

## JOAN'S STORY



In 1943 Joan Greenwood was a seventeen-year-old girl living at Number one Newbury Street, Kintbury. The tiny terraced house was home to Joan, her Mother, Father, Grandfather, sister Nancy, brother Jim as well as two evacuees, Ivy and Jean. Joan worked in Newbury and was aware of the Americans in the area from about Christmas of 1943 although initially had very little to do with them. Like many young girls she would attend dances held in the village halls in the area as well as the Corn Exchange in Newbury, including the concert by the famous American band-leader Glenn Miller “The tickets were sold on a first come, first served basis and I queued very early to make sure of a ticket...once inside there was barely room to move but that didn’t matter to me.”

Joan was also invited to many dances that the American troops put on at various locations and although her Mother was initially reluctant to let her attend, probably on grounds of propriety, her Grandfather interceded and persuaded her to let Joan go. The girls were collected by an army truck that drove round the villages and they sat on the slatted seats in the back and ate Donuts that had been provided for the journey. (Rationing had hit every household very hard and the Americans were very generous with their own supplies to the British civilians).

At one local dance early in 1944 she noticed this particular tall young man who was, unfortunately for Joan, with another girl. The next dance Joan and her friend attended he was there again with a friend but this time the other girl didn’t arrive. The young soldier who’s name was David asked Joan to dance and she willingly agreed. After the dance David walked Joan home but Joan for some girlish reason lied to him about where she lived and also as to her real name. She said her name was Joan Smith and when he had walked her a significant distance she told him that that was near enough to her house and that she would be fine to walk on her own from then on.

David tried in vain to find Joan again but without her real name was finding this difficult. Then one day Joan saw him at the bus station while on her way home from work, she had wanted to see him again and very bravely walked up to him and said "Hello David". He was very surprised and said that although he was on his way to a dance he would prefer not to go but stay a while with her. They walked into Victoria Park and sat on the edge of the pond and talked. Joan explained about why she had misled him and he told her all about his family. He came from West Virginia and his family ran a ferryboat service over the Ohio River. The two of them agreed to meet the next day and saw each other regularly after that.

David, who was a medic with the 501<sup>st</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment sleeping under canvas at Hamstead Park, would come to visit the family at Newbury Road for tea and would be dropped off and collected by his friend, a regimental Chaplain. (It is believed that this man could have been Captain Engels) The family saw David many times during the spring of 1944 until late May when suddenly the American visitors simply seemed to disappear. Joan went into Newbury one Saturday but the place seemed deserted and she sensed that something momentous was happening. It was at this time that all the paratroopers had been moved out to the airfields from which they would depart for the invasion of Europe.

Joan remembers vividly the night of June 5<sup>th</sup> 1944 as if were only yesterday. From about 11.00 PM onwards the sky seemed filled with hundreds of aircraft, some pulling gliders as they headed out for Normandy. It seemed to go on for hours, the last wave going over at about 3.30 AM as Joan and her family watched from their bedroom windows. David parachuted in to France on the morning of June 6<sup>th</sup> 1944, D-Day.

He survived the campaign and returned to visit Joan once more to tell her that he had had a difficult choice to make but that when his tour of duty was over he would be returning to his girl in the States. Joan was very upset by this news although her Mother had always suspected that it would happen one day. He went on to return to the war in Holland, Belgium and Germany and eventually return safely home. David wrote to Joan's family for a number of years, sending cards at Christmas and Easter.

Joan married and had a family of her own. She lives in Newbury