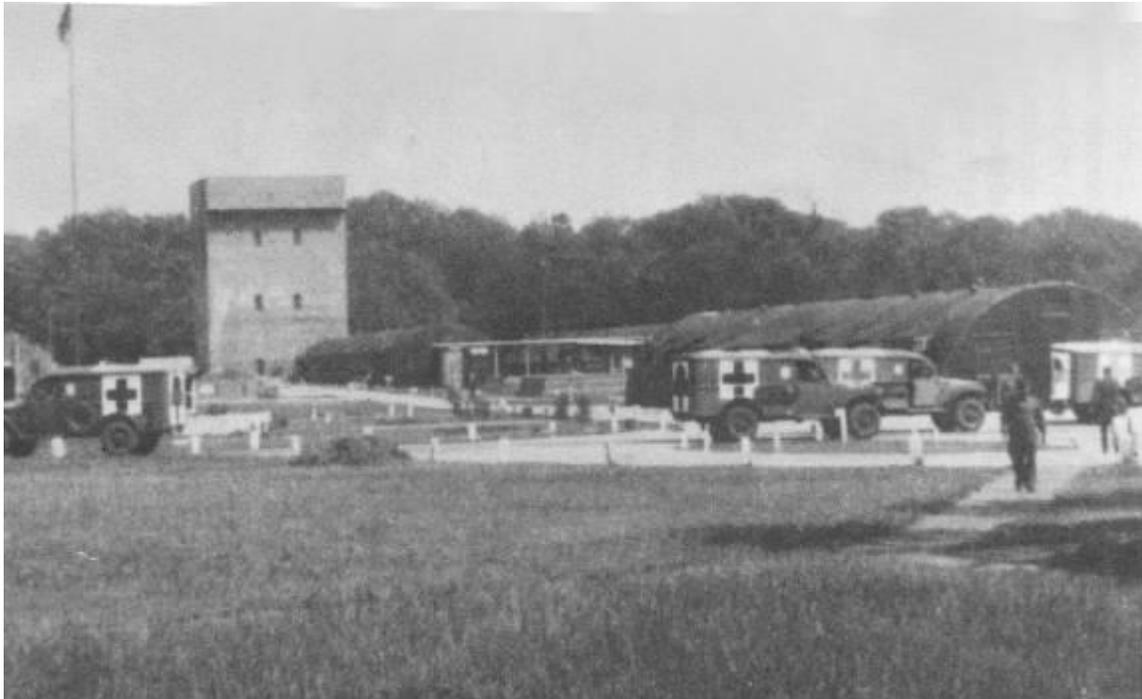


# THE AMERICAN ARMY AIR FORCE HOSPITAL AT WYMONDHAM COLLEGE



*A general view of the hospital, looking east towards the water tower.*

The American Army Air Force Hospital on whose site Wymondham College now stands, was one of a considerable number set up to care for the casualties of that organisation. The hospital at Wymondham served the personnel of fifteen heavy bomber bases, a fighter group and affiliated service organisations such as Engineer, Quarter-master and Ordnance troops, (estimated total; 60,000 troops). Additionally, 2099 patients were evacuated to the hospital by hospital trains in 1944 and 1155 in 1945.

## How it all began.

Between the wars, in the grounds of Morley Hall was the Mid-Norfolk Golf Course. When war came, the Golf Links were first of all taken over for agricultural purposes. Then, an emergency hospital, designed by the Ministry of Works and built under the Lend Lease arrangement, was constructed. On completion the hospital was handed over to the Americans - the 77th Station Hospital, which provided all medical care at station hospital level for ground and flying personnel of the Eighth Air Force in the vicinity.



Most of the work of the Surgical Service was carried out on casualties from the bomb wings received at high altitude on missions over France, Holland, Norway and Germany. Sixty percent of casualties resulted from flak, fifteen percent from cannon shell fragments and the rest from crashes and accidents. The general age of patients was 18-30 years and almost all admissions were severe. Almost eighty percent of wounds involved upper and lower extremities, fifteen percent the head and a small number the chest and abdomen, "a silent commendation for the armor protective clothing worn by fliers",



*Col. R. B. Warriner,  
Executive Officer of the 231st.  
with some patients and staff  
in the background*

## The 231st. Station Hospital

From March 6th 1944, the 77th became a Reconditioning Centre for Enlisted men and the 231st moved from Redgrave Park, Suffolk to Morley.

### The 231st Station Hospital

In the 'Barrack Bag', a history of the unit edited by Bert Outlaw, there is a marvelous story about the arrival of their Commanding Officer at Camp Atterbury, Indiana where they were in training.

"In September an old man arrived at Atterbury. Hobbling feebly up to the Headquarters of the 73rd - the lucky, lucky 73rd - he announced himself as Colonel Linwood M. Gable ...

"Sergeant, said the old man, "Get me a coke!" He took another look at the outfit. Thoughtfully he added, "and five aspirins!"

Colonel Gabel had served in the First World War and was wounded at the Battle of the Somme. His Executive Officer, Lt Colonel R. B. Warriner had worked in Europe between the wars and in 1936 had been within fifty feet of Hitler, who was alighting from a train.

The motto of the hospital was, "The patient comes first". From March 1944 it acted as a receiving hospital for Air Force casualties rushed direct from operational missions over Europe. After the invasion of France, ground forces battle casualties were evacuated there.

## 'D' Day 6th. June and the hospital trains

On May 29th 1944, a telephone call was received stating that within 24 hours the hospital would have to expand from 834 beds to 1254. It was not known where the beds would come from! Within the required period, 1st Lt. Berkowitz had obtained the beds and staff had set them up in ward tents.



*Ward tents erected to cope with mass admissions.*

A feature of the admission procedure was the maximum use of all personnel. Members of a Laundry

Platoon stationed at the hospital as well as convalescent patients were used as stretcher bearers. Though without training, their consideration for the patient's welfare proved to be the most important factor.

Vehicles were borrowed from nearby units to handle the evacuation and Military Police from a Detachment stationed at the hospital acted as road guards on the route. Local people recall ambulances queuing up down Golf Links Road.

This was in anticipation of the expected casualties from the 'D' Day landings. On July 12th Medical Supply personnel prepared 200 stretchers in two hours ready for the first mass admission of battle casualties from a hospital train at Wymondham Station.

Eight hospital trainloads, 2099 patients, were admitted to the hospital in 1944. Careful plans were made in advance with the hospital Admissions Officer boarding the train at Cambridge and recording any necessary information about each patient before assigning them to a ward.



*Every American Hospital has a Prisoner of War Camp attached to it. Here the tents of the camp are seen behind the baseball pitch.*

## After the War

The hospital closed at midnight on June 8th 1945. After the war it was first of all a transit camp for the Royal Norfolk Regiment and then two Training Colleges. When the Colleges closed, Sir Lincoln Ralphs had the inspired idea of turning the site into a boarding school for Norfolk County Council. In 1991 this became a Grant-Maintained School.

Extracts from Major General Kepner's Commendation

"Of the professional skill and efficiency displayed by the hospital there can be no doubt...

The quality of service rendered by the hospital and the manner in which it was performed has contributed greatly to the morale and effectiveness of this division...

*Compiled by Anne Hoare from the Hospital Records in the National Archives, Washington and the help of those quoted in the text. The photographs come from the collections of the late Lt. Colonel R.B. Warriner and Master Sgt. Dan Cavanaugh (retired).*

***Please contact the Public Relations secretary at Wymondham College:  
Tel 44 (0)1953 609000 (4312) for an appointment to visit.***