



ARMY

TALKS FOR THE

**EIGHTH
AIR FORCE**

American Uncles-



HEADQUARTERS EIGHTH AIR FORCE

Office of the Commanding General

APO 634

12 June 1945

To All Personnel of the Eighth Air Force :

When the pioneers of the Eighth Air Force began their operations from bases in Great Britain they were setting in motion a vast experiment in air strategy which has now become world famous. But even earlier, our men who arrived in Britain more than three years ago were launching another experiment no less significant. This Island has been more than a base for our operations; it has been a home to several hundred thousand Americans.

It is certainly true that without the whole-hearted cooperation of the British people we could not have delivered the weight of our attacks nearly as soon or as effectively as we did. The military assistance we have received has been matched by the spontaneous and unofficial help we have been given by numberless individuals, communities and organizations. In their hospitality they have given us of their best, and often at considerable personal sacrifice. We shall not forget the kindness, either of the men and women, the villages and towns, of which Mr. Howard writes, or of the many organizations such as the British Council, the English-Speaking Union, the Ministry of Information, the Kinsman Bureau, and, of course, the Red Cross.

This story of Mr. Howard's captures for us the unforgettable human side of the Eighth Air Force's stay in Britain. It paints a vivid picture which will recall many similar memories for each of us. It is a fine expression of the common faith of our two peoples, and will be read, I hope, not only by all of us in the Eighth, but also by our families back home.



W. E. KEPNER,
Maj. General USA, Commanding.

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"AMERICAN UNCLES"

THIS is the quiet ploughland of old England, one of the most peaceful areas on earth, which was used to win the greatest war in human history. From the midst of these wheatlands and meadows, from among the centuries-old cottages, with their straw thatch and oak beams, the huge bomber fleets were airborne which pulped the heart of Hitler's Reich.

In these Eastern Counties the Pilgrim Fathers gathered and sailed away to escape tyranny and build a new world. To these Eastern Counties their twentieth-century Pilgrim Sons returned to free the old world from tyranny.

Few of us in East Anglia have been to the United States. But the United States have been to us. We saw them come in our hour of desperate need— young men in tens of thousands, nonchalant, gay, confident and courageous.

Now they are going home again, though many will stay behind for

ever, a part of that free earth for which they gave their lives. And as an Englishman, one of a race which is said to be cold and proud, I would like to try and tell you very humbly something of what all of us who have been privileged to meet the men of the Eighth Air Force feel and shall feel for ever in our hearts about Americans.

* * * *

The American story began for us long before the first Flying Fortresses or Liberators, the Lightnings, or the Thunderbolts, swept through the English skies. It began one spring afternoon five years ago when clearly and steadily throughout two days and two nights we heard in East Anglia the sound of far-distant explosions. They were dumps being blown up by the remnants of the British Army before it was driven into the sea at Dunkirk.

We expected the Nazis to attempt an invasion within a few weeks. Men, women and children, all of us,

Mr. Peter Howard, writer of this issue of Eighth Air Force Army Talks, is a farmer in East Anglia. He is the author of several wartime best sellers and was for many years a columnist for a London newspaper. He is also a distinguished athlete, having captained the All-England Rugby Football team and been a member of the English team which won the 1939 World Bob-sleigh Championship. His wife is Doris Metaxa, the international tennis star.

meant to fight. Yet we had nothing to fight with. In the area with which I was directly concerned, and on a likely line of advance if an invasion was attempted, we had seven rifles and 120 rounds of ammunition to defend a front 11 miles long and four miles deep.

Each night as my wife and I tucked the kids into bed, they would say "Mummy, Daddy, are the Germans coming over now?" We would look at each other over their heads and make some joke as an answer.

Every evening after the day's work men and women met together all over the Eastern Counties and concocted home-made bombs, out of tar, gas and cotton-wool. We had to light the cotton-wool with a match and then throw the contrivance underneath an advancing tank in the hopes that it would catch fire.

We sweated away digging slit trenches and hiding places in the undergrowth beside all roads leading from the coast, so the Nazis would not see us before we hurled our home-made bombs at them.

We arranged meeting places in the woods if our countryside was overrun.

We hid food in places where the Germans could not find it.

We planned to set fire to our haystacks and burn everything of use to the enemy in the line of his advance.

All night long we kept watch on the church towers, at cross-roads and at every important point in case the Nazis began to drop on us from the skies by parachute.

Then one evening all the able-bodied men were called to the

village hall. On the floor were large wooden boxes. From them each one of us was handed a rifle and 20 rounds of ammunition. For the first time since Dunkirk we felt we had something to hit back with if they came. Our hearts sang a new song. It is a feeling I shall remember all my days.

These rifles were the first weapons to reach the Eastern Counties from the U.S.A. Lend-Lease may have been a subject of political controversy in the United States. Over here it was as if a friend had suddenly put a weapon in our hands at a time when our backs were to the wall and we had nothing but faith left to us.

* * * *

All night long and every night the Nazi planes droned overhead on their way to London. For many months they were almost unopposed. We of the Eastern Counties slept on the ground floor and in the cupboard under the stairs, if we had one. Experience showed this was the safest place if the house was blitzed.

The German aircraft engines gave forth an eerie two-noted sound. If a glimmer of light showed from the ground they dropped bombs. Sometimes by mistake they bombed the reflection of the moon cast back to them from the lakes and waters of the fenlands.

The huge fires they started in London threw a rosy light on to the eastern horizon.

By day sneak enemy raiders roamed the skies and fled away again often unmolested. It was in those far-off days that the first preparations were made in the Eastern Counties for these vast airfields which presently were to

launch the death strokes upon Hitler's Reich.

We in Britain built and equipped the bases for the U.S. Eighth Air Force as part of our share of Lend-Lease in reverse. Many of them were placed on the finest farming land in Britain. Parts of the Eastern Counties of England grow heavier crops per acre than any other land in the world. And the surveyors sent by the Air Ministry to pick the sites of the bases chose land which was as level as possible. But the level land is often the best farming land, easiest to cultivate with horse and tractor, and the best farmers occupy it.

Farmers whose families had owned and farmed the same land for many generations found themselves suddenly dispossessed. They

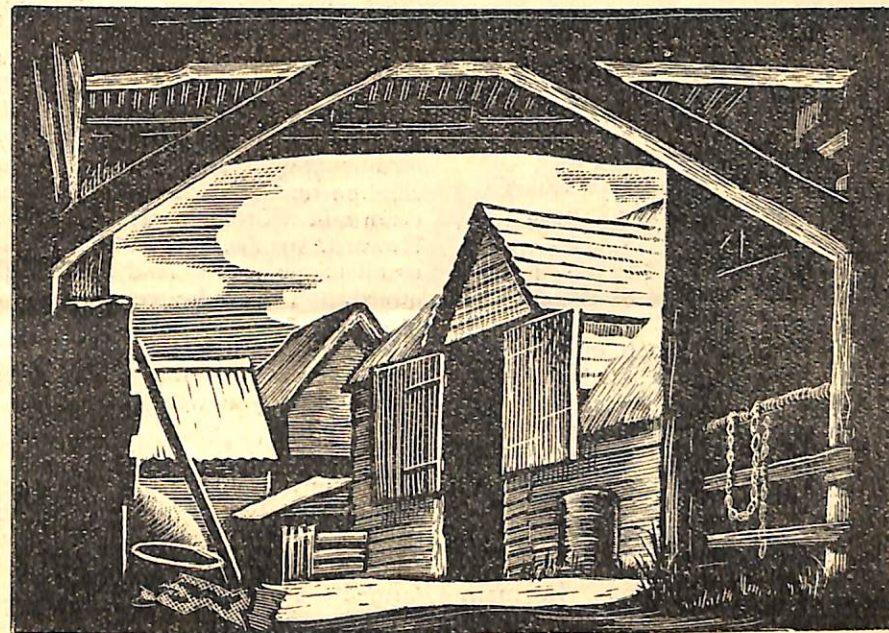
had to wait as long as three or four years for compensation from the Government, and when it came it was far below the market value of their holdings. But there was no complaint.

Bulldozers came smashing down the hedges and ditches.

Trees were hauled out root and all by huge steam engines, and if they snapped in the process their remains were blown up behind them.

Mountains of sand were carried and dumped in the middle of growing crops. Train loads of rubble from the blitzed areas of London were used to lay the foundations.

Tens of thousands of British workmen toiled through the wet and cold of winter weather, working long hours overtime, seven days a





week, mixing the concrete, digging the drains, laying the runways and building huts and hangars.

Soon acres of concrete lay where the acres of corn had stretched before. As dusk fell, we used to drive around the deserted perimeter tracks in a car with sporting guns pointing out of the windows and shoot at the partridges as they came home to rest.

The first American arrivals, pioneers of the Eighth Air Force, technical advisors to help the British workmen in the final layout of buildings and tracks, stared at us in amazement as, looking like a load of gangsters, we rolled by in the gloaming.

* * * *

Soon the first big bombers from the States, Liberators and Fortresses, began to arrive in the Eastern Counties. Then came the fighters. We who remembered the days when we called each other out of doors to look if we saw six friendly aircraft in the sky, watched them come sailing in by tens and fifties.

Village communities numbering only a few hundred people found themselves with several thousand Americans on their doorstep, in their shops and pubs, and, very soon, in their homes. In many parts of the Eastern Counties the

American population since the arrival of the Eighth Air Force, has far outnumbered the British.

It was not easy at first. You found some of us cold and glum and angular, I guess, with our reserved ways and quiet, superior glances. And then there were the children—how they followed you in their scores and hundreds, clambering over your trucks and jeeps, like birds that follow the plough, with their eternal request for “Gum, chum.”

You must have found them a pest. But you never showed it. And the kids loved you one and all.

One day a jeep arrived at my farmhouse with four grinning urchins clinging on the back of it. One of them said with much pride: “Mr. Howard, my Yank uncle has brought us all to see you.” And a wee girl added, “Yes, we’re coming every day in our jeep.”

You were all uncles to the children of the Eastern Counties and, like most uncles, you were heroes too.

* * * *

So many problems of adjustment were met on both sides with a grain of humour and an ounce of tact. In our parts old Mr. Hollox had farmed his land for fifty years. In pre-war days, if one boy from the

village walked over a corner of his field, old Hollox knew of it by nightfall. Now a huge perimeter track runs through the centre of his fields and a ditch which had been dug to carry most of the water off his fields was used by the base as a trash dump. Poor old Hollox used to go and look at this dump each day with a countenance so woebegone that his very beard seemed to whimper in the wind.

About this time he got in trouble with the local War Agricultural Committee for refusing to grow

feet from the village. He asked advice of a neighbour who mischievously said: “Oh, go to old Hollox and tell him that you have never seen land so well farmed as the land around here—and that it reflects great credit on the fine work of the War Agricultural Committee.”

The unwary commander did this. And old Hollox nearly dropped dead with rage.

That very night the commander got lost in the fields trying to find his way back to base in the inky darkness. At last, around midnight,



certain crops. This gave him another chip on his shoulder.

The commander of the air base wished to build a cinder track across one of old Hollox’s beet fields so that the men could find their way home at night with dry

he came to a farmhouse door and knocked to ask the way. It opened with a jerk. There in the doorway stood old Hollox, wearing a night-shirt and nightcap, holding a lamp in one hand and a gun in the other.

When next day the commander

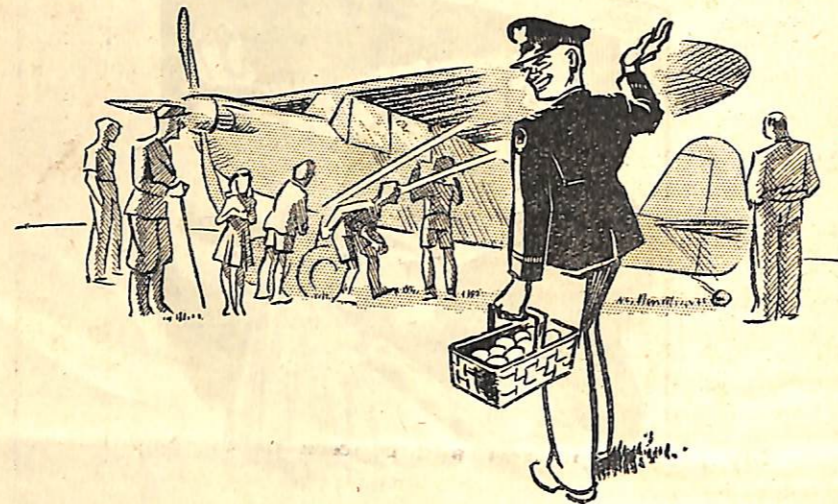
of the airfield told this adventure to the neighbor who had given him the mischievous advice, the neighbor said: "I expect you found it hard to understand his broad Suffolk accent." "Not at all," said the commander. "Mr. Hollox made his meaning plain enough."

Just the same, a few days later matters were arranged and old Hollox telephoned that they could build their cinder track.

* * * * *
So many pictures and memories crowd my mind as I think of those war years in the Eighth Air Force country.

appear and land for temporary repairs—several times a day and always in the same fields. After about twenty minutes it would take off again, surrounded and cheered by swarms of admiring children.

The mystery was solved when it was discovered that the pilot always took the occasion of his breakdown to buy as many shell-eggs as the farmer on whose land he descended would sell him. It was an enterprising scheme to replenish the commissariat of one of the Eighth Air Force bases.



Soon after the Americans began to arrive in the Eastern Counties a Piper Cub aircraft which was always having engine trouble became a well-known feature in the life of many villages. Day after day it would

How to do the laundry for these thousands of men from across the seas suddenly planted in the midst of us? From the American angle I guess it must have seemed that all the villagers charged high prices

MESSAGE FROM THE UNITED STATES AMBASSADOR

Modern warfare may bring few unmixed benefits, but one happy outcome of the present war will surely be the personal friendship and understanding between many thousands of men and women of the United States and Great Britain. Behind the great events which make the headlines there have been countless unknown acts of Allied co-operation which give strength and meaning to the official bonds between governments.

The coming of the Eighth Air Force to this country and the service you have rendered, and the genuine welcome given by the communities in which you have been stationed, are outstanding ties of friendship for the future. Those of you who have been guests in this country for many months will be able to give your families and others at home a clearer picture of the men and women of Britain, and of the gallant part they have played in this war. We have all come to understand the common heritage of our two democracies.

My personal interest and concern in the Eighth Air Force has permitted me to appreciate the great contribution you have made in the war against Germany. I know the men and women of the Eighth will always be gratefully remembered in the British Isles.

JOHN GILBERT WINANT.

and did not do the job too well at that.

But from the British point of view, the problem was two-fold—soapy and social. Our soap ration was barely adequate to keep our own hands clean when we came off the land at the end of our day's work. And socially, taking in washing was not considered "quite the thing" by the ladies of the Eastern Counties. It's a silly prejudice, but then human nature is funny stuff.

However, in village after village the word was passed around. "I'll do it if Mrs. King will" and "What's good enough for Mrs. Game is good enough for me"—so the talk ran.

Now almost every village home in the Eastern Counties has a share in keeping the shirts, socks and hankies of the Eighth Air Force clean, mended and ironed. Maybe all of us haven't done the job just the way you'd have it done by Mother back home. But we've done our very best. And taking in the washing has produced quite a social revolution in the village life of the Eastern Counties.

* * * *

Many of our villages are without a cinema, a club or even a library. But every community planned and plotted some way to make our guests feel at home. In one village there is an old building dating back from the 15th century. The ground floor has bars on the windows. It was used by the old feudal lords as a prison.

The village ladies hired this place, painted it themselves, furnished it and decorated it. They turned it into a Welcome Club for the Eighth Air Force.

Every night volunteers served

refreshments, and dances, debates, card-parties and other entertainments were organized.

Few American airmen who spent their evenings at this Welcome Club making friends with the village people, could guess that they were being entertained in an old jail, which no doubt had been used to imprison many of those who were unlucky enough not to book a passage on the *Mayflower* and got left behind.

Clubs of this kind were opened and run by volunteers all over the Eastern Counties. Above all, thousands of homes were opened to the men of the Eighth.

What did the men of the Eighth Air Force think of the Eastern Counties? Not too badly, we hope. At any rate, many thousands of them married British girls in these years of endurance and victory.

* * * *

Britain's Home Guard, over two million strong, at first armed with pikes and cudgels, finally with some of the best weapons of modern warfare, drilling in the evenings and at week-ends, unpaid for their minimum of 40 hours a month of training, stood ready for four years to fight the enemy if he landed on these shores.

The Home Guard was originally enlisted to defend their own towns and villages, each man to stand and fight and die if need be amid the streets and houses that he knew and loved.

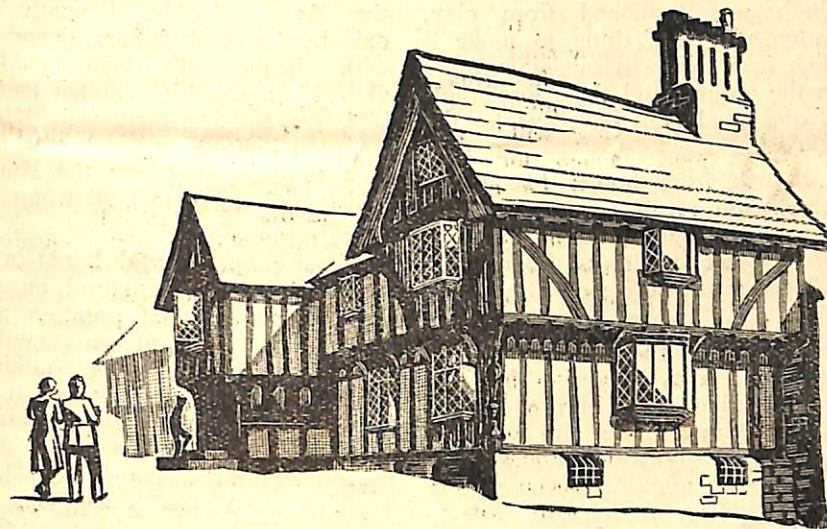
When the big bases for the Eighth Air Force began to spring up like monster mushrooms all over the Eastern Counties, the question arose of who should defend them against possible enemy airborne attack. In most places the military High Com-

mand delegated this duty to the Home Guard, by then a highly skilled and heavily armed body of trained men.

Plans were made to muster in agreed positions and protect the bases at any hour of day or night

left their traces of habit and language behind them.

As the plough breaks the soil between the vast air bases, alive and throbbing with the amazing machinery of the modern age, it turns up ancient pottery, Roman coins,



that the "call-out" was given. So the village warriors of the Eastern Counties were prepared to leave their own homes and villages unguarded and to fight to the death in defense of the Eighth Air Force bases if the Nazi paratroops had fallen upon us from the skies.

* * * *

The Eastern Counties have a sense of eternal values about them. They are the great invasion belt of British history. Across these counties have swept Danes, Dutch, Normans, Romans and many more, and have

weapons of flint and iron, fossils, skulls, and bones.

When the Germans dropped their bombs around East Anglia it was often found that the old buildings stood the shock better than modern constructions of brick and stone.

Maybe the old buildings of the Eastern Counties have a bit of give in them. They swayed at the bomb blast and stuck together, while more modern buildings stayed rigid and disintegrated.

These old buildings have endured for centuries. Their bones are of

oak, mostly old ships' timbers which sailed the seas in the days of John Cabot and Henry VII. The seamen used to exchange them with the farmers near the coast in return for victuals and supplies.

The flesh of the buildings, between the oak bones, is wattle and daub. Wattle is just bunches of hedge sticks bound together with withies. Daub was fashioned from clay, water and cows' dung to make it stick firm. It was mixed in holes in the ground and these forefathers of ours used their bare feet for the mixing.

It was from homes like these, which still stand around the air-bases of the Eighth, that the men and women set forth to board the *Mayflower* just over 300 years ago.

In those far-off days almost all the farmers in the Eastern Counties used to hold a Horkey. This was a celebration in the barn each year when farmers, men and villagers sat down together to break bread, sing hymns and songs, dance and thank God for the harvest.

So after the Pilgrim Fathers made their landfall in the West and in 1621 had gathered their first harvest safely in, with memories of the barns and villages of the Eastern Counties, now for ever left behind them, they held a Horkey.

That was the start of Thanksgiving. And while in America the festival of family and earth has been maintained and enriched, in England we have let it die out.

This good old custom was revived in our neighbourhood in honour of the Eighth Air Force. Last harvest in our four-hundred-year-old tithe barn, beneath Old Glory and the Union Jack, over a 150 guests sat

down to celebrate together. The officer commanding the base was there and several of the pilots and ground staff. There was the farmer and his wife and children, farm-workers and land-girls, the village blacksmith, the thatcher and the harvest hands.

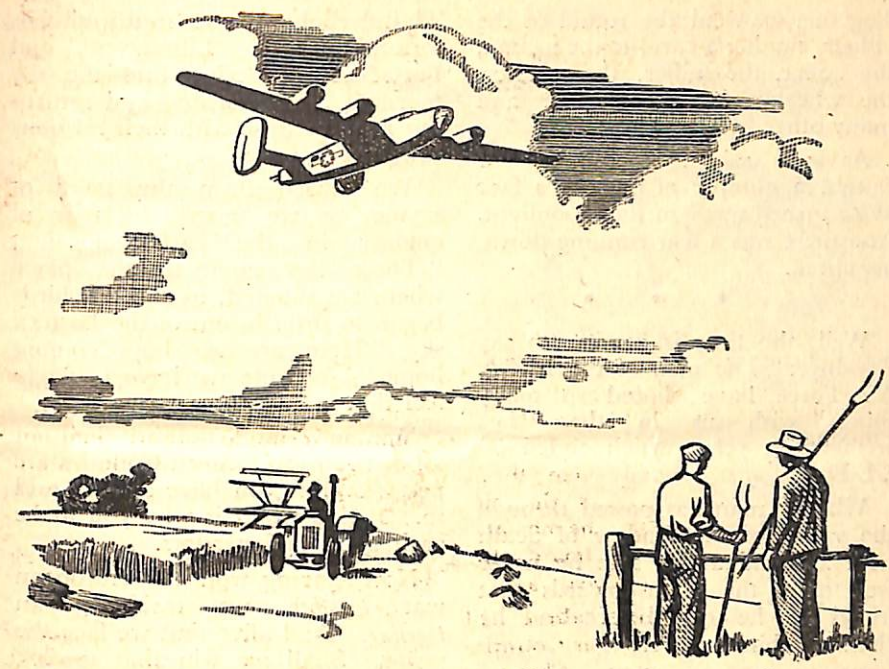
Outside the giant bombers rolled on like thunder in formation towards the Reich. Inside, beneath the oak beams and rafters decorated with sheaves of wheat, golden-globed mangolds and hedge-blossoms, sat free men, united in a common crusade against evil and able to enjoy together the simple faith which turns to God when the harvest is home.

We ate home-cured ham, bred, fattened, killed and cured on the farm, salad, mashed potatoes and apple fool. We sat on together until the late evening, talking, singing the old songs common to both sides of the Atlantic, hearing recitations from the blacksmith and from others in the village.

And one American said, as he went back to base: "My, I've thought of home for over a year now and this seems just like it to me."

* * * *

At Christmas time many of the Eighth Air Force bases put on shows which the children of the Eastern Counties will never forget. Jeeps and trucks scoured the villages. The young guests were mustered and transported to the bases in hundreds. There was a huge tree, decorations, games, a present for each guest, any amount of candy which the men at the base had saved specially from their rations, and above all, large quantities of ice-cream.



When the jeeps and trucks came back to the villages in the darkness, the children tumbled out of them with their eyes shining like stars and their cheeks red as holly-berries with excitement. "Look what our American uncles gave me," yelled one little shrimp of six, holding out a huge piece of sticky chocolate to her mother. "Oh, Mummy, it was wonderful," said a boy of four.

Remember that many of these children, growing up in the war years, had never known a Christmas like that before. They will think of American uncles for the rest of their lives whenever the candle-light falls softly on the dark green branches of the Christmas tree and parties and presents are in the air.

* * * *

On Christmas Eve, parties of villagers go carolling through the hamlets of the Eastern Counties as

their ancestors have done century upon century before them. Lanterns are not allowed in wartime because of the black-out regulations, but otherwise the traditional songs are the same. Last Christmas Eve we gathered outside a sixteenth-century Woolhall to sing the old favourite

"O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie.
Above thy deep and dreamless
sleep
The silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light;
The hopes and fears of all the
years
Are met in thee to-night."

Presently, around us in the darkness, we heard the shuffle of feet and the whispers of voices. Without comment, men of the Eighth Air Force joined up with us. Soon there were 15 or 20 Americans.

Together we went the round of the village, singing a carol to the parson, the baker, the miller, the saddler, the wheelwright, the builder and many other friends.

As we said "goodnight" I caught a glimpse of one lad's face as he turned away in the moonlight. And there was a tear running down his cheek.

* * * *

Well, the time is coming to say Goodbye. The men of the Eighth Air Force have shared so many things with us in these last tremendous years which ended on VE Day.

When a man has passed through the valley of the shadow of death with a friend at his side he never feels quite the same towards that friend as he did before and he cleaves to him for ever.

Our nation passed through the valley of the shadow of death and you came in your youth and strength and daring, in the majesty of your industrial might and power, you crossed 2,000 miles of ocean of your own free will to take that journey with us. How can we ever forget?

Every man in the Eighth Air Force has been an ambassador for his nation. And the job they have done in the building of new affection and understanding between our two democracies will live for ever in history.

You came to us in an hour when we were on the defensive with enemy planes in the sky above the Eastern Counties. You built up a strength so great that our minds could scarcely grasp the measure of planning and achievement as we saw those clouds of Mustangs and

Thunderbolts, those multitudinous formations of Liberators and Fortresses lumbering into the sky morning after morning and returning near to dusk with their missions complete.

We passed from the stage of saying, as we heard the roar of engines in the early morning, "There *they* go" to the place where we shouted, as the big birds began to drop in out of the Eastern sky, "Here are *our* boys coming home"—because we have come to feel that way about you.

You may have noticed that not all of us in the Eastern Counties are perfect. But you have seldom said so. Perhaps that is why you make such good ambassadors.

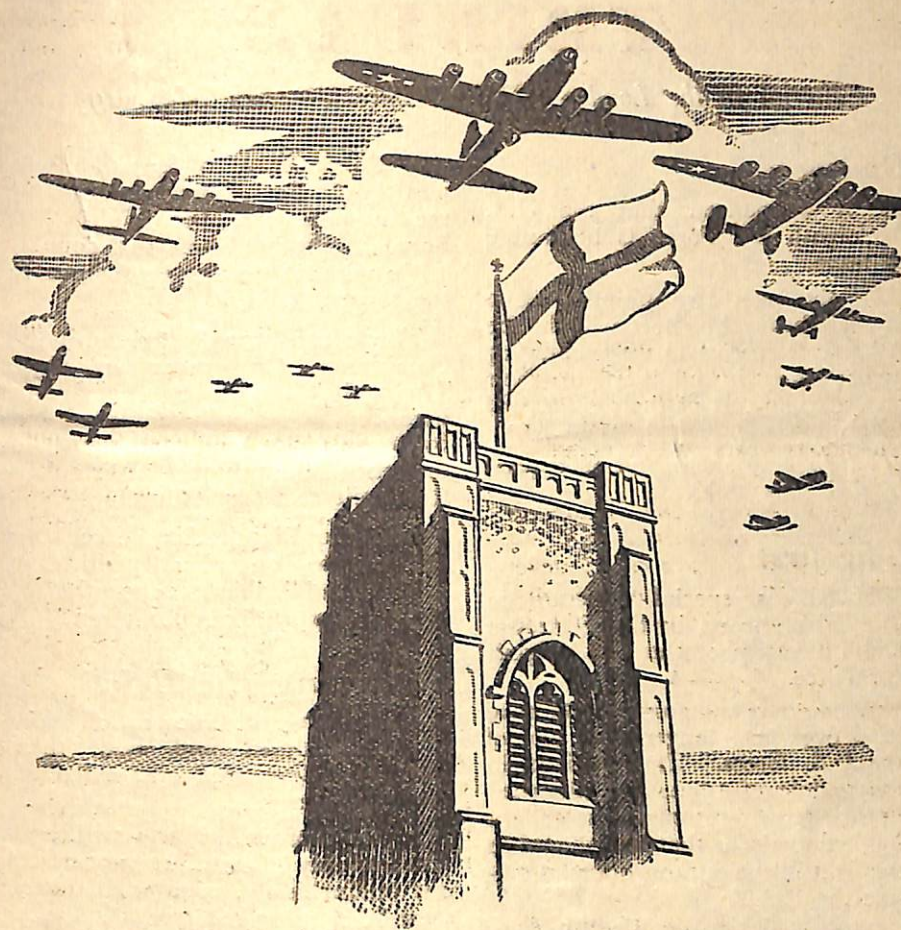
Now, having won the European war *together*, we tackle Japan *together*. And after that we face the peace. Shall we win that too?

Together we are bound to do it.

Plenty of people will try to separate us from each other in the years ahead, to stir up trouble between us, to get us spotlighting the faults in the other fellow while lightly skipping over our mistakes. But I do not think they will succeed.

A common language is not in itself enough to hold us together. It is just as easy, or even easier, to quarrel in one language as in two.

We have a heritage in common, also. But we have something more. As we of the Eastern Counties who have been privileged to live alongside the Eighth Air Force for the last months know full well, the ordinary men of our nations hold an idea in common. And an idea held in common will unite men of all nations, including our own.



Ours is the simple idea that men should be free to govern themselves—and that in order to be fit for this freedom they have to do, not what they are told, nor what they please, but as they should.

Some people call this idea "Democracy." It is, in fact, true democracy, though that noble name

is wrongly applied in many directions these days.

Yet this faith in true Democracy, held by the ordinary men and statesmen of our nations makes us like-minded, however much we may differ in detail.

And in this age of division, disunity and hate, the future goes to the like-minded.

TRIBUTE

London "Daily Express," 26th May, 1945.

Godspeed

IT is announced that the Eighth Air Force is to leave.

In the next two months of their heavy bombing Atlantic from east 40,000 men in crews. The rest follow by sea.

Farewell to them in their new tasks.

The first

THERE is special British hearts and Liberators Air Force.

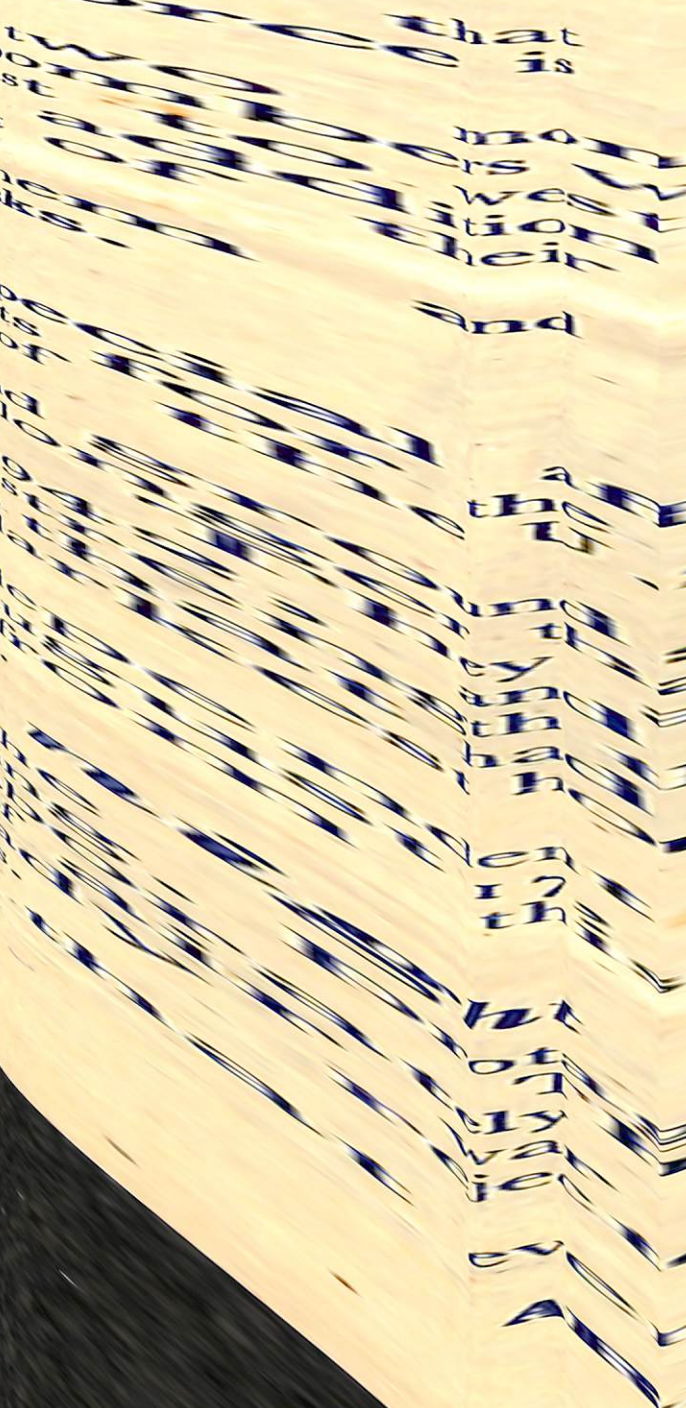
Their crews and been over here the U.S. forces, in the middle of Eagle Squadrons the fight in the side the R.A.F.

Their first mission was on they operated right to the end.

Day versus

THEY day were trained and equipped for this branch when it was already other belligerents.

Did you know



the U.S. beginning

the 2,000 will fly the carrying to their staffs will

Godspeed

ection in Fortresses 5. Eighth

staffs have in any of arrived in absorbed the gallant shared in rs along-

bombing 1942, and country

onists of ey were equipped at a time ed by the

in 1942

the whole future of day bombing was back for a moment in the melting-pot, and the Eighth Air Force might have left this country again without putting its theories to the test?

The controversy lasted until the Casablanca Conference in 1943. There, the issue of day versus night bombing was finally thrashed out by the air chiefs of each school of thought in the presence of President Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill.

And the Eighth Air Force were allowed to go ahead with the mighty and brilliant conception of air war mapped out for them.

Scourging the Reich

ALL the world knows how they went ahead and how their campaign developed and extended over all Germany.

It was thorough, it was swift and remorselessly efficient. It was carried out unflinchingly, even when losses were 60 or more bombers, each with a crew of 10, on a single raid.

The men of the Eighth Air Force believed in their mission, and the utter breakdown of the huge German war machine when the test came has proved how right they were.

The tribute and gratitude of the free world goes with the valiant Eighth and their brilliant commander, General Doolittle, as they cross the oceans again for new missions against Japan, the last enemy.