John Michael McVean Gubbins



Rank: - Captain

Number: - 172404

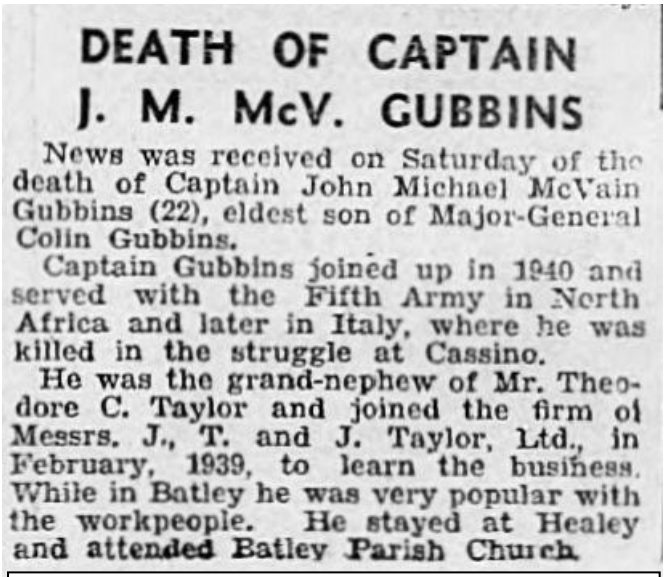
Regiment: - No 1 Special Force SOE Parent unit Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders. 5th Bn.

Died: - Killed in Action at Cassino 06/02/1944 Age: 22 years.

Memorial: - Cassino Memorial, Italy Panel 11.

John Michael McVean was born on 11 July 1921 in Marylebone, London the eldest son of Major General Sir Colin McVean Gubbins, K.C.M.G., D.S.O., M.C., and Lady Gubbins, (Norah Creina Somerville (nee Warren)) of Mayfair, London. He was the grand-nephew of Mr. Theodore Cooke Taylor, the head of the firm Messrs. J.T.& J. Taylors, Batley. He came to Batley to learn the business. His parents lived at Grove Road, Leighton Buzzard. Whilst in Batley he was popular with the workpeople, staying at Healey and attended Batley Parish Church.

John Michael joined up in 1940 becoming a SOE Instructor at Arisaig, Scotland in 1941. He served with the Fifth Army in North Africa and later Italy.



DEATH OF CAPTAIN J. M. McV. GUBBINS

News was received on Saturday of the death of Captain John Michael McVain Gubbins (22), eldest son of Major-General Colin Gubbins.

Captain Gubbins joined up in 1940 and served with the Fifth Army in North Africa and later in Italy, where he was killed in the struggle at Cassino.

He was the grand-nephew of Mr. Theodore C. Taylor and joined the firm of Messrs. J., T. and J. Taylor, Ltd., in February, 1939, to learn the business. While in Batley he was very popular with the workpeople. He stayed at Healey and attended Batley Parish Church.

Batley News, 19 Feb 1944

The Battle of Monte Cassino was a costly series of four assaults by the Allies against the Winter Line in Italy held by Axis forces during the Italian Campaign. The intention was a breakthrough to Rome.

At the beginning of 1944, the western half of the Winter Line was being anchored by Germans holding the Rapido-Gari, Liri and Garigliano valleys and some of the surrounding peaks and ridges. Together, these features formed the Gustav Line, Monte Cassino, an historic hilltop abbey founded in AD 529 by Benedict of Nursia, dominated the nearby town of Cassino and the entrances to the Liri and Rapido valleys. Lying in a protected historic zone, it had been left unoccupied by the Germans, although they manned some positions set into the steep slopes below the abbey's walls.

Repeated pinpoint artillery attacks on Allied assault troops caused their leaders to conclude the abbey was being used by the Germans as an observation post, at the very least. Fears escalated along with casualties and in spite of a lack of clear evidence, it was marked for destruction. On 15 February American bombers dropped 1,400 tons of high explosives, creating widespread damage. The raid failed to achieve its objective, as German paratroopers then occupied the rubble and established excellent defensive positions amid the ruins. Between 17 January and 18 May, Monte Cassino and the Gustav defences were assaulted four times by Allied troops.

John Michael was killed in Action at Cassino on the 6 February 1944.

He is remembered with Honour at Batley War Memorial Addenda



Researched by members of
Batley History Group