

The Americans in Quorn in WW2

During WW2 the population of Quorn doubled as the village played host to almost two thousand American paratroopers. At the first History Group meeting of the winter season the Quorn historian Sue Templeman came to the Methodist Church to tell us the story. Much of what follows is taken from her Quorn Museum website and is reproduced with her permission.

Where was the camp?

The 2,000 men of the US 82nd Airborne Division pitched their olive-green bell tents roughly where Northage Close is today, on land requisitioned from the Farnham family of Quorn House. They arrived in a snowstorm in February 1944, and made an immediate impression.

Britain had had a hard time after years of rationing and shortages, and a war that seemed to be dragging on and on. Suddenly here was glamour, excitement and an influx of fit young men in sharp uniforms which seemed far superior to the British khaki. They were polite, respectful and paid much more than their British counterparts. They had been given leaflets telling them how to behave and what to expect, so although they found things like our currency weird, they didn't criticise!

Social life in Quorn

To many of the men Quorn became their second home, where they could relax between training and enjoy village life with the local population. They loved our pubs, and some of the publicans even chilled the beer! The village provided plenty of female company for the young paratroopers, in the form of the many ATS girls who worked at Beaumanor as well as the land girls who worked in the fields. There were romances and marriages, but also broken hearts and babies! Some of the local men resented the competition, who had money in their pockets and a seemingly endless supply of treats unobtainable in England.

The arrival of the paratroopers created fresh excitement amongst the youngsters of Quorn. Some took to visiting the sites where the paratroopers had been training. What could be more exciting than collecting bullets and artillery that had been left behind? Nine-year old Cecil Stevenson 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 where he died shortly afterwards.

Off for D Day

Nobody (least of all the men themselves) knew exactly what all this training

was for. Then suddenly in May they left, to parachute into France ahead of the troops who landed on the beaches. A month later they returned to Quorn, less 186 that had been killed, some 100 taken prisoner, and about 300 too badly injured to return. So in total some 30% did not come back.

Operation Market Garden

When they arrived back at the camp they were more subdued, but life and training had to carry on. They stayed for another two months before leaving Quorn again in September, this time to parachute into Holland as part of Operation Market Garden. Again they sustained major losses, but the numbers are more difficult to quantify as there was no clear end to the operation. Then they moved south to the Battle of the Bulge, and never returned to Quorn as soldiers.

The PoW Camp

Shortly after the Americans left, what was Quorn Camp became a prisoner-of-war camp, housing German prisoners of war. This time more than fifty huts were built, each capable of housing 40 to 50 men. And when the war ended Germany was not in a position to accept and feed returning PoWs, so it was 1948 before the last of them were free to go home.

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