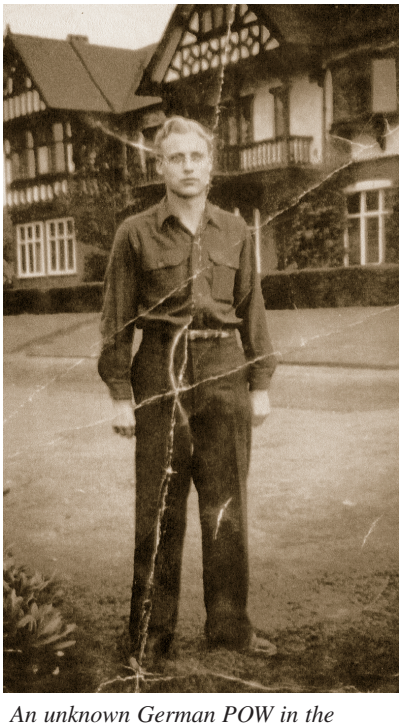
CHAPTER 8

Military & Wartime Activities during the 20th Century

Military bases are sited according to their strategic and tactical needs but personal desirability of the precise location often plays a big part. Upton had many large houses built during the 19th century and these became available and suitable as military headquarters and for military hospitals. Government House along with Upton Lodge became the official residence of the General Officer Commanding Western Command and his immediate staff. Oakfield (the Zoo) along with Moston Hall and the Deva hospital all became wartime military hospitals. Other large houses took on other functions during wartime and barrack huts were built in their grounds. Although the losses of local soldiers killed in action was greater during WW1, nevertheless, WW2 was closer to home - involving the community to a greater extent. The proximity of Liverpool and the presence of major fuel stores probably contributed to the extent of the Ack-Ack activity and to several recorded bomb drops within Upton and the surrounding area.

Government House & Upton Lodge

During the Great War the Royal Flying Corp (predecessor to the RAF) took over Dorin Court (see page 68) as their Group HQ. In 1920 the house and grounds were purchased by the War Department from Lieut. Colonel Gossage. Upton Lodge was then bought by the War Department in 1927 as an extension to the facility. The Upton Council minutes for 1927 record General Butler GOC Western Command living at Upton Lodge and War Office permission being sought to move their hedge back 20ft, all as part of making the Upton Cross crossroads wider and safer. While Gen Jackson occupied Government House, the Lodge was used as residence for the Chauffeur, the Dispatch Rider and other military staff but was mainly the offices as used by Jackson's ADC. Jackson retired before the outbreak of war and then the dual site became the official residence of the Major General Chief of Staff Western Command. This led to an impressive list of GOC's with their



An unknown German POW in the grounds of Government House during WW2

personal residence shifting from Government House to Upton Lodge. Residents included Generals Butler, Elliott, Horrocks, Templer and possibly others. As a major military residence during WW2, several distinguished guests are recorded. Princess Mary was a guest for a while. Her Lady-in-waiting was reputed to have taken Princess Mary's ration book to the Bache grocery store. During a visit by Field Marshall Montgomery the village school had difficulty getting the boys to attend in case they missed the opportunity of seeing 'Monty'.

In 1948 Gen. Horrocks relocated to new Government House at Eccleston Hill Hall and Upton's Government House became known to the Army as Old Government House and was converted into three flats for officers. Despite being remembered as a beautiful house with oak panels and sweeping staircase - it was demolished c1970 and the new building retook the original name of Dorin Court before recently becoming Weal Stone House. In the 1950s six married quarters were built in the grounds with more planned but not built. By the 1970s these were abandoned derelict squatted and vandalized. In 1983 the houses were sold with preference going to service personnel and the final link with the military broken since the local Council had already acquired and demolished Government House. Only the front boundary brick wall of Government House remains.

Other military sites around Upton

Further southeast along Wealstone Lane was 'The Firs'. This was another example of a 19th century gentleman's country residence used during the 20th century as military offices and barracks. Demolished in the early 1980s the memory is retained through the name Horrocks Road. According to records with the 'Firs School' – nearby Heywood Lodge was taken over by the military during WW2 and used for both an Ack-Ack headquarters and for ENSA as a training ground for military entertainers. A parade ground was established on the former tennis courts – now the school playground. The huts, later used by the Firs School, housed Italian POWs. The Italian POW presence in the village is well remembered. One task they undertook was to improve the bank alongside the Moston Road built some ten years earlier.

Ack-Ack guns and/or search lights were located on the top of the rise were Weston Grove now runs. The army huts in the area of the Weston Grove shops were later used for Polish families, immediately after the war. The Divisional H.Q. of No. 26 Fire Fighting Area, Liverpool, had a staff of forty based in the house and grounds of Upton Grange (now demolished) on Church Lane. This service began as the Auxiliary Fire Service in 1940 and was nationalized in August 1941. Extension huts within the Church Lane grounds were built in 1942 and used until the end of the war. An Ack-Ack gun on this site is well remembered by the Church Lane residents of the time. Some of the huts were dismantled and used by the scouts and other local organisations but the sites of these huts can still be seen on the 1956 OS map.

Around Acres Lane and Oakfield

This northern area of Upton Heath has seen military activity during both World Wars. The Acres was used as a Remount School during WW1 and horses were stabled in Oakfield's extensive stables. Prior to WW2, the Cheshire Yeomanry used Martin's Riding school. In 1939, Martin accompanied them to Palestine.

During WW2, a heavy Anti Aircraft battery known as H25 was set up to the north of Acres Lane. Early radar was reputedly used – taking the form of a large rotating cross carrying dipoles. The 71st Cheshire Home Guard HAA Battery was formed in April 1943. 'A' troop under the command of Capt. S H Woodiwiss supported H25 from its HQ at The Mount on Long Lane. American servicemen – mainly engineers in training for the invasion - are remembered as being there although the site is often refered to as 'the Polish Camp'. This relates to the immediate post-war period when Free Polish troops were sent there after duty in Italy and the site became a medical camp with military doctors and dentists. With reference to the late 1940s aerial survey photograph on page 124, the gun emplacements and the military huts can be clearly seen above the overlayed 'ACRES LANE' marking. The sites of the huts and of the gun emplacements can still be seen on the 1956 OS map. Even into the 1960s, local children continued to play in the underground passages. To the untrained eye, no indications remain in place today.

The fuel depots were largely located just to the north of Upton and supplied from Shell at Stanlow. The Royal Army Service Corp provided the guard and various outposts are remembered. These supplies were part of the PLUTO (PipeLineUnderTheOcean) fuel supplies for the D-Day invasion and beyond.

Once into the 1960s most traces of war-time activity had gone but the air raid sirens were still used for a while to warn of animals escaped from the zoo – which did happen but only post-war, despite wartime concerns.

Wartime Army Hospitals

During both wars local facilities were used as military hospitals. Moston Hall, Oakfield and the Deva were all used – the railway serving as useful transportation. Huts were added in the grounds to extend the facilities as shown here at Oakfield during WW1.



Lady Arthur Grosvenor instigated the hospital at Oakfield gaining it the name of 'Lady Arthur's Place'.

One fund raiser for Oakfield was through the sale of 'Birthday Books'. These contained photographs of the patients and staff at Oakfield – see some featured here – and each day was accompanied by a quotation.



One such quotation from Sister Allwood ran

'*When the war is done*
we'll recall the fun
The fun that conquered the pain -
For we'll owe a debt
(and we'll not forget)
To the jokes that kept us sane;
How the wounded could laugh
and bandy their chaff,
And kick up the deuce of a row !
….It may be, in peace,
when the sufferings cease,
We'll be sadder, aye sadder,
than now.'



And from a patient –

'*When troubles arise,*
promptly sit on 'em'

The following photograph shows injured WW1 troops on a day out at the Mill.



The Dale Barracks

The Dale barracks opened in 1939 for the 22nd Cheshire Regiment and Manchester Regiments. During the war the Machine Gun Training Centre relocated from London and the Office of the Commander of the Royal Engineers (Mersey District) was established. Post-war the Dale was a Primary Training Centre. In 1949 the Queen visited the Queen's Bays and in 1950 the King visited the Royal Dragoons. In 1956 the current building, used today as the Officers' Mess, was a secure asylum with the remainder of the barrack buildings converted to house patients as part of the hospital. The current sports/playing fields held some 29 Nissan Huts and 8 H Blocks again all part of the Moston Hospital. In 1987 following a major rebuild, the military hospital role was replaced with the 1st Battalion The Kings Regiment moving in to provide a Home Defence. In more recent times regular Infantry Battalions have used the Dale Barracks as home from which they can be rapidly deployed to 'Hot Spots' around the world. Married quarters are provided and many of the children attend the local schools. Also on the site – Fox barracks – is the local HQ of the Territorial Army.

The Memorial to those of the Upton Community lost in two World Wars

'Lest we forget' - this photograph records the dedication by Bishop Mercer in 1921.



The following local names are remembered on Upton's War Memorial –

1914 - 1918

James Anderton; James Benson; Archibold Buck; John Cash; Charles Coppack; George Crosby; Donald Cowie; Philip Evans; Laurence Frost; William Hancocks; Charles Harding; Francis Hodgson; William Joseph Hughes; Lewis Reginald Hughes; Thomas Knowles; Ernest Ley; Harry Lloyd; Roland Logan; Townshend Logan; Arthur Morris; Helenus Robertson; George Simpson; John Sturman; James Cecil Williams; John Williamson.

1939 - 1945

Samuel Brough; William E Farley; Stanley Formstone; William S Green; Roy C Hitchen; John B Hughes; Thomas Pleavin; Norman Rowlands; Percy E Williams.

A very thorough account of establishing Upton's War Memorial has been retained in the Upton War Memorial Committee Minute Book archived with the CRO – it is summarised here.

Although a memorial had already been created in the Parish Church, a public meeting was held in the Schoolroom on 21st March 1919 where it was decided to erect a village memorial. Sir John Frost of Upton Lawn, who was currently the Mayor of Chester, offered to donate land opposite the Wheatsheaf. However it was felt that this was not a central site. A site near Upton Cross was later preferred and Sir Philip Egerton was approached to donate land on the corner where it now stands. Sir Philip Egerton had lost two sons in the Great War and although they were not Upton men they were added to the Upton memorial in recognition of the gift of the site. The Celtic Cross of Darley Vale stone was the original design although varieties of cenotaph, obelisk and column were all actively debated before it was adopted. Mr Tyrer of Plas Newton had offered £100 and the community raised sufficient monies to fully complete the memorial as well as establishing a trust for its upkeep and a donation to the Royal Infirmary. The original idea was for the Parish Council to be the trustees but it was then decided to sign this over to the Charities Commission.

By the late 1930s, the site was neglected and the British Legion were offered an insufficient sum to reinstate it. However, after WW2, an envelope appeal funded the refurbishment and allowed for a further stone to add the names of those who fell in this conflict. This second dedication took place in 1948 and involved the military commanders of Western Command. By 1957 the growth of the village and the resulting traffic required road improvements. Warringtons, who were developing the land behind the memorial, agreed to allocate some land so that it could be moved back to where it now stands. In 1997 the County Council carried out a major refurbishment of the memorial and site and the 1922 Trust was wound up.

Remembrance of post-WW2 military conflict

The only Upton road name commemorating a lost military life is Moorhouse Close. *'Lt. Anthony Moorhouse died heroically during operations in Suez 1956'*

Community activities and experiences during WW2

Many local people were members of one or more of the voluntary Civil Defence organisations – whether uniformed or not. Others were involved in either 'digging for victory' or 'cottage industry production' or in 'raising funds' or in 'blood donations' all for the war activities. 'The WI Book' was written shortly after the end of the war and records some of the extensive local involvement. The following pages record two of the formal group photographs with lists of names.



The ARP outside St.Mary's village school in 1940.

From left to right

Back row - J G Kirkland; F Smith; G Woodworth; A R Brockley; C L Jeffery; A H Martin; S Wilson; C Bennett; W J Scarff; R E Oney

3rd row - W Jones; W H Gregg; C H Moors; W O Hughes; W S Reynolds; S K Thompson; Capt. R L Sadler; W Hird-Jones; C Smith

2nd row - Insp. Crosby; P C Wakefield; N E Mills; S Moore; F R Derry; A Halliwell; F G Clarke; A C Phillips; J H Moss; G H Reading; A Hirst; H Griffiths, Insp Foley

Front Row - J G Williams; F W Hooper; E Bancroft; H D Bell; W Paul; A J Warner; E T Wilson; J E Owen; F Stanley; F L Odel

The work of the A.R.P. (Air-Raid Precaution) started many months before the outbreak of war. Classes were held in the village school, and many adults were instructed and trained in various branches of First Aid including methods of dealing with gas warfare. When war was declared, the Men's Institute at the village crossroads became H.Q. for a mobile First Aid unit. This was under the direction of Mr. Chew, who organised A.R.P. work for Chester and Tarvin Rural District Council and for Hoole Urban District Council.

This mobile unit consisted of a fully-equipped travelling van. About sixty men and women from the village staffed it via a rota. These consisted of nurses, ambulance men, light rescue squads, messengers and drivers, all supported by a doctor attached to the section. Whenever a call came through from the Central Control at Hoole, our mobile First Aid unit was ready to help. When the main buildings of the Barrowmore Sanatorium received a direct hit from a bomb in 1941, causing many casualties, the Upton unit was the first on the scene.



Civil Defence Personnel 1942 comprising several organisations such as the Red Cross

from l to r (no definition of abbreviations offered – since none known)

back row - Parker(FAP) Sadler(M) Swaisland(MD) Denning(FAP) Smith(FAP) Hugh Pratt(FAP)

3rd row - Jim Harrison(FAP) Parry(MD) Harrop(FAP) Marchant(MD) Smith(FAP) Sutton(FAP) Cresswell(FAP) Leales?(FAP) Davis(FAP) Lightfoot(FAP)

2nd row - Chimes?(FAP) Oswald(MN) Collins(MN) Boughly?(MN) Griffiths(MN) Woodcock(AD) Dandy(AD) Bradbury(AD) Fruan?(MN) Braham?(MN) Wilson(Tele) Cassady(FAP)

front row - A.Chimes?(MN) Pearson(ML) Musgrave(AL) Rev.TOCEast(FAP) Dr.Whitlaw (i/c Mobile Unit) Samuel(GL) Pat Clay(TN) Matthews(TN) Lloyd(DL) J.Davies(DAL) Lilian Pratt(AD) EADavies(MN)

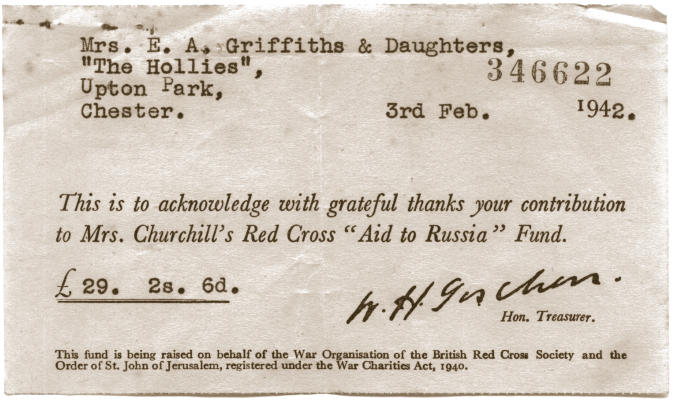
In January 1941, Mr Hugh K Frost J.P., presented a mobile canteen to the A.R.P. section. Staffed by Upton helpers, this canteen served throughout the war,

including service in the Liverpool blitz. After its wartime duties, in May 1945, it was presented to the City of Chester Cadet Welfare Committee. When the war ended, the Upton A.R.P. unit was thanked by Mr. Herbert Morrison for all its valuable work.

In August 1939, a branch of the Women's Voluntary Service (W.V.S.) was formed in Upton by Mrs. Epton. Their first task was to make preparations for dealing with the evacuation of schoolchildren from Liverpool. The Golf Club House was taken over as a school. W.V.S. members made over one hundred straw palliasses, then set to work to clean and clothe the children. Homes were found for them all among the inhabitants of Upton, and some of these children became so attached to their war-time homes and foster-parents, that they remained in Upton after the war was over and a few of them became officially adopted.

Many members of the W.V.S. were also doing A.R.P. and Red Cross work. From the day the Moston Military Hospital opened, Upton W.V.S. supplied voluntary staff to assist with meals seven days per week. Some members worked in the Hospital library, and when an outbreak of 'flu' occurred, voluntary staff were supplied to help in wards and kitchens. The W.V.S. made over 160 camouflage nets in preparation for D-Day. The Village Hall was used during the day for this task – becoming a canteen and leisure centre during the evenings (see also page 116).

A Voluntary Aid Committee was also formed, composed of members of the Parish Council, the Women's Institute and the W.V.S. Every Christmas each local person serving in the Forces received a parcel of food, knitted comforts and money. The knitting party made over 5000 garments in six years for the Services and for children from occupied countries.



Mrs. E. A. Griffiths & Daughters,
"The Hollies",
Upton Park,
Chester.

346622

3rd Feb. 1942.

This is to acknowledge with grateful thanks your contribution to Mrs. Churchill's Red Cross "Aid to Russia" Fund.

£ 29. 2s. 6d.

W. H. Gaskell.
Hon. Treasurer.

This fund is being raised on behalf of the War Organisation of the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, registered under the War Charities Act, 1940.

At the end of the war, Lady Reading wrote personally to Mrs Epton, as W.V.S. leader in Upton, to thank the group for all their war work, and to congratulate them on their wonderful effort.

Mrs. Griffiths received a personally signed letter from Clementine Churchill and the receipt, shown here, for her collection effort during the war. The National Savings Group was formed in June 1940 and had collected £56,887 by its cessation in July 1946. During Victory Week in April 1943, £13,000 was raised in Upton, more than five times the target figure. Children bought Savings stamps and most of the community was involved in fund raising.

Air Raids

Air raids were expected in WW1 and by 1916 emergency measures required a significant reduction in Upton's gas lamp street lighting from nearly 40 to only 5 with reduced hours. At this time no air raids actually reached our area but by WW2 it was a different story. Many air raid shelters were built but only one – on Demage Lane – is still known to exist today.

Several bomb drops are remembered. One fell on the Golf Course by the 9th Tee and the following extract is from the resident of 114 Upton Drive writing the next day – 27 April 1941

Last night the sirens went at 10.30pm as we were returning home so we hurried back picking up a strange man to shelter in our house because the raid was so bad. We also called for the lady next door and she came in. We just had time to put up the blackout, light the fire and the next we knew the house came in. It was over before we knew what had happened and all we were thankful for was that we were all safe and sound. The four of us spent the night in the scullery with no light but the gas fire on and never did the hours seem so long. The all-clear went at 2 a.m. and we had to wait until 5 a.m. to see the damage in daylight. A quarter of an hour after the bomb dropped the warden came and told us the crater was 30 foot deep and 50 foot across and was by the fence on the golf course by the railway lines. When we did see the damage it was heartbreaking but we set to and got to work. Ours is the worst in 20 - 30 houses. We can't sleep in the house it isn't safe. We got the windows boarded up and the demolition squad put tarpolein over the roof. I'm afraid that if we get anymore gunfire the lot will come down. We did order the sweep for May 12th but we don't need him since the lot came down.

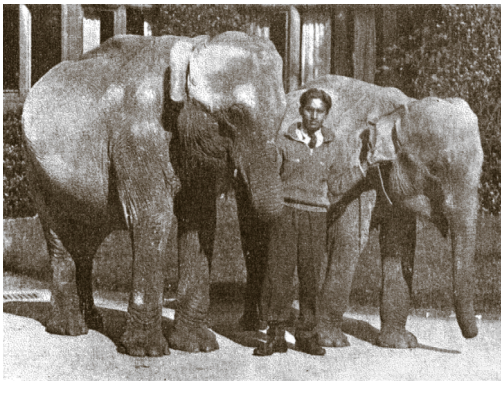
One bomb caused a breach of the canal and on another occasion a run of three bombs landed in the fields of Demage Farm. Had a fourth bomb been dropped it could have been a direct hit on a fuel reserve but in practice the three bombs only succeeded in splattering the cows in mud. Sheila Hooper recalls a direct hit on a house in the Moston area near the Moston Garage.

Village Hall use during WW2

With so many billeted soldiers in the area, the Village Hall served to provide some of their evening entertainment. Dances were held and many soldiers attended including Americans and other nationalities. During the day, the hall was used to make camouflage nets and it is understood that considerable local voluntary effort was employed. During autumn, local people had the opportunity to bring in their local stewed fruit for the canning facility that was on offer. There were a fair number of fruit trees in the area and this facility was heavily used at 1p a can.

Elephants displaced by the war given zoo sanctuary

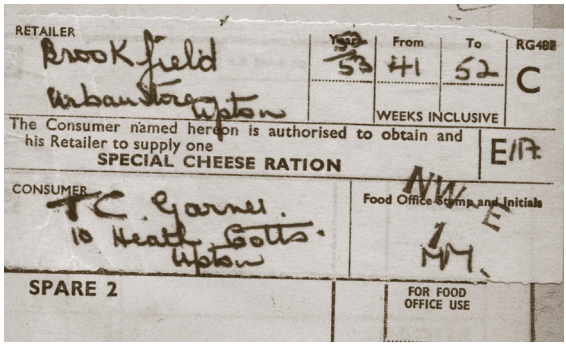
At the outbreak of WW2, two Asian cow elephants, Molly and Manniken, were part of Dourley's Tropical Express Revue - a German-Argentinian concern - travelling around Europe. The elephants became stranded in Northampton and were offered to the Government for work in the forests. The Forestry Commission's rules made no provision for the employment of elephants and their plight came to the attention of Ralph Marshall, a theatrical agent. George Mottershead agreed to them joining his zoo and they were transported to Chester by train. Locals recall them being walked through Upton to the zoo accompanied by their Singhalese mahout, Khanadas Karunadasa. Sadly, Manniken was in poor condition and died shortly after her arrival. Post-war, anti-tank blocks and pill boxes were used to construct a new elephant house and many locals recall their childhood rides on Molly (see page 273).



The aftermath

Rationing continued into the 1950s. A ration book – deposited with the Local History Group – records that T C Garner was entitled to a special cheese ration.

In 1951, a party of German visitors was present at an Upton Parish Council general meeting to study our local Government *'in action'*.


RETAILER
Brook Field
Urban Storage
Upton
Year 53
From 41
To 52
RG48
C
WEEKS INCLUSIVE
The Consumer named hereon is authorised to obtain and his Retailer to supply one
SPECIAL CHEESE RATION
E/17
CONSUMER
T.C. Garner.
10 Heath Gotts.
Upton
Food Office Stamp and Initials
NW E
1
MM.
SPARE 2
FOR FOOD OFFICE USE