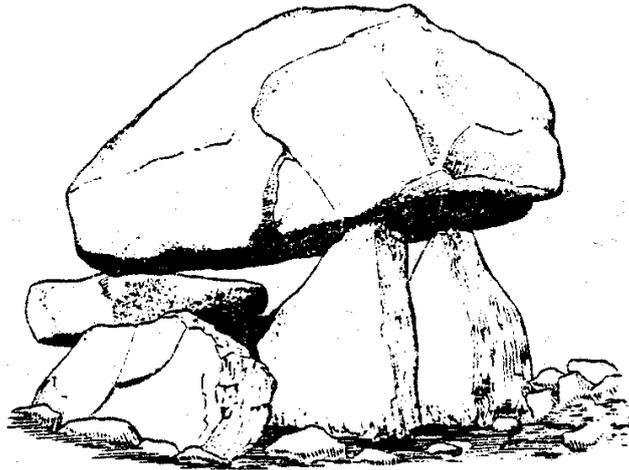


ULSTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



Survey Report: No. 20

**Survey of Derry More WW II Army Base,
County Armagh
UAS/09/05**

In association with



Liz McShane and George Rutherford

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Derry More World War II Army Base

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Summary

1.1 Background

The Derrymore estate (now owned by the National Trust) became a military camp during World War II. Most of the structures built at this time have been demolished and the ground re-landscaped. A concrete road and some earthworks remain.

1.2 Survey

A plan was produced and report written.

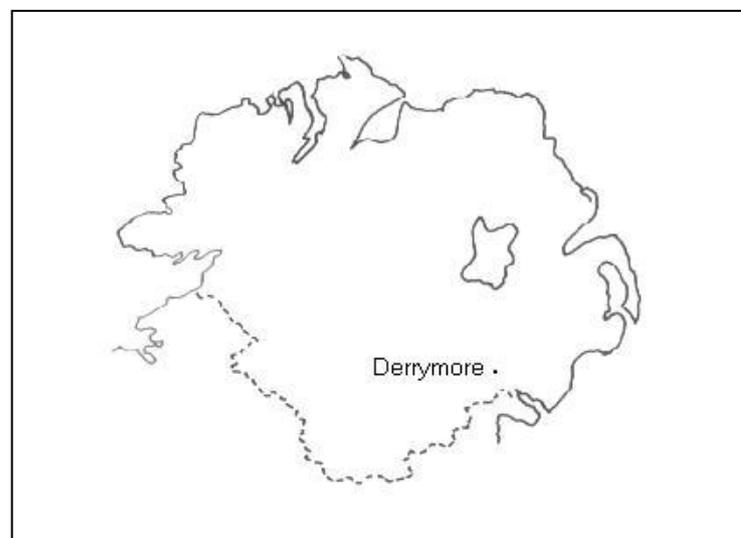


Fig. 1 Location of Derrymore within Ulster

2 Introduction

2.1 Background

In consultation with Malachy Conway, Archaeological Officer with the National Trust, it was decided that the UAS Survey Group would record remains of the World War II military camp in the grounds of Derrymore House, Bessbrook, County Armagh.

2.2 Objectives

To produce accurate plan and profile drawings of the site and carry out a photographic survey, compile this information into a report, and submit copies to National Trust and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency: Built Heritage (NIEA).

2.3 Location Irish Grid Reference J057280

The site is in the south of County Armagh, 2½ km. north of Camlough Mountain, 2½ km north-west of Newry, and beside the village of Bessbrook. It is in the townland of Derry More and situated in parkland between Derrymore House and Derrymore Road (B112), which leads from Bessbrook to the A25, the main road travelling west from Newry. Altitude is around 65 m. above Mean Sea Level Belfast.

2.4 Site Description

The site is an area of parkland lying east of Derrymore House and west of a public road. The ground is now used for grazing and grass cropping. The ground slopes gently down from the house for about 100 metres, then more steeply for another 40m, where it becomes almost level. After approximately another 30m a post and wire fence delimits a screen of tree planting along the B112. A concrete road enters the site from the south-east running in a north-westerly direction and turns right to meet the public road. From this turn a series of rectangular platforms continues north-west on the level ground towards the high stone wall of the garden. These platforms are cut by the post and wire fence and amongst the trees become depressions as the ground rises, their terminals clearly defined by angular cuts. To the west of the steep slope is a fairly level area reputedly used for Nissen huts. Further north is a copse of mature deciduous trees, now fenced off with post and wire. The canteen is said to have been here.

2.5 Neighbouring monuments

In the same townland and 400 metres from our survey area is a rath (SMR 026:007), which has been incorporated into the garden, suitably "improved". The entrance has a rustic arch, opposite is a throne of unhewn boulders, the banks support flowerbeds and the interior was laid out as a tennis court. A little closer is the Quaker Meeting House, built 1864. Beyond the demesne, but still in Derry More townland, were two other enclosures, (SMR 026:008) now destroyed, and (SMR 026:018) which exists as a crop mark. The Camlough River is rich in Industrial Heritage (much of it still flourishing in the 1940s) and

this sustained the building of the “model village” of Bessbrook from 1845. The Dublin-Belfast railway produced the admired “Egyptian Arch” and the Craigmore viaduct, and the electric tramway linked Bessbrook to Newry in 1885 along the Camlough River valley.

2.6 History

Derrymore House (listed building no. HB 16/23/010) was built 1776-1787 for Isaac Corry and sold by him in 1810 to Lt. Col. Young. A newspaper advertisement of 1820 states “... The Demesne is judiciously planted with about 140,000 trees ...” In 1828 the Youngs sold to Edward Smyth of Newry. The property was bought by Richardson (linen manufacturer in 1859 and remained in this family until 1952 when all 110 acres (44.5 hectares) were acquired by the National Trust. During World War II the property was occupied by units of the British Army and Nissen huts were built in the grounds. They were in Bessbrook for several years and the day after they moved out Americans arrived. The Americans were in occupation from November 1943 to August 1944. (See discussion.)

2.7 Previous archaeological surveys

NIEA does not hold any information on Derry More in their Defense (sic) Heritage database. As far as is known the site of the army base at Derrymore has not previously been surveyed.

2.8 Cartographic Evidence

OS Edition of 1909, 6 Inches to 1 Mile, Sheet 25 (Trace 6)

A narrow strip is fenced alongside the Derrymore Road. It closes to meet the roadside wall on either side of the gate, but no representation of track or road is shown entering the grounds. There are no vegetation symbols within the strip, which is unsurprising considering the narrowness of the strip. A gate lodge is the only other structure shown on our survey site (in the north-east of our plan).

OSNI 1971, 1: 10 000, Sheet 266

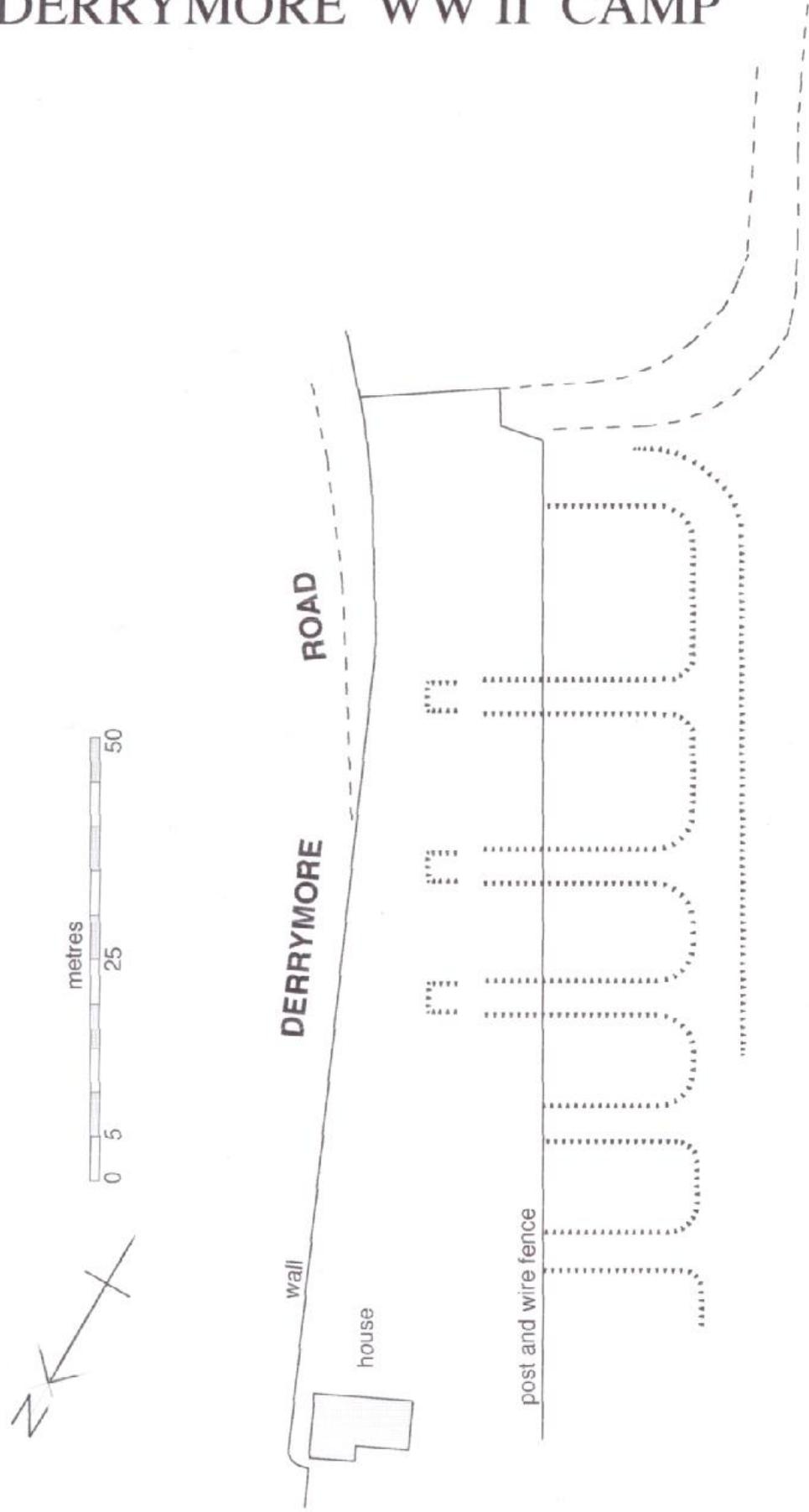
A fence is shown in its present position delimiting a wide roadside strip, but no vegetation symbols appear within the area. The road entering the grounds is shown in its present

position. No other structures are shown on our survey site except the gate lodge.



Fig. 2 Location of survey area within Derrymore estate (*National Trust*).

DERRYMORE WW II CAMP



2.9 Aerial Photographs

(1) St. Joseph JN 017 taken 08.07.52 (See fig. 5). The bend in the concrete road is shown clearly. Four rectangular bases (concrete?) show clearly on the higher ground and another protrudes from the mature trees (kitchen area?). The area of our survey is obscured by shadow but a rectangular pattern can be discerned on the grass.

(2) OSNI AP F4749 taken 09.09.91. There are structures along the main avenue to Derrymore House on both sides - these have since been removed by the National Trust and the ground landscaped. The four bases on higher ground are less distinct and appear merged, as a single rectangle. Poor resolution in the photograph prevents any analysis of the survey area north of the concrete road.

2.10 Archiving

Copies of this report are to be deposited with the Hon. Archivist UAS and NIEA.

2.11 Credits and Acknowledgements

The Survey was led by Harry Welsh and other members of the team were June Welsh, William Dunlop, Colin and Hilary Boyd, Anne MacDermott, Ian Gillespie, Yvonne Griffiths, George Rutherford, Ken Pullin, and Liz McShane.

UAS are grateful to Mr Malachy Conway, Archaeological Officer of the National Trust, for background data on the site, references to the United States Army in Northern Ireland in wartime and for choosing the site, and to Rosemary Mulholland of the Bessbrook Heritage Group for guiding our members around the immediate area and giving information about the locality, and also Joe Mulvenna for advising on AutoCAD.

3 Survey

3.1 Methodology

A plan was produced using the Society's Leica Sprinter 100 and drawn on site to a scale of 1:500. Later, a taped survey was used to tie this to Ordnance Survey detail.



Fig. 4. Concrete road approaching at centre, trees sheltering kitchen area at extreme right, platforms on left. (RIMG0001)

3.2 Research

Background material on the US Army in Northern Ireland in World War II was obtained from local history accounts and internet sites. Information on Nissen huts was available from an internet site.

3.3 Photographic Archive

A photographic record of the site and surroundings was made with a digital camera and a record sheet compiled (See Appendix 1). Results were saved to a compact disc.

3.4 Features surveyed

We were informed that a concrete road, still in use, was constructed by the army during World War II. We therefore surveyed the northern part including the turn towards the B112. North of this turn a series of rectangular “hut platforms” was identified and surveyed.

3.5 Recent Features

A modern post and wire fence runs through the survey area delimiting a strip 18m. to 26m. wide alongside the B112. This strip is planted with deciduous trees.

3.6 Omissions

On higher ground towards the House is a group of mature trees, which we were told once sheltered the camp kitchens. No remains of the structure were discerned. On the same level, to the south, an air photograph taken 1952 (St. Joseph JN 017) shows more rectangular platforms. The platforms are now disfigured and grass-covered. They were not included in the present survey.



Fig. 5. Aerial Photograph looking northeast (*St. Josephs JN 071*).

4 Discussion

4.1

The “hut platforms” have a width of about 3.4 m. The Wikipedia entry on Nissen huts states that they were produced in three standard spans, the smallest of which was 4.9 m. The platforms in our survey are narrow and long. There is no break between their surfaces and the roadway that serves them, giving the appearance of a road system incorporating several cul-de-sacs. See fig. 3. (As the ground rises towards the road each terminates in a sharply rectangular cutting.)

4.2

In some places cobble-sized stones showed through the grass, usually at the top of a slope. This creates a suspicion that the complex was formed from stone imported from a quarry.



Fig. 6. Stretch of concrete road. Derrymore House at left (RIMG0005(2)).

4.3 US Army in Derry More

American troops were based in Northern Ireland for approximately nine months in 1943–44. In May 1944 most of



Fig. 7. Looking north towards walled garden - "hut platforms" on right (RIMG0004).



Fig. 8 Looking SW towards disfigured platforms, Camlough Mountain in the distance (RIMG0008).

them went to France to take part in the D Day Normandy landings and the subsequent push into Germany.

Part of this deployment of troops were a number of Quartermaster regiments. The main Quartermaster Depot Q-111 was established in Belfast with 10 subordinate depots in Derrymore, Antrim, Crossgar, Finaghy, Larne, Moneymore, Siskinore, Ballymena, Balmoral and Ballywillwill.

Derrymore hosted the US Army Quartermaster Depot Q111-D from 23rd November 1943 to August 1944.

Derrymore first had British troops, recalled by a John McDonald of Bessbrook as a child of 6. He recalled Nissen Huts being built in the grounds of Derrymore House on what had been a nine-hole golf course. The Pond Field was dug up to provide practice in trench warfare. "On the day the British troops moved out, the Americans moved in. The Yanks ...were very patient with us kids when we hung around and gave us chocolate and chewing gum, we had the odd ride in a jeep. We naturally got involved in some mischief, it was not uncommon for them to hear the engine of a jeep or lorry start up when they were left unattended. We enjoyed the subsequent chase across the Pond Field. "

A story written by Mr FG Quinn, a resident of Bessbrook during the War, was submitted to the BBC WW2 People's War Archive in November 2004.

"A large number of American Army troops were stationed in Bessbrook...They were billeted in the Town Hall, the Technical School and the Orange Hall, the officers were housed at Mount Caulfield, the home of Sarah Richardson. They constructed a large camp at Derramore. They had Nissan type huts, footpaths and roadways and also had a PX Stores where they stored all their equipment, food, and gear. They also had plenty of cigarettes, chocolate and even nylon stockings, which they sometimes gave to their girlfriends in the village.

I was working in the Post Office and delivered telegrams to the Townhall. ...I became friendly with the young soldiers and one

especially whose name was George Earl Cooper. He was about 20 years old. He was a Cherokee Indian, another was a Mexican called Chicko.

In May 1944 they were confined behind barbed wire in the pond field and my friend told me that they were soon leaving. The Normandy landings started early in the morning of 6th June 1944 and my friends were some of the first to land at Omaha Beach. Many were killed. After some hold up at the beachhead cliffs they broke out and were soon on their way through France to Germany.

“Top Sgt George Earl Cooper survived the War and came to Bessbrook to see me before he returned to America. It was both exciting and sad times especially remembering all the young men and women who lost their lives in WW2.”



Fig. 9 Afro-American GIs, *Crown Copyright*

A contribution to the *Newry Journal* written by Anthony Carroll in August 2005 recounted a story told to him by a Councillor

Billy McCaigue. It describes encounters between local people and black American soldiers stationed in Bessbrook in 1943-44.

“One afternoon one of the soldiers came into the shop in the village and the young lady asked, ‘Sir, what can I get you?’ The soldier wondered who she was talking to as he was the only person in the shop. ‘I’m sorry,’ he said ‘It’s just that no one has ever called me ‘Sir’ before. Being black I’ve been called many names but never ‘Sir’”.

The story goes on to describe other black soldiers coming to the shop, getting on well with the assistant and hearing about a dance at the weekend. When they turned up to go to it, they were refused entry because ‘this RBI dance is only for Blackmen.’

This anecdote reflects similar experiences in Northern Ireland and Britain, where local people treated black US soldiers as equal to their white colleagues, in a way that contrasted with their experience of segregation back home and indeed in the army itself.

4.4 US Army in Moneymore

Troops from US Army Quartermaster Q 111-M were stationed at Springhill House, Moneymore for the same time period as the troops in Bessbrook. Mrs Mina Lennox-Conyngham in her book on Springhill *An Old Ulster House* (2005) refers to this.

“The first regiments to arrive were British (Berkshire Yeomanry, 119th Regiment Royal Artillery) and then American forces in 1942. 112th Engineers Company 1942, Company L 519th Quartermaster Regiment from Dec 1943, Company D 544th Oct 43 – 27th Dec 43, and 3991st Quartermaster Truck Company (Colored) 23 Dec 43 – 18th May 44.

She describes the US soldiers playing baseball and carving their names on trees. Occasional religious services were held in the court yard for different denominations. She referred to the black American soldiers as a separate group. “Last of all the

occupying troops came the Negro Americans, but these only used the Tower Hill Camp.”

All had left by December 1944, the house was de-requisitioned, although finally German prisoners of war were located in the Tower Hill, employed by the Government in tidying the camp and cutting up the big trees.

There are recollections by local people of the US troops in the Moneymore area. One from Lorna Niven, (whose father was the local village school teacher) tells of a friendship between her parents and a black American soldier stationed at Springhill. His name was Brent (or Brett) Johnson, but he had the nickname Mud, he was regularly invited to their home and played games of whist and shared meals with them. After the War he sent Christmas cards to the family. (Personal Interview Nov. 2009)

4.5 Racial Segregation in the US army

It is apparent that the Negro American soldiers in Springhill were segregated in their own regiment (3991st Quartermaster Truck Company Colored) and housed separately and away from the white soldiers. This is very likely to have been the pattern in Derrymore also.

A website on black American servicemen in World War II, “WW I through WW II” gives the context and history of black troops in the US Army.

Pre 1939, the US Army segregated African American servicemen into all-black units, the Navy used them only for menial labour and service tasks. In 1939 larger numbers were admitted and to absorb them, the army formed several new all-black units primarily in service and technical forces. The 47th and 48th Quartermaster Regiments formed in 1939.

The American troops that came to Northern Ireland in 1943 were Quartermaster Regiments and so included black soldiers.

Although in Sept. 1940, President Roosevelt signed a Selective Training and Service Act which contained an anti-discrimination clause and proposed a quota of 10% black soldiers, segregated troops remained official US Army policy throughout WWII.

“Deeply entrenched negative racial attitudes, prevalent among much of the white American population, including many of the top military and civilian leaders, made it very difficult for blacks to serve in the military. African American servicemen suffered numerous indignities and received little respect from white troops and civilians alike.

“Their sojourn in Europe during WWII made many black servicemen aware that the racial attitudes, so common among white Americans, did not prevail everywhere else. ...this knowledge ... made many black veterans unwilling to submit quietly to continuing racial discrimination once they returned to the US.

“In July 1945 President Harry Truman signed an order to end segregation in the US military.”

The view is that European wartime experience affected black veterans' reactions to discrimination at home and this, with other factors such as the growing importance of the black vote, contributed to the eventual campaign for racial equality in the late 1950's and early 1960's. The anecdotal evidence of local people in wartime Northern Ireland welcoming black and white American troops equally, could be said to have played a small part in this.

5. Recommendations for further work

Locate all available war-time and post-war air photographs of the area and reconstruct a more complete picture of the physical imprint of the military on Bessbrook in that period.

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PHOTOGRAPH RECORD FORM

Site: Derrymore WWII Army Base

Date: 25th July 2009

Make and Model of Camera: Ricoh Caplio G600 Wide

Cameraman: Colin Boyd

Frame No.	Viewed from	Details
RIMG001	N	Looking S along line of hut bases at foot of hill
RIMG002	NW	Looking at end of hut bases above
RIMG003	W	A few workers
RIMG004(2)	NW	Corner of site access road
RIMG0005(2)	SE	Old fence posts on access road
RIMG0006(2)	W	Single hut base beside road, S of above posts (or hard standing)
RIMG0007(2)	E	Possible bases at S end of road
RIMG0008(2)	N	End of site road; Camlough Road 40m. beyond
RIMG0009(2)	S	Section of site
RIMG00010(2)	SW	Section of site; hut bases at left and right of frame 6
RIMG0011	E	Original entrance from Bessbrook Road
RIMG0012	NE	Remains of old gateposts at 11
RIMG0013	NW	Field on W of estate road ("black" huts)
RIMG0014	NW	Hut bases along fence (13)
RIMG0015	S	Looking towards hut bases at bend in estate road ["kitchen copse" at centre]
RIMG0016	NW	Site of 2 possible hard standing on E side of road
RIMG0017	SW	Towards site of bases at 1
	SE	Towards site of bases at 15
	W	Across site of bases at 15 towards main gate
RIMG0030	N	As seen