

By Mike
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THE phone-in to our newsroom came out of the blue and from a long way away. New Jersey, USA, as 92-year-old Jim Bain pointed out, is five hours behind Worcester, UK, so he hoped he'd got the timing right.

Bang on the button, Jim and thanks for the call. Because yours is an uplifting tale.

It goes back to the Second World War and a part of local history that has rather disappeared into the mists of time. From 1943 until 1945 the Blackmore Park area of Malvern was the site of two American Army hospitals. The buildings were named after the hospital units that occupied them and they began life as the 19th General Hospital and the 65th General Hospital.

American service personnel, both officers and men, became a familiar sight in the hillside town and on their arrival the staff of the 19th General Hospital were invited to a civic reception in the Winter Gardens by Malvern Council. After God Save the King, the Winter Gardens orchestra burst into a rendition of the Star Spangled Banner.

The building of the single storey hospitals was all part of the forward planning for D-Day and while before the summer of 1944 there was a steady stream of casualties, after the Allied invasion the numbers increased dramatically. Up to 300 patients at once would arrive by hospital train at Great Malvern station and as many as 50 operations a day were carried out by the six operating teams in the surgical units. By the time Jim Bain was stretchered off a train in March, 1945, the 19th had become the 93rd General Hospital.

Jim had originally enrolled in US Army specialised training programme while still at school. After finishing high school he was sent to New York to begin a two year intensive program in engineering. Unfortunately due to high casualties in the North Africa Campaign the army needed replacement infantry and he was sent for basic infantry training.

In February 1944 Jim was assigned to the 87th Infantry Division where he trained as a machine gunner and in December arrived at Le Havre to become involved in the Battle of the Bulge. After 72 days of fierce fighting and many losses, Jim's unit reached the German border where it was to secure the town of Auw.

He recalled: "We were dug in using the ruins of a blown out farmhouse. The whole top of the building was missing. I don't know whose artillery had done it, but we were fighting through the rubble and attempting to capture a pillbox. I stood and ran for a better position. All of



TOGETHER: Jim Bain with his wife Mickey. Inset, Mickey takes to two wheels

Malvern holds fond memories for GI Jim



TAKING AIM: Jim Bain (left) with gunner's assistant Ray Denton

a sudden, the next thing I knew my rifle flew out of my hand and I was falling to the ground. Everything seemed to happen in slow motion. I had been shot.

"I think I was hit by shells from an automatic German weapon because as I was running, all of a sudden in my mind's eye, I saw splinters of my rifle flying through the air and falling into the snow. Several bullets hit my rifle but only one went into my left forearm. The bullet hit my bone and opened up quite a hole as it exited. I crawled and walked

a couple of hundred yard back until I saw a medic, who pointed me to the aid station."

Because of the nature of his injuries Jim had his first plane ride. He flew by C47 to England along with about twenty stretcher cases and a number of casualties that could sit up. He then travelled by train to the 93rd in Malvern. After a few weeks at the hospital he was relieved to find that amputation of his feet would be not be necessary. He said: "All I know is I was really lucky. If my feet

had been black instead of grey, I would have lost them."

He remembers evenings on the ward could be depressing: "At night, at any given time, with 20 to 30 wounded men in the ward, you could hear crying. Men were coming to terms with personal tragedy. The young man in the cot next to me was one of them. He had been a commercial artist before the war. He lost his right forearm in combat. He wouldn't talk to anybody.

"At some point during our stay, he overheard the doctors telling me that my arm was repairable and I would not be losing it. I had got lucky. With that he rolled over and congratulated me and we started talking. He told me how devastated he was now his career was ruined and how prospects of his future looked pretty bleak."

Jim asked the wounded soldier if he would sketch him. He added: "That young man did a sketch of me with his left hand

that I could not believe. It was exactly what I looked like. I think it even amazed him. It turned out to be the best therapy he could have had."

After spending a short time at a nearby convalescent hospital Jim was released to return home in May 1945 and sailed from Southampton on the hospital ship SS Argentina.

He added: "The residents of Malvern and the surrounding area contributed greatly to our return to normality. I can remember many elderly folk stopping us on the sidewalks to wish us well and say thanks. I am sure that most of the generation who could remember that time are gone, but maybe some of the younger folks will remember us.

"I've been back to Malvern with my wife Mickey to share the fond memories I have of that place and time and I am a great admirer of the town and its citizens for all the help they gave us wounded GIs."