

AIRBORNE IN NOTTINGHAM

It was just a question of time before the invasion would be taking place and the troopers took every advantage they could get to do and see everything. They knew that time wasn't on their side so some of the men decided to go further afield than Nottingham, especially when they had been issued with a weekend pass

London was one of the favourite places but some troopers went as far as Scotland, others went to Blackpool. It all depended on their various tastes. There was a lot to see and so little time to see it all.

One such trooper who, after seeing everything he wanted to in Nottingham, decided one weekend to venture out and explore the different regions John K. Lattimer, a medic with the 508 has this to say about his feelings for Nottingham and recalls the amazing discovery he made regarding his ancestors during one of these weekend passes. This is John's story –

MEMORIES OF NOTTINGHAM IN 1944

Nottingham was the most beautiful spot in all of England, into which to drop a group of American young men. Every American youngster admired Robin Hood and every American youngster knew that Sherwood Forest around Nottingham had been his home. Most of us who were attached to the 508 Parachute Infantry Regiment thought we were being kidded when we were told we were to be quartered in and around Nottingham. We all became Robin Hoods. Once we were "settled in", and had marveled at Wollaton Hall, we all headed (sooner or later) for the castle, to see where the notorious Sheriff of Nottingham had held forth. I can remember relaxing on the grassy green bank leading up to the ruin, on what seemed like one of the few sunshiny days of the entire war. It was a great moment. When I wrote home, I said that I expected a "grey goose quill" to come flitting in through the window, from the longbow of an old friend. My family deduced immediately that we were in or near Sherwood Forest. I also remember what a great relief Nottingham was after the weeks and weeks of rigorous training, despite our ubiquitous "double-timing", while everyone else marched at a leisurely pace. It was even finer than Ireland. Our 82nd Airborne Division quickly took over the town and it was worth your life to be there if you were not a "trooper".

The gentle folk of Nottingham accepted us with some hesitancy, after hearing the wild talks (all true) of our Division's exploits. I can remember the uncertainties of some of the older citizens who hesitated for some time before finally blurting out an invitation to come have a spot of tea and scones, glancing at us the while to see if we were going to

demand red meat, dripping blood. We were always in such a state of hypoglycemia that we would eat anything in sight. We were trained down to a state of pure muscle I can remember thinking how skinny everyone was. Even the Generals and the medics were skinny, a real surprise. I'm sure some of the English people were startled at the way we wolfed down any food that was put down anywhere near us.

One family who invited me to dinner was pleased with the razor blades and cigarettes I brought to the patriarch of the clan, but I always headed instinctively for the large oak chair on one side of the room, that had a sturdy oak coffee table in front of it where I could prop up the shiny boots of which I was so proud. I noticed that the father sometimes seemed a little restrained in his welcome, but it was some time before I deduced that it was his chair for which I always headed and then occupied for the entire evening. When I finally voiced my deduction, he protested vigorously, and insisted that I sit in his chair, even though from then on I felt a little less comfortable in it.

During breaks in the training schedule, one of the trips we were permitted was to Oxford, where I was startled to see a monument in the street which had the name Lattimer on it, in honour of one of my ancestors, Bishop Hugh Lattimer, plus two other fellows (also Bishops) named Ridley and Cranmer. I remember being a bit indignant when I found out that this was a monument to the spot where my great, great, great grand uncle had been burned alive, at the stake, by "Bloody Mary" Tudor in 1555. She had wanted Uncle Hugh to change the Church of England back to Catholic, because she was a strong Catholic, being the daughter of Catherine of Aragon (one of the wives of Henry the VIII), and Latimer refused. In later years, when I was made an honorary member of the British Association of Urological Surgeons, I often remarked that I hesitated to open my mouth at their meetings in England, after what they had done to Uncle Hugh when he wouldn't do what they demanded. I also knew that Katherine Parr, Henry VIII's last wife, had been a Latimer before she was a Parr. I have letters written by all of them, in the -1500's, in the family archives."

Another soldier who visited "other parts" was Lt. Malcolm Brannen, he and another officer from the 508 decided to visit London and as Malcolm says: –

"We saw all of the famous land marks - I won't enumerate them because I don't want to slight anything or anybody. But we saw it all under the

AIRBORNE IN NOTTINGHAM

guidance of a first class guide. He really was worth ail that he asked • in fact we gave him a nice "tip". But we had a couple of experiences that we were not looking for.

My friend liked fruit - and grapes in particular. We saw a vendor near the Palace and he was selling grapes. My friend bought a bunch, there were about 20 grapes on the bunch and when we asked the price the vendor said, "One pound." We told him that the bunch that we had was not a pound, "why it only weighed a little over half a pound" The vendor said, 'no, no, no. — it costs 1 cash.' We paid up and counted the grapes - 20 grapes -about 20 cents a grape. They actually turned out to be SOUR GRAPES.

The second experience that we had, we certainly didn't plan for it - but get we did! We had to conserve money and we hired a room in the hotel just off the main beat - about 0200 hours the first night that we were there the hotel was struck by a bomb from a plane that just happened to fly along. There were other explosions besides ours but we didn't wait to see if there were any more coming — one end of our room was demolished but we were not hurt, luckily, but we packed up and went to another hotel right next to the Piccadilly Hotel and finished our five days of sight seeing tramping around the streets of London, visiting all the famous places that our first guide mentioned and pointed out. We left for Nottingham on our final day with our pocket books flat but our spirits sky nigh.

Although Malcolm Brannen enjoyed his short visit to London, it is obvious from the following story that his favourite city in England was Nottingham, Malcolm's description of the town and its people is typical of the men of the 508. Although it has been nearly 40 years since he first arrived in Nottingham he has vivid recollections of the town which remains with him to this day.

WOLLATON PARK AND CASTLE

I thought first of an old castle, or estate near the place where I was brought up in New England, more precisely, Massachusetts. I used to go past a place called "Winnikinny Castle", in Haverhill, Mass. It had spacious grounds and a large stone mansion overlooking a lake. There were loads of trees on the lot and it was just beautiful. There were only certain days when visitors were allowed to walk on the roads and paths on the grounds — and fewer days when people could visit the grey stone castle. It was so imposing that I have never forgotten it.

The grounds of Wollaton were guarded by stone walls and iron gates which made me think of "Fairy Land" — and the castle was always so majestic, its grandeur towering into the heavens, just dominating the whole area. When we were first given permission to visit the castle, and it's halls, and look out the large windows and survey the grounds below it, and especially the encampment that had been established by our governments for our very own 508 Airborne Infantry Regiment of which we were so proud. It was almost unreal!

I loved it and I'm certain that many others did also In order to let you know wha^t I thought of England, Nottingham and living in and around Wollaton I will copy parts of a letter that I wrote to my sister on 7th April 1944. It went through APO 514, PM New York, N.Y. to my sister Evelyn Brannen, at that time in training to become a registered nurse at the Norwegian Hospital in New York City, She already had a Bachelors Degree and a Masters Degree and has had several years of teaching in two or three colleges but she was not too happy and wanted the nurses training and registration Below are excerpts from one or more letters from me to her:

"How is the snow where you are? I understand that on the first day of Spring you had quite a lot of snow - well - as yet we have seen only traces of it about two times. We have seen some heavy frosts and several times the fog has been so thick that I thought it was snow — but in due time it cleared it is very damp, and most of the time - especially at night we are cold and clammy During the day the sun is nice and it is pretty and fairly warm The sun sets and rises as great, large red balls — very pretty.

The country here is very much like USA, especially New England — green lawns and lots of trees and pretty brick houses - lots of large ones — many-apartments. There are loads of stores (called shops, I think) of all kinds and types — but we can't buy anything because all is rationed. Food is scarce — and so is beer and liquor, sweets and smokes I see more buses — double-deckers and singles, trolleys than I ever saw in the USA. There are very few taxis and very very few private cars. There are several dances nightly — and loads of girls some nice -some plain and if you smile at them they treat you like old friends even though they haven't met you formally — and I guess that they realize what a position that we all are in — all of us together.

The blackouts are REAL ones — not just practice — and have been going on for five years. According to the Sheriff (in my letter I had to refrain from using the name of the city in which we were stationed in

AIRBORNE IN NOTTINGHAM

because of security and censorship regulations), that is one reason that he hasn't caught Robin Hood.

The police - Bobbies are great big men with their nice blue uniforms - silver buttons and great tall hats. They really look enormous All of the people in Nottingham have been wonderful to us.

There are all kinds of uniforms here Australian, Polish, Czech - Russian, Canadian, USA and any number of others. There are Air Corp Engineers, Airborne-and tankers-Infantry - all types. There are also several girl uniforms - ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Service), WLA (Woman's Land Army), W.A.A.F.'s (Air Force) - W. R. E. N.'s (Navy) and so, so, so many in uniform too.

Another letter –

"The last few days have been just wonderful - just like spring in Durham" (Durham, New Hampshire - where we both went to the University of New Hampshire and both accepted Bachelor degrees). Continuing – "and the days are so long - it stays light from am until 10 15 pm or so at night -quite warm now during the days - and not too cold at night." This letter dated 28th April 1944 - just two weeks after the first letter that I quoted from above.

Another - "No, I haven't had much time to fool with a bike (in answer to a question about my activities) I rode one one morning on an instruction trip to an area, but that's all, in fact I don't go to many places the cinema lines (queues) are so long and the pictures old some of the boys have made friends in some of the pubs but you make a date and some training schedule changes your plans so I just loaf around when I can. The English AIRBORNE wear red berets - they are well respected - we also - when one meets you by introduction they say -'OOOOOOH AIRBORNE- how nice', Makes you feel good."

This ends the letter quotations - but to get back to the dating of the girls - especially ATS's and other service personnel — I met a nice little girl - black hair - sparkling eyes and so easy to talk to - her name was Mary, but I have misplaced her last name. Well, we made a date one night and then the next day I was placed on an extra duty and had to call and cancel. Later on I met her again and we made another date — and guess what? Mary called me and said she had extra duty and could not meet me, but we'd try again. Then we moved out and I never saw her again, but I can see her black hair and shining eyes even to this day.

The men in my company also made dates with the English Service personnel. One man went a bit over board and brought one of the ATS's hats back to his quarters one night He showed it to some of us modeled it for us and it was a great joke - until the First Sergeant of the young ladies company called me - the culprit's Company Commander, and asked me to find the hat and please have it brought or sent back to the woman to whom it belonged because she was getting extra duty every night until she got it back. I was lucky because I knew the whereabouts of the hat and had the man bring it to me. I sent it back to the girl's first Sergeant and that was it

I walked downtown several times when I first went out of our encampment. I have always liked TO walk and the best way to get to know the area in which you have to live is to go over it completely and in detail In this way you can see what type of place you are living, playing and working I looked at the buildings, the stores and manufacturing plants and I watched the few Taxis, the innumerable buses - single and double deckers, I watched the bicycle riders, both male and female and those persons walking It was a grand tour for me In fact I walked downtown more than I walked back - mostly because I had more time. When I was going back to the area I was limited to the check in hour.

One place that I liked to walk was past the Cricket Club - past the club grounds. The pretty paths and the nice houses and apartments. The air was nice and the scenery was beautiful. This environment reminded me of home also. After several times of covering the some route I may have never seen what I passed - I was thinking of the paths and trails I had walked on at home.

One of the places that I visited when I walked on the route mentioned above was a very friendly pub "YE COCKED HAT" in the Broxtowe Lane area. It was a nice clean, and hospitable place. I got acquainted with many of the regular customers and always had a good time. I hated to leave but I knew that all good times must come to an end - especially when I had a curfew to honour.

Speaking of walking, I had another walk that I never said too much about. One Saturday night I went downtown and met a friend - that is, we became friends and this friend lived in a town several miles outside of Nottingham. Of course, I had no transportation but I did take her home on the bus it was quite a ride but finally we came to the stop where we got off the bus near my newly found friend's abode. It was late, later than I real/zed - and the buses stopped at midnight so I knew I would have to hitchhike a ride back to

AIRBORNE IN NOTTINGHAM

Nottingham and Wollaton Park because there was a battalion problem scheduled for 0700 hours - even though tonight was a Saturday and in the morning it would be Sunday, usually a day when we could sleep an hour or two longer. To make matters a little worse. There were few cars on the road, but very few, and I knew the hitchhiking would be a difficult task. Of course, there were no lights on the road and those cars passing by were blackened out so that the drivers could not see anyone on the road. All of these things made it more difficult and my mind was filled with thoughts of, "If I don't get back to Wollaton Park on time — what then?"

Well, to make a long story short, much shorter than the walk back to Nottingham, I finally, just as it was getting light, reached the outskirts of Nottingham. At this point I come to a junction, one road went straight ahead and one road went to the right. I pondered — straight or right. I took the straight route and arrived in downtown Nottingham which meant that I would just have to walk to Wollaton Park and I'd reach my destination, possibly in time to report for the problem we were having.

I started out for Wollaton and after several minutes of walking fast and double timing, like the old boy scouts used to do, that is, walk to one or two telephone or light poles and then double time for the same number of posts, I came into another junction and knew that I had to cross the road that I had come upon because I knew where I was and knew that our gate into Wollaton was just a few hundred yards onward. But what bothered me is that if I had taken the road to the right about half, or an hour before, I would have been at Wollaton now. Yes, I recognized the road and now knew I could have saved lots of time and walking, running, worry and my poor feet and legs. Yes — I was "Home" in just a few minutes and as I walked along beside of the high wall I wished that I had stayed home last night. In just about five minutes I came to the gate and wondered what the guard would say, actually not what he would say, but what he would think/

The guard was there all right, and I had no trouble and no talk — I just went in and went right to the aid station to have my feet looked at, I figured that if I had them attended to and had a band aid put on the places that were hurting, I would be O.K. for the problem coming up.

The Officer on duty at the dispensary was Lt. Beaudin, the 3rd Battalion surgeon. He looked at my feet and I guess he thought it would be better to cut them off than try to patch them up. But, he washed them, put cream or salve all over the raw places and put some dressing on them shaking his

head all of the time. Then he gave me the good news — the battalion problem had been called OFF.

That was good news, in fact I'm sure it saved me from lots of pain, hardship and troubles. I went to my tent and rested and passed up breakfast, I hated to pass up breakfast because we used to say, "Eat when you can because you do not know when you'll get another meal." Anything could happen, and if you had not eaten it might be hard on you, and your own fault at that.

Once when I was walking I saw a group of large, beautiful buildings some distance from me and they made me think of the colleges and university buildings in New England such as Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth and Exeter and Andover Academies, also West Point in New York State.

When I got on the campus I found out it was Nottingham University. It is beautiful. I spoke to a young lady who was on her way to one of the buildings and she invited me to walk along with her.

She pointed out several buildings, named them and told me what purpose they served. She also offered to guide me through one of the buildings at a later date because she had an appointment in just a few minutes. However we did not make a date for the tour but she told me I could walk around, go in some of the buildings and ask questions of anybody that I wanted to. She said anyone would be glad to guide me around if they had the time.

Most of us were glad to return to Nottingham and Wollaton Park after our Normandy campaign was completed. It was like coming home. We renewed acquaintances with what we thought were "Old Friends". We then realized exactly what we had — and I know that I speak for 508'ers other than myself.

After the Holland campaign we did not return, much to the dismay of many. But, on my first visit to Nottingham while on leave from Frankfurt A/M, Germany I revisited Wollaton and again had a heavy heart when I had to leave it — maybe forever".

For Tom Porcella and all the other troopers of the 508, Pay Day was the best time of the month Tom remembers: -

"Nottingham was a bee-hive of activity on Pay-day. The way we spent our money, you would think our days were numbered. Well for some of us they were, so we lived for today and to hell

AIRBORNE IN NOTTINGHAM

with tomorrow. I personally settled into a regular routine. Most of the time I went to town myself because I preferred to be a loner. The reason for this was I soon realized that if I was with a crowd of other troopers there would be a big chance of getting into fights with other soldiers, plus the fact that it wasn't much fun to help carry drunken buddies back to the park. To me it made sense to go out alone and get back to camp in one piece without all the bumps and bruises.

Whenever I went into town, my first stop was the "Crown Hotel" where it was always possible to get one shot of whisky. We were only allowed this amount due to the shortage, or as the landlord used to say "Rationing you know, old boy", and from there I used to have a pint of beer in each pub till I reached the "Gregory Hotel".

It was at the Gregory Hotel that Tom learnt how to understand the English monetary system,

"My first visit there was really a memorable one for me. The place was jammed packed full of American paratroopers and I had to push and shove my way to the bar. "I stood at the bar for quite a while before I was noticed, and this lady behind the bar noticed me and shouted, "What's yours Yank?" I shouted back "Two beers", putting up two fingers, she replied "A half or a pint", then I shouted, "Whatever you have lady."

The lady, who I found out later was called Mrs., Parker, pumped the beer into two glasses and passed them over to me, narrowly missing the troopers bunched up at the door. I asked her how much I owed her and when she answered I couldn't hear her for the noise so I held out a handful of coins and yelled at her to help herself.

I don't know what I'd said to upset her but if looks could kill I think I would have dropped dead. Anyway she motioned me to go to the far end of the bar where it was a bit quieter and after barging my way through all the people I had to wait a few minutes before she came up to me.

Once again I offered her the handful of coins and Mrs. Parker pulled me closer to the bar and said, "See here Yank! When I ask for two and sixpence, don't ever show me a handful of coins, you should understand your money and pay what you are asked."

I explained to her that I didn't know anything about this English "funny money" and on hearing this Mrs. Parker told me to open my hand and proceeded to explain fully the value of the various coins.

Now to me, this was a great gesture on her part to take time from serving and explain to a lonely G.I. the English money. I was very thankful and felt quite humble.

Mrs. Parker also warned me that not every pub would be like hers, meaning that us not knowing how to handle the money, we could be taken advantage of, something that would never happen in the Gregory. I thanked her and when I left the pub I remember thinking, what a lovely lady.

After that meeting with Mrs. Parker, Tom more or less spent all his free time at the Gregory, but as Tom says -

"My routine remained the same, but it all depended if I had a shilling for a beer, and if I was short my one and only stop would be the Gregory. I really enjoyed myself there and I would sit at my favourite spot in the corner and watch the action in the pub, it was great.

The realization that the people of Nottingham were on strict rations came to Tom one day as he was walking up Likeston Road towards the "Gregory" He was peeling an orange and when he threw the peel away, he was surprised to see a group of kids pick it up and start to eat it.

"The thing I remember most about these kids was their lovable faces, and although they matched every movement I made eating the orange, they never asked me for any, so I shouted them over and gave each one a piece of the orange. I shall never forget the look on their faces as they ate it and then saying "Thank you Yank", as the juice ran down their chins."

From then on, Tom made it a practice to save all of his oranges for the kids and made sure that whenever he had a bag of oranges that there were not more kids than oranges.

"I couldn't see one kid go without", explains Tom.

Although Tom preferred to give his oranges to the kids, one day he saw three children aged between 5-8 years old and after giving them their treat, noticed he had one left. A woman who had been watching Tom came up to him and asked him if he had one to give her Tom told her that the oranges were for kids only and she looked at him with pleading eyes and told him "that she wanted it for her sick husband, not herself". He gave her his last orange and as she walked away, turned around and said to Tom "God

AIRBORNE IN NOTTINGHAM

bless you Yank",

It was during this time that Tom obtained the nickname "Tommy-double-trouble" This name was given to him by the many people he used to talk to on his way from Wollaton Park to the Gregory Hotel.

"As the kids and the people got used to me walking up Likeston Road, whenever I couldn't make it, which happened now and then, most of them missed me and would ask me what had happened", says Tom: -

"I used to tell them I had been restricted to camp, but the truth of the matter was many a time I was completely broke so I found it easier for them to believe I was in some sort of trouble, rather than explain my predicament. My stock answer always was 'I had been in trouble', so from then on, whenever a familiar face came up to me and said 'Tom are you in or out today', I would reply I was in trouble and had sneaked out for a quick pint. One civilian, on hearing this said 'Tom you are now in double--trouble", and as the English are famous for nicknames I became affectionately known as s Tommy-double-trouble to all who knew me."

As well as obtaining a nickname in Nottingham Tom took something else from Nottingham back with him to the States. When the war was over, this time it was a wife. Molly remembers the first time she met Tom and it was a meeting that was to eventually change both their lives. Molly takes up the story: -

"I was first introduced to Tom by another G.I. early in 1944, when we simply said a brief "Hello" and then I went on my way. The next time I saw him, a few days later, was on a bus. I was going to town and he, with a few of his buddies, were going to the Red Cross on Derby Road. He got off first and as the bus pulled away, he stopped, looked up at me and gave me a great big smile.

A few days after this, I was crossing the Market Square with my roller skates. I often went roller-skating after work and there sitting on the wall with several other troopers was Tom. He walked over and asked where I was going. He then asked me if we could meet some other time, so I told him where to wait when I finished work.

We met only once or twice before he left for Normandy and I didn't see him again for quite a long time. It was April 1945 when Tom came back to Nottingham. He had been wounded the previous December during the Battle of the Bulge,

and had spent most of the past months in various hospitals.

At this time, we met several times and after a while he was sent back to France, but before he left, he gave me a ring and asked me to wait until he came back again to Nottingham. We wrote to each other almost every day and it was through the Royal Mail that Tom asked me to marry him. The war in Europe was over by this time and we began to make plans, but it wasn't until November 1946 that he managed to get a seven day pass. For three days we had the banns read in church and on the 4th day of his leave we were married in St Paul's Roman Catholic Church. This left us with only three days which we spent in London. Tom once again left for France and from there he returned to the United States. He was discharged from the army in January 1946 and I then joined him in New York in August of the same year "

Tom has this to say about when he returned to Nottingham to marry Molly: -

"As soon as I got to Nottingham, I went straight round to Molly's house, knocked on the door but received no answer I didn't know what to do because there wasn't anybody in, so I pinned a note on the door which read 'Dear Molly, I've come over to marry you'. I then went to my old local, "The Gregory", which was just around the corner from Molly's house. Well the landlord and his wife made me very welcome and at first I was the only person in the pub. Later on it started to fill up, people were buying me drinks and asking me if so and so was still alive etc. Somebody started to play the piano and it was great.

Anyway I soon became surrounded by quite a few of the local girls (I was still in my paratrooper uniform) and they were asking me questions about different guys in our outfit. Well, I happened to look up, and saw this pretty face poking around the door and it was Molly, so I shouted to her, "Hey Molly, come over here!" but after seeing me with all these girls, Molly slammed the door and ran off home I quickly followed her and did my best to explain everything Molly, thankfully decided to believe me and not long after, we did get married.

Tom and Molly are still happily married 39 years later they have a wonderful family and reside in New York. Tom still refers to Molly as his greatest war souvenir.

Another trooper who married a local girl was John Hargrave from Colorado, but as John says: -

AIRBORNE IN NOTTINGHAM

"My future wife and I didn't get off to a great start when we first met".

"I first saw Joan in the Victoria Ballroom a few weeks before we went to Normandy. She was sitting at a table and I liked the look of her big brown eyes."

"Being the young brash trooper that I was I walked over to her, pulled her to her feet and kissed her. She was so shocked she slapped me. I told her, "That's alright baby, I'm going to marry you" and walked away

"I didn't see Joan again till after the Normandy campaign. Mutual friends arranged a blind date for us and after that things went so well we got engaged. This was in September just before the jump into Holland.

I was wounded the following January and sent back to the hospital in Swindon where I managed to make several trips up to Nottingham during the next 3 months.

We were together on V.E. day and that was a day to remember. We were at the Victoria and the bandleader, Rube Sunshine, picked a representative from each country to say a few words. I was the American they chose and for me it was a very moving moment. Talking about the Victoria, does anybody remember Mom Taylor who worked behind the bar there, she mothered us all. She sewed on our buttons and listened to our problems, a grand old lady.

Anyway, Joan and I set everything in motion and when I returned from Frankfurt we were married at St. Andrews Church on Mansfield Road, 20th October 1945 She later joined me in Denver in April 1946.

Joan and John have had 38 wonderful years together and have raised two sons and a daughter. Both of them return to Nottingham quite frequently.

As mentioned briefly in Tom Porcella's story, the majority of all Americans found it near or impossible to understand the English monetary system. To them it was really confusing to figure out the value of the various different coins, because at that time there were shillings, pennies, sixpences, threepenny pieces, half pennies, two-shilling pieces, farthings, and a crown. This then was hard enough for the G.I but what must his feelings have been like when these same coins were referred to as "bobs, tanners, thrupenny bit, hape-nees

and two bob", etc , they must have been bewildered. It is understandable then, the panic or ignorance the troopers must have felt when, say for instance, they purchased something from a shop, and upon asking, "How much", receive a reply of say "Thirteen and sixpence Hape-nee", (and upon reading this, even the author became a bit confused), so when confronted with this problem, most G I 's simply held out their hands full of coins and told the shop assistant to "help themselves" thus relying on the persons honesty. Although most shopkeepers and other people who came into contact with the troopers took only the amount that was due, there were others, no doubt who took advantage of the situation and robbed the unsuspecting soldier of as much as they could.

Ray Pateracki remembers an amusing incident regarding the "funny money", he says: -

*"On my first night out, I decided to try some of the famous English fish and chips, so I called in to this shop and gave the guy a 10 shilling note, he asked me what I wanted, so as not to show my ignorance I told him 10 shillings worth please, (I had no idea of the value of this note), anyway, as I stood there I watched this guy shovelling fish and chips into the newspaper and my eyes nearly popped out of my head when I saw this huge mountain of food He wrapped this huge parcel up for me and everybody in the shop must have thought what a greedy person I must have been to want all this food. I beat a hasty retreat out and once outside the shop I gave most of the fish and chips to a bunch of young kids there, - *• leaving me with just a normal portion. I was far too proud to point out to the guy that I'd made a mistake ordering 10 shillings worth.*

James Luton from Pennsylvania has other recollections about the English money: -

"Although we had been shown the differences of the English money to ours during the regiments stay in Northern Ireland it was sometimes very hard to remember, because for instance one day whilst at Wollaton Park during a "pay day" crap game, a guy in the game shouted "Shoot 5 pounds" not realizing that 5 pounds was \$20, some guys this way won and lost a fortune due to getting mixed up with the dollars and the pounds!"

Zone Schlemmer from Hawaii remembers –

AIRBORNE IN NOTTINGHAM

Every time my buddies and I went into town we would come back to our tents at Wollaton Park and everyone would empty his pockets of all the different coins and throw them into a bucket. This happened every night and when it got towards the end of the month when most troopers were broke we would then dig the bucket up and go out on the proceeds — we found this to be a great system."

The 508 as well as all the other American forces in England during 1944 were well known for "throwing their money around". Most pubs eagerly accepted their custom but there were one or two pubs in Nottingham who refused to serve any American serviceman. The reasons for this were numerous but the most common reason for banning these troops was because some landlords were afraid that the paratroopers would cause trouble and this in the long run would affect business. Nottingham, famous all over the country for having the most beautiful girls in England, was obviously a favourite place for soldiers of all nationalities, so the occasional fight between these groups were bound to happen whenever they met. It was common knowledge that soldiers the world over will fight anybody and many a time, if there is no one to fight they will fight amongst themselves. This happened once to Davey Jones

This is what Davey Jones had to say:-

"I remember our company had been on a very hard route march, and on our way back to Wollaton Park someone decided that we would be allowed to call in at this pub for a quick pint of beer. The pub was quite empty and it was quickly filled up with the guys from my company. Anyway, after a short while, I got into an argument with a guy from my squad and we ended up having a fight outside the pub. This was hard to do because we were all wearing back-packs, etc., the fight itself didn't last too long and I won. I then returned to the bar, ordered another drink to cool off, when I walked the guy I had been fighting with. He came up to me and whispered into my ear, "You may have won this one buddy but the first time we go into combat, I'm going to kill you, and that's a promise".

I never gave this guy a second thought, I put his reactions down to "sour grapes". Anyway, two months later when I jumped into Normandy with the 508, it was pitch black when I landed I managed to get out of my chute and assemble

my rifle, not knowing where the hell I was. I started to crawl along the ground expecting at any time to be shot at by a ... German.

Well, after a short time, I crawled over a sharp rise in the ground when I immediately felt something cold enemy nose, I yelled out the password and stood up. The guy who had been himself crawling along the ground in my direction took the Thompson machine gun, which had been the cold thing on my nose, away from my face. I immediately recognized him as he did me, as the guy I'd fought with back in Nottingham two months previously. I also remembered his threat about killing me when we first went into combat. So imagine my relief and amazement when he dropped the machine gun and put his arms around me. This guy was so pleased to meet a friendly face he forgot about the threat he had made, and both of us continued together searching in the darkness for units of our regiment."

The most serious episode that happened during the 508's stay in Nottingham was the trouble between them and the American Negro troops. Fights broke out between these two groups all over Nottingham and even to this day I have had conflicting accounts on why it happened.

During World War II, the American army was completely segregated. Units were either completely black or completely white, it was American Government policy to keep white and black troops apart and the negro was held in such low esteem that they were never ever considered as capable or trustworthy of being "Front line troops", they were usually in service or supply regiments, so to put it generally, the Negro were thought of as "poor soldiers"

The trouble between these troops started sometime before D Day One account saying that the paratroopers of the 508 were riding in trucks through the streets of Nottingham returning to the Park after being on manoeuvres and to quote my informant:-

"As the trucks sped through the town, all our guys saw something that we had never seen before in our lives - there on the side walk were negro troops arm in arm with white girls, walking along as though they owned the place. The guys in the trucks stared in disbelief - this just couldn't be happening, it wasn't allowed in the States and they were going to make damn sure it wouldn't happen again here in Nottingham.

Well, we eventually arrived back at Wollaton Park

AIRBORNE IN NOTTINGHAM

and quite a lot of our guys got out of their fatigues and raced for the showers. In fact, once dressed in their Class A uniforms they didn't bother going to the mess hall for something to eat, such was the urgency of putting this problem right. We went into town and sorted the lot out. Every negro we came across we beat up and on some occasions, hung him by the waist with his belt to the lamp posts. There was hell to pay, and M.P.'s were running around everywhere trying to stop us but we went out there to do a job and we did it, to the best of our ability.

Although all of this happened nearly 40 years ago memories are bound to be vague and unsure etc., so the next incident I'm about to relate from another source could have been entirely a different day to the one above. Anyway, it still deals with the same problem and ended up with tragic consequences. My informant relates -

"A group of us paratroopers were standing talking in the middle of town when across the road we noticed a group of Negroes walking towards us. They stopped opposite us and started yelling abuse at us, which we returned the same. Then it happened, one of these black troops threw a large brick at us hitting a sergeant in the spine then ran off. The sergeant, who was a popular guy in our outfit was partially paralyzed by the blow. We managed to get him back to the camp and reported the incident to a young lieutenant. On hearing this, the Lieutenant ordered all available transport and near on got most of the regiment into town. He was the instigator and told us to teach these black troops a lesson.

It got pretty bad in Nottingham, troopers were fighting the Negroes everywhere they could find them, in pubs, on the streets, cinemas, etc. I know for sure that quite a few were even thrown into the River Trent and at the end of the day, at least 3 Negroes had been killed. Looking back 40 years later, I'm not proud of my participation in this episode but at the time it seemed the right thing to do."

Although these events really did happen, it was hushed up completely by the civic and army authorities. If it had received full-scale publicity, there would have been nothing between the Blacks and Whites throughout England. The end result was from that day on, White troops were allowed out on one day, the Blacks allowed out the next day to avoid any clash between them. Everything possible was done to keep them apart from each other.

The citizens of Nottingham were invited by the U.S. Army authorities to witness America's national game, "Baseball" and posters were up all over various parts of Nottingham advertising this unusual occasion.

It was unusual because a fully organized Baseball match had never been held before in Nottingham and to promote it further the city council allowed the match to take place in the county's oldest football clubs grounds. This belonged to Notts. County at Meadow Lane and it was also taking place on a Sunday (28th May) and being as Sunday was the only day of the week that people could have off from work, it was hoped that a decent crowd would turn up.

Sunday, 28th May came, and the weather was absolutely gorgeous, not a cloud in the sky and after the gates were closed the final count of spectators reached over 7,000, half of which were young ladies. When both teams came on to be introduced they were met by thundering applause.

The two teams consisted of members of two separate units and due to the very strict war time censoring, instead of naming the units, one team was called "The Red Devils", the other "The Panthers". The two units were in fact, part of the 82nd Airborne Division and the names "Red Devils" and "Panthers" were used because of two units unofficial regimental shoulder patches. For instance, the 508 were "The Red Devils" and the 505, billeted just outside Loughborough were "The Panthers."

Hardly anybody in the crowd knew the rules of the game so a commentary was provided by Sgt. Grimshaw who explained everything the best he could throughout the game. He also told the crowd that the only difference between having a baseball game in Nottingham and in the States was a Popcorn vendor and people selling Frankfurters "

Bud Warnecke, who lived in Illinois, was himself a member of the 508's team and remembers the game well:

"We beat the hell out of the 505 at that baseball game, the score at the end being 18 - nil to our guys. We put this down to our "secret weapon" our team possessed which was in the form of a guy called Forrest Brewer, who before enlisting in our outfit was a professional baseball player in the States with the then Washington Senators team. Sadly Forrest was later killed in action during the Normandy campaign."

The baseball game was a great success and all the spectators thoroughly enjoyed the game. In fact,

AIRBORNE IN NOTTINGHAM

one member of the crowd was [a] Nottingham businessman who through watching the game was prompted to write a letter to the States, describing his feelings towards the American troops who had invaded his hometown.

Mr. F. Gray sent the letter to the hometown of Bud Warnecke and it was published in the "Breese Journal" about a month later. Mr. Gray also sent newspaper clippings from the Nottingham Guardian about the baseball game, these too were published in the American newspaper.

As the two teams battled it out between themselves, the crowd cheered and yelled encouragement to both sides. Little did the spectators know, but nine days later, these same young men who were entertaining them so well, would be in fact taking part in another entirely different "Ball Game". This would be on 6th June 1944 and as part of the allied Airborne spearhead. Instead of fighting against each other as they were now, these two teams with their respective units would be fighting side by side for their very existence in the invasion of Europe against the Hun.

When the game had finished, the crowd slowly dispersed. The 505 returned to Quorn, near Loughborough. The 508 team with other members of their regiment went into town for the victory celebration. Most pubs did a brisk trade as the troopers celebrated their win over the 505 regiment. This would be the last time that the 508 would be seen in Nottingham for nearly six weeks, but no one knew this at the time, so the evening went well and as usual a good time was had by all.

The next morning, the 508 were told by their respective company commanders that the invasion was on. No one would be allowed to leave the camp under any circumstances. In fact, as a further precaution, M.P.'s were standing guard at all the entrances to Wollaton Park as the massive security clamp down came to force. Only people with personal orders from the commanding officer would be allowed in or out.

The situation at Wollaton Park was just the same as in thousands of other camps. All over England soldiers were confined to camp and preparations were made for the move to their many marshalling areas.

The three battalions of the 508 pulled out of Wollaton Park and the trucks carrying them made their way to the different airfields that had been allocated to them, one of which was at Folking-ham, which was situated roughly 20 miles from Grantham.

Upon reaching the airfields, the troopers were kept in a state of readiness, equipment had been drawn, as well as ammunition. Barbed wire fences were set up around the airfields perimeter and just as at Wollaton Park M.P.'s were once again posted at all the entrances. No one was allowed out, in fact, all contact with the outside world was cut off, phone calls were even banned.

To ensure that the troopers knew their Drop Zone and targets well, huge tables were set up in tents and hangers with sand mock ups of the lay-out of the land in France where they were going to drop. Every detail of the 508's plan was explained time and time again to troopers, nothing was left to chance, weapons and equipment was checked and re-checked hundreds of times. Officers ensured that every man knew exactly what he had to do. They were told about the passwords, the terrain, what resistance to expect, how the French would re-act etc. They practiced getting in and out of the aircraft and when everything humanly possible was covered the troopers went over it again.

The 508 were to spend nearly a week at these airfields. No one knew or if they did, they didn't say exactly when they would be going to France. The waiting was unbearable at Folkingham airfield, the troopers got involved in card games when-ever they had spare time, anything to take their minds off the invasion. Films were shown in the hangers to the off duty soldiers.

Davey Jones remembers seeing one such film

"I was just nineteen at the time and I cried all the way through the film, not because it was a sad movie but because I thought that this would be the last film I would ever see "

Torn Porcella remembers his stay at Folkingham:-

"We were laying on our cots thinking about the task that lay ahead when all of a sudden a burst of gun fire erupted amongst us, most of us dived on the floor wondering what the hell was going on, when we saw this lone trooper standing looking very sheepish with a sub-machine gun in his hands. He said he had been cleaning it when all of a sudden it went off. Luckily for us all the gun was pointing upwards at the time and the bullets went through the roof, leaving five holes in the ceiling."

Authors Note:

"Years later in 1979 I met Tom Porcella for the first time when Torn was visiting Nottingham I took Tom

AIRBORNE IN NOTTINGHAM

to what was left of Folkingham airfield and as we stood on the old runway, Tom related the same story about the shooting. While walking through the one remaining hanger that was still standing, try to imagine our excitement when lo and behold there on the roof we found five bullet holes, both Tom and I were really amazed.

Major David Thomas also rennumbers the time spent at the airfield: -

"I was killing time by playing poker and being as I wasn't doing too well, decided to go into another hanger and listen to Chaplain Elder, our Protestant Chaplain, who was holding forth to sold out houses, it is not that I profess to any great religiosity, but at times like that I figured there is no reason not to cover all aspects.

As I settled down on a cot in the back row, the only seat available, Chaplain Elder reared back and said, "The Lord is not concerned with those who only turn to him in times of great need, he is not also concerned with those who only practice fox-hole religion" — at which point, I got up and strolled back to the poker game. I figured the Chaplain saw me come in and knew all about my track record."

By the evening of 5th June, everything was ready, and to describe those last few hours before the 508 took off, I will use extracts from the regiments official history, it goes on to say:-

All last minute changes in equipment had been made, bundles had been loaded into the par-racks on the C47's, and final arrangements had been made between jump-masters and air-crews as to when the bundles would be released.

Although the final meal was worthy of Kings, the cooks talents had been wasted for the most part, pre-occupied minds were oblivious to good food. Immediately following the meal, the entire unit went black face using soot from the huge blackened stoves in the kitchens and after coffee and doughnuts had been consumed the officers and men of the regiment waddled out to their planes. There they fitted their chutes and said their last goodbyes

The regimental history goes on to describe what every paratrooper was carrying as he climbed into the plane. Since the parachutist is supplied almost entirely by what he carries on his person and what can be safely dropped from an airplane. Special clothing had been designed for him,

trousers with large pockets were adopted to facilitate carrying large quantities of ammunition and rations.

For the drop on Normandy this uniform was impregnated to offer protection against gas attack, in the pockets were carried one complete K ration consisting of three meals, several D ration chocolate bars, two fragmentation grenades and other articles to suit the individual.

Over this jump suit was worn a belt supported by suspenders, on the belt were hung canteen, a gas mask was secured to the left leg, a trench knife was strapped to the other. The boots were protected to resist gas and over both shoulders were slung bandoleers of ammunition, some of the men carried binoculars too.

Next the parachute back pack and harness fitted and from the harness was suspended a musette bag containing in addition to clean socks and extra ammunition, a ten pound antitank mine, the reserve chute was strapped across the chest to secure all this equipment and finally after putting on his camouflage covered helmet, adjusting his chin cup, and picking up his rifle, the paratrooper was set to go — for the trip across the channel, a Mae West life preserver was placed over the head.

The average weight of each trooper carrying all of this equipment was over 300 lbs. By being issued with all this it was hoped that every man once in combat, had the means immediately available to him to tackle any problem — this was fine in theory but things can happen of which nobody could expect or be trained for. In fact casualties occurred within the 508 regiment even before they took off. One group of paratroopers were getting into a plane when a grenade broke loose from one of the troopers, the following explosion killed one Sergeant and wounded four others The plane was also badly damaged.

In another incident the starboard engine refused to start but the air corps showed their prowess by the rapidity with which they transferred all the men and their equipment to another plane. They were 15 minutes late taking off but caught up with the rest of the group over the English Channel.

The invasion of Europe is another story, but to touch on it briefly, the plan called for the 3 allied airborne divisions, 2 American and one British to land a few hours before the main invasion fleet and cause as much disruption as possible within the German lines of communication, hold certain key positions and above all stop German reinforcements from reaching the beaches, thus enabling the allied invasion to land on the beach from the ships so

AIRBORNE IN NOTTINGHAM

there would be a breathing space as they formed up along the 50 mile stretch of Normandy coastline, and then they would push inland towards the paratroopers.

The 508 landed on French soil at exactly 0215 hours, the three battalions were widely scattered over the Normandy countryside. Troopers were split up from their units and some of them started their own private war as they fought to be re-united with their comrades - a full account of the 508's activities during the Normandy campaign will be published later in another book.

On 7th June contact with the enemy was broken and the 508 were put into reserve, then on 13th July the remnants of the 508 were loaded onto two L.S.T.'s at Utah Beach which took them to Southampton.

The troopers were very, very weary, some were even in a state of shock. They had been in action continuously for 31 days and of the 2056 young men who had landed on D-Day only 995 were returning back to England, the rest were casualties of which 307 being killed.

The 508 landed at Southampton to a hero's welcome. People were waving and cheering as the troopers left the L.S.T.'s and boarded trains for Nottingham.

The welcome at Southampton was greatly appreciated by the troopers but it was nothing compared with the welcome they got when the train pulled in at Nottingham. There were two A.T.S. bands and hundreds of people waiting to welcome the 508 back "Home".

As the bands played "Over There", there were shouts of "God bless you Yank". The troopers walked slowly through the crowd, the tiredness plainly visible on their faces. People were crying and it was at this moment that the 508 came to realize that Nottingham was indeed their second home. In fact the 508's history stated that one trooper had suggested that the regiment should not have received foreign service pay at all during their stay in Nottingham, such was the bond of friendship that was felt between the 508 and the citizens of Nottingham.

After reaching Wollaton Park, fifty per cent of the regiment was immediately given a 7-day furlough; the other fifty per cent would have the same the following week.

Just how fierce the fighting had really been suddenly hit the troopers the minute they returned to their tents. They could tell by looking at the empty cots how high the casualties were. In fact, on more than one occasion, a trooper would find that he was the lone survivor -from his eight man tent, and it has been brought to my notice that

on discovering this, many a trooper simply sat on a bed and cried his eyes out for his missing buddies.

Howard Hughes from California says: -

"The only sad time I had in Wollaton Park was when we came back from Normandy. We left with about 130 of the finest men I have ever met and when we returned 5 weeks later only 30 of us came back. I remember someone singing "Danny Boy", the tears came down my cheek when I looked around and saw all the men who were no longer with us, it was a sad day, I lost so many good buddies, we had been like one big "family."

One trooper who was at Wollaton Park when the survivors of the Normandy campaign came back was Darrell Glass and he said: -

"I and a handful of other soldiers arrived at Wollaton Park, Nottingham assigned to "C" Company 508th P.I.R. We had just qualified for the Airborne at a school elsewhere in England, which had been established prior to D-Day to expedite the training and delivery of replacements for the 82nd Airborne Division once the invasion was underway.

Upon arrival we were informed that the 508th and other contingents of the 82nd were already at airfields preparing for a mission, and that our lot was to remain in camp, ready to follow them at any time should we be needed.

Further orientation told us that should the mission last more than 28 or 29 days, we would definitely be dropped in as replacements. In the meantime, we would remain restricted to camp as a reserve element. We all wondered, "What have I gotten myself into?"

I, for one, was still uncertain as to my "place" as a paratrooper, volunteering for the Airborne specifically to get out of a "chicken" outfit. I knew little of the traditions or the make up of the Airborne.

We all began to adjust as green paratrooper, with a daily routine of calisthenics, running, climbing, mock jumping, and all the other strenuous activities designed to keep us fit and ready.

All the uncertainties any of us had began to change rapidly when one evening we saw wave after wave of C-47's filling the skies, headed for

AIRBORNE IN NOTTINGHAM

that mission which was the Invasion of Normandy.

The first real lump welled in my throat as I began to realize that future buddies would be making the D-Day landing in just a few short hours, and that many I would regrettably never know would not be returning.

In a matter of no more than a couple of days, we began to hear of some of the heroic deeds being performed. We heard reports of the valor in action by the men of "C" Company; men that we had not had the privilege of meeting, men that we began to know by name and a fast-growing reputation, men that we would be proud and grateful to serve with.

The names of those killed, missing, or captured began coming in then, and those of us who could type were asked to spend torturous, heart rending hours each even-ing typing letters to notify parents and loved ones.

After what seemed an eternity, we received word that our Company had been relieved and was on the way back to Wollaton Park.

We fell out around 8:00 pm one evening and prepared to receive "C" Company.

As the returning heroes neared the Company area, the First Sergeant, Leonard Funk, brought them to order and into march step.

As we saw 18 or 20 men of the approximately 130 that participated come marching in cadence down the Company street, an enormous lump filled my throat and tears came to my eyes I watched that small group of men in "Baggy Pants", worn out, bedraggled and sleepy eyed, march into the area with chests out, chins high, and with an aura of pride beyond description A pride that overflowed into all of us, into me.

Not only were those men marching into a Company area, but into my life as the greatest bunch of guys in the world It was at that point that my decision was really made I'm a paratrooper for life and a "C" Company man - eternally!

Ray Pateracki, also has sad memories of his units return to Nottingham: -

"Vividly etched into my memory bank is the day that we returned to Wollaton Park after our Normandy jump. How well I remember looking into the tents and seeing so many empty cots. Cots that had been filled with guys whom we had learned

to love like brothers. Guys who were occupying graves back in Normandy and others who had been wounded, some to return to the 508th, some to be shipped home.

Issued passes, we descended on Nottingham like a plague of locusts, trying to forget, drinking ourselves into semi-conscious states. I speak for myself when I say that I often wondered the next morning how I ever made it back to camp."

As Ray stated, once on pass, the troopers did their best to try and forget the last 5 weeks of hell, sympathetic landlords gave them any drink that was possible, there was no rationing for these men but try as they may, it was impossible to forget the men they had left behind. Anxious civilians kept asking about this trooper or that trooper, and more likely than not, the soldier they were inquiring after had been killed or wounded. This made things worse, so no matter what the trooper did to try and forget he was constantly reminded by questions asked by these genuinely worried people.

Even M P.'s upon finding one of these troopers the worse for wear because of drink, instead of throwing them in the stockade, drove them back to Wollaton Park and handed them over to their own unit.

When everybody had returned to camp after their 7 day furlough, a memorial service was held at Wollaton Park in honour of the men who had been killed in Normandy, Col Roy Lindquist, the 508 CO. had the regiment on parade and looking down at them spoke proudly these words

After Col Lindquist had spoken, it was the turn of each unit commander to read out the names of the men killed in action, and as this was done, the troopers stood to attention as the guidon, belonging to the unit being named, was slowly lowered.

it was a very solemn occasion. Many thoughts must have crossed their minds as the men listened to the names of those who had been killed. For some, it was heart-rending to hear names of buddies who would never return and when it was the turn of the 508's own male chorus to sing the song "My Buddy", emotions couldn't be held back. These proud young men, battle-scarred and weary, unashamedly wept, nobody could hold back the tear. The 508 had been together for nearly 2 years, they regarded the regiment as "family" and here they were now, survivors of nearly 5 weeks fighting, remembering how some of their buddies had died. The recollections for some were horrific, for instance one trooper witnessed

AIRBORNE IN NOTTINGHAM

his buddy decapitated by German 88mm anti-aircraft shells. Another remembers his friend stepping on a mine, losing both legs and who could ever forget the time a German Tiger Tank broke through to one of the 508's first aid posts, machine-gunning the wounded. The list of stones like these were endless, the most tragic one though was one that concerned S/Sgt. Joe Lazarro. He was one of the most popular men in "F" Company, always ready to help anybody, no matter what the problem was. A former member of "F" Company takes up the story: -

"It must have been roughly 3 days after our initial landing in Normandy when some guys out of "F" Company came across S/Sgt [Lazarro], they had been looking for stragglers and supply bundles and there, hanging from a tree, his feet only 3 feet off the ground was S/Sgt [Lazarro].

It was apparent to us all that he had trouble getting out of his chute, and that must have been how the Germans found him. They used his body for bayonet practice, and for us to find him like this bloated and covered in flies was devastating. We cut him down and brought him back with us "

The 508 were not given time to dwell on these thoughts, the war was still on and it would be only a matter of time before the regiment would be assigned another mission. Replacements were arriving daily and some of the troopers who had been wounded were coming back.

Training was resumed to get them back into top class physical condition, lessons had been learnt during the Normandy campaign and mistakes rectified. Confidence and morale once again soared amongst the 508 and after a short period they were indeed ready for anything. The regiment was once again at full strength and itching to go, they were proud to be called veterans.

Having now settled down during the training and re-equipping program, the troopers started to look forward to their nights and weekends off in the town. A significant change concerning their attitude and behaviour was noticed by all who came into contact with them. One landlord recalls that they were now more serious. He says: -

"We respected them more now for what they had done and been through. Gone was the shouting and mischievousness that was associated with the troopers. They were now more quiet, more thoughtful etc in fact, they had matured rapidly and I for one regarded the change in their attitude as something as quite alarming. They had

gone to Normandy as easy going young men and returned to Nottingham entirely different people. They had in fact, grown up and this had been done the hard way,"

Many of the troopers renewed old acquaintances and some even married. The war was going well for the allies, so now it seemed a future could be had by all. Plans were made for when the war ended. Promises too, but unknown to anyone in Nottingham or the 508 troopers there were many more battles to be fought before hostilities ended.

During the month of August the 508 were alerted on numerous occasions for different missions. Sometimes these were canceled within hours, other times not until the last minute as the 508 assembled at the airfields. The reason for this was the allied armies were advancing so fast, they overtook designated Drop Zones before the airborne plans could be put into operation.

After each cancellation, the 508 would return to Wollaton Park, stow away most of their equipment into the tents and life would carry on normally as near as possible. Although the troopers were allowed out to town, the regiment was always in a full state of readiness, waiting for the next orders.

It was on one of these occasions that a simple joke went wrong. Joe Cananze from Massachusetts tells the story

"Our regiment was standing by, everything ready for the word to go, and after many a false alarm, troopers were beginning to think that the war would be well and truly over long before we ever got involved again.

There was this particular young guy in our Company (he was a replacement and had never been in action) who was always moaning about the war, he kept telling everybody he didn't want to go into combat, all he wanted to do was to go home. He was a real pain in the ass so it was decided to set him up.

All the way through our company lines was a radio wired up which broadcast music most of the day through speakers, this system could be used as a Public Announcement too, just by pulling out one cable and inserting the microphone. Anyway the guys and I waited for this trooper to return to our lines one day and when I saw him coming I hid behind a tent with the microphone in my hand, I pulled the lead out of the radio and inserted the microphone plug, and said in the most official voice I could muster "We interrupt this broadcast for a very important announce-ment, — All

AIRBORNE IN NOTTINGHAM

hostilities between Germany and the Allies have ceased, the German army has surrendered unconditionally" — I then put the radio plug back in and music continued to come out of the speakers.

I have never seen such a happier looking guy as this one was, he was smiling and waving his arms about yelling, "We are going home, the wars ended." My buddies and I were really enjoying all of this when all of a sudden, the shooting started. First one shot rang out, then another and another, we looked around and saw guys all over the park blasting off their M1's, carbines, B.A.R.'s Thompsons, etc. into the air and shouting "The war is ended " We were amazed at all this and could not understand what had gone wrong. Then suddenly it dawned upon me, instead of putting the microphone into the company's P A. system I had unknowingly put it into the regiment's socket. So in fact my official announcement had been broadcast to the entire regiment.

There was hell to pay, officers and Non-coms started to rush around telling guys to stop shooting, and when some form of order was installed an investigation took place to find the culprit. It was only a matter of time before they got to me and I was hauled up in front of Col. Lindquist no less. The Colonel listened to my excuse, he then read out to me the riot act, he gave me 7 days punishment, but I swear to this day that as I marched out of his office, Col Lindquist and the other officers present tried their best to hide a smile, they could see the funny side of this incident "

Charley Paradise remembers another unusual incident at Wollaton Park: -

"One day the entire regiment was on parade on the park, a P51 Mustang (American fighter plane) came down to tree top level and buzzed us two or three times, this was very unusual and we all wondered what the hell the pilot was trying to do? Anyway next day on the radio, Berlin announced "That was a nice parade you boys of the 508 had at Wollaton Park yesterday " — We often wondered was it a Yank or German who had been flying that plane."

Bud Warnecke also has an amusing story that happened when the 508 returned from Normandy.

"I had received a battle field commission in Normandy and during the re-training period at Wollaton Park I was in charge of all the 60mm mortar men in the battalion We had a live firing range not far from the park The last thing I had the

crews do was to fire for affect with all mortars with ten rounds in the air before the first one hit the ground

One of the mortars crews aid not hold the bipod down and with each round the mortar tube shifted to the left When I saw what was happening I held my breath as rounds exploded near on and across a civilian highway Right behind the round that exploded on the highway came the regimental C O. Colonel Roy Lindquist and the only thing I remember him saying was, "how can I go through the Normandy campaign without a scratch and then come out to my firing range and almost get killed "

Paul Sherbak of Indiana also had a bi+ of a fright one day during training.

"Our company had spent all day and all night practicing Tank attack problems, we were on a place called Strawberry Hill near Mansfield and when we were allowed eventually to bed down for a couple of hours well deserved sleep, we all got into our two-men tents but after a short while I found that I needed to go to the latrine. Anyway on my way back I noticed it was full moon so I let out a very loud wolf call at the moon. I didn't know if there were any wolves in England but neither did my buddies because on hearing my wolf call they jumped out of their tents with their rifles blazing. I would have been killed a thousand times but for fact that we were only using blank ammo."

During the early part of September, the 508 yet again received orders to prepare itself for another mission. Intelligence sources stated that the German army was in full retreat and it had been decided that now was the time for 3 airborne divisions to land in Holland behind enemy lines and secure and capture several bridges The plan went on to explain that the British 30th Corp would then race up the one main highway and cross the bridges held by the airborne troops.

The 82nd Airborne Division with the 508 attached to it would land in the Nijmegen area, the 101st would land in the Eindhoven area and the British 6th Airborne would land at Arnhem. This then was the plan, and if successful would shorten the war by 6 months. The airborne divisions had just 7 days to prepare so things got pretty hectic..

One of the lessons learnt by the Normandy Campaign was how quickly the troopers ran short of

AIRBORNE IN NOTTINGHAM

ammunition etc., supply bundles were lost so it was decided that every man would carry as much ammunition on himself as humanly possible.

Charley Paradise remembers getting ready for Holland says -

"Each and everyone of us filled every pocket and space we had with spare ammunition No way were we going to be caught out again like we were in Normandy. Ammo Boxes were strewn all over the camp as troopers helped themselves. Much later in Holland we heard a rumour that two young kids playing in Wollaton Park had found some gammon grenades which had been left behind. We were also told that the kids had been killed. It upset us all very much."

N.B. This in fact was not just a rumour, grenades had indeed been found by kids playing in the park but only one had been killed, the other, seriously wounded, was taken by the Americans to a hospital where he later recovered.

Once again, same as before in Normandy, the Park was guarded by M.P.'s as the security clampdown came into operation. Finally when everything was ready the 508 left Wollaton Park for the airfields, no one [in the] regiment knew at the time but this would be the last time the 508, as a regiment would be at Wollaton Park. Everybody thought that they would return again just as [after] Normandy but this was not to happen.

One of the troopers who remembers leaving the Park for the airfields was Nathan Silverlieb from Massachusetts. In his story he relates about the many times the 508 left Nottingham on different missions and then finally the Holland one. He says:-

"I recall many fearful times in the area, also we travelled to a relatively local airport to depart for a combat jump right outside Pans, but, fortunately, the mission was called off. A short while later we were placed on alert and went back to the airport for a jump into the area where France, Germany and Belgium joined. Our fears were rather strong, since we would be dropping in on four or five Panzer and Infantry divisions. Thank God, that mission was also called off, and back to good old Nottingham we went. With a sigh of relief we returned to our tents in Wollaton Park, but it was a short stay, again we rode to the airport, for a drop outside Brussels, and again the mission was canceled And again we re-entered Wollaton Park with

thanks.

There was one event I think I shall never forget. About September 13th we fell out for a briefing and were told to prepare for another mission. After the briefing we knew, in our hearts, that this one would not be called off at the last minute, for we were issued American invasion Flags, to be sewn on our right shoulders. After receiving the flags, nervousness really took over, exemplified by the lines at the latrines, all waiting to use the Honey Buckets.

However, we left Wollaton Park in style, the next day, transported in civilian double deckers. The ride through Nottingham enroute to the airport, was most memorable. There was quite a number of citizens lining the streets as our convoy passed through. They waved their 'goodbyes' and gave the 'thumbs up' sign, but the worried looks on their faces - and, yes, the tears in some eyes - were signs which made me fully aware that a great danger was near. A few days later on, 17th September, we dropped into Holland.

Joseph Swickert from New York also has vivid recollections of numerous call-outs the 508 had, Joe has this to say about one of them: -

"I remember the day we were scheduled to take off for a combat jump between the Siegfried and Maginot Line, which in our briefing appeared to be quite ominous, even our Chaplain looked rather tearful. Anyway, just like a miracle, seconds before we were due to take off, the mission was canceled. General Patton had beat us there.

Its needless to say, none of us were disappointed and we once again returned "Home" to Wollaton Park "

On September 14th, the 508 left Wollaton to participate in operation "Market Garden", one of the many airfields used was the one of Langar, once again last minute preparations were made on the airfields but even with all this going on, many of the troopers thought that perhaps this mission too could be canceled like the others, but on 17th September, the 508 received the green light, the operation was definitely on.

Just prior to the take-off, Lt. Col. Mendez, C.O. of the 3rd Battalion, gathered around him all the pilots who were to ferry him and his men to Holland. Lt. Col Mendez still remembers the way his regiment had been well scattered

AIRBORNE IN NOTTINGHAM

during the Normandy Drop, he had this to say to the pilots:

"Gentlemen, my officers know this map of Holland and the drop zones by heart and we are ready to go." Lt Col. Mendez continues, "When I brought my battalion to the briefing prior to Normandy, I had the finest combat-ready force of its size that will ever be known. By the time I gathered them together in Normandy, half were gone - I charge you, put us down in Holland or put us down in hell, - but put us all down together in one piece."

The troopers climbed into the planes, some of them wondered how long it would be before they returned to Nottingham. The men did not know it at the time, but as the planes roared down the runway carrying the 508 to Holland the 508 as a regiment would never ever again return to Nottingham.

The camp at Wollaton Park would remain the 508's base camp right up until December 1944. Here replacements and troopers returning from the hospital after being wounded would be given new equipment etc. and then sent on to join the regiment wherever it was.

One of the last troopers to go back to Wollaton Park before the camp closed was Nathan Silverlieb, who says; -

The saddest time I ever had in Nottingham occurred late in November 1944 while I was on a pass from the hospital. As I entered Wollaton Park and looked around, I felt a lump in my throat as I saw that most of the tents were down. The handful of troopers there updated me on everything that had happened since 20th September, the day I had been wounded in Holland and also told me they were pulling out soon to rejoin the regiment somewhere in France."

This then ends the story of the 508's stay in Nottingham between March and September 1944. The city and its people had a great impact on the memories of these troopers, memories that are still clear even now – 40 years later.

Jim Lutton wrote to me with his recollections of Nottingham and his letter was typical of all the stories I received from ex-members of the 508 concerning their stay in Nottingham I think it is worth printing Jim's story exactly as he wrote it, this would give the reader some idea how much Nottingham and its people were regarded by the troopers from Wollaton Park, here then is Jim's story:

"As to my impressions of Nottingham, I first read about the "Adventures of Robin Hood" when I was only nine years old. and fell in love with Nottingham there and then.

Later on as a paratrooper, the time I spent there did nothing to disillusion me — I still love it and always will.

When we returned from Normandy, we were all given 7 days furlough, and I could have gone anywhere in the British Isles, but I chose to spend my time in Nottingham itself.

I had close relatives in Glasgow whom I could have visited (they had spent some time with my family in 1938, here in Pittsburgh) but it was at a time when children were being evacuated to the North to escape the "Buzz Bombs" and I did not want to take up space on the trains.

My ancestry is Anglo-Saxon, my parental lineage is from Ulster (Bainbridge Co. Down) and Glasgow, Scotland. My maternal grandmother was of Welsh extraction — I therefore felt quite at home in "The Isles".

We have a legendary humourist, Will Rogers, who was quoted as saying "I never met a man I didn't like" — to paraphrase him, I never met an Englishman woman or child that I didn't like, wherever I went in England. I was always treated like a favoured guest and consequently tried to act accordingly.

I recall being invited to dinner one occasion and knowing that my hosts had put their entire weekly ration on the table as a gesture of hospitality, I frequently told a "little white lie" and pleaded that I was a vegetarian, also with other members of our outfit, I drank my tea 'black' being aware of the rationing of sugar and milk.

Unfortunately we were not so frugal with your beer which we drank in copious amounts — where as an Englishman might nurse a pint through half an evening. We drank it as fast as it could be served, for this I apologize, we were not aware that the taverns were also rationed at the time. Some of the troopers grouched that the beer was too warm and was not like what they were used to, but others of us accepted the beer as the national drink and adapted accordingly. I could never get used to a female companion ordering a mixture of gin and port.

Regarding Nottingham hospitality - one evening when my girlfriend (Cathy Clarke) and I were walking home from dinner (we had been to a cafe across the road from the Park) we heard an

AIRBORNE IN NOTTINGHAM

operetta being broadcast on the wireless which we both liked — it was coming through the window of a private house so we stopped on the pavement and listened. Being a brash cheeky Yank, I knocked on the door and asked if we could come in and listen. We were heartily welcomed and even offered refreshments — do you wonder that I love the people in Nottingham?'

The above mentioned, Cathy Clarke was a girl I went with and whose family took me in and treated me royally, my mother sent me a box of "goodies" from home and included a box of tea bags which I presented to Cathy's mother. At the time tea bags were unknown in England and Mrs. Clarke proclaimed that after the war, she and Cathy would go to the U.S. and drink tea out of bags. I lost contact with Cathy whilst I was in Normandy but I heard she later went to London to be a nursing sister.

My other memories of Nottingham include riding a bike during a blackout and nearly running over a bobby, the double-decker buses, the Flying Horse Inn, a near drowning in the Grantham Canal, the Trent, walking its banks but the fondest memory I have is of the people, never have I met such warm and friendly people. Nottingham should be proud of its people, I certainly was and still am."

What of the 508 today? It has been over 40 years since the regiment left Nottingham to participate in the allied airborne invasion of Holland but the comradeship that prevailed in this elite unit during the war is very much alive today.

Of all the many airborne veterans association that are in existence in the United States today, the veterans of the 508 are the most active.

In 1974, O. B. Hill, an ex-member of the regiment thought it would be a great idea to try and get as many veterans of the 508 together for the first time since 1946, and after countless phone calls and letters, the first reunion of the 508 was held in Chicago in 1975.

Only a small number attended, but such was the response that it was decided to form the 508 association, and each attending member promised to "search out" more of the regiment, who would be scattered all over the states.

The association held another reunion in 1976, once again in Chicago, and the numbers gradually started to swell, so much that now in 1985, the 508 association proudly boasts having over 1,000 men on their regimental roster, this is no mean feat and the success of the

association must surely be to O. B. Hill and other members of the regiment who, through simple detective work managed to get in touch with ex-members of the regiment, thus making the association what it is today.

The bond of friendship that was formed way back in Nottingham between the 508 and the local people is very much alive today. Large groups of the 508 and their wives frequently return to Nottingham, some come independently, but they all share one thing in common, that is to return to their "second home".

The 508 association first came to Nottingham in June 1978, the local press had a field day, one headline read "The Boys Of The 508 Are Back In Town" and it was no small wonder that during their short stay in the city, their hotel was flooded with "old friends", many a quiet looking lady in the late fifties would turn up proudly wearing the silver paratrooper wings that she had been given 40 years before by a young trooper. Such is the magic that is still going strong between the veterans and their friends of long ago.

A short ceremony was held at their former camp site at Wollaton Park. The 508 association dedicated a plaque and a tree to the people of Nottingham and now whenever any member of the 508 return to Nottingham, the plaque at Wollaton Park is the first place they visit.

The veterans of the 508 returned once again to Nottingham in 1981, and their latest visit was in 1984 where the association's chairman O. B. Hill officially opened a display cabinet at the museum in Wollaton Park dedicated to the regiment. This will be for future generations to see, a permanent reminder that for six months, Nottingham was home to over 2,500 American paratroopers in 1944. And it should also help keep alive the memory of this great regiment. The story of the 508's stay in Nottingham by using a letter sent by Jim Lutton describing his feelings for Nottingham and its people. I think it's fitting enough to finish this book with a poem written by a young Nottingham lady describing her feelings for one trooper. Here then is Katy's poem, which incidentally was written when Katy went down to Wollaton Park on April 12, 1945.

12th April 1945

*So this is England in peace
Yet I sat in this self-same spot a year ago
And it was war.
It all seems the same, the grass, the sky, the sun,
But then you were here
So much has happened since,*

AIRBORNE IN NOTTINGHAM

*The others now seem only a memory.
But you, who I should not remember, live in my mind-*
Always there in my every thought,
Yet it is said you love another.
I don't understand - we, who meant so much
And said to each other the things we said,
Should be together - forever.
Yet it was you who changed as did others in June '44
That test of nerves the night you dropped, the suspense
And then to see your comrades killed around you,
And to kill, yourself
The blood and sweat, they shocked your nerves.
You were not expecting it to be like this -An easy victory,
the undefeated Paratroops.
Yet for seven days and nights you were alone.
Seeing
them fall beside you,
Wondering each hour if the next would be you.
What could I know of all
I could not guess
I too thought it would be an easy victory,
The undaunted Paratroop with whom I loved and laughed
A month before
He could not be serious, mud-caked and frightened
Even in battle
He would laugh and say "'To hell with them"
And so I wrote you letters
And the future, our life, and laughed
Told you little incidents that would make you smile
Then July 14th - you came back.
No telegram, just that knock.
For 45 days I had waited for this,
But yet towards the end I doubted,
No letters, no word before that night
"I can only stay ten minutes,
"
I've got to meet the boys to celebrate"
You were changed, my hand was there for you
to hold,
But you didn't - my eyes to look into
But I received no answering look
Ana afterwards when we were alone.
You told me "This is good-bye
This is the last time we shall meet."
You looked beyond me as you spoke those few words
And I knew with all my heart that you didn't mean them
Had you looked at me
You would have seen there ail my thoughts of you
All those thoughts I'd stored up whilst you were over there
Risking all - even your very life
But no - you didn't look and so you never knew
As I would never know again
The thrill of having you hold me close
And the bitter sweetness of your kiss
They were mine no more - they belonged to
someone else.
In that moment, something within died.
It has never been reborn.
I loved you then, I love you now, you have gone.

But I will always remember you - to eternity

I have been asked many, many times about my interest in the 508, the most common question being "How come the 508 means so much to you when you cannot even remember the war?" Well to be quite honest, I don't know why myself. All I can say is that as far as I can remember, I have always read about World War II, especially actions concerning the 82nd Airborne Division, so when the local Military Vehicle Restoration group informed me that a unit of the 82nd would be at Wollaton Park on a certain date, its needless to say, I jumped at the chance to meet representatives of this fine Division.

How well I remember that first meeting I took my wife, Sharron and son Sean to Wollaton Park and as we walked towards the Americans, the feelings I felt are hard to describe. But one thing was for certain. After talking to them for just a short time, I decided there and then that something should be done to show these wonderful people that the sacrifices and hardships they went through during the war should be appreciated and not to be forgotten. So, I took it upon myself to try and do my best to keep alive the memory of the 508 Parachute infantry Regiment.

Easier said than done but I started to correspond with these veterans, especially O. B. Hill, the 508's association chairman, and looking back now six years later, I think it was due mainly to O. B.'s encouragement that I carried on. His letters to me were full of admiration of the Nottingham people and such is his warmth and friendship which came over in his letters. He made my son Sean, who was then only nine years old, an honorary member of the 508, a great honour indeed!

I went ahead and purchased a genuine 1943 American jeep and relying entirely on my good friend John Wood, it was renovated almost back to its original condition after 18 months of hard work.

I attended various military shows with the jeep which was made out to the 508 insignias, having markings of the regiment stencilled on the front bumper, this then was one way of keeping alive the memory of the 508 Airborne Regiment. In fact, when at these shows a member of the public would come up to me and say, "I remember that regiment well." I knew I was doing the right thing.

My interest continued to grow so in 1980, my wife, son and myself visited the United States and we were met there in New York by a 508 veteran, Tom Porcella, who generously gave us the freedom of his house. We also

AIRBORNE IN NOTTINGHAM

visited Fort Bragg, home of the 82nd Airborne Division in North Carolina and spent 5 wonderful days there meeting present day members and veterans of the different airborne units that formed the 82nd Division.

A month after returning to England I received a package from Fort Bragg which contained a certificate, plus insignia, making me an Honorary Lt. Col of the 508 Airborne Division. This to me was a really fantastic honour, but the actual honour of being made a Lt Col. of the airborne created problems.

Anyone who knows me will agree that I hate flying, in fact whenever I am in a plane I actually fly that plane and land it with my nerves. So to be given the rank of Lt Col in the Airborne regiment seemed very false to a strict ground-gripper like me.

To overcome this problem, I went to a local parachute club and signed up for a parachute course. To say I was a bit nervous would be a slight understatement. When it came time for me to actually jump out of a perfectly safe aeroplane I died a thousand times, nobody in this world could have convinced me that the chute would open. Anyway it did, and I landed right on the very edge of the 400-acre drop zone. I went back to the club the next day to prove to myself that I could do it again, thus permitting me in my own mind the right to be made an honorary Lt. Col. and although after bailing out the second time and missing the Drop Zone by nearly one mile, I felt that I had at least earned the right to wear the Lt. Col.'s insignia but most importantly I had experienced slightly, how the paratroopers must have felt on their first initial jump too.

Over the past few years many 508 veterans have visited my house. I have also met the veterans on trips to Normandy and to Holland. The greatest honour, I think bestowed upon me was in October 1982 when I attended a reunion of the 508 regiment to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the activation of their unit. I was invited to talk to over 700 veterans and their wives at the officers club at Fort Bragg. To me it was a tremendous occasion, It is very hard when well over a thousand pairs of eyes are watching and waiting and my nerves must have showed, but the spell was broken once again by O B, Hill because when he introduced me he said, "Just listen and see how he's murdered our language". This comment was as good for me as it was to the veterans - we all had a good laugh.

So that is how it all began, my interest in the 508 regiment. It is through this interest that my family and I have received so much kindness from the 508 association. I hasten to add that I was never motivated to do any of

this with reward in mind I think to put it as simple as possible why I do what I do for the 508 regiment is to say in my very humble way a BIG THANK YOU to the 508 regiment and other regiments of all nationalities on behalf of my generation for making possible the freedom we all enjoy at this moment in time for which they had to pay, in some cases, the supreme price.