

Veterans pay respects to comrades in two Second World War battles

By Stewart Payne

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Veterans gathered yesterday to commemorate the 60th anniversary of Second World War battles, with one ceremony marking a reconciliation with the Japanese.

At Sandhurst, His Excellency Masaki Orita, the Japanese ambassador to Britain, took part in a service that saw old foes united in remembering their fallen comrades.

A wreath laying ceremony arranged by the Burma Campaign Society commemorated the battles of Kohima and Imphal, waged between April and June 1944, as the British 14th Army halted the Japanese advance towards India.

Yesterday's ceremony was attended by Japanese veterans. Lt Col Michael Lowry, from Donhead St Mary, Wilts, a veteran of Kohima, said: "The best thing about any reconciliation is that one says 'this can never be again', because in the end war doesn't solve problems."

Lt Col Lowry met Lt Masao Hirakubo, 84, who lives in Ealing, west London, who has received an honorary OBE for his work in campaigning for reconciliation between Japanese and British veterans.

In another ceremony, the battle of Monte Cassino was commemorated as more than 200 British ex-servicemen gathered in the Italian heat for a poignant service to mark the 60th anniversary of its ending.