



Ronald Gifford

Guardsman 2660072, 3rd Battalion Coldstream Guards

Died December 7th 1943, aged 24

Commemorated at Cassino War Cemetery

Son of Ernest Alfred and Florence Elizabeth Gifford, of Port Isaac, Cornwall

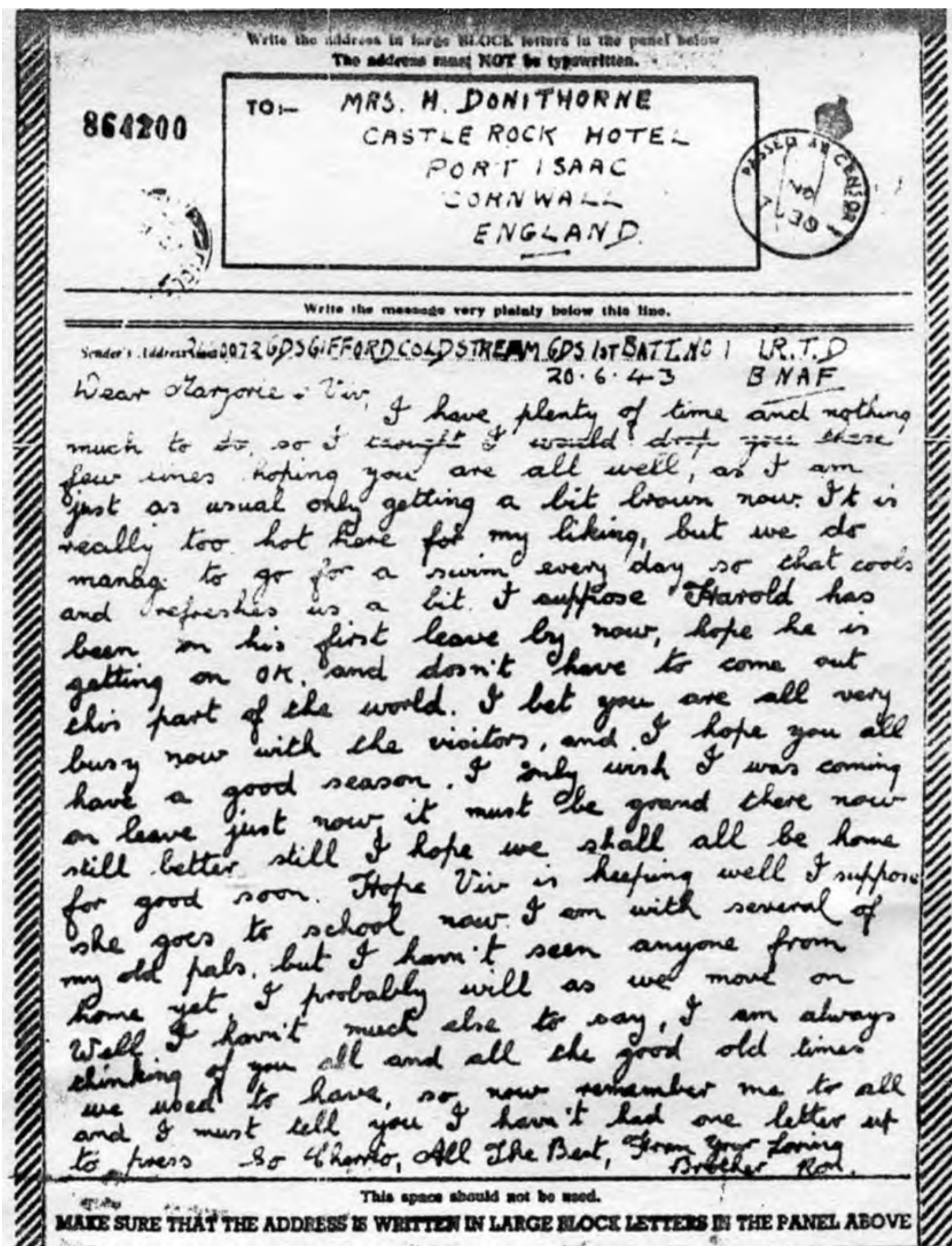


Guardsman Ronald Gifford

Ronald Gifford was born November 24th 1919 in Port Isaac, the son of Ernest Alfred and Florence Elizabeth Gifford. He is the older brother of Terry Gifford. As an agricultural worker he was in a reserved occupation, but like many men of his generation he chose to enlist, entering Redruth recruiting office on February 5th 1940 where he gave his occupation as a gardener. He was immediately placed in the Coldstream Guards, one of the country's elite regiments, second only in order of precedence to the Grenadier Guards. The south west of England, along with the north east, is a traditional recruiting area for the Coldstream Guards.

It seems he spent the early years of his service in the UK, and the family recall that he was required on one occasion to serve his King more directly than most, when he was told to go to Sandringham to help out with a shooting party for the King and his guests. It is also recalled that his father requested he be returned to help with the carrot harvest. The country's desperate need for food meant crops could not be left in the ground for want of labour, and the request was granted. His Service and Pay Book shows he was given '28 days Agricultural Leave 22.3 - 19.4.43'.

The week after his return from carrot picking he was given a further two weeks, this time 'Change of Station Leave' from April 26th to May 10th 1943. This must have been embarkation leave prior to going overseas, as a letter Ronald wrote home the following month was sent from No 1 Infantry Reinforcement Training Depot in the port of Philippeville (now Skikda), Algeria, on the Mediterranean coast, where he was part of the British North Africa Force. The Axis forces in North Africa had surrendered on May 13th 1943, so he would have been there training for the allies' next move to Sicily and mainland Italy.



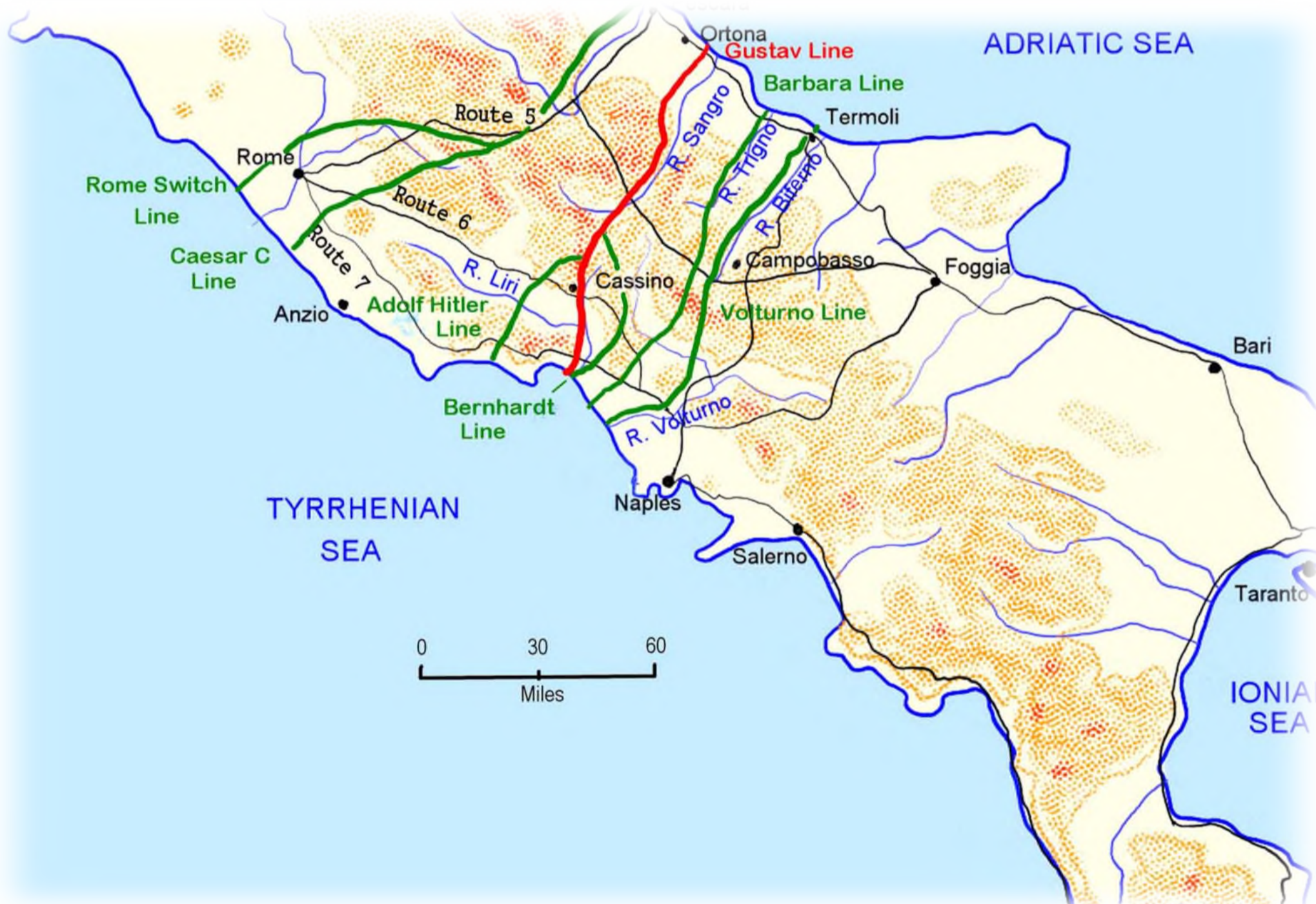
Ronald's letter to his sister Marjorie and niece Viv from North Africa

The 3rd Battalion Coldstream Guards was part of 201st Guards Motor Brigade (formerly 22nd Guards Brigade). After North Africa, the 201st joined 56th London Division in X (Ten) Corps for Operation Avalanche, the landings at Salerno, Italy on September 9th 1943. X Corps met determined resistance from 16th Panzer Division and had to fight their way ashore with the help of naval bombardments, but still ended that first day 5-7 miles inland. The Coldstream Guards won two battle honours around Salerno, at Battipaglia and Capezzano. The next step was Naples to the north of the landings, starting on September 19th, which was taken by October 1st. Early October saw the whole of Southern Italy in allied hands, and the advance began up the spine of Italy, reaching the Volturno River north of Naples on October 6th.

Kesselring was given the task by Hitler of defending Italy, and created a series of defensive lines which in these mountainous regions were difficult to overcome and gave the advantage to the defender.



Ronald Gifford in his Coldstream Guards platoon (second from left, back row)



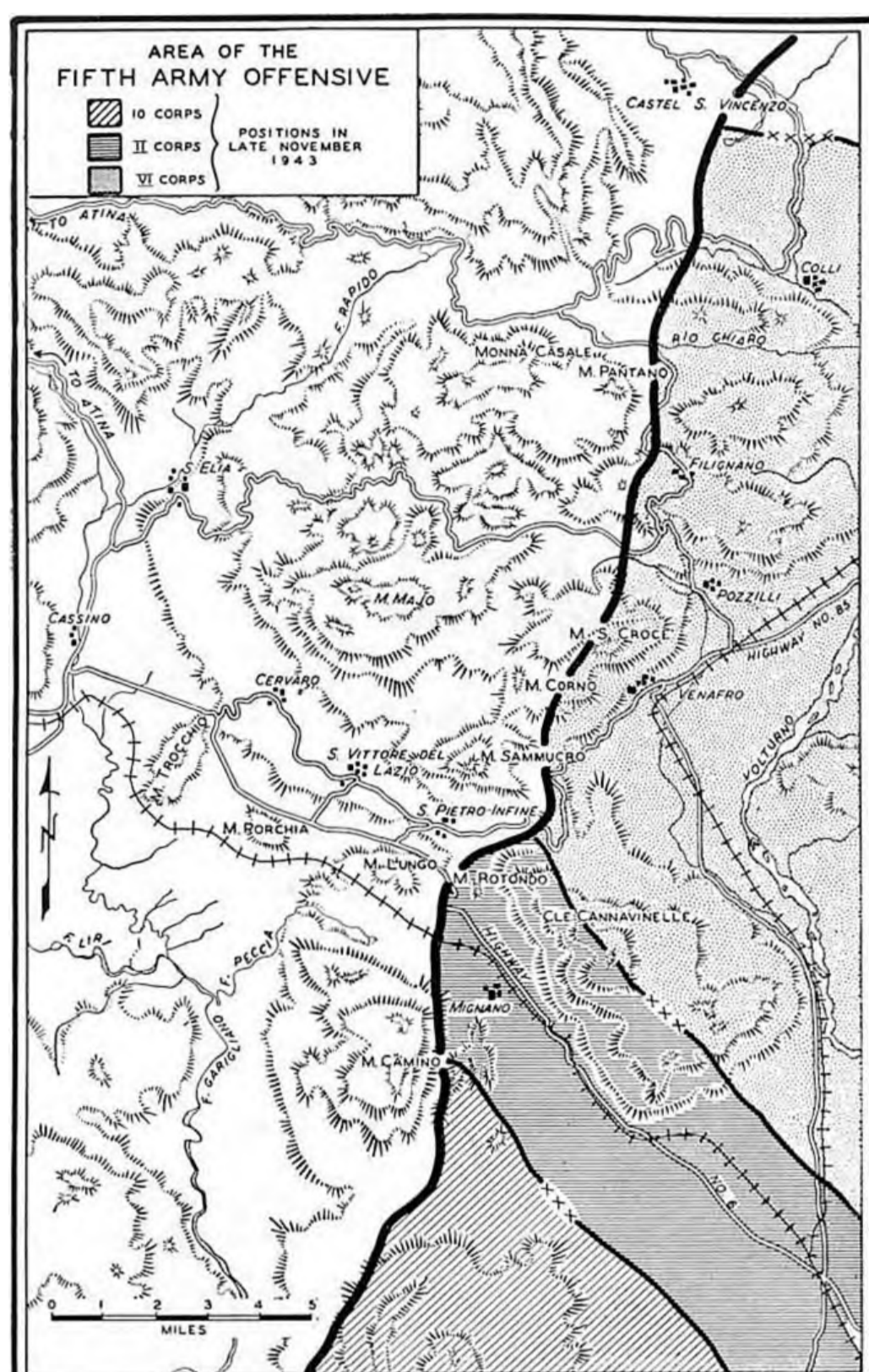
The German defensive lines north of Naples

Ronald Gifford



The first to be overcome by 201st Guards was the Volturno Line just north of Naples, which they crossed on the night of October 12th. The Germans adopted rear-guard tactics, skilfully using the terrain to slow the attackers advance towards the next line, the Barbara Line. This was reached on November 2nd and broken through fairly quickly whilst the Germans retreated to the Bernhard Line just south of Cassino.

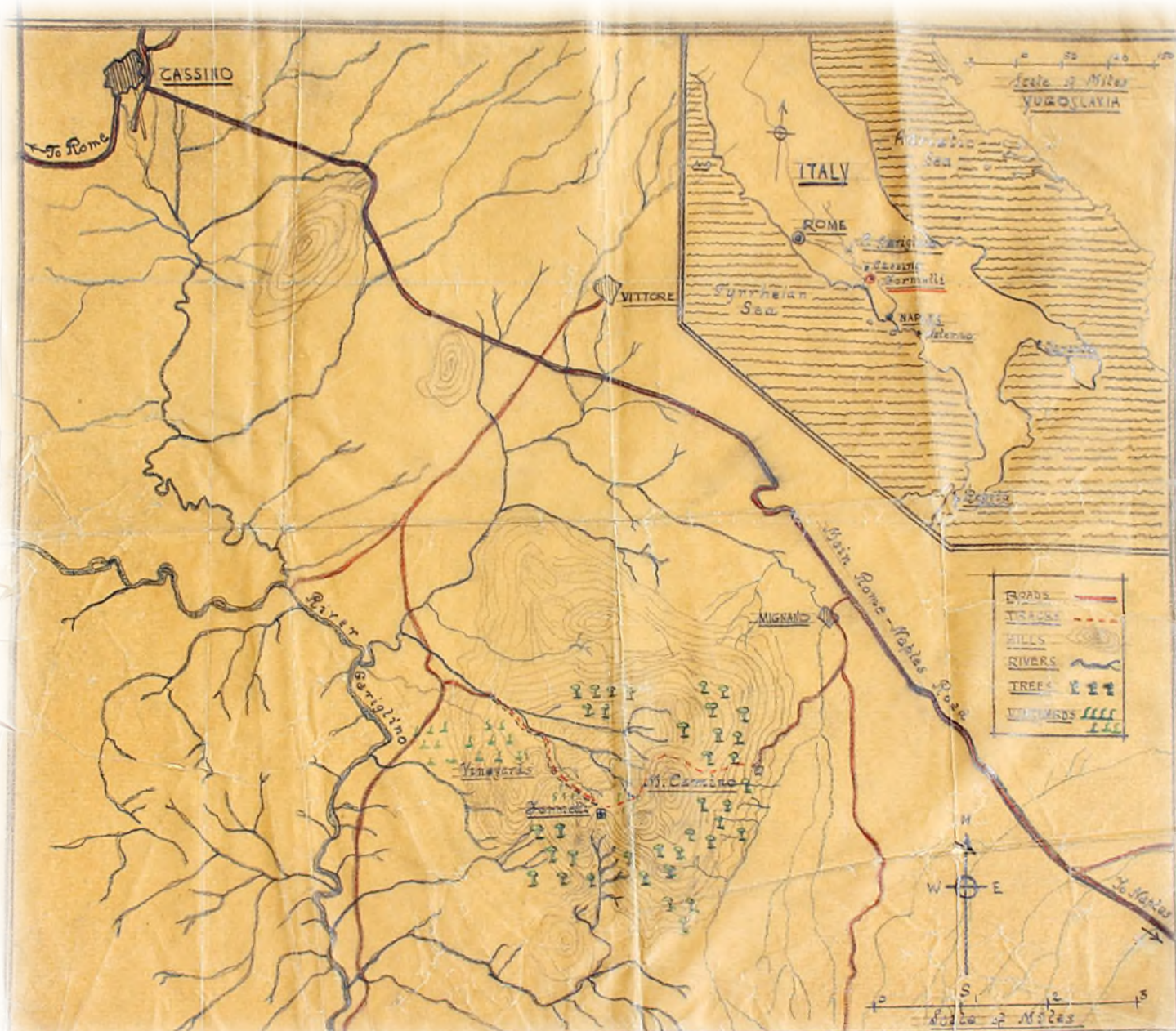
It was here that the Coldstream Guards met the toughest going, around Monte Camino.



Map showing the Bernhard line and the disposition of allied troops. 3rd Battalion Coldstream Guards was part of 56th London Division in X (10) Corps

Like the notorious Monte Cassino a few miles further north, the dominating peak of Monte Camino was crowned with a monastery. Behind it was Monte la Difensa overlooking Mignano and the strategically important road to Rome. Slopes in this mountainous area are very steep, and the German prepared defences led to a stalemate. After 5 days of heavy fighting between 3rd and 9th December 1943 the 56th London Division took Monte Camino and the Camino mass was eventually cleared of German troops.

The following April, the formidable Moroccan Goumier troops, who were skilled in penetrating the most vertical of slopes in full kit, were undertaking an exercise on Monte Camino and came across two British skeletons inside the German watchtower. Deeply impressed by the men who had scaled such an obstacle under fire, they subscribed to erect a plaque to honour the bravery of all the British troops who fell in the assault. On every Good Friday, 4,000 peasants from the villages on Monte Camino climb up the mule track in their bare feet on a pilgrimage to the chapel. As they pass the plaque they give it an 'Eyes Left!'



Sketch map of the area around Monte Camino to the south east of Cassino



Monument to the British Fallen on Monte Camino Erected by the Moroccan Goums

To the British Fighters
Gloriously fallen on Monte Camino
November-December 1943
The Moroccans Goums

Amongst the fallen was Guardsman Ronald Gifford. He was killed on December 7th, no doubt by a German sniper, in an orchard near the hamlet of Formella on the south western slope of Monte Camino.



The approach to Formella today, showing the steeply sloping land and the many trees to hide snipers

Guardsman Ronald Gifford is buried in the Cassino War Cemetery beneath the imposing rebuilt monastery on the top of Monte Cassino.



Original grave marker to Guardsman Ronald Gifford



Current Gravestone of Guardsman Ronald Gifford



A picture of Cassino War Cemetery with the monastery behind, taken on a visit by the Gifford Family



State Colours of His Majesty's Coldstream Regiment of Foot Guards

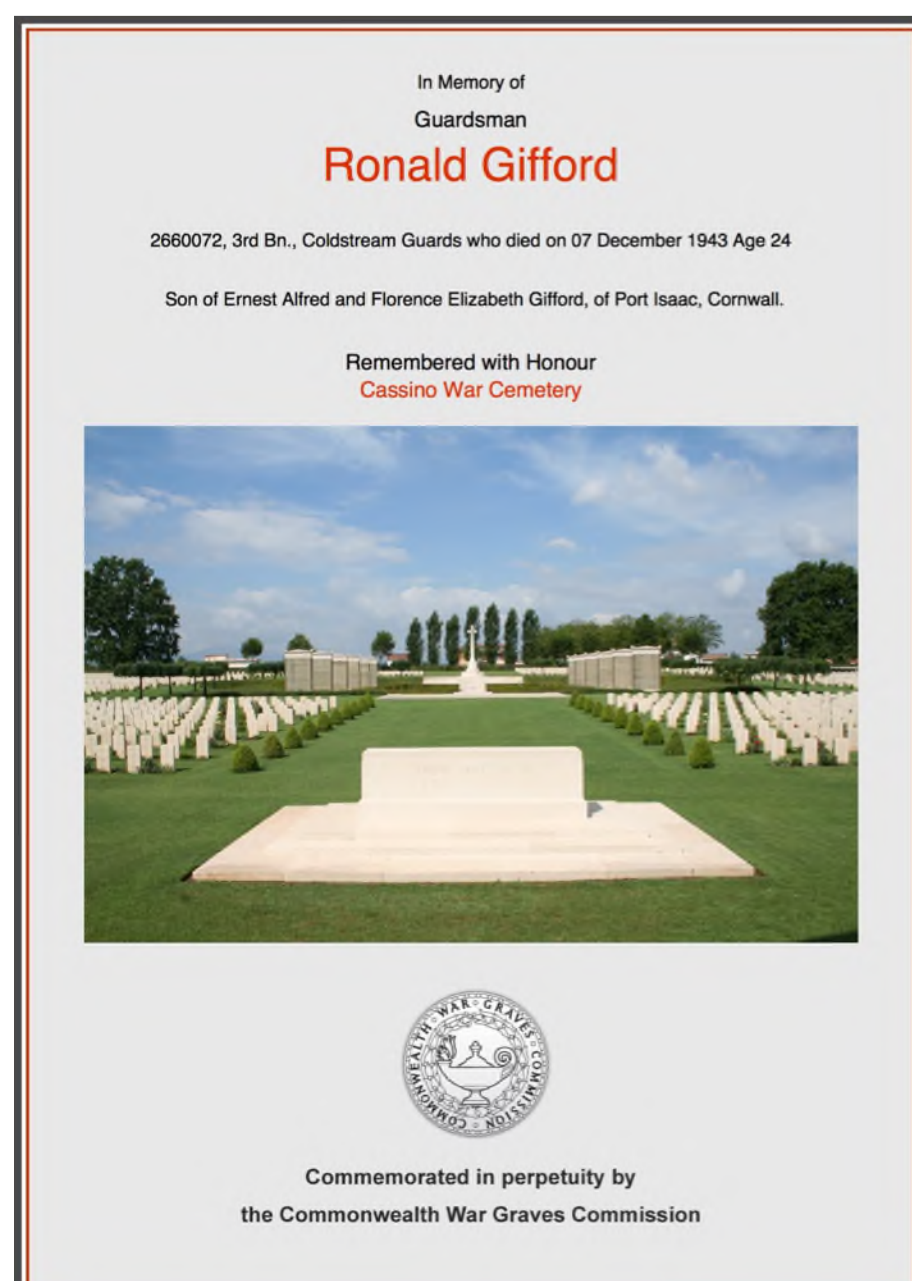


Letter of Condolence from King George VI



The medals of Guardsman Ronald Gifford, together with their original box and the note inside. Left to Right – 1939-45 Star, Italy Star, Defence Medal and War Medal 1939-45

Order of Wearing	Description of Ribbon	Clasp or Emblem (if awarded)
1 1939-45 Star	Dark blue, red and light blue in three equal vertical stripes. The ribbon is worn with the dark blue stripe furthest from the left shoulder.	None
2 Atlantic Star	Blue ribbon with a green thread and a central white stripe.	Air Crew, Barrage Balloon, France and Germany
3 Air Crew Europe Star	Light blue with black edges and in addition a central white stripe.	Aircrew of France and Germany
4 Africa Star	Pale buff, with a central vertical red stripe and two narrower buff stripes on either side. The ribbon is worn with the red stripe furthest from the left shoulder.	8th Army or 1st Army or North Africa 1941-43
5 Pacific Star	Dark green with red edges, a central yellow stripe and two narrower buff stripes on either side. The ribbon is worn with the dark blue stripe furthest from the left shoulder.	None
6 Burma Star	Dark blue with a central red stripe and in addition two orange stripes.	Pacific
7 Italy Star	Five vertical stripes of equal width, one in red at either edge and one in green in the centre, the two intermediate stripes being in white.	African or Italy
8 France and Germany Star	Five vertical stripes of equal width, one in blue at either edge and one in red in the centre, the two intermediate stripes being in white.	African
9 Defence Medal	Flame coloured with green edges upon each of which is a narrow black stripe.	Silver Medal (British Commonwealth) for long service.
10 War Medal 1939-45	A narrow central red stripe with a narrow white stripe on either side, a broad red stripe at either edge, and two intervening stripes in blue.	Oak leaf



Sources:
Coldstream Guards: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coldstream_Guards
201st Guards Motor Brigade: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/22nd_Guards_Brigade
Salerno landings: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allied_invasion_of_Italy#Salerno_landings
Attacks on the Volturno Line: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volturno_Line#Fifth_Army_on_the_River_Volturno
Bernhardt Line Offensive around Monte Camino: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernhardt_Line#5th_Army_Bernhardt_Line_offensive
and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monte_la_Difensa
Plaque to British Fallen on Monte Camino: <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=HK1-AwAAQBAJ&pg=PA129&lpg=PA129&dq=v=onpage&q&f=false>
and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moroccan_Goumier#Italy.2C_1943.E2.80.9345
We are grateful to Terry Gifford for the images and family information he has provided.