pearson was due to him.

With hindsight the Germans had registered the crossing, possibly a patrol alerted them, possibly it was routine. I suspect the former but the dead German was a prisoner from B Company being escorted back by Private Lewis M.M. Enemy shelling killed them both.

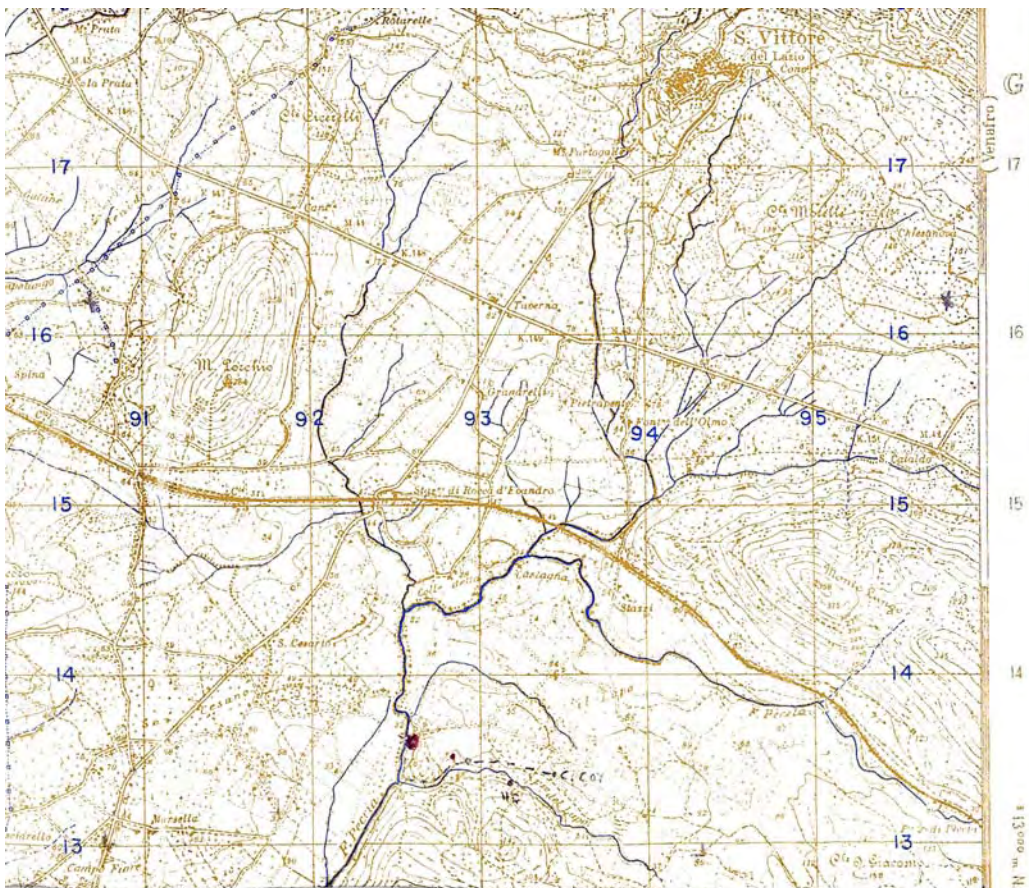
I apologise for the paper, as does Mrs T (Thorman) for her attempt at an enlargement. She was a better artist 52 years ago!

Enclosed with the letter was a map drawn by Mrs Thorman based on the military map I had sent and Major Thorman's description of events. Mrs Thorman's map showed exactly where her first husband (Major Higgins), my father, and the other soldiers had been killed. Mrs Thorman's map is shown below.



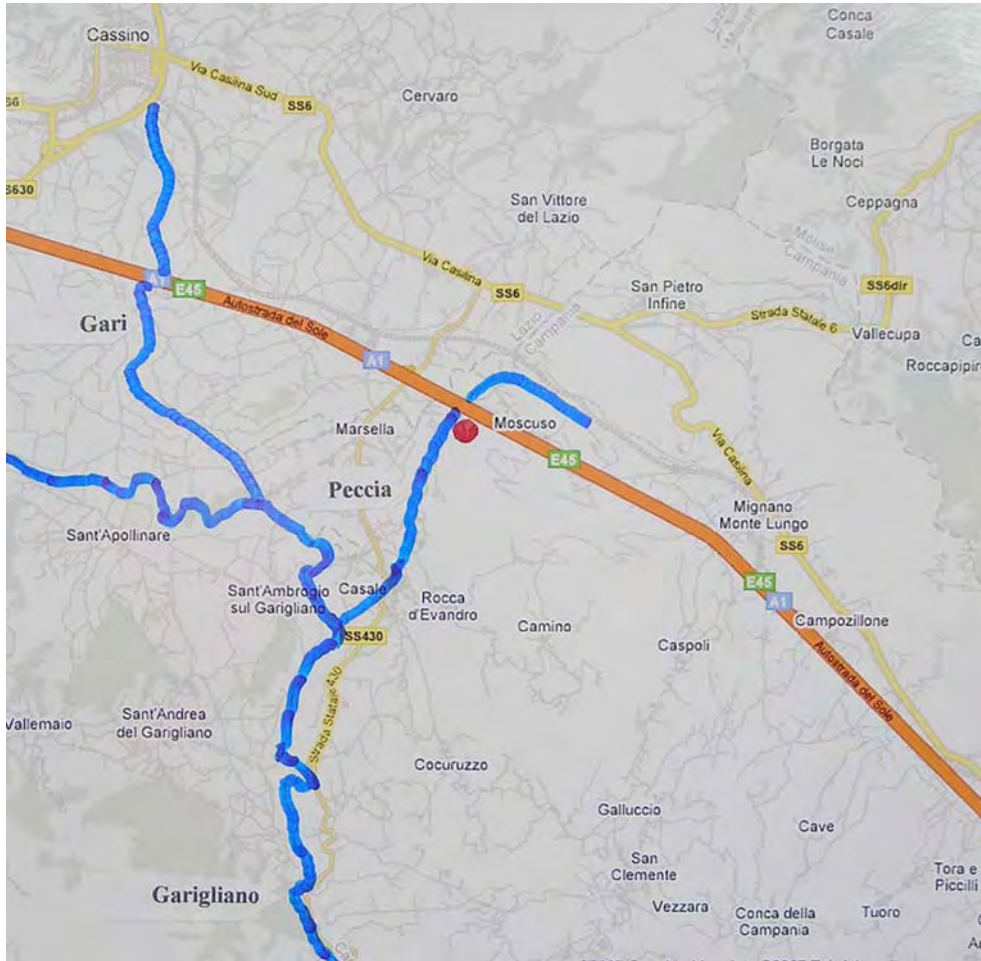
Mrs Thorman's Map

I transferred the information from Mrs Thorman's map to the military map and this is shown below.



Military Map

I had finally achieved my objective and identified exactly where my father had been killed. Fortunately, I could now see that the new motorway had been constructed just to the north of the site which is shown at the centre of the following location map as a "red spot". The map also shows the rivers Peccia, Garigliano, and Gari.



My mother wrote to Major Thorman and his wife, Mary, on many occasions and spoke to them frequently on the telephone. Mother became good friends with Mary - they had a lot in common - both their first husbands had fought side by side for many months and had been killed side by side on the 5th January 1944.

In 2003, my mother, my wife, and I visited Major Thorman and Mary. The Major was 85 and Mary was 89. They were both frail but made us very welcome. The Major had been very pleased that someone from my generation had documented the action in which his best friend, Major Higgins, had been killed. When we arrived, the Major had all his war documents and memorabilia laid out on a huge table. He invited me to examine the documents, which I did with gusto.

Location Map

In Major Thorman's letter (above), he refers to a Lt A.H. (Tony) Bell being sent to identify the bodies of the soldiers killed. Within Major Thorman's war documents I found a copy of the diary of Tony Bell. One section of the diary describes the horrendous site of the mutilated bodies he had been sent to identify. This description is so horrific that I have not included in this account. Fortunately, I know from Major Thorman, that my father's body was not badly mutilated.

Having now identified exactly where my father was killed it was now time to try to visit the location.

Stan Pearson

This is the third and final instalment of Stan Pearson's account of his research into the death of his father, Sergeant John Pearson of the Lincolnshire Regiment, on 5th January 1944.

Visit to Italy 15th to 19th May 2004

Having identified where my father was killed it was now time to visit the site. Once again, my mother (now 84!), my wife and I planned to visit Italy. In preparation for the visit, I carefully assembled copies of the relevant documents and maps. I knew from the maps that I would probably have to travel across farmland to reach the site. I did not speak any Italian and was aware that if I met a farmer as I crossed his fields I would have some explaining to do. I therefore needed to obtain and take with me a written translation of the following:

"Dear Sir/Madam

This person's father was killed in this area during World War 2. He and his family wish to visit the place where he was killed to lay a wreath and say prayers.

The place he was killed is shown on the map.

Please kindly allow them access. Thank you very much."

Thankfully, my cousin Phillip came to my rescue. He knew an Italian Yorkshire man (!) who worked in a supermarket close to where Phillip lives in Addingham. He kindly wrote in hand the translation I needed; the typed translation is as follows:

"Gentile Signore

Il padre di questo persona morì durante l'ultime guerra mondiale, perciò ora questo signore e la sua famiglia si partono dell' Inghilterra per vesitare il luogo dove morì per poterci dire una preghiera e porre dei fiori sul luogo dove fu trovato.

Il posto dove fu ucciso si trovo sulla mappa.

Vi prego di essere genteli con loro e dare loro il permesso di accesso sul posto.

Fortuitously, 2004 was the 60th anniversary of the battle of Monte Cassino and a Service of Remembrance was planned at the Cassino War Cemetery on the 17th of

May. We travelled independently and hired a car, but we stayed with the veteran's party in the Mirosole Hotel at Gaeta.

One day when we were visiting the cemetery, we met an Italian military historian, Dr. Alessandro Campagna. We told Alessandro about father, my research and showed him the maps. Although he was not familiar with the site where father was killed, he volunteered to take us. Unfortunately, a new high-speed rail link between Rome and Naples was being constructed and this ran about 500 yards south of the site. This had resulted in many roads and tracks being cut off or diverted and our planned access to the site from the west was thought to be impossible.

We therefore tried to access the site from the north where the new motorway had been constructed. Once again, the construction of the motorway had resulted in roads and tracks being cut off or diverted which made map reading and access difficult. We did however manage to get on a hill with a disused farmhouse built on the summit. From here, we could look down on the site where father was killed, which was about 400 yards away. We stood in silence and said prayers. Because of the rough terrain, it was not possible to get to the site. However, we could see that the site was immediately by the side of the motorway bridge that crossed the River Peccia.

The following day I decided to take my life into my own hands by driving and stopping on the hard shoulder of the motorway bridge over the River Peccia. My intention was to get out of the car, throw a rose down onto the site where my father was killed and then take photographs. When I stopped my car on the motorway bridge hard shoulder I saw that it was only about five foot wide and that if I tried to open the car door it probably would be struck by one of the many fast moving heavy wagons that were thundering down the inside lane. I therefore decided to drive off the bridge about 200 yards down the motorway. Here the hard shoulder was much wider and I parked the car and got out. I then started to run back along the motorway hard shoulder with a camera in one hand and a rose in the other. I thought 'how will I explain what I am doing if stopped by an Italian police officer?' I arrived breathless at the bridge, threw the rose onto the site where my father was killed and then took photographs. That was as close as I got to the place my father was killed—I had seen the place but not stood on it!

When we returned home, I wrote to Major Thorman and his wife Mary. I enclosed photographs of the place where Major Higgins and my father lost their lives. They replied and expressed their gratitude and Major Thorman confirmed that we had indeed seen the place where my father was killed.

Having reflected on our visit we decided to return to Italy in 2005 to try and find a way down to the site where father was killed.

Visit to Italy 15th to 20th May 2005

Once again, my mother (now 85!), my wife Margaret and I planned to visit Italy. In preparation for the visit, I carefully assembled copies of the relevant maps. I reasoned I might have to travel through dense thicket so I took a thick pair of long trousers.

On our arrival in Italy, we once again headed straight to the cemetery and said prayers at father's grave. The next day I was absolutely determined to stand on the site where father was killed. We went straight to the hill on which stood the Italian farmhouse which was some 400 yards from the location. There was a very rough track running down the side of the motorway which appeared to be heading in the right direction. The track was far too difficult for mother and Margaret to walk down so reluctantly I left them by the side of the derelict farmhouse.

Clothed in my thick long trousers (not pleasant in the hot Italian sunshine!), I gingerly went down the track. I encountered thick brambles, nettles etc., and a variety of Italian wildlife making a range of eerie sounds. The track stayed parallel to the motorway so I knew I was heading in the right direction. After about 20 minutes, my anticipation was heightened as I heard the sound of the River Peccia. Then, there it was, right in front of me—the river bank on which father had been killed. With very mixed emotions, I walked the last few yards and stood on the site on which he was killed.

For a few minutes, I had an emotional 'chat' with father. I then collected some soil and placed it in a plastic bag I had taken for that purpose. Poppies were growing profusely in the area so I collected some and returned to mother and Margaret.

The following day we were driving along a road which was west of the site and I noticed a track called 'Strada Valle Mucosa'. I suspected that we might be able to drive down the track and get close to the site. This we did and after a bumpy journey, we finally arrived at the river crossing - albeit on the opposite side of the river to the spot where father was killed. Thus, I was able to get mother and Margaret to within 10 feet of the location. We all said prayers and cast the poppies into the river.

Visit to Italy 11th to 18th MAY 2007

This visit was organised by our Monte Cassino Society. Once again, my mother (now 87!), my wife Margaret and I planned to visit Italy. On this occasion, I was armed with a print of "Google Earth" of the area. We also took with us a large metal cross with the inscription "Sgt Jack Pearson. Killed in Action. Jan 5th 1944. R.I.P."

John Leach, who was with our party, had also lost his father at Cassino and volunteered to help me take the cross down to the site where my father had been killed. John and I had been forewarned about the possibility of encountering snakes! John was dressed in wellingtons and was armed with a large stick. We set off down the track (John first!) and quickly came across the first snake—a black one about 3 feet long. It crawled off into the bush and I immediately dropped back about 10 yards calling out to John "are there any more"? We encountered one more snake and I dropped back 20 yards shouting encouragement to John in front.

We arrived at the site where father had been killed, placed the cross in the soil and took a photograph. I said a few prayers and we then left the site. My thanks to John.



The following day I drove mother and Margaret to the other side of the river where they could see the cross. We again said prayers and put poppies in the river.

My mother said this was her last visit and so I took a photograph of her last farewell to 'Jack'.

This was the end of the 'journey' started some five years earlier.



Blue line: River Peccia
Green line: Original route of Peccia
Yellow line: Track we walked down
Red line: Track we drove down