

Reflecting on 'many pleasant moments'

US soldier's memories of Desertcreat Farm

IN his welcoming letter to the officers and men of the United States armed forces newly arrived in Northern Ireland during 1943, Sir Basil Brook wrote: "I bid you hearty greeting. You have come to a beautiful land, inhabited by a homely and hospitable people.

"They will be eager to show you that you are among friends. Ulster extends to you a cordial welcome and wishes you good fortune..."

After reading this invitation, PFC George Jacobus, a 19-year-old paratrooper with the famed 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, billeted at Desertcreat Farm, Cookstown, took every opportunity to "march, curse and dance" his way in and out of dancehalls, pubs and local places during his stay in Cookstown. He had "one hell of a good time!"

However, sometimes, as Jacobus recalls, things were not always what they seemed: "Shortly after Thanksgiving Day, one of our 'E' Company officers came by and asked if any of us would like to

attend a tea dance. My instincts should have told me, no - this is too good to be true. However, my buddy, Bob Gagne, and I went along for the ride."

"Several miles from camp, the trucks drove up a long driveway and stopped at an impressive castle style building [Killymoon Castle].

"There were about forty of us in the group. Entering a large ballroom we spied food, teacakes and a large bowl of non-alcoholic punch. As our attention focused on that, a dignified matronly lady in her late fifties entered the room and announced that the music would soon begin, and it did.

"The ladies playing the piano and fiddles were also a bit old and I began to fidget. The sedate setting was too much. Suddenly the patter of footsteps and in walked a large group of ladies - immaculately dressed and tastefully made up - but not one of them less than 50-60 years of age! Gagne said he was going to kill me for talking him into this deal."

"We quickly were introduced to a dance called 'The Hokey Pokey.' First we formed a circle while holding hands, and the lyrics went something like this:"

'You put your right foot in
You take your right foot out
You put your right foot in and you shake it all about

You do the hokey pokey and you turn around
That's what it's all about.'

You then proceed with the same rhythm until you get to the part, 'Put your whole self in and you shake it all about.'

"Let me assure you that the old gals could shake it very well. We were embarrassed as hell, but we all had a good laugh. What the heck, we made the best of it while we were there. It was like dancing with our grandmothers."

Then Jacobus remembers "one lady who, even though she was in her late sixties, was looking for an opponent to play her at ping-pong. I volunteered."

"We played the first game and I lost; also the second game. So much for my ability as a ping-pong player."

"It seemed as though we were there for hours - or days! At any rate, the trucks picked us up and returned us back to camp for chow at 1700 hours. We vowed never again to attend a tea dance any place in the British Empire - Amen. By the way, we lied and exaggerated to the guys in the platoon when they questioned us about our trip."

Undaunted by his experience, Jacobus "was not deterred from pursuing any future opportunities to seek out the Irish colleens"

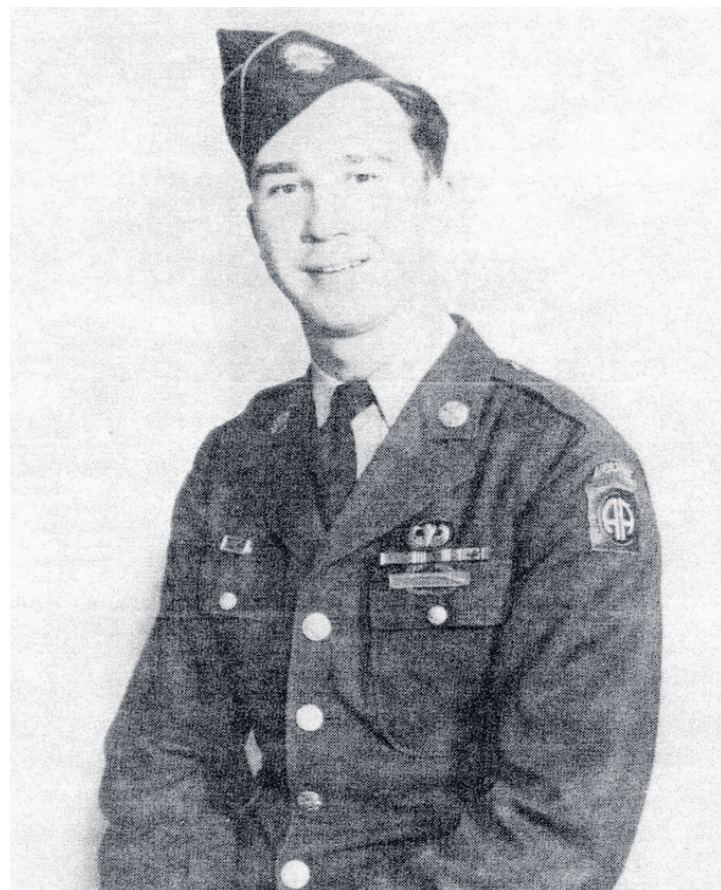
George Jacobus survived the war, but after sustaining a leg injury on the D-Day jump of 6 June 1944, he received a medical discharge and returned home. Soon after he became the golf professional at Ridgewood Golf Club, New Jersey, but his old war wound eventually forced him to give up that profession.

Eventually he became a school-teacher of geography and advanced economics until his retirement in 1986. Thereafter he worked part-time as an independent financial advisor.

Jacobus married twice and raised four sons.

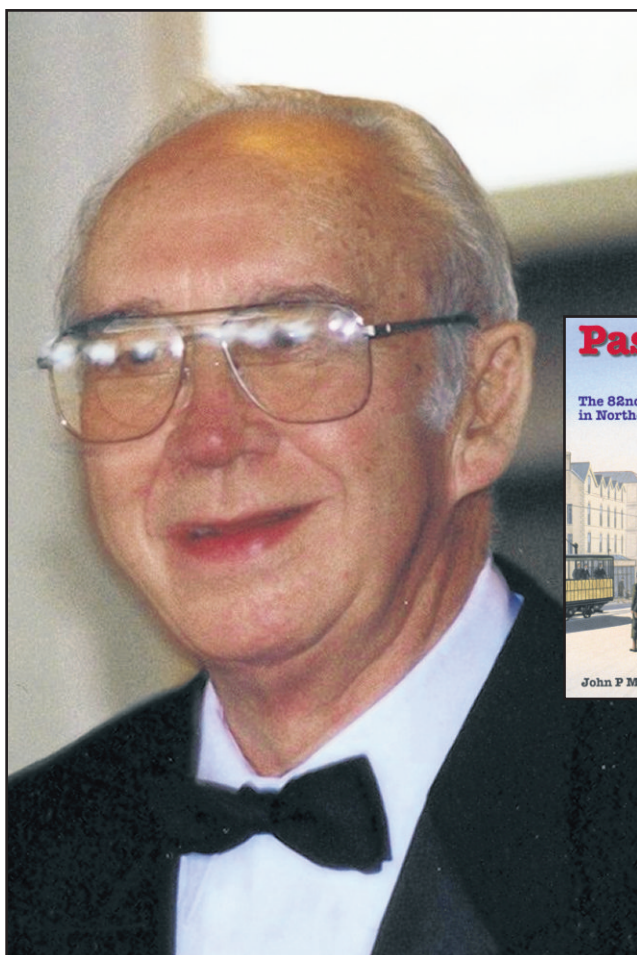
Throughout his life he always looked back fondly on his time in Cookstown recalling many more stories of his experiences there until his death in 2007.

Extract from 'Passing Through' by John McCann

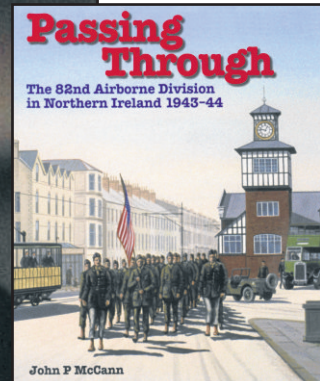


George Jacobus, 'E' Company, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment. Photograph taken when in N. Ireland.

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ABOVE: The Stars and Stripes flutters limply in the foreground as a sentry from the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment stands guard outside the front entrance to Killymoon Castle, Cookstown, January 1944.



'Passing Through' by John McCann - available now

George Jacobus photographed during the summer of 2003.