

## 228<sup>th</sup> Station Hospital, Haydon Park, Sherborne

It is unlikely that Sir Walter Raleigh envisaged that in future years, an American Military Hospital would be erected in his deer park, situated high on Jerusalem Hill, now part of the Digby Estate.

An advance party prepared the way for approximately 500 enlisted men<sup>1</sup>, officers, doctors and nurses who were shipped over from Indiana to the Firth of Clyde in Scotland and then south by train eventually arriving at Haydon Park. They set to work clearing the grounds, erecting Nissan huts and some brick buildings, equipping wards and theatres (medical and surgical), building accommodation blocks, mess halls, a motor pool (garage), a dental clinic and a Red Cross Centre. One of the Nissan huts was converted to a church for Catholic<sup>2</sup> and Protestant<sup>3</sup> services and a road was constructed to facilitate the movement of large US Army vehicles from the port at Weymouth. By 18<sup>th</sup> September 1943, 228<sup>th</sup> Station Hospital, Haydon Park, Sherborne was in working operation and a patient was admitted, the first of 22,924 American, allied and foreign troops and operatives.



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<sup>1</sup> The unit contained black or African American troops. In 1941, fewer than 4000 African Americans were serving in the military and only 12 had become officers. By 1945 1.2 million were serving in uniform.

<sup>2</sup> Every night, Lt Cuccioni the Catholic Pastor was 'over the hill' and needed to be sobered up.

<sup>3</sup> Rev Slaten, the Protestant Pastor and his assistant Sgt Burns were often seen on the wards giving last rights to dying men.

Life at the hospital developed. Some of the soldiers were musicians and a 'swing' dance band was formed. Local girls were invited to weekend dances on the first Saturday of the month. A khaki bus with two pick-up points, Sherborne and Milborne Port, would collect them and bring them to the dances; this was because enlisted men were not allowed to associate with nurses as they were officers in the army<sup>4</sup>. It is alleged that, in time, a number of appointments to see the Colonel were made by pregnant girls, resulting in the speedy redeployment of the soldiers concerned to another stations or even France.

Several local girls from Sherborne and Milborne Port were employed at the 228<sup>th</sup> Hospital as cleaners, telephone operatives and shorthand typists. Some cycled to work, others were collected by jeep with their own driver. The soldiers were frequently invited home to supper with the girls' families and would arrive by bicycle or jeep (if there was one coming to Sherborne/Milborne). Neighbours became curious and were invited as well; Thursday night became party night.

Some of the soldiers used to drink in The King's Head, now The Tippling Philosopher. Others began to attend the Methodist Church on Sundays. The church superintendent, Mr Tom Dyke, had a cine camera and used to show films on a Sunday night after service. The church schoolroom was opened as a canteen for all servicemen and the local ladies took it in turns to work there in the evenings serving soft drinks and sandwiches.

It wasn't all fun and jolly larks though. On 30<sup>th</sup> March 1944, there was an accident when a truck rolled over a live mine whilst the troops were recovering mines at the end of a mine-laying exercise, causing a huge explosion. 29 Americans were killed and several others were severely injured. The incident was censored until much later<sup>5</sup>.



<sup>4</sup> It is believed that in 1944 Lt Col J Kingsley MacDonald tore the page relating to this edict out of his Army Regulations book and mixed dances were allowed, on the grounds that it would boost morale.

<sup>5</sup> In 1989 a plaque was placed outside Sherborne Abbey to honour those killed.

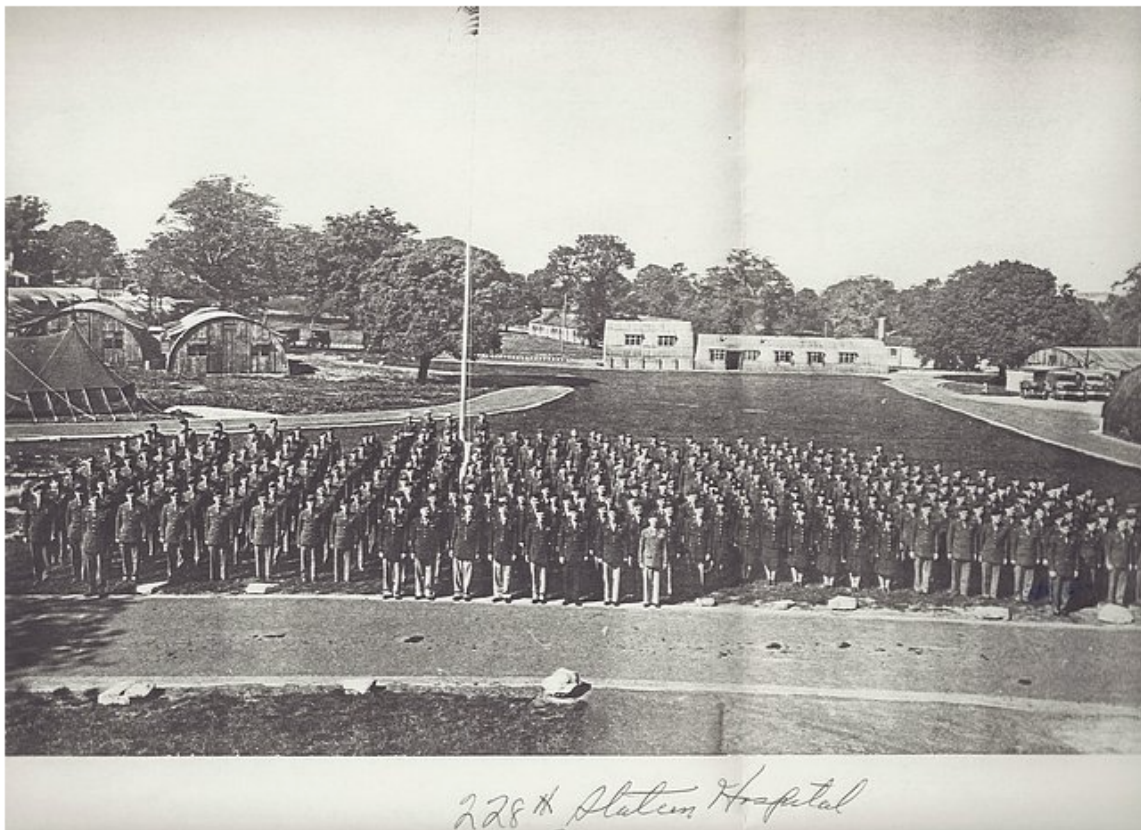


After the D Day invasion, the 228<sup>th</sup> was made into a General Hospital with no additional personnel. Ward tents were added and at times over 1100 patients were handled. When they ran out of beds, the German patients were laid on the floor.

The war with Germany was coming to an end and majority of patients were transferred to other hospitals. Much of the equipment and supplies went to the Yeatman or Yeovil hospital and most of what was left went to Mr Young who had a farm down the hill towards Milborne Port. He thanked the men who made the delivery with a barrel of his rough cider...

Members of the 228th American Hospital, Haydon Park, nr Sherborne, Dorset.

August 26th 1944.



Many close friendships had been formed which continued over the years with letters and transatlantic visits, usually including a walk up the hill to the camp. In 1983, a reunion was held and 57 228<sup>th</sup> stalwarts visited England for two weeks and were housed all over Sherborne.

Article from a Michigan newspaper:-

ONLY 10 PAGES / KOP SHODIM  
BEAUTIFUL BAVARIAN TOWN  
Frankenmuth News, July 26, 1989-5A

## Motor Lodge site of WWII station hospital reunion

Personnel of the WWII 228th Station Hospital will celebrate a 44th reunion at the Bavarian Inn Motor Lodge from July 27 through July 29.

The 228th Station Hospital was activated at Camp Atterbury, Indiana, in 1942 and after extensive training arrived in the United Kingdom in 1943. It consisted of some 400 enlisted men, 76 nurses, and 40 officers, many of whom were doctors. Red Cross workers and chaplains also were assigned to the unit and 23 English civilians were employed as domestics, maintenance personnel, telephone operators and clerk typists.

Hayden Park, near Sherborne, Dorset, England, became the site of the hospital. "The park was surrounded by a high stone fence with a gate and a picturesque garbouse which was occupied by the gatekeeper. Many deer roamed freely in the park and could be seen early in the morning and late evenings grazing peacefully in the area," tells Al Blumlein, Saginaw, a spokesperson for the personnel.

The hospital consisted of 23 large quanset-type wards and during peak periods, 12 large tents were set up for the overflow. On D-Day a large influx of wounded GI's were brought to the hospital via ambulances and hospital trains, and over 3,000 wounded and ill were treated during the six days following D-Day. Those more severely wounded were given preliminary treatment and transferred to general hospitals further north in England. The average confinement in the 228th Station Hospital was 16 days, and then the military men were returned to duty.

As the war zone moved further inland, the hospital became a prisoner of war facility. Army engineers and military police arrived and high barbed wire fences were erected. Prisoners were assigned to housekeeping duties and K.P., always guarded by an M.P. (military police).

"Many air raid alerts were experienced, our own, as well as the nearby town of Sherborne," Blumlein said. "Alert sirens cut through the noise of the German bombers flying overhead. No bombs were ever dropped near our location."

The 228th Station Hospital was deactivated in 1945 but during its tour of duty approximately 23,000 patients were processed through the hospital. "Even with the large influx of patients, each and everyone was given the best medical loving care that was possible during wartime," Blumlein claimed.

Many personnel from the 228th Station Hospital have visited the hospital site in England and were royally welcomed and housed with the residents of Sherborne," Blumlein tells.

English civilians who worked in the hospital or some who attended the recreation room dances have been in attendance at previous reunions in Columbus, Ohio.

"The 228th Station Hospital reunion personnel from all parts of the U.S. wish to thank the people of Frankenmuth for their warm and friendly hospitality," Blumlein said.



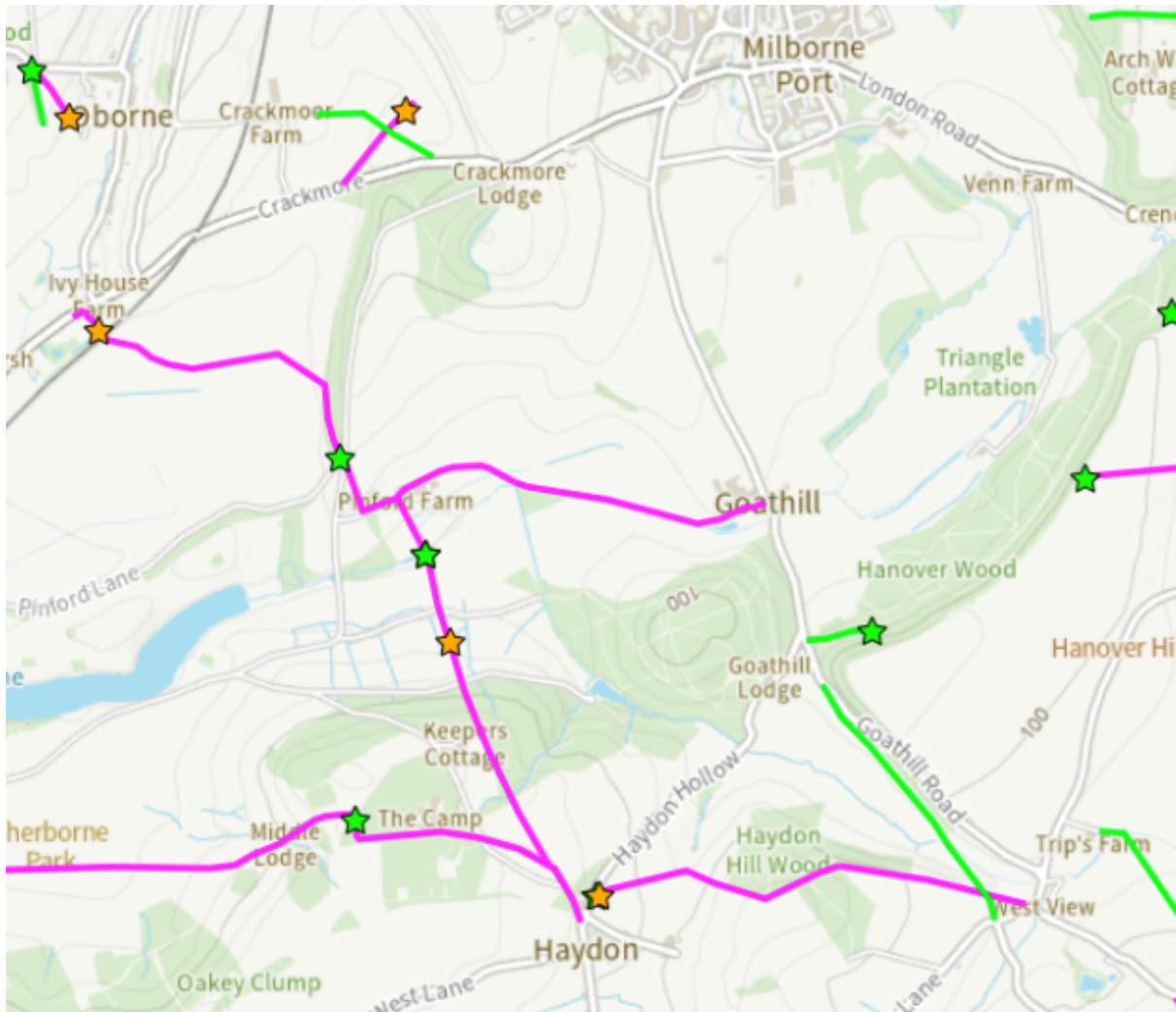
CAMP HOUSING FOR 228TH STATION HOSPITAL - ENGLAND

Quanset huts served as living quarters to the 228th Station Hospital in England during WWII. A 44th reunion of military personnel from the outfit will be held this weekend in Frankenmuth.

HOSP WARD

Following this, Haydon Camp was transferred by the MOD to the Polish Resettlement Corps and was utilised as a holding place for Polish refugees, eventually closing and being dismantled in 1955/56; but that's another story<sup>6</sup>.

Today, nature is reclaiming this piece of local history.



Valerie Jackson  
May 2024

With reference to *The 228<sup>th</sup> American Hospital at Haydon Park, nr. Sherborn, Dorset* by Jean Treasure (née Smith)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.polishresettlementcampsintheuk.co.uk/haydonpark1.htm>