

The logo for the CIPR Pride Awards 2019 Gold Winner. It features the text 'CIPR PRIDE AWARDS 2019' in white on a black background, followed by 'GOLD WINNER' in large, multi-colored letters (pink, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple).

Category: Consumer Relations Campaign

Company: Big Wave PR and Royal British Legion

Entry title: The unsung heroes of Monte Cassino

Brief and objectives:

The Royal British Legion was awarded LIBOR fines to offer journeys of remembrance to all those who fought in WWII.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of D-Day and Monte Cassino, however the media is jam-packed with stories about D-Day and it's tricky to get such high profile coverage for other major battles that were also fought during WWII. Those who served during the Italian campaign are often overlooked and were once known as the 'D-Day Dodgers'. The Royal British Legion wanted to attract as many veterans who served in Italy/Monte Cassino (target 25) to join a tour of remembrance to lay old ghosts to rest and to raise awareness of how the battles in Italy were also a major turning point to bringing an end to WWII.

The idea, research and planning:

Big Wave PR has been working with Royal British Legion for many years and understands the marketplace well.

Due to a very small budget a very hardworking media relations campaign was employed.

Only through PR can we reach out to WWII veterans, there is no database, to issue a letter of invitation to join a tour. The tours can only be promoted via the media and there is no budget for advertising.

Behavioural research - all veterans are now in their 90s and we knew that we needed to overcome any concerns about travel and coping with the emotions of going back – with this in mind we knew that our target audience wasn't just the veterans, but their children, grandchildren and carers.

Media review undertaken to ascertain which outlets would prove most effective in building awareness to the veterans and influencers.

The idea: retell the story of Monte Cassino from the mouths of veterans to create engaging and compelling editorial and to encourage sign-up from other veterans who served.

Strategy, tactics, creativity and innovation:

Strategy: Bringing to life the stories of WWII's unsung heroes.

Tactics: Stage one 'getting bums on seats' - launch the tours to the UK media via press release, letter to the editor and interviews with veterans and spokesperson from the Royal British Legion. Focused activity with BBC radio stations and local newspapers - media channels that the veteran's and their family would engage with and trust.

Stage 2: Identifying strong case studies and selling-in the human story of war at Monte Cassino, to raise awareness and to recognise their enormous part in bringing an end to WWII.

Offer press trip to key media, but there was no budget to fly out to Italy, so carefully analysing which media would give the biggest return. Also, opting for media that could afford to travel by their own means, and tell a great story.

Innovation - researching and understanding the best news hooks and human interest angles. For example: finding a family of three generations, heading back to Monte Cassino, the veteran who was applying for a passport for the first time to go back and the meeting-up of German and British veterans at the commemorations. These news hooks were fed to the media to give in-depth stories to our chosen 'top tier' media – BBC and Daily Express.

Issuing facts and figures about the battle to demonstrate the severity of battle – more casualties at Monte Cassino than there were during the infamous battle of Passchendale during WWI.

Delivery:

February - Project planning, launch press release, line-up veterans and spokespeople for interviews

March - Selling-in media interviews, setting-up broadcasts with BBC radio stations

April - Case study liaison, press tour liaison for target media: The Daily Express and BBC, film created of top case study for Royal British Legion digital outlets, media briefings and training for tour guides.

May - Tour takes place, press visits to Italy, set-up interviews with veterans and spokespersons, gain pictures and distribute stories, evaluation.

Measurement and evaluation:

'Bums on seats' the campaign delivered 120 passengers (40 veterans and 80 family members/carers) all travelling on a journey of remembrance to Italy or the National Memorial Arboretum to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Monte Cassino – way over target!

Daily Express ran a front-page lead, opinion piece and double page spread about the commemorations in Italy.

BBC ran stories on BBC News, BBC online, BBC Scotland, BBC Look East (x2), BBC Spotlight.

Other regional media included ITV Anglia, 20 BBC local radio stations, and over 100 local newspapers.

The film made for Royal British Legion's digital channels was seen by 45,000.

Media campaign provided over 5 million opportunities to see.

On and offline conversation on the unsung heroes of Monte Cassino grew and large numbers of families came forward telling their own stories about what their dad/granddad did in Monte Cassino - keeping remembrance alive.

Budget and campaign impact:

Budget - £4,800 (four months).

120 people travelled on a journey of remembrance to Italy or the National Memorial Arboretum to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Monte Cassino - way over target!

For veterans of Italy/Monte Cassino they were able to return, perhaps one last time, meet up with fellow veterans who understood what they went through, and were able to 'lay old ghosts to rest'. Families were able to understand what dad, granddad did in WWII and get to really understand their relation much better - the effects of war.

Veterans felt proud and honoured that their battle had been acknowledged and commemorated and that they'd hit the headlines back home.

The campaign covered the entire UK raising much-needed awareness about the battle at Monte Cassino and the Italian campaign.

Nichola Rowlands-Smith, Head of Travel, Royal British Legion: "The veterans of Monte Cassino/Italian campaign have been our unsung heroes. It is only right that their efforts are recognised, especially on the 75th anniversary, and their stories are remembered for generations to come."

"Thanks so much for all you've done, you've made us feel special, like all we did during WWII has finally been recognised. It's been good to go back, very emotional, but I'm glad I've done it to remember all the fallen - thank you." Veteran of Monte Cassino.