



This slightly exaggerated William Linzee Prescott sketch of Cookstown Main street, as seen from Killymoon Crescent looking north towards Holy Trinity Church.

Margaret 'swept off her feet'

"It seemed that most of our courtship was done by telephone, but we managed a few fun times together."



The wedding of Margaret McKenna and Sergeant Larry James, Headquarters Company, 505 PIR, at Holy Trinity Church, Cookstown, July 1945

DURING the American Army's time in Northern Ireland, one soldier recalls: "Some men found pretty lassies, fell in love and married them, but with most of us only there for three months, these marriages were a hurry up thing. However, some were successful."

An example of such a relationship was the one that occurred between Sergeant Larry James of Headquarters Company, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, and Margaret McKenna of Cookstown.

Margaret recalls, "I liked to go to Mrs Devlin's café, which was on the corner of Drum and Sweep Road - close to where Headquarters Company was stationed.

Mrs Devlin approached me one day and told me that a soldier in her place was eager to meet a nice young Irish girl. She said she had thought of me right away and wondered if I would be interested?

After thinking about it for a few days, I asked my girlfriend if she would accompany me to meet this soldier who said his name was Paddy. She agreed, but when I met him, he didn't impress me too much. Then, at

Christmas, he asked me to join him for carol singing in the town centre, and invited me to a dance in the Old Mill building on the Drum Road near Blackhill. Both occasions were very enjoyable and we got to know one another much better."

"Straight away I found out that his name wasn't Paddy after all; it was Larry. I also discovered that his grandmother had originally come from Belfast, having gone out to America as a very young girl."

"Then, when I saw him going to church one Sunday, I realised there was something good about him, and we continued to see each other occasionally."

"Being in Headquarters Company, it seemed that he was always manning the switchboard. When he asked me to call him, I would go to the telephone booth in the middle of town and we would talk for hours. Sometimes it would get so late that he would have to send his jeep driver to see that I got home safe."

"We went to the Cookstown Picture House a few times, but even then it was hard to get away on time. So again, he would send his jeep driver to get me there and he would join me

later."

"It seemed that most of our courtship was done by telephone, but we managed a few fun times together."

Larry James proposed to Margaret before he left for England.

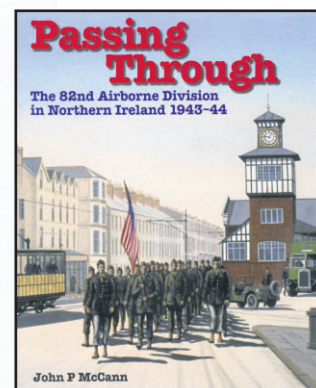
"He was to be one of the first to go," remembers Margaret, "and I said I would wait for him. However, knowing the mission ahead, I wasn't sure if I would ever see him again. But, I guess it was meant to be. He came back, and we got married in the Holy Trinity Church, Cookstown, in July of 1945."

Shortly after the wedding, Larry and Margaret James moved to America and raised four sons. Larry passed away in 2001 after 56 years of being happily married to Maggie.

During that time they returned to Cookstown many times, even celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary there (this story was covered by the Mail at the time).

Maggie is still alive and well and living in Florida.

Extract from 'Passing Through' by John McCann.



'Passing Through' by John McCann - available now

LEFT: This William Linzee Prescott sketch depicts a sentry walking his post on interior guard duty at the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment camp on the Drum/Sweep Roads near Cookstown.