

FROM THE COTSWOLDS TO ARNHEM

(A SOLDIER'S STORY)



By Jack Taylor
Fife and Forfar Yeomanry
250 (Airborne) Light Composite Company R.A.S.C.
8TH Royal Tank Regiment

250(Airborne)Light Composite Company R.A.S.C. at The Longhills, Branston.
and
Jack Taylor's Memoir

In February 1944 the above army unit, having recently returned from Africa, arrived at Lincoln. Company H.Q. was established at The Moorlands, Newark Road, Lincoln, and No's 1, 2 & 3 Parachute Platoons were billeted at The Longhills, just south east of Branston.



Longhills Hall Photo by Peter Scarcliffe

They occupied The Hall, nearby stables, and a barn. As well as supplying logistic support on land and in the air, the Parachute Platoons had a secondary role as a defence platoon of the Brigade to which they were attached which meant that a greater degree of infantry training was necessary.

On 24 February 1944, Jack Taylor, a young newly trained parachutist arrived at The Longhills to join the 250 (Airborne) Light Composite Company R.A.S.C. and he was posted to No. 1 Platoon. He had transferred from a tank regiment, The Fife and Forfar Yeomanry to become a parachutist. This was the start of his love story with Lincolnshire and soon the start of his love for a lady from Potterhanworth who subsequently became his wife.

It was here that he became aware of the artistic talent of one of his colleagues, a man named Arthur Sims, who created a number of large murals on some internal walls of The Hall which depicted various military activities. (Some years later they were over painted but fortunately photographs survive). In August the Company were deployed to various locations in readiness for possible operations, with No.1 Platoon being located at Barkston Heath.

On 17 September Operation 'Market Garden' commenced and Jack and his colleagues and many more were parachuted into Arnhem. Subsequently, like many others, Jack was captured and became a P.O.W. Towards the end of the war he was released and returned to the U.K. and after completing his enlistment period of seven years, he eventually settled in Branston together with his wife, the young lady from Potterhanworth.

Located near the entrance to The Longhills are two commemorative brass plaques which are in remembrance of the men of 250 Company R.A.S.C.

FROM THE COTSWOLDS TO ARNHEM

(A SOLDIER'S STORY)

I was born in a small town in Gloucestershire called Morton in Marsh but subsequently my family moved to the village of Broadwell. It was there in 1940, at the age of 16 years, that I joined the Home Guard. The unit was formed by combining the villages of Broad well and Donnington and consisted of about 20 members. We were issued with armbands and three rifles but no ammunition and we had to take turns in using the rifles for rifle drill. Eventually we were issued with uniforms and we continued various forms of training some of which was quite bizarre in an amusing sort of way.

One of our major exercises, with other units, was to defend Stow-on-the-Wold from an attack by a Canadian Regiment which had just arrived in the U.K. I think they were the first contingent of troops to arrive from Canada. We were given the task of setting up roadblocks on the road which ran from Morton in Marsh to Stow-on-the-Wold. By this time our unit had 6 rifles but only NCOs could use them on exercises. We were in fact issued with 'hand grenades' but only pretend ones for they were in fact potatoes and small bags of flour to throw at the enemy. The potatoes were rolled in the flour and thrown and if any of the opposing troops were marked with flour it counted as a hit. God knows what the Canadian troops must have thought of this. It would have made a superb comedy film except this was serious training in order that we would be capable of defending the country against an expected German invasion.

In April 1942 at the age of 18 years I enlisted in the army, signing on for a period of seven years. I volunteered because I wanted to serve in a tank regiment like my brother. He was in the 17/21st Lancers (The Death or Glory Boys), a cavalry regiment which was part of the Royal Armoured Corps.

Initially I was posted to the Shropshire Light Infantry Regiment at Shrewsbury for assessment and basic training which lasted for six weeks. I was then posted to a Royal Armoured Corps Regiment at Farnborough to undertake tank training. I cannot remember the name of the regiment but I believe it was one of the cavalry regiments, and I subsequently qualified as a Driver/Gunner. (All tank crew members were trained in dual roles).

After completing this training I was posted to the Fife and Forfar Yeomanry, a tank regiment which was based at Uckfield in Sussex and was equipped with Covenanter and Crusader tanks. This being a Scottish regiment made for a very interesting posting.

We spent a large amount of our time on manoeuvres in various parts of the country such as York, Kings Lynn, Uckfield, etc. We were always kept well away from the towns because of the damage that our tanks might cause to the roads etc. However, at one of the locations near a village the local residents were organising a fete to raise money toward the cost of a Spitfire aeroplane and our C.O. was approached by the fete committee to see if he would be prepared to loan the regimental pipe band for the parade. Now it was unfortunate but most of the band members had just gone on seven days leave, but nevertheless, not wishing to disappoint the locals, the C.O. agreed. He decided that the remaining bandsmen would have their numbers bolstered by pressganging men who would not be on any duties on the day in question to march with the band. I happened to be in the wrong place and was duly requisitioned together with five others. We were each given a bagpipe which had been stuffed so that it could not be played, and also a kilt to wear. On the day of the parade we were positioned in the centre square of the band and then we marched through the village with our arms pumping but not a sound emanating from the six of us to disrupt the rhythmic screech of the rest of the band. The locals were delighted and we received undeserved rapturous applause and praise as band members.

It was sometime in late 1943 when I was in our Orderly Room that I saw a notice asking for volunteers for the Parachute Regiment. At this time I was feeling somewhat frustrated for we were just running about to various parts of the country playing war games when what we all really wanted was to be involved in the real action. After thinking about it I put my name down and in due course my posting came through and I was instructed to report to the Initial Parachute Training Centre at Clay Cross in Derbyshire.

I arrived there in December 1943 and I soon discovered that things were run very differently from what I had been used to for this was a tough regime. To begin with everything had to be done at the double and if anyone was caught walking they would be put on a charge. Anyone on a charge would have to go before the C.O. and he would give the offender a choice of either accepting whatever sentence he decided, or to fight three rounds with him in the boxing ring. Now this C.O. was a Major, he was an ex-member of the Black Watch Regiment who still wore his kilt and also a Scottish middleweight boxing champion, and he was known as

‘Mad Jock’. Not many chose the latter option. The whole purpose of this tough training regime was to get us supremely fit and to develop an aggressive nature, and under the guidance of some very tough physical training instructors (P.T.I.s) this was achieved. They were hard task masters.

One of the ways of improving our fitness and aggression was an activity known as a ‘Rumble’. This consisted of long low wooden seating forms being used to form a rectangle, and then an equal number of men would be lined up along the back of each of the longest sides of the rectangle facing each other. The ‘Rumble’ would then commence by the first two men facing each other being ordered to step into the rectangle and fight and wrestle each other. When these two finished the next two would step in and fight, and so on until every man had gone through the experience. All this was carried out under watchful eye of a physical training instructor. (P.T.I.). After the first three weeks of this pretty intensive training regime we were allowed out for a night in Chesterfield. My friend and I had both finished our duties and managed to get away early and get a lift into town. We had been informed that transport had been arranged to pick us up at 11.30 pm to take us back to barracks, but what they did not tell us was that we required a ‘pass’ to get on the trucks. When we turned up at the location where the trucks were waiting we found that the Regimental Police were checking everyone on and there was no way they would allow us on without a ‘pass’. Failure to report at the guardroom before 12 midnight was a major crime leading to a serious charge so I decided to have a look around to see how I could solve this problem. It was then that I noticed that one of the trucks was not carrying the usual spare wheel in the carrier under the chassis so I went to have a closer look thinking this might be the answer to my problem. I wedged my head and shoulders into the carrier and I found that I could put my feet over the rear axle so I knew I was well clear of the ground and I felt pretty safe so I decided to stay put and let the truck take me back to barracks. It was not the most comfortable of rides but it went without mishap and it saved me from being put on a charge. Dangerous? Maybe but there was no way I was going to step into a boxing ring with ‘Mad Jock’.

Of equal importance to paratroopers was the ground training which was to ensure that we were able to land properly when hitting the ground. This included getting used to the force of the impact, bending the knees slightly, using the balls of our feet and doing a sideways roll. The training area for this activity was in an old stone quarry near Clay Cross. A platform had been erected on the top edge of the quarry and extended out beyond the edge over a drop of

approximately some 30 feet. Above the platform was a large fan but without any power supply. A rope was securely wound around the spindle of the fan and the other end then attached to the harness worn by the parachutist as he stood on the edge of the platform ready to jump. As he stepped off the platform the rope would start to unwind from the fan and this would spontaneously rotate the fan blades which in turn would meet resistance from the air, thereby acting as a brake and slowing down the unwinding of the rope and consequently slowing down the descent of the parachutist. Sounds very complicated and a Heath Robinson contraption but it was simple and effective.

After six weeks of toughening up and ground training at Clay Cross we were posted to Hardwick Hall near Manchester for parachute training at Ringway Airport. We were familiarised with the equipment and made aware we had to complete a total of eight jumps to qualify. We were also aware that a number of fatalities and serious injuries had occurred at Ringway during parachute training. Our first two jumps were from static balloons and it was not a very inspiring sight to see a large basket suspended from a barrage balloon. There was a bar across the top of the basket to which our static lines were connected and in the middle of the floor was chute hole (like a short funnel) which was the exit for us to make our jump. The basket was just big enough to accommodate 3 parachutists and the dispatcher. Well, up we went in a rather eerie silence except for the occasional sound of the wind whistling through the rigging lines connecting us to the balloon. After reaching the jump height of 500 feet the order was given for each of us in turn to put our feet in the hole and push ourselves off and away we went floating back to earth. I cannot say that I felt any particular emotion during these jumps for it was all a matter of concentrating and making sure we were doing everything right, but it was a nice feeling when I felt a sudden jerk on my body when my parachute opened.

These two jumps from a balloon were followed by five jumps from an aircraft which was in fact a converted Whitley bomber with a hole cut out halfway along the floor of the fuselage and which was our exit. The full stick of 20 men had to be split with 10 men being forward of the hole and 10 men to the rear. The Whitley bomber had a very narrow body so we all had to sit in a staggered position on alternate sides of the fuselage with our knees almost under our chins and when the green light came on we all had to inch our way to the hole and exit the aircraft in turn. It was not easy exiting the Whitley for if you pushed off too hard could smack your face on the opposite side of the chute hole and likewise if you did not clear the bulk of

your parachute it would catch the edge of the hole and it would throw you forward with the same result.

After completing these 5 jumps we came to the final one, a night drop from a balloon at 500 feet. This was quite an experience, not a sound except the creaking of the basket, nothing to see, just pitch blackness all around. This got too much for one man on the course and he refused to jump and that was it, straight back to his unit, no second chance.

We were all glad to complete the course without any mishap and I was pleased with my assessment which was recorded as 'Above average, a very confident parachutist'. We were presented with our red berets, our 'Wings Emblems' and a parachute regimental cap badge and also granted seven days leave after which I had to report to 250 (Airborne) Light Composite Company, Royal Army Service Corps at the Moorlands, Lincoln. This company was part of the 1st Airborne Division.

When I first applied to join the Parachute Regiment I anticipated that at the conclusion of the course I would be posted to such a regiment. However, because I had not previously undergone any infantry training I was posted to an R.A.S.C. Airborne Unit. I was content with this and I can say my infantry training was carried out very thoroughly at the Longhills at Branston.

On 24th February, after my leave, I arrived at Lincoln railway station. It did not seem like a very satisfactory introduction as there was no one else at the station and I appeared to be the only posting to 250 Company and there was no transport awaiting my arrival. I made enquiries as to the location of the Moorlands and I made my way there on foot to report my arrival. It was then that I was told that although I had arrived at Company Headquarters, (the C.O. was a Major Gifford) I was at the wrong place and I should be at The Longhills at Branston, and worse still there was no transport available for me. I was given directions and told to make my own way there and this I did by walking all the way there in full kit including my kit bag. An R.A.S.C. company with no transport? Ridiculous!

Later that day I arrived at The Longhills and my love story with Lincolnshire began. I was issued with my R.A.S.C. cap badge and shoulder flashes and at first I was billeted in The Longhills Hall. I found there were three parachute platoons at this location, Nos. 1, 2, and 3. and I was posted to No.1 Para Platoon. I should explain here that each platoon consisted of

some 30 to 36 men and each platoon had a Platoon Captain in charge, ours being Captain Cranmer-Byng. The defined duties of R.A.S.C. parachutists were to provide logistical support for their formation, both on land and in the air. The Parachute Platoons of 250 Coy had a secondary role as the Defence Platoon of the Brigade to which they would be attached, for which a greater degree of infantry training was required. One of the men also billeted in The Hall was a talented artist named Arthur Sims and he had painted some large murals on two of the walls in the hall which depicted aircraft and paratroopers in action. These paintings remained visible until a few years ago when I understand they were painted over. (Incidentally, after the war Arthur Simms became a commercial artist and his work was featured in a number of magazines).

In the British Army there has always been a degree of friendly rivalry between regiments and in my case, not being a dyed in the wool R.A.S.C. man, I was to begin with, wrongly regarded by some as being somewhat superior to them because I had come from a tank regiment, so I had to earn their respect. I did have a couple of spats with Sergeant Walsh who was No.1 Para Platoon Sergeant, which resulted in me having to spend a night in the guardroom but we later became good friends and things settled down very well. After a short period in the hall I was moved into the stables to join others located there. All our transport was located at company H.Q. at the Moorlands with just a few vehicles at the Longhills for the use of the officers.

As the days passed there was the normal routine of army life, route marches of several miles which would last for hours and take us through many of the villages. We carried these out by marching for 50 minutes and then resting for 10 minutes. There were other training exercises, physical training, target practice which we carried out at the Longhills and other locations around the country, and we wanted to get to know about the village of Branston and the residents who all made us very welcome. The Salvation Army had turned a house in Silver Street into a little tea room, there were a number of shops, a village hall and a recreation ground. There were also two public houses, The Plough which never seemed very popular, and the Waggon and Horses which seemed rather small with the bar or rather the servery being at the end of a passageway and consisted of some planks of wood resting across two beer barrels. The beer was drawn off from barrels situated at the rear of the server and collected in a large metal measuring jug from which it was poured into your glass. There was a piano in a room off on the right and I am sure that in a week it had more beer poured into it than some

of the patrons consumed. The dance in the village hall was the highlight of the week. A man named Frank Harrison was member of the band and his party piece was to place his violin on his head and play it. I later learned he was a painter and decorator and he lived in Johnson Villas at Branston.

It was at one of these dances that I first met a lovely lady named Gwen Tindall from the neighbouring village of Potterhanworth. I did not know it at the time but she would eventually become my wife. (And I thank God that it happened).

The normal routine of army life continued and one day we had a visit from Sergeant Major Gibbs from Company Headquarters. He told us that our fitness levels were dropping and so we would be starting early morning training runs commencing at 6 am. Now with him being somewhat obese (some said he was a fat so and so) we insisted that he came with us. He agreed and he said he would be right behind us. And he was, on a pedal cycle.

As part of our physical training we would play a type of football cum rugby, a sort of rough and tumble, while wearing our army boots but this resulted in too many minor injuries, mainly bruises and grazes, so it was decided we should wear gym shoes. The first match caused a broken collar bone. It seems it was a wrong decision by the P.T.I.s or whoever made it.

It was during one of our training marches that I again saw the lovely lady called Gwen whom I had previously met at the dance at Branston. We had just finished our forced march and were carrying out patrol work on the roads through Potterhanworth when I saw her and her family in the garden of their house so I dropped a thunderflash by the hedge as I passed. When it exploded it caused quite a bit of mayhem and I had to go back later and apologise, but afterwards I seemed to spend a lot of time at Potterhanworth, and it was not to visit the Chequers Pub for the couple running it seemed strange miserable people. I think I went there once.

One of the major exercises we were involved in while we were at Branston was to fly to Cirencester in Gloucestershire to take part in defending it against the Guards Armoured Division. In this exercise we were dropped from 1000 feet and I found that it was a marvellous view of the countryside at that height. Normally we dropped from around 500 feet to reduce the time spent in the air when we are most vulnerable to enemy sniper fire. (I would

add that the parachutes we used gave a far faster descent than the large rectangular ones used by display teams and civilians in this day and age). On this exercise our Platoon Officer, Captain John Launcelot Cranmer-Byng, to give him his full name, was not all that keen on parachuting and as he was jumping at number one we thought we would give him a bit of a hand. Unfortunately we popped him out some 5 miles from the drop zone and we later learned that he had landed in a tree and some farm workers thought he was a German and refused to let him down until the Home Guard arrived at the scene. He was not a happy man.

As parachutists we were required to do two glider flights in case there was not enough aircraft available for all parachutists, so we went to Barkston Heath to complete them. The glider they were using was a Waco and it was literally a small platform with room for 4 parachutists and the pilot and the rest was just a canvas covered frame. It went up and down like a yo-yo at the end of a tow rope. We all learned the meaning of air sickness.

On 6th June 1944 (D Day) the Normandy landings took place and we were all bitterly disappointed and frustrated that we were not used in that operation. We were supremely fit and highly trained and we wanted the opportunity to engage with the enemy and demonstrate our professional skills. We were obviously being held in reserve in case something went drastically wrong with the landings or elsewhere and a quick response was required.

In August we left Branston and went to Barkston Hall where we were under canvas to get ready for operations, many of which were planned and then for whatever reason they were quickly cancelled. All this only added to the frustration we felt concerning our lack of involvement in any real action. At this time each R.A.S.C. Para Platoon was attached to an individual Parachute Battalion in readiness for deployment.

At this location we were camped next to the lake so we did a bit of fishing with explosives and there was fish on the menu for the next few days. Next we were moved into the stable block at the village pub for a while and then into Nissen huts on the outskirts of the village.

The United States 82nd Airborne Division were billeted on the other side of Grantham and a few interesting meetings took place whenever we met up with them in the town. They did not like being called cissies just because they had reserve parachutes when they jumped, whereas the British did not use them. Fights took place and some people suffered a few bruises etc, but then it escalated to a very serious level when one of the American soldiers went back to

his billet, collected a pistol, returned to the town, and shot and wounded a member of the Royal Signals. The outcome was that the authorities allocated different days for us and the Americans to visit Grantham.

During the few weeks we were at Barkston my mate 'Tojo' Spencer and I would sneak out of camp to go and see our girlfriends. He had a girlfriend that lived in Lincoln and my Gwen was at Potterhanworth. We would try to hitch a lift but it was hopeless as there was hardly any traffic so we would walk the whole distance together to Lincoln and I would go on to Potterhanworth. For the return in the late or early hours I would walk back to Lincoln, meet 'Tojo' and then we would both make our way back to camp by alternately running and walking short distances. We did this at least a couple of times a week but on one occasion we suffered for it. We arrived back at about 5.30am, went to bed for a short while, then got up to find that we were going on a route march. Of course we had no option but to comply and go on it. Sometime during the march 'Tojo' and I, Sergeant Walsh, and one or two others were having a discussion, and I happened to mention that my feet were a bit sweaty and sore. Sergeant Walsh then said that I must be going soft, so to let him know that I was not I told him about our walk to Lincoln and back the previous evening. Now shortly after this he must have related to Captain Cranmer-Byng what we had been up to, for he called us into his office but rather than giving 'Tojo' and me a rocket he said to us, "Bloody good show, but next time you do it come and see me and I will excuse you from the route march". This was heartening news but we never put his promise to the test to see if he really would excuse us.

Traffic was non-existent on those roads late at night or the early hours but on one occasion when returning from Lincoln we got a lift with a milk lorry to take us part of the way but then one of the tyres punctured so we stopped to help him to change the wheel, then we continued. I cannot remember where he dropped us off but Captain Cranmer-Byng caught us getting back into camp. We knew we had taken a big risk by going out because we were on 'standby'. He told us that everyone was kitted up ready to be taken to the airfields and that we should pray that the operation went ahead for if it did not he would see us in his office. We scrambled around, got kitted up, then joined the others, then it was called off, and we knew we were in real trouble. We feared the worst. We were later marched into his office and stood in front of the Captain for one of the worse crimes a soldier can commit. Then Sergeant Walsh stepped forward and said that he should be standing there with us because he had

given us permission to go out. What a good friend, he was a life saver. That was the end of the matter.

We were suddenly briefed on the Arnhem operation (Market Garden) but without much conviction that it would be any different from previous briefings for operations that had quickly been cancelled. We were briefed on our target, namely the town of Arnhem and the bridge over the River Rhine, that we would be on the 1st Lift, and our Nos.1 and 3 Parachute Platoons were scheduled to deliver the ammunition and supplies required at the bridge. Our No.2 Parachute Platoon would be part of the 2nd Lift on 18 September which would include the Company vehicles to equip the Divisional troops of the Parachute Regiment, RE and RAMC. We were also informed that XXX Corps, which included the Guards Armoured Division, would push north to support us, arriving two days after our drop. Our heavy transport would reach us by travelling overland at the rear of XXX Corps. Although his whole operation was behind enemy lines it appeared that everyone was of the opinion that there would be little resistance from the enemy. (Little did they know!)? The drop was to be spread over three days because there was insufficient aircraft to cope with the large numbers of troops and equipment.

Suddenly on 17 September we were on our way, being transported to the airfields where we boarded the C47 Transport planes and took off for Holland. As well as the entire troop carrying C47s; I believe there were 12 Horsa gliders carrying more troops and some light transport. The flight was uneventful except for some anti-aircraft fire, but previous air attacks had put some of the enemy A.A. units out of action. The 21st Independent Parachute Company had preceded us as pathfinders to mark out the drop zones, there being 3 for parachutist (DZs) , 3 for gliders (LZs), and 1 for supplies (SDZ). Our drop zone was near Heelsum, and unfortunately like the other zones it was about 8 miles from Arnhem and the bridge. For the Dutch civilians on the ground it must have been like an armada of planes, gliders and parachutists in the air, something they had waited years to see and would lead to their liberation.

Everything appeared to be going to plan and we made our way to the collection point which was a farmhouse on the outskirts of Heelsum adjacent to the drop zone. We later learned that two men from our platoon had been killed on the drop, both having joined our unit only days before we left England, and Sergeant Walsh our platoon sergeant was also missing. (I later found out that he did eventually make it to our unit but later he was killed in action). Our

orders were that No1 Platoon and No 2 Platoon would accompany the 2nd Battalion Parachute Regiment to the bridge as they advanced along 'Lion' route, but as our platoon was incomplete our Platoon Officer, Captain Cranmer-Byng, who was the senior captain of the three platoons, ordered No.2 Platoon under Captain Desmond 'Paddy' Kavanagh, to the bridge and kept No.1 platoon at the drop zone to organise supplies. (Captain Kavanagh was later killed while single handedly attacking an enemy machine gun post). We were then engaged on securing the area and patrolling the edges of the drop zone. We did learn that there were areas of soft ground on some of the landing zones for the gliders which caused serious problems on touchdown. The wheels would sink into the ground and bring the gliders to an almighty abrupt halt, causing the rear end to rise up and then crash over and begin to disintegrate. A number of glider troops were killed and injured in this way. There was also one or two collision between some of the gliders. The same thing happened on the second day when light transport and light artillery was being landed, for with the abrupt halt on touchdown the vehicles and guns broke free from their moorings as the rear lifted and they rolled forward at speed crushing some accompanying troops and the pilot.

On the second day, our transport having not yet arrived, five of us were sent out on a scouting mission to try to commandeer what transport we could find. We knew that the enemy had moved into the woods around the village but no contact was made. Eventually we found what appeared to be a school bus. There were no passengers in it but the driver was still with it.

Fortunately he spoke good English and after we told him why we needed his bus he volunteered to drive it for us saying that we might find it difficult because of the foreign controls and the left hand drive. He also said that if he was captured he would tell the Germans that we had forced him to drive the bus for us. We agreed and returned to the drop zone where we were ordered to load up with ammunition and establish a supply dump at Oosterbeek which was roughly about halfway to the bridge. We created the dump in a clearing in a wood just outside the town.

We completed this without too much interference from the Germans until we were on our way back when we ran into an ambush. Suddenly we found ourselves under fire with bullets slamming into the bus and the driver was killed instantly. Somehow we managed to stop the bus but we were stranded in the middle of a clearing with enemy fire coming from a wooded area on raised ground to our left and machine gun fire from raised ground in front of us.

L/Corporal Plant was killed at this point and we were pinned down in the open area. There

was a house about 50 yards from our position and one by one we managed to reach it, take cover, and return fire. Three of us had rifles and one of us a sten gun but we had no radios to call for any assistance. The fire fight lasted for almost two hours before finally our ammunition ran out. When we could no longer return fire the Germans eventually realised we had run out of ammo and they came forward and captured us. At some stage one of them stole my wrist watch and I never saw it again.

The four of us spent the first night in a police cell in the town, then a night in a barn, and next to a transit camp at Lindberg. There I was surprised to see a lot of our 2nd Platoon in captivity. Conditions there were very primitive with water being supplied by three stand pipes which were only turned on between 6.30 and 7.0 am each morning. Roll call was 6.30 to 7.0am each morning so you can imagine we became very grubby and dishevelled. From there we were moved by train travelling in cattle trucks to a camp near Berlin, Stalag IV B. On the way there we reached Cologne and an air raid was taking place. The train stopped before we reached the station because it was being bombed and they marched us through the streets to the other side of the station. It was then that I saw a sight that has remained with me to this day. All around was devastation but the Cathedral was standing there virtually untouched. The workers who were making safe the nearby damaged buildings did their best to drop loose masonry on us but we escaped with minor injuries.

We reached Stalag IV B near Berlin and found there were a lot of Russians there but we were segregated from them and after a few weeks we were moved to a camp near Dresden, again by train in cattle trucks. There we were put to work in a logging camp up in the mountains returning to the camp at the end of the day. This went on through the winter and was extremely cold work.

Our guards were quite elderly and not very enthusiastic for the German cause, especially as they now realised the war was lost. One of them had a deformed arm and he informed us that the Americans were only about 50 miles away. We told him that the Americans would shoot him and the other guards if they were still holding us prisoner when they arrived. This did the trick for they allowed us to walk away and they disappeared.

We eventually located the Americans and at first they did not know what to do with us. We just marvelled at their rations for they were eating huge prime steaks. We spent about two weeks with them and even accompanied them out on their patrols. I told them about my watch being stolen and a Sergeant lined up a number of German P.O.W.s, made them roll up their sleeves, and divested them of their wrist watches, giving one to me. It was a good watch which I used for about 18 years.

After about two weeks enjoying their hospitality we were airlifted back to the U.K. where I was granted two weeks repatriation leave and I renewed my courtship of Gwen. After my leave I had to report back to a tank unit as my airborne service was classed as a temporary assignment and I was a regular, and so I was sent to a training unit at Newcastle and then to the 8th Royal Tank Regiment at Barnard Castle, where I became a driving instructor teaching recruits to drive all kinds of military vehicle, including heavy tanks.

Gwen and I were married at Potterhanworth Church on 18th December 1946 and I was demobbed in July 1949. In the 1950s Gwen and I took up residence in the village of Branston. Another ten years and I will qualify to be called a 'Yellow Belly'.

Footnote – Many words have been written and spoken about Operation Market Garden and Montgomery said “In years to come, it will be a great thing for a man to be able to say ‘I fought at Arnhem’.” That is true, but one has to question the planning of the operation and we must draw our own conclusions. Why was the confirmed presence of SS Panzer armoured units in the area ignored? Why was the soft landing ground for gliders not noticed? Why were the Drop Zones so far from Arnhem? Why was there a loss of radio communications? Why was XXX Corps advancing on a narrow road with ditches either side and where they were exposed to ambush and devastating enemy fire? A three day lift gave time for the enemy to strengthen their defences after the first day.

**BASES FOR AIRBORNE TROOPS PRIOR TO 'OPERATION MARKET
GARDEN'**

1ST Airborne Division

Divisional H.Q. and Defence Platoon.	Fulbeck Hall.
1 st Parachute Brigade	Syston Old Hall.
1 st Parachute Battalion	Grimsthorpe Castle & Bourne.
2 nd Parachute Battalion	Stoke Rochford & Grantham.
3 rd Parachute Battalion	Spalding.
1 st Air Landing anti Tank Battery	Heckington & Helpringham.
1 st Para Squadron R.E.	Donington.
16th Para Field Ambulance Unit	Culverthorpe

1st Air Landing Brigade

Brigade H.Q. and Defence Platoon	Woodhall Spa.
7 th (Galloway) King's Own Scottish Borderers	Woodhall Spa.
1 st Border Regiment	Woodhall Spa & Bardney.
2 nd South Staffordshires	Woodhall Spa
181 Air Landing Field Ambulance R.A.M.C.	Stenigot House & Martin.

4th Parachute Brigade

Brigade H.Q. and Defence Platoon	Knossington Grange
156 Parachute Battalion	Melton Mowbray.
10 th Para Battalion	Thorpe Satchville, Burgh on the Hill & Twyford.
11 th Para Battalion	Melton Mowbray.
2 nd (Oban) Air Landing Anti Tank Batt. R.E.	Harrowby.

4 th Para Squadron R.E.	Uppingham.
133 Field Ambulance R.A.M.C.	Barleythorpe Hall.
<u>Divisional Units</u>	
1 st Air Landing Light Regt. R.A.	Boston.
1 st Forward (Airborne) Observation Unit	Harlaxton Hall.
1 st Airborne Divisional Signals	Caythorpe.
9 th (Airborne) Field Company R.E.	Tattershall & Coningsby.
21 st Independent Para Company	Newark.
1 st Airborne Reconnaissance Squadron	Ruskington.
250 (Airborne) Light Composite Co. R.A.S.C.	Longhills Branston & Lincoln.
1 st (Airborne) Div. Field Park R.A.O.C.	Grantham.
1 st (Airborne) Div. Workshop, R.E.M.E.	Sleaford.
1 st (Airborne) Div. Provost Comp. C.M.P.	Stubton Hall, Newark.
89 th (Parachute) Field Security Section, Intell. Corps.	Wellingore .

Polish Independent Para Brigade Group

Brigade H.Q.	Rock House, Stamford.
1 st Battalion	Easton on the Hill.
2 nd Battalion	Wansford.
3 rd Battalion	Peterborough.
Anti Tank Battery	Blatherwycke.
Engineer Company	Wansford.
Signals Company	Easton on the Hill.
Medical Company	Stamford & Blatherwyke.

Peter Scarcliffe - 2007

250 (Airborne) Light Composite Company, RASC

Based at Longhills Hall, Branston, and Lincoln. Flew in 4 C-47's from Barkston Heath and Saltby, and 34 Horsas and 3 Hamilcars from Keevil, Harwell, and Tarrant Rushton.

Went in: 226 men Died: 29 Evacuated: 75 Missing: 122

Captain John Launcelot Cranmer-Byng

Unit : No.1 Para Platoon & 1st Para Jeep Section, 250 (Airborne) Light Composite Company, RASC

Service No. : 170362

Awards : Military Cross

At ARNHEM on the 20th September, Captain Cranmer-Byng was ordered to take an RASC party under cover of darkness and to take over a sector of the perimeter at a point where there was danger of enemy infiltration in the houses flanking the 4th Parachute Brigade position. This movement was successfully accomplished and the line was held, and at one time advanced, for four days in spite of heavy fighting and frequent attacks by mortar, self-propelled guns and single tanks.

Captain Cranmer-Byng was in command of the party throughout and was in much of the heaviest fighting. On one occasion, despite a slight wound in the hand, he shot an enemy sniper dead. On another occasion he took a party of men out with a PLAT and managed to drive off a self-propelled gun which was attacking the position at short range.

Subsequently, Captain Cranmer-Byng successfully disengaged his party, and led them down in the darkness through the enemy lines to cross the river to safety.

It was largely due to the inspiring leadership and coolness displayed by Captain Cranmer-Byng that the RASC sector held out against very considerable pressure, without food or sleep, and that the party was subsequently able to withdraw to safety when ordered to do so.

250 (Assault) Light Composite
Company, RASC

NKG = No Known Grave

<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
17/09/44	BONDY, Robert C.	Dvr	35	-
18/09/44	BENNETT, Wilfred	Dvr	24	NKG
18/09/44	KENNEL, John J.	Dvr	19	NKG
18/09/44	PLANT, Leonard	L/Cpl	22	-
18/09/44	THOMAS, Robert J.	Dvr	23	-
18-25/09/44	BUTTEN, John S.	Dvr	30	NKG
18-25/09/44	WHITTET, Henry G.	Cpl	35	NKG
19/09/44	FIELD, Martin J.	Dvr	20	NKG
19/09/44	KAVANAGH, Desmond T.	Capt	25	-
19/09/44	McKINNON, James G.	Dvr	26	NKG
19/09/44	WALFORD, John A.	Dvr	28	NKG
19/09/44	WIGGINS, Albert	Cpl	22	-
20/09/44	GEERE, Kenneth J.	Dvr	20	-
21/09/44	BURNS, Joseph D.	Dvr	22	-
21/09/44	HILL, Frederick W.	Dvr	27	-
21/09/44	HUGGINS, Stanley A.	Dvr	28	NKG
21/09/44	PEACOCK, Leonard	Dvr	-	-
21/09/44	SNELLING, Robert J.	S/Sgt	28	-
22/09/44	MORTON, James	Dvr	33	NKG
22/09/44	DAVIES, Henry C.	L/Cpl	29	-

23/09/44	DOCHERTY, Archibald F.	L/Cpl	38	-
24/09/44	DOUBLEDAY, Robin	Cpl	26	-
24/09/44	HATTON, Douglas	Dvr	22	-
25/09/44	LAW, Albert	Dvr	25	NKG
25/09/44	WALSH, John	Sgt	39	-
25-26/09/44	SHARP, Walter R.	Cpl	31	NKG
01/10/44	PRESTON, William R.	Dvr	31	-
02/10/44	BELL, Robert F.	L/Cpl	37	-
15/10/44	JUDD, Leslie J. G.	Cpl	28	-
27/02/45	OLSSON, Arthur O.	Dvr	31	-
05/03/45	JOHNSON, Edward G.	Cpl	29	-



122 MISSING.

UNDESIGNED TRIBUTE TO CAPT. KAVANAGH - K.I.A.

AUTHOR - RICHARD RDAMS - 2ND LT. AT COMPANY HQ. NEWARK ROAD
AND WHO LATER WROTE 'WATERSHIP DOWN'.

During the war I early on volunteered for airborne duties and at the end of 1943 found myself posted to 250 light Company RASC (Airborne). The company formed part of divisional troops and was therefore under the direct command of the divisional commanding officer Major General Urquhart. The company, effectively, fell into two parts. There were three platoons of glider-borne troops and three platoons of parachute troops. (The latter were required to be volunteers but the glider-borne troops rated as ordinary soldiers, e.g. under orders, without the need to volunteer.)

Commanding the company was Major John Gifford. Gifford was a very reticent, quiet person, opposed to any kind of self-advertisement on the part of his soldiers, e.g. boasting about being parachutists, etc.

The three platoons of parachutists were commanded by Captain Cranmer-Byng, Capt Gell and Capt Kavanagh.

Captain Kavanagh had a strongly aggressive personality, which made him a man of mark throughout the company. He really lived up to the popular (public) notion of a parachute officer. He and his sergeant McDowell were always undertaking hare-brained, crazy exploits, often risky and dangerous. This made them noted and admired by all the NCOs and other ranks in the company. John Gifford didn't like Kavanagh's dangerous self-advertising exploits and wished he wouldn't do them. At the same time he greatly valued "Paddy" Kavanagh's qualities of leadership and courage.

Kavanagh really embodied the public idea of the "mad Irishman" – full of dangerous exploits and "leading from the front".

I remember that once, Kavanagh required his men to crawl on the ground under close fire above them from a Bren gun. He himself began by setting them an example and kept telling the gunner to fire closer and closer above his back. Finally, it was found that they were actually firing bullet holes thorough his airborne smock. Kavanagh never boasted about his exploits and in his personal character was easygoing and pleasant to everybody. It is not surprising that he was liked and admired throughout the whole company although, as I have said,

John Gifford, the commanding officer, while he greatly valued Paddy, disliked his self-advertising and dangerous larks. At the outset of operation "Market Garden" Paddy's platoon was one of those required to parachute into action behind the enemy lines. Apparently Paddy had been expressly advised, upon landing, to avoid one particular road as being occupied by the enemy. It would seem, as I have been informed, that upon landing and getting his platoon up together, Paddy deliberately led them down this road. He soon came under enemy fire. He grabbed a Bren gun and, together with his sergeant McDowell, leapt into a nearby ditch from where he returned the enemy fire. He ordered McDowell to get their men together and take them to a nearby wood. He himself would cover their retreat. As they went through the wood, they heard the unmistakeable sounds of a German light machine gun and a British Bren gun in a duel.

Paddy was not seen again. He lost his life and is buried in the nearby airborne cemetery.

Incidentally, I must object to the epithet "noisy" used in your letter to describe Capt Kavanagh. This suggests that he was boastful and self-advertising. He was nothing of the kind. He combined audacity with a most easygoing personality and was the very reverse of boastful.

It is not surprising that he was a hero to his men and regarded as a most valuable officer although, as I have said, Major Gifford would have preferred him to be less obstreperous. I remember that Paddy, who was a journalist in private life, published in a Sunday paper an account of his platoon's parachute activities, which made them out as a lot of daredevils. John Gifford deplored this but refrained from criticising Paddy.

I can only conclude by stating the simple fact that no one who came into contact with Paddy is likely to have forgotten him.

Subject Re: Website Feedback
From JOHN RAWLING <jp.rawling@btopenworld.com>
To Peter Scarcliffe <bar@pscarcliffe.plus.com>
Date 20-03-2013 14:59



Hi Peter

I just wanted to let you know that I have been in email correspondence with the distinguished author Richard Adams, who is now aged 93, and still reasonably well for a man of his age and living at home with his wife. I had heard that there was a connection between my home, Longhills Hall, and the book Watership Down, written by Richard Adams. As you will know, the house was requisitioned during the war and much history surrounds the place. The war memorial by the lodge on Sleaford Road commemorates those stationed there who lost their lives in the Arnhem Landings.

There is still the name on the back of an old door, in one of the first floor bedrooms at Longhills, of one Captain DT Kavanagh. Being an inquisitive sort of soul, I decided to find out more.

It turns out DT "Paddy" Kavanagh was the son of Peter and Mary Kavanagh and hailed from the Aintree area of Liverpool. He was much loved by his fellow soldiers and clearly made a considerable impression on Adams, who himself also attained the rank of captain. More than 200 men were crammed into the hall and surrounding buildings during final preparations for the attack in what was known as Operation Market Garden. According to various sources contained in wartime historical websites, Cpt Kavanagh died in heroic (or some might say foolhardy) circumstances during the Arnhem landings of Sept 1944. He and a group of men came under fire from a machine gun emplacement. Kavanagh - as you will hear - was a noted crackshot and seemingly pretty much fearless. He commanded his men to make good their escape while he attempted to take out the German fire. He lost his life on Sept 19th, and is buried in a cemetery nearby (photos of which may be seen on the net).

Capt Adams confirmed to me recently that Kavanagh was the inspiration of the brave hero figure of his classic 1972 children's novel Watership Down. In the book, the hero rabbit is 'Bigwig'. He wrote to me with his memories of Capt Kavanagh saying:

"During the war I volunteered early on for airborne duties and, at the end of 1943, found myself posted to 250 Light Company RASC (Airborne). The company formed part of divisional troops and was therefore under the direct command of the divisional commanding officer Major General Urquhart. (note: Roy Urquhart was the commanding officer of the 1st Airborne division involved in Operation Market-Garden. He was portrayed in the 1977 film 'A Bridge Too Far' by Sean Connery) The company, effectively, fell into two parts. There were three platoons of glider-borne troops and three platoons of parachute troops. (The latter were required to be volunteers but the glider-borne troops rated as ordinary soldiers, ie under orders, without the need to volunteer)

"Commanding the company was major John Gifford. Gifford was a very reticent, quiet person, opposed to any kind of self advertisement on the part of his soldiers, e.g. boasting about being parachutists etc.

"The three platoons of parachutists were commanded by Capt Cramner-Byng, Capt Gell and Capt Kavanagh.

"Capt Kavanagh had a strongly aggressive personality, which made him a man of mark throughout the company. He really lived up to the popular (public) notion of a parachute officer. He and his sergeant, McDowell, were always undertaking hare-brained, crazy exploits - often risky and dangerous. This made them noted and admired by all the other NCOs and other ranks in the company. Major John Gifford didn't like Kavanagh's dangerous, self-advertising exploits and wished he wouldn't do them. At the same time, he greatly valued 'Paddy' Kavanagh's qualities of leadership and courage.

"Kavanagh really embodied the public idea of the 'mad Irishman' - full of dangerous exploits and leading from the front.

"I remember once that Kavanagh required his men to crawl on the ground under close fire above them from a Bren gun. He himself began by setting them an example and kept telling the gunner to fire closer and closer above his back. Finally, it was found that they were actually firing bullet holes through his airborne smock. Kavanagh never boasted about his exploits and, in his personal character, was easy going and pleasant to everybody. It is not surprising that he was well liked and admired throughout the whole company despite, as I have said, John Gifford (the commanding officer) disliking his dangerous larks.

"At the outset of Operation Market-Garden, Paddy's platoon was one of those required to parachute into action behind enemy lines. Apparently Paddy had been expressly advised, upon landing, to avoid one particular road as it was being occupied by the enemy. It would seem, as I have been informed, that upon landing and getting his platoon up together, Paddy deliberately led them down this road. He soon came under enemy fire. He grabbed a Bren gun and, together with his sergeant McDowell, leapt into a nearby ditch where he returned enemy fire. He ordered McDowell to get their men together and take them to a nearby wood. He himself would cover their retreat. As they went through the wood, they heard the unmistakable sounds of a German light machine gun and a British Bren gun in a duel.

"Paddy was not seen again. He lost his life and is buried in the nearby airborne cemetery. (Note: he was only 25-years-old when he died)

"Capt Kavanagh combined audacity with a most easy going personality, and was the very reverse of boastful. It is not surprising that he was a hero to his men. I remember that Paddy, who was a journalist in private life, published in a Sunday newspaper an account of his platoon's parachute activities which made them out as a lot of dare-devils. Major Gifford deplored this, and would have preferred Kavanagh to have been less obstreperous but, regarding him as a most valuable officer, refrained from criticising Paddy.

"I can only conclude by stating the simple fact that no one who came into contact with Paddy is likely to have forgotten him."

One of the drivers with the company, Arthur Stott, has made annual visits to the war memorial on our drive to pay his respects to his friends who lost their lives. On one visit, I invited him and his family into the hall to look round. He was fascinated to see how the lovely old house - which was used as a furniture depository after the war and had fallen into a sad state of disrepair - had been restored to its former glories by the owner who occupied Longhills Hall for some 20 years before we moved in during 2006, and then extensively by ourselves thereafter. It was interesting when Mr Stott saw the name DT Kavanagh on the door his eyes were filled with tears. It seems he too, like Capt Adams, would never forget Paddy.

John Rawling March 2013

From: Peter Scarcliffe <bar@pscarcliffe.plus.com>
To: jp.rawling@btopenworld.com
Sent: Tuesday, 19 March 2013, 23:25
Subject: Website Feedback

Hello John

Very nice to hear from you. Your E-mail has been forwarded to me and I am very interested in the info you have unearthed. You and I have met previously when I visited your home last year in respect of the photos of the murals etc. Please let me know when you are available for me to call and discuss your find.

Peter Scarcliffe
 Chairman Branston History Group

copy for P.S.
Mar 2012

WARTIME MEMORIES OF BRANSTON

BY

MR JIM WILD

Feb 1944 250 Light Company R.A.S.C. 1st Airborne Division.

We arrived at Longhill's Hall, Branston, having spent several weeks in Boston, stationed on the Dock area. Our Company had, had fourteen days leave, having arrived back from North Africa on the Christmas Eve amid ice and snow. With arriving at Longhill's from the direction of Metherringham, we had no idea there was a village half a mile down the road. The result was a walk across fields covered in 18 inches of snow, and finishing up in Heighington at either the Turk's Head or the Butcher and Beast.

Our Billets in Longhill's consisted of the stable block, one or two of the farmworkers houses in the complex, or in the old cow byre down the next farm lane. Incidentally, the old cow byre is now a bungalow called 'Arnhem House' due to one of our Plattoons sleeping there. They also had their own shower and toilet. The main part of the Hall became officer's sleeping rooms, our canteen and officer's dining room and lounge

We had a firing range over at the back but most of our training was carried out either in Edale, Derbyshire around Glossop, or up near Scarborough. Holme Firth became one of our billets in an old mill near the river.

Our route marches took us around Wragby, Bardney and as far as the villages around Wragby. The river at Five Mile was used for our Amphibian trips, or practices of river crossings.

Our War Memorial is now just inside the entrance to Longhills, near where our guard tent used to be. My sleeping quarters were over the stables. Twenty of us slept there. One of our lads, being an artist, painted murals on one or two of the walls in the big hall. As far as I know, they are still there.

After a few weeks we made the Waggon and Horses our main hostelry and started to run dances at the Village Hall, mainly on Saturday nights. (It was at one of these dances that Jim, who came originally from Manchester, met a local girl, Mabel Butler. On the evening that they met, Mabel lent Jim her bicycle to ride back to Longhills after the dance. When her Father found out in the morning, he said she would never see her bike again, but it was promptly returned. So began a courtship which ended in their marriage. Jim and Mabel eventually settled in Heighington, where they now live.)

There was a fox covert in the woods at the front of the Hall, and plenty of rabbits. One or two of our lads used to go poaching rabbits and pheasant, where they got rid of them I will never know, except to take some home on leave with them.

Before we went to Arnhem, we were, each platoon, sent to a different location immediately after D-Day. Our platoon were sent down to southern England, after two weeks in Reevesby Park. I and my mates in our platoon flew from one of many airfields in Wiltshire. The ones that got back from Arnhem were moved to Washingborough Hall.

We also had some lads in Nissen huts up Hall lane. Our workshops were in Foremans yard and Garage, and the lads lived up Hall lane. We also had some at Canwick after Arnhem. Incidentally, our platoon did the Penine walk as an exercise just before D-Day. We were No 3 Para Platoon and we slept in the stables of the pub in Edale near the railway. The Landlord was a keen hill walker and talked us into doing the Pennine Way. In those days it was new, and you had to use maps and a compass as there was no footpath. We did 220 miles of it in 7 days and were then called back to Branston because of the invasion.

During one of our reunions, we presented a lectern to Branston Church, which has been in use ever since. I hope this write up will enlighten the younger people of Branston regarding their village during the last war.

Jim Wild. 7/1/99

Jim died in May 2011

Mabel now Resident in Beckfield House at Heston

RE-TYPE9 FROM DOCUMENT PASTE9 ONTO WALLPAPER IN HALL

Appendix 'B' to Company Standing Orders

FIRE ORDERS

Part 1. Measures to prevent outbreaks by fires.

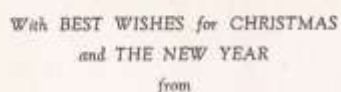
1. Outbreaks of fire are easily caused by careless disposal of cigarette ends, spent matches and broken glass. All cigarette ends etc. will be carefully extinguished before disposal and empty bottles will not be thrown away, but will be placed in salvage receptacles provided
2. Faulty fire places, electrical wiring and fittings in billets will be reported immediately for rectification.
3. The use of candles and hurricane lamps in tents and billets is permitted but great care must be exercised when this form of lighting is used.
4. Smoking and the use of naked lights in the vicinity of W.D. vehicles, petrol and oil stores, ammunition dumps, or general stores is strictly forbidden. Petrol and oil will always be stored separately and not in the same building as other stores.
5. Grass and undergrowth will be cleared from around vehicle standings and petrol dumps.
6. Fire Points consisting of sand and water buckets will be available in requisitioned buildings, and at Suitable points in vehicle and tent lines. All personnel will acquaint themselves with the positions of the Fire Points. Buckets will be kept filled.
7. Regimental Police and guards will act as Fire Piquet and will ensure by regular inspection and tests during their tour of duty, that all fire fighting equipment is in working order and available for instant use. Any defects or deficiencies will be at once reported to the Orderly Sergeant.
8. Fire alarms will be situated at the entrance to the camp and in the vehicle lines.
9. The National Fire Service will be called for all outbreaks of fire by the telephone orderly immediately On the alarm being raised without reference to any other person.

Part 2. Action to be taken on the outbreak of fire.

1. The person or persons discovering the outbreak of fire will:
 - (a) Shout for assistance.
 - (b) Endeavour to extinguish the fire.
 - (c) Give the General Alarm.
 - (d) Warn the Orderly Officer.
2. The Orderly Officer will assume complete command of all arrangements for extinguishing the fire.
3. The Orderly Sgt. will organise a fire fighting cordon, salvage parties, and a bucket and chain squad from assembled personnel, and direct the work of extinguishing the outbreak until the arrival of a senior rank or outside assistance.
4. The Guard Commander will turn out the guard and place it at the disposal of the Orderly Officer under a conducting N.C.O. and rouse all available personnel
5. The Fire Piquet will take all steps to extinguish the fire with appliances available and prevent spread of the fire pending the arrival of outside assistance.
6. When fire occurs in the vehicle lines, any vehicle not involved will be immediately removed from the danger area.
7. The Orderly Officer will be responsible that outside Fire Services are notified as soon as the outbreak is under control.

14/1/44

J.H. Gifford. Major R.A.S.C.
250 Co. R.A.S.C. (Airborne Light)

[illegible]

The Way We Were



DARING: British paratroopers drop onto Dutch soil at the start of the battle for Arnhem. As the 60th anniversary approaches, people are thinking back to their memories of what was to be a turning point of the war.

County training ground for Arnhem troops

AS the 60th anniversary of Operation Market Garden approaches, many people will be remembering the vast number of troops billeted in Lincolnshire in 1944 with whom they became acquainted and who were destined to be sent into battle at Arnhem.

The troops were members of the Parachute Battalions, several infantry regiments and numerous attached units.

My memories of one such unit, namely the 250 (Airborne) Light Composite Company, RASC, go back to March 1944 when I was nine years of age and my family moved to a bungalow, which is now known as the East Lodge, at The Longhills, Branston. And my father commenced employment at the nearby Longhills Farm.

At this time, I found that this company of troops were billeted at The Longhills Hall, with numbers one and two platoons occupying the hall and an adjoining building, and number three platoon occupying disused cowsheds at the nearby farm.

These men were all parachutists and were trained as infantrymen, all in readiness for airborne operations, and they were equipped with Jeep vehicles and trailers.

The company headquarters was at the Moorlands in Lincoln, where their



by Peter Scarcliffe
news@lincolnshireecho.co.uk

heavy transport was also based. Their presence added a measure of excitement to our lives, for these men were the real thing, unlike we children who played soldiers. There were no restrictions on us using the road leading through the parkland area to the top road to Branston. In fact, three cottages very close to the hall were occupied by civilian families.

Jeeps and trailers were parked among the trees and I could watch as they carried out maintenance checks, and occasionally I would be given a

short ride in a Jeep. My father befriended a number of these men, four in particular, and whenever one of these four was granted a short leave, he and his wife would be invited to spend it at our home so that time was not lost in travelling to other parts of the country.

During the ensuing months, I was occasionally able to see them carrying out their duties and training tasks, one of which was to keep themselves in a high state of physical fitness, and they were often to be seen running on the surrounding roads.

Adjacent to our home was a very large grass field with a deep hollow running through the centre, and it

PROGRESS: September 1944, Echo readers are kept informed with the progress Allied troops are making in Holland, and the news makes encouraging reading.

was here that one day they were engaged in target practice. The target was the base of a young tree on the other side of the hollow, some 300 to 400 yards away. They cut through the trunk with sustained rifle fire, leaving a stump about 12 inches above the ground. I also saw them in full camouflage dress in the surrounding fields as they trained for action as infantrymen. At the conclusion of one such exercise, one of the soldiers climbed down from the fork of a huge tree near to our home, and as he joined his colleagues, I heard him complain bitterly that he had left his cigarettes up in the tree. He did not bother to go back up to retrieve them, and it was far too high for me to climb.

One of the highlights during their time at The Longhills was in the early summer when a garden fête was held on the Lincoln Road Recreation Ground at Branston. These soldiers made a huge contribution to the event by erecting a full-size boxing ring and putting on exhibition bouts. This was very entertaining for everyone, especially us young boys.

Then one morning, we woke to find they had gone. I think this was in August, and we later learned they had gone to Barkston Heath in readiness for action. In late September, we learned they had been part of the first lift dropped into Holland by parachute.

■ Peter's story continues next week.

Channel swim ends in tragedy

A BTL by a crusty father of time to get himself into the record books, ended in tragedy 50 years ago this week.

Ted May bravely stepped into the waters in an attempt to become the first man to swim the English Channel without an escort. But he disappeared a few hours later as conditions worsened.

The story is recounted in today's edition of our weekly nostalgia special, *The Way We Were*.

On a lighter side, there's a chance to discover how the pandas of Lincoln were about to be replaced by little green men, 60 years ago.

Geoff Mayer ends his popular series of articles recalling the many changes he has experienced during his life of work and leisure.

And discover how a new era was starting for Lincoln City FC fans in September 1964.

If you would like to contribute stories and pictures to future editions, we would love to hear from you.

✉ Send them to Peter Brown (The Gossip), Lincolnshire Echo, Braxford Wharf East, Lincoln, LN6 7AT.

Streakers' cold water shock

PLANS by two youths to do a late-night streak through a Lincoln street came to an abrupt and cold end, 50 years ago, when someone threw a bucket of cold water over them.

Undercover of Separation, 1954, when one of the youths, aged 19, admitted behaving in a manner likely to cause a breach of the peace.

He was fined £15.

Police said another youth would be appearing in front of the court at a later date.

The court heard how a shopkeeper saw two youths, naked apart from their shoes and socks, in the street outside.

He decided to deliver his own summary justice by emptying a bucket of cold water over the two, said prosecuting officer, Inspector Cecil Muxlow.

The youth was putting on his trousers as police arrived.

The youth told the court he drank five or six pints of beer before streaking.

New era begins at Flixborough

FIVE years after Britain's biggest peacetime explosion, Nypro's Flixborough chemical works near Scunthorpe, reopened 25 years ago this week.

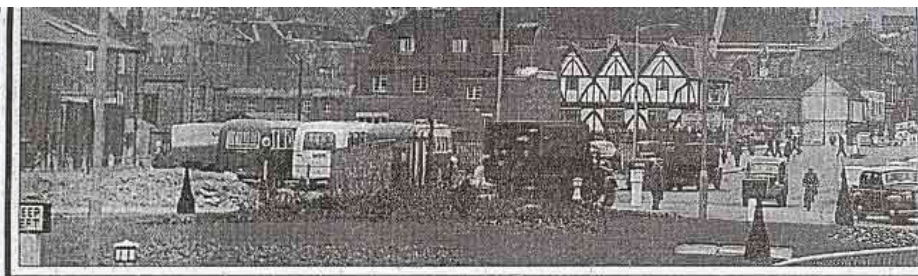
And as he officially opened the works, National Coal Board chairman Sir Derek Ebor, pledged the plant had been rebuilt with absolute safety in mind.

The gleaming £37 million plant was a joint venture between the coal board and Dutch State Mines.

The official opening took place outside the major new office block and on a special plaza dedicated to the memory of the 23 people who died when the previous plant blew up.

The new works, which spread over 114 acres, was expected to be fully operational and producing a basic ingredient in nylon manufacture, within weeks.

le of Wight
to me
family, in
o lived at
ater, Isle of
er Charles
asby from
what is now
riod until he
. I now live
sby, and my
Mark came
m the Isle of
n.
is born.
over from
ELD lived in
' with her
from which
been donated
red, Lord
quarry. Why
away such a
his? Anne
was the sister
ife, and
me had been
14 and Agnes
s time the
les as Alfred
' Anne and
I went to stay
OR family, at
where they
everend
junior was
I and still
ice of
raits of
id carrying a
as Little Red
SON junior
om de plume
became
DGSON and
9th in 1890.
as and Louisa
ums of
favourite
y happy
rassy. The
problems
I can seemed
funding and
needs were
WELD
merit and
ferred source
falls. Aunt
fred,
gnal and
his received
ousin
o cut out
with and
Alfred's
by Emily.
'Hood,
of her money
915.
be same root
mise that a
ed with trees
ome from the
and is a
aller thereon.
his is the
hus today.
pational
this is
t the food
be very
ring. The
ar was for a
me a buyer
household.
ome to the
ledge'
many
ped and we
to examine a
line at Family
Station Road,
N38 6AP. Tel:
net.com



BYGONE DAYS: Decades ago, we all knew that the Melville Street/Broadgate route was arguably the busiest in Lincoln and we didn't know how it could possibly get any busier... How wrong we were! It looks positively peaceful in this undated picture from the Echo archives. In the foreground is the large traffic roundabout that

you used to find at the northern end of Pelham Bridge.

In more recent times, the traffic got so busy here that the roundabout could no longer cope, so it was abolished and the junction is now controlled by lights.

The old Thornbridge car park, immediately behind the roundabout, is now occupied by the city bus station and its

rooftop car park. But the site was already acting as a bus terminus even in those days.

It was the arrival and starting point for services which ran between Lincoln and Scunthorpe, via Ingham and Kilton Lindsey.

The old Thornbridge Hotel and the Thorngate slipper baths on the other side of the river have also disappeared, but the distinctive Green

Dragon building and the church of St Swithin, with its graceful spire, survive.

When the picture was taken, the old Central Cinema site with its adjoining shops had not yet then been redeveloped as Thorngate House, which would become the offices of Ruston Gas Turbines, EGT and Alston, before the site would be cleared again in 2004.

Proud to say they fought at Arnhem

NATIONAL archive records show that 226 men went into Arnhem and of them 29 died, 75 were evacuated and 122 reported as missing.

These horrific casualty figures demonstrate their total involvement in the numerous actions at the bridge, the Oosterbeek Perimeter and elsewhere, including the house-to-house fighting, and are now recorded in the annals of airborne history.

Captain J. L. Crammer-Byng, No 1 Platoon Commander, was awarded the Military Cross and his citation reads as follows: "At Arnhem, on September 20, Captain Crammer-Byng, was ordered to take an RASC party undercover of darkness and to take over a sector of the perimeter at a point where there was danger of enemy infiltration in the houses flanking the 4th Parachute Brigade position."

"This movement was successfully accomplished and the line was held, and at one time advanced, for four days in spite of heavy fighting and frequent attacks by mortar, self-propelled guns and single tanks."

"Captain Crammer-Byng was in command of the party throughout and was in much of the heaviest fighting."

"On one occasion, despite a slight wound in the hand, he shot an enemy sniper dead. On another occasion he took a party of men out with a PIAT and managed to drive off a self-propelled gun which was attacking the position at short range."

In last week's edition of The Way We Were, Peter Scarcliffe recounted his childhood memories leading up to the battle of Arnhem 60 years ago. Today he concludes his story, recalling the events which led up to a senior officer being awarded the Military Cross...

"Subsequently, Captain Crammer-Byng successfully disengaged his party and led them down in the darkness through the enemy lines to cross the river to safety."

"It was largely due to the inspiring leadership and coolness displayed by Captain Crammer-Byng that the RASC sector held out against very considerable pressure, without food or sleep, and that the party was subsequently able to withdraw to safety when ordered to do so."

There is no doubt it took a special kind of courage to land by parachute in enemy-occupied territory, knowing they could be shot on the way down, or they could be surrounded by the enemy after landing."

Montgomery later said: "In years to come, it will be a great thing for a man to be able to say 'I fought at Arnhem'."

Of the four men I mentioned in last week's article, who spend a short peri-

od of leave at our home, only one returned and he and his family remained lifelong friends of my parents.

These are my memories, as a very young schoolboy, of some very, very brave men who were sent to fight at Arnhem.

A memorial has since been erected in honour of the men of 250 (Airborne) Light Composite Company RASC, and this is located at the side of the driveway leading down to Longhills Farm at Branston.

Next week in The Way We Were, local historian Paul Ranshaw looks at the part Wellington played in the Arnhem preparations.

In recognition of the 60th anniversary of Operation Market Garden, the Echo publishes a 44-page special publication dedicated to the Battle of Arnhem this Saturday. Order your copy now. It costs 50p.

Blockbuster film that led to a hit record

IF you had saved up your pocket money to buy the latest pop record at CR Spouse's shop in Lincoln Cornhill 50 years ago this week, what would have been your choice?

Top of the city pops was Frank Sinatra's Three

Coins In The Fountain. They had seen the film in Cinemascope at the Lincoln Ritz, and now it seemed that just about everyone wanted to take a copy of the record home with them.

If Sinatra didn't appeal to you, then what about Nat

King Cole? His latest record Smile, from the film Modern Times, was doing very nicely.

Eddie Calvert was playing My Son, My Son on his golden trumpet.

The Johnson Brothers were singing Sh-Boom

while David Whitfield was making the teenage hearts flutter with Cara Mia.

But for unusual song titles, the latest release by Max Bygraves took a bit of beating. It was Gilly Gilly Ossenfeffer Katzenellenbogen By The Sea.

hovered within a quarter of a mile from them, and away.

"It was about 25 ft and around seven ft higher than Alan Rick (4 Skegness).

"It was hovering up and we had a co view of it for as long as two, before it flew away."

Alan and his two were on their way to work on the Revest they saw the object Kirkby.

"It looked a bit like but if it had been seen ropes and a bit certainly not a hell cloud, or anything. I have never seen it."

He reported the sighting to the Coningsby but a spokesman offered no explanation.

City faces property

A PROPERTY boom up in Lincoln 10 years ago - and it was continuing progress university.

Echo readers were estate agents were many inquiries about accommodation in Parade area that the unusual step of homeowners to sell.

And much of the being generated by speculators who convert large properties and flats to be expected to flood in study at the university.

The campus was the south bank of the river and with a proposal to be constructed in Fossdyke flows into property in the We be just a few minutes from the university.

One city estate agent proposed university generated extra income in area. A lot of properties quite large and old converted into flats.

County college

A NEW era in the teaching in Boston years ago today with £270,000 College of Education opened the first time.

The Echo reports arrivals - at seven nine - were a busload from the Alford area.

They were followed minutes later by a mini-bus from the and Chapel Hill area.

In all, around 130 registered and took in a variety of class first day.

And more were expected days ahead.

Preparations on in 1960 and building under way a couple

The building work the local construction involved.



PROPERTY OF BRANSTON HISTORY GROUP



PROPERTY OF BRANSTON HISTORY GROUP



PROPERTY OF BRANSTON HISTORY GROUP



PROPERTY OF BRANSTON HISTORY GROUP





PROPERTY OF BRANSTON HISTORY GROUP



PROPERTY OF BRANSTON HISTORY GROUP



PROPERTY OF BRANSTON HISTORY GROUP





