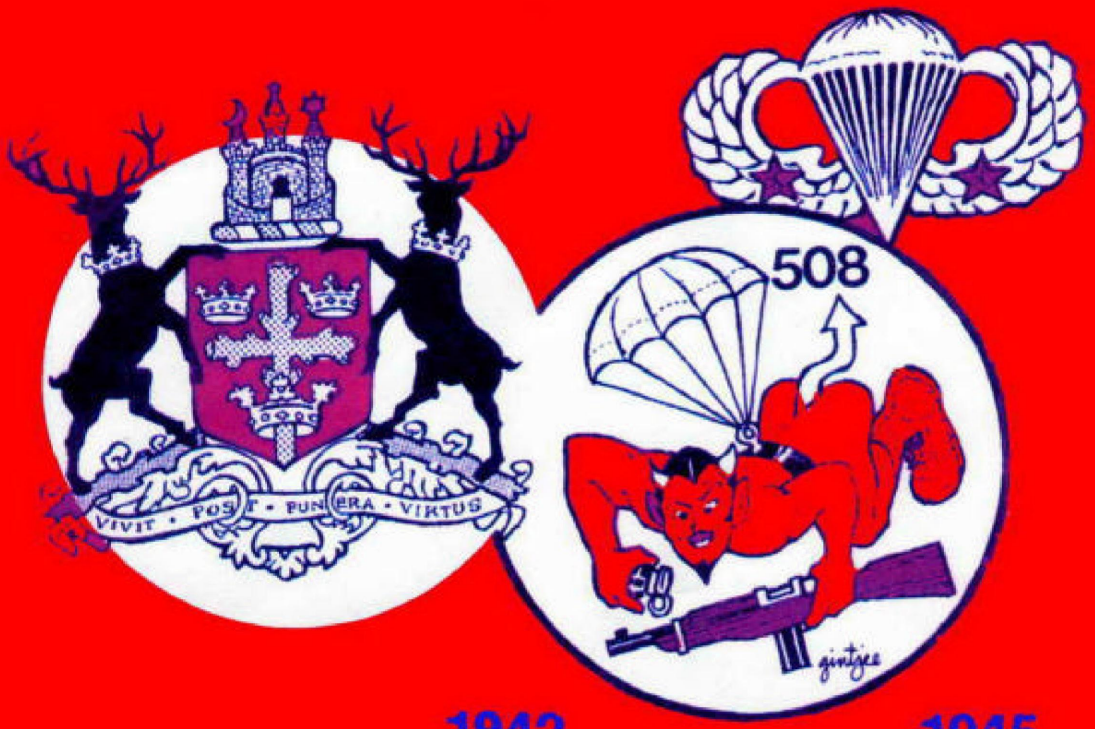
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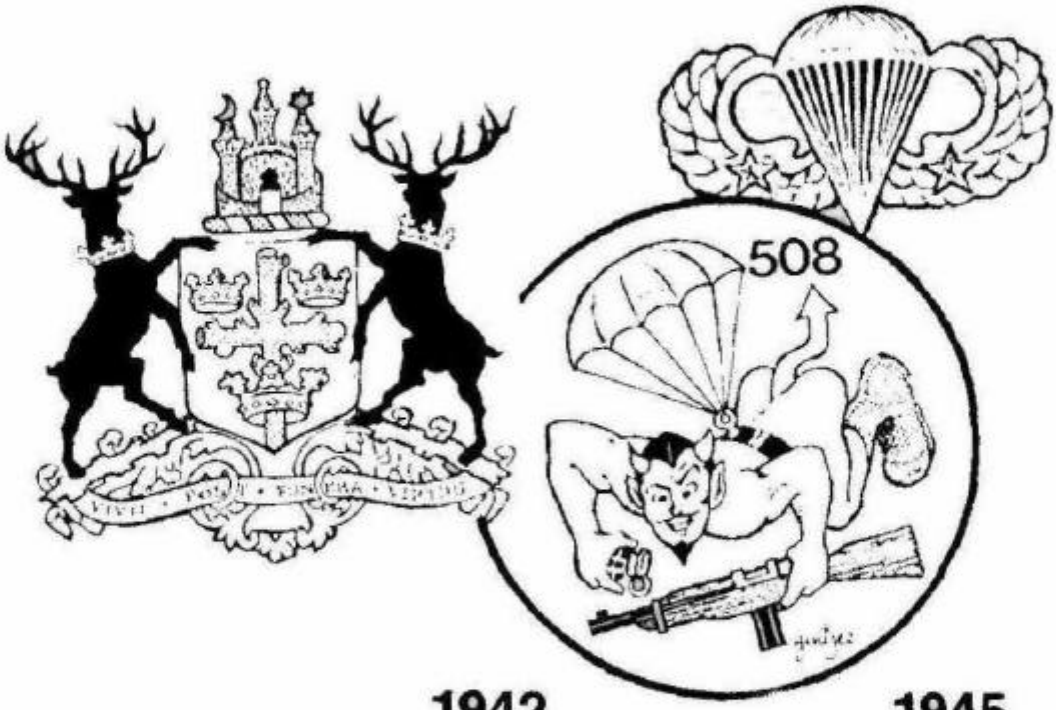


1942 1945

The Impact of an elite American Parachute Regiment on an English City in World War II

DAVID J. PIKE

508th Parachute Infantry Regiment



1942 **1945**

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FOREWORD

I feel highly honored for having been asked to write the foreword for this fine book. The subjects, Nottingham, England and the 508 Parachute Infantry Regiment, are both dear to my heart. Friendships made in both, during the war, continue to grow and, each year, become stronger.

The author, David Pike, was a mere infant when we arrived in Nottingham in March 1944. Today, he is our Official Ambassador of Goodwill in Nottingham He is an honorary member of our association and I am happy to call him my friend, David, his wife Sharron and their son Sean have worked tirelessly in their efforts to keep the memory of the 508 P. I. R. alive throughout England and particularly in the beautiful city of Nottingham.

Thanks to the Pike family, the 508 now have a tree with a plaque in Wollaton Park. We also have our own mini-museum within the confines of Wollaton Hall We have been honored countless times in the Nottingham Council House and many of us have beautiful gifts from our visits there. All of this has been made possible by David Pike and his wonderful family.

During 1944, Nottingham was a beautiful city and it continues to grow, prosper and remain a beautiful city today. We of the 508 found the citizens of Nottingham to be quite friendly. They regularly proved themselves to be among the most tolerant people in the world We took over their pubs, invaded-ed their restaurants and hotels, made far too much noise wherever we went and we completely disrupted their way of life

During our visit there in 1944, we failed to remember that we were guests in their country. We disturbed entire towns frequently as we marched through them, late at night, singing raucous songs at the top of our voices. We drank their very limited quantity of spirits as if it were water. We yelled loudly at all of the females as we passed them on the streets. We were downright rude. In spite of our rude behavior, and our complete lack of consider-ation for the citizens, we were accepted warmly and were made to feel that we belonged there On each return visit to Nottingham we rediscover the tolerance and the friendly attitude of the people They continue to accept us graciously and make us feel welcome

The stories related in this book are authentic and were supplied by various citizens of Nottingham and veterans of the 508 These stories have been assembled and retold in an entertaining manner by David Pike There is a generous collection of photos from the period covered

Nottingham and the people living there in 1944-45 were a wonderful experience for me. I was deeply impressed by the many courtesies extended to me by the people. On numerous return visits, I find that the warm, friendly attitude of the residents still exists I am happy to call Nottingham my second home. It is a beautiful part of the world and the people there are like members of my family.

O.B.

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of 1944, the allied Generals were busily organizing the plans for the proposed invasion of Europe which was to take place later that year

As part of this massive build-up of, machines and equipment, the American 82nd Airborne Division, who had just returned from Italy, where they themselves engaged in re-equipping and organizing for^ the task ahead, this Division was stationed in the relative, peaceful area of the Cookstown area in Northern Ireland. Owing to the fact that the 82nd had left one of its regiments, the 504 at the Anzio Beach Head, the Division itself was under strength, so it was decided that the American 2nd Brigade, consisting of the 507 and 508 Parachute Infantry Regiments, already in Ireland and fresh from the states, would be attached to the 82nd for the invasion of Normandy.

In early March 1944, the 82nd, with its attached units, left Northern Ireland, and on arrival in England, the Division was spread over various locations in the Nottingham - Leicester area, these locations ranged from woods, estates, and in some extreme cases, old dis-used horse stables, but this wasn't the case where the 508 were concerned, they were allocated the plum location of Wollaton Park, with its stately home, plush acres of green land, and wild deer roaming free, but the most important thing about this location as far as the troopers were concerned was that Wollaton Park was situated only 2 miles from the center of the city of Nottingham

This book is then their story, and the impact they had on the city of Nottingham, and more important, the impact the people had on them, this is not another war story, But more of a story of young men, 4,000 miles away from home, living from day to day, the future uncertain, because they knew, some of them would die in the

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Normandy campaign, it is also a story of why these young men would eventually come to regard Nottingham as their second home, and hopefully this book will show that the popular wartime saying regarding the G I.'s as being "over-paid, over-sexed, and over-here" didn t apply to all U.S forces stationed in Britain, especially, the men of the 508.

THE ARRIVAL

It was approaching midnight on March 10, 1944 as the trams carrying officers and men of the 508 Parachute Infantry Regiment entered the outskirts of the City of Nottingham, forgotten now was the long journey they had experienced which had started in the very early hours of that same day when they left their old camp at Port Stewart in Northern Ireland

There was hardly any member of the regiment who had any regrets leaving Port Stewart, the camp consisted of rows and rows of the infamous Nissan Huts, and was situated miles away from anywhere, in fact the only time members of the 508 managed to get away from the camp was when the occasional weekend pass was obtained, and this enabled the chosen few to visit places like Londonderry or Belfast. But apart from these short breaks life was pretty dull, mainly consisting of field problems and other kinds of manoeuvres. The weather was constantly bad and this even prevented the 508 to do any practice airborne jumps.

The orders for the 508 to move to Nottingham were classified as secret because the regiment was going to be attached to the 82nd Airborne Division which was to have a leading part in the proposed invasion of Europe later on that year, spear heading the assault into Normandy. Every precaution possible was taken to keep this information regarding the 508's final destination secret from everybody except for a few of the regiments top ranking officers.

A few days prior to the move, Colonel Roy Lindquist was inspecting the troops, as he often did, this ensured keeping everybody on their toes one hundred per cent, when he noticed one trooper wearing a soiled tie, "Haven't you got a clean tie?" asked the Colonel "Yes Sir", replied trooper Charlie Paradise, "but I'm saving it for when we go to England." A look of amazement came across the Colonel's face and he said, "I suppose you know also whereabouts the Regiment will be going." "Yes Sir", remarked Charlie once again, "I hear its going to Nottingham." On hearing this so called secret information. Colonel Lindquist stared hard at the startled trooper and walked away slowly, shaking his head in disbelief, forgetting all about Charlie's dirty tie, much to the relief of the trooper

Sgt. Don Jakeway of Johnstown, Ohio, vividly recalls the journey from Northern Ireland to Nottingham

"The Regiment boarded trains at Port Stewart and traveled to the docks at Belfast", says Don. "We then left the trains and boarded a ship which took us to Scotland. The voyage was uneventful and we landed safely in Bonnie Scotland, we were then put on to trains once again south to Nottingham." As Don says, "There wasn't a guy amongst the 2,000 Paratroopers on the train who hadn't heard of Nottingham before", he goes on, "As the tram headed for our final destination, I looked out of the carriage window and completely forgot about all the discomfort we were experiencing due to the amount of troops and their equipment that was in the carriage with me. I was in complete awe. Here I was in 'Merry Old England', beautiful green countryside, land of Kings and Castles, heading for Robin Hood country. It was really amazing. I was keen on history at school back in the States and to be here in the land of Legends really left me gasping."

A huge convoy of military trucks were lined up on the streets outside the station, these would be used in relays to transport the entire regiment to its new base camp at Wollaton Park, which was situated roughly 2 miles south of the City centre. Although most of the men ordered on this detail were themselves actual members of the 508 also, the thought of eventually meeting up once again with the regiment and their buddies was something they had been dreading for days. Staff Sgt. Ray Pateracki explains.

"Because of my many years of experience in the hotel business prior to my joining the military, I was the non-com in charge of 20 or so men sent to Nottingham from Northern Ireland as the cadre, whose sole job was to set up tents and to do whatever was needed to get the new camp ready for when the regiment finally arrived."

You can well imagine our joy when we first set toot in this wonderful city, after spending months in that barren, cheerless area of Northern Ireland We busted our butts during the daylight hours getting the camp ready, but once the sun set we hustled those same butts into town.

Surrounded by a myriad of pubs, our biggest problem was selecting one that appealed to our fancy. I for one selected the Jolly Higgler, a pub that was located a mile or so down the road that led into

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town from Wollaton Park.

How well I remembered the chill that settled over this pub when I first strolled in. I was the first American paratrooper they had seen and they weren't about to receive me with open arms until they had thoroughly studied my behavior.

Fortunately, as I continued to patron-ize the "Jolly Higgler", the habitués of the pub did find out that I didn't wear horns on my head, and that I was a fairly nice person, respectably married man and lonely. They came to accept me and I met and made many fine friends. As a matter of fact after "Time Gentlemen Please" was called out, I would sneak to the back of the pub and the proprietor would let me in for additional imbibing.

Being as my guys and I were the only American Airborne troops in Nottingham, we were enjoying ourselves so much. Every one of us hoped and prayed that it would be months before the rest of the regiment arrived, but such was not to be, they were arriving at the designated time, and we all knew that with over 2000 paratroopers coming to Wollaton Park, "Our Nottingham" would never be the same, and I worried in case they too would invade my pub. Fortunately as it turned out, most of the guys, when allowed that O pass from camp preferred going into the centre of town, thus leaving the "Jolly Higgler" and my new found friends in relative peace "

When the trains came to a final halt at the station everybody was ordered off and told to line up on the platforms. This was easier said than done because every soldier carried his personal equipment which included rifle, packs and kit bags, etc. and utter confusion reigned for a short time as the men scrambled through the small doors of the carriages. There was a lot of shouting and shoving by the men as they spilled out onto the platforms. The yelling of officers and sergeants telling them to form up in their respective squads and platoons didn't help matters either.

After the men had been assembled and some sort of order prevailed, the troopers were marched along the length of the platforms, out onto the streets to the awaiting trucks. They were then immediately loaded aboard them and with an M.P. escort the convoy drove steadily through the dark and deserted streets of Nottingham.

During the short trip to Wollaton Park some of the troopers were leaning out of the back of the trucks trying to see something that could be identified with their own thoughts of Nottingham. After all, wasn't this supposed to be Robin Hood's country? Everybody had read or heard about this famous outlaw and his continual fights with the evil Sheriff of Nottingham and how he robbed the rich to feed the poor. But as the convoy rolled through the town there was nothing to be seen, no castles, no forests, to say the troopers were dis-appointed would be an understatement

Suddenly the convoy started to slow down and drove through a big entrance surrounded by equally big gates, then drove for about a quarter of a mile before coming to a halt. "Okay you guys, everybody out" bawled some sergeant and what had happened at the station earlier was repeated once again. But this time it was much worse, at least on the station platform there was the occasional lamp lit, and the men could see something, but here at the camp the blackout was in full force, not a light was to be seen except one now and then carried by some guy whose task it was to guide the now very tired troopers to their tents. Men were continually getting lost the equipment they put down one minute and couldn't be found the next. Troopers were stumbling over the ropes supporting various tents and all in all a sigh of relief came from every guy when they finally reached and were directed into the tent that had been allocated to them.

It was virtually impossible to get any sleep, trucks were arriving every 10 minutes or so, unloading their cargo of men and equipment, then pulling out to make the return trip back to the station for more men and more equipment. This would go on and on till daybreak and as the men lay exhausted in their wooden cots inside the tents many thoughts about the future were going through their minds, but one thing was for certain to all the men, the 508 had finally arrived in Nottingham and everybody was looking forward to when they could get their first pass into town All in all, things were looking pretty good.

At exactly 5:30 am, the camp was wakened by the sound of a lone bugler playing Reveille, inside the tents the men were moaning and groaning about the lack of sleep they had had, etc., because some of them had only arrived a couple of hours previous as part of the last convoy of men from the station. One of the troopers, Sgt Owen B. Hill remembers that first morning well: –

"After hearing Reveille, it was a mad scramble to get dressed and out of the tent. All of us were keyed up with the knowledge that we were in Nottingham and we all wanted to have a good look at our new location, and being one of the first out of our tent, I must admit that my first impressions were very daunting. It was still dark, very cold and damp,

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but the thing that comes to mind straight away was the mist, it hung very low, obscuring what little vision we had. Not that there was anything spectacular to see, because the only thing we could make out was the tents, it was impossible to see anything else."

Little did Sgt Hill or the majority of the 508 realize at the time, but of all the various locations spread over the Nottingham - Leicester area that had been allocated to the 16,000 men of the 82nd Airborne Division, Wollaton Park was by far the best. The Park consisting of over 700 acres of plush, beautiful English landscape which was ideally situated just 2 ½ miles from the centre of Nottingham City itself. Yet in comparison, one regiment of the 82nd was given old dis-used horse stables miles away from anywhere and another regiment was allocated to some barren woods next to a very small village.

"As it became lighter and the mist slowly cleared away, we could now see more of our immediate surroundings", continues Sgt. Hill, "There all around us as mentioned before was the masses of tents, in fact within a couple of days, our camp site was to be called Tent City, a name that would stick during our entire stay there. Troopers were all over the place doing exactly as we were, looking and trying to find anything that would tell us we were indeed in Robin Hood's country, when all of a sudden a bunch of guys started yelling and pointing "Just look at that castle". We all looked in the direction they were pointing and there, over-looking our entire camp in a commanding position on a hill was what we all thought genuinely at the time was 'Nottingham Castle', we had never seen anything like it back in the states. Needless to say, this was pointed out to us later on that the castle was in fact "Wollaton Hall", but at that moment in time, to us, anything that big had just got to be a castle.

As we all looked in amazement at "Nottingham Castle", shouting and yelling started up once again at the other end of the camp. This was followed immediately by bursts of gunfire, it sounded like a full-scale battle was taking place so everybody ran like hell to see what all the ruckus was about. When we arrived at the scene of the shooting, the sight that confronted us was really unbelievable, there, racing away in the distance was a herd of wild deer, some of our guys were still blasting their M1's off at them, there were already two deer laying on the ground, hit by the gunfire. Everybody, including myself were as excited as hell because we just couldn't believe our luck, after all, here we were in Merry Old England, in a new camp site, Nottingham Castle (so we thought) and to top it all, herds of deer roaming around, it was just fantastic, none of us had known nothing like it."

The timely arrival of an officer investigating the shooting, brought everybody there back to the land of reality with a bump.

"Who in the hell is responsible for all this", demanded the Captain, looking down at the deer.

"We are", shouted the troopers, owning up right away, because as far as they were concerned it was open season on deer no matter what country they were in.

Their smiles quickly faded when the Captain informed them that

"All deer in England were owned by the King and protected by law, also, did they know it was still a hanging offense to kill the Kings deer without permission."

On hearing this information the troopers got very worried

"What kind of country is this anyway", said one would-be hunter. "Nobody told us about the deer", the Captain replied, "You guys are in big trouble", and went away to fetch the M.P.'s.

The end result of all this was that the troopers concerned were heavily fined by the U.S. Army and also a substantial amount of compensation was paid to the British Government for the loss of the deer, but the G.l.'s had the final say, those two deer that had been killed, mysteriously disappeared, and were never found again, except for now and then in some enlisted mans cooking pot.

"They were", as quoted by a guy who wishes to remain anonymous, "A welcome change from army food and went down well".

The camp now started to settle down in the usual military way, there was plenty of work to be done. Men were detailed for this and for that, but no matter what job they were doing, the only thing that mattered to the men was the question of Nottingham itself The advance party was plagued by questions, such as, 'what was the Pubs like', and 'where did all the girls hang out', it was obvious that the guys in the know were not giving any secrets away, so

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everybody was looking forward to passes being handed out so that they could find out for themselves what was in the offing.

Word got around the camp that no passes were being issued on that first day, except to essential personnel. This news did not go down very well with the young troopers, so quite a few of them walked around their camp checking for ways to get out unobserved After all, they were paratroopers, elite of the U.S. Army and no fence was going to cause a major problem, so plans were made and as soon as it became dark, troopers could be seen breaking out over the fence at the rear of the camp.

Once they were clear of the fence, the troopers ran in all directions, it didn't matter which way they went as long as it was away from Tent City. But no matter which path they took everyone of them would eventually come to the same final obstacle, this was the 8 foot wall that surrounded all of Wollaton Park This wall, as legend has it, took seven bricklayers, with seven apprentices seven years to complete the seven mile long wall.

When the wall was first built about 300 years ago, its purpose was to keep the local peasants out of the estate, nobody could foresee that in the future, hundreds of U.S. Paratroopers would be scaling that same wall to break out from the park to be with the local people.

Having scaled the final hurdle, many of the troopers by pure chance, headed for Beeston, and one of the first pubs they came to, which would later be a favorite haunt for quite a few of the 508 was the "Cricketers Arms", but more about pubs later. The only thing of significance that came out on that first night was that the number of bicycle thefts increased rapidly in the Beeston and Long Eaton area. This was due entirely to the fact that most troopers found the bicycle a great form of transportation, which was easily obtained. People left them standing outside their houses, shops, pubs, etc., and it became a usual sight to see a G.I. pedaling furiously at night towards Wollaton Park, and upon reaching the wall, throw the bike over, and then himself. The trooper would then select a hiding for the bike, either in the woods or bushes until was required again.

And so ended The first day, the troopers were not allowed out officially for the first week, but this did not stop a number of them breaking out every night. They were all anxious to sample everything that Nottingham could offer, so when it was announced on Regimental Orders that passes would be handed out every day, but to only fifty percent of the regiment at a time, the men started to clean and press their uniforms, give their jump boots an extra shine, and above all else, ensured that their "silver" jump wings glistened on their jackets. These men were proud as hell of being paratroopers, so took even more pride in their appearance.

One of the troopers allowed out during that first week was David M. Jones of San Francisco. Davey, as he is popularly known has this story to tell.

DAVID M. JONES

"Upon arriving in Nottingham, and the 508 being stationed in the wonderful location of Wollaton Park, which every soul in the entire regiment realized how fortunate we were to be in a central location, near a major city, because all American military establish-ments are almost always located in areas we call the boon docks.

After getting settled in our 6 man wooden platform pyramid tents, we found clothing care became a real problem because there were no attached quarter master corp. to take care of these matters.

I decided to expand my horizon by going out of the gate, or climbing over the wall, I can't remember but I know I started to walk up the main road towards the "Admiral Rodney" pub and finally arrived at a water canal that crossed under the main road. Parallel to the canal was a dead end street which still exists. Known as Bridge Road, this led to the coal mine (Wollaton Pit) and the homes that bordered this road were "Company" homes, rented to the men who worked in the mine.

I stopped outside number 30 Bridge Road because there fending flowers in her garden was a motherly type lady.

My intentions were to find someone to do my laundry, and I had a bundle under my arm and I soon found out that I was the first paratrooper from the Park to be met by this lady.

I introduced myself, and she did the same. Her name was Mrs. Booth and 1 immediately got the impression that there was formed a motherly re-action.

Mrs. Booth invited me into her home and I discovered she was a Scot and her husband was a native of Nottingham and he worked at this Mine as a blacksmith all his working life.

During the course of our tea, Mrs. Booth asked me

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about the bundle, and of course, the mission I had originally set out on came to light. She insisted I leave my laundry and arrangements were made and agreed on.

When I returned to collect the laundry I was confronted with meeting two additional and wonderful people, Mr. Booth and his 18-year-old daughter, Lorna, and I can assure you all that was on my mind was clean socks, underwear, etc. but little did I know how fond I was to become of this great family.

Once again I was invited in, this time for tea, and a sweet roil, and it suddenly came to me what I had been missing the past 2 years since I had joined the Army. Honest to goodness family life and the Booth family filled this vacuum.

It was impossible to get Mrs. Booth to take payment for the laundry service so it became a kind of game for me to see what I could liberate from our mess hall in the form of "Goodies". In fact, I remember on one occasion I managed to obtain an entire canned ham and you can imagine the feast that was had by the Booth family and myself. One Sunday afternoon, bearing in mind, that probably a full canned ham had not been seen by this family since the start of the War 5 years previous.

As time went on, I was truly made to feel part of the family, my mother back in the States would write to Mrs. Booth and send her items of clothing that were so difficult to obtain in the shops in England Mrs. Booth even sent my mother a telegram telling her not to worry about my being wounded in Normandy and that I was at their home and looking fit.

Between the Holland invasion and the Ardennes campaign, I was still at Wollaton Park convalescing from my wounds when I came down with a month long sinus infection and one day not being able to stand the unheated tents, laying on an army cot I managed to dress and climb the wall and make my way to "Ma" Booth, and when I knocked on her door, looking like something the cat had brought home. I was immediately ushered into the house, helped upstairs to a spare bedroom, undressed and tucked into bed with a hot water bottle placed at my feet, hot lemonade forced down my throat and generally treated like "Royalty"

This happened on a Friday, and I was able to spend the weekend there without risk of causing trouble from our base camp and the treatment handed out was needed to get me back to some semblance of health.

I will never forget the wonderful and generous hospitality I received as an American G.I. from this wonderful family and 1 hope they remembered me with the same feelings I had for them.

Mr. and Mrs. Booth have passed on, but I keep .n touch with their daughter Lorna who is married with 4 children, perhaps I made some impression on her because when her first son was born in 1950, he ended up with the name "David".

Every trooper in the 508 had been issued with a special booklet describing Nottingham and its attractions, so what did the City of Nottingham have to offer to any visitor in that year of 1944.

According to the booklet, there was plenty to do and to see, every usual tourist attraction was fully described in detail, and directions laid down There were even three American Red Cross Service clubs in the City, one at the Albert Hall Institute, Derby Road, St. Peters Schools canteen on Broadmarsh, and also one on Carrington Street. There were 18 cafes in and around the City centre where one could get a cup of tea and a cake, etc., but only four of these "Cafe de Paris" on Pelham Street, the Elite Cinema Café, "Lyons" on Long Row and "Popular Cafe" on Castle Gate were open on a Sunday, the rest were closed.

The only information about pubs was the licensing hours, this was something the Americans had never come across before back in the States Most bars were open all day, but here in Nottingham the hours were week days 10.30 a.m. to 2 30 p m, opened again 6:00 pm to 10:00 pm. Many G.l.'s on their first trip to a pub was fascinated by the "Landlord". When it was closing time he would shout at the top of his voice, "Time Gentlemen, Please "

This amused the G I 's quite a lot and: later on after getting established in regular pubs the landlords used to shout quite often.

"Time Gentlemen, Please, and you bloody Yanks too "

This used to go down great with the troopers, who took all this in the spirit it was given.

Sundays were a bad day, entertainment wise, to quote the official booklet

"The English Sunday is intended to be a day of rest. No buses run until 1 pm. No games are played in the Parks, Theatres and shops are closed, but Cinemas are open "

The only dance hail open on a Sunday was the

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Odeon-Ritz in the Market Square, and this was only open between 2:45 pm to 8 40 pm, so apart from, visiting different pubs, there was very little to do. Even if you were interested in sport, Sundays were also bad days. The booklet goes on to say "Baseball", The Forest pitch always at the disposal of American troops - except Sundays, "Golf", Wollaton Park and Bulwell Forest closed on Sundays.

*But after reading that about Golf there is a note at the bottom of the page saying*N.B. It is almost impossible to buy either golf or tennis balls

This is then what Nottingham had to offer but no amount of restrictions were going to spoil it for the troopers, because when it was their turn to go out on pass, they would all make the most of it. One such trooper, Ray Barnhart, who came from Long Beach, California, has nothing but fond memories of wartime Nottingham and its people.

"Looking back on my younger years, I don't think there was anybody who had a greater impact on my life than Adolph Hitler" comments Ray, "In our generation he stands head and shoulders above them all, because were it not for him and his cast of gangster henchmen, I would never had made the all expense paid trip to England, Nottingham and its people were wonderful, I often wonder to this day if the American people would have been as kind and generous if the situation was reversed."

Ray continues -

"We Americans would never know how we would react if our homeland had been bombed and under the threat of invasion, I met a wonderful elderly couple, I think their names were Stewart. They owned a "Fish and Chip" shop near a pub, and if it wasn't for them I think I would have starved on many occasions because the 3rd Battalion cooks were the worst in the army If you missed one meal, you had to be carried to the next one.

I was invited to the Stewarts home for one Sunday dinner, and just before leaving camp. I raided the cook house and managed to get a complete ham and a pound of butter I rationalized my theft by saying to myself that the cooks would ruin it anyway.

The Stewarts had a son who was in Burma, I often wondered if he came home safely

When we returned from Normandy to England I thought the rolling countryside was the most beautiful I had ever seen and when we got back to Nottingham with its pretty girls, fish and chips, the pubs, it was just like coming home. The Stewarts took me to a pub and it was fantastic with everybody singing, "Roll me over, in the clover"

The wonderful people of Nottingham helped us all in one way of another to forget the war - and 1 for one will always be grateful, especially to the Stewarts."

For some troopers, going into town on their first pass, problems arose as soon as they had left the main gates at Wollaton Park They did not know exactly how far they were away from the city, so they looked for the official means of transport that would get them to their final destination.

Thinking that England had the same usual conveyances as in the States, most of them looked out for taxis, and many of G.I. made the mistake of waving a taxi down, only to find that the taxi was indeed a police car. This occurred many times during the 508's stay because the young troopers didn't realize that petrol was severely rationed in England so taxis were very limited for private use.

Riding on buses were a great treat for the troopers, especially the double-decker buses. They had seen nothing like these in the States and most G l.'s loved to ride upstairs so that they could have a good view of the surroundings. Paul Strawn from California remembers riding on the buses with mixed feelings

"During our stay at the Park in Nottingham the only real means of reliable transportation around town was the bus line,

Naturally the bus employees easily became impatient with brash, tough, rowdy and often inconsiderate troopers of the 508 who acted as anything but polite guests of the city natives.

One female employee in particular, frequently demonstrated her annoyance at being compelled to serve the offensive bus riders She often made it clear that she would serve us only in a mechanical, impersonal fashion and that she found our presence distasteful.

After I was wounded in Normandy and had made slow progress in three military hospitals in England I was considered well enough to travel back to Nottingham to get some personal belongings left there before the jump It was my first day away from

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hospital and 1 could only walk with the aid of a cane My boot was partially cut out and it was painful and difficult to put pressure on that leg and foot.

There was a considerable wait at the Nottingham bus station after a train trip from the hospital I was beginning to regret even trying to leave the hospital before being fully recovered I was in no mood to be pleasant.

When the appropriate number city bus arrived, I saw that the conductress was the woman who had been so curt with us in the past I ignored her and took the nearest available aisle seat, when she came down the aisle to collect the fares, I held out the proper change, she did not take the fare

On her way back I held the fare out in front of her, she put her hand on my shoulder, leaned over and said quietly, "Keep it Yank",

The bus stops did not coincide with the entrance to our tent camp in the park, the bus employees never made exceptions. They stopped only at the official bus stops, even if the bus was full of military riders wanting to get off at the military gate

As we approached the Park, I began to shuffle towards the bus exit, to my complete surprise, the bus, for the first time to my knowledge, stopped right outside the military gate for this lone military passenger I still remember these personal acts after forty years, they reappear distinctly in ones memory "

Once the troopers arrived at the City Centre, it was a question of what to do and where to go Some decided to just walk around and look at the sights, some headed straight for the pubs (that is of course if they were open) to try the local beer, etc, and when they did go into the pubs, once again the G.I 's were made to realize that even beer was rationed too. Many of them at first made the mistake of asking for "Whiskies All Round", but they soon came to accept quite quickly that at most of the time, the only drink available was beer, so they settled for that, only to find it warm compared with American standards. Still, they all managed to acquire a taste for it in the end.

To say the paratroopers took over the pubs is a slight understatement. There were quite a few pubs that they never went in at all, but the ones they did go in became well and truly "their pub". Troopers from different company's and different battalions of the 508 "adopted" the pub of their choice and it became an un-written law that outsiders were not made welcome

Ail of this was very well for the 508, but what about the locals^ The people who had been using the same pub for years at first resented their pubs being *"taken over"* by these *"bloody* foreigners" and listening to their loud talk and aggressive ways. It was from this type of behavior that the popular wartime saying about, "Over paid. Over sexed, and Over here". But to be quite fair the behavior of the American troops, especially the 508 was because of the times they lived in

These young men, average age about 20 years old were living from day to day. They knew in their own minds that quite a few of the regiment would be killed in the coming invasion of Europe so they were going to enjoy life for as long as possible They had been training for nearly 18 months now and the strain was beginning to tell on them. Most of the troopers tried to hide their feelings but the majority of them thought,

"What the hell! Lets enjoy things while we can "

They certainly did and to the best of their ability. The above could apply to all servicemen who were in England at that time. Nobody knew what was going to happen in the future and I'm sure that whether they were American, English, French, Polish or Canadian, etc., the attitude was the same.

"Have a good time while it is possible "

One of the locals who remembered well how the 508 took over one particular pub was Mr. Smith of Aspley. He relates his story with fond memories of the troopers

"When the Second World War broke out, my father, who was an assistant civil engineer in Nottingham, immediately lost his job. He was out of work for some weeks and then found employment in the City Engineer's Department of Nottingham Corporation and later became a Staff Officer of the Rescue Squad.

By early 1944 the authorities decided to start demobilising some of the emergency service personnel and my father was released from his duties He decided not to return to civil engineering and instead became landlord of the "Hand and Heart" public house on Derby Road, Nottingham At that time one of the small number of pubs owned by the T LOSCOE BRADLEY brewery selling "BRADLEY'S BRILLIANT ALES" I was sixteen years old at the time and over the next two years I spent many hours working (probably illegally) for my father as a cellarman and bartender.

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Almost immediately the "HAND AND HEART' *became the home away from home of U S Airborne troops stationed at Wollaton Park and they visited us every night That is every night we opened as beer was in short supply and opening hours were carefully rationed We never opened at lunch and only two or three evenings a week and then only for a couple of hours at a time Our weekly ration of beer was ten 36 gallon barrels of mild and 1 nine gallon barrel of bitter If we had wished we could have probably sold every drop of beer in one night.*

The American servicemen were all white. This was not by wish of my father, but simply an embargo designed to keep the peace The white troops did not want the black troops in the pub and the same situation often applied in reverse in other pubs. There were several pubs down the side streets off Alfreton Road which were black Americans only and these were left strictly alone by white U.S Servicemen I am not sure whether British servicemen were allowed in these predominantly black pubs, I know they were not too keen in entering our pub when the Yanks were present in large numbers. The practical effect of this racial segregation was that we never experienced physical violence in the "Hand & Heart", The troops kept order amongst 'hem-selves My father was quite a small man, although he had a strong personality, and I was only a boy, but there was never any trouble although we were constantly surrounded by strong healthy men, far from their homes, expecting any day to be marched into Europe, and drinking large quantities of beer If a soldier did become too drunk and get a little obstreperous he was immediately ejected onto the pavement by his fellow troopers and told not to return until he was sober,

They were a marvelous bunch of young men who gave me a liking for and interest in Americans which has persisted to this day. They loved the "Hand and Heart" and in particular the rear rooms carved out of the solid rock We had a collection of ancient muskets and pikes which fascinated them and these we did hove to secure firmly *to the wall, or they would have quickly vanished and later resurfaced in New York, Omaha and San Antonio.*

We had an old piano in the large rock room and a lady pianist named Lear, She was a quite marvelous player who knew every popular tune ever written and played by instinct and totally without music. She could also drink like a fish Whenever a Yank went to the bar for a refill he automatically bought an extra glass for Lear and on returning placed it on top of the piano I have seen as many as fifteen full glasses on top of the piano and thought at the time it was probably a blessing in disguise that we did not have a license for selling spirits. The waiter was *called Ernest and he often kept a mental record of the number of times a Yank told him to "Get one in for Lear" She habitually drank between thirty and thirty three half pints of beer during the course of the evening.*

The troops came from ail over the United States and after nearly forty years I can only remember dearly a few of their names and faces. I remember a slight, dark, sallow featured soldier from New York he was called Malcolm and had been training to be a lawyer. Two soldiers who always came in together were called Big Bill and Little Jim. I think one of them was from Nebraska Another soldier was called Mex and he presumably was of Mexican origin. Certainly he was married to a lovely looking Mexican girl as he told me so when he showed me a photograph of her and their children. He said she had the most beautiful red hair Finally, I remember Doug who was my mothers favorite He was also called Tex because he was a Texan He was very handsome with an open laughing reckless face and he had most vivid blue eyes He called my mother Momm. A lot of them called her that and my father Pop I was referred to as "Hey Kid".

One evening when we opened up as usual none of the American Airborne troopers came in and this was an unheard of occurrence. Nor did they for several evenings afterwards. We realized why of course when the B B.C. announced that the allied invasion of Europe had begun My father and mother and I did not talk much to each other about the Yanks and what was probably happening to them but I believe we thought about them a great deal Even I realized that the Yanks with being Airborne troops would probably have been in the forefront of the invasion, but to a sixteen year old it all seemed a little unreal. My parents must have waited for news with great foreboding.

I think IT was about 5 weeks after D Day when we opened the "Hand and Heart' one evening and a few of our American friends walked in. There were many familiar faces missing and we never saw them again. They had been involved in very heavy fighting and had suffered alarming casualties Only the remnants came back to Wollaton Park Malcolm was one of those who returned physically unharmed. However, mentally he was in a bad way and later on that night he was violently ill in the toilets. Big Bill and Little Jim also came in together but they were very quite and only stayed a short while.

Mex had been killed There was no sign of Doug

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and no one mentioned him. Later that night I asked one or two of the Yanks about him but they simply said, "forget ii, Kid". Finally I found Malcolm in the toilet being very ill and I asked him. He said, "Doug", Oh Tex, he came down in a free and couldn't get clear of his parachute in time. They cut his throat". My mother quietly mourned Doug with the vivid blue eyes for many months.

Mr. Alan Mitchell, who now lives at Clifton, also has memories of the 508:

"A contingent of the Wollaton Park "paras" used to be billeted at "Players Athletic Clubs Pavillion" on Western Boulevard I was fourteen years old at the time and a member of St Margaret's Church choir on Aspley Lane. The paratroopers used to use the hall belonging to the church as a cookhouse and they were often seen wandering up Aspley Lane for their eats which would be ready for them in the hall.

One event sticks in my mind, the Vicar of the church was giving a sermon one Sunday morning, when all of a sudden loud music was heard coming from the hall outside It was one of Glen Miller's famous melodies and it really woke the congregation Afterwards the vicar stormed out of the church hall to see the sergeant in charge of the cookhouse We never got to know what was said.

We used to go to the Youth Club most nights, but as soon as the cookhouse was complete for the day, we all used to go over and see the sergeant, who used to show us tricks which intrigued everyone of us, and it never failed to amaze us at the amount of food that they used to have compared with our wartime rationing Some of it we had never seen or tasted before.

We used to hold dances in the youth club on a Saturday night and as most of the local men were in the army, about four of us, we were only teenagers, played in the band. It was really great playing such tunes as "You'll Never Know" and ''My Devotion". The audiences were mainly American paratroopers and the place was packed solid.

Although I never heard them myself, the 508 had their own 12-piece band, and they too used to play at the hail on numerous occasions. The stage bedecked with different colored parachutes.

All in all, the G.l.'s I met were a nice bunch, especially the Mexican boys, one of whom I used to walk down Western Boulevard regularly with on my way home and he to Wollaton Park." Mr. Mitchell is now the organist at St. Margaret's Church.

There was one pub where the troopers never went in This *being* "The Admiral Rodney" which was located just outside the main gates to Wollaton Park The reason why the men never used this pub is explained by Henry (Hank) Lefebvre who at the time was an officer in the 508

"Once in Nottingham, we all went about finding our own off duty diversions and it was interesting to note that- the Officers and the men sought out their own pubs, there was an unwritten agreement that we didn't frequent their pubs and they didn't ours.

The Officers pub was "The Admiral Rodney" and an interesting facet of the pubs was "the back room" because at closing time, the familiar "time gentlemen please" was called out and then the regulars adjourned to the back room where you could continue to be served. I never knew how many of them were there in the "Admiral Rodney" but I was quite a few times You of course, had to be invited by the owner of the establishment before you could even know there was a back room.

We also learned that darts was an Englishman's game and that the Americans function was to lose and buy the drinks. We would be playing with old worn darts on The board in the pub and then the Englishman would ask if' you wanted a game After you said O.K. he would then reach into his pocket and pull out his case with matched weighted darts You then knew at once that it was all over except for paying for the drinks "

Hank has other memories of his stay in Nottingham and goes on to say –

"As a Lt. I had to take bed check when I was on duty. As duty officer for the company you usually had to censor the outgoing mail and then make bed checks after taps. This consisted of making sure there was a body in each bed in the tents.

We were familiar with most of the tricks played on us, such as stuffing the bed to look like a body was in it, and men from the first tents checked trying to run around to tents further down the street to hop into the bed of a buddy who was out on the town.

I wasn't quite prepared for one incident *however, as \ was going from one tent to another, I heard the rustling of a tent flap, so I thought that l would wait and see who came out To my*

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surprise I saw the end of a 3,5 rocket launcher appear, this was an anti-tank weapon, a hollow tube 3 5 inches in diameter and about 5 feet long.

I couldn't figure out what the launcher was doing coming out of the tent flap, until I saw a trickle of water coming out at the end and on to the ground. The ingenious trooper had solved the problem of getting out of bed in the middle of the night to go to the latrine way down at the end of the company street."

The 508 were involved in quite a lot of training during their first initial stay in Nottingham D-Day was coming up soon and the men knew when it did come they would have a difficult job on their hands so as the days passed, training was increased, problems had to be sorted out at every level. No matter how small, many a house-hold in the Not-tingham area were frequently woken up in the early hours of the morning as the paratroopers marched down the roads and streets returning to Wollaton Park from one of the many night problems the regiment held. After all, they all knew that some day soon in the not too distant future they would be landing somewhere on enemy-occupied Europe at night, so any practice they could get was well worth it.

Along with all these manoeuvres and preparations, life at the camp in *those first few weeks was far from ideal. Major David Thomas from Texas was the 508's Medical officer and he had this to say about the park in those early days.*

"Our camp, of course, consisted of tents and a few tar paper snacks for items like dispensary, mess halls and clubs, wafer was available, but sewage was a bit primitive As a matter of fact, we used what was euphemistically referred to as honey buckets, this created a regimental crises, since these honeys were the means of dispensing an outbreak of CRABS referred to as peduculosis - pubis technically.

Before we got the folks who handled the honey to use proper sanitary procedures, the epidemic ceased, I saw crab-lice in the usual habitat, plus in armpit and eye-brow hair "

No matter what the troopers had to put up with, morale was still very high." Doc Thomas" goes on with his story –

"The morale of the 508 was best exemplified by a young rifleman out of A Company who reported to the dispensary with a complaint of blurred vision.

We shipped him to the hospital which supported us for evaluation, he was checked in a dark room and when he did not respond to voice, he was evaluated and found to be stone deaf.

I called him in, found out he had come the whole route, starting at base training until now, reading lips. I told him he didn't meet the standard required for a trooper and would have to leave the regiment This trooper said he didn't want to leave the 508 and would stay in any job. I found him a slot as a cooks helper to keep him in I hope now 39 years later that this trooper is rich and famous running a gourmet restaurant, because to me he had great patriotic devotion,"

It was no small wonder that getting an invitation to someones house for tea was really appreciated by the young troopers. It was treated as a welcome break away from the camp and military way of life. One person who had a regular visitor to his home was Mr. Harry Blankly, who in 1944 lived in the Lenton Abbey area Harry says –

"Those American boys were a godsend. With such a shortage of food etc., i.e. rationing etc. just imagine getting chocolates, cigarettes, washing powder and soap They brought their washing to be done and came round later to pick it up.

It was really lovely to swap stories of their lives in America and this took a lot of their homesickness away at being made so welcome.

One trooper we made friends with came from Virginia and as was normal, the photographs were always in the fore and with me being an old soldier of the First World War, there was always the possibility that I served in France with some of his relations.

My daughter, who was 16 at the time and a member of the St. Barnabous Church would entertain them in the church hall with singsongs and dancing She also escorted them into town showing them the Castle and the pub that was cut out of the Castle Wall which was called The Trip to Jerusalem. All the troopers were fans of Robin Hood and these trips helped them to write letters home full of stories associated with the town they were billeted in.

The 508 made Beeston their first port of call for a drink, but there wasn't much chance of getting drunk because supplies were very low. There were of course, stories of the troopers pinching bikes, then throwing them into the

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lake but this wasn't too serious.

The regiment were sometimes allowed visitors in the Park and they provided good refreshments and always managed to supply a barrel of beer. After all, these men were special - US PARATROOPERS".

Harry also remembers when the 508 dropped into Normandy on D Day.

"It was a sad day for ail of us when they got orders for Normandy, this, as we now know was a real disaster for them arid casualties amongst the 508 were very severe. The trooper from Virginia who we had befriended was one of those killed in Normandy and my late daughter received a lovely letter from his parents thanking us for making him so welcome while he was stationed at Wollaton Park.

To us, they were not "God Damn Yanks", they were "Good Damn Yanks", and I guess like myself, people who lived in the Lenton Abbey area, who are still alive today will never forget them."

In order to create a good Anglo-American relationship, the Nottingham Council decided to give a reception at the Council House Certain officers and men of the 508 were selected to represent the regiment, but before reading about their version of what it was like, below is the official write up taken from The Nottingham Guardian newspaper, dated 26th March 1944.

NOTTINGHAM "AT HOME" TO THE U.S. ARMY

Council House Gathering First of Kind in the Country Nottingham, as the centre of the lace industry, had many links with America before the war. These links have now become stronger, and the Midland city yesterday showed in no uncertain manner that her citizens are anxious that post-war relations between themselves and their cousins overseas shall be of the most cordial nature The luncheon given in the Council House yesterday was the first of two functions arranged in honour of the U. S. Army. Tomorrow there will be a reception and dance, also in the Council House, to which 200 American N.C.O.'s and men will meet an equivalent number of British W A.A.F., A T.A., and V.A.D. members.

It was a colourful scene in the banqueting hall yesterday. Flags of America and Britain adorned the room, and in front of each American soldier was a hand painted copy of the flag of his particular state. These had been autographed and were later handed to the Lord Mayor (Coun F. Mitchell), who presided, and who handed each man a gift of Nottingham lace as a souvenir of the occasion.

The autographed flag replica cards are to be mounted and preserved as exhibitions in the Castle Museum. The lunch was a lavish as war-time limitations permitted and the informality of the proceedings, despite the presence of notabilities with decorations and attendants wearing their traditional bright red uniforms, appeared to charm the guests

LORD MAYOR'S SCHEME

The gathering was the first of its kind in the country me idea coming from the Lord Mayor, who some years ago experienced the warmth of American hospitality

With the Lord Mayor at the top table were the Sheriff (Coun F Carney), the Lord Lieutenant (the Duke of Portland), the High Sheriff of Nottingham (Capt. J. Farr), Lord Belpher, Air Vice-Marshal F. P. Don. Major-General J. F. Harter, Sir Harold Bowden, Field Director A R . , Torris A. Lyche, Sir Ernest Jar-dine, Principal H.A.S. Wortley, Messrs. Gervis Huxley, Carlyle Holt and J L Nicol, the Deputy Lord Mayor (Aid E. A. Braddock), Aid. S. C. Armitage, Aid. H. Bowles, the Town Clerk (Mr. J. E. Richards'), and Mr. H. L. Palmer (American Red Cross).

Among the United States officers present were Lt Col Nathaniel R., Maj. D. Thomas, Maj. J. Vollmar, Maj. J. Selemeyer, Lt.-Col. H. F. William, Lt. Col. A. C. Englebach, Lt. Col B. G. McKibben, Maj. J. H. McNally, Maj. H. Sinclair, Lt. L. S. Paul, Lt. C. McLean, Lt. C. N. Root, Maj. O. J. Wollenman, Jnr., and Mr. F. M. Barker, American Red Cross.

Non-commissioned officers and men present included –

Pte. Herbert G. Anderson, Pennsylvania, Cpi Robert A Taylor, Washington, Pte William E. McGlanahan, West Virginia, Pte Lawrence T Zezza, Wisconsin, Pte. James B. Feidman, Ohio, Pte John E Austin, North Carolina, T/4 J. Dean, Nebraska, T/5 Angela Creco, New York, Sgt Thomas P. Gallaher, New Jersey.

Pte. George L. Crandall, Oklahoma, 1st Sgt Eagar Glen Box, New Mexico; S/Sgt Stewart Frizzed, New Hampshire, Cpl Edward C. Garrity, Nevada.

Pte, Albert T. Barr, North Dakota, Pte. Leonard

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Collins, Jnr, Kentucky; Pte. George D. Peterson, Minnesota, Pte. Wayne H. Albert, Iowa, Pte. James Jackson, Maryland; Pte John W Loughnane, Montana, Pte, Donald E Faulkner, Kansas, S/Sgt Oscor M. Cavallin, Mississippi, Sgt. Thomas Elmer. Jnr., Missouri, Pte. Joseph G. C. Boucher, Massachusetts, Pte. Joseph G. C. Nadue, Maine, T/5 Fred E. Peschi, South Dakota.

Pte. William S. Trammell, Alabama, Pte. James L. Haley, Arkansas, Pte. Burton J. Melchin, Delaware, Pte. Lewis M. Burrows, Colorado, Pte Roy L Smith. Arizona, T/4 George J Melrose, Jnr., Connecticut, Cpl. Jesse B. Evans, Georgia, Pte. Chester J. Parker, Illinois, Pte. Warren A. Sparks, Indiana, Pte. Charles R. Somerville, Utah, T/4 Theodore R. Harness, Idaho, Pte. Donald W. Cady, Oregon; S/Sgt Barnard B. Major, California

Sgt. Mille H. Emmons, Texas, Pte. Homer Hough, Michigan, T/4 James M. Frzier, Tennessee, Pte. Edwin Earl Leifeste, Florida, Cpl. Willis A. Hatcheil, South Carolina, T/Sgt Madison D. McKee, Virginia. T/5 Claude Elton Parker, Louisiana, Pte. Robert E. Davis, Vermont, T/4 Joseph O. Smith, Rhode Island.

The toasts of the King and Queen and the President of the United States was honoured, and the Lord Mayor, proposing "Our American Allies" said they knew the Americans had come to this country with one object - the speedy defeat of our common enemy They knew too that when this had been accomplished they were willing and eager to take their share in the reconstruction which must follow

"We have so precious a common heritage", added the Lord Mayor, "to hand down, and so great a common mission to fulfill that we cannot afford to go our separate ways".

We were a proud race, and we felt confident that all English-speaking peoples had that ingrained honesty of purpose which had earned the respect of the world. We shared this honour with the American people and felt that at the end of the war it was our duty to see that a catastrophe of this kind did not occur again.

On behalf of the citizens of Nottingham he extended a hearty welcome to generals. N.C.O.'s and men alike "May our friendship be firmly cemented and form the foundation of a perfect understanding and a happier world", concluded the Lord Mayor

THE FIRST CONCERN

The reply was made by Pte James S. Bills, of Wyoming. He said he felt honoured to have been voted to respond to the welcome to Nottingham and the great hospitality they were enjoying.

The toast of the "City of Nottingham" was given by Lieut. Col. N. R. Hosket. To most Americans, he said, the name of Nottingham struck a responsive chord and mental pictures of childhood hours spent in reading of Sherwood Forest, Robin Hood, Maid Marian and ail the others of that gay band. The hospitality, friendship and good comradeship depicted in those stories were not a figment of the authors imagination, but part and parcel of the county and city, and were as much alive today as in the year 1200

One of the most impressive things to foreigners - they were foreigners to this land - was the willingness of everyone with whom they came in contact with to help them and co-operate with them in every possible way From farmers tilling their fields to men in high civil and industrial positions, they always appeared to have time to answer their questions and help to solve their problems. That was due to their inherent traditions of hospitality and friendship and belied in every way the mistaken idea of English aloofness and reserve There were two great reasons why they should understand, respect and work with each other - their mutual heritage of background and similar language Each nation had the common heritage, but each had adapted itself to its particular climate, task and needs. In these times of stress, however slight, differences in their make-up were thrown aside and they stood together against the common foes - the Axis. Going round Nottinghamshire, Americans were amazed at the variety of scenery in such a relatively small area Practically every section of America was represented in the scenery and natural attributes found in Nottingham and the County Many of the men at the luncheon had a tinge of nostalgia as they travelled about and saw the facsimiles of their own home areas That was the case with him. In Nottinghamshire, on the streets, in the stores, and in the public houses the feeling of comradeship between American soldiers and British people - military and civilian alike - exerted its powerful influence.

*When the war was over there were many of them, who would return to Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, to enjoy in leisure and peace that which the must take today in haste Replying, the Lord Mayor spoke of the establishment of *he comforts for them which had become the largest of its kind n England, with an income of over 1000 or $5000 a week. One of its objects had been to see that a troop British and Allied who became temporary residents of Nottinghamshire were made we/come Consequently, directly the first American group came to the City and County they*

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were ready to welcome them with open arms.

One of the first comforts supplied to an American was a full sized billiard table and since then the comforts had included table tennis sets and all kind of sports gear, and cigarettes for men in American hospitals and even ornamental shrubs to beautify their camps.*

SHERIFF'S TRIBUTE

The Sheriff of Nottingham who also responded, said it was gratifying to hear Americans speak of the keen appreciation of British hospitality it pleased Nottingham particularly because many of their citizens in the state members of their own kith and kin who were being welcomed by the; American people. It was said of the British that they were staid and cold but he reminded them that love never grew cold and our affections had gone out to the American people During the proceedings as a specie tribute to the city, squadrons of the United States of America planes flew over the city centre.

According to the Press, the gathering at the Council House was a huge success. So what did the men think about it? Sam Forcucci, who at present is the Chairman of Music at the State University of New York College, was one of those chosen few ordered to participate at the reception held 39 years o Sam says

"I shall never forget the thrill I experienced as a young 19 year old, having been personally invited along with other members of the 508's band to be the Lord Mayor's guest at a reception given at the Council House We were all cordially greeted and given a piece of Nottingham Lace, which I later sent to my mother

The real thrill for me was conducting a march from the balcony of the Council House overlooking the City Commons area, and I also recall later that evening that we played for a dance in the Ballroom "

One of the 508'$ Officers who attended was Lt Malcom D. Brannen, (this officer later killed a German General in the Normandy campaign) still has the letters he wrote to his sister back in the States about the reception at the Council House This is what L1 Brannen had to say in his letter-

"It was a nice affair, the Lord Mayor and Sheriff were all dressed in their party clothes and we were all dressed in our best uniforms. They spoke to us and welcomed us to their City and offered us all the help that we might need. They opened the doors of the City and gave each one of us a real pretty silk handkerchief made in the local mills. Many of us, including myself, attended the affair after being ill with the flu for a few days I was as weak as I could be, but I just had to be there, not only because our C.O. ordered it, but because I wanted to be there I considered it a historical meeting, and to me it was· The Lord Mayor was great, he made a good welcoming speech and a good luck wish for us all. Both he and the Sheriff were good speakers and made us laugh several times In fact. I think they took any illness that any of us had right out of our minds, and I say once again, it was a "Grand Affair".

The reception was a huge success. Friendships made that night were to last until the present day. The men climbed back into the trucks for the trip back to Wollaton Park. Everybody was in high spirits, in fact, the 508's Catholic Chaplain, whose name was Maternowski, had obviously drunk more than his fair share, L1 James McDuffie remembers

"The Chaplain begging to be let out of the truck, so when the convoy pulled up briefly, they threw him out, it was 2:00 arm in the heart of a sleeping English City. I have no idea where he ended up for the night." (Chaplain Maternowski was later killed during the fighting in Normandy).

The American authorities made it top priority that a good relationship between their forces and the British People should be forged and kept, they even produced a booklet called -

"A Short Guide to Great Britain" this was issued to every G.I. coming into England. It was hoped that after reading the "guide" the American soldier would be able to understand and get along with his British cousins.

Amongst the guides 38 pages, was a list of things they hoped would help the G.I. This came under the heading -

Some Important Do's and Don'ts

1. Be friendly, but don't intrude anywhere it seems you are *not wanted.*

2 You will find the British money system easier than you think, a little study beforehand on shipboard will make it still easier

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3 You are higher paid than the British Tommy, don't rub it in, play fair with him, he can be a pal in need.

4 Don't show off or brag or bluster • swank as the British say, if somebody looks your way and says "He's chucking h<s weight about", you can be pretty sure your off base, that its time to pull your ears in.

5 If you are invited to eat with a family, don't eat too much, otherwise you may eat up their weekly rations.

6 Don't make fun of the British accent or speech, you sound just as funny to them, but they will be too polite to show it.

7 Don't try to tell the British that America won the last war, or make wisecracks about the war debt or about British defects in this war.

8 NEVER *criticize the King or Queen.*

9 Don't criticize the food, beer or cigarettes to the British; remember they have been at war since 1939.

10 Use common sense on all occasions; by your conduct you have great power to bring about a better understanding between the two countries after the war is over.

11 You will soon find yourself among a kindly, quite hard working people who have been living under strain such as few people in the world have ever known In your dealings with them, let this be your slogan "It is always impolite to criticize your host." "It is military stupid to criticize your allies "

No matter how good their intentions were, there was always the occasional fight or brawl in some pub, between the troopers and British soldiers. This never became too serious and usually both parties involved in the fight would shake hands afterward and carry on drinking together. The Military Police and civilian police tended to turn a blind eye to these minor incidents because, after all, where there are thousands of soldiers of different nationalities trouble is bound to happen now and then.

The most common cause of trouble between the G.I 's and British Tommies was of course women. The Tommy, poorly paid, and poorly dressed could not compete against his American counterpart "There was no comparison to be made between them," says one Nottingham woman, who as a young girl of nineteen often dated the young G l.'s.

"I mean, just take the uniform the American paratroopers wore, it was fantastic and we were attracted to them straight away

You must imagine what it was like back in 1944", continues the lady. "Before the war, all we could do for entertainment was to go to the pictures, and most of the films we saw were made in Hollywood so for us to actually meet and hear these young men talk like our screen idols, was to us, like something out of this world. Okay, some of the Yanks were loud-mouthed and brash, but this was the American way, we loved them all and the 508's stay in Nottingham was a period in our lives that quite a lot of people here will never ever forget. We had been at war for nearly five years, suffering hardships through rationing etc. so the arrival of the Americans to our city brought a welcome change, and offered a ray of light to our otherwise drab and boring lives. They came with an entirely new language and what we remember most about them was that they knew how to enjoy themselves. They lived for that day and that day only. The future was uncertain for them, in fact this could explain some of their actions. They lived as though there was no tomorrow. They were here to do a specific job, namely, the invasion and the general thought going through their minds at the time was "to hell with everything and everybody, enjoy life while you can", and this is what every man of the 508 set out to do.

One of the greatest ambassadors of the 508, was their very own dance band. They played all over Nottingham. The music was greatly appreciated by most people who heard them and along with the music, the paratroopers introduced jitterbugging, a lively dance. But most dance halls in Nottingham that was run by "the old school" would throw anybody out straight away who dared participating in what they called a "vulgar form of dancing".

The band played at the Palais de Dance, it played in the Council House. It even played at the Eastwood Miners Welfare and it soon got a good reputation as an excellent band. The band also had a group of paratroopers who would sing along all the favourite popular music. They too were very good, in fact so good that they were invited to sing at one large Nottingham Church. This had been arranged by the 508 Protestant

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Chaplain with the express purpose of cementing Anglo-American relationships. One of the troopers who took part in the singing at the Sunday evening worship was Sgt Sam Forucci, Sam says:

"My boys were dependable. They all agreed that they would go out drinking during the day but promised to report outside the church 15 minutes before they were due to perform

Well, they kept their promise, and the two ministers led us in procession down the middle aisle and we assembled in the main part of the church and sat in seats ordinarily reserved for the choir.

The minister began his sermon and went on and on, and on. To my astonishment, my boys were beginning to give me the look that they had to go to the toilet to empty some of the beer which they had drunk during the day I had a good look round then their looks became so desperate and I couldn't see any doors. I began to shake my head "NO" well after what must have seemed an eternity to the guys and low and behold about a dozen of them got up in unison and marched around the minister and down the middle aisle. Their return in about 5 minutes left no doubt in the minds of the congregation what they had been up to and when finally they got back in place, after walking around the still talking minister, even I was somewhat relieved.

Well our own Chaplain then got on his feet and started to rant and rave to the congregation, and after a while, six men of the original defectors took a second trip to the toilet. I held my head in my hands and said to myself, no matter how well we sing, we are doomed.

The amusing thing about ail of this was that the first time the boys went down the aisle to the toilet the congregation was in complete silence, the second time they all broke out into hilarious laughter, even the ministers had to laugh, all this proves that the Americans were no better holding their beer than the English "

The paratroopers presence quickly became established in Nottingham The 508 Headquarters at Wollaton Park was flooded with letters containing invites for any airborne soldier who could be spared from duty to participate in ail kinds of functions, be it a dance, party or for dinner at someones house. It seemed to the Officer in Charge that quite a lot of people in Nottingham wanted to show their appreciation in whatever way was possible.

One such invite came from Lord and Lady Trent who asked if it would be possible for the 508 to release two officers one evening to attend at their home. One of these lucky officers was Lt. Hank Lefebvre Hank remembers: -

"It was a beautiful home Lord Trent looked just like Churchill and we were introduced to Lady Trent and their 17 year old daughter. We then went into the dining room and the five of us were served in royal style

After dinner the ladies adjourned to the pariour and Lord Trent, my friend and I were in great rooms having Port wine, Brandy and cigars. It was like we'd been transported back in time to a 1930 movie.

Lord Trent led the conversation and he asked, "Have you seen Jim lately?" we looked at each other and I said "Jim, Lord Trent?" and he replied, "Yes. Jim Gavin." He was talking about our divisional commander. We informed Lord Trent that we didn't see much of General Gavin and he said that was too bad, because Jim had been at his house the night before for dinner. Then after some more small talk Lord Trent slowly stood up and looked all around the room, and talking as though the room was full of people said, "Shall we join the ladies"? I then knew we were in a 1930 movie, it was incred-ible.

We hit it off with the Trents very well and we were their weekend guests many times after that. They fitted us out with tennis white flannel pants, white cable knit tennis sweaters and we played many a doubles games teamed with various English high-ranking officers with their ladies seated along the edge of the court. They were grand people and very kind to two Lt. of the 508."

It wasn't ail fun and parties for the troopers, training was stepped up as the date for the planned invasion of Europe grew nearer and the troopers took part in many maneuvers so that problems could be ironed out.

Being as the airborne would be landing in the dark for the invasion, the top brass decided that a practice jump for the 82nd would be beneficial to the men, it was hoped that by participating in a practice night jump, they would get confidence in their officers, confidence in their equipment and most of all confidence in the Air Force, Because, after all it would be the Pilots job to get them where they were expected to land and drop them accurately.

So the practice jump went ahead. The 508 alongside

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other regiments of the 82nd were dropped in and around the Leicestershire area, and apart from the expected and usual injuries, like sprains and fractures paratroopers sometimes received on landing, the regiment came out of it pretty good or so they thought.

Upon landing the 508 had to re-group and head for certain locations. This was done and the men then waited for stragglers who had got lost etc, to catch up with them and it soon became apparent to one platoon that having waited for quite a while for one of its members, something had happened and when it became light, a full scale search was organized to find the missing trooper.

One of the men taking part in the search was Major David Thomas, Medical Officer for the 508.

"It was several days before we found him", recalls Doc, "he was in a grove of trees and it was obvious that he had had a chute malfunction and was killed instantly. I removed his gloves and had them laundered well to remove the smell of death. I later wore the same gloves for the drop in Normandy. I'm not superstitious but I figured that those gloves couldn't: be unlucky twice! They weren't."

News of the accident spread through the regiment, and although anything like this was "Bad News", morale of the 508 was not really affected. Every paratrooper knew that a malfunction of the chute was a risk they all took every time they jumped. After all, the troopers received an additional $50 a month for being on jump status and as far as they were concerned, a paratrooper was a special kind of man and a malfunction of the chute was one of the many hazards that airborne soldiers had to face every time they jumped The accident was treated as "just one of those things."

The regiment moved back to Wollaton Park by trucks, and when all their equipment had been unloaded and checked away, every trooper attended a de-briefing about the practice jump, every problem was painstakingly discussed and they all realized that some of the difficulties they encountered on landing, such as re-grouping etc would occur again when they jumped in Normandy They were confident and were looking forward to getting to grips with the "Krauts".

After the de-briefing session, troopers who were lucky to have a pass that night, headed for the showers, put on their "Class A' uniforms and raced into town to meet the friends that they had made over the weeks, be it girl-friend or just people in the pubs they frequented. No matter who it was, the people of Nottingham were more than good friends to the different members of the 508. A relationship was forming between the locals and the regiment, that to say was simply "special" was something of an understatement.

The troopers became well known for their acts of generosity, especially to any family who had "adopted" them. One such family was asked by a trooper if they would like a can of tomatoes Strict rationing was still in full force so the family readily agreed to meet the trooper at the 508's camp at Wollaton Park The parents sent their two young daughters to collect the tomatoes, so the young girls stood alongside the fence that separated the camp from the rest of the park.

"We stood waiting for our "G.I. [name of G.I. withheld) relates the girls, and imagine our amazement when we spotted him carrying this big drum towards us. "Where's our tomatoes we asked?"

"Right here" said the trooper, pointing to the drum. He then rolled it over the fence to the girls.

"The drum was a 5 gallon can of tomatoes and we had to roll if all the way back home, it took us over half an hour and when we finally arrived home our dad had to get a hammer and chisel to open it. Needless to say everyone on our street was eating tomatoes for a week, thanks to our very own special "trooper".

There were many visitors to Wollaton Park during the 508's stay there, both official and unofficial One such visit which was on the official basis consisted of a Major and two Sergeants, whose job was to go around the many camps all over England giving lectures and demonstrations to the different troops in preparation for D-Day and one of the paratroopers who was in the audience on this particular day was William Windom, who admits that instead of being made confident of the Officer's knowledge of German weapons arid tactics, the end result left much to be desired.

"The demonstration was made to assist aid American dog-faces to "know your enemy", remembers William:

"The Major gave our battalion a pep talk first and his tone of voice was similar to the one we heard every month watching our V.D. films There was then a brisk parade by the two Sergeants who must have been quick change artists because of the different German uniforms they kept changing into, and

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while they were marching up and down in front of us the Major did a very nice narration informing us of the differences in German rank insignia units, dress and hand weapons, etc.

The audio department then took over, permitting LOUIS and HOMER, the two Sergeants, to rest their panting sides. Here the Major took centre stage, smoothly winding the phonograph changing the records and at the same time maintaining a mood of reliable horses mouth information, proceeding at some length to really enlighten us all on battle sounds All of us were mesmerized as the Major started to describe the different noises of battle.

STRAFING AIRCRAFT

OURS - ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ POOM ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ

THEIRS - WWWWWWWWWWWWWWW - BOOM - WWWWWWWWWWWWWW

ARTILLERY

OURS - BOOM - SSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS – POW

T H E I R S - PIP - B O O M WAA WWWWWWWWWWWWWWW WWWWWWWWWWW

MACHINE GUNS

OURS - WAG - DAG - DAG DAG - WAGA -DAGA - DAG – DAG

THEIRS: - BRIIIiiIiiIIIP - BRIIIIIIIIIIP "

At this point, one of our troopers stood up and said to the Major, "How many rounds per second, are there Sir?"

Lets see, said the Major, theirs is about 850 but the barrel burns out in less than a year, ours is 4 but some of those barrels have lasted since the "Spanish-American War". You have the better weapon soldier" As the Major continued with his talk, I noticed quite a few of our guys looking at each other, and instead of beaming with confidence, there were quite a lot of faces showing worried looks, but the Major wasn't to be put off, and earned on: -

RIFLES

OURS - POW - POW - POW - POW - POW - POW - POW - PING

THEIRS - POW - POW POW - POW - POW - POW - POW - POW

You see, exclaimed the Major, "You know by the Ping when your rifle is empty, the German never knows", the Major continued:

GRENADE

ours - click - ping – paff

THEIRS. - WHURRAR - BOOMWAAH

At the conclusion of this supposedly morale - boosting talk, William remembers that:

"Our battalion was a bit more subdued and more thoughtful. We had always been told that our weapons were more superior than, any that the Germans had got and now after listening to the Major, we were not too sure and instead of assuring us all about the future battle we knew would soon be happening, the Major had unknowingly done more damage to our morale than any of the hundreds of German propaganda films we had seen in fact as the Major and his two Sergeants drove away in their caravan of cheer to their next errand of education, I thought I saw one of our troopers try to shoot off his own foot without moving his 45 from the holster "All I did was to go click."

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