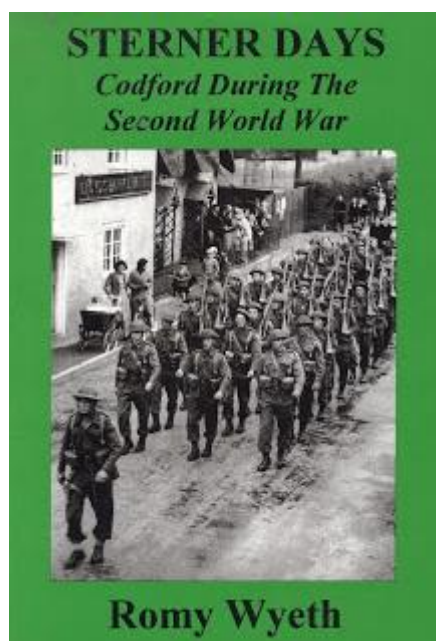


Codford



STERNER DAYS, CODFORD DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Romy Wyeth



An extract

This is a fragmented portrait of one Wiltshire village during an extraordinary period of history, a period still within living memory. The storytellers allow us to glimpse, through their eyes and their voices, one of the most important chapters in the annals of world history.

In 1939 the first troops since the First World War arrived in Codford, the vanguard of a massive military build-up which was to culminate with Operation Overlord, and the invasion of Europe five years later.

The area east of the road from Codford St. Peter to Manor Farm was the location of the main camp in the village during the Second World War. Another camp was situated between Little Wood and the church at Codford St. Mary.

The 6th Guards Armoured Brigade was at Codford between 1941 and 1943. They were given a fond welcome by the people of Codford and are remembered as being the most popular troops ever to have been stationed in the village. When they left they were succeeded by the 11th Armoured Division who remained only a short while.

When American troops arrived in September 1943 they met with wet conditions underfoot, similar to those of the First World War when the village was nicknamed 'Codford On The Mud'. It was this which prompted the GIs to build their very own 'Burma Road', to combat the morass which appeared whenever the erratic English climate chose to open the heavens and flood the landscape.

Codford was home for the U.S. 3rd Armoured Division, 32nd Armoured Regiment, the Maintenance Battalion and Supplies Battalion, while Stockton House, nearby, saw the soldiers of Combat Command 'A', the 45th Medical Battalion and Trains Headquarters. These men vacated Wiltshire for France during the early part of July 1944 but more Americans arrived for a temporary stay afterwards.

A Polish Corps, under the command of General Anders, was in camp at Codford after the Second World War. Stockton House was used as their headquarters. The Poles were at Codford until demobilisation and some of them later took up permanent residence in the village.

This book, *Sterner Days*, focuses attention on the military and civilian aspects of village life during the war years, through the memories of those who lived or were based in and around Codford.

Some fought for King and Country, while others worked at essential services, growing the food, tending the livestock and keeping the lines of communication open; preparing to defend their homeland in case of invasion. Women learned to make do and mend, to eke out the rations and to take up the duties of the men away in combat. Codford children found themselves surrounded by soldiers and military activity; childhood, for them, became something of a great adventure.

In 1945 the Second World War ended. It had been a time of upheaval and change, a period after which nothing and no one remained untouched by the experience. Those who remember those tumultuous times when the forces of evil were poised across the England Channel and the world was in flames, are dwindling voices. They made history, and their stories evoke another time, a time when Britain stood alone and refused to surrender.

In 1941 Winston Churchill said "Do not let us speak of darker days; let us rather speak of sterner days. These are not dark days; these are great days - the greatest our country has ever lived; and we must all thank God that we have been allowed, each of us according to our stations, to play a part in making these days memorable in the history of our race."

Sterner Days, Codford During The Second World War.

Romy Wyeth.

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