

FRANK SMITH'S STORY

Frank was one of a large Hungerford family of very little means. His father worked for the Great Western Railway and his mother stayed at home, although she was not in the best of health by the time war broke out. They lived at Salisbury road at the south end of Hungerford.

Frank's first memory of the Americans being in the area was when he and his brother were down on the town tip searching for scrap metal to sell. Some G.I.'s arrived in a truck to dump some refuse there and Frank and his brother ended up going back to the base with them.

It was not long before Frank, usually with his brother, were regular visitors to the camp at Chilton Foliat on Sir Seton Wills' estate, a short distance away over the marsh to the North. Their father would tell them to get up to the base to see what they could get (Frank affectionately remembers his father as a kind of Fagin).

The boys spent a great deal of their time at the camp at the expense of their education and they were beaten regularly for their truancy by Mr. Gill and Mr. Chislett (Mr Chislett's beatings were less severe). The camp consisted of mainly black painted Nissen huts (Quonset huts to the yanks) a sentry stood under a tree at the main entrance although he thinks that there was at least one other entrance at which stood another sentry in a box. There was an admin block, kitchens, a medical facility and a large training area which included a mock up of a C-47.

There was also a large hangar for packing parachutes where the packers would put their names on each chute once it was packed. The troopers used to be picked out to fight in a ring to toughen them up. Frank thinks that about once a fortnight the men would be taken by truck to Membury to jump over Chilton Foliat. They had so much equipment strapped to them they could hardly walk. They would always lose large amounts of equipment while parachuting and Frank and other boys would collect this stuff up, he particularly remembers the chin cups of the helmet straps having their names in them. Once he seems to think that there was a free fall demonstration over the camp he can remember waiting with everyone else while a commentary was spoken over a 'Tannoy' describing the descent before the parachute was deployed and they could spot where the trooper was. The troopers would say 'Hey kid, have you got a sister, give her these, compliments of the 101st Airborne' The presents were nylons.

The boys could walk straight onto the camp and into the P.X. Frank also remembers that they watched Superman films in the camp picture house.

Frank particularly remembers one Sgt Pinnix. This man had a uniform cut down for Frank to wear when he was on the camp. On one occasion Frank was loaded up onto the truck to Membury with the troopers and

got onto the steps of a C-47 that was about to take off before being spotted by an MP who yanked him away.

On another he was down by the canal when some troopers came by, they threw some coppers into the shallow water and laughed as the kids scrambled in the water for the coins.

One November (1943) Christmas came early. The Americans threw a party for the kids and hid large quantities of candy for the children to find. He also says that the American Red Cross wagons gave out sweets to them.

One time, he thinks just before D-Day, all the school children were tasked by their school teacher, Miss Pounds (who carried a large red carbuncle on her face) to carry their chairs out to Hungerford Common. When the job was complete General Eisenhower came and gave all the assembled men and officers a talk. He doesn't remember the content of the speech.

Frank used to collect washing (dobie) from the troops and cycle it over to his Granny who lived on the edge of the common. When he returned it the men would put it up to their faces, smell it and say 'Gee, ain't that white!' Granny got paid for her work and Frank got a few coppers too for the carrying, although he felt that it was a huge privilege to do it.

When he and Bill had collected enough money they could go to the pictures. One time when the intermission was on Frank and Bill took the opportunity to take a look around the cinema. They spotted their sisters Dorothy and Olive sitting at the back with a couple of Americans. The two men were wearing sheepskin flying jackets and one was smoking a cigar. Bill said to Frank, 'Come on, let's go and see the girls and see what we can get off the yanks! You go up one side and I'll go up the other' This they did and positioned themselves either side of the little group. Bill said 'Hiya gel, got any money?' One of the yanks said to the girls 'do you know these kids?' to which both girls replied emphatically 'we've never seen them before!' the disgruntled boys were forced to retire empty handed and left the cinema. On their way home they met their father. Mr. Smith was not too bothered what the boys got up to but was very protective of the two girls and he asked Frank and Bill if they had seen the girls. Bill, being slightly miffed at the rebuff he got from his sisters said 'Yes, we have, they're in the pictures with two yanks!' Mr Smith made off immediately for the picture house. The two boys headed for home and let slip to their Mother what had occurred.

She advised them that it would be a good idea to get themselves to bed if they didn't want to cop it from their dad when he returned as he was very likely to be in a foul mood and wanting to give the boys a hiding for telling tales!! The boys could see 'picture hill from one of the windows and witnessed their father coming back down the hill hitting in turn the two girls AND the two Americans!

Bill took the opportunity of saying to the girls soon after 'You'll know us next time you see us!'

Olive worked for Whites dairy and on her round one morning her horse bolted, taking off down the high street. A gallant American stepped out into the street and stopped the horse for her and saved the day.