

# **‘I do feel good because my stomach is full of good hotcakes’: comfort food, home, and the USAAF in East Anglia during the Second World War.**

## **I**

The link between the armed forces and food during the Second World War was a fundamental one: without access to sustenance, no military unit could hope to prevail against an enemy. To ensure troops were at their peak physical and mental performance, it was essential that they were supplied with a sufficient quantity of food, in addition to water.<sup>1</sup> Combat effectiveness was also affected by the quality and nature of the food. It was reported that the commander of the British Army’s 16th Infantry Brigade, Brigadier Bernard Fergusson, was of the opinion that ‘lack of food constitutes the single biggest assault upon morale’.<sup>2</sup> Food, however, only aided morale when it was liked.<sup>3</sup> An article from 1941, published in the *American Journal of Sociology*, reported that individuals were ‘made sullen or irritable by bad food’.<sup>4</sup> As other factors that influence morale in the armed forces have been examined elsewhere, including the quality and quantity of equipment, access to mail, patriotism, unit loyalty, living conditions, and comradeship, the aim of this article is to

---

<sup>1</sup> N. Hill, J. Fallowfield, S. Price and D. Wilson, ‘Military nutrition: maintaining health and rebuilding injured tissue’, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 366 (2011), p. 231.

<sup>2</sup> B. Fergusson, *The wild green earth* (London, 1946), p. 99.

<sup>3</sup> J. Edwards, M. Kipps and J. Thomson, ‘British military feeding – the influence of food habits and food preferences on combat nutrition’, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 7/3 (1988), p. 262.

<sup>4</sup> J. Landis, ‘Morale and civilian defense’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 47/3 (1941), p. 332.

explore the ways that the service personnel of the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) stationed in East Anglia during the Second World War, sought comfort in food.<sup>5</sup>

Although rationing on the American home front has been examined in depth,<sup>6</sup> scholars have rarely focused on the food and foodways of American military personnel throughout the war.<sup>7</sup> Foodways can be defined as ‘all of the activities, rules, contexts, and meanings that surround the production, harvesting, processing, cooking, serving, and consumption of those foods’.<sup>8</sup> There has also been a lack of transnational enquiry more generally in the literature of foodways in the Second World War.<sup>9</sup> Foodways, however, offer

---

<sup>5</sup> See K. Roy, ‘Discipline and morale of the African, British and Indian Army units in Burma and India during World War II: July 1943 to August 1945’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 44/6 (2010), J. Litoff and D. Smith, “‘Will he get my letter?’ Popular portrayals of mail and morale during World War II’, *Journal of Popular Culture*, 23/4 (1990), A. Fletcher, *Life, death, and growing up on the Western Front* (New Haven, 2013), F. Manning, ‘Morale and cohesion in military psychiatry’, in F. Jones, L. Sparacino, V. Wilcox, and J. Rothberg (eds.), *Military psychiatry: preparing in peace for war* (Washington, 1994), and G. Sheffield, *Command and morale: the British Army on the Western Front* (Barnsley, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> See T. Witkowski, ‘World War II poster campaigns: preaching frugality to American consumers’, *Journal of Advertising*, 32/1 (2003), M. Yang, ‘Creating the kitchen patriot: media promotion of food rationing and nutrition campaigns on the American home front during World War II’, *American Journalism*, 22/3 (2005), T. Tunc and A. Babic, ‘Food on the home front, food on the warfront: World War II and the American diet’, *Food and Foodways*, 25.2 (2017), M. Leff, ‘The politics of sacrifice on the American Home Front in World War II’, *The Journal of American History*, 77/4 (1991), and B. Wansink, ‘Changing eating habits on the home front: lost lessons from World War II research’, *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, 21/1 (2002).

<sup>7</sup> P. Rutherford, ‘On arms and eggs: GI egg mania on the battlefields of World War II’, *Food and Foodways*, 25/2 (2017), p. 125.

<sup>8</sup> T. Peres, ‘Foodways archaeology: a decade of research from the Southeastern United States’, *Journal of Archaeological Research*, 25 (2017), p. 423.

<sup>9</sup> T. Tunc and A. Babic, ‘Food on the home front, food on the warfront: World War II and the American diet’, *Food and Foodways*, 25/2 (2017), p. 103.

historians a different medium to analyse how conflict was experienced. Knowledge of foodways is not only important for understanding ‘the material lives of the soldiers, but it also provides a rich insight into their emotional existence’.<sup>10</sup> It is essential, when undertaking a study of food during wartime, for scholars to consider the ‘symbolic power of foodstuffs’ and to move beyond calorific intake and the logistics of supply.<sup>11</sup>

Previous studies on food and the American military during the Second World War have generally focused on frontline infantry troops serving in a combat role.<sup>12</sup> In contrast to these soldiers, the service personnel of the USAAF deployed to East Anglia were stationed on the same base for extended periods of time.<sup>13</sup> Despite not being on the frontline, the aircrews conducted missions where they were faced with the threat of death, injury, and capture. Although the ground crews had an indispensably difficult, skilled, but often boring job, they were not in physical danger unless the airfield became a target of attack. This study will fill a gap in the historiography of foodways and the military, by focusing on personnel deployed at a distance to the frontline, specifically the service personnel of the USAAF based in East Anglia. In addition, it will also explore the ways aircrews and ground crews viewed food.

---

<sup>10</sup> R. Duffett, ‘Beyond the ration: sharing and scrounging on the Western Front’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 22/4 (2011), p. 473.

<sup>11</sup> K. O’Connell, “‘Uncle Wiggly Wings’: children, chocolate, and the Berlin Airlift’, *Food and Foodways*, 25/2 (2017), p. 156.

<sup>12</sup> See B. Arnold, “‘Your money ain’t no good o’er there’’: food as real and social currency in the Pacific Theater of World War II’, *Food and Foodways*, 25/2 (2017), p. 115 and P. Rutherford, ‘On arms and eggs’.

<sup>13</sup> D. Reynolds, *Rich Relations: the American occupation of Britain 1942-1945* (London, 2000), p. 297. It could take an aircrew, for example, over half a year to complete their tour of duty, whilst for ground crew there was no fixed term of duty (Ibid., p.297)

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the American armed forces believed that ‘homesickness’ and a strong attachment to home amongst the troops was detrimental to the conduct of the war. In an attempt to combat homesickness, a number of organisations, including the United Services Organisation (USO) in 1941, were established to try and create a home away from home through the use of familiar foods, smells, and sounds. It was the aim of these agencies to raise morale and keep soldiers motivated by providing them with support to adjust to their military life.<sup>14</sup> According to one observer, during this period of transition:

the U.S.O. has proven most valuable. When the soldier gets a pass or leave time, he naturally yearns to return temporarily to scenes and things that remind him of home, the folks and associations he has left behind.<sup>15</sup>

By creating this environment, the agencies evoked feelings of ‘nostalgia’ amongst the troops. Psychologists today see ‘nostalgia’ as a largely positive emotional experience, which helps to maintain and promote psychological health.<sup>16</sup> Although at the time the concept of ‘nostalgia’ was associated with homesickness and had negative connotations, by ‘recreating’ the sounds, smells, and tastes of home, the American military were, in fact, using it to increase the morale of their troops.

---

<sup>14</sup> S. Matt, *Homesickness: an American history* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 201, 203, 204.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Need of U.S.O. to Fighting Men Told by Campaign Head’, *Los Angeles Times*, 19 July 1942.

<sup>16</sup> C. Routledge, T. Wildschut, C. Sedikides, and J. Juhl. ‘Nostalgia as a resource for psychological health and well-being’, *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 7/11 (2013), p. 810. See K. Batcho, ‘Nostalgia: retreat or support in difficult times?’, *American Journal of Psychology*, 126/3 (2013), X. Zhou, C. Sedikides, T. Wildschut, and D. Gao, ‘Counteracting loneliness: on the restorative function of nostalgia’, *Psychological Science*, 19/10 (2008), M. Vess, J. Arndt, C. Routledge, C. Sedikides, and T. Wildschut, ‘Nostalgia as a resource for the self’, *Self and Identity*, 11/3 (2012), and X. Zhou, T. Wildschut, C. Sedikides, X. Chen, and A. Vingerhoets, ‘Heartwarming memories: nostalgia maintains physiological comfort’, *Emotion*, 12/4 (2012).

The food consumed by the service personnel was not, however, solely provided by the military. Soldiers would often write to their families, friends, or partners back home in the States requesting certain food items be sent through the post.<sup>17</sup> This article aims to show how the wishes that were expressed, and reactions to receiving parcels, demonstrate the importance of comfort food to the maintenance of morale. Although comfort food sought out by an individual might appear a personal choice, it was embedded within a culturally constructed definition of comfort with its own deep resonances.<sup>18</sup> The food craved, requested, and served to the service personnel helped to create and reinforce their American identity – an effect achieved through the close cultural association between food and nationality.<sup>19</sup>

## II

The current consensus on ‘food’ maintains that it is more than mere nourishment for the body as it can help to alleviate depression and provide comfort.<sup>20</sup> The consumption of certain food items can create a short term feeling of well-being and a sense of solace.<sup>21</sup> In a study of

---

<sup>17</sup> B. Arnold, ““Your money ain’t no good o’er there””, p. 115.

<sup>18</sup> J. Locher, W. Yoels, D. Maurer and J. van Ells, ‘Comfort foods: an exploratory journey into social and emotional significance of food’, *Food and Foodways*, 13/4 (2005), p. 277.

<sup>19</sup> M. Weiner, ‘Consumer culture and participatory democracy: the story of Coca-Cola during World War II’, *Food and Foodways*, 6/2 (1996), p. 109.

<sup>20</sup> J. Locher, W. Yoels, D. Maurer and J. van Ells, ‘Comfort foods’, p. 289. Locher defines comfort food as ‘any food consumed by individuals, often during periods of stress, that evokes positive emotions and is associated with significant social relationships’ (J. Locher, ‘Comfort food’, in S. Katz (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of food and culture* (New York, 2002), p. 442).

<sup>21</sup> C. Spence, ‘Comfort food: a review’, *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science*, 9 (2017), p. 105.

comfort food and people's personal preferences, Locher, Yoels, Maurer, and van Ells proposed four sub-classifications of food items that each evoke different reactions: nostalgic foods; indulgence foods; convenience foods; and physical comfort foods.<sup>22</sup>

Nostalgic foods are normally associated with a particular time and place in an individual's past. These memories could be linked to intimate social interactions during the preparation of food, being cared for by another, or sharing food with significant others during special events.<sup>23</sup> For Americans, nostalgia forms an important element of many celebratory meals, such as Thanksgiving.<sup>24</sup> When separated from family and friends, fractures can appear in our sense of self. The consumption of food that evokes memories of the past could help mend these cracks by reaffirming an individual's sense of identity and alleviate feelings of homesickness.<sup>25</sup> Nostalgic food can also enable individuals to recreate a sense of childhood peace and happiness.<sup>26</sup>

When seeking comfort, foods perceived as indulgent, either in terms of expense or richness in calories, fat, or sugar are often sought out.<sup>27</sup> Numerous studies have demonstrated

---

<sup>22</sup> J. Locher, W. Yoels, D. Maurer and J. van Ells, 'Comfort foods', p. 279.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, pp. 280, 281, 282 and C. Spence, 'Comfort food', p. 105.

<sup>24</sup> See D. Goldstein, 'Remembrance of foods past', *Gastronomica*, 9/4 (2016), A. Hirsch, 'Nostalgia: a neuropsychiatric understanding', *Advances in Consumer Research*, 19/1 (1992), C. Spence, 'Hospital food', *Flavour*, 6/3 (2017), and D. Sutton, *Remembrance of repasts: an anthropology of food and memory* (Oxford, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> J. Locher, W. Yoels, D. Maurer and J. van Ells, 'Comfort foods', pp. 280, 283.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 280.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 284 and H. Wagner, B. Ahlstrom, J. Redden, Z. Vickers, T. Mann, 'The myth of comfort food', *Health Psychology*, 33/12 (2014), p. 1. Sweet and salty tastes are the most prevalent tastes amongst a wide range of foods selected to provide comfort (C. Spence, 'Comfort food', p. 107).

that when stressed, people consume more sweet foods than savoury.<sup>28</sup> One of the most reported comfort foods is chocolate, with individuals often seeking out specific brands.<sup>29</sup> Indulgent foods can also be used by mothers when trying to comfort their children.<sup>30</sup> The association between certain indulgent foods and comfort can, therefore, be transmitted or learned early on in an individual's life. This link can then be reinforced over time by significant others or by reinforced habit. The convenience of indulgent food is also an important consideration when seeking comfort. Biscuits, chocolate, crisps, ice cream, and pizza are all cited as convenient comfort foods as these provide instant gratification.<sup>31</sup>

The physical attributes of a food item are also important considerations in selecting food for solace. Foods that are hot, easily eaten, and digestible are sources of comfort: soup, for example, warms the body and is associated with being 'cosy'.<sup>32</sup> How comfort food plays on an individual's senses, especially its oral-somatosensory qualities, is important.<sup>33</sup> The aroma of food is also of significance when seeking comfort. Research has demonstrated that there is a strong link between odour and memory.<sup>34</sup> Baked items, such as bread and cookies,

---

<sup>28</sup> See N. Grunberg and R. Straub, 'The role of gender and taste class in the effects of stress on eating', *Health Psychology*, 11/2 (1992), J. Kandiah, M. Yake, J. Jones, M. Meyer, 'Stress influences appetite and comfort food preferences in college women', *Nutrition Research*, 26/3 (2006), G. Oliver, J. Wardle, E. Gibson, 'Stress and food choice: a laboratory study', *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 62/6 (2000), and G. Oliver and J. Wardle, 1999. 'Perceived effects of stress on food choice', *Physiology Behavior*, 66/3 (1999).

<sup>29</sup> J. Locher, W. Yoels, D. Maurer and J. van Ells, 'Comfort foods', p. 284.

<sup>30</sup> N. Charles and M. Kerr, *Women, food, and families* (Manchester, 1988), pp. 229-230.

<sup>31</sup> J. Locher, W. Yoels, D. Maurer and J. van Ells, 'Comfort foods', pp. 284, 285, 286.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p. 287.

<sup>33</sup> C. Spence, 'Comfort food', p. 106.

<sup>34</sup> See J. Willander and M. Larsson, 'Smell your way back to childhood: autobiographical odor memory', *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review*, 13/2 (2006), J. Willander and M. Larsson, 'Olfaction and emotion: the case

evoke memories of carefree times, and remind people of similar aromas that wafted through their childhood homes.<sup>35</sup>

Food items that bring about a physical change to one's body are also sought after when in need of comfort: coffee and alcohol are the most commonly selected. Not only is coffee warm and aromatic, the caffeine it contains offers the drinker a 'pick-me-up'.<sup>36</sup> In addition to drinkers' assertions that alcohol is beneficial to stress reduction,<sup>37</sup> it also provides comfort as it is often a social activity.<sup>38</sup>

Through the consumption of certain food items, an individual can exercise control over their body and mind. In turn, this allows them to define their individual identity.<sup>39</sup> The choice of food can also provide 'comfort' to an individual in a stressful situation.<sup>40</sup>

### III

---

study of autobiographical memory', *Memory and Cognition*, 35/7 (2007), A. Arshamian, E. Iannilli, J. Gerber, J. Willander, J. Persson, H.-S. Seo, T. Hummel, and M. Larsson, 'The functional neuroanatomy of odor evoked autobiographical memories cued by odors and words', *Neuropsychologia*, 51 (2013), and C. Reid, J. Green, T. Wildschut, and C. Sedikides, 'Scent-evoked nostalgia', *Memory*, 23/2 (2015).

<sup>35</sup> J. Locher, W. Yoels, D. Maurer and J. van Ells, 'Comfort foods', pp. 288-289.

<sup>36</sup> J. Locher, W. Yoels, D. Maurer and J. van Ells, 'Comfort foods', p. 288.

<sup>37</sup> R. Levenson, K. Sher, L. Grossman, J. Newman, and D. Newlin. 'Alcohol and Stress Response Dampening: Pharmacological Effects, Expectancy, and Tension Reduction', *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 89/4 (1980), p. 528.

<sup>38</sup> J. Locher, W. Yoels, D. Maurer and J. van Ells, 'Comfort foods', p. 288.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 274 and C. Fischler, 'Food, self and identity', *Social Science Information*, 27/2 (1988), p. 280.

<sup>40</sup> C. Spence, 'Comfort food', p. 108.



The importance of chefs, and the food they produced, to the morale of troops is mentioned in the US War Department's 1941 Technical Manual for Army Cooks (TM 10-405):

Good cooking is recognised the world over as a fine art ... The Army cook holds a responsible position, as *the health and contentment of troops depend largely on the quality of the cooking for their mess* ... When he takes an interest in his duties and constantly turns out the best possible meals, it will promote health, contentment, and pride of organization in each soldier. On the other hand, poorly cooked meals will do more to make soldiers discontented than any other factor'.<sup>41</sup>

To aid the work of their cooks, the US military also issued technical manuals listing a wide range of different recipes, as cooks were not expected to remember exact ingredients for all the dishes.<sup>42</sup> The recipes supplied 'represented the food habits of American families',<sup>43</sup> including Boston Baked Beans, Harvard Beets, Succotash, Creole Summer Squash, Clam Chowder (Boston Style), and Fried Chicken (Maryland Style).<sup>44</sup> Despite having access to recipes, a good cook also needed 'practice, imagination and, above all, a desire to please those who eat the food he prepares'.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> US War Department, *The Army Cook: TM 10-405* (Washington, 1941), p. 2. Authors' emphasis.

<sup>42</sup> US War Department, *Army Recipes: TM 10-412* (Washington, 1944), p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 127, 194, 200, 207, 216, 233. It is interesting to note that these recipes were highly regionalised.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1.

When food was served by the cooks in the mess, the relationship the service personnel had with it was complex: some eagerly awaited it, whilst others regarded it merely as sustenance for survival.<sup>46</sup> Before leaving the States for the UK:

Lt Col Robert H Terrill required each squadron host a squadron picnic at Riverside Park, [a] few miles from Sioux City. Very successful.

Beer by the barrel – wives and girlfriend and abundant food. Value of eggs and beer not understood. Eggs thrown at each other as party got going. Beer spilled – they would not taste the like of it for a good long spell.<sup>47</sup>

One of the first questions soldiers of the 874th Chemical Company had when they reached East Anglia was ‘[h]ow was the food?’<sup>48</sup> Many airmen claimed to dread ‘early rising and bad food more acutely than they feared flak or Focke-Wulfs’.<sup>49</sup> It was the opinion of one member of ground crew that the:

[f]ood on this side of the Atlantic is never really good, it is only fuel from which energy is generated and serves to satisfy the gastronomic desire rather than culinary palate.<sup>50</sup>

Despite complaints, the Americans deployed to East Anglia realised they could have been ‘sent to a less civilized theatre of operations’.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> C. Wayne, *‘Little Fields of America’: Inhabitation and Identity in a Militarised Landscape, 1943-1945*, (Unpublished MA Dissertation, University of East Anglia, 2018), p. 51.

<sup>47</sup> B0556 Tibenham, 2nd Air Division Memorial Library, Norwich (hereafter cited as 2ADML), p. 1298.

<sup>48</sup> B01418 Hethel, 2ADML, p. 0287.

<sup>49</sup> B0556 Tibenham, 2ADML, p. 1333.

<sup>50</sup> B0600 Old Buckenham, 2ADML, pp. 0579-0580.

<sup>51</sup> B0556 Tibenham, 2ADML, p. 1333.

Although food served to the service personnel might just be field rations straight from the can,<sup>52</sup> in a letter home to his mother, Rodney Ive, a member of aircrew with the 453rd Bomb Group, stated that ‘combat crews in the E.T.O. [European Theatre of Operation] get the finest food they have to offer over here’.<sup>53</sup> The food in England was some of the best Mary Elder, of the Women’s Army Air Corps (WAAC), had eaten in the Army. For example, one day for lunch she was served meat loaf, candied sweet potatoes, cabbage slaw, raisin bread, gravy, canned peaches, and coffee for lunch.<sup>54</sup> That evening, dinner was ‘pork roast and believe me it was good’.<sup>55</sup> The food served in the mess halls was generally ‘American’ cuisine: fried chicken, waffles, chop suey, macaroni, steak, meatloaf, hot dogs, turkey, cornfritters, and fries all appeared on the menus.<sup>56</sup> Paul Steichn, a member of aircrew with the 93rd Bomb Group, also enjoyed the food in East Anglia. He wrote to say that on 16 March 1945 he was served:

[p]otatoo patties – they are really good when well cooked, hamburger with onions, peas, some kind of apple salad, orange juice, coffee and ice cream. Also raisin bread and butter. We really eat pretty well here

---

<sup>52</sup> Letter, 16 December 1944, MC 371/658, USF 13/4, 2ADML, p. 2 and Letter, 2 August 1943, MC 376/99/2, USF 3/6, 2ADML, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Letter, 26 August 1944, MC 376/153/1, USF 8/3, 2ADML, p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> B0557 Tibenham, 2ADML, p. 0345, B01418 Hethel, 2ADML, pp. 0140, 1554, Letter, 10 December 1944, MC 376/385, USF 2/9, 2ADML, p. 1, Memoir, MC 376/195, USF 11/6, 2ADML, p. 73, Letter, 20 September 1944, MC 376/99/3, USF 3/7, 2ADML, p. 1, Letter, 27 April 1945, MC 371/170, USF 3/3, 2ADML, p. 3, and Letter, 27 December 1944, MC 376/99/3, USF 3/7, 2ADML, p. 1.

honey, in fact just as good as the States except for milk and fresh vegetables.<sup>57</sup>

In correspondence with his wife, Roy Jonasson, ground crew with the 389th Bomb Group and a self-confessed ‘chow hound’, regularly wrote about the food he ate on base. One day he was feeling particularly ‘good because ... [his] stomach is full of good hotcakes and hot coffee, yes, lots of them’ (Figure 1).<sup>58</sup> In October 1944, after one particularly good meal, Roy was left ‘purring like a cat does after he has swallowed a gold fish’.<sup>59</sup> For dinner one night in April 1945, he had a supper of pork, potatoes, beets, bread, peanut butter, coffee, slaw, and ice cream from the mess.<sup>60</sup> He went on to tell his wife that ‘[w]e all feel like a million. *Gee, how the stomach and mind react to a good meal*’.<sup>61</sup>

In addition to the food served to them in the mess hall, service personnel could supplement their diet from snack bars on base and agencies such as the USO. It was possible to obtain from Station 124’s dayroom, Tibenham (Norfolk), which was ‘probably the finest dayroom in the ETO ... mild and bitter, potato chips, snacks, cokes and many other items to delight the appetite’.<sup>62</sup> Snacks could also be acquired from the Red Cross’ ‘Clubmobile’ that would visit the airfield every week (Figure 2).<sup>63</sup> From this catering van, service personnel could get ‘good American coffee ... [and] morale lifting [doughnuts]’ (Figure 3).<sup>64</sup> Cookies,

---

<sup>57</sup> Letter, 16 March 1945, MC 376/385, USF 2/9, 2ADML, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Letter, 19 July 1944, MC 376/99/3, USF 3/7, 2ADML, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> Letter, 30 October 1944, MC 376/99/3, USF 3/7, 2ADML, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Letter, 3 April 1945, MC 376/99/3, USF 3/7, 2ADML, p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> Letter, 3 April 1945, MC 376/99/3, USF 3/7, 2ADML, p. 1. Authors’ emphasis.

<sup>62</sup> B0556 Tibenham, 2ADML, p. 1670.

<sup>63</sup> B0556 Tibenham, 2ADML, p. 2241.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1578.

Coca-Cola, cake, and pies could also be purchased at a Red Cross Club (Figure 4).<sup>65</sup> In July 1944, the personnel based at Station 114, Hethel, were provided with a soda-dispensing fountain in their Post Exchange (PX).<sup>66</sup> At Station 144, at Old Buckenham, the snack bar was transformed into the ‘drug store back home’ during one memorable dance.<sup>67</sup>

Holidays and times of celebrations were important occasions for the service personnel, with food playing a central role (Figure 5). One Halloween, an important event in the American calendar, Station 144 held their ‘best dance in month[s] with jack o’lanterns and pumpkin pie’.<sup>68</sup> The personnel on this base also ‘celebrated [Christmas Eve that year] in *true American style*’.<sup>69</sup> For Christmas dinner the following day, they were served tomato juice, fresh fruit, turkey, giblet dressing, vegetables, hot parker house rolls, and butter.<sup>70</sup> Many of the service personnel had invited their lady friends to [join them for] a *real Yankee dinner*’.<sup>71</sup> Christmas 1943 was marked by the 445th Bomb Group at Station 124 by a turkey dinner, with plenty of meat and trimmings, cooked to ‘home standards’.<sup>72</sup>

The cooking of food items typically associated with a time of celebration was important to the service personnel. For example, when the cooks ‘outdid themselves in the

---

<sup>65</sup> Memoir, MC 376/195, USF 11/6, 2ADML, p.72, Letter, 11 April 1945, MC 376/99/3, USF 3/7, 2ADML, p. 1, and Letter, 16 February 1944, MC 376/99/2, USF 3/6, 2ADML, p.1.

<sup>66</sup> B01418 Hethel, 2ADML, p. 1277.

<sup>67</sup> B0600 Old Buckenham, 2ADML, p. 0792. During this dance, the officers served the GIs chocolate and caramel cookies topped with cherries and whipped cream (Ibid).

<sup>68</sup> B0599 Old Buckenham, 2ADML, p. 1500.

<sup>69</sup> B0600 Old Buckenham, 2ADML, p. 0880. Authors’ emphasis.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 0885.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 0885. Authors’ emphasis.

<sup>72</sup> B0556 Tibenham, 2ADML, p. 1053.

preparation of the “birds”, they ‘were the most popular men on the base’.<sup>73</sup> Although the responsibility befell Sgt White of the RAF to prepare a turkey for the Americans at Station 124 one Christmas, the cooking ‘passed inspection of the personnel present’.<sup>74</sup> After the Thanksgiving meal at Station 114 (Figure 6):

Everybody relaxed ... with *nostalgic thoughts of home* and wondering just where next Thanksgiving would be enjoyed. Many minds with but one four letter word foremost, HOME.<sup>75</sup>

#### IV

To supplement their rations and the food they purchased in the PX, the American personnel would write home to the States requesting items from family members and friends. Contained within the parcels posted to East Anglia were food items whose emotional value was just as important as their gastronomic value.<sup>76</sup> An article published in *Life* magazine in 1944, although referring to American Prisoners of War and not personnel serving abroad, highlighted the importance of food packages:

You’re hungry and homesick. Into your hands comes an 11-pound package of food.

It’s all yours. Raisins, sugar, coffee, oleo, corned beef, biscuits, ham, salmon, orange concentrate, milk chocolate, cheese, powdered milk,

---

<sup>73</sup> B01418 Hethel, 2ADML, p. 2130.

<sup>74</sup> B0556 Tibenham, 2ADML, p. 1379.

<sup>75</sup> B01418 Hethel, 2ADML, p. 2130. Authors’ emphasis.

<sup>76</sup> N. Clarke, J. Cranfield and K. Inwood, ‘FightingFit? Diet, disease, and disability in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-18’, *War and Society*, 33/2 (2014), pp. 88-89.

soap and cigarettes! *Familiar cans and packages*. Labels that look like old friends.<sup>77</sup>

This article made the American public aware of the importance of nostalgic food items in the maintenance of morale amongst soldiers away from home.

Letters sent home from Norfolk by service personnel of the 2nd Air Division clearly demonstrate that the comfort food they received in the packages was important to their morale. By providing a direct link with the people they loved, the food items were gratefully received. Alfred Neumunz, a member of aircrew with the 453rd Bomb Group, found it hard to express to Babs his appreciation for the 8-ounce package she had sent to him, but wanted her to ‘know how I feel [about the package]. It’s you and always you’.<sup>78</sup>

Dominating the requests for food items were those consumables that reminded the service personnel of home. The most common wishes were for sweet, indulgent food. On receiving gumdrops from his wife, Roy Jonasson wrote back expressing how they ‘taste[d] good, like *American candy*’.<sup>79</sup> Although some personnel were just happy for any sugary items, some requested specific branded products, including Milky Ways, Hershey Bars, and Oh Henriess.<sup>80</sup> Indulgent foods were also a fallback food item if the aircrews and ground crews could not ‘think of anything new to ask for so ... [they would] ask for the same thing – candy or cookies’.<sup>81</sup>

Although chocolate and candy were the most common indulgent food requested by the USAAF personnel in East Anglia, they were not the only items on the wish lists. John van

---

<sup>77</sup> ‘Honest-to-gosh American food!’, *Life* (10 January 1944), p. 67. Authors’ emphasis.

<sup>78</sup> Letter, post mark 9 September 1944, MC 376/153/2, USF 8/3, 2ADML, p.1.

<sup>79</sup> Letter, 24 September 1943, MC 376/99/2, USF 3/6, 2ADML, p.1. Authors’ emphasis.

<sup>80</sup> Letter, 28 March 1945, MC 371/170, USF 3/3, 2ADML, p.4.

<sup>81</sup> Letter, Friday March 30, MC 371/170, USF 3/3, 2ADML, p.6.

Acker, a member of aircrew with the 491st Bomb Group, asked that if his mother and father had a 'fruit cake that might keep a while, send it over. We love to sit around the stove at night and eat things'.<sup>82</sup> On returning to base from a visit to London, John found he had been sent 'aunt Mary's fruit cake'.<sup>83</sup> This family recipe would have been one he had known from his childhood. By consuming the cake, John could rekindle familial ties and gain comfort from memories of a past civilian life and his childhood. Roy Jonasson also received a fruitcake through the post from his wife. After sharing it with his comrades, he wrote back to her telling her that:

All the fellows said you sure are a good cake baker. And I said I know that and, dear, I know lots more! You see, dear, you shared the cake with my buddies and they sure enjoyed the cake so much. We are all smacking our lips.<sup>84</sup>

Fruit and nuts were also commonly requested by the service personnel. As these food items were scarce in East Anglia, it meant that any received 'will taste good'.<sup>85</sup> Roy requested that his wife send him:

some of the stuffed dates you have fixed. They will have to do until I have you. You know, dear, those stuffed dates have a few nuts in them. Well, you are a little nutty. Now, don't you wish you could get hold of me? Well, I do!<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Letter, December 21, MC 371/658, USF 13/4, 2ADML, p.6.

<sup>83</sup> Letter, 11 March 1945, MC 371/658, USF 13/4, 2ADML, p. 1.

<sup>84</sup> Letter, 16 January 1944, MC 376/99/2, USF 3/6, 2ADML.

<sup>85</sup> Letter, 30 April 1944, MC 376/99/2, USF 3/6, 2ADML, p.2.

<sup>86</sup> Letter, 28 March 1944, MC 376/99/2, USF 3/6, 2ADML, p.2.



In May 1944, after receiving homemade stuffed prunes by post, Roy shared them out amongst the personnel in his barracks. All his comrades asked him to inform his wife that she ‘sure know[s] how to make them taste good’.<sup>87</sup>

When he could not think of what food items to request from his family, Rudolph Howell, a member of aircrew with the 389th Bomb Group, asked the advice of his armourer. Eventually the pair agreed on peanuts, specifically Planters Cocktail Peanuts, as Rudolph ‘love[d] them and you can hardly get them over here’.<sup>88</sup> Robert Boyle, a pilot in the 489th Bomb Group, also requested peanuts, but his preference was for ‘more peanut butter and jam’.<sup>89</sup> Jam, honey, or other sandwich spreads were also commonly on the service personnel’s wish lists. After receiving a jar of honey, Roy Jonasson planned to take it to the:

mess hall and use it on hot cakes some of these mornings. Yes, I’ll let Bill, Jack, and Jim have some, too, on their hot cakes. How did you know I liked honey? Well, I know you knew I liked one kind of Honey (you) but when I can not have that why I’ll have to do with a jar of honey. I can just taste the honey now on those hot cakes. Many times we have had pancakes without syrup of any kind and the honey will sure be nice to have.<sup>90</sup>

## V

---

<sup>87</sup> Letter, 29 May 1944, MC 376/99/2, USF 3/6, 2ADML, p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> Letter, 22 March 1945, MC 371/170, USF 3/3, 2ADML, p. 4.

<sup>89</sup> Letter, 23 September 1944, MC 371/558, USF 12/4, 2ADML, p. 4.

<sup>90</sup> Letter, 9 January 1944, MC 376/99/2, USF 3/6, 2ADML, p. 2.

To the American service personnel deployed abroad, food became an obsession.<sup>91</sup> Those serving in the USAAF in the ETO were in a relatively unique position compared to personnel in other branches on the military. Even those personnel deployed to the region realised that their living conditions were ‘civilised’.<sup>92</sup> In contrast to other theatres of operation, where eggs were deemed the most desirable food, and discussions of bacon and hotcakes could cause emotional breakdowns,<sup>93</sup> the USAAF personnel in East Anglia had access to a wide range of food items. Food obtained from both military and familial channels could comfort soldiers through its nostalgic associations, indulgent nature, convenience, or physical composition. Meals and food items that simulated dining during peacetime were more valued by the American service personnel.<sup>94</sup>

Military personnel’s access to food was generally best back at camp where stability ensured better supplies.<sup>95</sup> Despite the USAAF cooks serving ‘food ... all mixed together in a stew’,<sup>96</sup> American style cuisine was often on the menu. Although their living conditions might be far from ideal, familiar food items allowed the service personnel a small sense of ‘normality’: ‘The musty odor of the barracks gives the impression of a pig pen. But *it’s home and there’s – Beans!*’<sup>97</sup>

In addition to the savoury dishes served up at the mess, the American military also realised the importance of sugary comfort foods. For combat troops, few non-essential food

---

<sup>91</sup> P. Rutherford, ‘On arms and eggs’, p. 124.

<sup>92</sup> B0556 Tibenham, 2ADML, p. 1333.

<sup>93</sup> P. Rutherford, ‘On arms and eggs’, p. 124.

<sup>94</sup> R. Duffett, ‘A taste of army life’, *Cultural and Social History*, 9/2 (2012), p. 258.

<sup>95</sup> R. Duffett, ‘Beyond the ration’, p. 455.

<sup>96</sup> Letter, 9 September 1943, MC 376/99/2, USF 3/6, 2ADML, p. 2.

<sup>97</sup> Letter to Miss Babs Doniger, dated Saturday, MC 376/153/2, USF 8/3, 2ADML, p. 2. Author’s emphasis.

items had as much merit as ice cream. This provided soldiers, who were potentially nutritionally and calorically deprived, with an immediate reward. As such, it was even prescribed by doctors as a treatment for combat fatigue. In addition, ice cream had a special place in the memories of most service personnel as it was an affordable way to cool down during their youths.<sup>98</sup> Although ice cream was occasionally on the menu in East Anglia, it was mainly served up as a treat during celebrations.<sup>99</sup> At Station 114, for example, the 389th Bomb Group were given ice cream at their 200th mission party.<sup>100</sup>

By reminding them of their past lives, food, and the flavours of home, could provide service personnel comfort from the stress and fear endemic in their daily lives. The meals served were, therefore, vital to the maintenance of morale amongst the USAAF personnel deployed to East Anglia. Although the comfort gained from food items was important, food also acted as a trigger to remind service personnel what they were fighting for:

When I get home I'll sit and watch you in the evenings at dinner time and at breakfast time ... I'll warm the coffee and I'm real good at burning the toast. But I can fry eggs! Here we have powdered eggs and I have not eaten any since the first day. Gee, a fresh egg will surely taste good and a good cup of coffee. But, we are not kicking as we are so interested in winning this war and what little we can do we

---

<sup>98</sup> B. Arnold, ““Your money ain’t no good o’er there””, p. 118.

<sup>99</sup> In March 1944, Roy Jonasson informed his wife that he was being served ice cream once a month (Letter, 22 March 1944, MC 376/99/3, USF 3/7, 2ADML, p. 1).

<sup>100</sup> Letter, 22 September 1944, MC 376/99/3, USF 3/7, 2ADML, p. 2.

want to do. *We have so much to look forward to after this war is over.*<sup>101</sup>

Despite nostalgic food providing security by drawing on memories of happier times, it is also important to note that service personnel also drew comfort from food-related thoughts of a peaceful future. Whilst eating a cheese sandwich and writing to his wife, Roy Jonasson told her how much he was looking forward to returning home and preparing one for her. He planned on eating her ‘out of house and home’, but as long as Roy had his wife he would not have to worry.<sup>102</sup> It was also not necessary for an individual to be consuming a food item to gain solace from it. The thought of eating food in a post-war world provided comfort. When Roy returned home he wanted ‘some gingerbread and coffee ... Gee, I really love gingerbread. And I love you, too. Just think, you come before gingerbread’.<sup>103</sup>

Food items also had the potential to offer comfort to those service personnel in East Anglia by providing a tangible link back to the United States. One ‘peaceful’ evening, whilst writing a letter to his wife, Roy Jonasson was ‘passed [by Dick] some maple sugar from New Hampshire, his [Dick’s] home state. *I can see you so clearly*’.<sup>104</sup> Although not from his home, the maple syrup provided Roy a direct link back to the States that brought his wife to mind. This helped to maintain the social bonds connecting him to his past life. When Roy noticed oranges that were sent to Station 114 had been packed in Olive, CA, it:

*sure brings one close to home.* The fellows all kid me about the oranges when they are small and sour because I always say they are

---

<sup>101</sup> Letter, 2 September 1943, MC 376/99/2, USF 3/6, 2ADML, p. 2. Italics authors’ emphasis. Underlined original emphasis.

<sup>102</sup> Letter, 17 January 1944, MC 376/99/2, USF 3/6, 2ADML p. 1.

<sup>103</sup> Letter, 28 November 1943, MC 376/99/2, USF 3/6, 2ADML, p. 1.

<sup>104</sup> Letter, 31 August 1943, MC 376/99/2, USF 3/6, 2ADML, p. 2. Authors’ emphasis.

from California if they are large and sweet. They say they are from Florida! Well, I kid them right back.<sup>105</sup>

In the 1942 Annual Report to the Postmaster General, the US Post Office Department recognised the critical role the organisation played in winning the war.<sup>106</sup> It noted that the: frequent and rapid communication with parents, associates, and loved ones strengthens fortitude, enlivens patriotism, makes loneliness endurable, and inspires to even greater devotion the men and women who are carrying out our fight far from home and friends. We know that the good effect of expeditious mail service on those of us at home is immeasurable.<sup>107</sup>

The receipt of a food parcel was physical proof that ‘the folks at home were remembering those overseas’.<sup>108</sup> Requests from American service personnel in East Anglia were varied and included: fruits; nuts; marshmallows; chocolate; sweets; crackers; soup; Ovaltine; instant coffee; and homemade food items. These provided the personnel direct links to their previous civilian lives. The greater selection of food supplied both by the military and from care packages meant the choice of comfort food was much more individualised amongst the USAAF service personnel in East Anglia.

## VI

---

<sup>105</sup> Letter, 20 August 1944, MC 376/99/3, USF 3/7, 2ADML, p. 1. Authors’ emphasis. Roy also mentioned in his letters home to Bee, oranges that had been packed in Fullteron, CA, and Duarte, CA (Letter, 6 June 1944, MC 376/99/3, USF 3/7, 2ADML, p. 1 and Letter, 15 October 1944, MC 376/99/3, USF 3/7, 2ADML, p. 1).

<sup>106</sup> J. Litoff and D. Smith, ““Will he get my letter?””, p. 22.

<sup>107</sup> *Annual report of the Postmaster General for the fiscal year ended June 30 1942* (Washington, 1942), p. 3.

<sup>108</sup> B0600 Old Buckenham, 2ADML, p. 0878.

The regular appearance of references to food in USAAF personnel's letters, diaries, and memoirs demonstrates the important role it played in their lives and to morale. It is clear from their comments that calories alone were not sufficient to guarantee satisfaction.<sup>109</sup> Certain items were even classified by the American military as 'comfort items'. Chocolate and chewing gum, for example, were seen as essential for maintaining troop morale overseas.<sup>110</sup> Not only did these items provide comfort, they also promoted the US as a country of wealth and prosperity.<sup>111</sup> For soldiers trying to cope with the horrors of war, simple joys could be found in food, cigarettes, and alcohol.<sup>112</sup>

Morale is affected by both individual and group factors. Among the former are supply of food and drink, sleep, equipment, and protection from the elements.<sup>113</sup> These factors, combined with unit cohesion and esprit de corps, are all components that impact the enthusiasm and persistence with which military personnel carry out their role. This article, however, has shown that the relationship between food and morale is more nuanced. For the personnel of the USAAF stationed in East Anglia, where food was more readily available, it was the nature of the food that was important. For these personnel, food that reminded them of home improved their morale. Despite the difference in experiences

---

<sup>109</sup> R. Duffett, 'Beyond the ration', p. 454.

<sup>110</sup> K. O'Connell, "'Uncle Wiggly Wings'", p. 144.

<sup>111</sup> A. Babic, 'Epilogue: foods of war, and wars on food: the American military commissary and (re)shaping the American diet', *Food and Foodways*, 25/2 (2017), p. 161.

<sup>112</sup> T. Cook, "'More a medicine than a beverage': 'demon rum' and the Canadian trench soldier of the First World War", *Canadian Military History*, 9/1 (2000), p. 13

<sup>113</sup> F. Manning, 'Morale and cohesion in military psychiatry', p. 15 and K. Roy, 'Discipline and morale of the African, British and Indian Army units in Burma and India during World War II', p. 1281.

between the aircrews and ground crews, it appears from that both groups had a similar relationship with food.

Letters and parcels from home helped USAAF personnel to maintain familial ties despite being deployed.<sup>114</sup> Military officials were aware of the importance of ‘mail call’ to morale. Extra care was, therefore, given to the mail, even retrieving and reproducing letters from crashed mail planes.<sup>115</sup> Within these parcels, service personnel might find branded food items or family recipes which reminded them of their civilian life. The contents allowed the personnel briefly to escape their military milieu and return to a time of peace.<sup>116</sup> By writing to their relatives about the food they sent, the personnel were not just passive recipients of the positive feelings that came with the parcels: they were also involving the sender in the process.<sup>117</sup>

Although it has previously been argued that ‘the egg was the most prized food item among American soldiers during the Second World War’,<sup>118</sup> this study has demonstrated that this was not necessarily the case amongst the USAAF service personnel in East Anglia. The comfort they found in food was more individualised, as these personnel had a much greater selection of food from which they found solace.

Meals served in the mess were regular reminders of the difference between the service personnel’s former civilian life and their current life in the military.<sup>119</sup> It was possible,

---

<sup>114</sup> L. Kelly, ‘Managing memories: treating and controlling homesickness during the Civil War’, *The Journal of Medical Humanities*, 39 (2018), p. 289.

<sup>115</sup> J. Litoff and D. Smith, “‘Will he get my letter?’”, p. 24.

<sup>116</sup> R. Duffett, ‘Beyond the ration’, p. 465.

<sup>117</sup> Although the authors did not have access to the letters sent by relatives of the USAAF personnel, it can be assumed that they gained pleasure from hearing about how the parcels they sent were enjoyed.

<sup>118</sup> T. Tunc and A. Babic, ‘Food on the home front, food on the warfront’, p. 104.

<sup>119</sup> R. Duffett, ‘A taste of army life’, pp. 253-4.

however, for food to provide comfort by evoking nostalgic thoughts of home.<sup>120</sup> The memory of enjoying food at home also reminded them of what they were fighting for and allowed them to contemplate returning home in a post-war future. This was also true in the wider American armed forces. When John Hersey asked US Marines in the Pacific what motivated them, their response was that they were:

*Fighting for pie ...* In other places there are other symbols. For some men, in places where there is plenty of good food but no liquor, it is a good bottle of Scotch whisky. In other places, where there's drink but no dames, they say they'd give their left arm for a blonde ... But for all of them, these things are just badges of home ... *Home is where the good things are* – the generosity, the good pay, the comforts, the democracy, the pie.<sup>121</sup>

---

<sup>120</sup> P. Rutherford, 'On arms and eggs', p. 124.

<sup>121</sup> J. Hersey, *Into the valley: a skirmish of the Marines* (London, 1943), p. 52. Author's emphasis.