Editorial

When I moved to Grove in 1979 it was apparent that houses had been built on the confines of an old airfield, of which there were still some remains. Unaware that the airfield had any significant history compared to the well-known ones, 1 was intrigued to learn of any wartime activity here. Some time later I came across a detailed wartime map of the airfield and eagerly set about placing our house on this chart - only to discover that it is built on the old ablutions site!

Since then, we have found only small references to the activities at Grove in a number of publications (detailed at the end of this book), but no publication relating the full history of the airfield. The Ridgeway Military & Aviation Research Group has already published the history of the secret Bofors Gun Factory at Tubney Wood, which has proved to be far more popular than envisaged and still creates a great deal of interest. Following on from this, we have decided there is a requirement for a Grove airfield history, particularly after a series of very popular talks on the subject by Don Summers. This project is our largest by far and has been helped by the support of many people - not least our 'veterans' in the USA who have willingly contributed much unique material to the story and are most eager to receive their copies. Don has managed to produce, I think, a well-balanced mix of material which for some time now has become his 'baby" and with some generous help, we have been able to improve the quality of presentation of this publication. We leave the reader to judge how well we have done.

George Rance Publications Editor

UPDATE 2018

The first edition of this short history proved more popular than was ever imagined. Even today, although out of print, there is still a steady flow of requests for copies. The unexpected demand resulted in copies finding their way to a number of individuals who had memories of, or a connection with, the base during or soon after WW2, with whom the author had had no previous contact. Some of these were kind enough to provide their recollections of the base. Over the 20 years or so since the book first appeared, and thanks to the generosity of these and others, a huge amount of additional information has come to light, and a number of misconceptions have been laid to rest. It is RMARG's ambition to research histories of militarily significance in the area, and to place its findings in the public domain, believing that history belongs to no one individual or organisation. Rather than undertaking a complete reprint of the Grove airfield in the knowledge that some of the earlier contents were incorrect and/or incomplete, it was decided to put the whole book onto the RMARG website in its original form so that it can be readily accessed by everyone. Additional factual material and corrections will be included as the text and illustrations updated chapter by chapter.

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Acknowledgements

Since the first edition of this narrative was published, the Worldwide Web has revolutionised the task of the researcher. The updates included in this edition have benefitted greatly from information gleaned via that source, both as a portal to relevant sites and as a means of contacting individuals. To the many people that have contributed to those sites, as well as to the individuals who have personally provided photos and information, the author offers sincere thanks. With their assistance, it is hoped that this updated history more accurately conveys the story of this vital airbase, and gives the reader a greater appreciation of events that occurred during its busiest period.

Although considerable efforts were made to ensure the accuracy of this account, inevitably, after all this time the memories of eye-witnesses cannot be relied on absolutely. Wherever possible, individual recollections have been verified, but clearly, personal memories are only of value because they are private to the person concerned and where they do not affect the history as a whole, they have been included without necessarily being verified. The author therefore accepts full responsibility for any inaccuracies that may be present, and would like to express here his appreciation to all those who have given him the benefit of their recollections and have supplied a wealth of material for this brief account. A number of US veterans of wartime Grove have contributed hugely, and thanks are due to all those that have made possible contact with them. Particular thanks are due to E. Anderson, R. Berndt, F. Carnaggio, Dr. E. Hawkinson, Mrs A. Heaton, M. Mooney, A.H. Sahlberg and L. Yeuell for information. Especially valuable have been the photographs from the collection of the late B. Mayer that have kindly been made available by C. Guemelata. The Public Relations Group at UKAEA Harwell and Culham have been extremely helpful, as was Mike Warman. John Bolt’s recollections and photos form a significant part in the jigsaw puzzle of this history. The USAAF Historic Records Center at Maxwell AFB provided a wealth of valuable material.

A number of RMARG members have also assisted in its preparation, providing encouragement, information and photographs. The author particularly thanks Colin Appleton, Mike Berrie, John Godfrey, Brian Humphries, and Murray Maclean for their generosity and help. Publication would not have been possible without the efforts of Brian Prior, Nigel Dawe and George Rance, who not only helped with information, but spent much time and effort on the design and layout of this publication, as well as providing helpful suggestions and criticism. The author is also grateful to the many other local individuals have also provided their recollections of the war period.

The support of UKAEA at Harwell and Culham in this publication is gratefully acknowledged.

Opinions expressed in this booklet are the author's personal views and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Ridgeway Military & Aviation Research Group as a whole.

The reader is asked to accept that reproduction of 75year-old black and white photos is less than perfect, but the information they contain is thought to far outweigh defects in their quality.







1 – *Introduction*

There were actually three airbases bearing the name Grove.
The 1st was a little-used aircraft storage facility located near Retford in Nottinghamshire.
The 2nd was a former Luftwaffe base in Denmark, which was used as a collection area for captured German aircraft at the end of WW2.
The 3rd was just outside Wantage, and is the subject of this brief history. Whatever other claims made about the base, to the Americans it was the muddiest base in England.

Why all the mystery?
Once a typical English farming community of less than 400 people, Grove village lies just over a mile north of the ancient market town of Wantage, some 12 miles SE of Oxford. During the post-war years, its population has grown more than twenty-fold, and at a casual glance, it looks today very much like any other English dormitory village. But in spite of the extensive housing development and the demolition of most of the buildings and runways, anyone looking westward from Grove could hardly miss signs of the former WWII airfield. Chances are though, that you'll find no mention of it in any history of World War II. Not surprising, perhaps, for it was never home to fleets of bombers or squadrons of fighters. No airborne forces were launched from here to land in Fortress Europe, and the only German bomb dropped within 3 miles of the airfield caused no casualties and very little damage. (It landed between Grove and Wantage alongside the canal, so far from the airfield that some local people thought it had been aimed at the town gas holder!)
The 1960 edition of the 1-inch Ordnance Survey map shows a number of wartime airfields in the area - even some grass landing fields. And yet, where the last traces of Grove's concrete runways can still be seen, the map shows the pre-war road layout, with no indication whatsoever of any airbase (except, oddly enough, the bomb dump!). Even the new memorial in the village cemetery gives scant clue to what went on here fifty or more years ago. Curious, for during its brief wartime life, the airfield fulfilled two roles vital to the Allied cause and for the last year of the war it was the busiest airbase in Europe.
Since the first edition of this history was published, a close relationship was established between members of RMARG, the 45th Air Depot Group and the 31st Transport Group Veterans Association. Through this friendship, a great many more details have come to light, and these have been included in this revision. Partly as a result of that friendship, and with the enthusiastic support of Mr Robs Lamplough, one-time owner of the former technical site, the 1998 annual reunion of the 31st TG veterans was held at Grove. Prior to that event, a group of volunteers from RMARG had constructed a second monument,

at the SW end of the main runway. A highlight of the reunion was the dedication of this tribute to the work of the 31st TG.

2 – Plans

Under the Airfield Expansion Plan, during the period shortly before the outbreak of World War II, land at Grove was surveyed for possible use as an airfield. It was, in some respects, less than an ideal site for an aerodrome, but it was fairly flat and met (just) the requirement of being five miles from any nearby airfield (Shellingford, Kingston Bagpuize and Harwell), and also from the practice bombing range east of Venn Mill. Also important was that construction would require the demolition of only a very small number of homes, and remove only one local highway. In true British fashion, it became the topic of a heated discussion - not between farmer and Air Force – but between government departments, in this case the Air Ministry and the Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries. In a typically pompous letter to the Secretary of State for Air, a MAF official stated, "The proposed site at Grove [in Berkshire] comprises 272 acres of first quality milk-producing land. The Aerodromes Board has, I understand, been unable to find any possible alternative in an area that has already been very thoroughly explored and exploited. As the site is badly needed as an integral part of the plan for bomber OTU's and their satellites in this part of the country, I am prepared in the

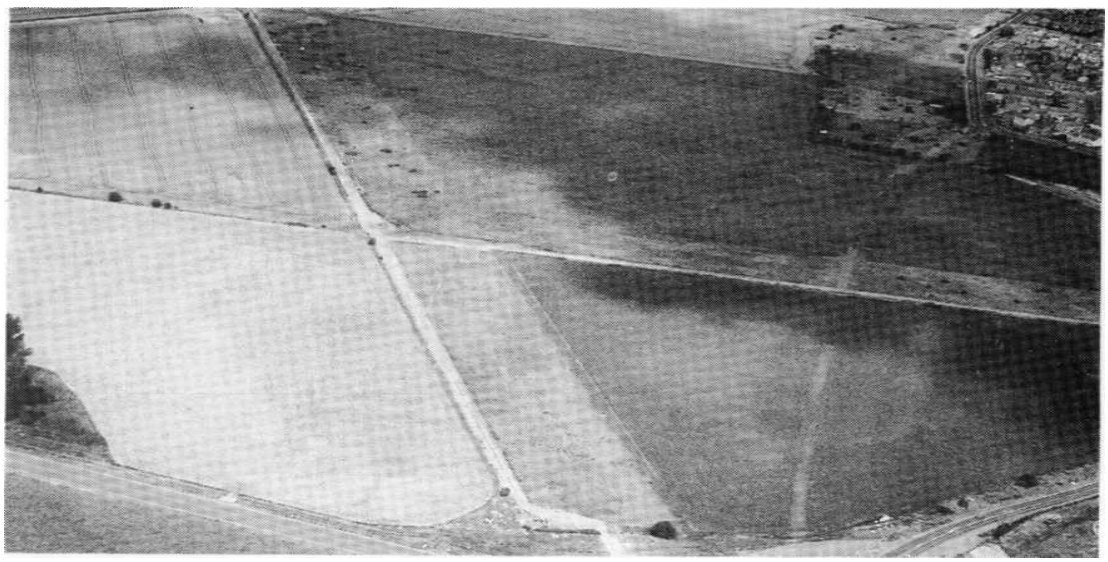


Grove airfield as it appeared in 2000. Although only the two 'stubs' of the runways at lower left remain as concrete, the outline of the runways and most of the perimeter track is clearly visible. The local authority has plans for 2,500 new homes on the site if the drainage problems can be adequately solved.



The new cemetery, with its central memorial to the airfield occupants, is shown to be almost exactly inline with the former Grove main runway.

circumstances not to press my objections to its acquisition."
The RAF must have considered the outcome a foregone conclusion for in 1940, at least a year before any decision was made, a party of some 300 airmen 'detrained' at the nearby Wantage Rd. railway station to establish the airfield!
Military might finally prevailed and the land acquisition order was signed in May 1941. With the benefit of hindsight, it appears likely that some ‘massaging’ of details had



1995 view looking NW from near the Mably Way roundabout, showing the line of the old Barwell Lane and its post-war replacement road on the former perimeter track, right of picture. The Crown Packaging Co. (formerly Metalbox) complex is off on the left. (Author)

taken place during the negotiations, for the area initially required for the runways, hangars and associated buildings was over 350 acres, and by the time all the accommodation and other buildings had been completed, the base eventually occupied over 1,000 acres!

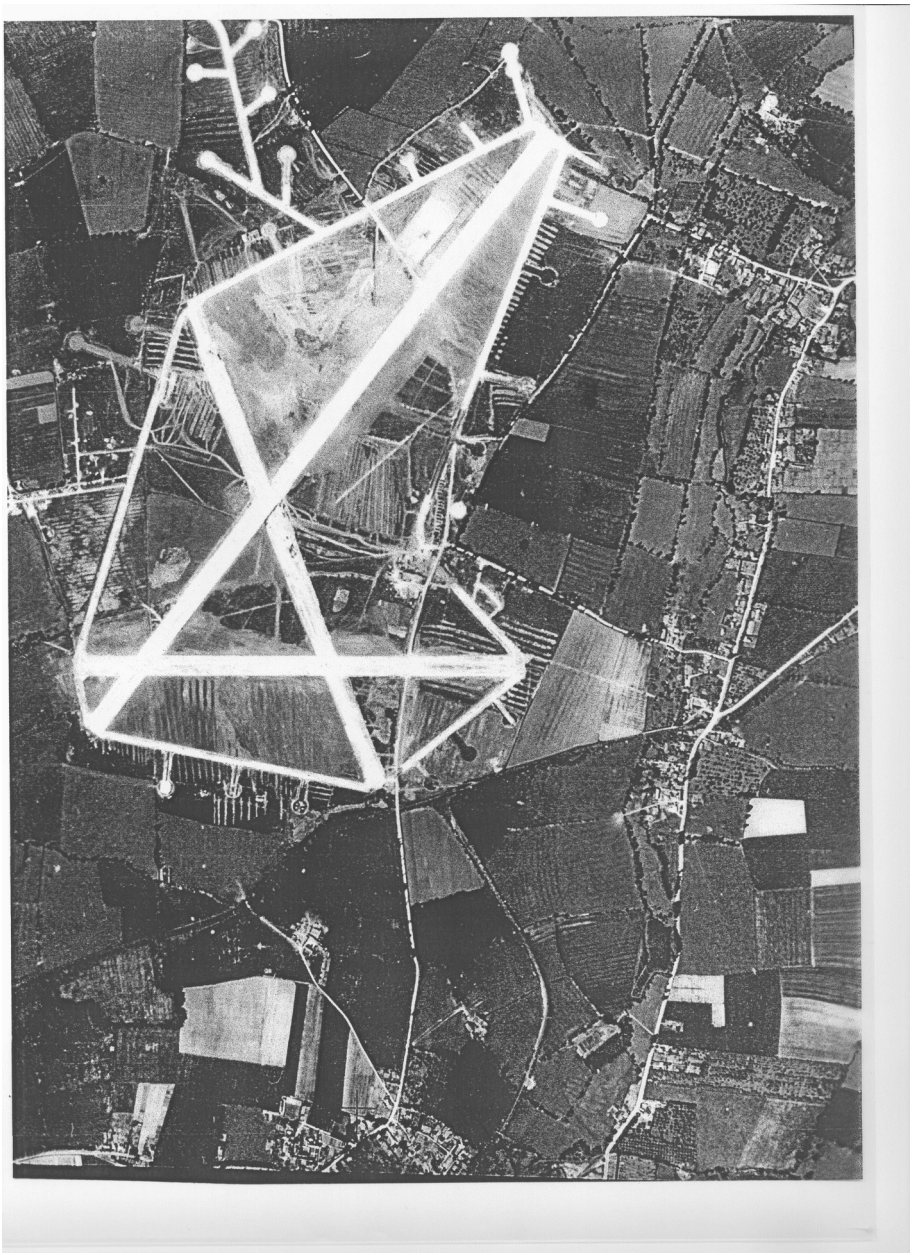
This was not the first military use of land at Grove. During the first World War, hundreds of horses shipped in to Avonmouth Docks from N. and S. America and Commonwealth countries arrived by rail at Wantage Road station and were taken to nearby Monk's Farm. Here, and at several other similar farms in the area, they were 'broken in' and trained for use by the Army cavalry and artillery regiments. More than 2 million horses were imported during that conflict.

Now, Grove airfield was intended as a training base for RAF Bomber Command, and was one of a number of such airfields built in the South Midlands, where they would be protected behind the fighter aerodromes in the south and east, and out of the flight paths of the bomber force based further north. Scheduled to become a satellite for No.15 Operational Training Unit based at Harwell, circumstances dictated that it would never be extensively used for that purpose.

Construction began immediately of an airfield with three concrete runways, aligned 04-22 (6,000ft), 16-34 (4,200ft) and 09-27 (3,600ft). These numbers correspond roughly to the compass bearing of each runway, divided by 10. Thus runway 04 represents a heading of 40 degrees from north. The second number is, of course, the bearing in the opposite direction. This design was Air Ministry standard for a bomber base, the three runways forming a triangle. After careful deliberation, it had been concluded that if the intersections were widely separated, any single cluster of bombs dropped on an airfield could not disable all three runways at once. Outside the triangle of runways, a number of dispersed aircraft hard-standings were normally built, the precise location of these varying according to the local geography. This variation was generally encouraged so that no standard dispersal arrangement existed, and thus any attacking aircraft would not find planes on the ground arranged in any fixed pattern. The dispersal areas themselves were bases of concrete and could be either of the circular 'frying pan'' type or the loop style commonly called 'spectacles', since that was their appearance from the air. Provided with 54 dispersed hard-standings and two of the large, T2-type hangars (each 240ft long and 120ft wide, the 'T' denoting transportable), the airfield was situated on the eastern side of the village, mainly within the Grove parish boundaries, while the technical and accommodation sites stretched into Challow and Wantage. Capacious bomb storage facilities were included in the plans, on farmland northwest of the airfield, between the villages of Challow and Denchworth. There was also an Operations Building just to the Northwest of the technical area, which was given a thick concrete roof and was constructed to be proof against possible gas attack.

A feature common to Grove and Harwell airfields was the proximity of the 600ft-high Ridgeway close to the end of the main runway. Although pilots used one of the other runways whenever possible, to avoid this obstacle, part of the ridge, known as The Devil's Punchbowl, was to be the cause of a number of accidents at both airfields. The runways cut two local roads, Barwell Lane, which connected the Belmont area of Wantage to Cane Lane at Grove, and Denchworth Road, which ran from further down Cane Lane and joined Grove to Denchworth. This latter was replaced with the road that remains today, linking the northwest of Grove to the railway bridge, and skirting the end of the main runway. There was never a replacement for the section of Barwell Road that was dug up for the airfield. The modern road simply utilises the airfield perimeter track that served the runway which had disrupted the original road. Accommodation was

provided for some 400 airmen, in huts located around the edges of Wantage and Challow.



Grove airfield as it neared completion of its initial layout in summer 1942. The technical site (centre left) is hardly started, and the operations headquarters are top left, out of shot. Clearly visible are the 'Ridge & Furrow' features, which previously formed part of the historic drainage of the heavy clay soil of the area. The former road to Denchworth is cut in two places, but there is no infringement on Grove village itself. Note that at this time there is no sign of the road around the northern edge of the main runway, which was later constructed to replace the original Denchworth Road. Near the bottom centre of this photo, alongside the canal spur, can be seen the circular crater of the only German bomb (of 1100lb) to be dropped on Grove. Local rumours suggested that it was aimed at the town gas holder, but the airfield seems a more likely target. Whatever the facts, the bomb missed both and caused no major damage or casualties.

3 - Changes to the plans.

During the construction period, the course of the war changed substantially and in particular, two decisions were taken that radically altered the fate of Grove, both in terms of the size of the base and in the uses made of it.
The first decision was that, having declared war on Germany and Japan, the United States agreed to initially devote the major part of its resources to the defeat of Germany. For this purpose dozens of new bases were built in Britain and a number of existing and part-finished airfields were allocated for use by the Eighth US Army Air Force. Grove was one such airfield and it was marked as an air cargo base. Until the preparations for the invasion of Europe were complete, the base would be used for training purposes by the RAF, and as an Emergency Landing Ground (ELG) for aircraft in transit from USA to bomber bases in East Anglia. A small party of US airmen took up residence at Grove towards the end of 1942, although no US bombers landed there during this period and they moved on early in the following year. From time to time US officers visited this contingent, and there were occasions when individual aircraft were seen on the dispersal close to the roundabout where the jet aircraft is now displayed. These included a Percival Provost and a Supermarine Spitfire, both in US markings.



A 1995 photo of the original RAF camp guardhouse. There were several additional entrances to the expanded airbase, and this became a 'picket post' for stores brought in for loading onto aircraft. After the deactivation of the base, it was used for many years as a store for props and scenery belonging to Wantage Amateur Dramatic Society.

The effect of the second decision was more immediate. By this time, the Allies had agreed that the cross-Channel invasion of Europe would take place in the spring of 1944. In considering the invasion, the allied High Command recognised the need for glider-borne forces. This decision provided the first deviation in the plans for Grove airfield, and ensured that the airspace above the Thames valley would soon become extremely congested. In spite of the urgent requirement for RAF bomber aircrews,

whose operational training took place at many of the aerodromes in the region, the upper Thames Valley was designated as a Glider Training Area.
As soon as this training was complete, Grove would be handed over to the newly formed Ninth USAAF. An essential part of the plans was that as USAAF operations from Grove began to build up, other flying training in the area would be reduced.

4 - Initial Operations

While the USAAF prepared itself for operations from Britain, the RAF grasped the opportunity to make use of Grove.
For a few months, from August 1942, Vickers Wellington twin-engined bombers from the busy 15 Operational Training Unit (OTU) at RAF Harwell used Grove airfield as a satellite, as was the original intention. From here they undertook night navigation exercises and made use of the practice bombing ranges at Odstone, three miles south of the Uffington White Horse, and Landsmeet, between Lyford and Drayton. But their stay was brief, as a more urgent requirement arose.
Within the glider Training Area, bounded by the Berkshire Downs in the south, the Cotswolds to the northwest, and the Chilterns to the northeast, a number of training bases, including Grove, between Thame and Cirencester were commandeered. They were used to train more than 600 soldiers to become heavy-glider pilots and to develop and practice the skills for rapidly deploying glider-borne troops and weapons. Very soon, the skies of the Vale of the White Horse were crowded day and night, not only with de Havilland Tiger Moths (the RAF's elementary training aircraft), but also with gliders of various sizes towed sedately around by underpowered tow aircraft.
It should be remembered that few RAF training aircraft were equipped with radio at that time, and gliders only had the facility to communicate with the pilots of their towing aircraft. Air traffic control was therefore almost non-existent.
The final part of the training for glider pilots took place at RAF Brize Norton, at what was called the Heavy Glider Conversion Unit (HGCU). Here, glider pilots who graduated from training on smaller gliders were taught to fly the British military cargo- and troop-carrying type. This airfield had grass runways, which were badly affected during the rains of autumn and winter 1942 by the frequent landings and take-offs of heavy tow aircraft (mainly modified Armstrong Whitworth Whitley twin-engined bombers) and large Horsa gliders. It became clear that if glider training was to continue there, it would be necessary to provide concrete runways.



RAF Bomber Command's ubiquitous Vickers Wellington Bomber.





The ungainly Armstrong Whitworth Whitley bomber. Obsolescent by the outbreak of WW2, it served the RAF well as a glider tug.


THE AEROPLANE 202 FEBRUARY 19, 1943

AIRBORNE INSPECTION.—H.R.H. the Duke of Gloucester watching airborne troops entering an Airspeed Horsa glider during a series of visits he made to stations of the R.A.F. Flying Training Command.

This contemporary photo not only shows that Grove-based Horsas sometimes carried live loads, but also that training of airborne forces was sufficiently important that it warranted an official visit by members of the royal family. [Aeroplane magazine]

While the new runways were being laid, the HGCU was temporarily moved to Grove. From December 1942 and for the following three months, local residents became familiar with the sight of large (~ 88ft wingspan) gliders approaching the airfield at

amazingly steep angles. One local youth recalled being convinced that the swishing sound of a Horsa glider flying low over Wantage Market Place would shortly be followed by the sound of it crashing nearby. He might have been more alarmed if he'd known that many of the gliders carried 3½ tons of concrete blocks, often used to simulate the expected operational loads! There is no record of the boy's fears being justified, as there seems to have been no accidents to gliders or tow aircraft at Grove.
The concrete runways at Brize Norton were completed in double quick time, just in time for Grove to be commandeered for three days by the Hawker Typhoons of No's 132, 174 and 184 RAF Squadrons which operated from here during the large military exercise 'Spartan'. This was a very large exercise, involving some 250,000 troops in two armies, one advancing northwards from the South Coast, to be met by the other, which moved west, and then south from bases in East Anglia. Both were supported by more than 400 RAF and RCAF fighter-bombers, mostly Hawker Typhoons, which used any available airfields along their way, and other makeshift landing grounds such as those along the foothills of the Ridgeway.
The next use made of Grove was as a temporary base for the 57 training aircraft of the RAF's No15 Advanced Flying Unit (Pilot) [15 AFU(P)], which moved in from RAF Acaster Malbis, in Lincolnshire. This unit was slated to take up residence at the as yet unfinished RAF Thruxton near Andover. From March 1943 the unit's twin-engined Airspeed Oxfords were a regular sight in the surrounding area. Many of the trainees and instructors came from the Commonwealth and were warmly received in the community. One Australian instructor ensured that his pupils were shown the core of the Empire by flying over Windsor Castle, which was much appreciated. Such trips were also used to demonstrate that railways were a great help to aerial navigation; following the railways was encouraged, and was especially useful around Windsor as the nearby main line from London to the West Country runs past Grove.
An essential part of the instruction course was instructing pilots to use the RAF Airfield Beam Approach System, a radio device that helped direct aircraft pilots to safe landing, and was extensively used during periods of poor visibility. The standard RAF trailer-mounted equipment was installed near the north end of the main runway. After instruction and practice, the student pilot's forward vision from the cockpit would be obscured with a screen so that he would have to rely on the system to land. Naturally, there were mishaps as pilots practised using the system.
The airfield had been intensively used almost as soon as the runway concrete was dry, and there had been no attempt to flatten the former ground features. There were many occasions when student pilots missed the runway on landing, and aircraft ran across the grass, where the uneven surface often resulted in damage to their undercarriage. It was reported that replacement items were fitted at the rate of almost two per week during the eight weeks of the unit's stay.
No 15 AFU (P) left Grove for temporary occupation of Membury airfield and the (then) less crowded skies around Newbury and Hungerford.
In less than a year since it had become available, RAF Grove had been an extremely busy and important airfield. It had briefly been used for its intended purpose, and helped complete the final stages of training of a number of bomber crews for the RAF. Crucially, it had been the temporary home of the Heavy Glider Conversion Unit, and helped complete the training of dozens of glider pilots. It had played a small but important part in Exercise Spartan from which a very large number of lessons were learned. Lastly, it had found temporary use as a home for basic training of RAF Bomber Command pilots, teaching them navigation and the important skill of using the standard RAF Beam Approach radio landing aid. This list of uses would be a credit for any

airfield in the country. But by far the most significant period in the history of RAF Grove had not yet even begun.
On 27th July 1943 Grove airfield was formally taken over as USAAF Station 519.

5 - The Americans Arrive in Numbers

The first elements of the US Engineering Corps began setting up camp next to the A338 at Grove in early July, with their heavy earthmoving equipment. During the next few weeks their numbers increased, as did the amount of machinery they brought. From that time onwards Grove was transformed. A large area east of the existing runways was developed into a storage and engineering site for the 9th USAAF Service Groups which were shortly to arrive. They also attempted to eradicate some of the ridge and furrow features on the airfield. In addition, accommodation huts, both prefabricated wooden structures and the corrugated iron Nissen type were built. Hundreds of huts were erected to house up to 7,000 servicemen, along with canteen, medical and recreational facilities for them.
The village, whose dwellings had been mainly along two roads, found itself in the middle of the extended base. The airfield extension reached the western edge of it, and to the north and east, domestic quarters sprang up everywhere. In addition, the western fringe of Wantage and the northern edge of Challow became enveloped in a variety of military buildings. The Americans even built two new wastewater treatment plants and a tall steel water tower on Grove's Main Street, which remained in place into the 1970's.



Laying concrete taxiways and dispersals, and erecting storage hangars.

Robert Metzer belonged to one of the engineering companies involved in building the extensions to Grove airfield. They were kept at the task for almost six months, and by the time they left, not only was the Air Depot site complete, but additional accommodation had been erected for more than 4,000 servicemen, and provision had been installed for another 3,000 temporary residents in tents. As well as providing

photos taken during that work, he also mentioned the drainage problems they encountered. “We had to dig 5ft deep holes for building foundations. When it rained, one man dug, while another bailed water out with a pail attached to a rope.”





The water tower, which stood for many years near the Bell public house, can be seen as being close to a number of accommodation huts, near what is now St Ives Road.





It appears that when the task was almost completed, the site was inspected by a senior US officer who arrived in a small communications aircraft that was photographed outside one of the buildings.



This last photo looks as if it might be the interior of the Officers Club.



Typical of the accommodation huts at Grove, which were inspected regularly. The men dug their own slit trenches (seen on R) as there weren't enough air-raid shelters: fortunately they were never needed. The US Army was concerned that the men had good-quality drinking water, so they provided Lyster bags, which were 36 gallon double-skinned canvas bags with purification tablets added to the water.



The Lyster bag was like a water fountain, and had 6 taps at the base, as can just be seen above.

While Metzer's unit was erecting buildings, other US engineering units were busy installing electricity supplies and waste-water systems, all of which were to prove very useful to the local community after the Americans had vacated the base.
Inevitably, some of the clay soil dug up by the earth-moving equipment was deposited on the roads by the vehicle tyres. As a result, village roads became like ice rinks when wet, and in dry weather traffic kicked up clouds of almost choking dust. With the constant flow of trucks into the base, this situation persisted for the next two years, long after the engineers departed. It had a very unfortunate effect on the Wantage tram, which ran alongside the road between Wantage and the station. Clay that dried on the rails became hard as rock and caused frequent derailments, much to the amusement of the Americans, who regarded the ancient trams as relics of bygone times.
Thus began a trying time for local residents. The road through the village was closed to buses after one vehicle skidded into a wall as it attempted to stop for passengers. Thereafter, passengers to and from Oxford and Abingdon were compelled to walk to the A338 as the nearest bus stop. Cyclists on the local roads were forced to stop every few yards to clear the mud from under their mudguards. On dry days dust clouds reduced visibility to a few yards.
Meanwhile, planning for the invasion of Europe included the resupply by air of the USAAF close-support fighter-bomber groups as they followed the ground forces across France. That resupply task was allocated to the transport group that was soon to be based at Grove, and included ammunition. Grove Park, from the railway station to Ardington was allocated as an ammunition sub-depot. The original RAF bomb store, northwest of the airfield, was difficult to access from the railway, which was to be the principle means of replenishment, so it was rejected as an ammo store and used to store other items. Within a few weeks, copses in the fields and roadside ditches hid 5,000 tons of bombs, air-to-ground rockets and machine gun ammunition, brought in mostly by rail. No sign has been found of a narrow gauge railway, which was often built at such sites.
This decision was to cause a great deal of local trouble. At that time, many in the US regarded black people as inferior, and the armed forces were rigidly segregated by race.

Black Americans were formed into separate units, mainly as drivers and ammunition handlers. Separate facilities were constructed for their accommodation, recreation and sports, or facilities were allocated for different racial groups at different times. Thus, in addition to the hundreds of black drivers delivering other stores to Grove by truck, the 1954th Ordnance Depot Company, which handled the ammunition, being manned by black troops with white officers, raised the prospect for racial tension in the area. In contrast, few civilians in the area had ever met a black person, and there was little or no racial prejudice among local people.



One of very few pictures of black Ordnance Company troops at the Grove munitions store, which was designated US Army depot O-577.

Very unusually, USAAF Station 519, Grove had two public houses within its boundaries, and a third a few yards away. Army regulations prohibited alcohol on base except in the officers club, but here were pubs right at its heart. The Americans soon got over their preference for ice-cold beer, and both pubs were the first in the area to run dry - within a few hours of each beer delivery.

Another unusual feature of the expanded base was that there were civilian residents inside the camp perimeter. The US Army decided to issue passes to the inhabitants, a move that proved very unpopular as local villagers strongly objected to being obliged to show these documents every time they returned to their homes. Common sense soon prevailed and the requirement was quietly dropped. The works included a new road, said to have been completed in one day, around the north end of the airfield, replacing the road that was lost to the main runway. Construction work continued until the engineers finally departed in December, by which time all three USAAF groups had arrived. The camp now extended from the vehicle repair depot opposite the Volunteer pub to what is now the W&G trading estate at Challow, which was the reception area for materials delivered by road from ports such as Avonmouth.



Emblem of the 9th USAAF Service Command.



Almost complete: 3TAD site just prior to the arrival of the 45th ADG.



The unofficial emblem of the 45th ADG veterans, adopted post-war by their Association.

The first major US users of Station 519 were the men of the 45th Air Depot Group (45th ADG), who arrived on 4th August 1943. The base was then officially designated as No 3 Tactical Air Depot (3TAD), 9th USAAF Service Command. The American aircraft industry was set up for mass production, and generally produced finished items to a given specification. Rather than introduce modifications at the factory assembly lines, equipment modifications were performed at centres purpose-built for the task. For the

9th USAAF, one such centre was Grove. Since it was to be the closest TAD to the invasion beaches, the base was scheduled to play a vital role. This was another deviation in the plans for Grove and meant that in addition to providing a transport base for the US Army, Grove would become a major repair and engineering support facility for all types of aircraft operated by the 9th USAAF.

Major Leon Yeuell (former Supply Officer for 3TAD) recalled. “Before leaving the States, I had read that England had a temperate climate with moderate rainfall. However, nothing prepared me for Grove. For several days after any rain, the place was partially flooded, and the sticky clay clung to your boots. Trucks delivering stores didn’t always stay on the roadways and soon there was mud was all over the place. It wasn’t long before everyone said that Station 519 was the muddiest base in England.

“We had no idea what was in most of the crates, which were only marked with the Army code number. We simply ensured that crates with the same code number were stacked close together. For myself, with stores stacked wherever space allowed, I had no idea either where to find any specific item of equipment, but I had a brilliant deputy, Chester Clarke, who had a memory like a computer. It was shear chance that he was deputy and I was in charge, it would have worked just as well if it had been the other way around. Without him, there’d have been a heck of a mess!”

By the end of 1943, all of the new storage buildings were crammed with aircraft parts and stores, and crates of equipment were stacked in the open air wherever space could be found. The bomb storage area, built for the RAF northwest of the base, was also filled with crates covered with waterproof tarpaulins.

“Since there were few 9th USAAF aircraft in Britain at the start of our stay at Grove, the first task given to our group was to modify more than 100 P-51 Mustang fighters for the 8th USAAF. Engineers at Rolls Royce and Packard (the US manufacturer of Merlin engines) had found that injecting small amounts of water into the engine with the fuel provided increased power. This in turn could be used to increase the range of the aircraft, allowing them to more effectively protect the American bombers on their daylight bombing raids. Kits of the appropriate parts were shipped to Grove, and the time allocated for each installation was 125 man-hours. Within a week, the time for the task had been cut in half, enabling the work to be completed well ahead of schedule.

“Our next task was to fit radio-navigation equipment into hundreds of C-47’s (Dakotas). This was very frustrating, as no sooner had we modified about 250 of them, than we had to take all the stuff out and fit different equipment.

“Soon afterwards, twin-engined aircraft began to arrive - P-38 Lightning fighters, A-20 Havoc (known as the Boston in the RAF) attack bombers, B-25 Mitchell and B-26 Marauder bombers. These had been carried across the Atlantic as deck cargo and arrived in Britain in stripped-down configuration. Re-assembly areas were set up at bases such as Filton (Bristol), Speke (Liverpool), Prestwick (Glasgow) and Langford Lodge (Belfast). They were then flown to Grove for installation of the latest modifications before being delivered to their squadrons.” Very soon however, aircraft modifications were included at the aircraft reassembly bases, so that they could be taken directly to their operational bases. There were also a few P-51 Mustangs and P-47 Thunderbolts delivered to Grove, but as soon as other TAD’s were brought into service, these single-engined aircraft were handled elsewhere. No 6 TAD, for example, set up at Membury, specialised in servicing P-47’s.



Major Leon Yeuell (2nd from R) and fellow officers at Grove 1943.

Grove's second ADG, the 43rd, arrived on 2nd October with a similar task as its sister group. The manner of their arrival is aptly described in the diary of aircraft recovery specialist Cpl 'Del' Sahlberg. He had spent six months in training before embarking on the Queen Mary in New York for the transatlantic voyage to Scotland.

"At 11:09 am on the 21st of September the ship quivered and began to move. My last sight of America was at 11:58 am. The crossing was not entirely uneventful, but we docked at Greenock Scotland on the night of the 27th September 1943. We then proceeded by train to Glasgow, where we had coffee and doughnuts before proceeding south by train to Oxford. En route after dark, we witnessed our first air raid and anti-aircraft fire. We arrived in Oxford at 1:30 am the morning of the 2nd of October. It was cold and raining as we boarded a fleet of trucks. Eventually we arrived at Grove, still cold, and it was still raining steadily as we were made to stand for 20 minutes with full packs and no raincoats before being assigned our huts. There were no beds, blankets or fuel but we were so exhausted we just lay down in our wet clothes on the floor and slept. Welcome to station 519 Grove England, our home for the next year of our lives.

"We were given just two days to find our feet before we began our task, during which time, we discovered the mud, and had our first service by our chaplain, Lt Whistler. Our own first disaster happened on 20th October. An A-20 aircraft crashed on the field, killing the popular Capt. Boylan, C/O of HQ Sqn. and two other officers. Sole survivor was an enlisted man, Cpl. Zimmerman. As the plane took off, a downdraught caused it to bounce, breaking the landing gear and causing a leak in the hydraulics. The ship couldn't retract its wheels and had no brakes. The pilot was one of our best; he tried three times to land but had to take off each time. The last time he stayed down but ran off the runway, crashed through a hedge and piled up in a ditch. The ship folded up like an accordion and flipped over onto its back. The pilot had half a dozen of the aircraft

structural braces through him, hardly recognisable as a human being. He and the other officer died instantly. Captain Boylan was brought out of the wreck alive, but survived for only eight hours. Everyone on the base was stunned for days."



This post-war photo shows the US-built extensions at the eastern side of the original Grove airfield. Seven additional hangar-size buildings can be seen, as well as many smaller workshops. This airfield extension was retained into the mid-1950's by the RAF as a military storage area.

The main task of the ADG's was to modify and repair the aircraft of the 9th USAAF, but there was no shortage of other tasks for them.
Each ADG included several Mobile Repair & Reclamation Squadrons, and these were among others that were sent to the major glider assembly area between Thatcham and Newbury, including Newbury racecourse. (US gliders, mostly Waco CG-4A's, were fabric-covered steel frames. They were shipped over from USA in crates, three for each glider.) Between September 1943 and May 1944, some 5,000 were assembled and towed out from Greenham Common airfield to their various bases. As D-Day

approached, increasing numbers of aircraft being supplied to the 9th USAAF were being used in operations, and damaged machines placed heavy demands on the MR&R squadrons. Their recovery teams were hard pressed and found it difficult to provide transport for the technical squadron members from their home bases to the Newbury area.
Some of the bases allocated to 9th USAAF groups were not yet completed, which meant that some groups received their aircraft at Grove and remained there for a short period, flying training and familiarisation missions while their bases were being finished.
In the years leading up to WW2, the USAAF had experimented successfully with the use of modified light civilian aircraft for communications, observation and artillery spotting. The types most used were manufactured by Taylorcraft (L-2), and by Piper (L-4). Both of these flimsy machines (two occupants, top speed around 90 mph) were nicknamed ‘Grasshoppers’ because of their size and ability to operate from small fields. There were also a few of the larger, longer-range Stinson L-5’s. During 1944, more than 800 of these flimsy machines were assembled at 3TAD.



The scene at the TAD part of Grove airfield in autumn 1943. Crates of aircraft parts and innumerable other items stockpiled wherever space could be found.

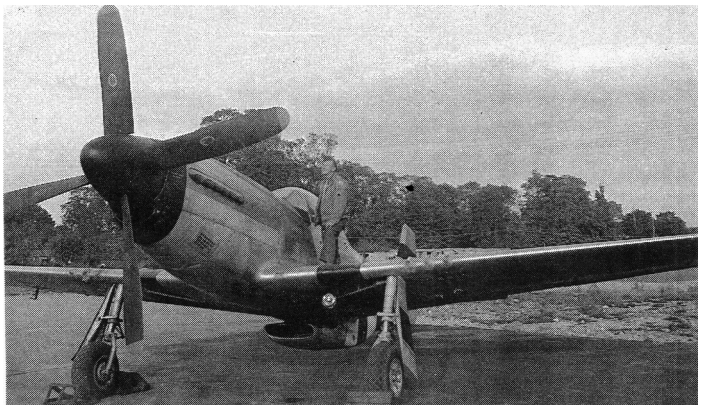
The ADG’s also stripped equipment from a number of war-weary Boeing B-17’s and Consolidated Vultee B-24’s to allow them to carry jerrycans of fuel for the Army. There was little room at Grove for these large aircraft, and they were transferred to RAF Lyneham from where they flew their fuel delivery flights over the following months.
So, by the end of May 1944, 3TAD was fully established as a major service centre and spare parts storage facility for aircraft of the 9th USAAF, including the almost 1,000 C-47’s of the Troop Carrier Command, and the machines employed by 31st Transport Group. The Air Depot Groups had proved their mettle and demonstrated their ability to recover, service and modify damaged aircraft, as well as re-assembling thousands of US gliders and hundreds of spotter aircraft for the Army.



The scene at 3TAD after rain. The concrete aprons are barely visible beneath a generous covering of mud, and great care was needed by drivers to avoid skidding into stacks of equipment.



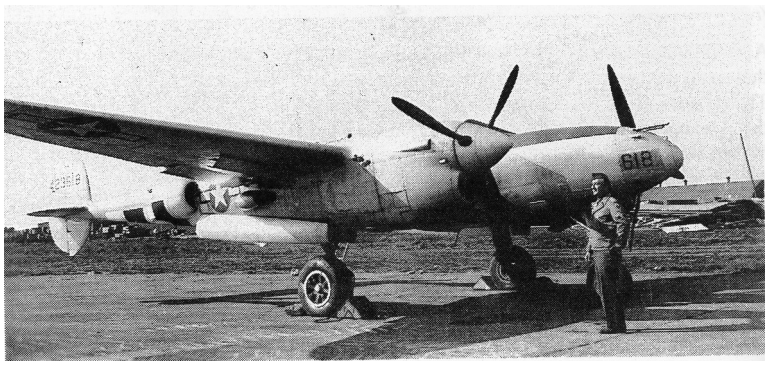
The very popular Chaplain Whistler leads prayers on Christmas Day 1943 in the main Supply hangar. Note the muddy boots!



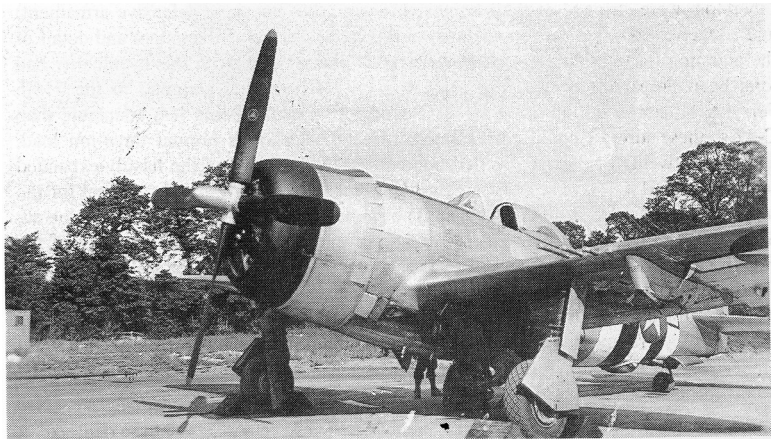
Not a frequent sight at Grove after October 1943, this is a late-model P-51 Mustang.



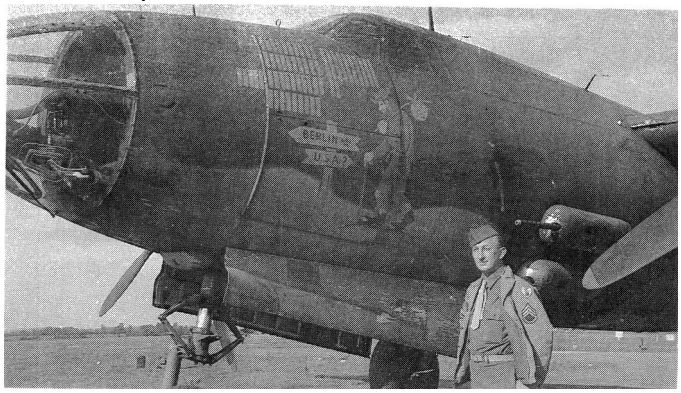
Two different versions of A-20 attack bombers, widely used by the 9th and frequent visitors to 3TAD for major servicing.



A Lockheed P-38 Lightning. This picture must have been taken after D-Day as the aircraft bears the black and white "Invasion Stripes" which were applied to all aircraft that flew over Normandy after 6th June 1944.

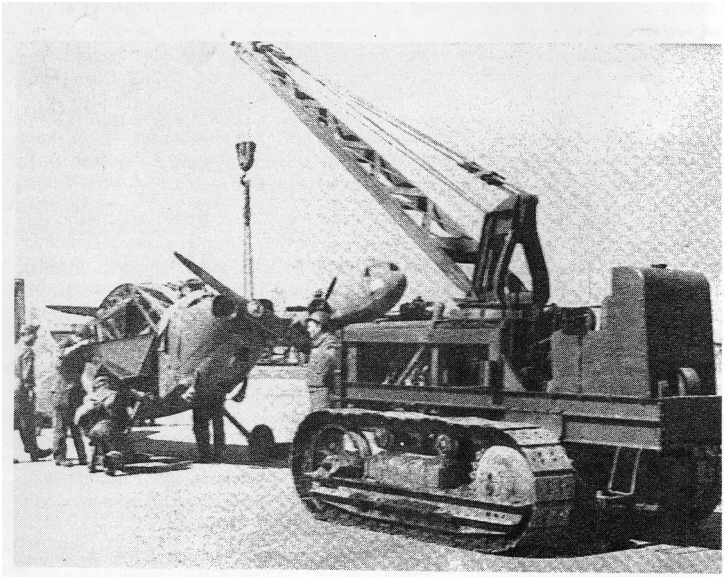


Republic P-47 Thunderbolt, a rare visitor. This late version also bears 'Invasion Stripes'. It was twice the weight of a Spitfire, but was a real bruiser fighter-bomber that could survive a lot of punishment. Its high fuel consumption severely limited its range and users of the type were prime customers for the drop tanks supplied in their thousands from Grove.



These two B-26 Marauder bombers, Hikin' for Home and Miss Behavin' had been on many missions for the 8th USAAF before transferring to the 9th, as each displays with more than 50 mission symbols.





A tracked crane helps install the engine of a wingless Grasshopper.



A newly completed L-4 near the dispersal NW of the base. A special fitting installed is the egg-shaped tank in the cabin. This was an additional fuel tank, made from the standard oxygen storage tank as used in USAAF bombers. Major Yeuell said this additional fuel provision made him suspect that D-Day would take place in Normandy, for no additional fuel tank would be required for these 'Grasshoppers' if it had been planned for the Pas de Calais.

The third and last group to arrive at Station 519 was the 31st Transport Group. For what was to be a daunting task, General Brereton, commanding 9th USAAF, had selected Col Karl Feldman, who was well liked for being very demanding, but scrupulously fair. After his initial visit, in late July, Col Feldman reported to his commanding general that a number of changes were necessary if he was to accomplish the task.
Fully aware that his squadrons' pilots were not trained in night flying, he informed his superior that the short daylight hours of the coming winter would make it impossible for his unit to deliver the number of aircraft required unless blind flying provisions were significantly improved. In a very short time, the RAF Beam Approach caravan was replaced with a purpose brick-built radio cabin installed just off Winter Lane, outside West Hanney in line with the main runway and exactly 2 miles from it. To complement this 'inner' marker, the RAF agreed to share use of Harwell's 'outer' marker, which was located just south of the Ridgeway at Gramp's Hill, Letcombe Basset. Thus aircraft from both the USAAF's Station 519 and RAF Harwell could make use of the generator-powered beacon. Col Feldman also insisted that until his group was provided with an adequate number of C-47's, numbers of alternative aircraft must be made available. In

addition to being granted most of his requirements, Col Feldman persuaded the ADG's at Grove to recover and restore a number of crashed transport aircraft that had previously been deemed beyond repair.

The 31st Transport Group, 9th USAAF Service Command 'stood up' on 24th October at Grove. It's initial complement of C-47's was a mere four aircraft, but thanks to Col Feldman's foresight, these were supplemented by a variety of smaller machines, including twin-engined RAF Avro Ansons and Airspeed Oxfords, some single-engined Percival Proctors, and a few of the rugged Canadian Noorduyn Norseman (designated C-64A by the USAAF). The twin-engined types were quickly fitted with Beam Approach equipment. The composition of the 31st evolved as time went on. Initially it comprised three Transport Squadrons and three Ferry Squadrons.

During autumn and winter 1943, as operations from Grove began in earnest, the amount of elementary flying training that took place at RAF Shellingford, near Stanford in Vale, was cut back. Its relief landing ground at Bush Barn, Pusey became an storage park for Royal Navy aircraft, and training ceased altogether at RAF Kingston Bagpuize. This latter airfield became No 4TAD, a centre for the assembly and preparation of photo-reconnaissance versions of the American P-38 Lightning and P-51 Mustang.

The C-47's would each fly 20 or so ferry crewmembers to an assembly area, then return for a second trip. Meanwhile, the Ferry crew would collect newly-completed aircraft and fly them to their assigned bases, mostly near the South Coast, where the smaller transport aircraft would meet them and return the Ferry crews to Grove. Operations continued seven days a week, and only the very worst weather curtailed their activities. Within a few weeks, more C-47's arrived with their crews, flown across the 'Southern Transatlantic Route' via Florida, Brazil, Ascension Island, and West Africa before skirting the Iberian Peninsular and arriving at airfields in Cornwall. These additional aircraft were soon hard at work and by June the following year the 31st had over 100 C-47's on strength.

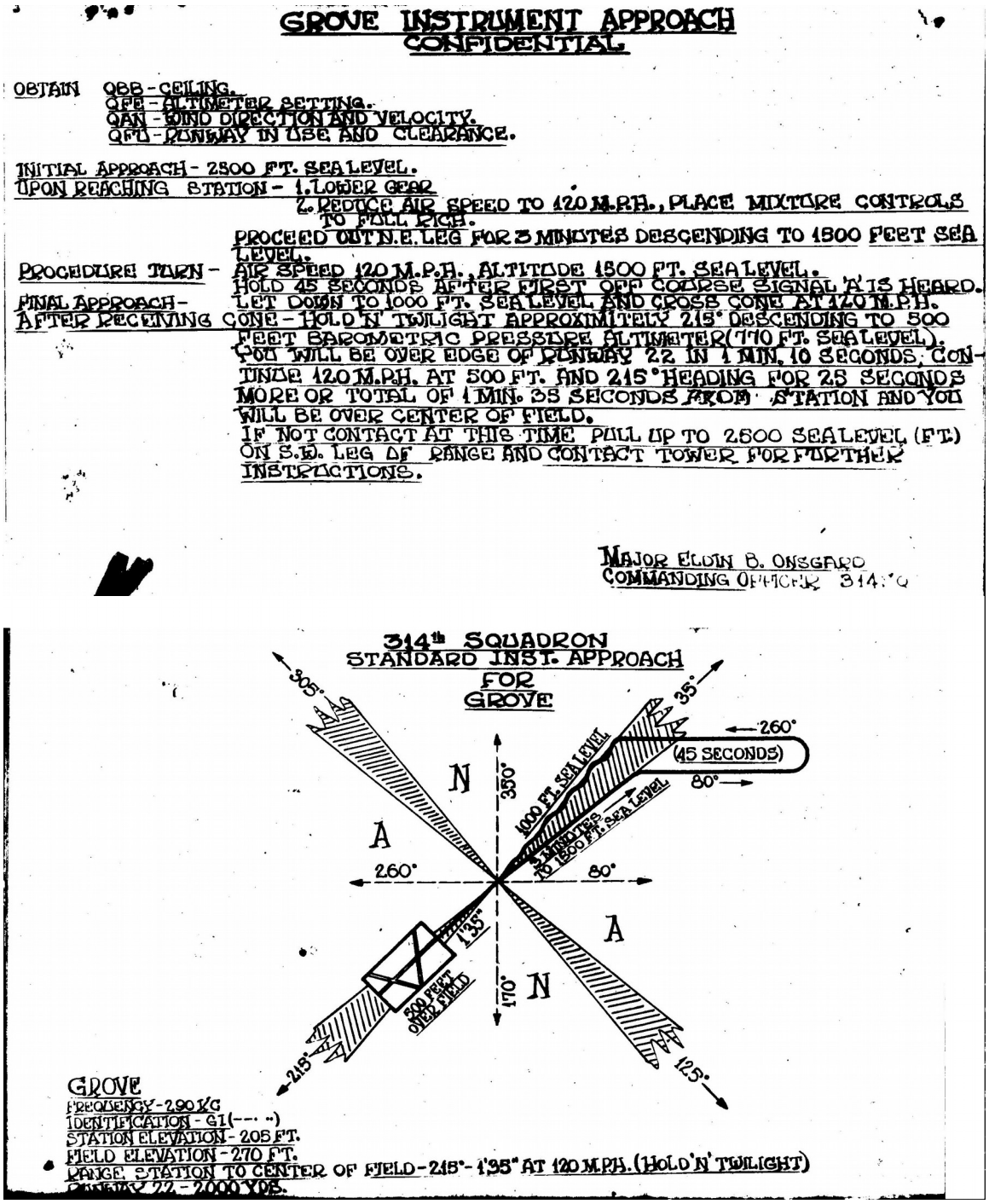
C-47 pilot 1st Lt James B Hill enlisted in February1942 and trained in Louisiana on twin-engine aircraft. He anticipated being assigned to a bomber unit, but in November 1943 found himself flying a C-47 across the Atlantic. Arriving eventually at Station 519, he was informed by Col Feldman that his future lay in flying with a transport squadron. He was unfamiliar with the RAF Beam Approach System, and only ever received minimal training for it, so he always carried the beam approach notes in a plastic wallet in his pocket whilst in Europe.

As soon as each 9th AF fighter-bomber or bomber group was established in the UK and took possession of its aircraft, it began operations. Some of the fighters were used to escort the bombers of the 8Th USAAF on their raids into Germany, but as D-Day approached, more and more were employed as fighter-bombers in France. Their prime targets were road and rail transport, in order to disrupt German supply routes to the proposed invasion areas. Such ground attacks were met with increasingly formidable anti-aircraft defences, and aircraft losses were high. These losses were made good by replacements flown in by the Ferry squadrons of 31st TG.

Ideal in the fighter/bomber role were the P-38 Lightning and the P-47 Thunderbolt. The latter in particular carried a hefty punch and could withstand a great deal of punishment. Its main drawback was its high fuel consumption, which limited its range. To make these formidable aircraft more effective, the 31st TG kept them supplied with drop tanks, as well as with ammunition, air-to-ground rockets and bombs.

Drop tanks were a German invention (nick-named Dachshund), quickly adopted by the Allies. They were tanks of additional fuel, normally carried under the wings of single-engined machines. Their drag limited the performance of the aircraft, but greatly

extended their endurance. The fuel they contained would be used first, and the tanks would then be discarded. If extra performance was required before the tanks were empty, they were discarded with their contents.



GROVE INSTRUMENT APPROACH
CONFIDENTIAL.

OBTAIN QBB - CEILING.
QFE - ALTIMETER SETTING.
QAN - WIND DIRECTION AND VELOCITY.
QFU - RUNWAY IN USE AND CLEARANCE.

INITIAL APPROACH - 2500 FT. SEA LEVEL.
UPON REACHING STATION - 1. LOWER GEAR
2. REDUCE AIR SPEED TO 120 M.P.H., PLACE MIXTURE CONTROLS TO FULL RICH.
PROCEED OUT N.E. LEG FOR 3 MINUTES DESCENDING TO 1500 FEET SEA LEVEL.
PROCEDURE TURN - AIR SPEED 120 M.P.H., ALTITUDE 1500 FT. SEA LEVEL.
HOLD 45 SECONDS AFTER FIRST OFF COURSE SIGNAL 'A' IS HEARD.
FINAL APPROACH - LET DOWN TO 1000 FT. SEA LEVEL AND CROSS CONE AT 120 M.P.H.
AFTER RECEIVING CONE - HOLD 'N' TWILIGHT APPROXIMITELY 215° DESCENDING TO 500 FEET BAROMETRIC PRESSURE ALTIMETER (770 FT. SEA LEVEL). YOU WILL BE OVER EDGE OF RUNWAY 22 IN 1 MIN. 10 SECONDS. CONTINUE 120 M.P.H. AT 500 FT. AND 215° HEADING FOR 25 SECONDS MORE OR TOTAL OF 1 MIN. 35 SECONDS FROM STATION AND YOU WILL BE OVER CENTER OF FIELD.
IF NOT CONTACT AT THIS TIME PULL UP TO 2500 SEA LEVEL (FT.) ON S.E. LEG OF RANGE AND CONTACT TOWER FOR FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS.

MAJOR ELOIN B. ONSGARD
COMMANDING OFFICER 314TH

314th SQUADRON
STANDARD INST. APPROACH
FOR
GROVE

GROVE
FREQUENCY - 290 KC
IDENTIFICATION - G1 (--. .-)
STATION ELEVATION - 205 FT.
FIELD ELEVATION - 270 FT.
RANGE STATION TO CENTER OF FIELD - 215° - 1'35" AT 120 M.P.H. (HOLD 'N' TWILIGHT)
RUNWAY 22 - 2000 YDS.

The first tanks were made of steel, but both sides were reluctant to provide this strategic material to the enemy. The paper firm Bowater Scott came up with the solution for the Allies - drop tanks made of resin-impregnated paper. These were substantially lighter than the steel version and simply disintegrated when they hit the ground, leaving nothing useful to the enemy. Ground-attack aircraft inevitably discarded their drop tanks before beginning an attack, so the tanks were only used for a single trip.

Soon, paper drop tanks were being delivered to 3TAD by the hundred, if not thousand, for onward transport to P-47 units. They were so lightweight that one man could easily carry them, and so many were jammed into C-47's that crews had to struggle to find room enough to reach the flight deck!



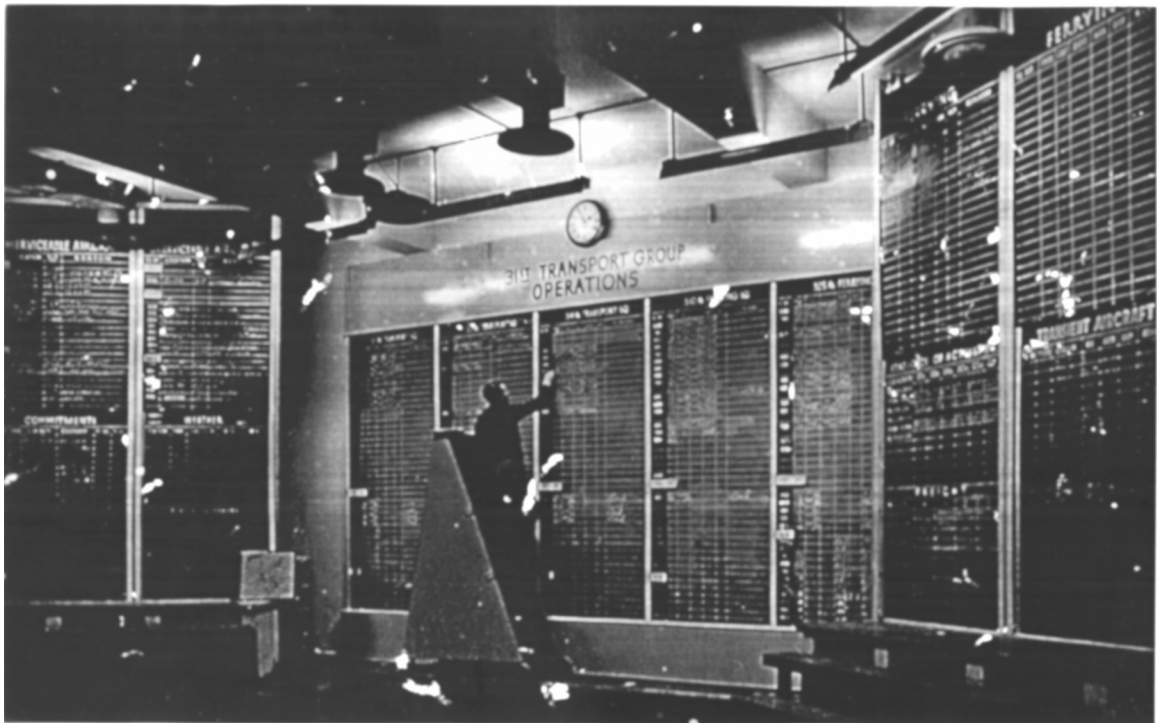
Drop tanks being delivered to Station 519 fresh from the factory. Note the use of civilian lorries. These paper tanks only remained leak-proof for a few hours, so they not were filled with fuel until just before missions.



More drop tanks at Stn. 519. A US truck collects another consignment from the stocks to load aboard a waiting C-47.



A sight seen scores of times every day from late 1943 until late 1945, a 31st TG C-47 lands at Station 519.



The operations room of the 31TG in 1944, showing the activities of group aircraft and crews. This was one of the original RAF buildings, and featured air conditioning against possible gas attack (even the external doors were gas tight) and a reinforced roof as partial protection against conventional bombs.

A typical day would begin with the flight crews being roused well before dawn, breakfasted and briefed. Then, still in darkness, they were driven to their aircraft, which were positioned, loaded and full of fuel, near the end of the runway with engines running. As soon as there was enough light to see along the runway, they would take off. Flying would continue until it was too dark to land safely. As the days lengthened, flight crews would be airborne for up to eighteen hours per day. The standard regime was for crews to fly one day, sleep one day and have one day a week free. Thus there were two crews for each aircraft, which often flew a hundred or more hours per week. Aircraft of the period required servicing after every 100 hours, and engine replacement

(for overhaul) after 500 hours, so that the engineer squadrons of the ADG's were kept busy.



First Sight. This remarkable photo was taken from the cockpit of Major Milton "Mitt" Evans, C/O of the 314th Transport Squadron as he arrived at Station 519 for the first time on 29th October 1943. It was taken looking southwest from somewhere above the Volunteer pub, and steam from a passing railway train can be seen at bottom right. It is clear that some construction work is still going on, and the new road around the north end of the main runway has been completed.



A 314 Squadron Dakota nick-named 'The Green Banana"



Nurses of the 806th MAES at 3TAD in summer 1944.

During the weeks prior to D-Day, the 31st TG gained two additional squadrons. These were comprised of nurses of the 806th and 811th Medical Air Evacuation Squadrons, which would play an important role, particularly in the first few weeks after the invasion.

Early in 1944 HQ 9th USAAF Service Command attempted to boost morale in 31st TG by introducing a group logo. Two ideas were proposed and the group was asked to choose their preference.



This was the second version which was preferred and was widely used, often with the label Far Shores Airline.

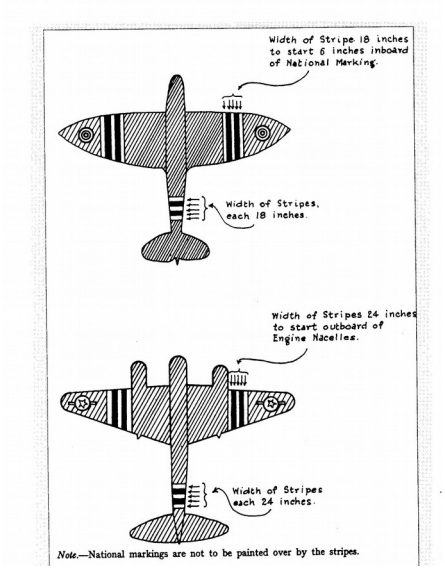


This first offering was the more artistic of the two, but made no mention of casualty evacuations.



The hugely popular comedian Bob Hope entertains a crowd of servicemen and women at Grove.

As time went on and the group's primary task was nearing completion, it began to take on some less demanding tasks, including providing transport for various celebrities that were flown over from USA to entertain the troops. Stars such as Bob Hope, Frances Langford, Ben Lyon, Bebe Daniels, Joe Louis and sections of the Glenn Miller orchestra were flown around USAF bases in Britain, giving performances.
By the end of May 1944, the 9th USAAF was essentially at full strength, although Ferry squadrons were kept busy delivering aircraft to replace those lost on operations. Huge convoys of trucks had delivered an immense stockpile of equipment which was stored at the Air Depot wherever space allowed. At prodigious effort, Grove's Transport and Ferry squadrons had fulfilled their initial task of delivering over 4,500 front-line aircraft from their assembly areas to their operational bases, as well as delivering replacements for aircraft lost on operations, machines that had been repaired by the ADG's and spare parts for damaged aircraft. Meanwhile, the 43rd and 45th ADG's had helped assemble some 5,000 gliders and 800 liaison aircraft, as well as establishing a huge stockpile of spare parts for frontline aircraft and maintaining the 9th USAAF fleet of 1,000 C-47's. Their engineering sections had repaired and overhauled dozens of aircraft damaged in accidents, and modified hundreds more. In the case of the 31st's C-47's the ADG's also installed foldaway stretchers so that the machines could quickly be converted from cargo-carriers to medical evacuation aircraft (Medevacs in modern terms).
There was one more essential task for the 45th ADG before D-Day.
Allied Planners had decided that in order to reduce the risk of aircraft misidentification, all Allied aircraft appearing over Normandy on D-Day (more than 10,000 in total) would carry distinctive markings. On 1st June 1944 aircraft and trucks left Grove for more than 70 9th USAAF bases from Cornwall to Nottinghamshire carrying thousands of gallons of paint. This was to be used to mark the aircraft with the black and white so-called Invasion Stripes. The work was to be completed by 11.00 am on 4th June. No aircraft with these markings was allowed to leave Allied airspace unless specifically instructed to do so. The original order did not require glider aircraft to be marked, but in the event most were also given the distinctive markings. Below is a copy of the original Order.



OP SECRET
SUPREME HEADQUARTERS
ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE
OPERATION MEMORANDUM
NUMBER 23
DISTINCTIVE MARKING – AIRCRAFT

TOP SECRET
Copy No.38

18 April 1944

1. OBJECT

The object of this memorandum is to prescribe the distinctive markings which will be applied to US and British aircraft in order to make them

6 - It wasn't all work: New experiences for the GI's.

If the arrival of large numbers of US Army personnel, with their brashness and unfamiliar ways, was a severe shock to the rural community, wartime Britain was just as big a cultural awakening for the Americans. The combined number of US servicemen in the three groups based at 3TAD, and the ammunition company close by, out-numbered the population of Wantage and Grove by more than two to one. With the British wartime restrictions on food and almost everything else, local items that the Americans enjoyed soon became more scarce than ever. With pubs always short of anything alcoholic, there soon grew an unofficial barter system that provided cigarettes and sweets to anyone with items to exchange. Whiskey was worth its weight in gold!
Lt James Hill, of the 314th Transport Squadron recalled his loathing for Brussels sprouts, a feeling shared by many of his colleagues. But not all English food was distasteful for him. 'On the other hand, it was in Wantage that I first tasted and immediately liked fish and chips. Our hut was quite close to the road into Wantage. At night, although technically absent without official leave (AWOL), we would often slip out and walk into town for orders of fish and chips. My wife and I went back to Wantage many years later, and to my surprise, the fish and chip shop was still in business, just down the road from the Baptist church. I was surprised and delighted at the memories it brought to mind.'
The traditional English fish 'n chips became so popular among the Americans that the shop frequently ran out of supplies, much to the annoyance of regular customers. Local people were asked to place their orders in advance to ensure they were not disappointed. One local, a boy at the time, remembered seeing a sign in the fish shop saying 'Standing Orders Only" and resolutely avoided sitting on the windowsill, for fear of being refused his supper!



The fish bar of fond memory. What would the GI's have made of the kebab offering?

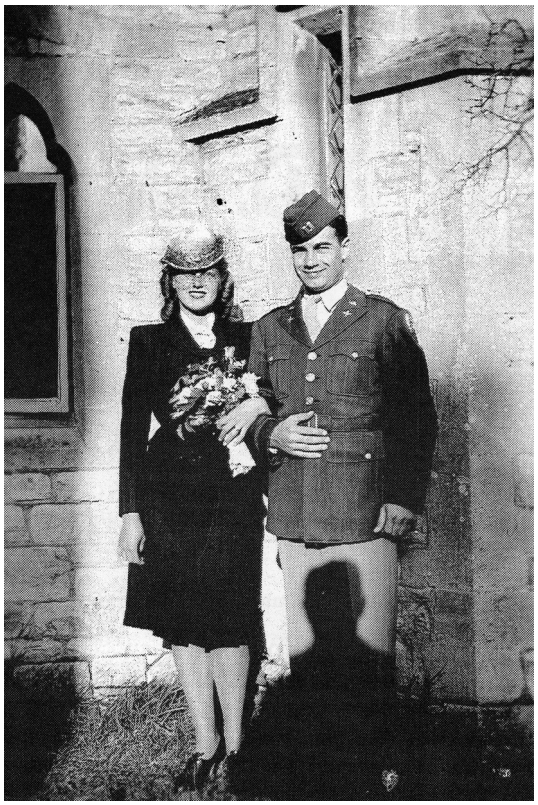
Some years after returning home, another Grove GI wrote '- - as I learned of the rationing and shortage of consumer goods, I wondered how they survived at home. But then they did not have Nazi bombers and buzz bombs to contend with. Rationing and

shortages were much more severe for the British people and they had my admiration for their bulldog determination to see it through to victory.'

An initial misunderstanding gave rise to resentment among local civilians. Early each morning a US truck pulled up outside Lock's bakery, just off the Market Place, and was loaded with freshly baked bread. (Although the bakery is long gone, the Hovis sign still hangs above the building.) Some British people, subject to strict rationing, resented what seemed to be the lavish issue of bread to the Americans. Only a little while later did it become known that the same truck delivered bread mixture prepared at the camp the day before, and that the bakery was paid to cook fresh bread overnight from dough supplied by the USAAF.

Many US servicemen became fond of English pubs. Mick Mooney, of 45th ADG recalled, "A lot of our guys didn't touch alcohol, but those of us that did loved the pubs around Wantage. The warm beer took some getting used to, but the atmosphere was great. We really enjoyed the pub games, darts, shove ha'penny, a sort of miniature 10-pin bowling game on a table, and cribbage. I never got the hang of 'crib', all that stuff about 'apples and pears and one for his knob!' We used to laugh at one of our guys. I think he had Red Indian blood in him. He could throw a knife and hit a fly's eye at 10 paces, but he couldn't play darts to save his life!" One GI had grown up as part of a farming family in Wisconsin, and he felt very much at home in the rural setting of 3TAD. In his free time, he loved to walk or cycle around the area, enjoying the familiar sights and livestock. On one such trip, he came across a herd of cows being driven along the lane for milking. He struck up a conversation with the farmer and offered to help. His offer was enthusiastically accepted and the farmer was delighted to finish the milking in double-quick time. He asked if the GI wanted anything for his help. His reply was that what he missed most since leaving home was a glass of milk fresh from the cow. The farmer went indoors, fetched a mug, filled it and passed it to the GI. "Up to that time, I hadn't realised how much I'd missed having such milk every day. That mug of milk, warm and fresh from the cow was the best thing I'd tasted since I joined up. I'm sure the farmer had no idea how much I enjoyed it." From then on, he resolved to visit the farm as often as he could, but as things turned out, his squadron moved to France within the next few weeks, and he never returned to the farm.

Quite a few US servicemen became genuinely fond of the British families with whom they came into contact, and a good many of the friendships established during that period became permanent. Several US servicemen from Grove married local English girls. Probably the first to do so was the popular squadron commander Capt. Joseph B Booth. Before the end of 1943 he married the daughter of the local school headmaster in Wantage Parish Church. The couple maintained their links with Wantage and have returned to the area a number of times in recent years.



Capt. Booth and his bride Rufus Peacock outside Wantage Parish Church after their wedding.

There were other events that lodged in the memories of local people.
But the biggest boost to Anglo American relations came at Christmas 1943. Contact was made with local families through the schools. One child from each family was invited to a Christmas party on base. Each child was chaperoned by a nominated GI, who visited and made friends with the family beforehand. The children were collected and brought by Jeep to the party on base, and returned in the same way afterwards. There they were given treats that many found entirely new to them. One girl remembered, “There was all sorts of exotic fruit - oranges, bananas and even pineapples, which I’d never seen before! We also had jelly and cake that we had never dreamed of. The final treat was a bowl of ice cream and we could have as much as we wanted, it was absolutely marvellous.” For many years she refused to believe that Father Christmas arrived in a reindeer-hauled sleigh - she had seen him with her own eyes and he travelled in a C-47! Leon Yeuell recalled, “We could of course make ice cream, but we had no facility to freeze it. So we borrowed the services of a visiting B-17, loaded it up and flew it round at 25,000 feet ‘on a training mission’ for an hour or two. When it landed we had tubs of ice cream ready for the kids.” GIs and children alike hugely enjoyed the event and many GIs became firm friends with the families of the children they had escorted.



A young local partygoer receives Jeep driving instruction from her American hosts.

Large US bases such as Grove could support very accomplished music societies – Glee Club in US parlance. They were officially encouraged as morale-boosting activities, both for participants and their audiences. They also provided alcohol-free recreation for US servicemen. To the British, such a title would convey the impression such groups would perform only modern music, but as the poster indicates, such groups could have an extensive repertoire that included classical as well as modern works. The 3TAD Glee Club was very popular, and performed over 100 concerts in the area within a period of about a year.

Sgt. Carlo Guemelata recalled, “There were several unofficial singing groups at Grove and guys who could play guitar. Some of them would get together and sing popular songs in local pubs. But the Glee Club was officially organised. They wouldn’t accept just anybody. To become a member, you had to have an audition and agree to attend practices and rehearsals. Lt Welch wouldn’t tolerate any fooling around. Quite a few

Chuck Guemelata was a member of this Glee Club!

S. MARY'S SCHOOL HALL
WANTAGE

(by kind permission of the Sister Superior)

Tuesday, September 5, at 8 p.m.
1944

3rd T.A.D. Glee Club

U.S. ARMY AIR FORCES

(By permission of the Commanding Officer 3rd T.A.D.)

Entertainment in Song . . .
An Informal Concert

THIRTY-SIX VOICES BLENDED IN SONG . . .
Russian, French, English, American Folk Songs, Negro Spirituals, Sea Chanteys . . .
MUSIC by
Beethoven, Bach, Brahms, Bantock, Greig, Berlin, Elgar Romberg . . .
VIOLIN SOLOS . . . PIANO SOLOS . . .
Songs in Swing Time by the Sextet, supported by the Bass Fiddle, Violin, Guitar . . . Vocal Solos . . .

Director: Lieut. JAMES WELCH
(Asst. Director Paulist Choir New York City, Soloist N.B.C. Catholic Hour Choir.)

Accompanist: Mr. RUFFEL JUSTHAM

ALL PROCEEDS FOR S. DUNSTAN'S SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND.

TICKETS--5/-, 2/6 and 1/-

Obtainable at A. V. Gibbs & Son, Mill Street, Wantage.

A. V. GIBBS & SON PRINTERS, WANTAGE.

A.V. Gibbs, a long-established firm in Wantage, printed the sheet.

guys were turned down, but I suppose as an Italian-American, I had music in my blood, and had no problem becoming a member. We got time off when the Club was due to give a concert, and gave performances at several US bases around Newbury as well as to the RAF at Harwell and Abingdon." Above is a handbill announcing a performance of 3TAD Glee Club in Wantage. The admission charge seems to have been used in good causes.



The 3TAD Glee Club preparing to give a performance at the US Hospital in Oxford, which later became the Churchill hospital.

7 - New Experiences for local people.

Some local women found employment in the American Red Cross. One of them, June Maisy, remembered a number of occasions when part of the famous Glenn Miller Orchestra played at dances held in the camp gymnasium.

She recalled, "People say that Glenn Miller never was at Grove, but I'm certain I saw him several times, but not when the band was due to play.

"Most of Americans were just young lads really, and very few of them shaved regularly - dead scruffy really. There were an awful lot of them that just worked and slept, not going out much, except to the pub. It was 12-hour shifts seven days a week; I think some of them were just exhausted at the end of the day. And it seemed strange to me, that they could all dance really well, but couldn't march to save their lives. For the dances, they really smartened themselves up, and they'd send out lorries to bring in girls from villages all around. If you worked on the camp, as we did, you weren't supposed to go to the dances.

"They were very strict about security, and before you could work anywhere on the base, you had to sign to say you wouldn't say anything about what you saw there. One entrance to the camp was just along from the convent. It seems funny now, they always drove you to and from home in a jeep, but if you forgot your pass, the sentry would make you go home and get it, even if he knew you. I was very impressed that they would never let you walk home at night. Working from 3pm till 11 pm, and sometimes

staying overnight to do the doughnut run at 5 o'clock, I suppose they did their best to look after our welfare.

"It sounds silly now, but in those days, you were too busy to wander around nosing into things. You might see something by the side of the road, if you were cycling or whatever, but there would be a sign telling you to keep away and you just left it alone. So there must have been a lot of things that we saw but never took any notice of.



Civilian employees of the American Red Cross enjoy their Christmas party in 1943. The young man on the left had been a merchant seaman and survived being torpedoed twice in the Atlantic. The second time, he and others were adrift for several days in an open boat, and suffered severely from exposure. After recovering in hospital, he was excused further duty and volunteered for the Red Cross.

"I'm sure there were a lot of black troops living in tents up by Grove Park, close to the ammunition dump, as well as at Challow. But except in the library, you would never see them with the other men - not that I ever heard of them causing any trouble, they just didn't mix." (There were tales of frequent brawls among the Americans in the Wantage pubs, but the author has not found anyone claiming to have witnessed any racial fights.) Mr Wasborough, whose family farmed much of the land taken over for the airfield, remembers the summer of 1944 during holidays at home from boarding school. "We could hear the Dakota's engines being run up early in the morning. By 7 o'clock, they had all flown off and they'd come and go all day until the evening. Then we'd see them circle and stream in over those trees to land. I don't think I ever saw them use the main runway.

"Our house seemed to be surrounded by airmen's quarters, and there was always a lot of traffic going to and from the communication centre just up there behind us. We all found it odd to see Nissen huts where our garden had been, and we didn't like losing our

privacy. But on the other hand the Americans loved children and we were never short of sweets. So we didn't feel too hard done by."

Mr Dyer, son of the former landlord of the Volunteer recalled how polite most of the Yanks were – except when they got drunk. "They would offer anything up to 10,000 cigarettes for a bottle of whiskey. Trouble was, we couldn't get any! And they would give cigarettes by the hundred for anything they wanted, especially fresh meat and vegetables. All the local allotment holders became addicted to Camels or Lucky Strikes.

"Some of the young women that used to come down from London, Bristol and elsewhere we are really cracking lookers. Several of them asked if we could put them up at the pub, but we'd have lost out on license in no time!

"All the copses in Grove Park, behind the pub, were piled high with ammunition. My old man was really worried because the guards around the stuff were very casual about smoking, and if one of those ammo piles had gone up, the pub would have gone up with it."

Mr Cotterell, one of generations of local farmers, recalled, "Over the course of a few weeks, one of our big fields beyond Denchworth Road Railway bridge, was filled with ambulances, jam- packed, nose to tail. The day after D-Day they'd all gone."

Don and Brian Pert, born and bred in Challow, remember the black troops. "We'd never seen a black man until the Yanks came, but to us kids they weren't very different from anyone else. It didn't occur to me until years later, but I never saw any of them even walking along the road with a white soldier.

"We were only nippers at the time, and we used to spend all our time on the camp, the sentries never took any notice of us. They were very fond of kids. We could have a meal in their canteen whenever we wanted. They used to give us chocolate and ask us not to get them into trouble. One of our favourite tricks was to run across the wires which supported the camouflage over the bomb dump. It must have been 12 or 15 feet to the ground but we didn't think about falling. As far as I know, there were no bombs there, I dunno if we'd have done it if there had been. I don't remember seeing any petrol jerrycans there, but they certainly wouldn't have stopped us. I was only caught once, I think, and this bloke put me in an aeroplane while the engines were running. It frightened the life out of me, I thought he was going to fly me off somewhere and leave me!"

Ruth Minns, who lived close to the Volunteer in the gate lodge of Grove Park during the war, remembered hundreds of black troops living in Nissen huts between there and Ardington - in spite of the ammunition stored nearby. "The black soldiers were never allowed to mix with the whites, they lived quite separately. When there were dances, perhaps in the school hall, you could have either black or white soldiers there. If you had both, they'd be fighting in no time. But apart from that, I don't think the Americans caused as much trouble in the area as our own English chaps.

"I shall never forget the mud on the roads while the Americans were extending the airfield, at times it was four or 5 inches deep. The lorries used to throw the mud on to the tramway, everywhere. Of course, when it dried and hardened, the tram would be derailed. It happened all the time. After it rained, it used to be like an ice rink. It would clog the wheels of my bike as I cycled to Wantage. I used to take a stick with me, and stop every few yards to scrape the mud off the tyres. Eventually I used to go through the park and along the Reading Road to Wantage, even though it was twice as far, and there were all those explosives in the fields. In the summer that followed, there were lorries everywhere, hundreds of them, and they used to create great clouds of dust. People daren't go outdoors at times. How there weren't a lot of accidents, I'll never know. It

got so bad that the Grove bus stopped going through the village because the driver couldn't see the way! It wasn't much better on the road alongside the village."
Another local man said he worked for a local farmer who supplied pork to the camp. "I used to do a bit of poaching on the side," he confided, "And I used to make more money selling rabbits and pheasants to the sergeant mess than the pig farmer did. I used to go home with pockets stuffed full of chocolate for the kids, and I'd have died years ago if I'd smoked half the cigarettes they tried to give me. They had mountains of tyres up there, but none of them would fit our old van. Some people were frightened by their lorries, thundering along in great convoys, but I thought they were better drivers than our army blokes. I suppose they were more careful because they weren't used to driving on the wrong side of the road."
Reg Raisbeck had moved out of London in 1940 to avoid the blitz. He had rented a cottage in Grove Park "in the middle of nowhere", confident that his young family would be safe. His peace of mind was rudely shattered however, when explosives began to appear all around his home. He was fortunate to find a house in Grove to move into when its previous occupants moved to Hanney.

8 - Some incidents in the area.

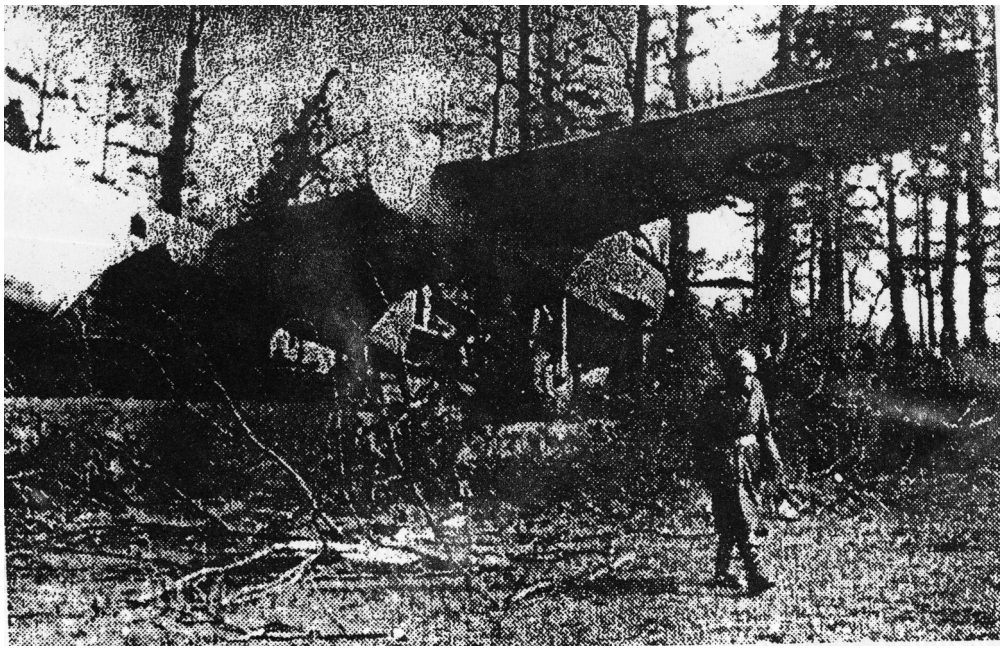
An Uninvited Guest

On 2nd March 1944, while activity at the base was reaching a peak, additional excitement arrived, courtesy of the Air Ministry and the RAF. A large and unorthodox British bomber made an emergency landing Grove during a heavy rainstorm. This aircraft, serial DW506, was a prototype of the very secret Vickers Windsor, an aircraft intended as the British equivalent of the Boeing B-29 Superfortress. With a 2,000-mile range, pressurised and capable of speeds up to 350 mph at 40,000 feet carrying a four-ton download, it was a very advanced and ambitious project. On a test flight from Farnborough, DW506 suffered an engine failure. Unable to feather the engine, the pilot had no option but to put down at the nearest landing site with a long enough runway – in this case Grove, and the Windsor landed down-wind from the northwest on the runway marked 16. This was rather shorter than the main runway and it was insufficient for the aircraft to come to a standstill before running off the end. It veered to the right near the end of its landing run, demolishing two wooden huts before breaking its back and coming to rest near the Wilts and Berks canal.
The crew members were lucky to escape without serious injury. A 24-hour guard was placed on the wreck and after three days it was returned by road to the factory at Weybridge with an armed escort. For security purposes the Americans were told that it was an experimental version of the Avro Lancaster. Only prototypes of the Windsor were constructed, and the type never entered RAF service.



A Vickers Windsor pictured at Farnborough in January 1944. Although high hopes were placed on this aircraft, it failed to meet expectations and was cancelled after three

prototypes had been built. With four main wheels, it must have been difficult to control on the ground.



The only known published picture of the stricken Vickers Windsor after its crash-landing. Despite the poor quality of the photo, the guard is clearly unhappy at his duty in the chill of March 1944.

Other Aircraft Incidents Around Grove.

Inevitably, there were a number of aircraft crashes around Station 519.

On the 27th May 1944, an Armstrong Whitworth Albemarle towing a Horsa glider lost power in an engine after taking off from Harwell. The cast-off Horsa landed safely next to the A417 near Ardington while the Albemarle landed down-wind at Grove. With no brakes, it overran the main runway, and came to rest close to the railway line near the 'Black Bridge'. Men from the ADG rushed to the scene and found the Canadian pilot trying to smash his way into the Perspex nose section using the emergency axe. The initial impression was that he was temporarily deranged, but it became clear that he was trying to rescue the navigator trapped inside. Both were recued and given medical attention.

On 10th June, two B-26's out of Grove crashed at Letcombe Bassett after colliding in mid-air, and on 24th an A-20 crashed in the same area.

On 23rd August a C-47 crashed and burned at Latton Down, south of Wantage, killing six men and a nurse. This aircraft had circled Grove intending to land, but the airfield was blanketed in thick fog. The pilot, unfamiliar with the area, tried to circle once more at lower height. His aircraft crashed just below the top of the ridgeway, only a hundred yards from the outer radio marker. Two of the B-17's that had been modified at Grove made forced landings during October. Another C-47 from Grove crashed in Huntingdon during November and yet another, from the 27th ATG, crashed in North Wales. In December, and newly modified B-26 suffered an engine fire shortly after taking off from Grove. The stricken machine crashed between Letcombe Regis and the 'H2S' station at Sparsholt Firs, killing the crew. On 10th January 1945, de Havilland Mosquito, serial No HJ780, from 13 OTU Harwell, crashed and burned at Pewit Farm, on the Ridgeway 2 miles south of Wantage after taking off from Grove.

But perhaps the most unfortunate accident happened in July 1944. There were several eyewitness accounts of the event.

The Price of Youth

2nd Lt Stanley E H Capstick-Dale was born in Northern Rhodesia (now renamed Zambia). In early 1941, he and his brother enlisted in the South African Air Force and trained to become pilots. Sadly, Stanley died while serving with the RAF's 3rd Tactical Evaluation Unit, based at Aston Down, Glos. His tombstone in the Commonwealth War Grave section of Botley Cemetery, Oxford marks his death in Hawker Typhoon JP847 at West Hanney on 24th July 1944. RAF records state the crash was believed to have occurred after an unauthorised dogfight with an unknown aircraft as he was returning from rocket-firing practice at Holbeach in East Anglia. There were a number of eyewitnesses to the incident.

At around 1.30pm that day, Mrs 'Vinnie' Vickers was dressing her baby at home in East Hanney before leaving him with her mother to start her shift machining aircraft parts in nearby Dandridges Mill. She heard low-flying aircraft approaching overhead, and looked out of the kitchen window to see them. There were two single-engined fighters, apparently chasing one another. The leader went into a steep climb, and as the second tried to follow, there was a loud bang: the aircraft turned on its back and fell to earth in a field, erupting in a ball of flame a few hundred yards from the house, just north of the village. As the fighter's ammunition began to explode, Vinnie ran out, concerned for her father, who was returning to work on foot along the lane beside the crash site.

By the time she reached her father, a fire engine and several other vehicles had arrived, driven across the fields. But in spite of the efforts of the would-be rescuers there was no hope for the pilot.

Recalling the tragedy many years later, Vinnie expressed surprise that none of the American occupants had come out from the small brick hut only 100 yards from the crash site, "They must have heard the crash or the commotion that followed."

[**Author's Note**: This hut housed the inner marker of the Beam Approach System. The men on duty inside were under orders not to leave their post for any reason unless specifically ordered to do so.]

At around the same time, Tech. Sgt. Mick Mooney of the 45th ADG stood in the sunshine beside a maintenance hangar on Grove airfield. Two days earlier he'd been given the task of fixing the air brakes on a dive-bomber variant of the P-51 Mustang. Twice he'd stripped down, cleaned and reassembled the complete mechanism, and twice it had failed. Finally, in frustration, Mick had replaced the complete wings, and he now stood watching as the Depot's check pilot, Captain Royle T. Jackson, put the aircraft through its paces. The machine flew round the base a couple of times before Mick saw a British single-engined fighter approach from the east. He continued watching as the two aircraft circled each other and then, inevitably, began a mock dogfight. The more powerful Typhoon soon got onto the tail of its 'adversary' and the pair roared along the main runway at low level. As they disappeared from view, Mick heard a bang followed by a plume of black smoke. Shortly afterwards he heaved a sigh of relief as the Mustang circled and landed back at Grove.

At around 1.00pm that day, Cpl 'Del' Sahlberg had finished righting an overturned steamroller outside Abingdon using his crane-equipped T2 wreck recovery truck, and begun his return to Grove. As he approached East Hanney, his thoughts centred on whether he was too late for a meal back at Grove. Over to his right, he saw a pall of black smoke and heard the bell of a fire engine. Back at the base, nobody could tell him what had happened and only later in the evening did he learn the cause of the smoke.

It seems clear that Lt Capstick-Dale died in the sort of flying accident that was all too frequent during that period. Despite the strict orders of their superiors, fighter pilots couldn't resist testing themselves and their machines against each other, sometimes, as in this case, with tragic results.



A Hawker Typhoon fighter-bomber, known in the RAF as the 'Tiffie'. Designed as an interceptor, it proved to be a formidable ground-attack aircraft. In addition to its four cannons, it could deliver eight-65lb air-to-ground rockets or two 1,000lb bombs.

The powerful (2,200 hp) Napier Sabre engine of the Hawker Typhoon earned a poor reputation for reliability, largely due to mass-production problems. It was a twin-row 24-cylinder power plant and any blockage in the oil or coolant flow could cause the engine to seize, often at the worst possible moment. It was believed that such a failure led to the untimely death of Lt Capstick-Dale.

There were, of course other incidents, most of which that had less tragic consequences.

Fire, Fire.

At around 9pm on10th August 1944, a large fire was discovered in a field between the base accommodation huts and the ammunition store. It took dozens of volunteers several frantic hours to bring it under control, and the station breathed a sigh of relief! A second fire took place a few days later in a storage hangar on base. Leon Yeuell recalled, "The hangar was full of all kinds of things, including some gas cylinders and 60,000 parachutes. We had fire trucks on base, but they were primarily to deal with aircraft emergencies, and while the airfield was so busy, they had to be on standby and were not allowed to deal with any other fire events, so we had to call the Wantage Fire Service. They arrived in two cars, each with a trailer-mounted water pump. With such inadequate equipment, nobody thought they would do any good, and nobody volunteered to help them. To our surprise, those guys quickly ran hoses to the creek nearby and went into the hangar spraying water. They put the flames out in next to no time, although about half the parachutes were destroyed or damaged, and the remains of the fire continued to smoulder for another two days. Ever since seeing how those guys set about their job, I've been amazed to see the huge fire trucks we have in the States.

They're impressive and make a heck of a noise, but I'm sure they're no more effective than those Wantage Fire Service guys with their pumps!"

Shot while Obeying Orders.

Frank Carnaggio was something of a misfit at 3TAD. Trained as an engine mechanic, he'd been shipped across the Atlantic in October 1943 to serve in the Ninth USAAF, but found himself languishing at the USAAF replacement depot at Stone in Staffs. He'd been assigned to the 474th Fighter Group, but unfortunately for him the rest of the 474th had not yet arrived in the UK. Finally, after several weeks, Frank was sent to Grove, where he remained pending the arrival in England of his unit. Here he had no specific job and hung around his hut with nothing to do but get acquainted with the other occupants.

One night soon after his arrival, he found himself among a group picked for night sentry duty. He and the rest of the detail cursed their luck, not only at being selected on a very cold wet night, but also because the Officer of the Watch was the least popular on the base, and universally despised.

Reporting for duty with rifle and oilskin, they were given strict instructions. The duty officer was very angry at the amount of pilfering from the base, for which he considered the local population to be responsible. He was sure that the activity happened mostly at night. He worked himself up to a frenzy and ranted for several minutes at this thieving. To their amazement, he then made clear to the sentry detail that they were not to hesitate, but to shoot anyone who failed to respond when challenged. Repeat, ANYONE! This was a direct order, and failure to comply with it would result, he said, in instant court marshal.

Out in the pitch dark and pouring rain, Frank marched nervously up and down for several hours, trying vainly to keep warm and dry, and hoping that there would be no thieving that night. The only shelter from the incessant rain was in the lee of a hut at one end of his patrol area. In the early hours of the morning he heard a vehicle approach, stop and switch its lights off. Cocking his rifle, he challenged at the top of his voice. No response. He challenged again. Still no response. After the third challenge, he fired a single shot, and heard a scream. His heart went to his mouth as the thought hit him that he might have injured a child.

Approaching, he discovered with horror that he'd shot and injured the duty officer! Frank's first thought was to get medical help, and he ran to the nearest source of light to call an ambulance. After an anxious wait, help arrived and the officer was carried off to the medical centre for treatment. Frank had no choice but to return to his sentry duties. Next day, after a sleepless spell in his hut, he went to see the patient, who between groans and curses promised him a court marshal and the harshest sentence. He knew that striking an officer would land anyone in deep trouble, but shooting one was an almost certain death sentence! After the earlier briefing, he had no doubt what was in store for him. A terrified Frank spent the next few days confined to barracks under armed guard until a board of enquiry could be convened.

In due course, he was called before a panel of officers to answer for his deeds. Fortunately for him, all the other sentries on duty that night confirmed the orders they had been given, and the board decided there was no case to answer. A very relieved engine mechanic returned to his barracks, only to be bombarded with a shower of empty cans and other missiles. His colleagues demanded that he apply for a weapons training course because he'd only wounded the officer!

Within a week, he received orders to report to RAF Thruxton, near Andover, his group's temporary home. He could not leave Grove quickly enough, and spent the next 18 months servicing the engines of Lockheed P-38 Lightning fighters.

Blacker than They were Painted.

Although there may well have been a lot of pilfering from the base by the local population, the base inhabitants themselves weren't above a certain amount of 'midnight requisitioning'.

Major Leon Yeuell came up with a solution to a problem common in bases in Britain. Like all servicemen, his quarters were allocated a mere 1cwt of coal each week for use in the single 'pot-bellied' stove which served as the source of heat. During the winter of 1943, every USAAF serviceman at Grove complained of the cold, and many obtained quantities of wood to supplement their meagre fuel allowance.

Major Yeuell was in charge of scheduling deliveries and unloading supplies that came from ports and storage areas all over the country. Great use was made of the railways, and because the railway sidings at Wantage Road station were very limited, the sidings at the Steventon extension to Milton depot were frequently used to temporarily hold wagons of stores for Grove. From there smaller loads were delivered to Wantage Road sidings as space allowed. A steam engine was kept ready there to take wagons to and from Steventon. As at most sidings, there was a large stockpile of coal at the station, stored in the open air. Major Yeuell noticed that the standard security method used to deter the theft of railway coal was to paint the surface layer with whitewash. This was a very effective measure as paint of any kind was unobtainable to civilians during the war. But among the innumerable stores delivered to the Air Depot were thousands of tins of white paint.

So occasionally, after the railway staff had finished work for the day, a USAAF truck would be loaded with coal from the stockpile, and the newly exposed surface of the coal heap would be painted white, so that to all intents and purposes the pile remained just as it had the day before. Soon, most of the officers and a few of those at the base 'in the know' had a plentiful supply of coal for heating, and although the stockpile in the siding was diminished, there was no evidence of any theft as the top layer always appeared white.

Night Photography.

Tech. Sgt Ed Anderson was in charge of Special Purpose Vehicle Preparation. This was the maintenance section for all vehicles used at Grove except Jeeps and GMC 2½ ton trucks. Ed's quarters were at the south of the base, while his workplace was at the northern extreme, in a separate compound opposite the Volunteer pub. After his evening meal, Ed would sometimes cycle back to work in the dark to catch up with his paperwork. It was a two-mile trip using the roads, but rather less if he went via the perimeter track on the east side of the main runway, so he used the short cut. Although there were strict instructions that the runways were off-limits to unauthorised ground traffic of any kind, Ed knew very well that the base was not equipped for night flying and did not consider himself at risk during these illegal trips. He also knew that there was little chance of being caught.

On a several occasions, as he cycled along the perimeter track, he heard an aircraft flying low overhead and saw the area around him momentarily lit up as if by some freak lightning flash. He presumed it was a German reconnaissance aircraft taking photos of the base, and felt sure that his cycle excursions in the dark were recorded on film in the Luftwaffe aerial photo archives. It struck him as a little strange however, that the

Germans appeared to take so much interest in what was a maintenance installation. Naturally, given that he was disobeying orders, he never reported the incidents.
Many years later, he learned that a team under professor Edgerton of the MIT laboratory in Boston was conducting operational tests on a special illumination device for the USAAF. Up to this point in time, night photography employed 'flash bombs' which gave enough light, but persisted long enough for anti-aircraft gunners and night fighters to target the camera aircraft. The new lamp provided a very short-duration intense flash, which only lasted a small fraction of a second, too brief for the gunners. Development and prototype lamps were being tested in aircraft from the 7th Photo-Reconnaissance Group from their base at Mount Farm, east of Oxford. Grove airfield had been selected as a test site because it was a nearby active but non-front-line base that could be photographed without the risk of anti-aircraft fire.
Several USAAF officers who became aware of the tests expressed scepticism about the new technique. Among them, Major Yeuell was quite certain that it would never be introduced. "The British and Germans had been at war for over three years and knew very well not to give away their position by shooting at a lone aircraft. But our guys would shoot at anything, and any low-flying aircraft showing a light near them would certainly be shot at by many of them and almost certainly hit."
Despite Major Yeuell's misgivings, the professor's device was successfully developed and became a valuable tool later in the war and afterwards. A smaller version of it (the stroboscopic lamp) later came into common use as a tool used in garages to adjust the ignition timing of petrol engines.

Guarding the Pay check.

Pete Robertson was a youngster living in East Hendred during WW2. His father was headmaster at the local school. Occasionally, much to his delight, Pete was allowed to accompany his father on a trip into Wantage by bus. He recalled what to him and others was an extraordinary sight.
"Once in a while we would be walking through the Market Square when a small convoy of US Army Jeeps would arrive, full of armed and white-helmeted Military Police, accompanying a truck. The square would be cleared of traffic, and people were ushered off the street, into shops. The Jeeps would take up positions, one at each entrance to the square, and the MP's would stand, weapons in hand, preventing any traffic from entering. Meanwhile, the truck, and two further Jeeps would take up positions outside Barclays Bank. While more armed MP's stood guarding the truck, others entered the bank with two officers, carrying two large metal boxes bearing the label US ARMY in large lettering. After a few minutes, the officers and their escort would emerge from the bank carrying the boxes, obviously much heavier than they had been before. When these had been secured in the back of the truck and the guards were in place with them, the convoy would reassemble and move off down Mill St, leaving life in the square to return to normality. The scene was repeated regularly and was so alien to normal Wantage life that local people would gather to see the spectacle first-hand.
"My father was friendly with the manager of this branch of Barclays Bank, and once in a while, after finishing his business there, he and I would be invited by the manager to join him in his office for a cup of tea. A week or so after we'd witnessed the military event for the first time, my father mentioned it to the bank manager. He started to laugh and the explained that he found the whole business hilarious. The day before the arrival of a 'consignment', he explained, he would receive a phone call from the base Finance Officer informing him that the consignment was due. He was instructed to contact the Post Office to check that it had arrived and telephone the officer the next day to confirm that it was ready for collection. About half an hour before the convoy was due to arrive

the manager would send two of his female staff to the Post Office next door with a small cart to collect the brown paper parcels containing the money!"

New for Old.

During summer 1944 one C-47 veered off the runway on landing and after skidding across part of the infield area, collided with a tractor that was mowing the grass. Fortunately for him, the tractor driver saw the aircraft coming and dived off onto the ground. The result was substantial damage to both machines and the tractor driver receiving a severe fright. Despite this, no one suffered injury more serious than a few bruises. The squadron commander quickly arrived and berated the startled tractor driver for trespassing on the base and causing substantial damage to a valuable aircraft. The farmer eventually explained that he had a contract with the base commander to cut the grass. He complained that in complying with his contract, the USAAF had caused great distress to one of his employees and destroyed his tractor, which was an essential tool and vital for his family's livelihood. When a copy of the contract was produced, the matter was settled and the farmer eventually received a brand new John Deere tractor!

A Grand Tour.

2nd Lt. Ed Tierney was the youngest pilot in the 314th Transport Squadron. Never in his wildest dreams did he think that a posting to Europe would allow him to visit the oases of North Africa, or the pyramids of Egypt. In early February 1945 his was one of three crews chosen to bring back from Russia some of the B-17 crews who had taken part in Operation Frantic. Some 8th AF bombers had attacked targets in Eastern Germany and then continued eastwards to land in Russia. Unfortunately, they were followed by a German aircraft and a few hours after they had landed, the their airfield was attacked by the Luftwaffe and many bombers were destroyed on the ground. Three C-47's were despatched from Station 519 to bring back the stranded B-17 crews. As a non-combat unit, the group was forbidden to fly across battle front lines, so they made their way to Russia via Gibraltar, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Syria, and Iran. Flying up to ten hours a day, the journey took almost three weeks, and the crews were able to enjoy the sights and sounds of the Middle East along the way. The crews then spent several weeks gathering US aircrews from various airfields in Russia. Sadly, one C-47 developed an engine problem and its return was delayed until it could be fixed. Although it was not Lt.Tierney's aircraft, he was the most junior pilot of the three and was delegated to fly home the last C-47 with the remaining bomber crews. The repairs took several days to complete, and Ed recalled trips by train to gather more returnees. He reported that he was very well treated by the Russians and felt obligated to join in vodka-drinking sessions with his hosts. This would have been fine except that he had little experience of alcohol as when he had left USA he'd been below the US legal age to drink! He was however, the only 31st pilot who had taken his camera and was able to bring back photos of his unique trip to show his family in later life. He was still in Russia in May when the news came that the war was over, and finally arrived back in Grove on 12th June.

Privileged Dating.

Former Air Transport Auxiliary pilot Mary Ellis's flight log includes mention of two visits to Grove. The first was in summer 1944, when she delivered an Airspeed Oxford, serial No T1119 from the factory in Portsmouth. The other was flying in a Mark XIV Spitfire, serial No RM984, from Keevil on 22nd December 1944. This latter aircraft was frequently seen at Grove during the last months of the war, but the circumstances remained a mystery for some time, as this mark of Spitfire was never in service with the

USAAF. Only much later did the truth emerge. Apparently, RM984 became the personal ‘mount’ of Group Captain Edward Donaldson, who was commanding officer of the first RAF operational jet fighter squadron, based at Colerne, near Bath. He was very keen on a nurse at Grove at the time, and used to fly the Spitfire to 3TAD to see her at every opportunity. Very few RAF pilots could claim the use of a late-model Spitfire as a ‘passion wagon’. [Details of the jet fighter squadron were of course very secret, and even the station commander would not have been allowed to land one anywhere but at its home base.] One C-47 crewmember recalled that he was a very dashing pilot. “On take-off he would always bring his wheels up almost before leaving the ground. Then he’d turn and fly along the runway so low that his propeller almost seemed to scrape the concrete. Some years later, I wasn’t surprised to read that he was the pilot of a Mark IV Gloster Meteor that broke the world speed record.”



Seen from the control tower, Gp Capt Donaldson’s Spitfire, with the inevitable Dakota in the background. The pool of water in the foreground was an ever-present feature during the winter of 1944-5.

Unintentional Broadcasting.

Navigator Lt John Oberg remembered his first familiarisation flight in the UK. His aircraft was en route to Chipping Ongar, Essex. The cloud base descended almost to ground level while they were airborne, and he remembered flying along the Thames estuary with no idea where they were. The radio operator kept requesting Chipping Ongar to identify itself, but received no reply. The aircraft was running low on fuel and the crew were becoming anxious. Finally, they received a message instructing them to land immediately or be shot down. They descended below the cloud base and landed at RAF Hornchurch. A car was waiting when they came to rest, and took the crew to the station commander, who demanded to know what they thought they were doing. The pilot explained their predicament and reported that their radio messages had not been answered. It was made clear to him that the radio in the C-47 had a range of hundreds of miles, and could be received in Berlin! No airbase would broadcast its location in such circumstances.
After this incident the long-range radios in 31st group aircraft were taken out and a less powerful replacement installed.

A Famous Visitor.

One of Lt Mario Paolini's duties was to act as the part-time official photographer for the 45th ADG. He recalled a number of visits to Station 519 by the famous bandleader, Glenn Miller. "Although he hated flying," said Lt Paolini, " He visited 3TAD several times, arriving by C-47, and occasionally led part of his band in performances at the Officers Club. I photographed his arrival on one occasion, and persuaded him to sign a copy. That was about six weeks before his tragic death."



Lt Paolini's autographed photo of the famous musician as he alights from a Dakota at Grove.

Having no Axe to Grind

In early 1945, and thought by some to be the work of a bomber group that was visiting 3TAD, the axe from King Alfred's statue in Wantage Market Square was found to be missing. There were always numbers of US servicemen in the town during the evenings, and with the blackout, it would have been very easy to remove it without anyone seeing. So although it couldn't be proved that the Americans were responsible, there was little doubt about the culprits. The town mayor made an official approach to the base commander who agreed that it was most likely that US servicemen were to blame. Amid profuse apologies, a replacement axe was ordered, funded by the Americans. It took some time to find someone to make a replacement but the item finally arrived and was fitted in place later in the year. Fortunately, by the time the replacement was installed, almost all of the Americans at Station 519 had returned home, and as far as is known it is the axe currently displayed.

Dangerously Distracted.

Tech Sgt Leonard 'Tex' McCrary was a flight engineer on a 314 Sqn C-47. A dramatic event that stuck in his memory happened in early July 1944. His aircraft, Lady Lynn, was scheduled to deliver a cargo of P-47 spares to the 362nd Fighter Group base at Headcorn in Kent. [The 362nd maintained a force of 84 P-47's. In its first 8 months of operations the group lost 80 aircraft.]

As their Dakota flew over Surrey, one of the crew spotted a small aircraft heading towards them, apparently on fire. As it approached, it became clear to Tex and the crew that the fiery object was in fact a buzz- bomb (V-1). They had never seen one before, and the whole crew watched it as the pilot turned their aircraft to keep it in view. After a few minutes it disappeared and Tex's C-47 tried to get back on course for Headcorn. Unfortunately for them, they found themselves in the midst of a balloon barrage. Despite the pilot's efforts, they caught one of the cables and to their horror, some eight feet was torn from their port wing! The pilot managed to maintain control of the aircraft, but they had to land, and quickly. By a piece of luck, they found themselves close to Kenley airfield and were able to land there without further damage. One of the features of the C-47 was that it was possible to replace a wing relatively easily, and a replacement wing was flown down from Grove the next day. An MR&R party arrived in the evening and the new wing was fitted. After a brief checkout flight, Tex and the crew delivered their cargo just in time to see the last P-47's of the 362nd group fly out to their new base, Ligneroles, in France!

Paying a Heavy Price.

A great friend of navigator John Oberg's was a pilot in one of the Ferrying squadrons, and regarded very highly.

"He was just like the rest of us in many ways. He liked to gamble and spent a lot of time in the Officer's Club playing poker, where he frequently won quite a lot of money. Unfortunately as it turned out, he also liked to chase after the girls, and on his frequent trips to Northern Ireland, made every excuse he could to stay on in Belfast where he found the girls irresistible. Col. Feldman got pretty mad about his frequent absences and warned him several times to quit fooling around and concentrate on the job. Finally the guy stayed in Belfast once too often. The Col. came up to me one day pretty angry and asked if I'd seen the guy, who was due to be back at Grove that day. I told him I hadn't, but suggested that maybe the weather around Belfast had closed in. That didn't wash with the Col. and next day the guy was transferred out to a B-26 outfit.

"Many years later, I came over to Normandy for the D-Day commemorations, and after the ceremonies, I stopped by the US Cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer at the western end of Omaha Beach.

The first grave I saw was that of my friend, whose B-26 was shot down on D-Day."

9 - D-Day and Afterwards

The tempo at Grove increased immensely after D-Day.

Significant for the Allies, but particularly for the 31st TG, was the construction of the airstrip behind Omaha Beach. It was one of two such airstrips completed by sunset on 7th June 1944. The day had been a very busy one for the engineer companies, who had finished the task in spite of harassing shellfire.

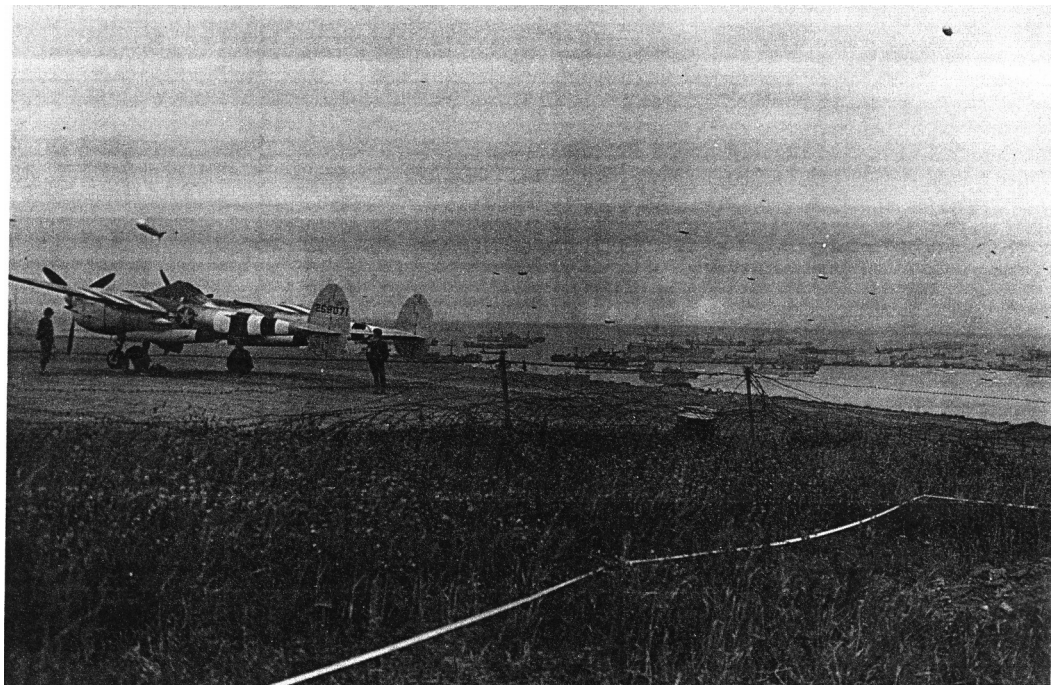
The 9th USAAF groups began their operations in earnest, bombing and attacking the enemy in support of the Allied Army as it advanced through Normandy. 3TAD was at full stretch to keep up with the increased demand for ammunition and parts to replace those damaged in these operations, the MR&R squadrons were equally busy retrieving and repairing crashed machines, while the ferry squadrons were also striving to deliver replacement aircraft.

As the Army drove inland, engineer battalions prepared landing strips close to the front line, so that the close-support squadrons could keep pace with the Army. This allowed the 31st to make use of the temporary strip, E-1(for Exit 1), that had been created on D-Day +1 at St Laurent-sur-Mer, close to Omaha Beach. Typically, Col Feldman flew the

first 31st TG C-47 to land there, on D-Day + 5, and from that date on, the group kept up a constant flow of supplies and spare parts, despite the strip being under sporadic shellfire.



Heavy machinery at work on D-Day +1 preparing the airstrip at St Laurent-sur-Mer. Known as E-1 by the 3st TG, it was officially labelled A-21.



The scene at E-1 at 9.30pm on 7th June 1944. The first P-38's have begun using the strip. Despite the poor quality, the photo shows barrage balloons and landing craft that can be seen in the background. The 31st TG began arriving 5 days later.

The US Army Medical Corps set up a field hospital close to the E-1 airstrip where injured troops were treated and if necessary, prepared for air transportation to hospitals in the UK.

After delivering replacement aircraft directly to their operational bases, the ferry pilots of the 31st were brought by truck to E-1 for return to Grove. The distance from Grove was less than 200 miles, so that the squadrons were able to make four, sometimes five, round trips per day. The adaptions made to their C-47's allowed them to bring back casualties on their return flights. These flights landed at airfields around Swindon, from where ambulances took them to hospitals that had been set up in the area. For the first six weeks after D-Day, the 31st was the only US air transport unit evacuating casualties from Normandy, and brought out more than 26,000 wounded. The Troop Carrier Groups, which might have been able to assist in evacuating casualties were kept busy resupplying the airborne forces that had spearheaded the invasion, and it was late in July before they also began taking in supplies for other units and flying out casualties.
The condition of some of the wounded necessitated that they be flown back to the USA for treatment, and some nurses accompanied them, first to Prestwick or Langford Lodge by Dakota. There they were transferred onto four-engined C-54 aircraft and flown across the Atlantic. Pilot Ed Tierney and his fiancée Jean Foley were eventually married after a courtship that was interrupted by her nursing flights to USA with patients, and by Ed's four-month sojourn to Russia.
Reports soon reached the ADG's at Grove that several Grasshoppers, whose pilots were armed only with pistols, had been shot down by small arms while spotting for artillery. Pilots in US Artillery regiments asked if the ADG's could provide some means of defence.
A modification was quickly fitted to a few Grasshoppers at Grove. These unlikely ground attack aircraft were nick-named 'Maytag Bombers' after a US manufacturer of superior quality washing machines. Reports vary on the effectiveness of this armament, and very few Grasshoppers were fitted with it. With or without the additions however, the machines made a significant contribution to the effectiveness of US artillery units, so much so that they were targeted by the Germans whenever they appeared.



This unique photo shows Sgt Guemelata and colleagues fitting three Bazooka launchers under each wing strut of an L-4 at Grove in July 1944.

Invasion planners had intended that the Army would quickly capture and make use of the port of Cherbourg, but this was not to be, and it was late September before Allied ships could use the port. As a result, for the first months after D-Day, most of the Army's supplies had to be landed across the invasion beaches. Although the Allies advanced rapidly across France, the Germans held on tenaciously to the other Channel

ports. By the time Cherbourg became available, the front line was over 400 miles away! All equipment for the 9th USAAF close-support aircraft and urgent requirements for the Army had to be flown in by the 31st TG. This in turn meant that the supplies originally scheduled to be delivered to France by ship, had to be unloaded at ports in Britain, and



Another typical scene at E-1. This shows ambulances unloading patients onto C-47's for transport back to Britain. The wide cargo doors of the military C-47 are clearly visible in this photo. The white triangle symbol on the fin of the nearest aircraft indicates it belongs to the 31st TG.

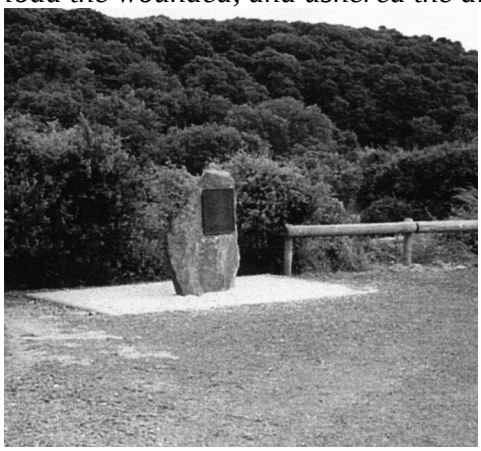


Soon after the 31st TG began using E-1, a P-47 (shown in the background above) and a Spitfire crash-landed on the strip. The MR&R squadrons soon collected the P-47, but

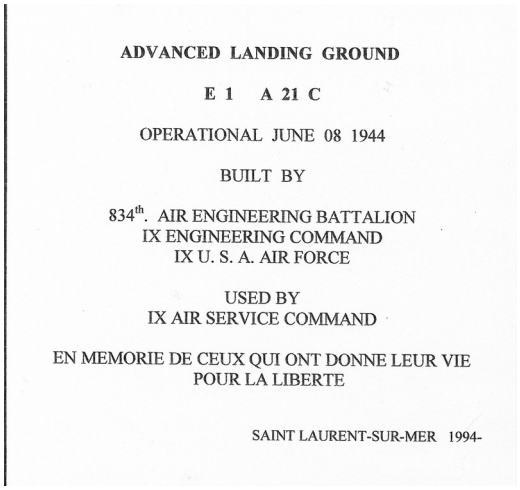
the Spitfire was abandoned. A C-47 flight engineer discovered that it had only suffered a punctured radiator. It was soon patched up and flown to Grove, where most pilots flew it a few times.



A poor-quality picture of operations at E-1. This officer, remembered only as Blackie, was much admired by the 31st aircrews. Without any radio communication with the aircraft, he performed as a mobile control tower, guiding aircraft to spaces as they landed, and directing trucks to unload the cargoes. He then directed ambulances to load the wounded, and ushered the aircraft to their take-off positions.



50 years later, Ed & Jean Tierney attended the D-Day commemoration ceremonies in Normandy, and were invited to unveil this memorial on the site of E-1 Airstrip.


ADVANCED LANDING GROUND

E 1 A 21 C

OPERATIONAL JUNE 08 1944

BUILT BY

834th. AIR ENGINEERING BATTALION
IX ENGINEERING COMMAND
IX U. S. A. AIR FORCE

USED BY
IX AIR SERVICE COMMAND

EN MEMORIE DE CEUX QUI ONT DONNE LEUR VIE
POUR LA LIBERTE

SAINT LAURENT-SUR-MER 1994-

The inscription on the E-1 Memorial.



Crew Chief Len McCrary checks the rescued Spitfire at Grove. Most 31st pilots flew this aircraft before it was returned to 602 (City of Glasgow) Sqn RAF in early September.

delivered by truck to Grove, for transportation by air to forward airbases. It was during this period that Grove became among the busiest Allied airbases in Europe.
By the end of September, the average distance from Grove to front line airfields had more than doubled, and in consequence supply flights became longer and less frequent. For a time, part of the 8th USAAF's transport group, 27th ATG was based at Grove to help with the task, but the resupply problem remained until other Channel ports became available.
The 31st TG's task was eased as much as possible by moving most of the MR&R squadrons to France, to be followed by the ADG's as soon as suitable installations were captured and repaired. So it was that the 23rd and 43rd MR&R squadrons vacated Grove in July, to be replaced by the 21st, 41st, 42nd, 50th, and 33rd squadrons. In mid-August the 43rd ADG left Grove for a new temporary base at Issigny-sur-Mer, and a month later, the 45th moved into the newly captured former Luftwaffe base at Chartres. In addition to its scheduled duties, by December 1944 the 45th assembled some 350 Grasshoppers as replacements for those lost in combat.

3TAD still had the task of maintaining the 1,000 C-47's of the 9th USAAF Troop Carrier Command, but now it was also the major stores depot for all 9th USAAF aircraft. The 31st flew every imaginable piece of equipment across the Channel, from ammunition to telegraph poles and wire, in addition to aircraft spares, food, medical supplies and mail. To maintain stocks at Grove, the flow of trucks from Avonmouth and elsewhere increased to previously unimagined levels.

After the major part of the ADG's had moved to Normandy, the 100-plus aircraft of the 31st were also moved to France for a time. In their place, part of the 27th Air Transport Group moved in to 3 TAD from their bases at Heston and N Ireland. Despite their best efforts however, there was simply not enough aircraft for the task. It was recognised that 3TAD as a stores depot was essential and that the 31st was the unit that could exploit it. In addition to which, the extra logistics and support required to operate the 31st in France placed further demands on the flow of supplies. So the group's stay in France was short-lived, and it returned to the base it regarded as home.



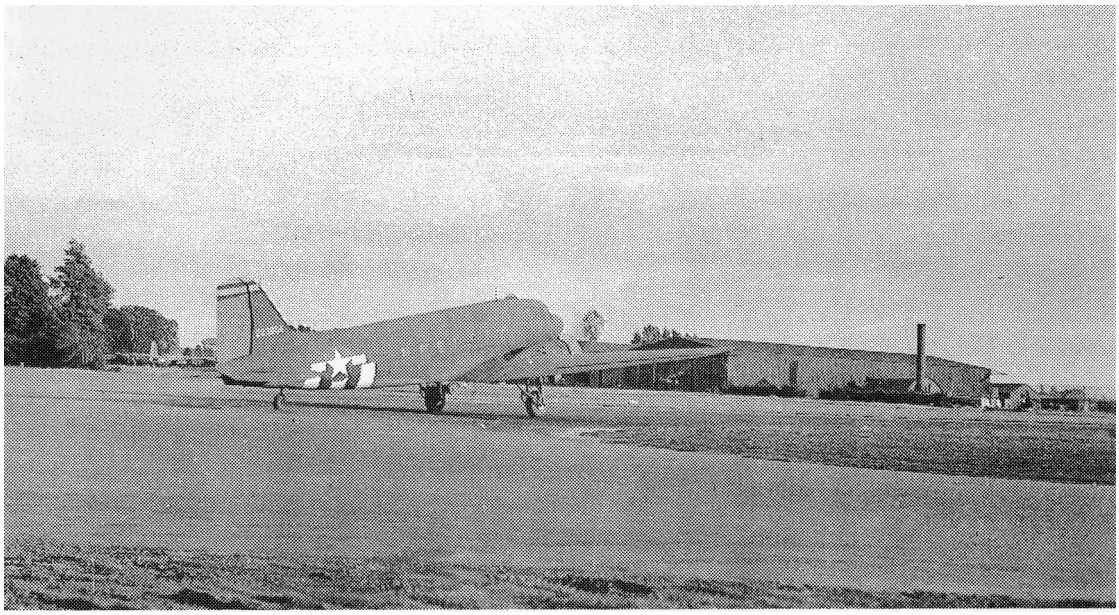
Everything, everyday; a typical scene at Grove during 1944.

One of the most urgent needs of the Armies was fuel. As mentioned earlier, the ADG's at Station 519 had stripped much of the operational equipment from a number of obsolete and war-weary US bombers, to allow them to carry larger numbers of jerry cans of fuel. These aircraft were kept busy flying from Lyneham. However, the demand for fuel was always far greater than the supply. The shortages became so severe that several front-line US bomber squadrons were taken off operations for a while and seconded to help with the deliveries. The eventual opening of the ports of Boulogne and Antwerp gave the opportunity to overcome the problem, but fuel shortages remained into early 1945.

It was 14th October before he Allies could begin laying a trans-Channel pipeline to Boulogne to help ease the fuel supply bottleneck. And it was late November before the port of Antwerp finally became available for unloading Allied shipping. The opening of these ports should have signalled an easing of the requirement for the 31st TG to transport stores from 3TAD, as equipment could now be delivered by ship to the heart of Belgium, and from there by road to the forward airfields. The group continued to deliver drop tanks, ammunition and replacement aircraft, but with the ADG's located in

France and Belgium, most of the aircraft servicing was performed closer to the front lines. The pace of life at 3TAD was expected to relax somewhat.
The situation was dramatically altered by the German surprise attack through the Ardennes, which became known as the Battle of the Bulge.
The opening phase began on 16th December. In spite of the appalling weather, the fighter-bombers of 9th AF operated at maximum effort whenever possible, from mid-December until well into February, and so of course did the 31st TG in support.
On the 18th December 1944, a message was relayed to all aircraft of 31st TG to return immediately to Grove. Most were in mid-flight over France or Belgium. Within a few hours, all aircrews were assembled in the briefing hut. There they were informed that the group had been given a mission of the highest priority.
They were to fly to Marseilles in order to transport almost 2,000 tank troops to airfields around Metz that were under the control of Gen Patton's forces. No explanation was given. They were instructed to have a meal while their flight details were prepared and their aircraft unloaded and refuelled, and be ready to take off within two hours. It was only a few days later the purpose of their operation that it became clear. Reinforcements had been needed to support Patton's drive to lift the siege of Bastogne.
The crisis continued into January 1945 and as a result, Christmas at Grove that year was a very muted event.
No sooner was that battle brought to a close, when preparations began for the operation to cross the Rhine at Wesel - Operation Varsity, launched on 24th March 1945. This demanded a huge preparatory effort from the support organisation, and USAAF records state that Station 519 became the busiest airbase in Europe at this time. There were several days when an aircraft took off from or landed at Grove on average every 80 seconds between dawn and dusk!

Aircraft used by 31st Transport Group



A C-47 Dakota of 27th ATG prepares to take off from Grove. This type of aircraft was the Allies' workhorse. Rugged and reliable, C-47's of 31st T G bore a white triangle on the nose and fin. It was also used to tow USAAF gliders, a task which could stretch the fuselage by up to four inches, and it was necessary to examine them regularly for cracks.



Percival Proctor. The RAF used ~ 800 of these three-seat communications aircraft. A few examples were used at Grove, and remained as communications aircraft.



A five-seat Airspeed Oxford, serial No N4839 assigned to 31st Transport Group



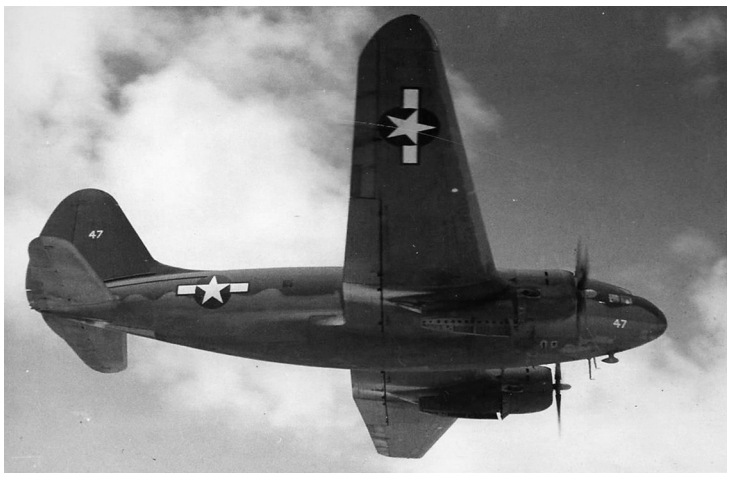
Hairless Joe was an impressed civilian airliner, designated C-53 by the USAAF. It was less adaptable than the military C-47's as it did not have the wide cargo doors. 31st TG normally used it to carry ferry pilots and other passengers. This particular machine suffered an engine fire over France in late 1944, and the crew were forced to bail out.



Faithful Annie. While awaiting more C-47's, the 31st T G used several Avro Ansons, which served the RAF in a number of roles, including as a six-seat liaison aircraft.



The 31st TG also used the rugged and reliable C-64A Canadian Noorduyn Norseman.



Curtiss C-46 Commando. This aircraft, which could carry twice the payload of a C-47, was intended to supplement the C-47 in USAAF service. One example was issued to each squadron of the 3st Transport Group in late 1944. However, it was not popular with pilots as it was less reliable than the C-47 and extremely vulnerable to anti-aircraft fire.

Over the subsequent six weeks, before the war came to an end, the resupply task of 3TAD gradually wound down. At the end of hostilities the 31st TG continued as an individual unit for a while, until it was absorbed into the US Air Transport Command, and its C-47's were kept busy repatriating Allied PoW's and delivering US troops to temporary camps in France to await shipping to take them home. It also assisting in transporting some of the hundreds of thousands of displaced civilians around Europe. The Grove ammunition storage was also run down, but it was September before personnel numbers in the area began to diminish significantly. After the departure from Grove of 31st TG and the various truck units, considerable accommodation became available, and the USAF decided that station 519 would become a staging area.
As the frontline 8th USAAF airfields fields in East Anglia were closed down (de-activated) their aircraft and flight crews were transferred to Service Command bases to prepare for the flight home. Their ground staff normally stayed just a long enough to close the base before moving out to staging areas to await return to USA by ship.