

# WW2 - Quorn Camp on Wood Lane



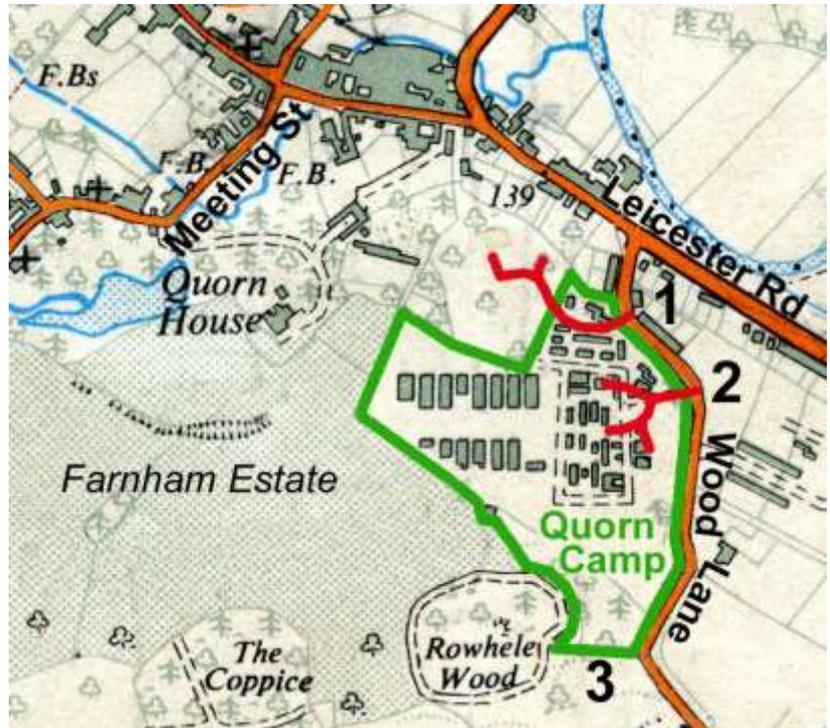
During WW2 the population of Quorn almost doubled for a while, as the village played host to two thousand American paratroopers - and what an impact they made! In this article Sue Templeman takes us back to the 1940s and examines the effect that the camp had on local people.

## Where was the camp?

Quorn camp was situated on the Farnham family estate, right at the back of their land, with the entrance on Wood Lane, exactly where Northage Close is today.

The proximity of the Great Central Railway meant that Quorn was an ideal location for the American troops, as they could arrive by train, and leave easily when required. The 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the US 82nd Airborne Division arrived in Quorn on February 14th, 1944 and pitched their olive-green bell tents in the grounds of Quorn House.

Their arrival took the village by storm. Britain had had a hard time for five years, with rationing, shortages, the men away and a war that seemed to be dragging on and on. Suddenly there was glamour, excitement and an influx of luxuries! These men were fit and good looking in their sharp uniforms. Their accents were something only heard previously from film stars, and they were very polite, respectful and were paid several times as much as British soldiers. The men had been given leaflets telling them how to behave and what to expect, so although they found things like our warm beer strange, they would never criticise!



This 1955 map of Quorn indicates the area of the camp (in green). Paddock Close (no 1) and Northage Close (no 2) have been added in red. The huts were built for the POWs and were not there when the Americans occupied the area.



The entrance to Northage Close



Left to right: John E Atchley (KIA), Nicholas J DePalma, Joseph J Comer, standing on 'Company Street' (now Northage Close)

## A warm welcome

The villagers took the Americans to their hearts and often invited them into their homes for meals. They loved our pubs, and some of the publicans even chilled the beer! Quorn provided plenty of female company for the young paratroopers, in the form of ATS girls (who worked at Beaumanor), land girls and local girls who were missing the local lads. There are many stories of romances and marriages, but also of broken hearts and babies in 1945!

The people who were least happy about the Americans, were the local men, who despite being away at war much of the time, felt resentful about this attractive competition, with money in their pockets and a seemingly endless supply of food, gum, sweets and other treats that had been rationed for five years.

Tony Fewkes who lived at 31 Leicester Road, 5 or 6 doors up from the junction with Wood Lane, has many memories of the American Paratroopers:

*“They all seemed tall, rangy men ... blue of eye ... lean of jaw ... well-tanned with their gum and their sharply cut uniforms. They were heroes ... or at least they were in the eyes of an impressionable eight year old boy whose horizons had been completely constricted by five years of continuous, depressing, wartime restrictions. Goodness, the furthest I had ever travelled was to see my Auntie in Leicester.”*



The King William IVth pub, where the Quorn Country Hotel is today. This was the closest pub to the camp.

*“I remember raucous summer evenings and mad scrambles back to camp after closing time at the King William IV pub. The unofficial use of our garden as a quick way back to camp to escape the Military Police patrols.”*

*“My father invited a few of these soldiers around for tea. Strange names like Cloid, Heinz, Buddy and Al. Greeting us with “Hi kids, here’s some candy” and “Hello Ma’am ... would you like some butter and tinned*



Tony Fewkes who was a schoolboy during WW2

*ham” Mother’s eyes widened “Thank you very much”, with English reserve.”*

*“I remember Al suffering from a terrible sore throat “This goddamn English weather”, and the image of my very small mother administering a spoonful of Famels Cough Syrup to this very large, tough paratrooper, as she would for us children!”*

The men soon felt like Quorn was their second home, and this was a comment that would recur over the years, and be repeated whenever they visited Quorn after the war. They had left America and been in action in North Africa and Sicily, where, although they would have had ‘down time’ they were still in a war zone. Once in Quorn they could genuinely relax between training, and enjoy village life with the local population.

### Fun for the children

Children as well as adults were affected by the war. Many of their fathers were away, mothers were often working on munitions, and treats such as cake and sweets were in short supply. Having spoken to many men who were boys at the time it is obvious that the arrival of the paratroopers created great excitement and entertainment for the youngsters of Quorn and surrounding villages. As the lorries rumbled past the paratroopers would throw chewing gum, sweets and even ration packs out to the children. They would also use the village lads to run errands for them to the shops and pubs, especially off to Dockray’s fish



Noel Wakeling – then and now!

and chip shop next to the White Horse. These trips were much enjoyed as the generous Yanks let them keep the change.



The more enterprising boys not only caught the goodies thrown down from the lorries, but also had great fun doing some daring scavenging. Noel Wakeling from Mountsorrel remembers walking along Wood Lane with his pals until they came to the bend in the road, where a brick wall went off at right-angles and formed one of the borders of the camp (marked 3 on the map). They would run behind the brick wall, keeping their heads down, and when the coast was clear they would scramble over and run a few hundred yards to where there was a dump in a deep hole in the ground. This was covered with wire netting, which was no problem for nimble young lads! They would get in there, grab what they could and run back as quickly as possible. Noel says

that it was amazing what the Americans threw away. There were full tins of meat, ration packs, sweets, cigarettes and even film – very rare during the war – all mixed in with the rubbish. Occasionally the worst would happen and one of the lads would get caught. This must have been terrifying when you realise that the paratroopers were tall, broad, and armed! They would lock the unfortunate miscreant up, and stand guard for a few hours, before letting them go with dire warnings.

Another form of entertainment and an exceptional scavenging opportunity, was to visit the sites where the paratroopers had been training. What could be more exciting than collecting leftover bullets and grenades, many of which were still live. Tony Fewkes recalls how him, his brother and their friends would gather together, and with a certain awareness of the dangers, carefully dismantle the bullets they had found, removing the projectile from the cartridge (which contained the explosive). They would then light a fire around the cartridges, which would explode with a very satisfying bang! Remarkably most of the youngsters came through these antics unscathed – but not all... Nine year old Cecil Stevenson from Hawcliffe Road in Mountsorrel, was playing in his garden on a makeshift see-saw, when he bumped down onto a mortar – part of the spoils from a recent foray. There was a loud explosion and Cecil was taken to Loughborough Hospital, but he died shortly afterwards.



Kit inspection

### Off for D Day

What the villagers didn't know, was what all this training was for. The men were preparing for D day and as paratroopers they would go in ahead of the main push. On Monday May 29th 1944, after three and a half months in Quorn, they left for their dangerous mission and were parachuted into France, in advance of the troops who landed on beaches. After a month fighting in Normandy they returned to Quorn victorious, but the cost was high. 186 men had been killed, over one hundred had been taken prisoner and over 650 had been wounded. Of the 650, about 300 were too badly injured to come back to Quorn. In

total 600 of the original 2,000 did not return to the village. 500 new paratroopers were drafted in to take their place.

### Operation Market Garden

When the Americans arrived back at the Wood Lane camp they were more subdued, but life and the training had to carry on. They were here for a further two and a half months before leaving Quorn again on Friday September 15<sup>th</sup> 1944. This time they parachuted into Holland as part of Operation Market Garden, which for them was mainly centred around Nijmegen in Holland. Again they sustained major

losses, but the numbers are more difficult to quantify, as there was no definite end to the operation. They then moved south to the battle of the bulge, and would never again return to Quorn as soldiers.

Tony Fewkes recalls:

*“We missed the shouted marching beat of their training marches, the games of baseball on the village green, village girls and soldiers by the riverside, the colour and laughter of those young men from another continent, who finally, one day, marched out of the village leaving a strange quietness”*

## The POW Camp



It has not been possible to find a photograph of Quorn POW camp, but the huts would have been very similar to the ones above, although arranged in a more regular formation.

Within a short time of the Americans leaving Quorn, the area off Wood Lane became a Prisoner of War camp. Many people remember that there were Italians there at some point, but so far all the documentary evidence relates to German prisoners of war. The American camp was purely tented, but in 1944/45 more than fifty huts were built, each capable of housing 40 to 50 men. Security was much tighter with barbed wire and many more guards, although in reality the camp was classed as a 'standard' camp, which had the lowest security, and

most of the prisoners had had enough of the war, and had no appetite to escape. As time went on, security eased and men were set to work helping local businesses, working in the fields or doing work for the local Council. There were no more forays for the village lads, as the prisoners had harsher conditions than the civilians. It was initially known as Camp no 183, but later Camp 9. This is confirmed by dates on postcards and letters written by the POWs.

The commander of the POW Camp in 1945 was Lieutenant Colonel Richard St. John Hartley. The commander, his wife and their three sons lived in Quorn House during this time with the Farnhams. The photograph (below right) of the three young boys was taken at Quorn House. They are (left to right) Charles (who was 8 years old), John and Piers.

Charles has many memories from his days in Quorn:

*“One of the tasks the prisoners were set was to unpack rations which were surplus from the previous US occupants and sort them into boxes. John, being four years older than myself, was helping the POWs in their task, for which they “paid” him with sweets. The boxes were then stored on the estate. I had made friends with some village boys and regrettably joined in a misdemeanour. We went to the store-house in the grounds and we found a small hole in the wall behind it. If you reached inside you could find a carton with tins of such delicious things as rice pudding or condensed milk. Dad found out, and I was in*



*trouble. His attitude was that it was not merely theft, but plunder. I kept well clear of the stores after that.*

*I remember the great joy of a birthday cake presented to me from the POW kitchen. I had never seen a cake of such beauty. It was a one off, made with much ingenuity and contained soft icing made with margarine and layers which I think were made of bread.*

*With many mouths to feed at a time of shortage and rationing, my father ordered that a major horticultural project should be started. Of course, at that time the need for fertiliser could not be met. My father proposed that the contents of the septic tanks would fill the bill, but the MO was not in favour, fearing disease.*

*I also remember George Farnham, but of course he was much older than myself so we did not meet much. Two incidents that come to mind are a great party that the Farnham's gave and to which I was invited, though it was principally for adults, (but we shared the house with the Farnhams), which I believed to be George's 21st Birthday. Dancing in the ballroom including the Lambeth Walk! Another was when I was walking in the park with him and he was upset in particular by ivy which he tore off a tree."*

In March 1947, after one of the harshest English winters on record, Georg Pierseck, a POW, wrote to his friend Gerhard Hauschild back in Germany:

*"Surroundings quite nice. The disadvantage: During the last few cold weeks not a single piece of coal - Food quite thin, lunch-time, the thinnest turnip soup all the time, Sundays for a change pea soup."*

Although the new residents were 'the enemy', some villagers accepted their plight and offered friendship and hospitality. Tony Fewkes again recalls:

*"My brother (Mike Fewkes) and Peter Gamble were very keen ornithologists, and as the POW's were allowed some freedom, they met up with a German, Major Robert Bröck, himself a birder. As time went on, Mike invited the Major to visit our house. He introduced himself formally in German, complete with a barely suppressed heel click. Mother, brought up with WW1 very strong in her memory was quite upset by this! History does not record whether the good Herr Major received his cuppa!"*

Not everybody was open minded to the prisoners and when the German Lutherians (non-conformists) wanted to use St Bartholomew's Church for their services, it was reported in the Loughborough Echo, that whilst the Foreign Office, the vicar [Teddy Pilling] and the bishop were happy, a vote of the Parochial Church Council refused permission. Fortunately Quorn Methodists stepped in and offered their Chapel which avoided an awkward situation. There was strong criticism for the intolerance, and eventually St Bartholomew's relented.

When the war ended Germany was not in a position to accept and feed returning POWs, and it was 1948 before the last POWs were freed from Quorn Camp. The British Army continued to use the site for their own purposes for another ten years.

### **The 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Veterans Return**

After the war an 82nd Airborne Veterans Association was created and Deryk Wills from Evington was the main Leicestershire link. The bond between Quorn and the 82nd Airborne Division, 505th PIR was unbreakable, and over the years the veterans would cross the Atlantic many times to visit their 'second home'. The last trip was in 2006, by which time the numbers were dwindling, the veterans were all over 80 and they were getting more frail. The photograph was taken in Stafford Orchard in 2006. Bob Murphy, on the left was underage when he joined up. He took part in the drop into St Mere Eglise in Normandy prior to D Day. He had a street named after him in the town - 'Rue Bob Murphy' on the Southside of the church square. Bob died in February 2009.



**Remembering the Americans**

Even though the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne were only in Quorn for a total of six months, the village will never forget the Americans that they welcomed into their lives. In the years after the war a commemorative brass plaque was commissioned and attached to a stone shipped over from the destroyed Church at Nijmegen. The memorial was placed in Stafford Orchard and in 1952 an avenue of lime trees was planted nearby. In 1994 a memorial stone was positioned just a few feet from the main war memorial on Quorn Cross, and each November a wreath of poppies is placed there by the son of one of the paratroopers. When Stafford Orchard park was refurbished in 2010, despite the passage of over seventy years, Quorn still felt that it was important not to forget this important period in the history of the village and the dreadful loss of lives. The Nijmegen stone was cleaned, a heritage board was created to tell the story, and the smaller of the Station Road park entrances was named the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Gate in honoured remembrance.



Top left: The Nijmegen stone  
 Top right: 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Gate and colonnade of lime trees.  
 Bottom left: The US war memorial in the Memorial Gardens.  
 Bottom right: Heritage board in Stafford Orchard.

**TV Programme**

In June 2017 a television company descended on Quorn to make a programme for the History Channel's 'WW2 Treasurer Hunters' series. It was presented by Suggs from Madness and Stephen Taylor, a military historian/ metal detectorist, who is chairman of the WW2 Relic Retrieval & Preservation Group. Working with archaeologists, a large group of metal detectorists set about investigating the site. This took place on two of the wettest and coldest days in June, at the end of what had been a glorious month!



Suggs with just some of the equipment a paratrooper would have landed with

Filming in the rain with the producers Tom and Lucy

The dig was both interesting and productive. The show was broadcast on television in October 2017, and then in 2018 there was a screening in Quorn Village Hall.

Over a hundred items were found. These included a Brylcreem jar, toothpaste tubes, shoe polish tins, part of a cut throat razor, coins, buckles, a penknife, a compass, cutlery, military buttons, lots of bullets, various military badges and most importantly several American and German dog tags. To find German dog tags on British soil is incredibly rare and seven were found in Quorn. Unfortunately due to German restrictions on information, it is not possible to identify individual soldiers.



### Postscript by Sue

In all the years that I have been researching the local history of Quorn, one of the most poignant things that I have come across is related to the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division. In May 2011 I was told that some flowers had been left on the US war memorial in the Memorial Gardens. By the time I looked they had gone, so I made a note to look in the next year. Sure enough in 2012 flowers were left again. The card said:

*"In loving memory. Sgt Chuck Burghduff, 505 Para Regt, 82nd Airborne, 1920 – 1944 Love always XXXXX"*



Chuck Burghduff. Note that the men would blacken their faces for landing overnight.

Flowers were still being left in 2018. It is not known by whom, but she must be in her nineties, and continues to remember this brave young man. Research shows that Chuck's full name was Sergeant Charles Leroy Burghduff and he was only 24 when he died. He had survived the D Day landings, after which he had been awarded a silver star medal, the third-highest personal decoration for valour in combat. Chuck was one of the pathfinders, who had the most dangerous job of going in ahead of the main drop. They would mark the drop zones and set up radio beacons to guide the aircraft carrying the main force. In September 1944, after parachuting into Holland at the beginning of Operation Market Garden, he was walking with his friend Bob Murphy, down a hill into the town of Mook, when he was hit in his side by machine gun fire and was killed instantly.

This article was produced by Sue Templeman on behalf of [www.quornmuseum.com](http://www.quornmuseum.com). Thank you to Tony Fewkes, Noel Wakeling and Charles Hartley for sharing their memories so generously.