

A Child and the 893rd

I was contacted by a man from the United Kingdom who was evacuated to Bradpole, Dorset, U.K. when he was a child. He was living in the same field where the 893rd Tank Destroyer battalion was bivouacked. Here is his story:

My name is Chris Butcher & I was born in Rochford Hospital, Southend on Sea on September 30, 1936. When WWII started in 1939, the Government decided to evacuate children to safer areas in the U.K. We probably moved from Southend in 1940, ending up in various places around Dorset or Southwest Coast of the U.K. We were evacuated to Yeovil, Ilhampton, Mangerton & lastly to Bradpole, Dorset. Bradpole was a small village next to Bridport Town, a mile away. Myself, about 7, with my sister Averil 9 & my mother, Daisy Frances, early 1930s lived in a bungalow in a field in Bradpole. The address was Home Farm Bungalows, Bradpole, Dorset. The field was owned by the Norman family who had a farm next door. The family still owns a butcher shop in village now. The bungalows were not built of brick but were like wooden caravans (a towed trailer camper).

Our Father was in France at the time as an Army Medic in the RAMC (Royal Army Medical Corps). I remember being at school at the top of Middle Street Bradpole. The date then was 1942, as we were told General Bernard Montgomery had just won a battle at El Alamein. There was a railway station just down the road on the left, which may have been named Bradpole or Bridport Station. I remember soldiers arriving at that station, because myself & other kids were there on the platform. As they stepped off the train and we were asking them, "got any gum chum?" We were given packs of Wrigleys gum. The soldiers were billeted in the same field as us, at Home Farm Bungalows, Bradpole. Some may have stayed in the village or in Bridport.

It was wartime and we had very little, we were poor & our father was in France. The soldiers were very kind to us. My mother was given food for us & I can remember being given Billycans (lightweight cooking pot with a lid and a wire handle) full of pineapple chunks. We were also given a sledge (sled) they made which we slid down the hill on. They also took us out for rides on their landing craft (DUKS) at West Bay, which was a water & beach area near Bridport. I remember their tanks on the railway platform. They helped us kids to climb on and in the tanks and I still remember the thick yellow grease on the moving parts.

I am 85 now, but my memory of that time is still very clear to me. It was all beautiful countryside & my childhood was spent in that area. I used to help the milkman on his horse & cart, hunt for mushrooms, make bows and arrows and collect bird eggs. We ran for miles through the woods by the rivers. The photo shown at the end of this account was given to my mother, which although not good quality, has survived. The photo is of a baseball team, formed from men of the 893rd and is dated June 1944. I only remember 3 names Chuck, Charlie &

Skyjack. I think Chuck is shown second from left, in the top row. Sometime after D-day, Skyjack returned to the village and stayed for a while. We were still there on VE day but returned to Southend soon after.

On the train I can remember my mother pointing out the River Thames as we passed over. I was clutching my gas mask box, which held two pet white mice. We continued our lives in Southend and I eventually became an Electrical Commissioning Engineer, travelling the world commissioning gas turbine alternators, with visits to New York, Iowa, Los Angeles and Long Beach, California, British Columbia, and more. My sister Averil, ended up marrying an American airman stationed at an American fighter aircraft base, located in Wethersfield, Essex, England. They moved to USA in the 1950s and went on to have four sons, so from humble beginnings, we did fine.

