

In rural East Anglia, the ideal site for bombing crews to prepare for raids on Germany, newly constructed airbases had a huge impact on the flat and largely agricultural landscape and on rural communities. In a short three year span the 8th Air Force occupied nearly seventy airfields in the region bringing around 3,000 men and women to each of these places.

Their presence affected the lives of those living in the villages surrounding the airbases, including the children who played on the airfields, the women who cooked, cleaned and cared for the servicemen, the Land Girls working on the surrounding fields and the families who welcomed the servicemen into their homes.

The impact of WW2 in the region can still be felt today, and is quite possibly the largest social and cultural change to have ever happened here.

Very few GIs knew that they were being sent from America to Britain. When they arrived in East Anglia, sometimes in the middle of the night and often with no idea of where they were, they awoke to new sights, sounds and smells. Many GIs recalled the revolting stench of kippers, the taste of meat pies and the unfamiliar texture of porridge.

To help the GIs to adjust to life in Britain the War Department produced a pamphlet called *Instructions for American Servicemen in Britain*. It contained useful information about popular British customs and slang words. It gave strict advice never to criticise the King or Queen, to show off, and in general stressed the need to get along with the British in order to defeat Hitler.

Not many of the Americans were prepared for the weather conditions in Britain and the problem of mud is something that features heavily in diaries and letters of the time. During the period that the Americans were stationed in Britain, a quarter of all days were non-operational because of the appalling weather. William R Sauerland stated:

*Mud, mud and still more mud – that's England in the fall*

Living conditions on base in general were described as 'rugged'. Many servicemen faced water shortages, and in the early days having a toilet block within walking distance was considered a luxury. In the winters, little coke fuelled stoves provided the often draughty and almost always cold nissen huts with a little warmth.

Fatalities were high, and during the four years the Americans were stationed in the region 26,000 airmen took off from airbases never to return. Dealing with loss became part of everyday life on the airbase and often close friendships between the GIs were torn apart. Jim McMahon recalls:

*When Fred was killed, the enlisted men in our crew went down to the flight line and stayed out long after dark waiting for him to return. It was a strange thing to do because we knew he was dead."*





'Salvo' mascot of the 322nd Bomb Group boarding for mission! (FRE 1184)



B-17 of the 390th flying over the English landscape. (FRE 1631)



Bikes were favourite form of transport for the GIs. FOLD 3 Image



Sergeant Fred Dioquardo of the 303rd Bomb Group stoking the stove. (FRE 943)



Havener and Wroneski of the 344th bomb group lounging about on base. May 1944. (FRE 7125)



Captain H Carey, Flight Surgeon of the 356th Fighter Group, with his dog 'Don'. (FRE 6074)



A line of boots belonging to personnel of the 44th Bomb Group. (FRE 3452)



Loading Bombs onto a B-17 the caption reads 'at a base in England' (Fold 3 Archive)



A determined GI overcomes barriers by making a make-shift iron. (Fold 3 Archive)





*Corporal Edward J. Bowman of the 303rd Bomb Group cleaning his muddy boots. (FRE 1049)*



*Thurleigh, 1942. A bomb crew of the 306th wave to Picture Post Girls in front of a B-17. (FRE 1162)*



*Roscoe Ann mascot of the 390th. Roscoe had free roam of the airbase at Parham – here she can be seen sitting on ammunition boxes. (FRE 1560)*



*Three B-24 Liberators of the 458th Bomb Group fly in formation over countryside. Image Courtesy of the American Air Museum. FRE 67211*



*Farmers at work near an 8th USAAF base during WW2. Image Courtesy of the American Air Museum. FRE6539*



*A B-17 Flying Fortress (serial number 42-10706) nicknamed "Miss Bea Havin'" of the 388th Bomb Group flies over countryside., Image Courtesy of the American Air Museum. FRE 6468*



*A farmer at work with a traction engine, photographed by an airman of the 44th Bomb Group. Image courtesy of the American Air Museum. FRE7089*



*Personnel of the 303rd Bomb Group visit the local water pump. (FRE 1002)*



*farmers wife herds a flock of ducks past Master Sergeant JF Hallmaker and ground personnel of the 91st Bomb Group, whilst cleaning the guns on a B-17 Flying Fortress nicknamed "Mary Lou". Image courtesy of the American Air Museum. FRE3546*



*Sunset over East Wretham, home of the 359th Fighter Group. Image Courtesy of the American Air Museum. FRE 6180.*



*Farmers collect hay at Andrewsfield whilst personnel of the 322nd Bomb Group work on a B-26 Marauder (serial number 41-31814) nicknamed "Bag Of Bolts". Image courtesy of the American Air Museum. FRE7089*