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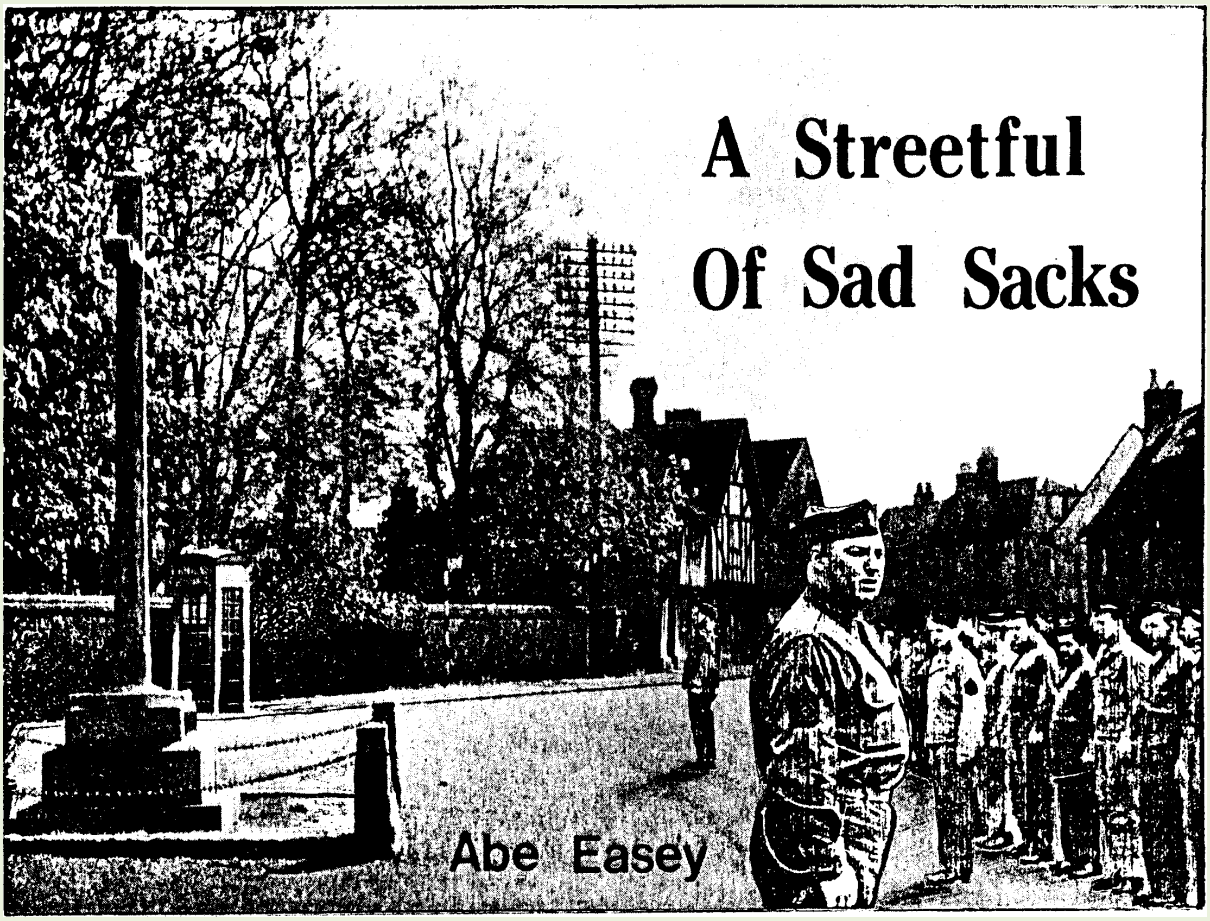
(There is a map of Sawston is HERE to assist with locations mentioned.)



(Examine this location in Google Street View.)

DURING THE SUMMER OF 1943 UNITS OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY AND ITS EIGHTH AIR FORCE MOVED INTO SAWSTON, WHEN THEY LEFT IN OCTOBER 1945, LIFE IN THE VILLAGE WAS NEVER

QUITE THE SAME AGAIN

The Sad Sack

An embodiment of the Army's lowest-rated born loser, George Baker's cartoon character made his name in World War Two as the hapless draftee who lost out in every conceivable military situation. Sergeant Baker's comic strip in the service magazine ***Yank,*** published on Sundays price 3d, depicted the Sack's confrontations with the perils and perplexities of wartime service life. In all his dealings - with fellow soldiers, top brass, foreign nationals, prostitutes and the rest of the world in general - the little private always came off second best. But he remained the Army's hero, a trusting soul whose own little world of dreamy optimism was constantly devastated by unforeseen disaster. His name derived from the drill sergeant's parade-square name for all new doughboys. To that redoubtable NCO all recruits were "sad sacks of shit."

Acknowledgements

The 66th Fighter Wing in Europe	*Karl H Houston and Newton W Carpenter*
Front and Center - Lest We Forget	*Lloyd 0 Olson*
Target Germany	*H M S O: 1944*

The photographs are by courtesy of the first two (private) publications mentioned above, former members of the 66th's Headquarters Squadron, Bruce Robertson, Verne Ralston and Eric Jacobs

Cover montage: First Sergeant Edward Rhatigan gets his men on parade against E.Danby's fine view of contemporary High Street

A Streetful of Sad Sacks

SECOND EDITION
1993

PREFACE

In this year of pilgrimage to East Anglia by many an Eighth Air Force veteran the small but significant role played by Sawston as host to the headquarters of the Eighth Army Air Force's 66th Fighter Wing ought to be recorded before it is lost in the slap-happy regurgitation of newspaper hearsay which now-a-days passes as local history. Not that press reports of the time have much to offer, censorship being strict and Journalistic resources small.

The twenty years of peace which were sandwiched between the two world wars ended much as they had begun. The population of south Cambridgeshire remained static at about 25,000. Agriculture, which one way or another employed most people, stayed depressed. Landowners complained of being drained by taxation. Harvests were bad. For the last two years of peace the prices obtained for wheat, sugar-beet and potatoes failed to cover the costs of planting. And although local road communications were as good as the average for rural England industry had stayed away from a region where almost all villages lacked piped water, sewerage and electricity. So for the whole of the two decades between the wars job prospects in this part of the country had been dim for fourteen year-olds.

Sawston boys leaving school still looked to farming or to the leather and paper industries for work. Girls could try for *"the gloves'* or take their chances, as had their mothers before them, by going into service. For there were plenty of vacancies advertised each week: *Kitchen maid, £36 per annum. Strong country girl, live as family, £25. Scullery maid, 17, £22. Young maid for rectory, £26 per annum. Really good house parlourmaid, £35 per annum.* No wonder that the Annual Domestic Staff Ball, held at the Dorothy Cafe in February of that last year of peace, turned out to be a palpable success.

There never was another. Mounting crises crumbled finally into a war which swept away the remnants of rural isolation and destroyed the sort of society which for centuries had typified the English village. Fifty years on, the returning veteran won't find much left of his old Sawston. Here and there perhaps a few memories might be stirred. He'll find the same telephone box standing near the same Cross. There'll be a familiar feeling about the little bit of High Street which winds southward by the Queen's Head, Warde's, the Lion and the Bull. Least changed of all will be his old headquarters, the Hall itself. The gardens behind the old house still slope gently down to the little bridge which, half a century ago, took him over the moat to his quarters on the other side. Now that place is green, silent, empty and the moat is dry, decayed. But if he looks back to the house, over the high box hedges, over the roses and the close-cut lawns, he will see the old sundial still perched high on the south wall. And from above that ancient timepiece the same, timeless words will be staring back at him: *TEMPUS EDAX RERUN. Time eats everything.*

September 1992 A.E.

Chapt. 1.

Snow clouds were gathering at half past five on the last evening of the year as the drizzly dusk turned swiftly to total darkness. When midnight came St. Mary's bells hung silent in their cobwebbed frames: the old year faded quietly away and 1941 made its shivery, uncelebrated entrance. Half a dozen men, air raid wardens and special constables, well- muffled against the icy wind, kept watch in empty, blacked-out streets. On duty between the fire station and the telephone exchange, two Home Guardsmen of B Company, 3rd Cambridgeshire Battalion, blew on their mittened fingers. Fifty miles away fires still raged in the City of London after Sunday night's ferocious blitz. The pencil shafts of a dozen searchlights scoured the night sky, their billion candlepower beams refracting in the ice crystals of the rolling cloud-base, reflecting eerily back to earth, wrapping everything in a ghostly mantle of cold, blue light. Sometimes the hollow crump of distant bombs echoed over barren fields and through dripping, winter-bare woodland. Few people, even amongst those who out of habit had bothered to stay awake, felt sorrow at the passing of the year. For it had been a catalogue of tragedy, relieved only by a temporary deliverance and it was ending with forlorn prospects of better times to come. No light glimmered in the blacked-out village from the murky dusk on that last day of December until the new year dawned at eight next morning. These were indeed the darkest of times.

Un-noticed by most people, the King and Queen visited Sawston Hall in January. The old house had become a sector operations headquarters soon after the Battle of Britain because the Luftwaffe's systematic mapping of the entire British defence system during August and September of 1940 had rendered Duxford too vulnerable to remain an RAF control centre. At the end of Church Lane a mysterious wire-fenced tower had sprung up and in hutments hurriedly built beside the cottages at the bottom of Windmill-lane a small detachment of airmen kept round the clock watch on two more wire- festooned towers.

The new year brought no respite for Fighter Command. Day and night the sirens wailed their dreary alerts and every village bore its share of bombs. In February Cambridge and Newmarket suffered more casualties. The same month saw men killed by enemy attacks on aerodromes at Duxford, Waterbeach, Oakington, Bassingbourn. A huge aerial mine suspended beneath a dirty-grey canvas parachute floated over Sawston one wintry night, searchlights coning its slow

descent into a patch of fenland north of Cambridge where it left a crater sixty feet deep and a hundred feet wide. Death and destruction rained on London, Birmingham, Liverpool and Bristol. With the April, full moon came heavy attacks on Exeter, Bath, York and Norwich. Piles of mattresses and blankets arrived at the Village College for refugees from expected raids on Cambridge. On April 1st a spy who had landed by parachute near Aylsham in November reached the end of his tether, shooting himself in one of the Christ's Pieces' air raid shelters. By June, cheese was rationed, one ounce for each citizen to add to the two ounces of butter, two ounces of tea, four ounces of bacon and tiny amounts of meat, marmalade and Jam which made up the weekly civilian diet. Eggs were scarce, onions had disappeared. From 1st June clothes were rationed. Rumours of spies, fifth column and flashing lights kept the Home Guard on its toes, especially after the Co-op bakery mysteriously burned to the ground in October.

The British Army had been driven out of Greece and had evacuated Crete. On the shortest night of the year, when daylight faded only just before midnight, the German Army struck at Soviet Russia. By the first week in October Moscow was under siege and in Sawston and the other villages of Cambridgeshire young men of the County regiment were making the most of their embarkation leave.

Then, on Sunday 7th December, the Japanese air force attacked Pearl Harbour.

In January 1941 Franklin D. Roosevelt had begun his third term as President of the United States. A few weeks earlier he had inaugurated the first peacetime military draft in American history, though opposition had been great. All men between 21 and 35 years of age were required to register so that 300,000 men could be drafted into the armed forces. At the same time the President had engineered the transfer of fifty American destroyers, moth-balled for twenty years, to the Royal Navy.

From the beginning of 1941 the re-elected President moved with a new confidence, proposing that America should stay outside the conflict in Europe but should become the arsenal of democracy, harnessing the power of American industry to Britain's desperate military needs. In March he persuaded Congress to approve the Lend-Lease Act, making American war materials immediately available to the government of any country whose defence the President deemed vital to the security of the United States. By May all German and Italian shipping in

American ports had been seized, all Axis assets frozen and all their consulates closed. When Hitler attacked Russia on 22nd June, the principle of lend-lease was even extended to the Soviet government. In July Japan unilaterally declared the whole of French Indochina to be a Japanese protectorate. The United States, Great Britain and the Netherlands straight away froze all Japanese assets, cutting off Nippon sources of finance for oil, rubber and scrap iron.

Roosevelt's anxiety about the course of world events grew. He well knew that many Americans were highly suspicious of Britain's war aims, especially her colonial policies. To still these critical voices the President urgently needed Churchill's agreement on some common principles which could form the basis of a better future for the world. August 10th 1941 found him on a warship off Newfoundland, holding a series of consultations with the British Prime Minister. The outcome was the Atlantic Charter, a proclamation of four freedoms which were to be the basic right of all men and women: freedom of speech and of religious faith, freedom from want and from fear. The Charter went on to declare that territorial aggrandisement was to be renounced by all nations and self government restored to "those from whom it had been taken". Britain and America would strive to make a world in which there would be equal access to trade and raw materials for all countries.

Japan gave no warning of her attack on December 7th. The great devastation of the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour was the ultimate move in her long-held plan to create a 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere', an empire of East Asia which would bring India, Burma, Indochina and Indonesia under Japanese control and influence. The shock of the attack put an end to divisions between the "America Firsters", those who had preached isolationism and pacifism, and the "Aid the Allies" campaigners who believed that only by the defeat of Hitler could democracy, and thus America herself, be saved from destruction. Only one dissenting vote was cast when, on the day after Pearl Harbour, Congress declared a state of war with Japan. As both Germany and Italy had bound themselves to come to Japan's aid should she become involved in a war with America, on December 8th 1941 America found herself at war with all three powers of the new Axis alliance.

Military chiefs in America had for long been considering their strategy should the United States become embroiled in a world war. Indeed, there had been several informal meetings between the heads of the US Army and Navy and their British counterparts. As early as March 1941 they had agreed that if the United States were to be drawn into the war the greatest menace would stem from Axis control of the

western coast of Europe. U-boats would be able to prevent all sea communication between the Old World and the New and there was an added fear that German potential for developing a secret and probably devastating weapon of war was considerably greater than that of Japan. The chiefs of staff therefore concluded that American force should first be exerted in Europe.

To this end the United States Army's Eighth Air Force came into being in February 1942. Given command was Major-General Carl Spaatz who immediately sent a group of senior officers under Brigadier-General Ira Faker to London. Their task was to prepare the way for a massive flow of American air power into the already war-weary English countryside.

Chapt. 2

At the beginning of 1942 the Old Yard had started working day and night, Sundays included. Space in the factory was at a premium because a Bermondsey leather company which had been bombed out of its dockside premises had been invited by Thomas Evans and Son to share the High Street works. So James Garnar and Sons had brought their dressing and splitting departments to the Old Yard and homes had been found in the village for their workers and families. Most of them were only too relieved to exchange the terrors of the London blitz for the relative peace of rural Cambridgeshire.

Spicers too was hard at work, turning out essential supplies of toilet rolls, envelopes, books and pads. Production lines had also been set up for shell and waste containers. At Towgood's, whilst orders for paper had dropped off at the beginning of the war, production was increasing by January 1942 to satisfy military needs, especially for map paper. Even the little company of Spicer-Dufay was not only occupied with experimental work for the War Office but also fulfilling Air Ministry orders for colour film, coated gas-detection strips and coloured eye screens. Many Sawston folk were setting off before first light to cycle to the Duxford works of Aero Research. There, besides those employed in turning out Aerolite adhesive to make

plywood for rescue launches, gliders and the exciting new Mosquito bomber, large numbers of both men and women were busy repairing Oxford airframes. Labour was in short supply everywhere and life was not made easier by wartime tax burdens; an unmarried farm worker earning three pounds a week had to pay eight shillings and twopence of this wage in income tax. Women were now called upon to undertake work formerly considered the province of men. Unmarried women and childless widows aged between nineteen and thirty years had become liable for call-up, either for the forces or for war work; indeed, women would soon represent a third of Britain's workforce. Even Italian prisoners of war were being drafted to work (and live) on local farms.

Bad news still streamed in from the war fronts. Benghazi was retaken by the Germans, Singapore occupied by the Japanese. Telegrams arrived at Sawston homes bringing news of men missing in both theatres. Nearly a million tons of Allied shipping disappeared beneath the waves in one month. The Germans pushed further into southern Russia.

In America, waterfront lights from Atlantic City to Miami Beach were turned off to avoid submarine attacks. And at Air Corps bases all over the continent new units were being activated every day. Most of them began with a nucleus of one or two men, then mushroomed as the drafts poured in. Many of these units were immediately allocated to the new Eighth Air Force and began intensive training for the coming battles in Europe.

One such unit, the 78th Pursuit Group, started life in a small way on 26th January -1942 at Mitchell Field in New York State. Soon equipped with the new twin-boom twin-engined P 38 Lockheed Lightning, the 78th was transferred to Hamilton Field in California in May. By November the pilots of the three squadrons had achieved a high degree of competence on their unconventional fighters and were ready to move to a combat zone. On 24th November the Group left New York harbour aboard the *Queen Mary* and seven days later found itself on the bleak Lincolnshire airfield of Goxhill. There it was planned to spend the winter, learning to cope with the unpredictable English weather and working up to the operational standards of the European theatre. The Group's Lightning aircraft came by sea to Liverpool, were assembled at Speke and flown to Goxhill. But hardly had they arrived when everything came to an abrupt halt. Earlier in the year Churchill and Roosevelt had decided to occupy French North Africa so as to secure a springboard for the invasion of Italy and *Operation Torch* began in November with the seizure of

Oran, Algiers and Casablanca. The need to replace losses in that Tunisian campaign suddenly claimed most of the 78th's pilots and all of its aircraft. Lieutenant-colonel Arman Petersen and a handful of pilots were left in England to face the task of rebuilding the 78th Fighter Group.

The little party of American officers which had arrived in February 1942 had faced an enormous task. By the middle of the year it was still grappling with countless problems of organisation, supply, control and security. But assistance was at hand. In a trickle at first, then in ever- increasing numbers, ground parties of the new Eighth Air Force tumbled on to the platforms of remote East Anglian railway stations. Earliest arrivals were contingents of engineers, dumped in muddy Suffolk fields to begin their job of grubbing up hedges, felling trees, filling in ditches and laying concrete runways for the fifty-one bomber Groups which planned to fly to England. Acclimatisation was hard; for a long time the main enemy was the black-out, the weather, the mud, and of course the British rations upon which at first they had to exist.

Half a dozen RAF stations in the South Cambridgeshire district were soon to be handed over to the Americans: Bassingbourn, Bottisham, Little Walden, Steeple Morden, Fowlmere and Duxford.

Duxford had been the home of Number 266 Squadron RAF since January 1942. Newly equipped with the heavy Typhoon fighter, 266 was suffering badly from the machine's considerable teething problems. People cycling along the Flowerpot road were never surprised to see another Typhoon resting wheels-up in one of the fields adjoining the aerodrome. Against the new fighter's impressive 400 mph speed capability had to be set the unreliability of its huge 2000 hp Sabre engine, the structural weaknesses of its tail assembly, its poor performance at altitude and its tardy rate of climb. Despite these problems having caused a number of fatal accidents, 266 had persevered with its conversion programme.

On 30th March another RAF squadron, Number 609, flew its Spitfires into Duxford and during the next six weeks the Spitfires were replaced by factory-fresh Typhoons. The plan was that the two Duxford-based squadrons would then join with Number 56 Squadron, already equipped with Typhoons and based at Snailwell, to form the first RAF Typhoon Wing.

Back in January, when they first arrived at Duxford, the men of 266 had quickly adopted the *Black Bull* at Sawston as their unofficial base and very soon 609

joined them in the pub's saloon bar which sported the village's first jukebox. Every night a variety of Air Force transport blocked the narrow pavement in front of the *Bull* and an assortment of private cars belonging to the Wing's pilots choked the tiny yard at the rear of the pub. Such a concentration of RAF Duxford's vehicle resources raised the eyebrows of passing brasshats and redcaps soon descended on the place, inspecting passes, checking the colour of petrol in the tanks of the private cars and even demanding to look at the identity cards of civilians in the bar. Nothing untoward was found but on the second Saturday in July a lorryload of 150 brand-new bicycles rolled up at Duxford's guardroom. Daily Orders soon announced that airmen with local passes would proceed on their excursions only on foot or by bicycle: the latter form of transportation could be drawn on a signature before leaving the main gate.

On the evening of Friday 5th June 266 Squadron held a dance at the Village College. Not to be outdone, 609 staged an even grander event at the same venue just three weeks later. On the previous afternoon the College had crowned its Rose Queen and some of the senior 'sophomores' were amongst the 300 guests. Prominent also was the squadron's newly- promoted mascot, Flight Lieutenant William de Goat, splendidly attired in full mess uniform. Only the officers were allowed a bar - so the goat got a drink - but a good time was reported to be had by all. On Friday September 18th 609 flew off to Biggin Hill. The next night 266 held its own farewell party at the *Bull:* it too was leaving Duxford to join Number 56 at Snailwell.

As soon as 266 and 609 had gone a new Typhoon squadron was formed at Duxford and the men and women of 181 Squadron kept the *Black Bull* lively for another two months. Then, at three o'clock on the afternoon of 10th December, 181's Typhoons took off for Snailwell. The squadron's *bods* soon followed, trailing with their kit to Whittlesford station, leaving Duxford empty and silent.

The *Black Bull* too was unusually quiet over Christmas that year, hoping no doubt, like Duxford itself, that new customers would arrive with the new year.

Chapt. 3

On the first day of July 1942 the US Eighth Air Force Bomber Command diary contained a brief but significant entry: *Arrival of aircraft: One B 17E. Total: One.*

But three weeks later two whole Bombardment Groups had arrived in England. Acclimatisation began. Offers of help by the RAF were willingly accepted, though British views about operating heavy bombers in daylight did not accord with those of the Americans, The RAF had already tried out a version of the Flying Fortress - they called it the Washington - but had rejected it because they felt that its defensive fire-power was weak and its bomb load small.

The Americans flew their first mission on August 17th: twelve Fortresses carried out a raid on Rouen, protected by a massive force of RAF Spitfires. That evening, Duxford's 266 Squadron intelligence officer had made a quixotic entry in his own diary: *'None of the Fortresses got to the* target. *But 87 fighters were shot down. Our losses: 87 fighters'*

The weather stayed fine and further attacks followed, on Abbeville airfield, on marshalling yards at Amiens, on shipyards at Le Trait and on an aircraft factory at Meaulte. September saw the arrival of the first B 24 Liberator group and on October 9th a force of 108 American bombers, again with Spitfire cover, attacked the steelworks at Lille. This mission brought the first real air battle between American bombers and the German defences and in the heat of the fight flying patterns over the target went haywire. Only 69 of the Fortresses managed to bomb the primary target and claims to have destroyed 48 enemy fighters were rapidly reduced to 21. Four bombers were lost.

November brought horrifying Allied shipping losses. At any one time a hundred U-boats were roaming the seas whilst seventy five more were re-provisioning in the Biscay ports. So despite bad weather the campaign against the U-boat pens took priority. Eight times that month the Americans went to Lorient, St.Nazaire, La Pallice and Bordeaux. But in December the weather really clamped down, allowing only four attacks to be mounted. By the end of the year the US Army Air Force had lost 99 of its bombers and over 100 more had received substantial battle damage. The loss rate was high. For most crews their official combat tour of 25 missions seemed a forlorn improbability.

On 19th October 1942 eighty soldiers of the newly-formed 312th Signal Company Wing of the US Army moved into a barrack block near the airfield at Barkesdale in Louisiana. Men had been drafted into the company from all over the continent but most of them came from mid-western states. As yet they had no commanding officer but they did have a First Sergeant, one Benny Addison, who soon informed them that they would be undergoing intensive training in signals procedure, in radio, telegraphy, cryptography and teletyping. On 2nd November the company left Barkesdale and three days later their Journey ended at Drew Field, Florida where scores of similar companies were already under rigorous instruction. A fortnight later, whilst the men were being examined for trade aptitude, a commander arrived at last in the shape of Lieutenant Herbert Cohen, an officer who quickly made his presence felt.

It was hot in Florida in December and the 312th sweated in their OD as they ate Christmas dinner outside the kitchen tent. In front of them stretched another four and a half months of hard slogging before another troop train would take them on the long journey to an embarkation base at Cape Shanks in New York State. Arriving there on 19th May 1943 they saw, eighteen miles away, the glistening tower of the Empire State Building, rising from the heart of Manhattan. Very few of the 312th had ever been anywhere near New York. They left Cape Shanks on 22nd May, on Shanks's pony, for there were no trucks or trains available that day. It was a long trek along dusty, open roads and through narrow village streets where old men waved and women cried as the laden column passed. Borne down with rifle, weapon belt, canteen, gas mask, field pack, helmet and duffle bag each soldier realised at last that it would be a long time before he saw his home again. A ferryboat carried them down the Hudson to New York harbour. Two great liners and a score of other drab-grey ships were frantically loading troops, lines of burdened soldiers queueing at a hundred gangplanks. But neither the *Queen Mary* nor the *Queen Elizabeth* were to take the 312th Signal Company Wing across the Atlantic. Their ride to war would be a slow one, in a little one-funnel steamer which could just make 15 knots on a calm day. On deck C of the *Esperance Bay,* Just above a hold packed with ammunition, they began a Journey which would end in a two-year stay behind the high street of a little English village called Sawston.

Another formation destined for Sawston was also on its way. The Headquarters Squadron of the 66th Fighter Wing had assembled at Norfolk Municipal Airport in March 1943. Known at the time as the 5th Air Defence Wing

the men had trained amongst the pine forests for their role in Europe. Luckier than the 312th Signal Company Wing, they embarked on the *Queen* Elizabeth, speeding across the Atlantic to arrive at Greenock on 2nd June, several days before the *Esperance Bay's* slower convoy. For **a** time the 66th lodged at Duxford, waiting for Sawston Hall to be readied for their occupation.

Chapt. 4

Despite its setback in the autumn the 78th Fighter Group had completed its working-up at Goxhill by early 1943. After the sudden exodus of his pilots and aircraft to North Africa, Colonel Petersen had painstakingly rebuilt his three squadrons with new men and new equipment. It had taken longer than planned. The Group's original equipment had been the P 38 Lightning, popular with the pilots who considered it to be a real thoroughbred compared with the over-sized, short-range, seven-ton monster which they were now required to take into battle. Nicknamed *"the Jug",* short for juggernaut - *'an overpowering object that advances relentlessly and destroys whatever is in its path'* - the P 47's enormous 2000 hp radial engine had caused such interference with radio that communication between pilots was impossible at high cruising speed. So many tyres had burst on take-off that a new type of tyre had to be fitted to support the fighter's great weight. In tight manoeuvres tail surfaces had buckled: on occasions the tail broke off altogether. Worst of all, the big Cyclone engine failed too often for comfort.

But problems had been slowly overcome and one grey Saturday evening in early April, just a week before Easter, the skies above Duxford filled with the roar of fifty *Cyclone* engines as Colonel Petersen led the 78th into its new home. People in Sawston who were on their way to catch the seven o'clock cinema show heard the big formation thunder over their village and looked up to see three squadrons of stubby, olive-grey shapes, dark against the evening sky. They watched them dive towards the airfield, pull up sharply to break formation and then peel away southwards, streaking low over the Chrishall hills to land in rumbling procession over Flowerpot-road.

Once down and settled into their new and comfortable quarters, pilots donned their Class A uniforms to explore the neighbourhood. Soon discovered, locked in a store behind the guardroom, was the hoard of black- painted upright bicycles which had been delivered to 609 Squadron eight months before. And it was balanced uncertainly on these battered but still roadworthy machines that the first representatives of the United States Eighth Air Force reached the door of Sawston's old *Black Bull*.

Chapt. 5

Private First Class Lloyd Olson stamped his boots on the crumbling pavement. He was tired, lonely and somewhat apprehensive on this, his second stint of guard duty in the new Company area. The night was black as pitch. Nothing and nobody moved. The silence was total. He stamped hard, partly to keep warm in the chill of the early hours but also to assure himself that he was awake, alive, a real soldier with a real gun, standing sentinel in a strange place where a war was certainly going on. His first spell of sentry duty, exactly a week ago, had been scary enough. At midnight a siren had wailed. In fact a chorus of sirens, one close by, another about a quarter of a mile away and several more in places beyond the dark limits of the little town. Searchlights had shot into the velvet star-studded sky. High above, invisible aircraft had rumbled through the heavens. Suddenly a candelabra of brilliant yellow flares had blossomed in the northern sky hanging there motionless amidst sprays of silent tracer which had spouted up from the darkness below. Flashes lit the street, silvering the darkened window-panes of the little houses around him. The sound of muffled explosions reached his ears and the ground shook beneath his feet. For a moment his eardrums felt as if they had been sucked inwards. But nobody had stirred. The street had stayed empty. A little later the homophonic voices of the siren choir had again soared heavenwards, filling the darkness with their shrill, monotonous harmony, lifting their high song of triumph over the evils of the night. Pfc Olson admitted to himself that his first taste of enemy

action had been un-nerving. He had felt frail, helpless, exposed. He was, moreover, much puzzled at the lack of interest displayed by the people of Sawston.

Now, standing in the same place, he was grateful that his second guard duty had been without incident. In fact he had been pleased to have time to himself, time to think. The snap of his boots rang through the black night and he worried that the echo might have wakened the folk who lived in the houses along the street. For his Company's new home was right in the middle of the village, in a small grass field at the back of the main street, reached by a gravel pathway running beside a redbrick church - *'Minister: Edwin C. Blackman MA'* said a peeling sign near the front doors. Beyond the church, at the upper end of the path, stood a manse and another redbrick edifice called the *Lecture* Hall. Both had been requisitioned for the 312th's use and both were now full of half-sorted equipment. Behind the lecture hall, ranged along the northern edge of the little meadow, were six timber huts, their weatherboarded sides tarred against the English rain. All had suffered at the hands of previous occupants, British airmen serving at Sawston Hall. Low flint walls bounded the meadow to the north and the south. To the east, at the back of the area, coils of barbed wire separated the Company's quarters from a footpath which ran parallel with the main street. Beyond the footpath fields of stubble stretched away to distant woods.

The Company's quarters had not yet been occupied but Cohen had ordered that parties of six men with a sergeant should mount guard each night. A mass of material had already been hauled from Duxford into the new quarters: beds, tables, chairs, all the personal kit of the hundred enlisted men who from tomorrow would be living in the six huts. Cohen's office had been set up in the manse. There too was the Orderly Room, filled with the paraphernalia of the Administration section. In the more spacious Lecture Hall a Day Room had been fashioned with a library, a bar, space for games and corners for quiet relaxation when off-duty. Just down the street a large corrugated-iron building, once a Boys Brigade hut, had been converted into the Company mess-room. Everything had been repaired, painted, swept, dusted, washed, polished, fitted with black-out curtains and then subjected to the minute scrutiny of a finicky commanding officer. Tomorrow was the last day of August. The 312th would move in. Then would begin in earnest the task for which the Company had come to England.

Pfc Olson looked at his watch. It was nearly 2 am. At any moment his relief was due and he could crawl back into bed. He tried to work out what the time would

be in Minnesota but it was hard because in England they had what they called *'Double British Summer Time'* and clocks were a couple of hours ahead of Greenwich. So his tired mind could not summon a picture of what his parents would be doing in the family home, nor could he work out if the Big Bend grocery store would be open for business. He only knew that less than a year ago he had worked happily behind the counter of that little shop. Now, as his relief stumbled along the dark pathway towards him, Lloyd Olson wondered ruefully if he would ever see Big Bend again.

Chapt. 6

In one important respect Sawston was ill-equipped to receive an influx of 350 American soldiers in the summer of 1943.

Most of the 502 homes in the village were huddled along the High Street together with 10 public houses. The rest were mostly in Mill Lane and New Road. The Spike was almost a hamlet apart at the southern end and consisted of a few grey-brick houses on the London-road, two terraces, each of a dozen cottages in grassy unmade lanes, two pubs and several glove- making workshops, all separated from the main part of the village by low- lying meadows stretching from West Green Plantation down to the river.

Conditions in the village were of great concern to the local doctor. In a report to the Rural District Council he pointed out that houses which in normal times would have been demolished were still occupied. Others condemned long ago were being re-occupied by people desperate for somewhere to live. Sanitary accommodation and drainage were neglected and in disrepair. Piles of refuse, including tins and bones collected for salvage, stayed by the roadside for weeks on end. Sewerage beds had overflowed and if something was not done quickly the health of the people would suffer. The District Council heeded Dr.Etheridge's plea for action and ordered its sanitary inspector to survey the village. He reported:

In view of the congestion of dwellings in the various yards and terraces abutting High Street and owing to the absence of adequate facilities for disposing of night soil and ashes it is recommended that a system of collection be instituted in those parts of the parish where it is necessary. Existing accumulations of such matter *should be removed and in specific cases where accommodation is extremely insanitary, dilapidated or inadequate, repairs should be carried out'.*

The District Council did what it could - it had only one sanitary inspector to cover all its fifty-two parishes. And little Mr.Hutchings, the founder of Hutchings and Harding, the Sawston glovers, who was vice-chairman of the Council, knew that the authorities could issue all the official notices to repair they liked but nothing would be done because there was no-one to carry out the work. For by mid-1943 not a single bricklayer, plumber or thatcher remained in the majority of South Cambridgeshire's larger villages.

But a weekly collection of night soil was instituted although from its London headquarters the Ministry of Health found time to remind everyone that the cost would have to be shouldered by the parish alone. By late autumn 164 houses, mostly in the High Street, were getting weekly visits from the 'water-cart', either after dark or in the early morning. Special attention was paid to the Junior School where for seventy years successive caretakers had disposed of night soil in the school garden. At the Lecture Hall the military authorities were induced to erect their own style 'latrines' in place of the single earth closet which for years had served the Sunday School and had become much over-used by NAAFI personnel living in huts behind the manse. Pye Radio's factory at the Grove also had pail closets but was to be included in the collection scheme only if the company paid the costs. Privy-pits which still served houses in Common Lane and one or two other places were converted to the more up-to - date pail closets which could be emptied weekly by the /water-cart'.

Of most concern was the state of the Sawston settling beds, for there did exist a sewerage system of sorts in the village. Sixty years before, Thomas Evans had run a pipe from his works to a piece of Huntingdon Charity land in Common Lane which he appropriated to receive sewage and trade effluent from his leather factory. A little later another pipe was run down Hillside and along the High Street, discharging into the same settling beds. **A** few yards along the road to Babraham the Linton Rural District Council had provided a bore-hole, a tank and a small-vane windmill to flush the High Street sewer, aided by other flushing tanks installed at the bottom of Hillside, next to the Greyhound, and just beside the Bull. From two

small settling tanks in Common Lane, Sawston's sewage gravitated over an acre and a half of land and then discharged into the Brook.

"The land has become saturated' said a health report at the time *"and is unable to cope with the present flow which includes a large increase of trade effluent from the leather and parchment factory of Thomas Evans and Son, discharging to the works by a separate outfall sewer. This factory effluent has overloaded the works to such an extent that almost crude sewage is being discharged into the stream'.*

So, in the autumn of 1943 there were bad smells in Sawston's High Street. Gullies were blocked, sewers overloaded. 350 soldiers coming to live in the village would really gum up the works.

A big effort was called for. Trade effluent exceeded domestic sewage flow by 1000 gallons an hour and Thomas Evans and James Garnar were given a month to screen their effluent or be cut off from the Council's disposal works. Tests on the High Street sewer found that there was a large escape of sewage into a road drain running down Mill Lane. Opening up the footpath in High Street revealed another fractured sewer with raw sewage escaping from a Y-Junction into an old brick culvert and thence into the road drains. Accumulation of sludge in the surface water drain alongside Town Close had filled the big 24" pipe with gas which was backing up and escaping into the atmosphere through gullies in Mill Lane and High Street. The ditch running into Common Lane was in **a** foul state. All needed urgent attention.

Most eventually got it, especially the sewerage problems, in spite of the chronic shortage of labour. But house and farm repairs remained undone. Not a single dwelling had been built in the village since 1939 and the housing stock in High Street was largely old, damp, worn out and very overcrowded. In some small cottages three families lived in cramped and insanitary conditions. Even in one of the newer houses in Town Close four families and three Barnardo boys were doing their best to exist in wartime Sawston.

Chapt. 7

Tuesday 13th April 1943 was a red letter day for the 78th Fighter Group at Duxford. Just before noon twelve Thunderbolts of the 83rd Squadron with Colonel Petersen leading took off to carry out the Group's first mission of the war. South of Saffron Walden they rendezvoused with two dozen P 47s of the 4th and 56th Groups which had taken off from Debden led by Colonel Chesley Peterson, commander of the 4th. A little later the Americans were joined by a strong force of RAF Spitfires and the great Anglo-American swarm of single-seater fighters headed at 30,000 feet towards St.Omer. No enemy 'planes or flak were seen during the time the formation spent over the northern corner of France but an hour and a half later only eleven Thunderbolts whistled in to land over Duxford's Flowerpot road. Colonel Joseph Dickman, the Group Executive Officer, had suffered engine failure north-east of Calais and had bailed out. Fortunately for him an RAF rescue launch was at hand and he was quickly fished out of the Channel.

At five past six that same evening Duxford echoed again to the roar of Thunderbolts clawing into the air. This time Arman Petersen was taking the 82nd Squadron on its first blooding over occupied France. Once rare they met up with machines of the 4th and 56th Groups to sweep with the RAF over the enemy coast at Berck. Again a Thunderbolt's engine failed during the mission but the pilot made a belly landing at Deal.

It was the 84th Squadron's turn on Friday 16th April. In the early evening twelve Thunderbolts lined up on Duxford's turf accompanied by six machines of the 82nd and six of the 83rd. They cruised over Belgium with 35 fighters of the 4th Group from Debden, meeting no opposition and landing back safely at Duxford just as the sun settled on the misty horizon.

Next day the three squadrons flew their first mission as a Group. From 12.25 pm to 14.00 hours the Group Commander led a 32-' plane formation in a sweep over Holland with the 4th and 56th Groups whilst 100 Fortresses bombed Bremen. In the evening, again with the Debden Group, the 78th flew another sweep from Walcheren to Bruges, encountering no enemy aircraft or flak.

Whilst the 78th's pilots droned high over the Belgian countryside that fine Saturday evening, guests were arriving at Bassingbourn for the 91st Bombardment Group's first grand dance. But the party spirit was hard to raise. Sixty men who

would have been enjoying themselves at the festivities had not returned from the mid-day action over Bremen.

Only three Fighter Groups were as yet operational in England, the 4th at Debden, the 56th at Horsham St Faith and the 78th at Duxford. All were equipped with P 47 Thunderbolt fighters and all were operating under the direct control of Eighth Fighter Command headquarters at Bushey Hall, Hertfordshire. Each mission was planned by Command headquarters staff who then despatched a coded Field Order directly to each of the three Group Operations Rooms. From teleprinters installed in each Group's Message Centre spewed a yard-long screed covering every aspect of the approaching mission. Duty Intelligence Officers would pore over the chattering teleprinters, then summon to their Operations Rooms everybody who was needed to translate the wordy document into a blueprint for action. Each Intelligence Room quickly became a hive of activity, each Operations block a bustle of hectic preparation. The last detail of each Group's part in the mission had to be worked out before pilots could be awakened for breakfast and briefing.

These were early days in the Combined Bomber Offensive against the Reich. The goal was to destroy the Luftwaffe prior to invasion of the Continent in the spring of 1944. Whilst the RAF steadily increased the weight of its night offensive, the Americans would develop their daylight operations against German industry. To carry out its strategic objective the Eighth Air Force would need 2700 heavy bombers and 1000 fighter aircraft. The basic tactical unit of both bombers and fighters would be the Group and each Group would consist of at least three squadrons. Three or four Groups would make up a Wing. Three or four Bomb Wings would comprise an Air Division and to support the whole bomber force would be three Fighter Wings. The headquarters squadrons of these Fighter Wings had now reached England and were busy preparing their bases. The 65th Wing would move into the little Essex town of Saffron Walden, taking over the redbrick buildings of the Johane Bradbury School for Girls in the Ashdon Road. The 67th Wing would find itself in grander surroundings, deep in the Scots pines of Breckland. It was occupying the impressive Georgian mansion at Elveden near Thetford, an English country seat converted in Victoria's reign to provide an imitation oriental palace for an exiled maharajah.

And by the end of August 1943 the third Wing, the 66th, would be installed in an old Tudor manor house at Sawston, Cambridgeshire.

Chapt. 8

The *Queen Elizabeth* tied up at Greenock on 3rd June 1943 and from its crowded decks the men of the 66th Fighter Wing's Headquarters Squadron debarked to the music of a kilted band. Soon they were on a train bound for the little railway station at Whittlesford in Cambridgshire. Each man had a guide to his new country:

"Britain may look a little shopworn and grimy to you. There's been a war since 1939. The houses haven't been painted because factories aren't making paint, they're making 'planes. British trains are old because power is used for industry, not for heating. The British people are anxious for you to know that in normal times Britain looks much prettier, neater, cleaner. You will find out right away that England is a small country - smaller than North Carolina or Iowa. England, Scotland and Wales together are hardly bigger than Minnesota. But the English language didn't spread across the oceans because the people were panty-waists……"

In fact the men found that the train was more comfortable than troop trains back home and the English coffee and meat pies dispensed by the Women's Voluntary Services tasted good to the travel-weary soldiers. When they finally spilled out of the grimy carriages on that grey Friday morning of 4th June 1943, Whittlesford seemed to be in the middle of no-where. But First Sergeant Ed Rhatigan soon had his squadron sorted into good order for the short trip to Duxford. There, from temporary billets, they would prepare their permanent base in the secluded old mansion at Sawston.

Until then Church Lane had been the most peaceful of by-ways. It funnelled from the High Street at the Cross, heading eastward between high flint walls. Ancient chestnuts arched above it, their crowns clifted with the ramshackle nests of a long-established colony of rooks. The lane ran by the gates of the Hall, then past the churchyard and the dairy barns. At the vicarage it grew dark under towering elms and its surface turned gravelly, rutted, weedy. Beyond the vicarage garden it became a grassy bridleway, curving north-east through broad arable fields, its route

marked by a line of scrubby hawthorn. It crossed the Babraham road at Sunderlands corner where a stand of stately elms straddled the parish boundary and from there it made its lonely, unmarked way across the Babraham commons, meeting the Roman road at Copley Hill. Its only traffic had been the tumble cart, the reaper-binder and, more lately, the Fordson tractor with its big iron-shod wheels. On Sundays the congregation of St Mary's strolled the few yards from High Street to the church porch but only the milkman and the postman, vicarage bound, were daily passers down the lane.

In the middle of June 1943 the first big white-starred truck, olive-drab sides bulging with the paraphernalia of war, rolled by the Cross into Church Lane and edged gingerly through the narrow gates of the Hall. Strange accents bounced off ancient walls as equipment was trundled into the house, dragged along stone-flagged corridors and pushed into every corner. On every floor, right up to the attics, rooms were labelled, swept, fitted out with desks, tables, typewriters, telephones. One suite on the west wing's first floor, looking out over the broad front lawn, became the offices of the Old Man himself, Colonel Murray C Woodbury, a stocky Roman-faced regular whose big black Packard with pennant flying would soon become a common sight in Sawston. Behind the wheel of the shiny limousine crouched always the thin figure of Corporal Teddy Berninski, the Colonel's faithful chauffeur, the man who had watched over the Packard as it journied to England lashed to the deck of the Queen Elizabeth.

To the west of the old house stood the stables, the yards and the barns. These too were quickly put to new uses. A cookhouse was built and a single mess served both officers and men. Beyond the moat Nissen huts had sprouted along a narrow concrete road. There, in the green shelter of the Hall woods, would dwell the Squadron's enlisted men.

The windows of the Great Hall were boarded up, as was the oak panelling within. The great stone-flagged floorspace was divided up, half becoming the War Room with its maps and target files and the other half the Message Centre with its teletype and cryptographic machines. All were guarded day and night. Passes had to be shown at every door. Two more armed soldiers kept round-the-clock watch at the Hall gates where a sentry box on the church side gave them some protection against wind and rain.

First Groups to be assigned to the Wing were the 78th at Duxford and the 353rd which had just flown its Thunderbolts into Metfield in Suffolk. Both came under the control of Sawston Hall on 18th August and both had just suffered the loss of their commanding officers. Lieutenant-colonel Arman Petersen had nurtured the 78th since its early days at Hamilton Field. 'Colonel Pete' had not returned from a sweep over France on July 1st. Lieutenant-colonel Joe Morris had led the 353rd since its inception at Mitchell Field, New York State in October 1942. He had been lost on an early morning Ramrod (close escort) mission on 16th August. The 66th Fighter Wing began its work in sombre mood.

Chapt. 9

On 20th August, just as the Stars and Stripes were being hoisted on the new flagpole in front of Sawston Hall, a big ex-Greyline coach bumped over the 'level' crossing at Whittlesford and chugged into the *Red Lion's* yard. The Clubmobile had arrived. Named *Christmas Columbus* the lumbering old bus had been fitted with ovens, cupboards, cold stores and every kind of facility which would enable it to dispense a homely selection of drinks and snacks to GIs at work in the more lonely outposts of their new country. Within a couple of days a crew for the vehicle had also turned up, three denim-clad girls, Vicki, Gen and Elaine, two American, one English. With their British ex-soldier driver they comprised the team which would take the *Christmas Columbus* on its daily morale-boosting sorties.

Their day would begin at 5 am. One girl had to get up early to turn on the doughnut machine in the bus which was parked in the hotel yard. She heated up the Crisco and hand-mixed the first 25lb of dough. At half past six the first batch of crispy doughnuts would be lifted out, a dozen at a time on long wire skewers, to be stored in trays on overhead shelves. At seven o'clock, when the two other girls arrived, the early bird would go to clean up and eat breakfast. She would always take a bag of hot, sugar-dusted doughnuts for the Red Lion's maids, waiters and permanent guests. Amongst those staying at the pub were Captain Jimmy Wilkinson and his wife Frieda. The captain had joined the 334th Squadron at

Debden in January but had bailed out of his P 47 over Castle Camps on the morning of 27th April after the tail of his machine had been sliced off by another Thunderbolt. Hospitalised for months with a fractured spine he was now recuperating under the loving care of his Austrian wife before joining the 78th Fighter Group at Duxford.

At eight o'clock on the morning of Tuesday 7th September the big drab-green coach edged its way out of the hotel yard and turned left on the London-Newmarket road, its first long day's work ahead. High above, three squadrons of Duxford's Thunderbolts climbed eastwards in the clear autumn sky, their task to catch up with a hundred Fortresses already on their way to bomb Evere airfield near Brussels. The 78th was to escort the bombers to their target and see them safely home again. Ground crews at Duxford had been up before dawn to prepare the machines for the day's operation and for the next hour and a half they would be hanging around waiting for the Thunderbolts to return to the *Duckpond*. Then there would be work to do again. This morning the GIs were in for a pleasant surprise. The Clubmobile was on its way. The Crisco Kids were about to make their first ever wayside stop with offerings of strong, hot coffee, piles of sweet, crispy 'sinkers' and, as time went on, all the local GI gossip.

Chapt. 10

From the beginning of September 1943 the headquarters of the 66th Fighter Wing began work in earnest. The 32 officers and 183 enlisted men at Sawston Hall became the hub of a force which would eventually comprise five fighter Groups. Each Group would have at least three squadrons and each squadron would have on strength some twenty fighter 'planes and thirty or so pilots.

Wing headquarters consisted of four sections. A-1 was Personnel. Lieutenant-colonel Elmer Ellis was in charge and he and his staff had to make sure that every unit maintained its proper strength in pilots, ground crews and all the other categories of personnel needed to keep it at top efficiency. Maintenance of discipline and standards of conduct throughout the Wing were also on A-1's list of responsibilities.

Lieutenant-colonel John Gerli was **A-2**. His section had the job of gathering, evaluating and disseminating every last piece of information which would further the success of the Wing's operations. Enforcement of censorship, security, the training of combat personnel in escape and evasion, all fell under the jurisdiction of John Gerli's Intelligence section.

Major Bryant Anderson was operations chief. To him and to the staff of A-3 fell the task of making sure that every Field Order received from Fighter Command headquarters at Bushey Hall was translated into a successful 66th Wing operation in the air. From Sawston's war room detailed operational orders would flow out to Fighter Groups at Duxford, Raydon, Nuthampstead, Metfield, Fowlmere, Leiston and Wormingford. Anderson's Combat Operations section maintained a twenty-four hour watch because most of the planning of a mission had to be done through the small hours of the night. His men were perhaps the most stressed of all who worked in Sawston Hall for the lives of the Wing's 800 pilots and consequently the lives of the thousands of bomber crews they were defending hung on the care with which plans and orders were prepared by the staff of A-3.

Logistics were the purview of A-4. Lieutenant-colonel Joe Browne's duty was to see that the necessary materials of war flowed smoothly from docks, airfields, and supply depots to the consumers at Duxford and all the other airfields, outposts and depots of the 66th Wing. In due course an enormous storage depot, known as Unit G.23 and employing 3,500 GIs, was set up at Histon to supply Air Force units throughout East Anglia. The stores and supply operation was a thankless, never-ending, ever-changing job which unless carried out with zeal and foresight could lead to collapse of the Air Force's entire war effort.

The 66th's Chief of Staff was Lieutenant-colonel Kermit A. Bailey. He was both Executive Officer and second-in-command of the Wing and his role was largely one of co-ordination. A youthful, fair-haired pilot with much operational experience and a lively sense of humour, the colonel was already a popular figure throughout the Wing and soon became a well-known man-about-Sawston.

Chapt. 11

Colonel Murray C. Woodbury, commander of the 66th, was a busy man at the beginning of September 1943.The Commanding General of the US Army Air Force was in England and all personnel in Essex and Cambridgeshire were summoned to Duxford on Saturday 4th September to meet the legendary 'Hap' Arnold, holder of US Army Aviator Certificate Number 2 and taught to fly by the Wright brothers themselves. Accompanied by Major- General William Kepner, chief of the Eighth Fighter Command, 'Hap' climbed the control tower at Duxford that Saturday morning to watch forty-eight Thunderbolts stream back from an uneventful sweep over the Antwerp area. Then with his top brass beside him the Big Chief addressed the men of the 4th and the 78th Fighter Groups. He kept his worries to himself, concentrating on the formidable tasks which lay ahead. The Eighth Air Force, he said, was engaged on a mighty mission, a combined bomber offensive with RAF Bomber Command that would destroy the German military, industrial and economic system, undermining the morale of the German people to a point where an Allied invasion of the Continent would bring a swift end to the war. Targets had been selected, priorities assessed, operations planned. The bombers, fighters and personnel required were assembling in England in massive strength. He knew that the 4th and the 78th Fighter Groups, pioneers in the European theatre of operations, would acquit themselves well in the trials ahead.

But the chief reason for General Arnold's visit to England was top level concern at bomber losses over targets inside Germany itself. The great *'Pointblank'* offensive's programme now called for large-scale attacks against the German aircraft industry, ball bearing plants, synthetic rubber factories and oil refineries, all of them situated deep within the Reich. Losses like the 60 bombers destroyed on 17th August by the Regensburg and Schweinfurt defences could not be sustained. Everyone knew the problem. The leaders of the Eighth, Spaatz, Eaker, Kepner and the commanders of the three fighter Groups wrestled every day with ideas and suggestions which might provide better protection for the bombers, preferably all the way to their targets and then all the way back again. Late in July some P 47s had been fitted with 200 gallon ferry tanks as a temporary expedient. Though this had enabled them to edge a little further into Germany, staying with the bombers a little longer than before, it was by no means the answer to the problem. Supplies of

properly designed drop tanks for the P.47s were desperately needed. But there were production difficulties and some felt that efforts would be better directed to getting rid of the snags which limited wider deployment in Europe of the P 38 Lightning. The Lightning's range was much superior to that of the Thunderbolt but it seemed unlikely that production would be re-routed to Europe. The Pacific needed every P 38 it could get. Arnold knew of course that, unacceptable as losses over Germany had become, a solution was just round the corner. It was a matter of ensuring that until then everybody stayed grimly hanging on.

"Trust me" was his message to Fighter Command that day. "We shall prevail. One day you'll be proud to tell your grandchildren that you were here in 1943".

And sure enough, by the middle of October Duxford was buzzing with word of a new fighter, a vastly improved version of the sleek P 51. Fitted with the British Rolls Royce Merlin engine, this new Mustang **was -** according to the grapevine - "a real hot ship with some range".

Security at Duxford was intense on the week-end of Arnold's visit and the local population was not amused when the Royston-Newmarket road was closed to civilian traffic. It remained closed when the General had gone and for the rest of the war armed guards at both eastern and western ends barred the local population from a right of way which had existed since before the Iron Age.

Life in Sawston itself took on a new bustle that autumn. It was plain that a great daylight air offensive against German-occupied Europe was under way - the wireless and the papers said so - and that the men in the village were playing a vital role. The Hall itself was under wraps, patrolled, guarded, strictly off limits to anyone without a pass. During daytime the High Street was awash with GIs, mostly on their way to or from work. Men of the 312th Signal Company living behind the Congregational church worked a three shift day, from 7 am to 3 pm, from 3 pm to 11 pm and from 11 pm to 7 am. On the way to work they hurried along High Street, clutching bags of jam and peanut butter sandwiches to see them through their shifts. Sauntering back to quarters eight hours later they dropped wearily into the messroom for chow before hitting the sack.

There were comings and goings too between the Hall and other places taken over by "the Yanks": the Grove, Brook House, the Vicarage, number 19 Hillside. Even Jock Banner's garage became an overspill for the 312th's motor pool. Jeeps sped up and down the High Street, Chevrolet supply trucks lumbered into Church

Lane, Dodge command cars ferried groups of officers between Duxford and Sawston Hall. But the handiest, most ubiquitous means of transport was the narrow-tyred, high-seated, straight-handlebarred army bicycle, drawn mostly from US Army stocks but also supplied in their thousands from Nottingham cycle factories under a sort of reverse Lend-Lease arrangement. Most soldiers had never ridden a bicycle before, some had never even seen one. At first all officially-issued bikes were known as 'Hitler's secret weapons' but GIs took to them as ducks take to water. Before long the Woolpack, the Lion, the Bull and the Greyhound were buried each evening under tangled heaps of Raleighs and Hercules stacked haphazardly against their ancient walls. And during the daytime off- duty soldiers rode their trusty new steeds deep into the surrounding countryside, ending up lost and thirsty in the un-signposted backwaters of Cambridgeshire, seeking help and refreshment in the taproom of the nearest pub.

The local hostelries attracted Americans from the start. The total absence of indoor toilet facilities in Sawston's ten pubs was no deterrent and the busy traffic between dimly lit bar and unlit shack with a hole in the ground seemed to retain the best of humour. New friendships with local regulars blossomed everywhere. The off-duty exuberance of Sawston's newest lodgers even raised smiles on the faces of old men who puffed clouds of evil-smelling smoke from the darker corners of every tavern. Plain, beer-tainted rooms with smoke-yellowed wallpaper, pew-like benches and scrubbed tables, pitted dartboards and ancient pianos, games of cards, dominoes, shove-halfpenny and cribbage, all these things added up to a new experience for the homesick GI - a cosy, private world into which he could retreat each night until at ten o'clock the landlord's shout of "Time, gentlemen, please" would return him to the rigours of army life in rural Sawston.

Though they instantly took to the pubs it was a while before GIs got a taste for English beer. Mild, bitter, brown ale and stout, it all seemed weak, watery and warm. They drank light ale at first because it was the only beer which put foam in the glass. Tastes developed as time went on but it didn't take so long to establish a brisk trade of cigars and tobacco - short in England - for supplies of real Scotch, worth a pound (4.03 dollars) a bottle and never available in the PX. Trade was mostly with the locals, and pubs were the place to meet them. American soldiers were paid once a month ("the day the eagle shits") and bar counters were soon strewn with halfcrowns, florins, bobs, tanners, threepenny joeys, pennies and halfpennies, all passed out by the landlord in change for the 'bed-sheet' pound notes invariably

proffered for even the smallest of debts. Sometimes farthings surfaced **in** this small change, causing astonishment then hilarity amongst the new patrons, their young heads bent earnestly over piles of unfamiliar coinage whilst the landlord discoursed on the intricacies of the British currency system.

Money posed another problem. Private first-class Lloyd Olson, kitchen-policing in the 312th's messroom, earned £3.14.2d a week. Lance-corporal James Putt of the Welch Regiment, making shipshape his billet on the Lawn at Whittlesford, received 11.2.9d a week. Whilst Lloyd was settling comfortably in Sawston, maybe even for the duration of the war, Jimmy's regiment had orders for India. Trouble in the pubs between rich and poor, between lucky and not so lucky, seemed a distinct possibility until the Welch decamped and were replaced by a Polish unit. But it was still "the bloody Yanks" who were blamed for drinking the pubs dry when later on beer joined the long-standing cigarette shortage.

Services in Sawston began to feel the strain. Outgoing calls from the little manual telephone exchange at 95 High Street soared to over a thousand a day. From the autumn of 1943 seven girls worked through the day until six o'clock when a man took over until ten. Another worked through the night. The exchange had fifteen military lines and was connected to eleven call boxes. Two of these were at Duxford aerodrome and as Duxford's GIs increased their social contacts in the neighbourhood these two lines became somewhat overloaded. There were still only ten outgoing lines to Cambridge, two to Shelford, two to Saffron Walden and one to Linton so a time limit of six minutes had to be imposed on all calls. Mrs Beebee was also ordered to set up a section in a separate room where random censoring of calls could begin, a task which she was to carry out herself. From the start the British telephone system bewildered American troops. GIs could not get used to being "put through" and manipulation of Button "A" (to complete the connection) and Button "B" (to get 'tuppence' back if connection proved not possible) baffled them completely. One frustrated master-sergeant stumbled out of the dark kiosk near the Cross after a vain attempt to ring his new-found girlfriend. He had progressed no further than the operator who had been sitting **in** the little white-washed exchange only a yard or two from where he had fumbled helplessly in the blacked-out booth.

"Crazy broad!" he groaned."Drop her on the krauts- she'll sure snafu their communications".

There was standing room only on Service 103 buses to Cambridge after the New Road corner stop. The big red double-deckers were a great novelty to Sawston's new residents. Off-duty and with orderly room passes in their pockets they queued **in** happy throngs to savour a top deck ride to Drummer Street. Apart from the pleasure of the rural ride there was much to see **in** Cambridge, much to do. The Bull Hotel had become an American Red Cross Service Club. At the top of the big staircase was a large lounge with comfortable chairs, a piano, a radiogram, table games and newspapers. The latest movies were shown there **in** the evenings. In a smaller lounge to the right were facilities to write letters or relax quietly. The Club was soon organising dances at the Rex, Houghton Hall, the Guildhall and, on Sunday evenings, at the Drill Hall. All were free of charge and if these were oversubscribed the Rex and the Dorothy ballrooms could each accommodate 500 dancers most evenings of the week. Cambridge pubs welcomed their wealthy new customers as did the Dorothy restaurant and the other fifteen cafes in the town centre.

And within a few steps of each other were the Regal, Central, Playhouse, Victoria, Cosmopolitan, Kinema, Rendezvous, Tivoli, Rex and Embassy, cinemas which could cater for every degree of taste and comfort. But whatever the night's chosen diversion, everyone ended up at Drummer Street. Long after the last Eastern Counties bus had chugged off to the Hills Road depot for the night, the tiny terminus filled up again with convoys of liberty-run trucks. It was never a problem to get back to any corner of American occupied Cambridgeshire.

Sawston itself had a few attractions to offer the off-duty soldier who wanted to get away from the army's own in-house provisions for relaxation, the PX and the dayrooms. Spicer's Theatre, with seats for 280, was an unusually plush form of entertainment for a village of Sawston's size. Lavishly decorated and lighted, it had been opened in 1932 by H.G. Spicer, the biggest employer and property owner **in** the village. Spicer Brothers had purchased Edward Towgood's paper mills in 1914 and in 1925 opened a paper conversion factory near the railway line. The Towgood and Spicer families were always deeply involved in church and social affairs and in 1930 Henry Spicer had given land to the local education authority for the building of England's first Village College, his understanding being that the authority would allow him to transfer his popular film shows from the old Congregational Lecture Hall to the new school's main hall. Incensed when the County Council reneged on its pledge, Spicer built a brand new theatre where it would effectively block public view

of the College's prestigious fountain court. And there it stood in the autumn of 1943, offering within its stylish blue interior a couple of hours comfortable viewing of the current M*ovietone News,* an indifferent second feature film which usually involved the doings of cowboys and Indians, a string of *Pearl and Dean* advertisements for the merchandise of local shops (these always raised a cheer) and then, with no interval for ice-creams or sweets, the main attraction, an 'A' film of some substance and pretty well up-to-date, all from seven o'clock on every Thursday, Friday and Saturday of the year. In this little theatre most of Sawston had learned all it knew about the American way of life.

Though the Woolpack, the Fox, the Greyhound and the rest of the pubs were popular from the first, they had one big drawback: no girls. English pubs were a male preserve, a serious disadvantage in the eyes of most GIs who were young, unmarried and a long way from home. So where could they meet the pretty girls they had already seen around the village? The answer was quickly discovered: at the local Saturday night hops.

Dancing was by far the most favoured pastime of war-ridden Britain. Every new film featured two or three songs which would then fill the radio waves and sweep the nation's dance halls. Local musicians were much in demand to play this huge output of popular music. New hits of 1943 included *"I'll* Get *By",* a Fred Ahlert melody featured in the Irene Dunne/Spencer Tracy movie *"A Guy Named Joe"* and *"Never A Day Goes By',* both lyrics relying heavily on the wretchedness of war-separated lovers. Two more 1943 tunes echoed other pre-occupations of the time: *"Silver Wings In The Moonlight"* a British composition and *"Comin' In On A Wing And A Prayer",* a New York Robbins Music Corporation song much intoned by the two thousand GIs up the road at Duxford.

Sawston's Village College was a popular venue for regular dances, organised for all sorts of good causes by all sorts of organisations. The autumn season began with a dance on the last Saturday in October when Fred Samuels and his band played to a hallful of jitter bugs from eight o'clock 'til half past eleven. Admission cost 2/- or 1/6d "if in uniform". A new rule applied on this occasion: numbers were limited, a sign of the times in an overcrowded Sawston. Well-patronised too were the Memorial Halls at Whittlesford and Shelford, the Robinettes at Duxford, the Madeline at Babraham. None were licenced so drinking had to be done first. Ten o'clock brought a noticeable influx of happy soldiery, inhibitions drowned in the High Street pubs, itching to demonstrate their own brand of fancy footwork to the

fascinated ranks of assembled female *cognoscenti. At* the same time a posse of sterner countenance would pay its first visit of the evening. White-topped, white gaitered, armbanded and immaculate, a sergeant and three corporals of the 989th Military Police Company walked through the noisy corridors, moving smoothly in the little zone of exclusion which always surrounded them in crowded places. They missed nothing: improper dress, unbecoming conduct, disorderly behaviour, foul language, any of these would bring swift removal of the offending soldier. The quartet would be back later, once or twice. In the meantime they and their colleagues would be around in the blacked out neighbourhood, as would Sawston's long serving village policeman, known to his American military counterparts as "Sheriff Mead". During the whole period of its virtual occupation by the American army, Sawston's High Street could be safely walked alone, day and night, from one end to the other, by any man, woman or child.

Local dancing flourished to the music of two Sawston bands, Fred Samuels and his merry men and the Premier Dance Band. Fred had been a notable jazz pianist for twenty years and in earlier days had provided extempore accompaniment for Spicer's silent film shows in the Lecture Hall. The Premier's line-up included a boy who had been taught the saxophone by bandleader Bobby Johnson. When Bobby disappeared into the Navy the budding youngster continued in the Premier under the watchful eye of another versatile stalwart of the local music scene, MacDonald Baden Westley, ("Max" to everybody in Sawston). Ronnie Ross went on to become a world-ranking saxophonist.

Cambridge-based outfits like the Stirlingaires, the Gordon Revellers, Teddy Osborne and Les Baker frequently played the village halls but it was Colonel Woodbury himself, commander of the 66th Fighter Wing, who paved the way to a considerable GI contribution to local music making. The colonel was a sociable man and soon after his arrival in Sawston he combed his command for musical talent. Wing parties and other functions demanded that the 66th should have its own in-house dance band, one that would compare favourably with the Debden Group's *Flying Eagles,* **a** stylish 17-piece orchestra which had been in existence since early in the year and had already gained a wide reputation. Woodbury found a pilot who had been a professional saxophone player, telling him to stop flying, find some more ex-professionals and start making music. In the Spring a small ad *hoc* group of Duxford musicians from the newly arrived 78th Group, calling themselves the *Thunderbolts,* had already made an appearance at Babraham's Madeline Hall on 19th May, filling

the place for a *Wings for Victory* dance at which a bottle of champagne was auctioned and sold for £200, a bottle of whisky for £95 and a bottle of port for £80. 0n that small group of players a larger and more sophisticated *Thunderbolts* dance orchestra was built. It later became much in demand, even though its pilot leader badly wanted to get back to his own Thunderbolt. "Not so many late nights" he said.

More musical talent surfaced at Sawston Hall and a second band was formed. Corporal Bob Bravin, a gifted Brooklynite, set up a popular quartet which he named the *Bobcats* - some people called them *Woody's Wildcats* - playing for the smaller parties and social occasions held in places like the Lecture Hall, the 312th's messhall and the base theatre which had been improvised from a barn in the grounds of the old Tudor mansion.

America's vast manpower resources meant that throughout the war the needs of the military were easily met by selective draft. Things in the United Kingdom were different and mobilisation was total. By the closing months of 1943 few young men were left to partner the girls at Sawston dances. It was a situation that was quickly, eagerly, expertly and comprehensively exploited by the village's young transatlantic guests.

Chapt. 12

At the end of 1943 284 local boys and girls were attending Sawston Village College and a further 33 were on the registers as 'evacuees', London children still billeted with families in Sawston or in the eight other villages served by the College. Younger evacuees attended the Junior school in Mill Lane and on Christmas Day the Americans invited all these 'war orphans' to a grand party in the 312th Signal Company's messroom. GIs got on well with English children, finding them well-behaved, friendly and more modest than most kids back home. And English youngsters were surprised to be engaged in long conversations without the irritating condescension which most of them had to endure in school and at home. Several other things attracted children to the Americans: the real and obvious lack of class

distinction between officers and men who mixed naturally both on and off duty; the more relaxed discipline; the fondness of GIs for sweets and comics; their widespread use of nicknames; their easy, unstilted use of the English language. The children were lucky because by Christmas messhall food had much improved. During their first few weeks in Sawston the Americans had existed largely on rations of British origin, dried eggs, dried milk, spam, Brussel sprouts, baked beans, mutton. Sausages ran mutton and sprouts a close third in the GI hate stakes but they liked the flavour and texture of the grey wartime English bread, rejecting it only on the grounds that being uncut it must be unhygenic. Missed most of all were fresh fruit and milk. Whilst English civilians were rationed to two pints of milk a week, GIs were never allowed to drink it at all, most British cows not being tuberculin-tested. So when the children hurried along to the Lecture Hall for their Christmas party they found tables laden with all manner of exciting things they hadn't seen for years. Some couldn't even remember the taste of golden syrup, strawberry and apricot Jam, thick-cut marmalade, condensed milk, Jelly with cream. And hamburgers, barbecued chicken, fishcakes, Hershey and 0-Henry bars would have been new experiences even for their mums and dads.

Besides the food, home comforts had improved considerably since the summer, largely due to the efforts of the more domestically inclined members of the 312th Company. At first there had been no running water and the only lavatory for nearly a hundred men had been in a shed where six large circular holes had been cut in boards suspended over a deep pit. It was not long before drains from the manse and the chapel began to overflow on to High Street, causing so much offence to pedestrians that Fortin and Sons were instructed by the District Council to lay a new 6" drain from the site to the High Street sewer. US Army engineers had then built a new latrine block and installed running water to basins and showers. The living huts themselves, all six of them cold and damp at first, had gradually been made more comfortable although the heating arrangements remained unalterably primitive.

With wood salvaged from an old supply crate an enterprising GI made a locker for his personal belongings. Others followed his lead and by the end of October all sixteen beds in his hut were furnished with footlockers, neat little stowages for all sorts of odds and ends. Home-made kitboxes began to appear in other huts and the Company Commander watched the fashion spread. When these simple pieces of furniture reposed at the foot of most beds, Lieutenant Cohen ordered their

immediate removal. "Within the hour," barked Benny Addison as he walked down the lines of stunned GIs. But most detected a doleful note in their First Sergeant's voice.

Herbert M.Cohen was a martinet, a stickler for good order and conduct, a believer in a level of discipline which would have been more appropriate to a regiment of over-trained assault troops than to a small company of signallers living in a quiet English village. Nothing escaped his attention and the lot of the 312th was often compared unfavourably with the more relaxed atmosphere at Sawston Hall where the charismatic Kermit Bailey set the tone. The 312th's afflictions had begun one November afternoon on Drew Field, Florida where the days had been so busy that the men hardly had time to read their mail. The Company had been resting briefly between training sessions when into its midst had walked an officer of small stature and no especial bearing. No one took much notice and nobody called attention. The chat went on. Without warning the newcomer exploded in a frenzy of wrath, rocking on his heels, stretching to the full height of his small frame, yelling the startled company to rigid attention.

"I am your new company commander" he bellowed, his voice ringing through the lines of tents and Quonsets.

"Lieutenant Jacobson has gone and I have taken over. My name is Cohen, Lieutenant Herbert Cohen. Now dismiss to your classes. Next time we meet I want you all at attention - fast!"

In the months that followed the 312th learned about discipline the hard way.

It often seemed that nothing could dent their commander's id. His faith in disciplined conformity as the road to military success was unshakeable though his zeal was often the subject of criticism by senior officers. The day the Company detrained at Whittlesford station had earned the lieutenant his first rebuke on English soil. Two trucks had been waiting in the graveled yard and when they had been filled with all the barrack bags, Cohen began to lead his weary, travel-stained men up the hill towards the airfield. He had formed them up in strict company order, marching them off at a smart pace with their rifles shouldered, gas masks and helmets slung. Belted and back-packed, the hundred GIs soon began to sweat in the warm afternoon sun. At the top of the rise the briskly-moving column was halted by a colonel, his jeep parked askew the road. Cohen doubled over to the waiting colonel, listened briefly, saluted and returned.

"At ease" he said. "March at ease!" But even then he had them back at attention before Duxford's guardroom hove into view.

Two days later the company was slated for close order drill on the airfield. Again Cohen was hailed by a colonel:

"See those P.47s buzzing over your head?" asked the senior officer. "They could be 109s. There's no call here for parades on this open field".

On their first Saturday at Duxford the men of the 312th were alerted for a colonel's inspection. Their uniforms were in a worrying state, crumpled and creased after three weeks stowage in duffle bags in the hold of the "Esperance Bay". Emmett Sweno had saved the day, filling a mess- tin with sand, heating it on a stove and then passing his improvised flatiron down the line. The colonel was impressed with the newly arrived company's turn-out and he told them so. But back at the billets Lieutenant Cohen conducted his own inspection. His eagle eye spotted all sorts of infractions and the whole company was confined to barracks for the next two nights.

In Sawston the harsh regime continued. Restrictions were commonplace and at the end of the year four men were awaiting court-martial. Punishment was severe, a fine and three months detention.

On 3rd February 1944 the whistle blew for a company formation in the Chapel Field. Dismissing the first three grades, Sergeant Klodd marched the rest along High Street to Sawston Hall. There in the war room waited Colonel Woodbury himself. For a while he chatted amiably to the men of the 312th, explaining the huge maps which covered the walls. Then he turned to the sort of life they were leading in the chapel field. He was friendly, affable, almost confidential. But the men were uneasy, diffident, not used to being in conference with such a senior officer. They nodded attentively as he went on but when he posed a few gentle questions no spokesman emerged.

"Well, I've been watching your Company these past few weeks" he said finally, "and it seems there are a few things to be put right"

He paused, looked out of the window, then went on quickly:

"So now let's talk about Lieutenant Sherwood. How do you feel about him? Think he knows his job?"

No commander would have posed such a question unless he was certain of the reply. And this time answers came from everybody's lips, affirmative, enthusiastic.

Woodbury stood. Klodd brought the men to attention. The interview was over. "Good luck to you all" ended the colonel. "Back at quarters you'll find you have a new CO."

1944 had begun well for the men of the 312th, despite the long hours of darkness and the foul winter weather. At breakfast on the first Monday in January each man received a fresh orange. Next morning everyone had a real egg. Meals were certainly improving. And some men were being invited to Sawston homes where, though food was short and they had been warned not to deprive British hosts of their tiny civilian rations, it was nice to sit in comfortable chairs and chat about everyday things.

Madge Townsend, a teacher at the Village College since 1931,1ived in 'Blue Gates', an elegant house which she had commissioned an architect to build for her on the Cambridge-road. Madge had been joined at Sawston by her sister Lois when a lot of the Townsend family property was destroyed by the bombing of Coventry and the two were amongst the first in the village to offer hospitality to American soldiers. During the early months of 1944 two or three enlisted men were invited to share frugal meals in the comfortable warmth of the Townsends' well-furnished home. Middle-aged, wealthy, intellectual, bluestocking, Madge and Lois were curious to know more about the social and political background of the ordinary GI and they paved the way for more Sawston families to extend the hand of friendship to the village's homesick visitors.

Donald Evans and his wife also lived on the Cambridge-road. Active members of the community in all sorts of ways, Donald and Joyce were closely connected with the affairs of Sawston Congregational Church and had earlier been involved with negotiations leading to the use of the Lecture Hall and Chapel Field by the Americans. The 312th Signal Company had arrived in the village with three officers, Lieutenants Cohen, Sherwood and Tuttlè. With the last two the Evans family formed a friendship which continued when Robert Sherwood became company commander and Charles Tuttle moved to Sawston Hall as Wing Signals Officer. Throughout their two-year stay in Sawston the Evan's house was second home to these two officers.

As the months passed, understanding between the village and its visitors grew. For the Michaelmas term the Village College arranged a new evening class aimed particularly at interesting the Americans in British history. GIs of both the 66th Wing and the 312th Signals had made friends in the village but the Chapel Field men were first to organise a dance in their dayroom to which local girls were invited *en masse*. The party on that third Saturday in February 1944 was also a celebration of Robert Sherwood's promotion to command of the company and it turned out a great success. Just as proceedings were drawing to a close air raid warnings sounded and the girls were escorted home in the glow of flares hanging high above the village, route markers dropped by the Dornier, Heinkel and Junkers bombers which droned through the night sky towards London. Over to the east the horizon flickered eerily where a stick of phosphor bombs had been jettisoned near Fulbourn. It was the first of several noisy nights in those early months of 1944.

But a lot of Sawston people felt that they were being swamped by an alien culture. They hated their High Street over-run with fast-talking, fatigue-clad soldiers. They were aggravated beyond measure to find curious GIs browsing through the Co-op's meagre stock of unrationed goods. They seethed with rage at Reg Lane's excuses to put off their own modest `make do and mend' requirements because they knew he had a backlog of fancy blouses to re-pleat for the nattier GI dressers. They mourned the quiet privacy of their old Sawston. They wanted their pubs, their buses, their shops and their cinemas back to themselves. And they complained loudly about the off-duty activities of "the Yanks", especially their dogged pursuance of Sawston's young female population.

Already there had been marriages. On Christmas Day a 312th man had married a local girl. And it looked as if there would be many more.

Chapt. 13

From 18th August 1943 Duxford represented exactly one half of the sharp end of the 66th Fighter Wing's offensive capability. The other half consisted of the

353rd Group at Metfield which had flown its first operation only nine days before. By the end of the year three more Groups were to be added to the Wing's strength: the 55th at Nuthampstead, the only unit in the Wing to fly the distinctive P.38 Lightning fighter, the 358th based at Leiston in Suffolk and the 361st, flying from Bottisham. Another Group, the 359th at East Wretham, was to spend a month under the 66th's control but was transferred to the 67th Wing at the end of November. So as the days shortened dramatically with the approach of winter the 66th Fighter Wing's headquarters at Sawston had to move into top gear.

Duxford's P.47s had seen a lot of action during the summer and the 78th's pilots were regarded as the Wing's old hands. Together with Debden's 4th Group and Halesworth's 56th Group, Duxford had borne the whole burden of providing escort for the string of attacks by Fortresses and Liberators on French coastal targets. From September other fighter groups became operational and joined the fray. By Monday 27th September enough 108-gallon paper belly-tanks had arrived to allow the 78th and four other Groups to fly to Emden with 246 Fortresses briefed to bomb the city's sprawling Industrial area. The weather was bad when Duxford's squadrons found the great bomber formation ten miles west of Emden, making a wide turn *away* from the burning factories. Enemy fighters were wheeling and diving amongst the tiered squadrons of Fortresses which for the first time had used British H'S radar equipment to bomb through a blanket of cloud. The 83rd Squadron, flying at 27000 feet, were first to reach the scene of the action. Then, from 29000 feet the 84th Squadron fell on the German fighters. Finally the 82nd Squadron descended from its top cover height of 32000 feet and in the three or four minutes it took to drive away the harrying Messerschmitts the 78th's pilots shot down ten. The three squadrons suffered no losses themselves and regrouped **as** best they could to take station with the Fortresses for the 400-mile journey home. Over the Dutch coast fuel warning lamps began to blink on the Thunderbolts' Instrument panels and the 78th had to dive away from the bombers, scrambling into the nearest English coastal aerodromes.

On Saturday of that week they all went back to Emden again. And the following week-end Duxford's pilots saw three consecutive days of action. On Friday they flew with the bomber armada to Bremen, on Saturday to Marienburg and on Sunday the 78th took off from their misty field to bring home 236 Fortresses which had attacked the Munster railway yards. This time the bombers had suffered badly from the rocket-fire of scores of Me 110s, Me 410s and even Ju 88s. Thirty Fortresses

failed to land back in England and the late afternoon's action had also cost two Thunderbolts.

Four days later bad weather socked-in Duxford. Nothing could take off. Elsewhere however there was a good deal of action and late in the afternoon, when local weather had improved a little, a Fortress appeared over the 'drome. lt fired a red Very and made a crash-landing on the field. Rushing over to the crippled B 17 the grounded 78th men were confronted with a sorry sight. The bombardier was dead, the rest of the crew tired and shaken. The Fort had been in the air for eight embattled hours, part of a 230-strong force sent once again to the great ball and roller-bearing works at Schweinfurt, too distant a target to allow continuous fighter cover. On the Eighth's last visit, 17th August, Schweinfurt had claimed 36 bombers. This time 60 went down. As one of the lead bombardiers on the raid later reported: "You could follow the path of the battle by the wreckage on the ground."

But the battle went on and as time went by the attacking force grew bigger and bigger. Early November saw the 78th Fighter Group at Duxford equipped with enough P. 47D aircraft to form an 'A' Group and a 'B' Group, each having three 12-'plane squadrons. On 25th November both groups provided close and high cover for a sister Group, the 353rd, as it tested the Thunderbolt's possibilities as a dive bomber. To observe results at first hand Colonel Woodbury flew on the mission but from his 84th Squadron thunderbolt he had to watch the 353rd's CO suffer a direct flak hit and bail out over St.Omer airfield. German flak that day was altogether too heavy for good bombing results.

The English winter had now arrived with customary vengeance. A wet and misty November saw only 11 missions but the Group claimed 6 victories for the loss of 3 Duxford pilots.

On December 1st the 78th celebrated the first anniversary of its arrival in England and a big dance in the base theatre helped to dispel a lot of nervous tension which had built up during that morning's bad weather mission to Solingen. December turned out to be a month of rain and dense fog. Nine missions were flown, eleven victories claimed and two Thunderbolts were lost. The 21st was a particularly black day for the 78th. Poor standards of aircraft recognition on the part of some pilots led to the shooting down of four RAF Typhoons. The pain of this error was only partly alleviated by the discovery that in the same fight RAF Spitfires had shot down another Typhoon. The four 78th pilots involved were immediately transferred out of

the Group but the whole business cast a blight on the Christmas dance held at Cambridge Guildhall that night. The proceedings at that event were broadcast to the United States in **a** live coast to coast hook-up.

Altogether the 78th had flown 113 missions in 1943, ending on New Year's Eve with a mid-day operation escorting 460 bombers to targets in France. This big and successful attack on La Rochelle and Cognac airfields brought 1943 to a satisfying end and that night the New Year was welcomed in with a party at Sawston Hall. Corporal Bravin's Bobcats provided the music. Up the road Benny Walpole MC'd a dance at the Village College where, on the stroke of midnight, Fred Samuels led his band into the same version of 'Auld Lang Syne' which they had played to welcome in each of the last twenty years.

Duxford's first mission of 1944 was on Tuesday 4th January when it contributed to a force of 430 Thunderbolts giving penetration and withdrawal support to Fortresses attacking Munster. Next day the 78th sent 76 Thunderbolts to protect 112 Fortresses bombing Merignac airfield near Bordeaux. Five fighters failed to return to Duxford and another pilot crash-landed on Ford aerodrome. January brought gales, low cloud and rain, a first taste of the wretchedness of the English winter for many pilots newly arrived at Duxford. But missions were flown on each of the last four days of the month, culminating in the 78th's first dive-bombing attempt during an attack on Gilze Rijen airfield on Monday 31st.

Chapt. 14

The sight and sound of huge air armadas assembling amongst the vast cloudscapes of East Anglian skies became commonplace in February and March. The 78th Fighter Group went with the bombers to Frankfurt, Leipzig, Brunswick, Regensburg, Augsburg, Stuttgart and Furth. On Friday 3rd March the people of Berlin saw for the first time the contrails of 90 P 38 Lightning fighters high above the city, harbingers of the terrible storms to come. Then, on 6th March, nearly 700 bombers went to Berlin, the first big daylight assault on the German capital's vast industrial capacity. The first squadrons of heavily-laden Fortresses had climbed

away from their mist-shrouded airfields at 6.45 am that Monday morning but not until one minute past ten o'clock had the 1st Bomb Division completed its assembly to drone over Cromer on its way to Germany. By this time the big fighter escort of 307 P.47s and 118 P.51s was airborne and on its way to catch up with the bombers. Five minutes before noon found Duxford's Thunderbolts racing alongside the leading half of the 100-mile long procession of Fortresses and Liberators. An hour later, just as the leading bombers were closing up for their bomb run, a ridge of cloud slid below them, blanketing the Erkner Ball-bearing works. It was too late to re-align the huge formation of 250 Fortresses for a radar bomb run on the secondary target, the Friedrichstrasse railway station in the centre of the Big City. So all the Groups of the First Bomb Division's cavalcade had to bomb where they could. Following the First, the Third Division had the same difficulties with cloud and could not see its primary objective, the great Bosch factory complex. Its 226 Fortresses also had to drop their bombs on targets of opportunity. Bringing up the rear of the huge attacking force the Second Division's 200 Liberators aimed their bombs at the aero-engine factory at Genshagen. Then, trailing many stragglers, the three Bomb Divisions came together over the little town of Kyritz, north-west of Berlin. There they turned west, flying in line abreast, protected by the long-range Lightnings of the 20th and 364th Fighter Groups. At ten minutes past two o'clock the bombers passed north of Brunswick, heading home. And half an hour later eight thousand anxious aircrew, sitting high in the cold skies above a hostile Europe, were heartened by the sight of approaching contrails. Massed formations of Thunderbolts had arrived to watch them safely over the North Sea. The last bomber landed back at its base at 5.45pm. 69 others never returned. 11 fighters had been lost, 2 of them from Duxford.

That was on Monday. Tuesday was a rest day. On Wednesday they all went back to Berlin. And again on Thursday. The rest of March saw the 78th in action almost every day. Better weather during the month produced 21 missions, 12 air and 9 ground victories, 9 pilots lost and 2 wounded. Colonel Woodbury himself had another trip. On the 26th March he piloted an 84th Squadron Thunderbolt on a sweep around Roye. During this same period the Royal Air Force went to Berlin 16 times. On the night of 30th March over the city of Nuremberg RAF Bomber Command lost more aircrew than Fighter Command had lost during the whole period of the Battle of Britain. Despite appalling losses the maximum power of two great air forces was now being exerted on the enemy.

So many aircraft were now involved in daily operations that it was becoming vital for squadrons and Groups to recognise each other quickly in the air. A week of atrocious weather at the beginning of April gave time for the 78th's ground crews to apply new fighting colours to their 'planes, 6" black and white chequer-board squares being painted on the massive engine cowlings of every Thunderbolt. The rest of April and the whole of May produced almost a mission a day, the 78th playing a full part in escorting the bombers to attack airfields, marshalling yards and many new targets code-named *No-ball,* referred to at early briefings as "special aeronautical facilities". (Situated on or near the French coast these targets were soon seen to be the V-weapon sites from which would be launched the secret weapons so long threatened by the German Chancellor). 42 air kills were claimed during these weeks but 16 pilots were lost.

Other Duxford pilots died in accidents. One of them was Captain Jimmy Wilkinson, now commanding officer of the 82nd Squadron. He had become an expert loco-buster and always maintained that, hit in the right place, a locomotive could be disabled for months rather than weeks. When the RAF asked him to demonstrate his technique at a Welsh test range he readily agreed. Bad weather at the range prevented clearance for the cross-country flight from Duxford but Captain Wilkinson requested permission for a local air-test of his Thunderbolt. Once airborne, he headed for Wales. Nearing the range he was killed when he flew into a mist-shrouded hilltop near Llandoverry.

Lieutenant Peter Lehman was not a Duxford pilot but on the afternoon of 31st March he had taken off from Debden in his P 51B 'spamcan' (as the Mustang was known at first) and was engaged in a low-level mock dog-fight north of Sawston, pitting his brand-new fighter against a P 47 from the 78th. Suddenly his machine flicked over and spun to the ground, disintegrating in the vernal depths of West Green Plantation behind Sawston Hall. Lehman, son of the Governor of New York, had been killed by a violent shift in the aircraft's centre of gravity caused by lack of baffle plates inside the upright fuel tank just behind his seat. 65 gallons of aviation fuel sloshing around the tank had disastrously upset the fighter's equilibrium.

Sometimes a daisy-cutting strafe of the home base brought calamity. On 10th February the propeller tips of a low-flying fighter flung up the turf at Duxford. Ploughing through the boundary hedge on to the Newmarket Road the 'plane sliced off the cab of a passing British lorry. The pilot, Robert Nathaniel Gore, gave evidence at the coroner's inquest:

"I closed my eyes when I saw the telephone wires coming right at me. I crashed and the 'plane caught fire."

The verdict: "Harry Benjamin Bradley, aged 44, was killed through being accidentally struck by an aeroplane out of control."

Chapt. 15

A full moon rose in a clear sky as dusk began to fall on June 5th. Everyone at Duxford knew that the big day was almost upon them. For over a week now rifles and gas masks had been carried everywhere. Round-the-clock guards had been posted at dispersals and the station workshops had produced some odd-looking armoured vehicles which roamed the lanes south of the airfield, watching for a German paratroop attack which Colonel Gray had called "a real possibility". After supper that evening hundreds of ground- crew trooped out to the flight line armed with paint and brushes. In the dimming light they set about marking each squatting Thunderbolt with broad black and white invasion stripes, a task which took until midnight. Pilots had assembled at eight o'clock to hear that invasion of the continent was about to begin. Briefings started. By eleven o'clock pilots had received their mission cards and were trying to get some sleep. Just before 2 am the first Fortresses took off in bright moonlight, rumbling through the night sky with their navigation lights burning. "Christmas come early" said a wondering GI as he looked up at the hundreds of moving lights, red, white and green. By 3.20 am the weather had changed and ten minutes later the 83rd and 84th Squadrons took off from Duxford in pouring rain to join the thousands of allied aircraft filling the skies over southern England in those historic small hours. Before the end of that day the 78th's three squadrons had each undertaken three patrols over the Normandy beach-heads. Details of one such duty are shown on a 78th pilot's mission card. Though now-a-days they may look like instructions for the local car club's treasure hunt, neither the timetable itself, nor indeed words of any kind, can recover the faintest reality of that or any other mission of the time.

6th June: *Start engines at 05.33 hrs. Take off at 05.42 hrs. Set course at 05.48 hrs at 3,000 feet, heading 163° Climb to 8,000. Estimated time of arrival at Eastchurch (57miles) 06.04 hrs. Head 202° Climb to 9000 feet. ETA Rye (32 miles) 06.13 hrs. Head 205° Climb to 15000 feet. ETA St Valery (73 miles) 06.32 hrs. Head 213° and climb to 17000 feet. ETA Bernay (55 miles) 06.45 hrs. Head 253° ETA Ecouche (40 miles) 06.55 hrs. Head 049° ETA Bernax (40 miles) 07.04 hrs. Patrol landing area until 09.15 hrs. Head 011°. ETA St .Valery (55 miles) 09.21 hrs. Head 039° ETA Duxford (155 miles) 09.49 hrs.*

At this time the Eighth Air Force had about 2100 operational heavy bombers in England. In June 1944 it lost 280. Another 324 bombers were lost in July and a further 318 in August. Eighth Fighter Command had about 900 Thunderbolts, Mustangs and Lightnings. In June it lost 242, in July 153, in August 279. But, said an official report, "*if the human and material costs of the summer's operations were great, so were the achievements. The bombardment of German oil refineries and synthetic petroleum plants brought the enemy's fuel position to the point of catastrophe by September. The scientifically planned Allied bombings were strangling the German war machine, leaving to the enemy no hope as he desperately rebuilt his damaged plants, save that the autumn and winter* might *shield his oil production system*".

Chapt. 16

By the spring of 1944 Sawston High Street had become as familiar to Pfc Lloyd Olson as the main street of Big Bend, Minnesota. Every day, rain or shine, he trudged from the Chapel to the Cross and turned into Church Lane for his eight hour stint in the code-room at Sawston Hall. He knew every inch of the way, every house and shop, every tree, every patch of weed which sprouted between the granite sets and from the cracked and crumbling pavement. At first, when autumn sunshine had gilded the lichened tiles of the streetside cottages, he had often wondered why everything was huddled into poky yards and alleys when so much open space lay beyond the little settlement, so many arable fields and grassy meadows stretching along quiet lanes and lonely footpaths. Later on he had explored the countryside around the village, walking grassy unmade tracks to

neighbouring, nameless hamlets, tramping through hidden farmyards, climbing little knolls topped by wind- racked woodland, wandering the banks of reedy, slow-running streams, stumbling upon places where even the locals rarely seemed to venture. Later still, groping his way to the Hall through the all-encircling gloom of a winter's afternoon, gasping for breath in the curling fall-out of a hundred smoking chimneystacks, it was easier to understand why the people lived **in** such small, close-knit communities, in villages which nestled in the shallowest depressions of the bleak East Anglian plain, in homes which crouched roof-to-roof along narrow high streets. They must always have needed the comfort of closeness, the consolation of neighbourhood, the spirit and the strength of kinship to be able to endure the miseries of the English winter, to survive the bitter winds, the snow and the driving rain which every year swept down from the frosty, fog-bound fens. But, whatever his musings in whatever season of the year, the little High Street and the people who lived there were now part of Lloyd Olson's daily existence.

One grey January morning, just as day was breaking, 312th men on their way to breakfast came upon an airman who had parachuted into an almond tree which grew beside the Chapel path. Scrambling over the paling fence surrounding the cottage garden they expected to find a Luftwaffe flyer dangling in the bare branches, victim perhaps of anti-aircraft, fire which had kept them awake during the night. Instead they were called upon to rescue an agitated gunner from the 91st Bomb Group whose B 17 had come to grief. Bassingbourn Fortresses had taken off before dawn for an attack on Frankfurt but formating in the cloudy darkness had proved a perilous business. High above Duxford two bombers had collided and only one had been able to return to base. Six of the second B 17's crew had jumped from their stricken aircraft before the pilot attempted a landing in an Ickleton field. But his bomber had crashed, killing all four who had remained aboard.

For most of January the High Street seemed plunged in perpetual darkness. Only if he was slated for the afternoon shift did Lloyd Olson see anyone on his way to the Hall. But towards the end of the month the Luftwaffe launched its 'baby blitz' on London and every night the village was bathed in the light of cascading flares, brilliant beacons of red, white and green dropped by the first raiders flying in from their Dutch bases to show following comrades where to turn south for the capital. Guns, flares, bombs and searchlights gave the 312th a lot of sleepless nights in February and March. A few minutes after midnight on 22nd/23rd February a Dornier 217 flopped quietly on to allotments in Cambridge. No one saw or heard it

arrive. It rested there undamaged, on its belly, with not a soul aboard and the 312th Signal Company was ordered to send out a posse to look for the evading crew. Another posse was called for a little later when a Heinkel 177 was shot down at Butler's Farm near Little Walden and four of the crew managed to bail out. One young man evaded capture for days, creeping about in the deep Essex woodland between Hadstock and Linton, putting paid to the plans of some 312th GIs who had fixed with their girlfriends to see *"Dangerous Moonlight",* main feature at Spicer's Theatre for three nights from Thursday 20th April.

Winter was slow to turn to spring that year. One cold Sunday morning in the middle of March General Woodbury talked to his troops assembled on the frost-covered lawn at Sawston Hall. It was likely, he said, that the enemy would attempt an invasion of England to forestall an allied assault on the continent. *"They will be suicide squads"* he warned, *"and we shall treat them as such".*

Everyone knew that the conflict was about to hot up. On the Saturday before the General addressed his staff at Sawston some of them had been sent to Duxford on detached duties and had witnessed with awe the 78th Group's thunderous departure to war. Early that morning the engines of ninety-six Thunderbolts had burst into life at exactly the same moment, filling the air with a barrage of sound against which the human voice was rendered powerless. In noisy, weaving queues the big fighters had lurched to the eastern boundary, swung on squealing brakes and roared eight abreast into the air over the heads of their anxious, waving ground crews. In twelve minutes all had left the ground. Noses up, engines screaming, the great swarm headed east, the last off straining to catch up with the leaders. Long after it was out of sight the sound of its going lingered in the empty heavens.

When winter finally turned to spring Sawston's High Street cast off some of its Dickensian gloom. Folk emerging each morning from the yards and alleys even began to nod cheerfully as Lloyd Olson plodded by. He in turn was feeling more at home. He had made some good friends in the village, as had other 312th men. Twice in May he had dined at the Townsends and colleagues were also being welcomed into Sawston homes. Some men had become regular worshippers at the Congregational church and a few had joined the little Methodist congregation just along the street. Many more, Catholics, Baptists, Lutherans and agnostics alike, lingered with the faithful little band of Salvationists which every fine Sunday afternoon paraded at Mill Lane corner. There they could join in the familiar

repertoire of best-loved hymns rendered in gladsome style by the, songsters and musicians of the Sawston Citadel.

Though GI duties daily grew more arduous there were 48-hour passes to be had and off-duty weekends could be spent in places which could be reached by 'bus or rail. London was always the most popular venue for two-day passes, though Lloyd Olson and his friends had been to Shakespeare's birthplace and stayed at the Lamb Hotel in Ely. Afternoon passes meant a search for more local diversions and bicycle traffic between Sawston and Cambridge was always considerable.

Life in Chapel Field continued to get better. Transformers had permitted the use of electric razors. Warren Clements had returned from a London trip with a radio for which each man in Hut 4 was asked to fork out a pound. Home-made ironing boards had much improved the everyday turn-out of the 312th, both on duty and off. One clever GI made an ice-cream machine but it was so successful that it was quickly commandeered by higher- ranking connoisseurs at Sawston Hall. Some men were transferred away: in mid-June Benny Addison, First Sergeant since the inception of the 312th, left the company. William Alspaugh took his place. There were lectures on sex, parades for visiting brass, film shows in the 'Barn' theatre. On Monday night, 12th June, some GIs paid a shilling each to see *'Salute the Soldier'*, a lively review staged by the Youth Club at Spicer's Theatre. The Village College hall was filled to capacity on August Bank Holiday for a dance in aid of Sawston's Homecoming Fund and a month later, on September 2nd, scores of GIs made their way to Duxford to hear Bing Crosby sing a song which that very week had reached the top of the AFN Hit Parade. Back in America it was a new crooner by the name of Frank Sinatra who was making his name with *"I'll be Seeing You"* but at Duxford the old groaner received rapturous applause after his hangar concert and later that day was entertained by General Woodbury at Highfield House.

The daylight battle between the Luftwaffe and the Eighth Air Force was reaching its zenith and signals traffic at Sawston Hall became so intense that shifts had to be reinforced. Sometimes Lloyd Olson, roused in the dead of night to assist an overloaded code-room, felt that he lived in a kind of limbo: for evermore he would be hurrying along High Street, fumbling for his pass at each of the guarded doors, coding and decoding a never-ending stream of signals, grabbing a meal on the way back to bed in Chapel Field and waking to face the same again tomorrow.

But his familiar routine ended abruptly at half past two in the afternoon of Sunday 3rd December 1944. Summoned to the CO's office he found that five men of the 312th Signals were to proceed immediately on detachment to special duties at the front line in Germany. He was one of them. Next morning, as a chill dawn broke over the village, a truck backed up the snow-powdered pathway to the dayroom's double doors. Pfc Olson and his four unlucky comrades climbed aboard and bade farewell to Sawston High Street.

Chapt. 17

Colonel Murray Woodbury became a Brigadier-general in March 1944 and units of the 66th paraded on the lawn in front of Sawston Hall to honour their Commander's promotion. The new General was popular throughout the Wing, spending much of his time at the grass roots of the vast organisation and flying sometimes with one of the Duxford squadrons. Enlisted men were often surprised to be accosted by "The Old Man" for their views and whenever there was hot news to be imparted, whether it was good or bad, he liked to do it himself, face to face with those it concerned. Woodbury's daily round was a busy one. Easily reached from London, Duxford held a special attraction for visitors and Sergeant Jim Smith, the General's secretary, had to keep a watchful eye on his chief's diary. As well as the top brass of his own Air Force 'The Old Man' hosted French and Russian generals, politicians (the US Undersecretary of War and the Lord Mayor of London among them) and several well-known stars of screen and radio. Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, Jimmy Cagney all spent an hour or two at Sawston Hall in the course of morale-boosting tours of troops in the European theatre.

One man welcomed back to Sawston Hall by Murray Woodbury was its owner, Commander Reginald Eyre-Huddleston, recalled to the Royal Naval Reserve "for the duration of the present emergency". This once familiar Sawston figure returned one day to find his house transformed into a hive of military activity. Provided with a microphone, he thanked assembled GIs for their care in looking after his home and its surroundings. It had taken more than three centuries to make the lawn in front of the house and he was glad that it was standing up so well to being used as a parade ground. He noted with approval that it had been railed to

stop invasion by careless vehicles and that the kitchen gardens behind the house were abundant with produce destined for the 66th's messroom tables. Prominent amongst the rows of onions, carrots, beans and peas were the yellowing heads of the General's favourite sweetcorn, the seed for which had been especially flown from its native America.

To transport senior officers from Sawston to conferences or to other airfields Wing headquarters maintained six or seven assorted aircraft at Duxford. The General himself used a Bobcat, a UC-78 5-seater twin-engined cabin monoplane, rudely referred to by the troops *as "the bamboo bomber"* but a machine which could provide fast and comfortable transport around the country. Or he could use the Wing Fortress, a war- weary B-17 with *"The Ole Man"* painted large across its forward fuselage. Furnished with a few comfortable seats the old warrior was more often known on the flight line as "The Waldorf Astoria". Or there was a Norduyn Norseman, a UC-64, a rugged high-wing eight-seater useful to convey larger parties around the Wing's far-flung empire. One P 47 Thunderbolt and an AT-6 Harvard completed the inventory, though after Christmas 1944 a Mustang replaced the Thunderbolt and the old Fortress faded gracefully into un-airworthy retirement. For a while it stayed proudly parked by the control tower, roosting there like a hen amongst a brood of busy chicks. But when it began to look a little the worse for wear it was towed to a less conspicuous corner. Later still 78th Group technicians converted a Mustang to take a second seat and it was in the *"Gruesome Twosome."* that the 66th's Wing surgeon, Lieutenant- colonel Ben Pentecost, flew operations long enough to win the Air Medal, helping to evacuate wounded men from the continent.

The Wing's little fleet of aircraft, parked usually near the control tower, had a narrow escape on Wednesday 19th June when a 401st Bombardment Group B 17 visited the airfield from its home base at Deenethorpe. Its co-pilot was a friend of two 84th Squadron "*jug jockeys"* and after lunch the Deenethorpe crew invited the two 78th Group pilots and fourteen enlisted men of the 84th Squadron to squeeze into the Fortress for a ride round local skies in a "real grown-ups' airplane". All went well until the big bomber approached low over the airfield boundary to 'beat up' the control tower. So low was its pilot flying that its left wing struck the station's blinker beacon which was installed on top of one of the hangars. Rolling on to its back the huge machine nosed up over the Royston-Newmarket road and plunged into the middle of an enlisted men's barrack block. All nineteen aboard the Fortress perished

in the inferno which raged for three hours. Mercifully, few men had returned to their quarters at the time and only one was killed.

Tragedy struck nearer to the heart of the 66th Wing's operations on September 3rd. It was a pleasant Sunday afternoon, and folk were sauntering along the footpaths which led from the end of Church Lane through broad fields of stubble to Pampisford, to Babraham and to Stapleford. There was little to disturb their enjoyment save the ever-present drone of aircraft passing high in the hazy blue. But at half past four a strange, uneven scream, as of powerful engines out of control, echoed in the eastern sky, stopping the strollers in their tracks, drawing their gaze heavenwards. A great black, slowly-turning shape plunged from the sky and disappeared below the treeline at Pampisford Wych. A muffled explosion shook the earth beneath their feet. In the silence which followed they saw a cloud of black, oily smoke mushrooming above the trees from the direction of Pampisford Hall. Soon, from the end of Church Lane, came a stream of GIs on bicycles, pedalling furiously over the bumpy fields towards the billowing pall of smoke. Two jeeps followed, racing across the stubble, passing the sweating cyclists in clouds of chalky dust, all of them taking the shortest cross country route to the scene of disaster.

Duty controllers in Duxford tower had seen the crash, knew that it had been a Halifax bomber and were frantically trying to discover from RAF sources if there were any bombs aboard. In the meantime Lieutenant Shoemaker and his 2027th Engineering Fire Fighting Platoon were racing to Pampisford Wych, escorted by the commander of the 989th Military Police Company, Lieutenant Louis Streb, and his driver, Sergeant Wayne Marsh. At Home Farm they came upon a scene of devastation, a blazing mass of tangled metal, shattered trees, exploding bullets. No one could possibly be alive in that raging horror. Two jeeps had already arrived from Sawston Hall, Just a mile away, and a middle- aged man from a nearby cottage stood gazing in disbelief at the awful desolation.

Those who had happily set out on their afternoon walks now turned homeward with heavy hearts, knowing that they had witnessed one more tragedy in the war's long saga of woe. But hardly had they set off when another mighty explosion rocked the countryside. For the Halifax had a full load of bombs, its Canadian crew briefed for a daylight operation. Five of them had died when it plunged to earth, three had parachuted to safety. But the exploding bombs claimed the lives of some who had hurried to that lonely spot only to save life. Lieutenant Shoemaker died in the dreadful holocaust, with Louis Streb and-Wayne Marsh. And

the man who ran to help from the little cottage at Brant Ditch End was killed by a falling tree. Dead too was the commander of Sawston Hall's headquarters squadron. Clyde J Kennedy had been promoted to Major only that very morning.

Chapt. 18

Never again will the skies above East Anglia be as crowded as they were in 1944. In the first light of each new day hundreds of weary Lancaster and Halifax crews traipsed to their de-briefing rooms, the sound of their engines still pulsing loudly in their ears. At the same time thousands of American airmen were clambering into their Fortresses and Liberators for the hard day's work ahead. And at Raydon and Leiston, Wormingford, Fowlmere and Duxford the 66th Wing's pilots ate their pre- mission breakfasts to the roar of engines being warmed by crew chiefs who already had been on the flightline for a couple of hours. The air assault on Hitler's Reich, by night and by day, was growing in ferocity.

And there was retaliation by the enemy, despite the progress of allied armies in France. The first 'pilotless aircraft' fell at Gravesend a week after D--day. Three weeks later Prime Minister Churchill told the House that 2754 flying bombs had been discharged from the French coast and though many had failed to cross the Channel, 2752 people had been killed by the new terror weapon and 8000 injured. Hitler's second secret weapon fell at Chiswick on September 8th, its one-ton warhead propelled by a supersonic rocket against which no defence seemed possible save somehow preventing it being launched at all.

July and August were months of continuous action for the Duxford squadrons. The first week in July saw them used as fighter bombers on railroad and airfield targets in northern France. For the next two weeks they escorted huge bomber forces to Munich, Kiel, and Hannover. There followed a series of strafing and bombing attacks on road and rail transport in both northern France and western Germany. September brought a return to escort duties for more large-scale bombing attacks on oil targets at Magdeburg, Merseburg and Hemmngstedt. On September 17th and 18th the 78th Group somewhat reluctantly acted as flak bait over Arnhem

so that B 24 bombers could make low level supply drops to the beleaguered troops of the British 1st Airborne Division. Air fights over Arnhem waxed fierce and furious: on the day that the ill-fated *Market Garden* operation was abandoned the Eighth Air Force lost 45 Thunderbolts over the smoke-shrouded battlefield. For valour displayed in that fortnight of desperate action the 78th was later to receive a coveted Distinguished Unit Citation. October began with bad weather but from the 5th of that month the great bomber armadas again streamed daily into Germany, to Cologne, Bremen, Osnabruck, Koblenz, Hamburg, Hamm and Maintz. With them always were the colourful fighters of the 66th Wing: Fowlmere's red and white chequered Mustangs; the green and yellow nosed Mustangs from Wormingford and the red and yellow squares of l,eiston's *Yoxford Boys;* Raydon's black and yellow nosed Thunderbolts and, last but not least, the familiar black and white patterns of Duxford's 78th.

Bad weather halted all operations on Friday 13th. But Saturday brought a massive resumption of operations by both the RAF and the Americans. *Operation Thunderclap* began at 0700 hours when 1000 Fortresses took off for Cologne and 1500 Halifaxes and Lancasters left their bases for Duisburg and Brunswick. That night the RAF went back to Duisburg, putting another 1000 bombers into a massive night raid on the city. The armies in France may have ground to a halt but Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris and Major-general Carl Spaatz were determined to press on with total destruction of the Ruhr industries and of Hitler's oil and transport resources, even if this meant, as Harris himself proclaimed, "wrecking Germany from end to end".

By the end of November Duxford was packed with Thunderbolt fighters. They filled the hangars and stood in serried ranks out on the airfield. When called upon its three squadrons could put 96 machines into the air but the great weight of the Thunderbolt fighter, the heavy usage which the airfield was having to withstand and the onset of what looked like being a cold, wet winter had combined to turn the grass surface into a slippery mixture of chalk and mud. A full-length runway of pierced steel planking was urgently needed or brakes would become a superfluous extra on Duxford's P 47s. On 16th December 30 brand-new 'Spamcans', P 51D Mustangs in bare metal finish, were ferried into Duxford and 82nd Squadron ground crews had just finished painting their stylish cowlings with the 78th Group's familiar 6" square black and white checks when orders came for all three squadrons to move to Bassingbourn. US Engineers would then be able to lay the badly-needed

new runway. Whilst at Bassingbourn the 83rd Squadron's complement of 30 Mustangs was delivered and training on the new machines went ahead despite the rain and snow which had set in on the 8th of the month. So bad was the weather that only two operations could be mounted from Bassingbourn. In both of them P 47s were used to escort Fortresses which had to bomb blind through thick layers of scudding grey cloud.

For ten whole days before Christmas the vast overcast shrouded western Europe, preventing any large-scale air operations from England. But in the early hours of Christmas Eve teleprinters at Wing headquarters throughout the Eighth spilled out the details of Field Order 760. At last clear skies were extending over western Europe and the Eighth prepared to launch its maximum effort. Everything that could fly was to go, assembly ships, training 'planes, reserve bombers, some even that lacked defensive guns. Airfields and marshalling yards were to be the targets for the biggest air strike ever, conveying a clear message to the enemy that Field Marshal von Rundstedt's demand for the surrender of besieged American forces in the Ardennes was vain delusion on the part of a doomed Wehrmacht. Into the cold blue skies of that frosty morning 2034 American Fortresses and Liberators and 500 RAF heavy bombers took off for Germany, protected by RAF Spitfires and 800 fighters of the Eighth Air Force. But for Duxford's new Mustangs and for those of the 339th Group out on the bleak slopes at Fowlmere it was a frustrating time. Both stations remained completely fogged-in: the 78th and the 339th were the only Groups in Fighter Command to miss the big day. But the 78th made up for it on New Year's Eve: Captain Maxwell of the 84th Squadron shot down the Group's 400th enemy aircraft. And by 3rd January all three Duxford squadrons were able to fly their brand new Mustangs in support of a 1000-bomber attack on rail yards in western Germany.

Saturday night was far from the loneliest night of the week in wartime Sawston. The High Street fairly buzzed with activity. A mood of excited anticipation filled the air. Regular customers of Sawston's pubs, determined to make sure of their Saturday night pints before the beer ran out, had to look sharp, as did local men home on forty-eight hour passes and anxious to catch up with the latest village *griff*. For the pubs quickly filled up with assorted homeless soldiery, all looking to Sawston to provide what they were missing of their hometown diversions. From Whittlesford came representatives of whatever regiment was garrisoned on the Lawn. The resident GI population was often dismayed to find its drinking haunts appropriated

by boy soldiers of the Welch Regiment searching desperately for signs of Sawston's high-life or impassive squads of hefty Dragoon Guards looking for somewhere to drown their sorrows. Sometimes solemn little detachments of Poles or Czechs sidled into the King's Head or the Commander-in-Chief soon after opening time and for one taut period the Woolpack became the favoured hole-up of a repatriated Eighth Army unit, ex-desert rats waiting impatiently at Whittlesford for an opportunity to re-acquaint themselves with the embattled *Wermacht*.

Earliest Saturday night traffic in High Street was the steady stream of picturegoers flowing north towards New Road. The doors had hardly closed behind the last arrivals at Sawston's own palace of dreams when another trickle through the High Street swelled swiftly to a flood. Old ladies pushed aside their lace-curtains to watch the girls go by. Splendidly arrayed for the premier sortie of the week, with hairstyles á *la Hayworth,* home-made dresses *á la mode,* skirts swinging fashionably to the knee, fine lisle stockings, wedge heels, shoulder bags, liberally adorned with eye-shadow and lipstick carefully conserved for the big night out, the young female population of the village stepped out confidently towards its Saturday night *Mecca*. The pilgrimage ended at Sawston's Village College, acknowledged top of all the local Saturday nightspots. There may have been no bar but there were ten pubs just up the road. The accoustics were good so the best bands played there. The hall had an excellent floor and the premises were modern, well appointed and non-sectarian. Above all there would be four solid hours of a music born of the war, music with a rhythm which echoed the mood of the times, with lyrics which spoke of love, separation, sorrow, and of a longing for the visionary gleam of a forgotten peace.

Whatever the reasons, the young found solace in that Saturday night refuge from reality. By nine o'clock the music had weaved and spun its spell: the air was charged: faces shone. By ten the hall was full, the corridors crowded and for the rest of the evening the bodies and souls of four hundred young men and women were in the hands of half a dozen men making music on a spotlit stage. Sometimes the spiralling arpeggios of a tango steadied the action on the floor. Sometimes the darkened hall filled with the wistful words of a slow waltz, *One More Kiss* perhaps or *Farewell to Dreams,* crooned softly by the swaying press of entwined couples. But it was the two-four and four-four time foxtrots, played in swingtime off-beat tempo, which lifted the hall to a crescendo of sound and action. The frenzy only subsided when half past eleven approached and the slower, sweeter harmony of *Who's Taking You Home Tonight* kept the floor full for the last waltz. Few had been able to

tear themselves away before a final shiver of cymbals marked the end of an all-too-brief sojourn in a magic world far from the factory, the army and the grinding, never-ending war.

Chapt. 19

The winter of 1944-5 brought atrocious weather. Pouring rain in the autumn was followed by weeks of freezing fog and frost. With January came ice and snow and by the 23rd of the month classrooms at the Village College were too cold to be used. Only in the main hall could heating be maintained and some form of teaching carried on.

Hitler broke **six** months' silence to speak to his people on New Year's Day. Much Brahms and Beethoven preceded his words.

"The world must know" he proclaimed, *"that this State will never capitulate....that victory will come to him who is most worthy of it...."*

Very few Sawston folk heard, read or cared about the Fuhrer's speech. They had endured the sixth grim Christmas of a war which seemed to be dragging on endlessly even though massive pressures were being exerted on the enemy. But in spite of everything, snowstorms, thick fogs, icy roads, chronic shortages of everyday necessities, there was a spirit of optimism in the air over the festive season. The children had enjoyed another Christmas party at the Hall. Each had received a present from a splendid red-cheeked Santa - First Sergeant Ed Rhatigan of the 66th Wing Headquarters Squadron had needed no padding to fulfil his merry Yuletide role. Thick fog on Christmas Eve had done nothing to prevent the main hall of the Village College being filled to the limit for a festival of favourite carols. And in the evening the Youth Club took time off from rehearsals of their *Queen of Hearts* pantomime to sing more carols along the befogged High Street, swelling the village's Homecoming Fund to the tune of £7. 6. 4½.

Little shafts of light were now beginning to appear, signs perhaps that the end of a long dark tunnel might not be too far off. On the first Sunday in December all the Cambridgeshire battalions of the Home Guard had assembled on Parker's Piece for their official stand-down parade. Spicer's Theatre now opened for six days of the week with changes of programme on Mondays and Thursdays. Military vehicles (and the few cars that remained on the roads) were driving about with unmasked headlamps. 'Black-out' was giving way to 'dim-out'. And notices were appearing in the *Weekly News* about a compulsory purchase order being placed on 12 acres of Gerald Hurry's farmland, needed, it was said, for post-war housing in Sawston. The Ministry of Health's permission had already been sought, said another report, for the building of 50 temporary dwellings on land in Babraham Road. According to Sawston grapevine these would all be for homecoming servicemen.

The Village College hall was packed with happy patrons when the Sawston Red Cross detachment organised the first dance of the new year on Saturday 13th January. Corporal Bravin's *Bobcats* played till half past eleven when noisy throngs of dancers plunged through the fogbound High Street, most of them taking the long way home.

Chapt. 20

Hampered by dreadful weather conditions in January the 78th nevertheless flew seventeen major missions. Snow and fog continued into February but still the Duxford squadrons provided escort on eighteen days of the month, flying with huge fleets of bombers to destroy oil and rail targets at Chemnitz, Prague, Nurnburg, Magdeburg, Hamm, Osnabruck, Hamburg, Bremen, Munich.

Operation Clarion began on the 22nd February, a furious, prolonged assault by more than a thousand bombers each day, pounding Hitler's tank factories, jet airfields, oil refineries and railway yards. That single month of vicious fighting cost Duxford 18 pilots. March began with even more strenuous efforts to support the allied armies breakneck drive into Germany, Austria and Poland. From the 1st to the 5th the Group flew every day. Montgomery's forces crossed the Rhine on the

23rd and encirclement of the Ruhr began. By April 11th Hannover and Essen had been taken. So fast was the advance that ground strafing by all American fighter aircraft was forbidden but the great bombing offensive continued. On the day after the sad announcement of Roosevelt's death the Russians took Vienna. By Saturday 14th a massed fleet of nearly 1200 Fortresses and Liberators was bombing enemy pockets of resistance on the French Atlantic coast without the necessity of a fighter escort. The German oil industry had been immobilised and what was left of the Luftwaffe sat helplessly on the ground. Though its leader had boasted that it would last for a thousand years, the last hours of the Third Reich were close at band.

Chapt. 21

In February the 312th Signal Company threw a party to mark the refurbishment of the Lecture Hall and on March 20th their Commanding Officer wrote a letter to his five men still in Germany:

"It seems like such a long time since you went away but we haven't for a minute forgotten that you still belong with us. Everything possible is being done to have you replaced for I know you miss the fellows in the 312th just as much as they miss you.

We're living in more luxury than ever now thanks to the efforts of Sweno, Raddatz and Schwegel who have completely renovated our day room, snack bar, library and upstairs writing room.

Spring has come to England early this year and we've gotten off to a fine start in our athletic program. Message Centre and Telephone are at present *tied for first place* in *the volleyball league. About thirty men have tried out for the softball team and many of the men are training for the track meet to be held on 10th April. Walters, Collins and Nickerson are throwing the shot-put; Nickerson and I are high jumping; Dubinsky, Dusabek, Burton and Alspaugh are training for the mile. It looks as though Grabowski and Pfaff may win the three-legged race while its a toss between Bommer and Priwer for the bicycle race..."*

Through March and April the daily routine of the 112th continued: if anything the communications workload grew even heavier as the 66th Wing's operations over Germany reached crescendo. A fortnight after the company's athletics meeting on April 10th the blackout in England was lifted; for the first time in six years the lights really shone. But winter still had a final fling on the last day of the month. Early in the morning there was a heavy fall of snow.

Chapt. 22

The 78th Fighter Group flew its last operation on Wednesday 25th April. At six o'clock on that misty spring morning nearly a hundred P 51s took off from Duxford to rendezvous with 11 Lancasters of the Royal Air Force's 617 Squadron. The target was Hitler's mountain retreat at Berchtesgaden and the Lancasters wanted no interference in their task of making certain that never again would the *Eagle's Nest* provide shelter for a Nazi leader. So, for the last time, Duxford made its maximum effort. Sadly, the day claimed one last life. 2nd Lieutenant Carroll had to turn back to base shortly after take off. Letting down through dense fog towards the airfield he flew into trees near Sawston, losing his life in the ensuing crash. That day too, six hundred Fortresses bombed an armaments factory at Pilsen. It was the last heavy bomber mission of the war.

Chapt. 23

The Fifth Army coming up from northern Italy met the Seventh coming down through Austria. American soldiers greeted Russians on the Elbe. Italian partisans killed Mussolini and his mistress on 28th April and two days later, with the Russian Army at the doors of his Berlin bunker, Hitler committed suicide.

Starting Monday 7th May the big film at Spicer's was *"Watch on the Rhine"* starring Bette Davis and Paul Lukas. The supporting feature was grinding to its predictable climax when the theatre manager walked in front of the screen. The audience booed at the interruption but the little man held up his hand. *"You'll all be glad to know"* he announced, "that *the war is over",* Boos changed to cheers. Some people even left.

That same evening Pfc Lloyd Olson lay sprawled on his bunk in the St.Marie Therese Convent in Luxembourg when Billy Terry, a fellow 312th exile, came in to say that the war was over. There was a moment's silence, then some-one said *"Oh".* But later in the evening there was dancing in the streets. First thing next morning Special Signals Detachment Number 9 began the long journey home. And for the little group of 312th signallers who for five months had roamed the front lines in France, Germany and Luxembourg, the 'home' they looked forward to seeing again was a hut in the Chapel Field at Sawston.

The sun shone on Tuesday 8th May and the temperature was in the seventies. At three o'clock Churchill broadcast to the nation. But in Sawston there was no official partying. Plans to celebrate the great victory had been ditched two weeks before when no one had turned up at a public meeting called by the Parish Council to prepare for the big day.

The 8th and 9th May were declared public holidays but Duxford personnel missed what local celebrations did take place because a two day restriction was placed on the base. At a formal parade on the 9th Colonel Landers read the official victory proclamation and the Chaplain offered prayers. For the rest of the week hardly an aircraft took to the skies above Duxford. Then at teatime on 13th May the familiar roar of engines echoed again over the countryside. For the very last time the 78th Fighter Group took off in force to join the great victory review, a majestic formation of 700 Thunderbolts and Mustangs flying slowly round London from 6 o'clock until 8 on that first Sunday of peace in Europe.

Chapt. 24

After VE-day every GI's thoughts turned to home, even if it was to be only a stop-off on the way to the Pacific war. Under the army's demobilisation scheme men with 85 points or more would qualify for immediate release. These high point men were soon on the way home and the scene at Sawston Hall changed quickly and dramatically, new faces appearing every other day. Most sections still had at least some duties to perform but the accent switched firmly to training and education. A 'station college' was set up to provide courses in all sorts of subjects - business management, radio, auto maintenance, book keeping, even psychology and languages. Athletic competitions abounded, passes and furloughs freely available. Entertainment became a high priority. Then on 6th July came the big blow. The 66th Wing Headquarters Squadron was destined for the Pacific. The move would be direct, with no home leave. Two of the Wing's Groups, Wormingford and Leiston would go to the continent with the Occupation Forces. Fowlmere was scheduled for the Pacific, via the United States. In Chapel Field the 312th signalers contemplated their future with considerable gloom.

A kind of peace settled on England. But many Sawston families still had husbands, sons, daughters in India, Ceylon, Burma, facing the ever-defiant armies of Japan. Their anxious times continued, even as Town Peas were picked on 11th July and next day the Rose Queen was crowned before an unusually big crowd. James Milner, long-time Warden at the College, was retiring at the end of term and many had come to say farewell to a popular school head. Not a soul watching pretty Doreen Darlow being crowned in that traditional summer ceremony could have envisaged another assembly that very same afternoon in the New Mexico desert at Los Alamos. There, all was being readied for the first-ever test of an atomic weapon. Three weeks later the full-sized bomb burst above Hiroshima.

Tuesday 14th August: In Hut Number 4, Chapel Field, Sixteen men awake in their beds, listening to the radio which Warren Clements had brought back from a London trip so long ago. At midnight the clipped, unemotional words of Clement Attlee, the new British Prime Minister: *"Japan"* he said *"has today surrendered"*.

Earlier that evening there had been a special Parish Council meeting in the Church Institute. The agenda was "to *discuss plans for Victory over Japan"*. It was

resolved that *"owing to the absence of any information from the Government, no action be taken to recognise VJ-Day"*

But a big celebration did happen, on 25th August. That Saturday afternoon a grand Anglo-American fete drew half of Sawston's population to Spicer's Sports Ground. There were sideshows, softball, volleyball, open-air dancing and fireworks. American participation was master-minded by the 66th Wing's signals chief, Captain Charles Tuttle. The Village College Youth Club did the rest.

The 312th held open house for the people of Sawston on Tuesday 28th and in September all equipment was turned in. By 31st October the Lecture Hall, the Manse and the Chapel Field lay silent and empty.

The 312th Signal Company Wing had gone home.

Chapt. 25

Crowds flocked to Duxford on 1st August 1945, invited by the 78th Fighter Group to the only open day ever held at Eighth Air Force Station Number 357. On foot, by bicycle, in 'buses which shuttled busily between the airfield and local villages, they streamed past the guardroom to take a closer look at the home base of American flyers who had helped to win the air war over Europe. Beyond the control tower row upon row of gleaming Mustangs were drawn up on Duxford's green turf, their sleek cowlings resplendent with the 78th's familiar black and white fighting colours. Below their polished canopies were lucky emblems and mission tallies, symbols of victories and the stencilled names of their flightline crews. But most conspicuous of all were the names which pilots had lovingly bestowed on their personal machines: "*My Baby", "Smilín' Jack", "Pin-Up Girl", "Geronimo", "Mr Ted",* "*No Guts - No Glory", "Fast-Action Jackson", "Sconk the Hunter", "Joker", "Pappy", "Big, Beautiful Doll"*. Often chosen had been the names of wives and sweethearts: *"Eileen", "Jeannie Vos", "Kitty", "Margaret's Mace"*. Kid sisters had also figured: *"Vicky", "Judy"*. A few names seemed to have secret, talismanic significance: *"Unmentionable", "Rough Edge", 'El Jeepd'*. But whatever the names splashed across the fuselages of those shining Mustangs the visitors queued that Wednesday

afternoon to climb into their narrow cockpits, handle their controls, finger the gun buttons and fancy - however vicariously - what it must have been like to fly to war with the 66th Fighter Wing.

In its twenty-two months of combat duty the 66th Fighter Wing had played a dramatic part in the destruction of Hitler's *Fortress Europe*. 3277 enemy aircraft had been downed, 2800 locomotives put out of action and 17,000 ground targets blasted. More importantly, the Eighth Air Force's huge fleets of B17s and B24s had been enabled to reach their targets, to destroy Germany's oil industry and to provide General Eisenhower's armies with a sky clear of the Luftwaffe. The cost in American lives had been grievous. But with the Wing about to join another war in the Pacific there was neither the time nor the inclination to dwell for long on the price of victory in Europe.

In the event neither the 78th nor any other of the 66th's Groups went to the Far East. VJ-day came and in September the colourful Mustangs were flown away to depots for disposal. The 78th left Duxford on 10th October and sailed next day on the *Queen Mary* from Southampton. The Group arrived in New York harbour on 16th and two days later it was disbanded.

Sawston Hall too was swiftly cleared. By the end of October both the old house and Church Lane itself had regained their ancient seclusion.

Chapt. 26

Nearly fifty years later veterans of the 66th Fighter Wing Headquarters Squadron staged a re-union in England, returning to Sawston Hall one warm October afternoon at the invitation of its new owners, the Cambridge Centre for Languages. At the end of their visit the Bursar displayed a ragged poster, discovered recently in a dilapidated old barn which had once served as the base theatre. *"We are"* it proclaimed in faded red and green capitals, *"General Woody's Boys"*.

All afternoon the veterans had probed into every nook of the Hall, marvelling at the unchanging character of their old headquarters. From their guides they

learned things which in two and a half years of wartime occupation they had never discovered about their historic surroundings. Now they poked into every corner, eagerly describing the former use of room after room to wives who found today's comfortable furnishings difficult to square with tales they had been told of a spartan life in war-time England. They wandered the restored gardens but could discover only the grass-covered foundations of the Quonsets where once they had lived beyond the moat. They ventured into High Street where a one-time sergeant was dismayed to find that his old workplace - the *Confirmation of Victory Credits* section - had totally disappeared, replaced by a Chinese take-away shop. An ex-master sergeant looked sadly upon the ivy-clad shack where for two and a half years he had been in charge of the Headquarters Squadron's clothing store.

"Never mind", he said quietly. "*We had it easy, I guess. Sawston was a fine little place to be. I made a lot of friends here".*

Memories abounded that day of those sometimes sad, often bizarre, usually noisy, but always busy years spent in Sawston village. Stories went round of parties and dances, leaves and detachments, pub fights and buzz-bombs, the black-out and the black market, narrow escapes from returning husbands, all kinds of mishaps and misunderstandings. Told too were old Jokes about the English climate. Some could remember tranquil afternoons in summer when Church Lane's ancient elms had cast their quivering shadows on fields of ripening wheat, birds sang in the Hall woods and the war seemed far away. But many more could recall pitch-black mornings in the middle of winter when, struggling from bed to the bitter-cold ablutions block, they were numbed to the bone by icy blasts which some men swore blew directly and unimpeded from the frozen plains of central Russia. But moments of comedy had lifted their spirits, like the morning when a pretty Sawston girl had stepped out of Mrs Fuller's hairdressing establishment to hear Colonel Bailey's sharp command of *"eye-yies, left!"* as he marched his newly arrived squadron through the High Street. She had been frozen in her tracks, pink-cheeked and rooted to the pavement, transfixed by a hundred pairs of smiling eyes until a distant *"eye-yies front!"* brought release from her first taste of a strange new humour. There had been pathos too, in the tear-streaked faces of two enterprising young whores who had set up business within the dusty confines of Harold Driver's Church Lane stackyard, dispensing their puny charms amongst the rustling sheaves until they were gently removed from their profitable pitch by *'Sheriff'* Mead and a jeepful of sympathetic 'Snowdrops'.

At the end of their nostalgic wanderings the GI veterans sat down to tea and scones in Sawston Hall's comfortable restaurant. It was then that Dr. Corsellis produced the tattered banner. They crowded round, cameras clicking, applauding the sense of history which had moved their hosts to preserve one small relic of a friendly invasion, half a century ago.

Fifty years on, they were still "*Woody's Boys*".

UNITED STATES ARMY EIGHTH AIR FORCE

66th Fighter Wing

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The high song is over. Even the echoes fail now;
winners and losers - they are only a theme now,
Their victory and defeat a half forgotten tale now;
And even the angels are only a dream now.

There is no need for blame, no cause for praise now.
Nothing to hide, to change or to discover.
They were men and women. They have gone their ways now,
As men and women must. The high song is over.

Humbert Volfe
The High Song Requiem
New York: George H Doran Co
1927