

A day I shall never forget by Marjorie Longdin



In 1978 Marjorie Longdin, then a member of Tickhill Afternoon WI, entered the following account in a WI competition and won first prize. It is reproduced here for insights it gives into life after D-Day. Marjorie is shown right after she became a Staff Nurse.

June the 12th 1944, D-Day plus six is a day that I shall never forget, even though it is nearly thirty-four years ago. I was a Junior Probationer Nurse training for my S.R.N. at the Leeds General Infirmary. That morning I returned to Ward One after a day off, arriving on duty at half past seven.

I had left the ward full of Women Medical Patients, very tidy and very feminine, all mobile and all able to be sent home if, and it was a big if, we had to take on wounded from the Normandy Beachhead.

That is just what had happened, and as I opened the ward doors I could hardly believe my eyes. First of all the untidiness hit me, every bed and locker was overflowing with khaki. Greatcoats, kit bags, remnants of tattered uniform, and under every bed army boots, and in the beds the pride of the British Army: glider pilots, parachutists, commandos, soldiers of the first wave of the assault troops to land on or behind the beaches. All so very masculine and I still think of them as my wonderful boys.

Splintered arms and legs stuck out from the beds at the most peculiar angles, and many beds had cages protecting wounded legs from the weight of the bed clothes.

After thirty-four years I can still put faces to some of those boys. The four Cockneys who all spoke a different Cockney dialect are very clear to me, and I can even remember some of their wounds. The Tank Sergeant with burnt hands, the young football fanatic with a shattered knee, the quiet older glider pilot who had been in a dyke for three days and nights and was later to die of a Coronary, and a boy who became one of our favourites. He was only nineteen and one of his feet had been blown off by a land mine, but he was always cheerful and nearly drove us mad singing "Mares eat Oats and Does eat Oats and Little Lambs eat Ivy".

For four years we had had very little chocolate or sweets on the home front and cigarettes were very hard to come by. In those days nobody had heard of lung cancer, so to show one was grown up one smoked or tried to smoke. During that day the Red Cross visited all our boys giving them an allowance of cigarettes, chocolates, notepaper, envelopes and stamps.

I was the most junior nurse on the ward, and, therefore, was Queen of the bedpan and bottle round, and never before that day or since have I been given so much chocolate or so many cigarettes. We on the Military Wards were very popular with our friends, who, much to their disgust were still on Civilian Wards.



One boy who was not badly wounded, asked me to telephone his mother in Birmingham, to tell her where he was, and it is only since I have become the mother of sons that I can understand the relief it must have been to her, to hear my voice telling her that her son was alive and back in England. She told me to tell him that his brother was also wounded and in hospital in the South of England. She was one of the lucky mothers.

All those boys will now be fifty-three plus, if they are still alive. Probably grey-haired, balding, thickening around the middle, with no idea that a plump, middle-aged mum, also going grey, often thinks of them, and that day when they were all part of our history and how proud she is of the memory of that day she will never forget.

Thanks to Marjorie Longdin for allowing her account to be published here. In 2008 Marjorie discussed her memories of life in Tickhill (where she has lived since 1949) with Lorna Payne for the Living Memories section of our main website where the photograph, left, can be seen.