



# Untold stories of the Second World War

HA webinar series in partnership with the Royal British Legion and Legasee

There are countless events, people, acts of defiance, courage, bravery and sheer hard work during the Second World War that have remained untold stories... until now. During the last year the Royal British Legion has been working with the specialist historian and film-maker Martyn Cox to produce brand new films and classroom resources.

These highlight and also shed fascinating new light on the service and sacrifice of Second World War veterans from Britain, the Commonwealth and Allied nations. Many of these remarkable men and women had roles in classified and clandestine wartime operations, mostly in support of wartime resistance in France or other occupied countries.

The Historical Association is pleased to work in partnership with the Royal British Legion and Legasee to bring HA members a brand-new series of free webinars delving into the making of these films, the interviews with those who were there and how you can bring these previously untold stories into the history classroom.

## Partner organisations

The Royal British Legion is the country's largest Armed Forces charity, providing lifelong support to serving and ex-serving personnel and their families, and as champions of Remembrance leading the nation in commemorating and honouring those who have served and sacrificed. The Remembrance team at the RBL have created a range of free educational materials to help children and young people learn about, and to pass on, Remembrance. The materials include over twenty films of Second World War Veterans and lesson plans.

Martyn Cox is a Legasee Educational Trust ambassador and co-founder of The Secret WW2 Learning Network. He has filmed oral history interviews in Britain, France, Belgium and the USA with more than 150 Second World War veterans who served overseas and on the Home Front in a wide range of military units and organisations. Martyn's specialist knowledge and experience have also led to him contributing to numerous documentaries for the BBC and Channel 4.

A Heritage Lottery Fund grant to the Legasee Educational Trust had enabled more than half of Martyn's filmed interviews to be digitised for viewing on the Legasee web site, which also features the testimony of several hundred more veteran interviews accompanied by classroom resources.

## Programme

### Untold stories of the Holocaust (in partnership with Legasee)

**18 January 2021**

In this webinar, Martyn Cox will talk about three very different encounters with witnesses to Holocaust-related events. Two were with interviewees for his recent Royal British Legion films: Marzena Schejbal who fought in the Warsaw Uprising, and Robin Fassam, a RAF photographer who helped document the liberation of the concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen.

He will focus mainly on his third encounter, which was ten years ago when he first visited Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in south-central France, which has since been described as a little village which *"... saved people's lives without killing or hurting or hating anybody"*

Between December 1940 and September 1944, the inhabitants of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon and the villages, hamlets and farms on the surrounding Plateau Vivarais-Lignon sheltered literally thousands of refugees, the majority Jewish, including many children.

### Untold stories of troops of the Commonwealth and beyond (in partnership with the RBL)

**23 February 2021**

In the course of filming more than one hundred oral history interviews with WW2 veterans, many memorable stories of either wartime action or roles on the Home Front have come from men and women born a long way from Britain.

In fact, the very first veteran Martyn Cox ever interviewed on camera was in Marseille, southern France, with Lise de Baissac who had been born in Mauritius - a British colony at that time. Her family had moved to Paris, but Lise fled to Britain in 1940 when Germany invaded France.

Lise returned to France two years later - but by parachute, as one of the first two women agents of Britain's secret service known as SOE. Her comrade was later arrested by the Gestapo and would be executed at the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp; but Lise undertook a second mission into occupied France, during which she and her brother Claude trained French resistance fighters in readiness for D-Day.

Amongst the other Commonwealth veterans Martyn has interviewed are two Indian soldiers, who took part in significant WW2 battles; a woman born in New Zealand but brought up in Australia, who also became a secret agent and was the most highly decorated Allied servicewoman of WW2; and a Jamaican in the Royal Navy who switched to the RAF to serve on an air-sea rescue launch. He helped save many shot-down airmen from the waters around Britain - and was later in a popular singing group with a hit record!

### Untold stories of women of World War II (in partnership with the RBL)

**23 March 2021**

Roughly half of Martyn Cox's filmed oral history interviewees have been with women veterans of WW2 - some were civilians and others in various branches of the military, or had more secret roles.

These 'women at war' have included a driver for a bomb disposal team during the Blitz who later drove for the Army Blood Transfusion Service; female secret agents and the women coders and wireless operators who communicated with the agents behind enemy lines; a mobile canteen driver

who later learned Polish and worked for the Polish government-in exile in London; women who listened in to the coded enemy wireless messages sent to Bletchley Park for decoding, and also an Enigma code-breaker; female members of the French and Polish resistance; and women who served on anti-aircraft batteries.

Martyn has recently made a Royal British Legion film about a particularly remarkable woman who, at the start of the war, was an anthropologist specialising in one particular tribe on the India-Burma border. She volunteered for the British army's top secret "V Force" and, with the rank of Captain, commanded 150 men from the tribe as intelligence gathering native scouts behind Japanese lines. She later gave jungle survival training to RAF aircrews in the Far East.

## Untold stories of the home front in World War II (in partnership with the RBL)

**20 April 2021**

There is inevitably an overlap between Martyn's many interviews with 'Women at war' veterans and those whose WW2 roles fell under the general heading of Home Front; but he has also met and interviewed several fascinating men whose wartime service had not been overseas.

Martyn will discuss more of the Home Front women he has interviewed, but also some of the men. He will highlight one role in particular, by way of the example of a young man who'd still been living at home near Portsmouth when he volunteered to train as a member of "Britain's resistance".

When Germany invaded and occupied a succession of European countries, many patriotic citizens had established local and national resistance organisations so as to bravely help fight for their eventual liberation by the Allies. Britain was the only country to already have a resistance organisation in place in case it was also invaded.

The deliberately bland name of 'Auxiliary Units' gave no hint the government had established a specially trained clandestine force of 'stay behind' units. Each team had its own underground hide-out with weapons, explosives, and wireless equipment and, in the event of Britain being overrun, these several thousand Auxiliers were prepared to fight and die on British soil.

Hitler's strategy eventually changed and Britain wasn't invaded, and so these men didn't have to go into action after all - but many then joined other military units including the SAS and SOE.

Book now at <http://www.history.org.uk/go/untold-stories-webinars>

