

# Making it Home

Material culture, affect, and the production of locality at US  
Eighth Air Force bases in the East of England



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## Abstract

Occupied by the United States Army Air Force between 1942 and 1945 as part of the allied strategic bombing campaign, the bases of the Eighth Air Force have left an enduring legacy on the landscape of the East of England. By viewing these airfields as individual assemblages composed of people, places, objects, and temporalities, this thesis will offer new perspectives on the material and social transformation of militarised spaces into affective places.

Employing multi-disciplinary concepts of affect theory, spectrality, and temporality, I will argue that the bases of the Eighth Air Force have acquired their patina of affect through an intensive process of meaning-making, shaped by the emotional effects of air combat and the strategic need to counter them. The desire to “make it home” – in both senses of the phrase - resulted in the production of distinctive localities and affective economies that reorientated bodies within the entanglement of the air base assemblage. By anchoring personnel in the present through the promotion of *esprit de corps* and the invocation of ‘home’, base commanders’ occupation with the affective qualities of morale helped orientate airmen to face the anxious affects of an uncertain future as a collective group.

Using the extant material culture of the bases, official wartime documents, diaries, and veteran memoirs, this thesis will show how these affective connections survived the war, sustained through translocal veteran networks, trans-national heritagisation efforts, the affective language of storytelling, and the symbolic significance of ‘the return’ of veterans and their descendants to East Anglia. The final chapter will consider the future of these obsolete military sites and the absent presences that reside in the phantasmic landscape, amid increasing pressure to find new uses for the land. It will explore ways in which affective connections can be captured and the ghosts of the past invoked through heritage placemaking as a process that brings together various technologies of memory.

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## List of Abbreviations

**USAAF** – United States Army Air Force

**BG** – Bomb Group

**ARW** – Air Refueling Wing

**NCO** – Non-commissioned Officer (a non-commissioned officer is a military officer who has not pursued a commission. Non-commissioned officers usually earn their position of authority by promotion through the enlisted ranks i.e. a sergeant)

**EM** – Enlisted Man i.e. servicemen below the rank of commissioned officer.

**RAF** – Royal Air Force

**GI** – General Issue

**ARG** – Airfield Research Group

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“The morale is excellent in this battery I’ve been living with...The only thing is they’re impatient for movement – they’d fire all day and move all night every day and every night if they could only keep going forward swiftly. Because everywhere in our army, ‘forward’, no matter what direction, is toward home.”

- Ernie Pyle, war correspondent with the United States Army, 1943



Figure 1 Illustration drawn by an English artist for her Eighth Air Force friend, Lt. W. H. Greene, 95th Bomb Group (courtesy of the Museum of the Mighty Eighth)

## Chapter I: Introduction

### The Affect of Home

24<sup>th</sup> November 1944

It was 3am when the Duty Sergeant threw open the door of the Nissen hut, drawing the frosty air into the barracks like a sharp intake of breath. The men rose wearily, dressed in silence, and stumbled into the bitter English night towards the waiting jeeps. In the mess hall, a breakfast of fresh eggs and bacon - a rare feast - brought sighs of resignation. It was well known within the 100th Bomb Group that fresh eggs, rather than the powdered variety, were only served before the most dangerous of missions.<sup>1</sup> After eating as much breakfast as they could stomach, the men made their way across the airfield to Headquarters to be briefed on the day's mission. A diary entry written by 2nd Lt Tony Pecyk, a co-pilot assigned to the 100th Bomb Group, described the scene on entering the briefing room:

'At the door each one of us checked into the attendance man. When briefing time came the officer in charge called roll. Then the S-E officer was introduced, he gave us the first glimpse of our mission today. As he arose to pull the curtain from the wall map, you could feel the anxiety of the pilots, copilots, navigators, and bombardiers permeating the atmosphere – this is all occurring at the officers briefing. Just before he yanked the curtain acute silence accompanied the anxiety. This was due to the speculation of going to Meresburg. The most feared target in the E.T.O. because of its intense flak and fighter support. There at Meresburg the air corps usually loses 40 or more bombers – usually more. The irony of it is that they haven't had too much success of knocking it out. This causes them to return to it. Anyhow, when the boys saw it wasn't Merseburg you could feel the tense anxiety vanish.'<sup>2</sup>

It is fair to assume from Pecyk's account that it is not just the cloying cigarette smoke that thickens the atmosphere of the briefing room. Affect, defined by Thrift as a 'set of flows moving through the bodies of human and other beings' permeates the space, moving between bodies primed by

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<sup>1</sup> John Alden Clark, *An Eighth Air Force Combat Diary: A First-person, Contemporaneous Account of Combat Missions Flown with the 100th Bomb Group, England, 1944-1945* (United States: Proctor Publications, 2001), 153.

<sup>2</sup> "2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Tony Pecyk's Diary", *100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Foundation*, [http://www.100thbg.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=212:2nd-lt-tony-pecyk-s-diary&catid=25&Itemid=581](http://www.100thbg.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=212:2nd-lt-tony-pecyk-s-diary&catid=25&Itemid=581) [accessed 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022].

anticipation and belonging.<sup>3</sup> At the front of the room the S-E Officer conducts this orchestra of feeling through the simple action of removing the curtain to reveal the target on the map. Tuning into the affective feedback loop, the commanding officers observe the collective reaction of the assembled men as a means of gauging the group's morale. A few months earlier, in March 1944, the curtain had been pulled back to reveal the target of Berlin. Whereas previous missions to the German capital had been met with resigned groans, on this occasion there was only an eerie silence. 100<sup>th</sup> BG commander Colonel Bennett 'felt petrified, this was a disastrous sign of low morale.'<sup>4</sup> For the group's commanding officers, if there was one thing more dangerous to the fighting spirit of a bomb group than abject terror, it was the absence of emotion.

### *Winter 2006*

Standing at the top of the restored control tower at Thorpe Abbots, the 100th Bomb Group Foundation's Official Historian Mike Faley gazes out across the muddy fields of Thorpe Abbots and the thin strip of broken concrete which once served as the perimeter track. 'You can almost hear those engines struggling to take off, the squeak of the brakes as they follow each other down the perimeter track towards take off position,' recalls Faley in *Echoes of the Mighty Eighth*, an article published in the newsletter of the 100th Bomb Group Foundation about his experience of visiting Thorpe Abbots, the wartime home of the 100th.<sup>5</sup> For Faley, who considers himself an expert on the history of the Bomb Group, the wartime stories he has immersed himself in over the years are played out in vivid technicolour when he looks out from the control tower at Thorpe Abbots. But it is not only the sights, sounds and smells of the wartime base that are embodied during this moment, but also the emotions of the men who once occupied this airfield. '...You feel you are at a special place', continues Faley, 'many of you [100th BG veterans] lost your innocence here; your friends for life were made here, and many took off, never to return. Thorpe Abbots evokes all of these emotions and more.'

For many visitors to the 100th Bomb Group Memorial Museum, the former airfield is an affective space, where encounters with the materiality of the wartime base - the building, objects and landscape - combine with visitor's own memory-work to elicit affective intensities; an impact described by Massumi as the moment when the body 'is filled with motion, vibratory motion, resonance'.<sup>6</sup> For Mike Faley, these empathetic affects are qualified as a connectedness to the past, a feeling which in turn manifests itself as belonging - a sense of being at home. As Gerald Twomey, the

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<sup>3</sup> Nigel Thrift, 'The "Sentient" City and What It May Portend', *Big Data & Society* Vol. 1, No. 1 (2009): 88

<sup>4</sup> John R. Nilsson. *The Story of the Century* (California: self-published, 1946), 49

<sup>5</sup> Mike Faley, "Echoes of the Mighty Eighth", *Splasher Six*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Spring 2006)

<sup>6</sup> Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect", *Cultural Critique*, No. 31 (1995), 86

son of a 100th BG pilot articulates, 'I savor and cherish this experience [visiting the museum] as a homecoming of sorts, even on the first visit. I feel 'connected' in space and time. 'I am there'.<sup>7</sup> While the atmosphere of Thorpe Abbots affects visitors in multiple ways across various registers, the potential for individuals to *feel the past* is particularly revealing of the affective capacity of the museum experience.

The juxtaposition of these two vignettes, describing on the one hand the bursts and flows of intensities experienced by aircrews as they prepare for a mission, and on the other, the emotional responses of visitors to the control tower museum, reinforces the idea of wartime Eighth Air Force bases as 'thick' places that are 'sticky' with affect, to draw on the respective terms of philosophers Edward Casey and Sara Ahmed.<sup>8</sup> However, it also emphasises the significance of affective connections between people and places in eliciting and processing these intensities.<sup>9</sup> In both of the scenarios presented above, the affective responses of individuals occur through a complex interaction of location, material culture, and a web of social, cultural and historical contexts. As Twomey noted, visitors to Thorpe Abbots feel "connected' in time and space'. By viewing the wartime airfields and their post-war remnants as sites where affect is transmitted, processed, and circulated, there is the potential for a deeper understanding of how structures of feeling emerge within situated military communities, and how these connections can develop, intensify, and shift over time. This concept of affective connections is borrowed from Spinoza, who sees affects as ways of connecting to others. As Massumi suggests, 'they are our angle of participation in processes larger than ourselves. With intensified affect comes a stronger sense of embeddedness in a larger field of life – a heightened sense of belonging, with other people and to other places.'<sup>10</sup>

This study aims to identify and examine the evolving affective topography of former Eighth Air Force bases from the war years to the present day, before offering reflections on the future heritage management of the sites. From a practical perspective, it is hoped that this thesis offers a timely assessment of England's Second World War airfields in relation to current discourses around affect and the role of the *more-than-representational* in heritage studies. While the research for this study has focused on three specific Eighth Air Force bases, the general findings can be applied to any of the one hundred bases operated by the Eighth Air Force during the Second World War.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Gerald S. Twomey, "Back to Thorpe Abbots: A Son's Journey" (n.d), *100<sup>th</sup> BG Memorial Museum Archive*

<sup>8</sup> Edward S. Casey, "Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does It Mean to Be in the Place-World?", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* Vol. 91, No. 4 (2001), pp. 683–93 ; Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Wetherell, "Feeling Rules, Atmospheres and Affective Practice: Some Reflections on the Analysis of Emotional Episodes" in Claire Maxwell and Peter Aggleton (eds), *Privilege, Agency and Affect: Understanding the Production and Effects of Action* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect* (London: Wiley, 2015), 6.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Francis, Richard Flagg, Graham Crisp, *Nine Thousand Miles of Concrete* (Historic England, 2016), 4

Indeed, the rationale behind this study is partly motivated by the desire to explore the enormous social and environment impact that airfield construction had on East Anglia. A 1945 *Aeroplane* article's description of the UK as 'one vast aircraft carrier anchored off the north-west coast of Europe', gives some scale to the enormity of airfield construction during the war, and the physical imprint that the 9,000 miles of concrete indelibly left on the British countryside.<sup>12</sup> Now, as the Ministry of Defence, Historic England, local councils, and heritage organisations, increasingly seek to assess the significance of militarised landscapes prior to potential redevelopment, there has never been a more opportune moment to better our understanding of the historic, social, and emotional complexities of these wartime bases. As Deleuze and Guattari insist, 'we know nothing of a body [human or inhuman] until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are'.<sup>13</sup> Looking to the future, it is hoped that by understanding how wartime bases have been socially and phenomenologically constructed over time, there can be opportunities to preserve and forge affective connections through the production of new localities that *mean* something to those who call them home.

## Historical Overview

During the Second World War the Eighth Air Force amounted to the greatest air armada the world had ever seen, reaching a total strength of 200,00 personnel by mid-1944.<sup>14</sup> At its peak, it could put up 2,000 bombers and 1,000 fighters in the air on any one mission.<sup>15</sup> While the Eighth enjoyed almost total air superiority by the end of the war, this dominance came at a heavy cost. Half of the United States Army Air Force's (USAAF) casualties in the war were suffered by the Eighth Air Force, totalling over 26,000 dead.<sup>16</sup> Formed in 1942, the mission of the Eighth was deemed to be one of the utmost strategic importance – the decimation of the Axis' industrial and transport systems, and the destruction of the Nazi fighting spirit.<sup>17</sup> While the RAF would bomb targets by night, the Eighth would brave the onslaught of fighter planes and anti-aircraft fire to conduct daylight raids on strategic targets, including industrial complexes, railway yards and U-Boat pens. To facilitate this round-the-clock strategic bombing campaign, the Eighth Air Force was assigned bases in the East of England, the majority of which were constructed by British building firms as part of a reverse lend-

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<sup>12</sup> *Aeroplane*, 31 August 1945

<sup>13</sup> Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 284

<sup>14</sup> "Eighth Air Force History", Eighth Air Force Fact Sheet, USAF, <https://www.8af.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/333794/eighth-air-force-history/> [accessed 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022].

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*

<sup>17</sup> Richard Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe, 1939-1945* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2013) CCXLIII

lease agreement. By early 1942, farmland across Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire, and Hertfordshire had been requisitioned by the Air Ministry for the start of the most ambitious civil construction project ever undertaken in the United Kingdom.<sup>18</sup> Approximately 690 bases were constructed in Britain during the war to meet the demands of the combined allied air offensive, including over 100 airfields to facilitate the heavy bombers, fighters, and support groups of the Eighth Air Force.<sup>19</sup>



Figure 2 Distribution of USAAF Eighth Air Force airfields (excluding Northern Ireland, June 1944)

<sup>18</sup> Geoff Mills and Daniel Knowles, *RAF and USAAF Airfields in the UK During the Second World War: A Complete Gazetteer* (No publisher: Fonthill Media, 2022), 1.

<sup>19</sup> Britain's pre-war total of 150 airfields had increased to 740 by the end of the war. John Schofield, Colleen M. Beck, William Gray Johnson, *Matériel Culture: The Archaeology of Twentieth-Century Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2002), 173.

Each Type A airfield (the standard type for heavy bombers) required about 600 acres of land, which had to be requisitioned, cleared, and levelled before the 130,000 tons of hardcore could be laid.<sup>20</sup> As well as the economic impacts of an airfield construction scheme of this scale (each heavy-bomber airfield cost in the region of £500,000 to construct, equivalent to approximately £16 million in today's money), the project also had enormous environmental implications on the landscape.<sup>21</sup> As American airfield engineer and ornithologist, Robert S. Arbib, recalled, 'as each new field was invaded by our crushing machines, as each new hedgerow was smashed and uprooted and shattered, as each great oak succumbed before axe and dynamite and bulldozer, we felt a pang. For there is nothing quite as final, quite as levelling, as an aerodrome.'<sup>22</sup> The transformation of the airfield sites from a landscape of rural fields and scattered homesteads to expanses of concrete signalled the beginning of a period of social upheaval for the surrounding towns and villages. The first USAAF air raid – a daylight attack on Rouen by twelve B-17s in August 1942 – was followed by a year of rapid airfield construction and a mass influx of Americans to East Anglia.<sup>23</sup> By the end of 1943, the Eighth Air Force, under the command of Brig Gen Ira Eaker, occupied 119 stations, increasing to 133 in 1944.<sup>24</sup> By this time the Eighth was divided into three numbered Bomb Divisions, which were themselves split into Combat Wings, each made up of three heavy bombardment (bomb) groups.<sup>25</sup> Writing in 1946, John Nillson, a USAAF press officer, vividly recalled the night that the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group arrived at RAF Thorpe Abbots in Norfolk.

*'The Time, early June 1943. The mist hung stationary in the night air, and the English countryside, so wan and haggard, wore a dismal cloak. The Nissen huts hunched up in the blackout, ghosts at night or, by day, huge tin cans ripped in half. It was an air base, and new, from which the RAF, as Arabs in the night, had pulled up its tents and departed.'*

*As an empty city, the base awaited the hurly-burly commerce of war – the raucous noises, the jests, the trepidations, the boredom, from the whole alphabet of human emotions. They would – magically – transform mortar, bricks, and concrete into an habitation of war.'*

John R. Nillson, 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, *The Story of the Century* (1946)<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> S. Willis and B. Hollis, *Military Airfields in the British Isles, 1939–1945* (Newport Pagnell: Enthusiasts Publications, 1987), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Francis, Flagg, Crisp, *Nine Thousand Miles of Concrete*, 4

<sup>22</sup> Robert S. Arbib Jr, *Here We Are Together: The Notebook of an American Soldier in Britain* (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1946), 18.

<sup>23</sup> C.S. Dobinson, *Airfield Themes: Studies in the Evolution of Britain's Military Airfields, 1918-45* (Council for British Archaeology, 2000), 193.

<sup>24</sup> Dobinson, *Airfield Themes*, 176

<sup>25</sup> Overly, *The Bombing War*, CCXX.

<sup>26</sup> John R. Nillson, *100th Bomb Group, The Story of the Century* (1946), 25.



The 'empty city' of Thorpe Abbots occupied an area 500 acres in size. Divided between technical and living areas, the base contained two T-2 hangars, three runways, hard-standings for fifty aircraft, and a domestic site capable of housing 3,000 service personnel – a population that far outnumbered the local inhabitants of the nearby hamlet of Thorpe Abbots.<sup>27</sup> The airfield boasted its own cinema, store, gymnasium, and chapel, among other amenities intended to meet the material and social demands of its population. As the Americans poured into the base, British contractors were still busy laying the three miles of sewers, nine miles of roads, and five miles of water mains that would service the base.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, it was the first time that the village of Thorpe Abbots had access to a sewerage system. However, it was not only the physical imprint of the base that gave it its permanence in the historical record, but rather the operational activities conducted by the group who called it home from 1943-1945. By the time the Stars and Stripes were lowered at the end of the war, the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group had been credited with 8,630 missions at a cost of 732 lives; earning the group the nickname of 'The Bloody Hundredth'.<sup>29</sup> It was at Thorpe Abbots, according to one Eighth Air Force historian, that 'history was made'.<sup>30</sup>

During this period of occupation, the weight of B-17s pushed the oil-stained hardstands a little deeper into the soft East Anglian mud, the Operation Room's blackboard bared the chalky stains of crossed-out mission targets, and the smell of disinfectant permeated the walls of the base hospital. From a military and material perspective, Thorpe Abbots had become – as Nillson describes - 'a habitation of war'.<sup>31</sup> However, as Nillson implies, it was not the physical impact of wartime activity that 'magically' transformed the base into a distinctive militarised place, but rather the 'whole alphabet of human emotions' felt by those who lived there. The base was not merely a receptacle for meaning but a transmitter of affect to those living within its bounds, from the subconscious shudder at the taste of a fresh egg in the mess hall, to the wave of relief as the tyres touched down on the tarmac after a successful mission. The influence of the human experience, rather than the orders of military planners, can be seen across countless recollections of Eighth Air Force veterans, who acknowledge how day-to-day routines, interactions, and emotional trauma shaped their understanding of the individual wartime bases.<sup>32</sup> Thorpe Abbots is just one example of how standardised, utilitarian bases were physically and socially transformed over the course of the

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<sup>27</sup> Edward M. Sion, *Through Blue Skies to Hell: America's 'Bloody 100th' in the Air War over Germany* (Newbury: Casemate, 2011), 8

<sup>28</sup> Richard Le Strange, James R. Brown, and the 100 Bomb Group Memorial Museum, *Century Bombers: The Story of the Bloody Hundredth* (Thorpe Abbots, 1990), 8.

<sup>29</sup> "100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Memorial Museum", 100<sup>th</sup> BGMM, <https://www.100bgmus.org.uk/single-post/The-Bloody-Hundredth> [accessed 7<sup>th</sup> March 2019]

<sup>30</sup> Sion, *Through Blue Skies to Hell*, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Nillson, *The Story of the Century* (1946), 25.

<sup>32</sup> See Gerald Astor, *The Mighty Eighth: The Air War in Europe as Told by the Men Who Fought It* (United States: Penguin, 2015).

American occupation into distinctive, meaningful localities, immortalised in the memories of those who occupied them.

## Scope

The focus of this thesis will be the US Army Air Force bases occupied by bomb groups of the Eighth Air Force between 1942 and 1945. While Britain boasted over 700 operational airfields during the war - the majority occupied by RAF squadrons – it is the bases of the Eighth Air Force and the Americans who occupied them that stand out for the far-reaching social and cultural changes brought about by their presence. The ‘Friendly Invasion’ was not merely a temporary military occupation but a cultural exchange that created long-lasting connections between the Americans, their British neighbours, and the air bases themselves. The title of this thesis, ‘Making it Home’, not only refers to the airmen’s collective goal of survival (whether that was returning to their home base after a mission or their familial homes in the United States at the end of an operational tour), but also the process by which airfields were socially, culturally, and emotionally transformed into homes. ‘Home’ is of course a subjective and multidimensional term, as shown in the proliferation of literature on the subject within the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, geography, psychology, history, and philosophy.<sup>33</sup> Describing the social and physical construction of home, Rapport and Dawson argue that ‘home brings together memory and longing, the ideational, the affective and the physical, the spatial and the temporal, the local and the global, the positively evaluated and the negatively’.<sup>34</sup> Rather than simply viewing the home as a dwelling, this thesis will explore the affective and diffuse aspects of home. Moreover, it will examine the symbiotic relationship between bodies and the spaces they occupy; exploring how one can construct and adapt the other. Sara Ahmed writes that ‘loving one’s home is not about being fixed into a place, but rather it is about becoming part of a space where one has expanded one’s body, saturating the space with bodily matter: home as *overflowing* and *flowing over*’.<sup>35</sup> The image of home as the coming together of bodies (both human and non-human) is pivotal to this discussion, particularly Ahmed’s emphasis on orientations, which ‘are as much about feeling at home as they are about finding our way’.<sup>36</sup> Bodies take shape as they move through the world, orientating themselves towards or away from other bodies. At the same time, the meaning of home shifts depending on this orientation; a relativity that becomes apparent

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<sup>33</sup> S. Mallett. (2004). “Understanding Home: A Critical Review of the Literature”, *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 52, No.1, 62.

<sup>34</sup> N. J. Rapport, & A. Dawson (Eds.), *Migrants of Identity: Perception of Home in a World of Movement* (Oxford and New York, NY: Berg, 1998), 8.

<sup>35</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 11.

<sup>36</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 9.

when exploring how Eighth Air Force personnel's perception of home changed depending on where their bodies were situated within the assemblage of the airfield.

This thesis will argue that individually and collectively, the men of the Eighth Air Force orientated themselves towards each other and the space of the airfield by mapping their emotions onto the topography of the airfield, from the nervous anxiety of the briefing room to the boredom of no-fly days wiled away in cold Nissen huts. In doing so, the spaces of the airfield were invested with meaning, both in the material culture of the base and in the imagination of its occupants. Boredom, homesickness, and esprit-de-corps prompted the production of wall art in communal spaces, while airmen – uncertain of their fate - carved their initials above their bunk as a lasting reminder that they were there. Elsewhere on base, the provision of home comforts, from donuts to the female American Red Cross staff who served them, contributed to a unique base culture that was shaped around the tastes, needs, and day-to-day routines of its inhabitants, while also reflecting the homes left behind and the imagined homes of the future. Just as the countryside was transformed into 'Little America' - the remnants of which would haunt the landscape long after the G.I.s' departure – so too were the American personnel changed by their experiences in England. As communities forged by the unique demands of air combat and the emotional needs of their occupants, the bases can be viewed as affective economies, where bodies were explicitly and implicitly orientated to collectively face their uncertain futures together. This process of alignment was carried out by USAAF commanders as a means of fortifying personnel against the emotional strain of combat. The success of this orientation was, I will argue, articulated through the concept of 'morale'. Using official military sources, personal diaries and letters, contemporary photographs, and veteran memoirs, Chapter One will explore how a topography of affect emerged at Shipdham air base in Norfolk, home to the 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group.

To quote Laurajane Smith's seminal work, *Uses of Heritage*, it is not merely the antiquity of the material remnants of a historic place that denotes it as heritage, but rather the 'act of passing and receiving memories and knowledge' that takes place there.<sup>37</sup> Focusing on the intergenerational transmission of memory, Chapter Two offers a study of translocality, phantasmic encounters with the remnants of war, and the curation and transmittance of affect within heritage settings. Centring on the air base of Thorpe Abbots, the chapter will argue that the affective connections between the Americans and their wartime home transcended the base through the transformation of the diasporic post-war veteran community into a distinct translocal network, brought together through an affective language of storytelling that both mythologised and memorialised the veteran experiences. This chapter will untangle the layers of memory, materiality, and myth, defined as absent presences, that permeated the landscape after the departure of the Americans at the end of

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<sup>37</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2009a), 2.

the war. Lastly, it will investigate how these ‘ghosts’ were managed through the restoration of the control tower and its dedication as a memorial museum. As part of a transnational heritage narrative, the control tower facilitates ‘the return’ of veterans and their descendants through the careful entwinement of memory, identity and affect.

The importance of the relationship between community stakeholders and developers will be emphasised in Chapter Three, in relation to the ongoing redevelopment of the wartime home of the 482<sup>nd</sup> Bomb Group, RAF Alconbury in Cambridgeshire. By highlighting how the current government guidance on military heritage fails to account for the intangible value of the material heritage assets, I will argue that the affective connections established between airfield preservation groups, Alconbury veterans, and the former air base, have become eroded. Moreover, I will evaluate how the site’s associations with the Cold War period have transformed the affective landscape of the base. Unlike Thorpe Abbots, where the ghosts of the past have been domesticated in the present, Alconbury’s Cold War interjections situate the site towards an uncertain future. How then can the developers produce the meaning of ‘home’ within this affectively ambiguous setting? To this end, I will consider to what extent heritage-orientated place making strategies carried out by the developer, as well as the organic development of intangible localisation practices, have fostered affective connections between residents and Alconbury Weald.

Each of the three chapters will focus on an individual airfield: Shipdham, Thorpe Abbots and Alconbury, respectively. There are many reasons for the decision to limit the scope of this study to three airfields, not least because of the vast number of Eighth Air Force bases in England, and the

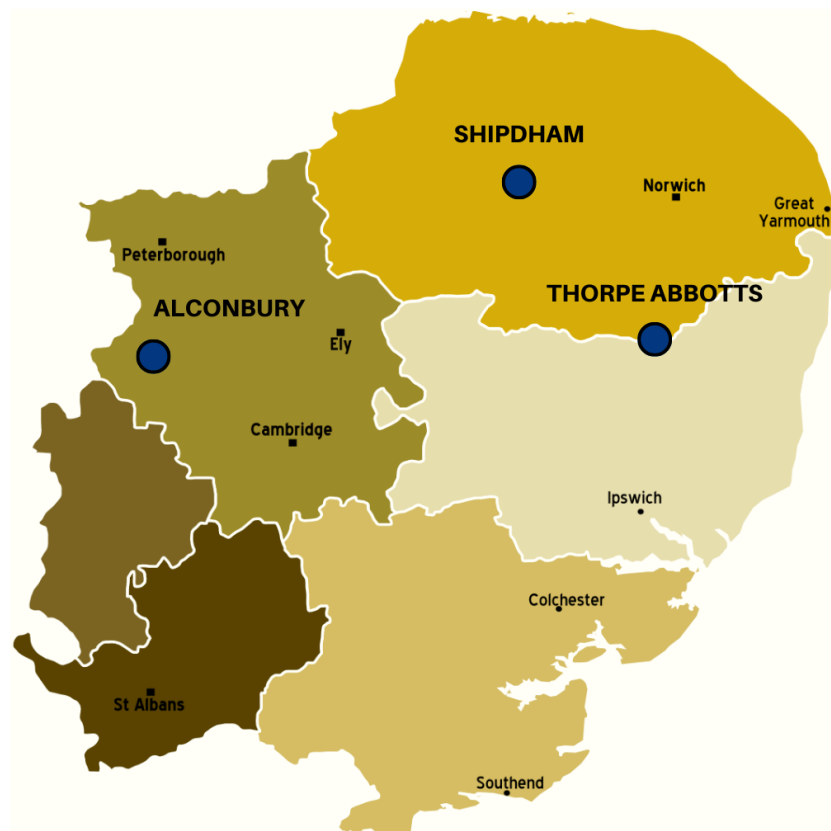


Figure 3 Map of the East of England showing site selection

even larger body of literature and sources relating to each. Aside from the research constraints, attempting to cover the entire Eighth Air Force would do an injustice to the purpose of this thesis: to offer an in-depth exploration of individual bases as distinctive localities. Falling under the category of microhistory due to its focus on small communities, this thesis aims to '[ask] large questions in small places', to quote Charles Joyner.<sup>38</sup> It is hoped that an in-depth study of the material culture, affective experiences, and the production of locality at a single base will provide insights to help inform our understanding of the Eighth Air Force's presence in England at a broader level.

The choice of bases has been determined by several factors, including the desire to include a wide geographical sample of sites. The separation of the Eighth into three Bomb Divisions is also accounted for, with the inclusion of Alconbury (1<sup>st</sup> Air Division), Shipdham (2<sup>nd</sup> Air Division) and Thorpe Abbots (3<sup>rd</sup> Air Division). Each Division had its own command structure and headquarters, located across the East of England. While the airfields of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division were scattered around the counties of Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Air Division operated in the area around the city of Norwich. The bases of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Air Division, meanwhile, were located in South Norfolk and Suffolk.

Another reason for this site selection is the variations between the development of the bases. Whereas Alconbury began life in the 1930s as a permanent RAF base, hosting several squadrons in the early years of the war before its transferral to USAAF command, Thorpe Abbots did not become operational until the summer of 1943. Shipdham, meanwhile, was the first US heavy bomber base in Norfolk and the continuous host to Consolidated B-24 Liberators from October 1942 to late 1945 – longer than any other airfield in Britain. The post-war lives of the bases have also taken different courses. While Shipdham was swiftly returned to agriculture (except for a preserved piece of airstrip used by a flying club), the living sites at Thorpe Abbots were retained as housing for local residents until the 1960s. After decades of disuse, volunteers began restoring its control tower in the 1970s, opening it as a memorial museum in 1981. Alconbury was one of the few airfields to retain its military flying purpose, reopening in the 1950s as a USAF base and undergoing an intense period of modernisation over the next three decades before finally closing in 1994. Since 2014 the airfield site has been part of a large redevelopment scheme which aims to create 5,000 new homes.

While the Eighth Air Force also had its own Fighter Command operating from East Anglia, their bases do not fall under the remit of this thesis. Although the fighter pilots worked closely with the bombers in their role as escort fighters - nicknamed 'Little Friends' by B-17 and B-24 crews - their experiences of conflict varied dramatically from that of the bomber crews. As one former Eighth Air Force fighter pilot put it, 'a fighter pilot is all balls and no forehead. If he thinks at all, he thinks that he is immortal; God's gift to women and his airplane. On a mission, he is too damned busy to be

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<sup>38</sup> C. W Joyner, *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1999), 1.

frightened because he is alone and has to do it all'.<sup>39</sup> While this summation may feed into Hollywood-driven stereotypes of the lone wolf fighter ace, it is certainly true that fighter pilots were required to exhibit individuality and some degree of arrogance to succeed in their role - markedly different qualities than those required of a bomber crew.

It is also worth noting that the Eighth Air Force were joined in the east of England by the Ninth Air Force from October 1943; a tactical air force tasked with supporting the invasion of the continent and the subsequent allied drive across France and Germany. As many groups of the Ninth Air Force operated from air bases vacated by the Eighth Air Force, their experiences on base bore close similarities with their Eighth counterparts. Despite the Ninth eventually amassing a total of 200,000 personnel in England (outnumbering the Eighth Air Force at the time), their contribution has been chronically overlooked in histories of the air war.<sup>40</sup> Regrettably, it is not within the scope of this thesis to readdress this imbalance, although it is hoped that many of these findings will be applicable to these communities and their wartime homes. Likewise, this study does not cover the unique experiences of the US engineering battalions (many of them made up of Black Americans), who were tasked with constructing the airfields from which the Eighth Air Force would eventually operate. Again, the experiences of this under-represented group is deserving of its own study in the future.

## Methodology

The thesis will comprise of three main chapters, with each section tackling the following research questions:

1. What was the role of material culture in the creation of affective connections between Eighth Air Force personnel and their home bases, and how did this translate into the production of distinctive homes?
2. To what extent did the memories, both imagined and real, permeate the bases in the decades following the end of the war and how has this shaped the affective experiences of those who curate and visit the sites?
3. How can affect be curated, managed, and utilised in the redevelopment of wartime airfield sites to create homes that make people feel a sense of belonging?

Navigating the fields of History, Anthropology, Conflict Archaeology, and Heritage Studies - and the intersections that lie between them - has required a careful approach to the methodology of this

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<sup>39</sup> Colonel John Cunnick, quoted in Philip Kaplan, *Fighter Pilot: A History and Celebration* (London: Aurum Press, 1999: Back Cover.

<sup>40</sup> Martin W. Bowman, *US 9th Air Force Bases in Essex, 1943-44* (London: Pen & Sword Aviation, 2010), 32.

research study. Up until now, literature on the Eighth Air Force's Second World War operations - as with most military histories - has tended to provide linear narratives drawn from official documents, letters, diaries, and memoirs. This reliance on the written word has helped to inform our understanding of the chronology of the allied efforts in the air, along with their historical importance to the outcome of the war. However, these histories have rarely strayed outside the temporal parameters of the war years and have even less frequently explored the significance of air bases as sites of meaning and affect for those stationed at them.

Despite the one-dimensional approach of many Eighth Air Force histories, the study of war – by its very nature – has produced countless compelling, emotionally-centred accounts of the human experience of combat. Even the prominent military theorist, Carl von Clausewitz, vouched for the significance of emotion as one of three catalysts for conflict.<sup>41</sup> Since the mid-twentieth century there have been increasing efforts to represent the emotional, cultural, and social dimensions of conflict in war studies. Esteemed military historian Michael Howard led the way in his call for the study of the subject 'in width, depth and in context'.<sup>42</sup> Howard reflected this mantra in his own work, promoting, for example, the importance of a group's *esprit de corps* and camaraderie in the maintenance of morale. Responding to Howard's call to arms, this thesis aims to provide a multidimensional and interdisciplinary account of the human experience of Eighth Air Force personnel and the material legacy of their presence, through the exploration of affect. To achieve this, however, will require turning away from the historical methodologies traditionally associated with military history.

Social sciences, particularly the fields of anthropology and sociology, have provided compelling methodologies for researching affect.<sup>43</sup> Affect theory, as I will explain, is an approach to culture, history, and politics that focuses on more-than-representational forces, or affects. Affects are neither entirely pre-subjective, nor can they be completely represented by linguistics; they are instead the product of entwinements with our interiority and the exterior world.<sup>44</sup> As Ben Highmore argues, these 'sticky entanglements of substances and feelings, of matter and affect are central to our contact with the world.'<sup>45</sup> Given its fundamental methodological challenges, how then, can affect be researched through empirical data? Highmore suggests that it is not up to the researcher to untangle this mesh of human and non-human, affect and subjective, but rather it is their task to position themselves within this entanglement: 'This means getting in among the murky connections between

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<sup>41</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 138-139.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Howard, "The Use and Abuse of Military History," *Parameters* Vol.11, No. 1 (1981), 9-14.

<sup>43</sup> Britta Timm Knudsen and Carsten Stage, *Affective Methodologies: Developing Cultural Research Strategies for the Study of Affect* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

<sup>44</sup> Yael Navaro-Yashin, "Affective Spaces, Melancholic Objects: Ruination and the Production of Anthropological Knowledge", *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* Vol. 15, No. 1 (2009), 5.

<sup>45</sup> Ben Highmore, "Bitter After Taste" in Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Eds.) *Affect Theory Reader* (Duke University Press, 2010), 119.

fabrics and feelings, between the glutinous and the guffaw'.<sup>46</sup> The significance of the role of the researcher in the affective assemblage has increasingly been recognised in the field of ethnoarchaeology. During their fieldwork on rock art in Australia, Brady and Kearney observed how their indigenous guides were affected by the sites they visited. At one sorcery site, it was not only the motifs painted on the walls that informed their study, but the fearful reactions of their guide; an affective experience that emphasised the potency contained in the rock art to the community who claimed it as their heritage.<sup>47</sup> As this case study demonstrates, researching the affects produced by materiality not only involves surveying non-human objects, but also their entanglement with the human subjects who feel connected in both time and space to the material world around them. In terms of my own research, this has involved extensive fieldwork at three bases, not merely to investigate the sites' material culture, but also its affective resonances with those who encounter it.

### A Rhizomatic Methodology

Researchers in conflict archaeology and heritage studies have typically viewed the material culture of the Second World War as remnants that were spatially and socially constructed during the war years, swiftly abandoned, only to be remade decades later as memory objects representative of a particular time and social context. In a review of John Schofield's *Materiel Culture: The Archaeology of Twentieth Century Conflict*, Cornelius Holtorf criticises this limited approach, questioning why 'no one seems to be concerned with the specific social constitution and performances [the material culture of wartime airfields] takes, or will take.'<sup>48</sup> According to Holtorf, academics and heritage professionals seem 'to take for granted that such sites, once preserved, will function as historic mnemonics of some kind, for the only reason that they were once meaningful in the past'.<sup>49</sup> By treating airfield sites as physical reminders of the war - socially constructed to meet the commemorative and historical needs of post-conflict societies - heritage literature all too often fails to acknowledge the role that the formation of *more-than-human* relationships - forged between people and places over time and transmitted from generation to generation - have played in shaping how military sites are interpreted in the present.

Temporality has an important role to play in understanding the bases as sites that have undergone a continual process of becoming. As I will argue, the nexus between people, time, space, and affect

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<sup>46</sup> Ben Highmore, *Affect Theory Reader*, 119.

<sup>47</sup> Liam M. Brady & Amanda Kearney (2016) "Sitting in the gap: ethnoarchaeology, rock art and methodological openness", *World Archaeology* Vol. 48, No. 5 (2016), 649.

<sup>48</sup> John Schofield, *Aftermath: Readings in the Archaeology of Recent Conflict* (Springer Science & Business Media, 2009), 20.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid*



should not be viewed as a linear thread of connectivity, but as a rhizomatic cartography (to borrow Deleuzian imagery) that stretches out across the topography of the airfield. Philosophers Deleuze and Guattari use the term rhizome to describe the relations and connectivity of things.<sup>50</sup> Rather than the analogical tree which has a starting point and linear hierarchy (trunk, branches, leaves), the rhizome adopts the imagery of the root, which spreads laterally underground with no direction and no start or end point. The rhizome offers researchers of affect a methodology for considering the connectedness of multiplicities, including people, places, objects, emotions, and times. The rhizome's principal of connectivity states that everything is connected to everything else in a network, even those things of a different nature. In this sense, every member of an Eighth Air Force base community is connected to each other, and by extension, the different people and places of their past and future lives. Take, for example, Mike Faley's affective experience in the control tower at Thorpe Abbots. By viewing Mike as part of the same rhizomatic plane as the control tower, the wartime occupants of the base, the museum volunteers, and his own knowledge of the site's history, we can begin to imagine the complex connectivity of the base, and how the past can resurface in the present as an affective experience.

The notion of the rhizome is closely linked to another concept theorised by Deleuze and Guattari: the assemblage. Like the rhizome, the assemblage provides a useful starting point for imagining the complex entanglement of materiality, affects, and historicity. In an archaeological context, an assemblage relates to groups of contemporaneous artefacts that when read together can convey information about a particular time or setting. The Law of Superposition tells us that the strata on the top of the assemblage are more recent, while those on the bottom are older. Of course, stratification can sometimes be disrupted, causing artefacts and contexts to intermingle. It is this intermingling of contexts, temporalities, and material that most closely relates to the Deleuzian notion of the assemblage, which encourages the researcher to realign their gaze from viewing the world as a fixed, final product to a multiplicity of elements that are constantly ongoing, evolving, and becoming.<sup>51</sup> In the assemblages of Deleuze, and more recently the likes of Jane Bennett and Manuel DeLanda, there are no major distinctions between inanimate and animate things. Objects are 'vibrant matter' that are 'animate players in the becoming of both past and present'.<sup>52</sup> An essential aspect of the assemblage is the idea of the *more-than-representational*. According to Harris, it is the sensorial qualities of things, 'the way they register on and with human beings, the way they stimulate memories and emotions through their affective resonance' that provide assemblages with their

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<sup>50</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *EPZ Thousand Plateaus* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004), 3-28.

<sup>51</sup> O.J.T. Harris, "More than representation: Multiscalar assemblages and the Deleuzian challenge to archaeology", *History of the Human Sciences* Harris, O. J. T. (2018). More than representation: Multiscalar assemblages and the Deleuzian challenge to archaeology. *History of the Human Sciences*, 31(3), 83–104. <https://doi-org.uea.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0952695117752016> Vol. 31, No,3 (2018), 83–104.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

capacity to affect. The fluidity of the assemblage and its attention to the *more-than-representational* is what makes it so useful as a methodological framework. Rather than being static objects onto which humans project meaning, the material culture of the airfield is an animated agent in the becoming of past, present and future. This approach argues that anticipation for the future and nostalgia for past homes manifested itself in the social construction of the air bases through sensory and mnemonic encounters with familiar images, objects, and domestic ideals, and the fervent desire to last long enough to 'make it home'.

In practice, this rhizomatic methodology will involve prying at the connective tissue that connects people, places, time, and objects. For example, Chapter One will draw on an archival record spanning from pre-war documents to post-war memoirs, as well as a body of material culture, ranging from Depression-era murals to wartime graffiti. By accepting a broad selection of sources, I hope to identify, interrogate, and map some of the connections between people, places, and contexts. How, for example, did the context of the childhood American home of the 1930s influence how home was conceptualised in the barrack huts at Shipdham? Similarly, how did the success of a bombing mission over Germany emotionally impact those ground crew waiting back at base? By viewing the base community as an assemblage that stretches beyond the war years and geographical boundaries of Shipdham, it is hoped that it will be a short leap to understand how these communities were sustained, expanded and recentred in the post-war years. Exploring how these connections are aligned is also important for analysing how human and non-human bodies were implicitly and explicitly orientated. By examining the sensory qualities of things, rather than just their materiality, is a particularly useful method of understanding the genealogy of memory and the ways in which interactions between bodies encouraged alignments. For example, Hamilakis argues that sensory experience, such as eating and drinking have the power to generate 'embodied remembering, linking people with each other, and with the locales, spaces, objects, and artefacts that partook of these ceremonies.'<sup>53</sup> Consuming food equates to consuming place, whether the literal place that the food comes from, or the place it evokes, based on past experiences. By studying the affective and sensory qualities of these acts and objects, the affective connections between people and places reveal themselves.

It is the continuation and stretching of these connections through the expansion and shifting of the rhizomatic map in the post-war years that will form the subject of Chapter Two. To make sense of the evolution of the assemblage of Thorpe Abbots, this section will draw from post-war records in the UK and US, as well as observations at the 100<sup>th</sup> BG Memorial Museum and 100<sup>th</sup> BG Foundation reunion, to chronicle how the community transcended the spatial bounds of the base. It will also

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<sup>53</sup> Yannis Hamilakis, *Archaeology and the Senses: Human Experience, Memory, and Affect* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 170.

show how the airfield assemblage, including the ruinous airfield landscape, restored control tower and powerful memory objects, has the potential to expand and contract time when veterans and their descendants return. The final chapter will look to the future of the airfields of the Eighth, questioning how the assemblages can be maintained and expanded despite, or perhaps aided by, the prospect of redevelopment.

## Sources

Owing to the temporal, spatial, and theoretical extensiveness of this thesis, it is necessary to draw from a wide range of sources. The historical and anthropological study of Shipdham in Chapter One will explore contemporary sources, veteran memoirs, oral history interviews and the extant material culture that remains at the site. An invaluable official record is the 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group history, a microfilm copy of which is held at the Air Historical Research Branch at Maxwell Air Force base. These historical records include official military documents pertaining to targets, formations and missing aircrew, alongside detailed accounts of life on base. The creation of this comprehensive record followed President Roosevelt's 1942 request that all federal agencies should record accounts of their day-to-day war activities. The aim, as one general put it, was to record history 'while it is hot'.<sup>54</sup> The 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, as with other Eighth Air Force units, had its own Group Historian responsible for compiling and writing monthly reports on events in the air and on the ground, based on submissions from the group's various squadrons and sections. These monthly accounts are surprisingly informal in their tone and contents, providing interesting details of everyday life across the base. In the monthly report from Shipdham's Red Cross Field Director, for example, is a tally of the number of snacks served, while a roundup of sports news records the fortunes of the 44<sup>th</sup> BG's various athletics teams. Despite the colourful account of base life provided by the official History, it is nevertheless restricted by the self (and literal) censorship of the writers. The group's morale, for example, is briefly assessed by the base's flight surgeon, however, there is little deviation from the light-hearted tone of the reports, even when the group was suffering heavy casualties. Here it has been necessary to 'read the silences', to quote historian of emotions, Barbara Rosenwein, who stresses that unemotional texts can be just as important as overtly emotional ones.<sup>55</sup> To attempt to fill this emotional void in the official archive, this section will also incorporate contemporary documents written by 44<sup>th</sup> personnel, including letters and diaries. Many of these are housed in the archive of the Mighty Eighth Museum in Pooler, Georgia and in the American Library in Norwich.

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<sup>54</sup> M. K. Kennedy, "Archives of the Historical Division, USAF", *The American Archivist* Vol. 17, No. 2 (1954), 124.

<sup>55</sup> Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions", *Passions in Context: International Journal for the History and Theory of Emotions* No.1 (2020), 1.

Research for Chapter Two has required a hybrid of archival research and fieldwork. In terms of the former, the archive of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Memorial Museum at Thorpe Abbots and the digital repository of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Foundation have proved to be valuable resources for chronicling the post-war history of the 100<sup>th</sup> BG community, as told through group correspondence, personal letters, and memoirs. Fieldwork for this chapter took place at Thorpe Abbots between 2019 and 2022. Signing up as a volunteer at the museum in the summer of 2019 enabled me to insert myself into the assemblage that I was researching. Of course, while being among the fabric and feelings of Thorpe Abbots - from showing veterans' families around the base to helping with cataloguing - allowed me to experience the site's affect first-hand, this approach is not without its limitations. Henri Bergson noted that there is no perception which is not full of memories.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, an attempt to evaluate affect will inevitably be influenced by the researcher's own subjectivity, based on their experiences, knowledge, and memories.

While the research methods for Chapter Two involved orientating myself within the assemblage, my approach to Chapter Three was much more as outside observer. Due to the aim of chronicling key debates between heritage values and redevelopment vs restoration at military sites, it has been necessary to take a more objective view in order to assess how bodies interact within the wider assemblage of the community at Alconbury Weald. During the research period I conducted interviews with stakeholders, including a representative from the development company, members of the local Airfield Research Group, and new Alconbury Weald residents. This was used in conjunction with documentary sources, including planning documents for the new development.

## Literature Survey

### Historical Context

Literature on the Eighth Air Force's time in East Anglia has all too often focused on the strategic significance of USAAF operations, presented either as part of the overarching narrative of the allied air offensive, or as a subject of enquiry within its own right. In the former category, Richard Overy provides an informative assessment of the American contribution to the air war in his seminal history, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939-1945*.<sup>57</sup> Of the various popular histories written about the Eighth Air Force, Donald Miller's *Masters of the Air* presents the most readable account of the Eighth,

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<sup>56</sup> Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004), 24.

<sup>57</sup> See Kenneth P. Werrell's Eighth Air Force Bibliography (Eighth Air Force Memorial Museum, 1996) for a comprehensive list of 4,465 published and unpublished materials relating to the Eighth Air Force.

weaving personal narratives with the wider strategic history.<sup>58</sup> Focusing on the exploits of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, Miller tells the story of the Eighth through oral histories, primary source material, and official histories. The first truly popular history to tackle the subject of the Eighth came from amateur historian, Roger Freeman. With its coloured maps, photographs and appendices, Freeman's *Mighty Eighth: A History of the U.S. 8<sup>th</sup> Army Air Force* was seminal in bringing the exploits of the Eighth to a popular trans-Atlantic audience in the 1970s.<sup>59</sup> Writing in a similar vein to Freeman is aviation historian, Martin Bowman, whose vast catalogue of work includes several books relating to the missions, men and aircraft of the Eighth, most notably *Castles in the Air* and *The Mighty Eighth at War*.<sup>60</sup> Like Freeman and Bowman, many of the authors writing about the Eighth developed a personal interest in the subject through their own experiences of the 'Friendly Invasion', culminating in texts focusing on particular air divisions, bomb groups, or even crews. Motivated by his connections to the airfields of Norfolk and Suffolk, for example, local aviator James Hoseason provides an illustrated account of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Air Division in *The 1,000 Day Battle*.<sup>61</sup> While lacking in the academic rigour or objectivity of professionally-trained historians, these texts are often the products of extensive research, compiled from interviews with local people and veterans, as well as visits to the former airfields.

Despite the focus of most histories being, understandably, on the aerial exploits of the Eighth, historians have increasingly focused on the human aspect of the bombing war, making use of post-war oral histories and veteran memoirs of combat veterans. Kevin Wilson's *Blood and Fears* is particularly notable for tackling the human experiences of bomber crews in the air and on the ground.<sup>62</sup> *Sweatin' Out the Mission* by Malcolm A. Holland, meanwhile, deals with the ground crew experience of the war through veteran interviews and wartime photographs.<sup>63</sup> The social and cultural impact of the 'Friendly Invasion' has been written about in relative depth, even if many popular histories offer a romanticised retelling of relations between British people and American servicemen. Academic work into the area has provided more compelling narratives, such as Lucy Bland's *Brown Babies*, which reveals the long-term social effects of interracial relations between Black G.I.s and white British women. Other research has focused on the psychological experience of air warfare, most notably historian Mark K. Wells' *Courage and Air Warfare*, which analyses and

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<sup>58</sup> Donald Miller, *Masters of the Air: The Bomber Boys Who Fought the Air War Against Nazi Germany* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Ltd, 2007).

<sup>59</sup> Roger Freeman, *Mighty Eighth: A History of the U.S. 8<sup>th</sup> Army Air Force* (London: Doubleday, 1970).

<sup>60</sup> Martin W. Bowman, *Castles in the Air* (United States: Brassey's, 2000); Martin W. Bowman, *The Mighty Eighth at War* (London: Pen & Sword Aviation, 2014).

<sup>61</sup> James Hoseason, *The 1,000 Day Battle* (UK: Gillingham Publication, 1979).

<sup>62</sup> Kevin Wilson, *Blood and Fears: How America's Bomber Boys and Girls in England Won Their War* (London: Orion, 2016).

<sup>63</sup> Malcolm Holland, *Sweatin' Out the Mission: 8th Air Force Ground Support in World War Two* (London: History Press Limited, 2010).

compares crews' reaction to combat, morale, leadership and strategies to prevent emotional breakdowns in both the RAF and the Eighth Air Force.

Despite the breadth of the topics addressed in academic and popular histories of the Eighth Air Force's time in England, little attention has been paid to the temporal-spatial dimension of the airmen's experience. For example, while Wells deals with the problem of morale, he does not interrogate the notion of morale as a collective *feeling* that was dictated as much by conditions on the base as it is my success or failure in the air. Likewise, military historians writing about the Eighth's wartime history rarely extend their scholarship beyond 1945 and the departure of the Americans. Perhaps the most notable exception is the work of Roger Freeman, whose fascination with the abandoned structures of Eighth Air Force bases almost rivals his interest in the military operations, as the following passage from *Airfields of the Eighth: Then and Now* illustrates.<sup>64</sup>

*'Conceived in war, they [the airfields of the Eighth] experienced their moments of glory, and when the war ended, were left empty and derelict to die... On these, the massive runways are cluttered with buildings of motley design and purpose while most of the original buildings have gone. All that is except for a forlorn looking control tower, standing apart like a leper at a prayer meeting, or an operations block lurking in a copse or thicket on the fringe of the airfield like a red brick-ghost...'*

Roger Freeman, *Airfields of the Eighth: Then and Now* (1978)

Roger Freeman's evocative lament on the fate of East Anglia's airfields represents a characterisation of the materiality of the bases that will be familiar to anyone researching the history of the region's aviation heritage. By far the most dominant voice in the literature of the 'Mighty Eighth', Roger A. Freeman's emotional connections to the bases of the Eighth were formed during the war years, when he spent much of his childhood visiting USAAF bases. After the war, he balanced his historical research and writing with a full-time farming career. Freeman's *Airfields of the Eighth: Then and Now* (1978) created the mould for subsequent books on the material culture of the Eighth, by introducing a lexicon that has anthropomorphised, and in turn eulogised, the airfields and their material remains. Photographs of wartime scenes are juxtaposed with their contemporary equivalents, a visual template that emphasises the passing of time while simultaneously highlighting the continuity of the landscape. On the pages of Freeman's books, the past and the present live in parallel. The work reflects Freeman's own experiences of exploring the abandoned Eighth Air Force bases in the immediate post-war years. Describing his first visit to Thorpe Abbots after the war, Freeman remarked that 'the place had an atmosphere. There was a presence. Somehow it was if all the

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<sup>64</sup>Roger Freeman, *Airfields of the Eighth: Then and Now* (London: After the Battle, 1978), 6.

emotion, all the action of the long-gone days were being radiated'; a charged atmosphere that Freeman attempted to replicate in his expansive volumes.<sup>65</sup> It is a format replicated more recently in Martin Bowman's *Ghost Fields of East Anglia* and *Echoes of England*, in which the aviation historian shares images of abandoned control towers, rusting Nissen huts and overgrown runways, accompanied by vignettes from veterans' testimonies of their time spent in England.<sup>66</sup> It is a coupling that visually frames the historic voices within the decaying buildings of the present, whilst simultaneously animating the decaying remains with emotions and memories of their past occupants.

In these authors' dealings with the ruined bases, a recurring discourse becomes apparent— the idea that the 'mute and spectral' airfields can in some way evoke the past.<sup>67</sup> This preoccupation with the 'haunted' landscape of the bases takes multiple forms, from literal accounts of ghostly encounters (a whole chapter is devoted to 'Ghost Stories' in *Echoes of East Anglia*), to metaphorical choices, such as Freeman's description of an old operations rooms as a 'red-bricked ghost'.<sup>68</sup> In one moment, popular histories portray the buildings and runways as haunted, such as in D. A. Lande's account of a dilapidated hangar that 'still echoes the metallic clank of ground crews', whilst in the next sentence it is the tangible remains themselves that are the spectral figures.<sup>69</sup> Writing about a visit to a derelict airfield of the Eighth Air Force, German writer W.G. Sebald described the 'dilapidated control towers, bunkers, and corrugated iron huts' of the old base as being populated by the 'dead souls of the men who never came back from their missions, and of those who perished in the vast fires'.<sup>70</sup> It is a spectral gathering reminiscent of the accounts of returning American veterans and their families and in the work of popular historians, who evocatively describe the 'mute and spectral' control towers.<sup>71</sup> Of course, the civilian ghosts of Sebald's imagination, attuned by his own childhood experience of living through the bombing of Germany, are uncanny visitors to the landscapes of the Eighth, but nevertheless illustrate the ability of the site's materiality to generate affects.

The predilection to view the remains of these sites as affective spaces, capable of conveying historical, cultural, and emotional meaning to the visitor, presents an interesting contradiction between the impermanent nature of the sites' materiality and their enduring social significance as the final homes of those killed in the skies over Europe. Redundancy and gradual dereliction have been the fate of the majority of the 67 bomber bases airfields occupied by the Eighth Air Force of the

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<sup>65</sup> "Roger Freeman speaks at Thorpe Abbots", *Splasher Six*, Summer 1986.

<sup>66</sup> Martin W. Bowman, *Echoes of East Anglia: A Sentimental Journey through Pictures and Memories, 1940-1945* (Halsgrove, 2006); Martin Bowman, *Ghost Fields of East Anglia: Capturing Fading Memories of the Aerial War, 1942-45* (Wellington: Halsgrove, 2007).

<sup>67</sup> D.A. Lande, *From Somewhere in England* (Airlife Publishing Ltd., 1991), 10.

<sup>68</sup> Roger A. Freeman, *Airfields of the Eighth Then and Now* (London: Battle of Britain Prints International Limited, 1978), 7.

<sup>69</sup> D.A. Lande, *From Somewhere in England*, (Airlife Publishing Ltd., 1991), 8.

<sup>70</sup> W.G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction* (London: Random House, 2003), 77.

<sup>71</sup> Lande, *From Somewhere in England*, 10.

United States Army Air Force (USAAF) during the Second World War. Despite the impermanence of these wartime airfields, the significance of their relationship to the human experience of conflict, including personal tragedy and loss of life, has been the subject of renewed interest in historical, archaeological and heritage discourses in recent years.<sup>72</sup> In Marie Louise Stig Sørensen and Dacia Viejo-Rose's edited volume, *War and Cultural Heritage : Biographies of Place* (2015), the materiality of conflict is described as a 'receptor, container, and reflector of intention, meaning, and emotion'; a complex definition that emphasises the agency of militarised places, not just as passive backgrounds onto which meaning is inscribed, but as multi-dimensional spaces capable of containing, reflecting and transmitting affects.<sup>73</sup>

Historian Sam Edwards has written extensively about the airfields of the Eighth as sites that are 'haunted' by the past; 'that is, the idea that they are places at which the ghosts of memory might be seen, heard and felt.'<sup>74</sup> Edwards argues that the spectrality of air bases have been reinforced through the emergence of a discursive framework for experiencing the sites.<sup>75</sup> Edwards, for instance, cites the iconic opening scenes of *Twelve O'Clock High* (1949) - a film considered to be the definitive account of the Eighth Air Force in the Second World War - as a key point of reference for veterans returning to their old air bases. The film begins in 1949 when an American veteran stumbles by chance on an old Toby jug in a London antique shop. He instantly recognises it as the same piece that had once adorned the mantelpiece of his base's Club. The porcelain had been practical as well as ornamental: if the Robin-Hood shaped jug was turned to face the room it would signify to the men that a mission had been scheduled for the next day. Having rescued the Toby jug from the antiques shop, the American makes the journey to his old wartime base, which he finds in an abandoned and derelict state. As he stares up at the old control tower, he is suddenly aware of the sound of B-17s rumbling overhead, transporting him back to 1944 and the setting of the film's action. Through its *mise en scène*, Edwards argues that *Twelve O'Clock High* has produced a sanctioned narrative for how visitors are expected to interact with the material remains of the airfield sites.

Sam Edwards' work on the memorialisation of USAAF airfields has been fundamental in reimagining these militarised spaces as places enlivened by memories of the past and invested with meaning. Indeed, Edwards' argument that a discursive framework shaped by media, politics and nostalgia has been important in restoring some order to the ruined airfield landscape emphasises the significance of transnational commemoration efforts in guiding how the bases are experienced. However, where

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<sup>72</sup> Beck, Johnson & Schofield, *Matériel Culture: The Archaeology of Twentieth-Century Conflict*, 2.

<sup>73</sup> Marie Louise Stig Sørensen and Dacia Viejo-Rose (Eds.) *War and Cultural Heritage: Biographies of Place* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>74</sup> Sam Edwards, "Ruins, Relics and Restoration: The Afterlife of War Two American Airfields in England, 1945-2005", in Pearson, Coates & Cole (Eds.), *Militarized Landscapes: From Gettysburg to Salisbury Plain* (NY, New York: Bloombury USA, 2010), 209.

<sup>75</sup> Sam Edwards, *Allies in Memory World War II and the Politics of Transatlantic Commemoration, c.1941-2001* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).



this thesis hopes to build on Edwards' work is in the exploration of the pre-discursive and pre-conscious in the production and experience of airfield sites. Moving the focus away from the discourse of commemoration and heritagisation, I will instead examine the relationality of bodies within the airfield assemblage, arguing that personnel formed affective connections with their bases during the war years through localisation practices that simultaneously inscribed meaning onto people and places. The air bases, therefore, were not merely sites invested with meaning in the post-war years but were distinctive 'homes' which emerged from the unique circumstances of air combat and the stickiness of morale, with its innate potential to affect and be affected.

Edwards' work can be viewed within the wider context of memory studies; a field that emerged from the 'spectral turn' in the 1990s.<sup>76</sup> Memory studies explores the representations and materialities of the past, and how they have been shaped by – and in turn shape – politics, communities, and culture. Notable figures in the field of memory studies are Marita Sturken, who deals with memory practices and technologies in her fundamental book *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (1997), Lucy Noakes' *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (2013), and more recently, Kyoko Murakami's article *Materiality of Memory: The Case of the Remembrance Poppy* (2017). Focusing on the memorial poppy as a memorial object, Murakami argues that when studying collective remembering, it is important to consider the interplay between discourse, materials, bodies, objects, and environment as the integrated whole.<sup>77</sup> Building on this approach to memory as an experience that integrates the tangible and the intangible, this thesis will view acts of remembrance as embodied, relational, and affective experiences that enable people to experience a sense of continuity and connectedness with the past and with each other.

## Constructing Affective Localities

At its heart, this thesis is a study of the transformation of space into place. Sociologist Thomas Gieryn identified three 'necessary' features of place: firstly, its geographic location as a bounded, finite spot in the universe; secondly, its physical and material form, and finally, its investment with meanings.<sup>78</sup> The pluralisation of the third condition – 'meanings' – recognises that our understanding of place is subjective. Indeed, it is these layers of individual and collective meaning that give place its complexity. However, as Gieryn points out, 'the meanings that individuals and groups assign to

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<sup>76</sup> Christina Lee (Ed.), *Spectral Spaces and Hauntings* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 5.

<sup>77</sup> Kyoko Murakami, "Materiality of Memory: The Case of the Remembrance Poppy", in Brady Wagoner (Ed.), *Handbook of Culture and Memory, Frontiers in Culture and Psychology* (New York, 2017), 117.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas F. Gieryn, "A Space for Place in Sociology". *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 26 (2000), 471.

places are more or less embedded in historically contingent and shared cultural understandings of the terrain'.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, the distinctiveness of place not only relies on its physical location or material form but on the provision of 'shared cultural understandings' between those who relate to it. The significance of this communal process of meaning-making is what led Gupta and Ferguson to define placemaking, not as the construction of physical spaces, but as the 'embodied practices that shape identities and enable resistances'.<sup>80</sup> Gupta and Ferguson's belief that placemaking is as much about creating resilient, distinctive communities, as it about shaping identifiable places, takes its lead from Arjun Appadurai's work on the 'production of locality'. For Appadurai, 'locality' is a 'phenomenological property of social life' and an 'inherently fragile social achievement' that is vital for the production of distinctive places.<sup>81</sup> Integral to this conception of locality is the role of 'local subjects', not just as the people who populate a particular neighbourhood, but as 'actors who properly belong to a situated community of kin, neighbours, friends, and enemies'.<sup>82</sup> It is the local knowledge of these actors, and the practices that derive from their familiarity with their surroundings, that allow for the maintenance and reproduction of locality.

Just as navigating the conceptualisations of place requires traipsing across a wide theoretical field, mapping the terrain of affect presents a challenging task, due in no small part to a recent surge in multidisciplinary engagement with affect and the varying theorisations and contestations that have emerged as a result. A common entry point to this complex theoretical landscape are the works of philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Brian Massumi, who both conceptualise affect as a pre-personal and non-cognitive intensity capable of moving between bodies, both human and non-human. For Massumi, affects are autonomous, in that they never solely reside in an individual place, nor in a single body, but rather in the interaction of places and bodies.<sup>83</sup> This redistribution of agency away from humans and into a host of bodies – including objects and places – emphasises the importance of the non-human actor as an 'affective catalyst', in the words of Jane Bennett, who subscribes to the Spinozian notion that 'organic and inorganic bodies, natural and cultural objects...all are affective'.<sup>84</sup> Affect theory therefore offers enormous potential to broaden our understanding of the relationship between people, places and materiality, particularly the role that affect plays in the construction of places that not only *mean* something to people, but also *do* something to them.

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<sup>79</sup> Gieryn, "A Space for Place in Sociology", 473.

<sup>80</sup> Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (Eds.), *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1997), 6.

<sup>81</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 179.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid*

<sup>83</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 35.

<sup>84</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NCL: Duke University Press, 2010), xii,

The literature of placemaking and the production of locality, by its very nature, has focused on the ways in which humans actively construct and shape the spaces they inhabit. This attitude is exemplified in Michael de Certeau's vivid description of the city's transformation under the individual footsteps of crowds of commuters, whose 'intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together'.<sup>85</sup> While de Certeau recognises the effect that walking has on the city, he fails to account for how this practice in turn affects the walker.<sup>86</sup> The same criticism can be levelled against Appadurai's theorisation of locality as 'a phenomenological property of social life', described as 'a structure of feeling that is produced by particular forms of intentional activity and yields particular sorts of material effects'.<sup>87</sup> Throughout this thesis I hope to tease out the parameters of locality by looking past the 'material effects' of placemaking in order to analyse the affective practices that produce locality and the affects that locality in turn yields.

Appadurai's own terminology paves the way for an affective re-evaluation of placemaking, particularly his use of the term 'structure of feeling' to describe locality, referencing a term coined by the cultural theorist Raymond Williams in the 1950s.<sup>88</sup> Describing structures of feeling as the 'affective elements of consciousness and relationships', Williams hoped that the notion could provide a methodology for cultural historians studying the emergence of social groups, periods, and styles. Rather than focusing only on the material and social infrastructures that define the socio-spatial particularities of a moment in time, Williams advocated for consideration of the 'affective infrastructure' - put simply, the emotional, bodily, and cultural experiences of life.<sup>89</sup> What did it feel like to live through a particular time? What was the atmosphere like? Williams argues that a structure of feeling is a historically distinct quality which 'gives the sense of a generation or period'.<sup>90</sup> Engaging with the ineffable qualities of Williams' structures of feeling, Appadurai uses the term to describe the distinctiveness that give neighbourhoods their 'sense of place-ness'.<sup>91</sup>

Both Appadurai's and William's approaches share an acute awareness of the complex relationship between humans and their surroundings and the potential of phenomenology to contribute to our ethnographic knowledge. As Thrift argues, explorations of affect offer us 'a different kind of

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<sup>85</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 97.

<sup>86</sup> Cameron Duff, "On the Role of Affect and Practice in the Production of Place", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* Vol, 28, No. 5 (October 2010), 881–95.

<sup>87</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 182.

<sup>88</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Hogarth Press, 1992).

<sup>89</sup> Devika Sharma and Frederik Tygstrup, *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and the Study of Culture* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 1.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid*

<sup>91</sup> Appadurai, 1996, 182.

intelligence about the world'.<sup>92</sup> In recent years, the desire to understand how places move us has led to an increased focus on the instinctive and emotional dimensions of social life generated and circulated across human and non-human bodies. Non-representational theory (NRT), as proposed by human geographer Nigel Thrift, has been particularly prominent in reconceptualising the relationship between affect and place. Emphasising the role of practice, particularly the interactions between humans and their surroundings, Thrift argues that place is 'a vital element in the constitution of affect'.<sup>93</sup> Focusing on the 'doing' of affect, non-representational theories have provided human geographers with an opportunity to explore the pre-cognitive aspects of everyday practice and the non-discursive ways in which humans interact with their surroundings, and vice versa. This approach also offers opportunities for historians and archaeologists to explore how places generated and affected by war have been imbued with a myriad of meanings through the affective practices of their inhabitants. In Marie Louise Stig Sørensen and Dacia Viejo-Rose's edited volume, *War and Cultural Heritage : Biographies of Place*, the materiality of conflict is described as a 'receptor, container, and reflector of intention, meaning, and emotion'; a complex definition that emphasises the agency of militarised places, not just as passive backgrounds onto which meaning is inscribed, but as multi-dimensional spaces capable of containing, reflecting and transmitting emotions.<sup>94</sup>

Recent research in the field of conflict archaeology has focused on how creativity has the potential to inscribe class and identity onto space, creating localities that 'resonate with affective and expressive values and articulate communal conviviality and social solidarities'.<sup>95</sup> Despite the nature of war being seemingly opposed to the idea of 'communal conviviality', it is during times of conflict and division that we see the starkest examples of locality production. One area of research that has been the subject of increasing attention in recent years is the study of Second World War internment camps, particularly the processes by which internees used creativity to 'transform the material world of the camps'.<sup>96</sup> Carr and Mytum's edited volume *Cultural Heritage and Prisoners of War: Creativity Behind Barbed Wire* (2012) provides numerous examples of creative expression in both civilian and military POW camps, from the role of newspapers as tangible souvenirs of internment, to the

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<sup>92</sup> Nigel Thrift, "Intensities of feeling: towards a spatial politics of affect", *Geografiska Annaler* Vol.86, No.1 (2004), 60.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid*

<sup>94</sup> Sørensen and Viejo-Rose, *War and Cultural Heritage: Biographies of Place*, 9.

<sup>95</sup> Tim Edensor, Deborah Leslie, Steve Millington, and Norma Rantisi, *Spaces of Vernacular Creativity: Rethinking the Cultural Economy*, (London: Routledge, 2009), 14.

<sup>96</sup> Gillian Carr and H. C. Mytum (Eds.), *Cultural Heritage and Prisoners of War: Creativity behind Barbed Wire*, (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1.

significance of 'inventive medicines' in Far East internment camps.<sup>97</sup> This research emphasises the affective role of material culture production, not only as a way of making captivity more comfortable, or for the alleviation of boredom, but also as a means of imbuing space with meaning. In her study of Second World War Japanese internment camps, Jane Dusselier argues that the production of material culture was one of the 'critical elements in a complicated process of placemaking'.<sup>98</sup> Uprooted from their familiar surroundings and forced to live out an indefinite existence in the basic enclaves of the camp, the Japanese-American internees were forced to rely on their abilities to 'remake places of survival' through the production of material culture. Dusselier therefore views the ability to produce material culture, whether pieces of furniture or simple decorative items, 'as a tool of recuperating a sense of place'.<sup>99</sup>

In Dusselier's example, it is the process of creative expression, as much as the affect of the objects themselves, that imbue the camp with meaning. The process by which individuals construct space through creative expression is often referred to as 'creative placemaking', a term coined by Anne Markusen and Anne Gadwa Nicodemus to describe the way that participation in art and cultural activities can provide the stimulus for urban regeneration.<sup>100</sup> Louise C. Platt explores the way in which the 'everyday creativity' of knitters in fact constitutes an important act of placemaking, by creating unique pieces knitters are both moulding a sense of self and attachment to place.<sup>101</sup> In this sense, it is the act of creating as much as it is the materiality of the finished piece that identifies people with places.

The placemaking potential of these typically mundane activities has opened new avenues for thinking about material culture – in its broadest sense – as an active agent in the production of locality. Within the field of military history, the relationship between materiality, place and affect has been relatively unexplored, although not completely ignored. Historian Quintin Colville, for example, has researched the expression of corporate domesticity by Royal Naval officers in the design and furnishing of their ship quarters during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>102</sup> Through the appropriation of a range of governing qualities, the naval home transmitted the masculine ideals of the upper class, while also

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<sup>97</sup> Euan McKay, "Souvenirs of Internment: Camp Newspapers as a Tangible Record of a Forgotten Experience" in *Cultural Heritage and Prisoners of War* (London: Routledge, 2012); Med Parkes, 'Tins, Tubes and Tenacity: Inventive Medicine in Camps in the Far East', *Cultural Heritage and Prisoners of War*.

<sup>98</sup> Jane Dusselier, "The Arts of Survival: Remaking the Inside Spaces of Japanese American Concentration Camps," in Carr and Mytum (Eds.), *Cultural Heritage and Prisoners of War: Creativity behind Barbed Wire* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 94.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid*

<sup>100</sup> Cara Courage and Anita McKeown, *Creative Placemaking: Research, Theory and Practice*. (New York: Routledge, 2018)

<sup>101</sup> Louise C. Platt, "Crafting Place: Women's Everyday Creativity in Placemaking Processes," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* Vol. 22, No.3 (2017), 362–377.

<sup>102</sup> Quintin Colville, "Corporate Domesticity and Idealised Masculinity: Royal Naval Officers and their Shipboard Homes, 1918–39," *Gender & History* No. 21 (2009), 513.

helping to mould its occupants to meet these standards.<sup>103</sup> Recent anthropological and psychoanalytical approaches to the notion of 'home' have gone some way to remedying the traditional view of twentieth century battlefields as cratered, barren landscapes completely disconnected from the idea of home.<sup>104</sup> In *The Secret Battle*, historian Michael Roper uses a Freudian psychoanalytical framework to argue that memories of family life - prompted by care packages, letters and photographs from loved ones - played a key role in sustaining the morale of the British Expeditionary Force during the First World War.<sup>105</sup> According to Roper, it was through this exchange of 'the stuff of home' that soldiers were able to cope with their hostile surroundings. The significance of home in the trenches is further explored by Ross Wilson, who challenges the perception of the Western Front as a 'barbaric, tortuous arena' by suggesting that British soldiers found unique meaning in the materiality of the war; a unique perspective of their surroundings that 'enabled troops to understand the violent, unpredictable and alien scenes they witnessed and inhabited'.<sup>106</sup>

Derwin Gregory's article on vernacular memorialisation in the Eighth Air Force analyses the excavation of a group of identification 'dog' tags at Thorpe Abbots, concluding that the tags were buried as an act of remembrance.<sup>107</sup> The recognition of the complex relationship between soldiers and their lived environment has gone some way to reframing the topography of war from a purely strategic landscape defined solely by the military interactions that took place there, into a series of distinctive places invested with emotions that continue to resonate long after the conflict has ended. The transformation is expressed in the musings of Robert S Arbib, who concluded in his 1946 memoir that 'during these two years I had seen many things to remember, a few things to criticize, a lot to admire, and some things to love...And just as we had been reluctant to leave America then, we were reluctant now to say good-bye to England, where we had, in army parlance, 'found a home'.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>104</sup> Ross J. Wilson, *Landscapes of the Western Front: Materiality during the Great War* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *Combattre: Une Anthropologie Historique de La Guerre Moderne, XIXe-XXIe Siècle*. Les Livres Du Nouveau Monde, (Paris: Seuil, 2008).

<sup>105</sup> Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2009).

<sup>106</sup> Wilson, *Landscapes of the Western Front*, 1.

<sup>107</sup> Derwin Gregory, "Vernacular memorialization in the military: personal acts of remembrance at RAF Thorpe Abbots", *Journal of Conflict Archaeology* Vol.14, No.2-3 (2019), 83-98.

<sup>108</sup> Robert S. Arbib Jr, *Here We Are Together: The Notebook of an American Soldier in Britain* (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1946), 207.

## Affective Atmospheres

One of the strands of NRT research that is of particular interest to this thesis is the idea of affective atmospheres, defined by Anderson as collective affects ‘that occur *before* and *alongside* the formation of, *across* human and non-human materialities, and *in-between* subject/object distinctions’.<sup>109</sup> The oppositional nature of atmospheres accounts for the ambiguity of their generation and transmission, according to Anderson, who uses the example of morale as evidence of how indeterminate and amorphous collective affects can permeate every aspect of everyday life, a trait which opens up the potential for them to be controlled, contrived and targeted.<sup>110</sup>

Despite their ineffability, atmospheres are an inescapable feature of the lived experience. Writing about the transmission of these collective affects, Theresa Brennan encourages us to remember a time when we have walked into a room and ‘felt the atmosphere’.<sup>111</sup> While Brennan asserts that these affects are pre-personal and contagious, moving from body to body, she concedes the ‘impression’ they make depends on our own affective states at the time of impact. ‘If I feel anxiety when I enter the room, then that will influence what I perceive or receive by way of an impression’, Brennan explains.<sup>112</sup> The contagious nature of anxiety as a feeling is expanded on by Ahmed, who argues that anxiety ‘is sticky: rather like velcro, it tends to pick up whatever comes near’.<sup>113</sup> Turning back to Pecyk’s description of the briefing room at the beginning of this thesis, the anxiety certainly seems to have an adhesive quality, attaching itself to the map, the briefing room, and the people inside. But where does this anxiety originate from? While Brennan, along with other theorists such as Tomkins and Anderson, might adopt an ‘outside in’ stance, arguing that affects get into the body through pheromones and unconscious imitation, there are others, including Ahmed, who argue that atmospheres are produced by the entwinement of semiosis and affect.

Providing a metaphorical accompaniment to the stickiness of affect, and the importance of semiosis in its production, is Edward Casey’s notion of ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ places.<sup>114</sup> For Casey, thin places lack affective connections that might mark the space as being distinctive. To use Appadurai’s terminology, thin places can be interpreted as spaces where locality, as a structure of feeling, has either not emerged or has been allowed to erode. Thick places, on the other hand, can be viewed as an

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<sup>109</sup> Ben Anderson, “Affective Atmospheres” in *Emotion, Space and Society*, No. 2 (2009), 77.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid*

<sup>111</sup> Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>112</sup> Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, 6.

<sup>113</sup> Sara Ahmed, “Happy Objects” in Berlant, Gregg, Massumi, Probyn and Seigworth (Eds.) *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 36.

<sup>114</sup> Edward S. Casey, “Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does It Mean to Be in the Place-World?”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* Vol. 91 No. 4 (2001), 683–93.

assemblage of affect, practice and habit, which combine to produce layers of meaning.<sup>115</sup> This thickening process has been expanded on by Edensor, who observes how the atmosphere of a football match is made thick by an assemblage of events on the pitch, fan culture and other vectors, ranging from weather, league position and light.<sup>116</sup> Fans, who have become attuned to the stadium through seasons spent watching the team, have devised strategies to manipulate the intensity of the atmosphere. Historical contexts, embedded in the practice of familiar match-day routines, are therefore integral to generating a sense of belonging among the fans, which they articulate as a sense of being at home.<sup>117</sup>

Like Edensor, anthropologist Yael Navaro stresses the role of embodied histories in attuning individuals to the affectivity of their environment. Navaro, whose ethnographic work focuses on the emotive energies that emerge from the materiality of the post-war landscapes of Cyprus, explores the significance of subjectivity in the production and processing of affect.<sup>118</sup> Focusing on the theoretical question of whether affect is discharged from subjectivity or from objects and places, Navaro comes to the conclusion that human interiority and the exterior world are inextricably linked; an entwinement that produces emotive charges, which are articulated by those Turkish-Cypriots living among Greek-Cypriot ruins as melancholia. Another compelling idea to emerge from Navaro's work is the role of the phantasmatic in producing 'make-believe' spaces. Taking her cue from Derridean 'hauntology', Navaro asserts that the host-like presences that inhabit the island project themselves onto the material places and objects of Northern Cyprus, transmitting affect to the people who interact with them.<sup>119</sup> The role that spectrality and subjectivity plays in the production of affective atmospheres will be explored in Chapter Two of this thesis, which examines how the 'haunted' landscape of Thorpe Abbots - an assemblage of ruined airfield buildings, silent countryside, personal objects of the dead and phantasmatic interpretation - produces affects capable of disjuncting time and place. The processing of these affects as canny (homely) or uncanny (unhomely), to borrow Freudian terminology, emerges from the interiority of the individual and their relationality to Thorpe Abbots.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> *ibid*

<sup>116</sup> Tim Edensor, "Producing atmospheres at the match: Fan cultures, commercialisation and mood management in English football", *Emotion, Space and Society* No.15 (2014), 1.

<sup>117</sup> *ibid*

<sup>118</sup> Yael Navaro-Yashin, "Affective Spaces, Melancholic Objects: Ruination and the Production of Anthropological Knowledge", *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* Vol.15, No.1 (2009), 5.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid*

<sup>120</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, (London: Penguin UK, 2003).



There is no denying that the turn to affect has resulted in a literature plagued by inconsistencies, vagueness, and contradictions.<sup>121</sup> However, it has also produced enlightening new ways of thinking about the relationship between people and places, and the ability of bodies (human and non-human) to move and be moved, both historically and in the present.

### Conflict Archaeology and Studies of Material Culture

Deployed soldiers have relied on temporary bases for shelter, protection, and territorial consolidation since the beginning of organised warfare. These bounded spaces have taken various forms across every conceivable type of terrain, from the bivouac ‘marching-camps’ of the Roman army to the highly sophisticated British and American Forward Operating Bases of the war in Afghanistan. Intended as temporary fortifications, the encampments are usually dismantled, destroyed, or abandoned as soon as their purpose has been served.

Despite the camps’ impermanence, the every-day life of their inhabitants has increasingly been a subject of research in the field of conflict archaeology; a discipline that aims to ‘emphasize the complex social relationships that lie behind warfare and its practice’.<sup>122</sup> One of the pioneers of the study of the lived experience of fortress dwellers was landscape archaeologist Chris Taylor, whose analysis of the earthworks of Bodiam Castle in Sussex played an influential role in transforming the perception of castles from utilitarian fortresses to private residences.<sup>123</sup> The consideration of how fortified encampments are experienced by their occupants has offered new perspectives on military history, encouraging a ‘bottom-up’ study of war’s combatants.<sup>124</sup> Closer to the subject matter of this thesis is the work of Robert Liddiard, who has explored the military landscapes of East Anglia as fluid and constantly-evolving topographies. In *A Very Dangerous Locality*, Liddiard and Sims adopt an interdisciplinary methodology, involving the analysis of physical remains, archival documents, oral history, and artistic representations, to chronicle the transformation of Suffolk’s coastal landscape during the Second World War.

Recent case studies on the domestic spaces of militarised sites have included the work of Hadley on the winter camps of the Viking Great Army; Geer, Orr, and Reeves on military encampments during the Civil War period; and Seitsonen, who explores themes of dislocation and displacement through the archaeological study of a remote Second World War German military camp in Finnish Lapland.

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<sup>121</sup> M. Bille, & K. Simonsen, “Atmospheric Practices: On Affecting and Being Affected”, *Space and Culture* Vol.24, No.2 (2021), 295–309.

<sup>122</sup> John Carman, *Archaeologies of Conflict* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 95.

<sup>123</sup> Michael Buser, “The Time Is out of Joint: Atmosphere and Hauntology at Bodiam Castle”, *Emotion, Space and Society* Vol. 25 (2017), 5.

<sup>124</sup> Carman, *Archaeologies of Conflict*, 95.

Conflict archaeology has also extended to the material remains of anti-militarisation movements, such as Schofield's work on the Greenham Common and Nevada Peace Camps, which seeks to unearth an 'archaeology of protest'.<sup>125</sup> The materiality of subversion has also been addressed in Harold Mytum and Gilly Carr's extensive work on Prisoner of War camps, with focus on how internees negotiated, experienced and demarcated the spaces of the camps through creativity and home-making practices.<sup>126</sup>

This latter case study demonstrates the intertwining of conflict archaeology, material culture studies and historical anthropology, particularly in the presentation of military establishments as communities populated by local subjects with the agency to effect the spaces they inhabit.<sup>127</sup> As Schofield and Harrison argue, the relationship between contemporary archaeology and cultural anthropology is strengthened by both fields' emphasis on material culture and their interest in the historical dimensions of human societies.<sup>128</sup> The interdisciplinary nature of conflict archaeology, within which this thesis situates itself, is emphasised by Pearson, Coates and Coles' definition of 'militarized landscapes' as 'material and cultural sites that have been partially or fully mobilized to achieve military aims'.<sup>129</sup> The cultural and social dimensions of militarized landscapes were observed by the notable American geographer J. B. Jackson, who drew from his own experiences as an officer in Europe during the Second World War. According to Jackson, 'armies do more than destroy, they create an order of their own'.<sup>130</sup> By identifying, negotiating and demarcating the landscape, Jackson and his comrades 'proved that we had been initiated into a group secret, that we were bona fide members of the military society'.<sup>131</sup> Rather than viewing militarized landscapes as a theatre where the drama of war is played out, the soldiers' surroundings becomes a character in its own right. Understanding how these assembled bodies interact on the stage is vital to understanding how connections between people and places are formed. As Jackson suggests, physical and emotional encounters between soldiers and their surroundings are important actions in the production of collective identity, which is in turn tangibly and intangibly inscribed onto the landscapes in which they occur.

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<sup>125</sup> Schofield, J. "Peace Site: An archaeology of protest at Greenham Common airbase", *British Archaeology*, 104 (209), 44-49.

<sup>126</sup> Gilly Carr and Harold Mytum, *Prisoners of War: Archaeology, Memory, and Heritage of 19th- and 20th-Century Mass Internment* (New York, NY: Springer New York, 2013), 195.

<sup>127</sup> Carman, *Archaeologies of Conflict*, 89.; Adrian and Ian Haynes (Eds.) "The Roman army as a community", *Journal of Roman Archaeology supplementary series 34* (1999), 7-14.

<sup>128</sup> Rodney Harrison, and John Schofield, *After Modernity : Archaeological Approaches to the Contemporary Past* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2010), 90.

<sup>129</sup> Pearson, Coates & Cole (Eds.), *Militarized Landscapes*, 1,

<sup>130</sup> John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *The necessity for ruins, and other topics*. (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 14.

<sup>131</sup> *ibid*

The idea that residues of meaning cling to objects and spaces of war more persistently than they do to peacetime materiality has been a recurring theme in writings about the First World War. For Nicholas J. Saunders, ‘the objects of war, like any artefacts, embody a diversity – but perhaps a unique intensity – of individual, social and cultural ideas and experiences’.<sup>132</sup> Saunders argues that the men’s experiences of the conflict were so invested in the materiality of the war that the Western Front has become more than just a backdrop for the conflict, but a living landscape onto which layers of meaning have accumulated. As such, these spaces have the potential to evoke a myriad of memories and emotions depending on who is experiencing them. This transformative power is harnessed in the surviving trench art, the creation of which saw an object of war transformed into a ‘potent memory object’.<sup>133</sup> Through this process, the object becomes a mnemonic for what has been destroyed (the human body) and in doing so ‘the memory of the body is replaced by the memory of the object’.<sup>134</sup> This approach focuses on the symbolic value of materiel of war, over the object’s intrinsic materiality. The notion of the object as a surrogate for another body is in contrast to theoretical debates in material culture studies, particularly those arguments made by Daniel Miller and his contemporaries at UCL in the late 1980s. Miller’s work vividly demonstrates that objects do not simply reflect people’s lives and actions. Instead, objects should be studied in their own right, as a part of people’s life worlds. According to Miller, ‘an understanding of any social actions and relations... demands an understanding of material culture and vice-versa’.<sup>135</sup> In *Vibrant Matter*, the political theorist Jane Bennett moves the focus from the human experience of things to the things themselves. Bennett argues that all objects have ‘thing-power’: ‘the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle’.<sup>136</sup>

## Affective Practice in Heritage Studies

As Navaro’s research shows, affect holds enormous potential as an analytical lens in ethnography. Similarly, the study of affect at sites of memory, particularly those shaped by war, presents an opportunity within heritage studies to interrogate not just what heritage and commemorative sites mean, but what they might do to those who visit them on an emotional scale.<sup>137</sup> The increasing presence of affect in heritage and museum studies has emerged in response to what Laurajane Smith

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<sup>132</sup> Nicholas J. Saunders, *Trench Art* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2011), 1.

<sup>133</sup> Saunders, *Trench Art*, 1.

<sup>134</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1992), 133.

<sup>135</sup> Daniel Miller and Chris Tilley, “Editorial”, *Journal of Material Culture* Vol.11(1996), 6.

<sup>136</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 6.

<sup>137</sup> Emma Waterton, “Curating Affect: Exploring the Historical Geography–Heritage Studies Nexus at Sovereign Hill”, *Australian Geographer*, Vol.49, No.1 (2018), 222.

calls 'the elephant in the room' - the glaring lack of recognition for the role that affect and emotion play as 'essential constitutive elements of heritage making.'<sup>138</sup> In order to correct this deficit, Tolia-Kelly, Waterton and Watson have set out a three-point agenda for heritage researchers. The first objective is to highlight the affective connections we have with our past, the second is to explore the embodied experience of heritage, and the final concern is to acknowledge the 'rolling maelstroms of affect' (as described by Thrift) that are produced, circulated and articulated at heritage sites.<sup>139</sup>

One of the first steps in reconciling the notion of affect with the discursive and semiotic nature of heritage has been to move away from the idea of affect as a pre-personal, extra-discursive and autonomous excess that imbues spaces and hits bodies prior to sensemaking, as conceived by the likes of Massumi, Thrift and Brennan.<sup>140</sup> Rather than viewing emotion as the qualified cognitive product of affect, Wetherell and Smith have argued that the process of registering 'core' affect 'simultaneously weaves together with meaning-making to produce dynamic flows of feelings, experience and actions that are culturally recognisable (and communicable to oneself and others) as affect and emotion'.<sup>141</sup> In short, the simultaneous entanglements of affect with the subjective process of meaning-making organise what Wetherell calls the 'embodied change', which in turn shapes how affect is articulated and circulated.<sup>142</sup>

One of the most compelling and productive approaches to emerge from the engagement of heritage studies with affect and emotion is the idea of affective practice, as proposed by Margaret Wetherell. Affective practice draws on Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus' as 'embodied history' to explore how social history is inscribed onto the body of the social actor through repeated practice. Focusing on the types of affects that are regular, relatively predictable and bound up in social relations, such as those produced at a national memorial service for instance, Wetherell argues that affective practices 'wear what could be described as grooves or ruts in people's bodies and mind, just as walking particular routes over the grass year after year produces new paths'.<sup>143</sup> The opportunities for assessing how individuals and communities engage with the present has been further explored

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<sup>138</sup> Laurajayne Smith and Emma E. Waterton, *Heritage, Communities and Archaeology* (London: Duckworth, 2009), 49.

<sup>139</sup> Divya P. Tolia-Kelly, Emma Waterton, and Steve Watson, *Heritage, Affect and Emotion: Politics, Practices and Infrastructures*, (London: Routledge, 2016), 1.

<sup>140</sup> "The future of affect theory: An interview with Margaret Wetherell", Margaret Wetherell and David Beer, <https://www.theoryculturesociety.org/blog/the-future-of-affect-theory-an-interview-with-margaret-wetherell> (accessed 18 February 2021).

<sup>141</sup> Smith, Wetherell & Campbell, *Emotion, Affective Practices, and the Past in the Present* (London: Routledge, 2018), 4.

<sup>142</sup> "The future of affect theory: An interview with Margaret Wetherell", Margaret Wetherell and David Beer.

<sup>143</sup> Smith, Wetherell, Campbell, *Heritage, Affect and Emotion*, 28.

through the idea of ‘affective heritage practices’, which aim to assess how social worlds, histories and ‘feeling actors’ are built and organised through the performance of heritage.<sup>144</sup> Examples of affective heritage practices range from the choreographed bodily motions and emotions of an annual memorial service to the collapse of temporal boundaries in historical re-enactment, and the empathetic emotions that this engagement with the past produces. Engaging with the idea of practice, Smith has called the act of conserving heritage a type of ‘social practice’ that draws people into networks that are in turn maintained and recreated through heritage activities:

*‘The product of the consequences of heritage activities are the emotions, experiences and memories of them that they create... What is also created, and indeed continually recreated, are social networks and the historical and cultural narratives that underpin these binding relations’.*<sup>145</sup>

Of particular interest to this thesis is the way in which these heritage practices contribute to the production and maintenance of affective connections to place. In explaining how objects can become ‘sticky’ with affect over time, Ahmed argues that ‘the association between objects and affects is preserved through habit’.<sup>146</sup> While affective practice can feel like a given, like locality, it can also be something that is ‘actively created and needs work to sustain’, according to Wetherell.<sup>147</sup> In this thesis I will argue that the affective connections established by members of the Eighth Air Force have been sustained and transmitted intergenerationally through a range of affective heritage practices. In the case of the 100th Bomb Group, these have included the symbolic and structured ‘return’ of people and objects from the US to Thorpe Abbots, the intergenerational participation of veterans and their families in reunions, and the repair and restoration of the materiel of the base by British volunteers. These practices, which over time have become embedded into the social architecture of the bomb groups, generate affect and emotion for the social actors who participate in them.

But to what extent can affect be curated and engineered so that it can be felt by those uninitiated in the performance of the affective practices described above? Museum studies is increasingly engaging with the notion that affects and emotions can be curated through design and interpretation. Using practice-based research at Australian memorial museums, McKernan and McLeod argue that visitors are inducted into affective practices of war commemoration through multi-sensory exhibition spaces that both reinforce and challenge accepted ideas about war.<sup>148</sup> Buser goes one step further in suggesting that time and place can be made to feel ‘out of joint’ through the employment of ‘ghosts’

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<sup>144</sup> Smith, Wetherell, Campbell, *Heritage, Affect and Emotion*, 30.

<sup>145</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 3.

<sup>146</sup> Sara Ahmed, “Happy Objects” in (Eds.) Berlant, Gregg, Massumi, Probyn and Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader*, (Duke University Press, 2010), 35.

<sup>147</sup> Margaret Wetherell, *Affect and Emotion: A New Social Science Understanding*, (SAGE, 2012), 142.

<sup>148</sup> Smith, Wetherell & Campbell, *Heritage, Affect and Emotion*, 85.

in interactive displays at Bodiam Castle.<sup>149</sup> These unsettling hauntological strategies are used to stage affective atmospheres, which emerge from visitor's interactions with the materiality of the site.<sup>150</sup> One of the most convincing arguments is archaeologist Yannis Hamilakis' observations of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C. Questioning why the memorial has such an 'immense affective impact' on those who visit it, he concludes that the site's affectivity derives from its 'multi-sensorial qualities, and its ability to structure a participatory, trans-corporeal landscape'.<sup>151</sup> It is in the silence and invisibility of the work, contrasted against the monumentalism found elsewhere on the Mall, that evokes the absent presences of those lost who have been lost. By making visitors walk around the monument through the ordering of names by the date they were killed rather than in alphabetical order, they are encouraged to walk through the war's chronology. Indeed, the materiality of the monument – reflective black granite – acts as a portal into another time.<sup>152</sup> Building on Hamilakis' notion that memorials can disrupt time and space through their materiality and form, Chapter Two will explore how the layout of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Museum orientates visitors towards the past.

Outside of heritage studies, there has been growing interest in how affective encounters can be engineered into the material and immaterial fabric of everyday life through placemaking. The expectation that cities should 'buzz' has made building affective infrastructure akin to laying pipes and cables, according to Thrift.<sup>153</sup> However, there is an increasing understanding within place making literature that cities already contain much of this 'groundwork' in the form of affective connections to the historic environment developed through every-day locality producing practices. Research conducted by Historic England concluded that adults who live in areas with more historic buildings and spaces are likely to have a stronger sense of place, as are those individuals who have an interest in their local historic environment.<sup>154</sup> Generating and maintaining affective connections to the past therefore offers a way for developers and urban planners to create 'thick' places. As Jones and Evans point out, this process must start with an attempt to capture and comprehend the embodied connections people have with places. It is only by understanding the nature of these affective connections that planners can develop regeneration schemes that mean something to the people who reside there.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Buser, "The Time Is out of Joint: Atmosphere and Hauntology at Bodiam Castle", 5.

<sup>150</sup> *ibid*

<sup>151</sup> Yannis Hamilakis, *Archaeology and the Senses: Human Experience, Memory, and Affect* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 194.

<sup>152</sup> *ibid*

<sup>153</sup> Nigel Thrift, 'The "Sentient" City and What It May Portend', *Big Data & Society* Vol.1, No.1 (2009), 58.

<sup>154</sup> English Heritage, *Heritage Counts* (English Heritage, 2009), 1.

<sup>155</sup> Phil Jones and James Evans, "Rescue Geography: Place Making, Affect and Regeneration", *Urban Studies* Vol. 49, No.11, 2316.

As this literature review has shown, the historiography relating to the air war has been dominated by discussion of the strategic consequences of the bombing campaign, without due academic consideration of the social, material, and cultural impact of the 'Friendly Invasion' on the East Anglian landscape. Even more lacking is an understanding of the bases as individual communities, constituted of complex networks of human and non-human bodies that were shaped around the unique circumstances of aerial combat. While the work of Sam Edwards had been pivotal in introducing the notion of the bases as sites invested with a complex web of meanings, this thesis will dig deeper into the emotional relationships formed between airmen and their English bases to understand why these sites have become transmitters of affect. As the interdisciplinary nature of this literature review has indicated, this thesis will draw on current debates within History, Anthropology, Heritage Studies, Geography and Conflict Archaeology to interrogate how the past social lives of these air bases have shaped their materiality in the present.

## Chapter Two: Anticipation and affect at Shipdham

### Introduction

*'A flier is a highly trained, highly skilled, expensive and valuable war machine. He is also a human being with a sensitive set of nerves, muscles and emotions. To most fliers, life in this war is a strange, chaotic interlude. The whole experience is uncomfortable and artificial, with no relation to any life that went before. This is obviously true of actual combat, with all of its horrifying experiences: it is equally true of the unspectacular daily routine— in barracks and muddy fields, or on leave in an unfamiliar country among strangers. In this unreal world, a man comes to think of his plane, his flying mates and his own skill of endurance as the only familiar elements he has to hold on to. He attaches a tremendous importance to them, and suffers when anything happens to upset them.'*

21 Jan 1944 - Letter from Miss Graves, Supervisor of Rest Homes, ARC to Mr Gibson, retelling observations by Capt. David Wright, a psychiatric consultant for the Eighth Air Force<sup>156</sup>

Barbara Graves, the Red Cross supervisor who relayed the observations of Eighth Air Force psychiatrist Dr David Wright, did so as a means of emphasising the tremendous psychological benefit that her American Red Cross Rest Homes were having on the morale of the air crew who had visited them since their establishment in the Spring of 1943. The Rest Homes, situated in large English country houses and hotels, were set up to provide an antithesis to the emotionally fraught experience of air combat and the anxiety-laden atmosphere of the air base. According to Dr Wright, the Red Cross had been so successful in its task of emotionally fortifying fliers against the mental strain of air warfare because it had 'established the character of the homes as homes', crafting a domesticated atmosphere of civility that stripped the airman of the heightened emotional intensity of the war machine and made him an individual again with 'a renewed sense of belonging to a world they knew before, in which familiar things and people still exist for them'.<sup>157</sup> The rest homes provided something that the air bases of the Eighth Air Force were lacking in their first few months of operation - the affect of home.

Dr Wright's conclusions, reached after months of observations and interviews with Eighth Air Force personnel, present bomber stations in 1943 as emotionally complex and fragile communities, distinct from infantry units, where the ebbs and flows of morale were more tightly bound to the physical sensations of ground warfare. Embodied encounters with mud, blood and sweat on the battlefields

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<sup>156</sup> "American Red Cross and 8th USAAF Combat Rest Homes for Combat Fliers, March 1942-May 1945", *Eighth Air Force Archive, Eberley Special Collections, Penn State University*.

<sup>157</sup> *ibid*



of Italy, for example, were in stark contrast to the experiences of Eighth Air Force air crews, who spent their mornings fighting a faceless enemy a mile above ground, only to return to clean sheets and fine china by teatime. As one airman put it, life in the Eighth was like 'having one foot in heaven and the other in hell'.<sup>158</sup> As a 1945 article in *Army Talks* notes, 'It's hard to give the feeling of being tucked away in the peaceful English countryside and yet living at the heart of the aerial assault on Germany.'<sup>159</sup> For the bases' ground personnel, the adrenaline-pumping thrill of imminent danger was replaced with a set of other - no less dangerous - emotions: boredom, anxiety, and homesickness.<sup>160</sup> The mental toll of the bombing war was exacerbated by the physical attrition of the early months of the campaign. Of the original 27 crews assigned to the 44th Bomb Group (totalling 273 men), only 25 per cent completed their tour of duty (25 missions), the rest having either been killed, injured, or taken prisoner.<sup>161</sup>

The attitudes of Eighth Air Force psychiatrists, such as Wright, mark a dramatic shift in military medicine, away from viewing neurological breakdowns as the result of the patient's predisposed 'lack of moral fibre', but instead, as an emotional reaction to the extreme physical and mental stresses to which they were subjected.<sup>162</sup> Psychological research undertaken by the US military in the 1920s introduced the term 'anticipatory neuroses' to describe a disorder that 'results from a dread of some intolerable danger that is as yet not fully realised and that belongs to a probable future.'<sup>163</sup> The recognition of the affective threat posed by 'probable futures' speaks to the importance of temporality in both individual and collective experiences of Eighth Air Force communities.<sup>164</sup> For aircrew, the anticipation of flying a mission impacted on how the men related to their base and each other. The idea that Eighth Air Force bomb groups were united by this shared state of anticipation resonates with Rosenwein's notion of 'emotional communities', defined as social groups 'in which people adhere to the same norms of expression and value – or devalue – the same or related emotions.'<sup>165</sup> For historians of emotions, it is the attitudes that communities have towards certain

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<sup>158</sup> D.A. Lande, *From Somewhere in England*, (Airlife Publishing Ltd., 1991), 91.

<sup>159</sup> 'On Base: Striking Arm of the Eighth', *Army Talks for the Eighth Air Force*, Vol. 1. No. 3. 10<sup>th</sup> March 1945, p.3.

<sup>160</sup> Office of the Surgeon General, *Medical support of the Army Air Forces in World War II* (Department of Defense, 1955), 666.

<sup>161</sup> Jim Hamilton, *The Writing 69th: Civilian War Correspondents Accompany a U.S. Bombing Raid on Germany During World War II*, (United States: J. Hamilton, 1999), 57.

<sup>162</sup> Mark Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare: The Allied Aircrew Experience in the Second World War* (Studies in Air Power, 1995), Xii.

<sup>163</sup> Bartlett, *Psychology of the Soldier* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1927), 189.

<sup>164</sup> For a contemporary insight into the medical treatment of Eighth Air Force personnel, see Donald W. Hasting's *Psychiatric Experiences of the Eighth Air Force, First Year of Combat Flying* (1944) which includes the case studies of 60 crewmen who were labelled 'psychological failures'. Also see David G. Wright's *Observations on Combat Flying Personnel* (1945).

<sup>165</sup> Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Review Essay: Worrying about Emotions in History". *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 107, No. 3 (2002), 842.

affective states – what Stearns describe as ‘emotional norms’ - that reveal how communities are maintained.<sup>166</sup> Taking this argument one step further, William Reddy suggests that groups can be governed by ‘emotional regimes’, where certain emotions are suppressed and others are acknowledged and encouraged.<sup>167</sup> A historical example of one such regime, offered by Jan Plamper, is the attitude of soldiers of the First World War towards fear. Whereas personal accounts from conflicts of the nineteenth century rarely acknowledge the presence of fear, the arrival of total war - and with it the prevailing sense of powerlessness that arose from encounters with shells and gas - resulted in soldiers’ letters and diaries that are awash with terror.<sup>168</sup> In response to these shifting parameters, psychiatrists on both sides recognised, and even accepted, fear and the manifestation of its physical symptoms as ‘shell shock’.<sup>169</sup> The increased engagement of military historians with emotions has undoubtedly advanced the study of the experience of war. However, the term ‘emotions’ is conceptually problematic, not least because of its enmeshment with reasoning, which arguably makes their study one of cultural history and changing social, political, and cultural contexts.<sup>170</sup> ‘Affect’, I would argue, is a richer and more productive term when dealing with the complex relations between military personnel and the spaces they inhabit. Sara Ahmed’s notion of ‘affective economies’ offers an analytical tool for exploring how collective identity is formed through the circulation and distribution of affect. For Ahmed, affects emerge from the attachments and interactions between bodies, objects, or subjects.<sup>171</sup> Over time, affects can become stuck to certain subjects, changing how individuals align themselves with the collective. Ahmed, among others, has shown how right-wing politicians have utilised affective economies of hate to coat objects, constituting them as a ‘common threat’.<sup>172</sup> This argument could be extended to military communities, where the circulating affect of anticipation caused by the uncertainty of ‘probable futures’ sticks to the people and objects of the base, orientating them into an affective economy held together in anticipation.

The manifestation of this anticipation as anxiety and fear was actively recognised by the United States military during the Second World War. While the Nazi regime openly denounced the notion of soldierly fear, the United States military was taking concerted steps to understand the complexity of soldiers’ emotions, including the acceptance of anxiety as a natural human reaction to the

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<sup>166</sup> Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, “Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards”, *American Historical Review*, Vol.90, No.4 (1985).

<sup>167</sup> William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), XIII.

<sup>168</sup> Jan Plamper, “Fear”, *Encyclopedia 1914-1918*, <https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/fear> [accessed 27th September 2021].

<sup>169</sup> P. Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2002).

<sup>170</sup> R. Petri, “The idea of culture and the history of emotions”, *Historiein* Vol. 12 (2013), 22.

<sup>171</sup> Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 118.

<sup>172</sup> Sara Ahmed, “Affective Economies”, *Social Text*, Vol. 22, No. 2, (2004), 121.

extremes of war. As Hans Pols argues, ‘the astute management of soldiers’ emotions made them more efficient fighting men.’<sup>173</sup> Living conditions, casualty rates, camaraderie and opportunities for rest and recreation became vital considerations in the emotional health of the individual, and by extension, the morale of the bomb group as whole. Bomb groups’ home bases emerged as important settings for the management of the dangerous psychological effects of anticipation. Not only were they spaces where group bonding and identity formation could take place, but they were also venues for rest and recreation; practices deemed essential to the prevention and treatment of anxiety. Despite efforts to ground personnel in the present through the reassuring permanence of the airfield, over time the multiple temporalities of the base became ingrained into the very fabric of the airfield. The uncertainty of ‘probable futures’ manifested itself in murals depicting imagined post-war scenes, and the visceral image of stripped-down beds, denoting the fates of those who failed to return. Elsewhere on the base, a nostalgic past resonated in the present through the provision of familiar objects from ‘the world they knew before’ – domesticated interiors, familial relations, and familiar food – deployed in a bid to allay the ever-present weight of uncertainty. Shipdham can therefore be seen as a site where multiple trajectories entwined; temporal overlapping reflected in the complex and often contradictory materiality of the air base. As I will discuss in Chapter Two, it is these folds in the temporal fabric of the former airfields that reveal themselves when witnesses and visitors interact with the materiality of the site – absent presences in the assemblage articulated as ‘hauntings’. The purpose of this chapter, however, is to explore the physical and social construction of Shipdham, not as one continuous temporal narrative, but as a complex process of meaning-making that transcended spatial and temporal boundaries. I argue, for example, that the events taking place in the air, hundreds of miles away from the airfield, were just as influential in shaping the base community at Shipdham as the intentional acts of localisation carried out on the ground. Likewise, the affects generated by interactions with the materiality of the base were pivotal in dictating how crews handled the anxiety of flying combat missions.

The chapter will begin by providing a brief history of the 44th Bomb Group’s formation and demographics, before explaining why the unique experiences of combat defined the 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group as a locality held together in anticipation. Turning attention to how the ‘affect of home’ was deployed to counter the unruly emotions of anxiety and fear provoked by ‘uncertain futures’, I will explore how the group physically and socially adapted their new home at Shipdham by collectively claiming, mapping, and domesticating its spaces. The final section of the chapter will argue that an idealised notion of ‘home’ was reproduced and transmitted through food, recreation, and letter writing.

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<sup>173</sup> H. Pols, “War neurosis, adjustment problems in veterans, and an ill nation: The disciplinary project of American psychiatry during and after World War II”, *Osiris* Vol. 22 (2007), 78.

## The Formation of the 44th Bomb Group

The activation of the 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group (BG) at MacDill Field on 15th January 1941 preceded the creation of the Eighth Air Force by more than a year, making the 44<sup>th</sup> BG one of the few Eighth Air Force units established prior to the United States' entry into the war. Despite the USA's official policy of isolation, its Air Corps – still an untested and understrength force in early 1941 – was seeking to move its focus from tactical to strategic bombing in reaction to the large-scale aerial campaigns being waged against British and German cities. The 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group initially comprised a skeleton cadre of four officers and ten enlisted men tasked with the job of recruiting and training new personnel in the science of strategic bombing. By April 1941, the 44<sup>th</sup> BG had bolstered its ranks to 200 personnel, including a small ground crew contingent. After completing basic training, air crew were sent to specialist training schools to hone their skills as pilots, navigators, radio operators, and gunners. As training diversified, so too did the Group's structure. Three Bomb Squadrons (numbered 66<sup>th</sup>, 67<sup>th</sup> and 68<sup>th</sup>) emerged, each with their own commanders and personnel. In February 1942, the 44<sup>th</sup> was one of two established bomber groups to be assigned to the newly-activated Eighth Air Force. However, the 44<sup>th</sup> would not be among the first groups to achieve combat status, much to the disappointment of its commanders. No sooner had the Group's strength reached 126 officers and 1,500 enlisted men in Spring 1942, it was swiftly reduced by almost half due to the transfer of personnel to other Eighth Air Force groups.<sup>174</sup> The fortunes of the Group were to change in July 1942 when it received orders to transfer to Will Rogers Field, Oklahoma, to prepare for overseas deployment. By this time, the Eighth Air Force had carried out its first bombing missions from air bases in England and was rapidly building up its strength in the European Theatre.<sup>175</sup> At Will Rogers, the 44<sup>th</sup> entered an intense training period focused on formational flying and navigation; skills which would be vital to the completion of successful bombing missions. However, the Group's progress was less than satisfactory in the eyes of one Air Force Colonel, who reportedly remarked that 'he had never seen such a bunch of eightballs in his entire military career'.<sup>176</sup> As told in the Group's own historical accounts, this derision - aimed at the perceived incompetence and misfortune of the Group – was not shrugged off, but actively embraced by the 44<sup>th</sup>. Before leaving for England, the Group adopted the nickname 'The Flying Eightballs' and designed an insignia featuring a cartoon pool billiard with a bomb tail fin, nose cone and wings. This distinctive

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<sup>174</sup> Steve Adams and Ron Mackay, *The 44th Bomb Group in World War II: The "Flying- Eight-Balls" Over Europe in the B-24* (PA: Schiffer Military History, 2003), 11.

<sup>175</sup> *ibid*

<sup>176</sup> Adams & Mackay, *The 44th Bomb Group in World War II*, 13.

identifying mark was painted on each of the Group's Liberators. While the practice of nose cone painting, commonly referred to as 'nose art', would become an important part of the visual culture of the Eighth Air Force, the 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group was unique in its decision to brand every one of its aircraft with the group's insignia. Despite its uncertain early months, by the time the air crews touched down in England in late September 1942, the group had gone to unusual steps to cement its fledgling identity in anticipation for its first taste of combat.

A glance at the diverse demographics of the 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group helps to explain why establishing a collective identity was deemed to be so important by the unit's commanding officers. Statistician Mara Truslow has analysed the available enlistment data for the flying personnel of the 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. This compilation of data offers an unparalleled insight into the demographics of the combat community that emerged at Shipdham.<sup>177</sup> One of the most striking statistics is the age of the enlistees. Of the 2,665 records examined (accounting for just over fifty per cent of the 4,903 combat personnel who served in the 44<sup>th</sup>), almost half (46 per cent) were aged between eighteen and twenty-one. These young men were educated at a level above the average American; a reflection of the intelligence and aptitude tests that potential aircrew were required to take to enter the service.<sup>178</sup>

As with most Eighth Air Force bomb groups, the unit was mainly comprised of civilian soldiers, who had signed up for the Army Air Force following the United States' entry into the war. While most personnel enlisted in the USAAF straight from high school or college, the occupations of those who were in employment represent every stratum of American society. The occupations ranged from office clerks and salesmen to tinsmiths and mechanics. Astonishingly, the number one listed occupation among flight crew was actor.<sup>179</sup> In fact, there were five more stage performers in the flying contingent of the 44<sup>th</sup> than there were farmhands. Through the feats of First World War aces and the celebrity of interwar aviators, flying had garnered an elite and glamorous status, especially compared to the perceived drudgery of life in the infantry; a reputation cemented by the enlistment of Hollywood greats, including James Stewart and Clark Gable, into the ranks of the Eighth Air Force. The supposed glamour of the Army Air Force drew volunteers from every state of the union, across the historic north-south political boundaries.

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<sup>177</sup> Mara Truslow, "44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Data Dashboard", [https://datastudio.google.com/u/0/reporting/1hIZHajwShFth\\_FQQaHM5B\\_h5i8SPOD8-/page/2M82](https://datastudio.google.com/u/0/reporting/1hIZHajwShFth_FQQaHM5B_h5i8SPOD8-/page/2M82) [accessed 12<sup>th</sup> September 2021].

<sup>178</sup> For aspiring officers, recruiters initially required at least two years of college education. The college qualification was later dropped in favour of an aviation cadet qualifying examination. Source: Wells (1995), 6-7. Sixty-eight per cent had graduated high school at the time of enlistment, considerably higher than the national average of fifty-one per cent recorded in the year 1941-42. Source: Mara Truslow, "44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Data Dashboard".

<sup>179</sup> *ibid*

Another characteristic of the 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group's flying contingent was its racial homogeneity. While some Asian-Americans, Latin Americans, and Native Americans were represented in Eighth Air Force air crews, the US Army's segregationist policies (based on the discriminatory 1925 War College report) prevented Black Americans from serving alongside white personnel in combat roles. It is important to note, however, that Black Americans played a vital and often overlooked role in the Eighth Air Force's operations in England, particularly in the construction of airfields and the transportation of munitions. While the historical lens has typically focused on the experience of flying personnel, it is also important to remember that a large proportion of the 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group's cohort were in fact ground crew, trained to carry out any number of duties in support of the group's combat activities, from administration and baking, to flying control and mechanical engineering.

It is also important to note that while the 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group was an exclusively male unit, the base at Shipdham was by no means a male-only environment. As I will discuss later in the chapter, a handful of female American Red Cross staff lived and worked on the base, while British women were frequent visitors onto the station in auxiliary and social capacities. At any one time, approximately 3,000 personnel lived and worked at Shipdham – a number that eclipsed the population of the nearby village from which the base took its name. This community was in constant flux, with casualties, tour completions, and replacements meaning that the time that an airman spent at the base could range from a few weeks to over two years. Overall, it is estimated that 7,000 personnel were stationed at Shipdham at some point between 1942 and 1945.<sup>180</sup> As with the differing experiences of ground crew and air crew, it is important to note that the experiences of personnel arriving at Shipdham in early 1945 would have been different to those of the men who first occupied the base in Autumn 1942. As historian Russell Strong noted, those who flew in late 1942 and early 1943 fought a very different war from those who came later.<sup>181</sup> Chronology therefore plays an important role when analysing and contextualising the recorded experiences of 44<sup>th</sup> BG personnel. However, it is also important to mention that there is no evidence to suggest that the emotional experience of fliers significantly changed over the course of the war. If anything, the physical manifestation of anticipation – fear and anxiety – was worse for those joining the fight in the later stages of the war, than those who arrived with the group in 1942, not least because replacement fliers had been made well aware of the risks of combat flying.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> "US Veterans on nostalgia trip", *Diss Express*, Friday 16 October 1987

<sup>181</sup> Russell Strong, *First Over Germany: A History of the 306th Bombardment Group* (NC, Hunter Publishing, 1982).

<sup>182</sup> A USAAF study found that 59 per cent of Enlisted Men in combat crews flying in the final months of the war felt fear on every mission, compared to 42 per cent of men who carried out their missions in 1943 and 1945.

## The affective anticipation of air combat

While it is the affective community which formed on the ground at Shipdham that provides the focus for this chapter, it was nevertheless the events that took place a mile above occupied Europe that shaped the way that personnel related to each other and to the locality of the base. This section will therefore begin by examining the anatomy of a typical bombing mission as a practice steeped in anticipation – from the nervous waiting of the pre-mission routine to the fearful anticipation of meeting enemy resistance during the raid. This practice, repeated each mission day, produced a locality defined by the threat of ‘uncertain futures’. It is unsurprising then that for those veterans who made the trip back to Shipdham in the post-war years, it was the sensory experience of preparing for a mission - the sights, sounds and smells - that returned most vividly. Forrest Clark remarked, ‘I can still see and hear the sound of the engines and even the smell of the gasoline...To me that is always going to be a part of England and I’m always going to be a part of England...I have left a little part of me back in England and Norwich and Shipdham.’<sup>183</sup> The mission routine, from the pre-dawn reveille to the post-mission brief, can be viewed as an affective practice of anticipation that wore grooves into the minds of the personnel on the base. As Flatley suggests, our spatial environments are imbued with the feelings and memories we have about certain places. Like physical maps, we navigate our world by these emotional guides, which in turn evolve through processes of palimpsestic rewriting.<sup>184</sup> At Shipdham, anticipation appears as a recurring emotion that accumulated on surfaces around the base, ingrained through practices that were repeated on every mission.

The intensity of this anticipation was undoubtedly amplified by the constant presence of death for those who chose to fly combat missions in the Eighth Air Force. The official history of the 44th Bomb Group, compiled during the war, relays the achievements of the combat unit during its time in England. Between November 7, 1942 and VE Day, the 44th flew 344 operational missions, dropping more than 18,000 tons of heavy explosives and incendiaries on targets in eleven countries.<sup>185</sup> This statistical evaluation of the group’s achievements does little to convey the human loss of the campaign, or indeed the emotional toll it placed on those who participated in it. Of the original twenty-seven crews (totalling 273 men) assigned to the 44th, only 25% completed their tour of duty. Although survival figures dramatically improved from Spring 1944, due in part to growing air

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The figures are similar for the Officers interviewed. Source USAAF, *Aviation Psychology Program Research Reports* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947), 126.

<sup>183</sup> “Recorded memoir of Forrest S. Clark [second of two recordings], part 2 of 2 (side B of cassette), MC 371/882/41/2. *American Library*.

<sup>184</sup> Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, MA University Press, 2009), 78.

<sup>185</sup> “44<sup>th</sup> BG History”, Reel B0137. *National Mighty Eighth Museum*.

superiority and the extended range of fighter escorts, the anticipation of combat - and the closeness of death - was nevertheless pivotal in shaping the character of both the emotional community and that of the locality produced at Shipdham.

For the aircrew who flew them and the ground crew who 'sweated them out', bombing missions served as an important framing device for wartime experiences. As Rosenwein suggests, emotional communities are in many ways 'textual communities,' in that they are created and reinforced by ideologies, teachings, and common presuppositions.<sup>186</sup> These discourses can act as 'regimes', owing to the disciplining function they often perform. This is particularly pertinent to the common experience of combat, the emotional intensities of which were in many ways regulated and structured by the vocabularies, norms and teachings woven into the fabric of the emotional community over time. A source of the regulatory apparatus of the emotional regime is the combat diary, which emerged as a method for individuals to record their experiences in England. Like veteran memoirs, which established a framework for recollections (as I will discuss in Chapter Two), combat diaries provided a structured template for processing and vocalising past combat experiences. A sense of anticipation and temporality is inscribed into the very format of these diary entries, which are typically headed with the mission number, date, and target for the day – a template which adds to the emotional suspense of the document, as the diarist nears the required 25 missions (later increased to 35) and the subsequent end of his tour of duty in England. Many of these diaries have retained their affective intensities, as the reader turns a page to reveal an abrupt end to the entries – the author never having returned from a mission. Indeed, for many airmen, it was the precariousness of their situation that provided the motivation to write down their combat experiences. Compared to the self-censoring (and literal censoring) of letters home, the diary offered a space to relay the emotional intensities of the day's events. Recording the experiences of his eighth mission in his combat diary, 44<sup>th</sup> pilot Rudy Santini frantically relayed the roller-coaster of emotions as he witnessed a nearby B-24 take a direct hit,

*'Well, the plane went into a spin, and bodies started falling out without parachutes. The men just didn't have time to put them on. It's terrible to see a man fall through space, I know, I've seen it. Well, to get that terrible sight out of my eyes, I looked off the right and down, and I saw two 109's pass by, just 1000' below us. I just prayed that they wouldn't come up and hit us. They didn't. Just about that time, Cronin, our radio man, was saying high mass on the flight deck. I was just about to join him, when I saw some fighters buzz past our plane. I looked at them and could hardly believe my eyes. They were our fighters. I was never so happy in all my life.'*<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the early Middle Ages* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2007), 25.

<sup>187</sup> Rudolph D. Santinini, "Copy of mission diary with related papers", MC 376/686, *American Library*.



From the despair of observing his comrades fall to their deaths, to the abject terror of spotting the enemy, and the final wave of euphoria at the arrival of US fighters, Santini experienced a full spectrum of emotions in the space of just a few minutes. However, it is the cycle of anxious anticipation, followed by the wave of relief, that provides the overarching narrative of the account. Watching aircrew fall through sky, Santini is separated from the reality of death by perspex, metal, and an expanse of sky. The affective image of the falling body is often associated with feelings of powerlessness for the witnesses. Writing about 9/11, Don DeLillo argued that the trauma of watching bodies fall from the towers made time feel scarcer and the future more uncertain, 'there is a sense of compression, plans made hurriedly, time forced and distorted.'<sup>188</sup> For Santini, the troubling affects of the image were remedied by feelings of camaraderie and patriotism, prompted by the arrival of US fighter planes. 'What an army we are together' concludes Santini, 'Oh there I go flag waving again'. In Santini's case, *esprit de corps* fostered on the ground and triggered by the sight of his comrades, served an important function in bolstering his morale against the troubling affects of combat. The very act of writing down these emotions after the mission can be viewed as a technique of the self, to reference Foucault, who argues that self-writing allows the author to integrate what he has learned, and process it into the creation of a new identity.<sup>189</sup> The practice of post-mission diary writing can therefore be viewed as a method of identity production and consolidation: in the case of Santini, helping him to process his feelings of fear, hope, and camaraderie.

## Uncertain Futures and the Pre-mission Routine

Despite the opportunities for elaboration afforded by the diary format, many documents divulge little more than the rudimentary facts of the mission. 44<sup>th</sup> BG gunner Donald Maule's diary ends abruptly with his 30<sup>th</sup> mission on 27 August 1944 and includes no other experiences of his time in England. It was not until a reunion in Norwich, forty years later, that Maule reopened the diary for the first time since completing his final mission.<sup>190</sup> Maule's account of his first experience of combat, which took place on D-Day, is particularly striking for its lack of emotive language:

*'We got up at 0200 and had breakfast. We had Fried eggs. After that we went to the briefing and were told this was D-Day and we were to go to the French coast and bomb. We left at 0630 and as we left the English coast, the water was full of boats going to France with our boys. When we*

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<sup>188</sup> Don DeLillo, "In the Ruins of the Future", 22 December 2001, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/dec/22/fiction.dondelillo>.

<sup>189</sup> P. Rabinow (Ed.), *Ethics, subjectivity and truth. The essential works of Foucault, 1954–1984. Volume 1* (New York, NY: The New Press), 209.

<sup>190</sup> "Diary and photographs relating to John Maule and his crew", MC 371/58, USF 1/7, *American Library*.

got there it was cloudy so we didn't drop any bombs because we didn't want to hit any of our own fellas. We got back at 11:45. We flew at 1500 feet. We had twelve 500lb bombs. No enemy fighters or flack.'<sup>191</sup>

Maule's matter of fact retelling of the events of D-Day - a mission that other fliers have described as the most spectacular experience of the war - exhibits the type of emotional detachment that is often associated with combat diaries.<sup>192</sup> One hypothesis offered by Spijkerman, Luminet and Vrints is that writing about conflict in a detached way allowed soldiers to come to terms with their experiences, without being overwhelmed by them.<sup>193</sup> Indeed, emotional detachment was deemed a requirement of survival by some fliers. After witnessing a plane go up in flames, William J. Mulholland wrote the following in his diary, 'When you see something like that you have to forget it and say to yourself, 'Their number was just up,' otherwise you'd be imagining everything about yourself, how you'd be burnt alive or blown to pieces.'<sup>194</sup> Rosenwein argues that these emotional 'silences' in textual sources are no less valuable than more emotionally charged texts. In fact, reading these silences can inform the researcher about the types of emotions that were embraced by the community, and those that were suppressed.<sup>195</sup> Writing about changes in Russian military psychology, historian Jan Plamper used texts devoid of outward expressions of fear to suggest that soldiers were no less scared, but had instead been socialised not to talk about their emotions.<sup>196</sup> As a replacement crew member arriving at a seasoned combat group, Maule's factual retelling of D-Day mimics the formal mission debriefs that all crews went through upon returning to their English bases. After a dispensed ration of whiskey to steady the nerves, crews would relay the facts of the mission - enemy resistance, bombing results - to interrogators. The expression of missions in factual terms can therefore be seen as an attempt by Maule to conform to the emotional regime set out by his superiors.<sup>197</sup> There is evidence in the official record to suggest that officers actively encouraged their men to rationalise and de-sensationalise combat experiences. An official Army Air Force report, based on surveys with Eighth Air Force crews, suggested that one of the

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<sup>191</sup> *ibid*

<sup>192</sup> Geneviève Warland, *Experience and Memory of the First World War in Belgium: Comparative and Interdisciplinary Insights* (Germany: Waxmann Verlag GmbH, 2019)

<sup>193</sup> *ibid*

<sup>194</sup> "Combat Diary, S/Sgt William J. Mulholland", *Rootsweb*, <https://sites.rootsweb.com/~bwickham/diary.htm> [accessed 30 November 2021].

<sup>195</sup> Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions", *Passions in context* Vol.1, No.1 (2010), 17.

<sup>196</sup> Jan Plamper, "Fear: Soldiers and Emotion in Early Twentieth-Century Russian Military Psychology", *Slavic Review* Vol.68, No.2 (2017), 259-283.

<sup>197</sup> William M Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 129.

keys to maintaining group efficiency was through the 'provision of an opportunity to de-emphasise a vivid emotional experience by talking it out under conditions which tend to make the experience seem more 'commonplace' and 'natural'.<sup>198</sup> Rather than denying the impact of these events, Air Force superiors hoped that by normalising the emotional effects of combat as 'commonplace' and 'natural', the shock could be processed. Trauma theory tells us that this 'normalising' approach is futile in the prevention of trauma, as trauma is linguistically beyond representation. Indeed, the crisis at the heart of many traumatic episodes, as Caruths argues, is whether the trauma is the encounter with death or the ongoing experience of having survived it.<sup>199</sup> Caruths suggests that it is not the shock of the event itself that transmits trauma, but the literature that follows - not through explicit accounts of the experience, but in the silences, figurative language, and linguistic peculiarities. Indeed, despite the formality of many combat diaries, even seemingly dry accounts can offer a glimpse into the sensory routine of the pre-mission routine and the way in which surfaces became coated with the affect of anticipation. Almost all of gunner John Maule's entries into his combat diary begin with the time he was woken up, followed by a brief evaluation of breakfast. 'We got up at 1:00, terrible breakfast. I was awfully tired. We were told to go to Burnbery, Germany and hit an aircraft engine factory. We hit it and got hit by all kinds of fighters. Lost lots of planes...' begins the account of Maule's 12th mission.<sup>200</sup> The inclusion of seemingly mundane details throughout the diary emphasises the importance of the pre-mission routine in grounding the otherwise unexpected and chaotic experience of aerial combat. For 44th Bomb Group Waist Gunner Robert M Foust, it was the sound of the Company Quartermaster (CQ) tasked with waking crews up that lived on in his post-war memory, 'Time to fly those Bloody Kites, wake up you fly boys. Doktor's Crew, Stone's Crew, breakfast in 15 minutes' the CQ hollered. I had been asleep maybe an hour when he shouted out. I'll probably remember that sound the rest of my life.'<sup>201</sup> The transition from sleep to consciousness signalled the beginning of an affective routine of anticipation that is frequently alluded to in diaries and memoirs. Such accounts relay the intense physiological sensations as men prepared for the day's mission. The act of close shaving, for instance, became integrally linked to the physical sensations of air combat, once men had experienced the irritation that facial hair caused at high altitudes.<sup>202</sup> From the moment they woke up, combat crew were actively aligned in anticipation for the impending mission as they physically and emotionally prepared for the day's events.

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<sup>198</sup> Psychological Branch, Research Division, Office of the Air Surgeon, Headquarters of the Army Air Forces, "Report on survey of aircrew personnel in the Eighth, Ninth, Twelfth, and Fifteenth Air Forces" (1944), 103.

<sup>199</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 7.

<sup>200</sup> "Diary and photographs relating to John Maule and his crew", MC 371/58, USF 1/7, *American Library*.

<sup>201</sup> 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association, *8 Ball Tails*, Vol.1 No.3 (Summer 1995).

<sup>202</sup> Martin W. Bowman, *Echoes of England: The Eighth Air Force in World War Two* (Tempus, 2006), 28.

Once washed and dressed in their flight clothes, crews were driven to the combat mess. The taste of breakfast on mission days is frequently remarked on in diaries, letters, and recalled in veteran testimonies. A recurring theme is the notion that air crews were fed better quality food depending on the threat posed by the mission. 'We could have pancakes, eggs sunny side up, or any way we wanted them' remembered 303rd BG Radio Operator Ben Smith, 'To me it seemed a somewhat macabre occasion and I found their jollity very disquieting and out of place. I could eat none of the breakfast anyway. Even to this day I have butterflies before breakfast'.<sup>203</sup> For Eighth Air Force fliers, breakfast would become irrevocably associated with the anticipation of the mission. Duffett has argued that knowledge of food in times of war not only enriches our understanding of 'the material lives of the soldiers, but it also provides a rich insight into their emotional existence'.<sup>204</sup> As Gregory and Cocroft conclude, the meals served to Eighth Air Force personnel were vital to the maintenance of morale, triggering feelings of home, identity and belonging.<sup>205</sup> Fresh eggs, Rutherford argues, were coveted by American infantry troops above all else due to their ability to evoke powerful childhood memories. While fresh eggs were no doubt favoured by Eighth Air Force air crew over the 'well-vulcanised, plastic lump of luke-warm goo' that characterised the powdered variety, for many Eighth Air Force fliers, any comforting associations with their past were quickly replaced by the anxiety of the impending mission and the loss of appetite that accompanied it.<sup>206</sup> No sooner had the flying crew eaten their meal than the announcement of the day's mission 'caused one's breakfast to churn and sour', recalled 44th veteran Donald Chase.<sup>207</sup>

In the briefing room - a short walk from the mess halls - the act of pulling away the curtain to reveal the day's target was imbued with its own anticipatory response, dictated by the perceived threat of the mission. For William C. Stewart, learning that the formidable Meresburg was the target for the day invoked fear, 'To say the least, shivers always ran up and down our spines to see the mission appear on the map'.<sup>208</sup> It was the sensory experience of the briefing room - the sights, smells and sounds inside this squat Nissen hut - that is perhaps most viscerally recalled in veteran accounts.

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<sup>203</sup> Bowman, *Echoes of England*, 29.

<sup>204</sup> R. Duffett. "Beyond the ration: sharing and scrounging on the Western Front", *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol.22, No.4 (2011), 473.

<sup>205</sup> Derwin Gregory and Wayne, Cocroft, "I do feel good because my stomach is full of good hotcakes": "'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", *History*, Vol.105, No.813 (2020), 806-824.

<sup>206</sup> Bowman, *Echoes of England*, 30.

<sup>207</sup> "Combat record of T/Sgt Donald V. Chase, 44th Bomb Group", MC 376/801, USF 23/8. *American Library*.

<sup>208</sup> Bowman, *Echoes of England*, 30.

'Most Eighth veterans remember the briefing room as a place of odors', remarked Philip Kaplan.<sup>209</sup> Combined with this sensory smog was the intensifying anticipation as the mass of men waited to hear where they'd be bombing. 'The mounting tension was felt in the room as more and more details were presented' recorded a reporter observing the briefing. The briefing room stands as a place where the affect of anticipation was not individually internalised, but collectively shared among the airmen. In fact, it could be argued that this affective practice was engineered as a means of actively aligning personnel into a collective unit, orientating them towards the same target. This is visually manifested in the act of synchronising watches at the end of the briefing,

*'there was absolute quiet as crew men prepared to synchronize their wrist watches. 'It is now thirty-five seconds after- thirty-seven seconds-forty seconds...' This was the moment they had known all their lives, the tensest moment of any operation, the zero hour when men synchronized their watches, not knowing which of them might return a few hours later'.<sup>210</sup>*

Serving a tactical purpose in ensuring that the group would drop their bombs with precision accuracy, this collective action also served to emotionally harmonise the assembled air crew, channelling their anxieties into collective action. Evrigenis argues that one of the requirements for successful collective action is the perception of a collective enemy.<sup>211</sup> The aligning function of the briefing room can therefore be seen to focus individuals' anticipation towards a common target, prompting collective action that would have repercussions on the group's efficiency and coordination in the air. The attunement of the aerial body is explored by Adey, who argues that military aviators were 'produced and manufactured bodies that had to be designed, preened, screened and developed into aerial subjects whose destiny it would be to secure and defend the nation.'<sup>212</sup>

Data collected by psychologists researching the emotional implications of combat flying suggested that the tensest moment of the mission occurred between briefing and take-off.<sup>213</sup> Physical symptoms included nausea, cold sweats, pounding heart, vomiting and diarrhoea, as men waited for

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<sup>209</sup> Philip Kaplan and Rex Alan Smith, *One Last Look: A Sentimental Journey to the Eighth Air force Bases of World War II in England* (Artabras, 1983), 67.

<sup>210</sup> John M. Redding and Harold I. Leyshon, *Skyways to Berlin: With the American Flyers in England* (London: Hutchinson, 1944), 98-99.

<sup>211</sup> Ioannis D. Evrigenis, *Fear of Enemies and Collective Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 18.

<sup>212</sup> Peter Adey, *Aerial Life Spaces, Mobilities, Affects*, (London: Wiley, 2010), no pn.

<sup>213</sup> Donald W. Hastings, David G. Wright & Bernard C. Glueck, *Psychiatric Experiences of the Eighth Air Force: First Year Of Combat* (New York: Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation, 1944), 165.

the final clearance from the control tower - a tense period that could last hours.<sup>214</sup> During this period, the Group's chaplain would give last rites and communion, bestowing blessings on each crew. At one briefing alone, Shipdham's Catholic chaplain, Father Henshaw, conducted devotions with 380 men.<sup>215</sup> For some, this divine intervention provided a much-needed comfort, while for others, the act only served to reinforce their sense of mortality and the impending possibility of death. Despite the intensified anticipation of the pre-mission routine, the sudden cancellation of a mission did not bring the cycle of anticipation to a close. According to Donald Chase, the 'scrubbing' of a mission moments before take-off, announced with the firing of a red flare – 'no matter how rough it had been promised—evoked groans of disappointment.' Elaborating, Chase explained that 'a fair percentage of a mission was the mental acceptance and emotional preparation for the flight. Red flares, whether fired from the ground or air, were distressing'.<sup>216</sup> Like the serving of eggs and the pulling away of the mission map curtain, the sight of a red flare triggered a particular set of affects among the occupants of the air base; an emotional reaction to a physical act that, over time, became embedded into the collective memory of the group. The relationality of affect, materiality and the senses is particularly evident in this pre-mission routine. Indeed, it was the *sound* of the voice waking the men, the taste of the egg, the *sight* of the flare, and the *touch* of the watch crown that transmitted affect. Like a rollercoaster, the collective anticipation of the group rose and fell during the hours before the mission. The only direction they could travel was forward, towards take-off and the point of no return.

### The Relief of the Return

As well as mapping out the affective landscape of the base, combat also played a role in reconfiguring Shipdham's place in the collective imagination of the group's air crew. Just as the crew's grasp of temporality shifted so that few could look beyond the immediate threat of each mission, the relativity of home was fundamentally changed by the anticipation of combat. For bomber personnel fighting for their lives over Germany, 'making it home' no longer meant returning to the distant shores of America, but rather, a safe return to the immediate safety of their airfield. Sara Ahmed argues that 'movement does not cut the body off from the 'where' of its inhabitation, but connects

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<sup>214</sup> Mark Wells, *Aviators and Air Combat: A study of the US Eighth Air Force and RAF Bomber Command*, (PhD Thesis, 1992) 127.

<sup>215</sup> "Chaplain Harshaw's activities during September, 1944", *44<sup>th</sup> BG History*, B0137, *National Mighty Eighth Museum*.

<sup>216</sup> "Combat record of T/Sgt Donald V. Chase, 44th Bomb Group". MC 376/801, USF 23/8. *American Library*.

bodies to other bodies.<sup>217</sup> By moving men away from their established homes in the US, the experience of air combat forced personnel to connect to other people and places. This sentiment is articulated by Jack Kirschbraun, who wrote the following in a letter to his parents in March 1944:

*'I recall the day, away back when, that home meant to me the house in which I lived. Then, when I went to college, home was the town in which I lived. When the Army took over home spread out about 300 miles in every direction. 'Home' since I have been overseas has been the whole United States. Well, let me tell you right here & now that the shores of this island looming up thru the haze of the channel is the most welcome, beautiful sight I have ever encountered. Boy that is home to me!'*

Jack Kirschbraun was killed a week after sending this letter, but for the short time he was in England, air combat reconfigured his perception of what it meant to be 'home'. Similar sentiments are echoed in the accounts of 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group air crew. When departing for a mission, Forrest Clark questioned 'would I ever see this land again, these fields, these steeples, for many of us would not return again and would never see this land below again. I thought just before the plane would rise through the clouds obscuring the landscape below I pray that I shall be able to see it all again.'<sup>218</sup> Robert Foust recalled touching down at Shipdham after a particularly hair-raising mission, 'Comin in on an emergency approach, the pilot landed on the grass beside the runway to avoid any sparks. When the B-24 rolled to a stop, we jumped out of the rear of the plane and began kissing the ground.'<sup>219</sup> An November 1944 article by 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Bert Stiles describes the emotions experienced by a pilot of a stricken B-17 returning to base, 'When he was eight years old he read Robin Hood the first time. After that he must have read it twenty more...He dreamed of it then, waiting for the day when he would stand at the rail of a ship, waiting for England to come out of the sea, out of the haze. Almost like now. But it wasn't the same. Because now, for a little while, England was home, more home than Colorado,'<sup>220</sup> Relief, as the positive conclusion of anticipation, accumulated on the surface of the runway with each successful mission. It was here that the notion of 'the return' as a symbolic act which brought together the group's combat and ground personnel, took hold. The return of aircraft had a temporal significance, marking the passing of time for the entire base. Ruth Register, the Red Cross Field Director at the 492<sup>nd</sup> BG's base at North Pickenham, took her seat on a blast shelter wall to await the returning bombers. Taking a handful of pebbles, she would throw one to the ground for every safely returned plane. The circulation of anticipation across the whole group is evidenced in a wartime study, which showed that a significant minority of Enlisted Men (28

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<sup>217</sup> Sara Ahmed, "Collective Feelings: Or, The Impressions Left by Others", *Theory, Culture & Society* (London: SAGE), Vol.21, No.2 (2004), 27.

<sup>218</sup> "'Tales of the 44<sup>th</sup>' Memoir, relating to Forrest S. Clark and the Griffith's Crew: part one", MC 371/13, *American Library*.

<sup>219</sup> Robert M. Foust, *8 Ball Tails*, Vol.1 Iss.3, Summer 1995,

<sup>220</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Bert Stiles, "Portrait of a Guy Thinking About an Island", November 1944, *Air Force*.

per cent) felt more fear waiting for their friends to return from a mission than they felt when flying their own missions.<sup>221</sup> Indeed, Ahmed argues that ‘homes are the effects of the histories of arrivals’.<sup>222</sup> Arguably, it is the lack of arrival – the failure to return – that haunts those left behind, forming melancholic connections with the landscape.

As I will discuss later in this thesis, the significance of the return cemented long-term emotional connections between the personnel and Shipdham’s runway, compelling veterans to perform their own symbolic return in the post-war years. During the war however, it can be argued that the affectivity of a mission, from nervous anticipation to temporary relief at its conclusion, was part of a daily cycle that aligned bodies on the base through the affective practice of waiting. Anticipation, however, did not ease with the passing of each mission. Wartime studies showed that anxiety increased as fliers neared their final missions, with 56 per cent of those surveyed feeling more fear ahead of the final missions of their tour, compared to the fifteen percent who feared their first.<sup>223</sup> While self-confidence improved by flying missions, experiencing the realities of air combat reinforced fliers’ vulnerability, intensifying anticipation on later raids. As time went on and the possibility of safely returning to the US became more probable, so too did the fear of dying, as experienced by Norm Kiefer. Having been briefed for a particularly dangerous mission to Berlin nicknamed the ‘Big One’, Kiefer was forced to wait weeks for the weather to improve enough for the mission to get underway. ‘After about three weeks of sitting around stewing, I could stand it no more. I told McAtee not to schedule me for two days and took off for London with a razor and a pair of shorts in my pockets. This was my one and only experience of being AWOL. I came back two days later relaxed and able to cope.’<sup>224</sup> While the anticipation generated by the act of waiting orientated the group towards a shared future, its negative manifestation as feelings of fear and anxiety, posed a constant threat to the morale of the group. This mentality is perhaps best reflected in the replacement of the medical diagnosis ‘operational fatigue’ with ‘anxiety reaction’ by Eighth Air Force flight surgeons in January 1945, to describe the most common neuroses suffered by air crew.<sup>225</sup> It was understood that the main threat to the mental health of the group was no longer past experiences of combat, but the uncertainty of the future. Air Force commanders and flight surgeons were particularly apprehensive of the repercussions that one man’s morale could have on the fighting efficiency of the group as a whole. Whereas the loss of an infantry soldier to ‘shell-shock’ was deemed strategically insignificant, the impairment of a highly-trained combat flier as a result of

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<sup>221</sup> As I will discuss later in this thesis, the runway, which had come to signify the return of air crews, would become a focal point for the ‘return’ of veterans in the post-war years. Source: USAAF, *Aviation Psychology Program Research Reports* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947), 129.

<sup>222</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 9.

<sup>223</sup> USAAF, *Aviation Psychology Program Research Reports*, 148.

<sup>224</sup> Kiefer, Norman C, *The Green-nosed Flying 8-balls: A History of the 506 Bomb Squadron* (United States: 506th History Publications, 1993), 266.

<sup>225</sup> USAAF, *Aviation Psychology Program Research Reports*, 97.



stress or anxiety placed the whole ten-man bomber crew at risk.<sup>226</sup> The near-automation of the bomber crew, which required every member to work together with split-second timing, became hindered by emotional strain. Yet at the same time, passionate notions of camaraderie and group loyalty were deemed essential to maintaining the morale and combat efficiency of the unit. It is perhaps not surprising that aircrew selection tests required examiners to score the candidate's 'emotional control', alongside his arithmetic reasoning, reading comprehension and finger dexterity.<sup>227</sup> Of all the emotions that could threaten morale, anxiety was the most concerning. Excessive anxiety manifested itself in physical symptoms, such as stomach complaints and tremors, and caused tempers to flare, disrupting relations between crew members. Worse still, the excesses of anxiety could circulate, affecting the morale of the whole base. Here, the difference between fear and anxiety is important. Stanley Rachman describes anxiety as the 'tense anticipation of a threatening but vague event', while fear is an emotional reaction to 'a threat that is identifiable'.<sup>228</sup> While encounters with the enemy produced an immediate fear response, the spatial distance between the object of fear and the base made Shipdham a place of heightened anxiety.

As well as anxiety over the future, the base commanders at Shipdham were also met with another temporal conundrum in the form of homesickness – a yearning for the familiarity of their past lives. Writing about the early American colonies, Susan Matt argues that they were places 'populated by individuals who looked backward rather than forward, who nurtured a connection to the land and cultures they had left behind, and who often tried to replicate at least some part of those cultures'.<sup>229</sup> Three centuries after the homesick Pilgrims attempted to replicate the old world in the new, the American arrival to Shipdham yearned for the familiarity of their homes in the States. In his wartime poem 'Bomber Base', Hyam Plutzik writes about the nostalgia for home experienced by the ground personnel at Shipdham.

'The runways stretch silent; somewhere in the blackness  
The guards stand, unseen, longing for home,  
And a woman's arms, a warm bed in a house.'<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Office of the Surgeon General, *Medical support of the Army Air Forces in World War II*, 556.

<sup>227</sup> John Clemans Flanagan, "Report on survey of aircrew personnel in the Eighth, Ninth, Twelfth, and Fifteenth Air Forces", (USAAF, 1944), 1-2.

<sup>228</sup> Stanley Rachman, *Anxiety*, (Howe, U.K: Psychology Press, 1998), 2.

<sup>229</sup> Susan J. Matt, *Homesickness: An American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 21.

<sup>230</sup> Hyam Plutzik, "Bomber Base", <http://www.hyamplutzikpoetry.com/ww2-letters>, accessed 9 August 2022.

For Plutzik, the empty runway is the metaphorical intersection between the uncertain future, denoted by the 'blackness' stretched out before the guards, and the comforting memories of the past. The image of a cold, forlorn soldier reminiscing about the comforts of home is replicated throughout the history of warfare. Indeed, the very notion of 'nostalgia' was coined by physician Johannes Hofer in the late seventeenth century to describe the maladies inflicting Swiss mercenaries serving overseas.<sup>231</sup> Hofer described nostalgia as a 'continuous vibration of animal spirits through those fibers of the middle brain in which the impressed traces of ideas of the Fatherland still cling.'<sup>232</sup> The affective qualities of home are viscerally brought to life in Horf's description of nostalgic affliction and its vibratory impact on the militarised body. During the Second World War, nostalgia was included on the U.S. Surgeon General's list of maladies.<sup>233</sup> Captains Flicker and Weiss declared nostalgia as a 'contagious disease' that could spread through army camps 'with the speed of an epidemic'.<sup>234</sup> For these Medical Corps doctors, 'the greatest single factor in waging successful warfare is morale. A most important factor in attaining morale among fighting men is the preventing or overcoming of nostalgia.'<sup>235</sup> The U.S. military clearly faced a temporal dilemma: on the one hand, the anxiety of uncertain futures was being transmitted through the nerve-shredding experience of flying and the anticipation of waiting, while at the same time, the nostalgic longing for past homes brought its own melancholic neurosis.

I would argue that the only way to remedy the temporal mess Eighth Air Force commanders found themselves in was to reorientate the base's occupants in the present. Just as anxiety and nostalgia was mapped onto the surface of the base in the form of visceral memories and embodied encounters, so too was it challenged through physical interactions with the materiality of the base that formed meaningful connections between personnel and their home base. As this next section will show, the base at Shipdham was transformed through explicit and implicit acts of placemaking which were aimed at countering the negative affects of anticipation with the reassuring affect of 'home'.

### Mud and morale at Shipdham

*The young soldier in action for the first time may find it impossible to bridge the gap between war as it has been painted and war as it really is—between the way in which he, his peers, his officers and his subordinates should behave, and the way in which they actually do. He may be dangerously*

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<sup>231</sup> David Lowenthal, *The past is a foreign country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 10.

<sup>232</sup> Johannes Hofer, 'Medical dissertation on nostalgia' (1688), p.384

<sup>233</sup> Lowenthal, *The past is a foreign country*, 10.

<sup>234</sup> David J Flicker and Paul Weiss, "Nostalgia and its military implications", *War Medicine* Vol.4 (1943), 386-7.

<sup>235</sup> Flicker and Weiss, "Nostalgia and its Military Implications", 380.

*unprepared for cowardice and muddle and horror when he actually encounters them, unprepared even for the cumulative attrition of diet and fatigue. But nevertheless the 'myth' can and often does sustain him, even when he knows, with half his mind, that it is untrue.*

Michael Howard, "The Use and Abuse of Military History", *Parameters: Journal of the US Army War College*, Vol. I, No. I (1981), p. 10.

Like most heavy bomber bases used by the Eighth Air Force, RAF Shipdham (designated Station 115 by the USAAF) comprised several dispersed sites scattered across a large area of countryside (see Fig. 1). Constructed to RAF plans in 1941-42 and costing £1 million, the main features of the technical site were the three intersecting concrete runways, connected by a perimeter track. From this concrete track sprouted circular hard standings - one per aircraft. Two hangars and several workshops and utility buildings were positioned at the south of the runway. By far the most distinctive structure on the technical site was the control tower, a two-storied building with a glass conservatory on the roof from which the operations staff could survey incoming and departing aircraft. Unlike many of the other control towers built at temporary USAAF airfields, the tower at Shipdham conformed to an early RAF design, featuring large Crittall windows and a meteorological tower. Despite this remnant of pre-war architecture, Shipdham was a far cry from the campuses of high-quality, art deco-style buildings found at permanent RAF bases, such as Duxford and Marham. Instead, the base was populated by single-storey concrete slab Maycrete huts and metal-framed and clad Nissen huts. Constructed away from the main runway to limit human loss in the case of an attack were five domestic sites. Each of these sites contained officers' quarters, sergeants' quarters, barracks for enlisted men, latrines, and ablutions. Connected by pre-existing farm roads were the two communal sites, housing mess halls, recreational facilities, and separate clubs for officers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs), and enlisted men. The administrative site was the location of the group's headquarters, offices, and briefing room.



Figure 4 Shipdham airfield in 1946. The living sites are located to the south of 'A'-shaped runway (Source: American Air Museum, Document 17708)

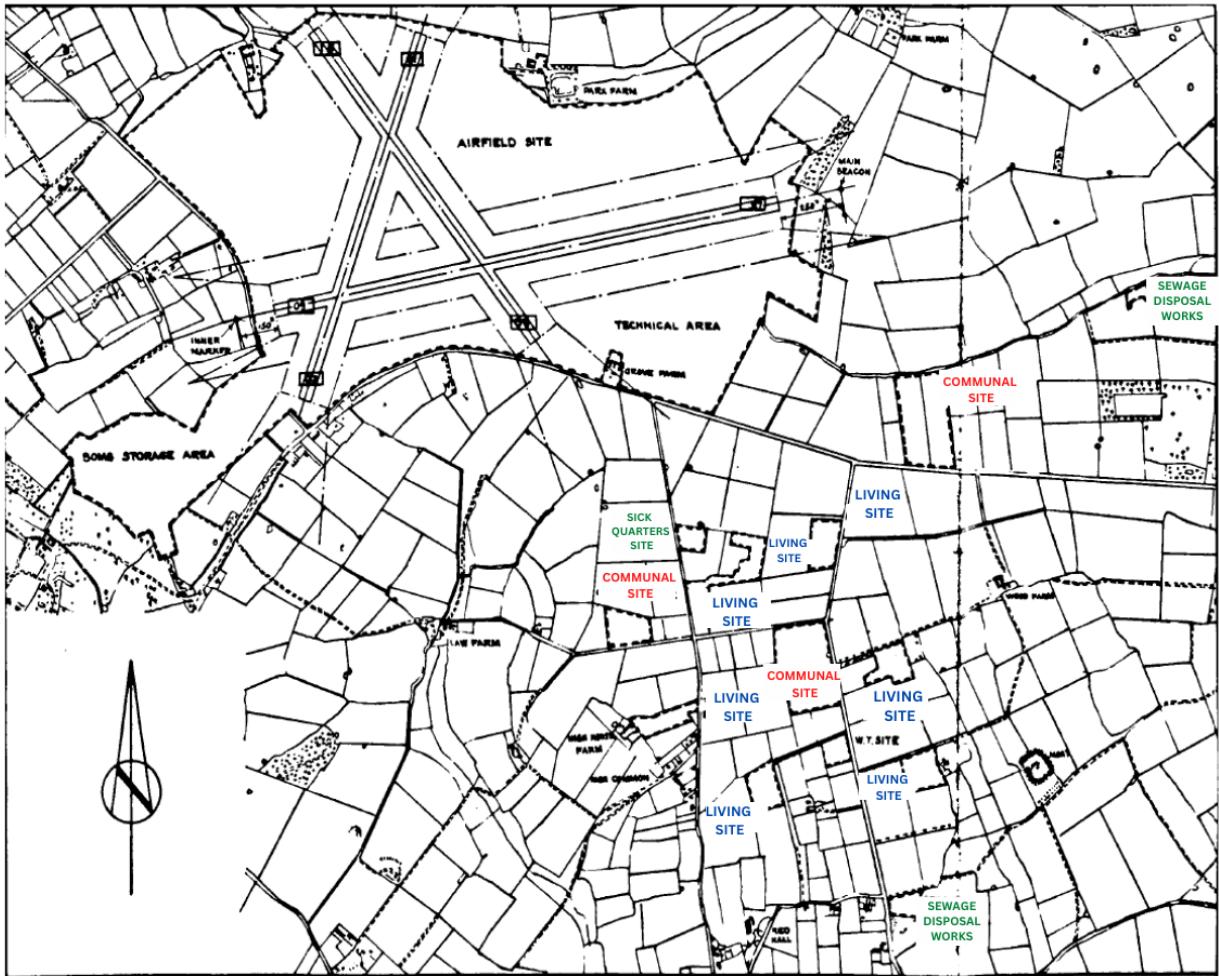


Figure 5 Airfield plan of Shipdham

A 1945 army publication recounting the arrival of the Eighth Air Force in England asserted that ‘when the Eighth Air Force personnel moved into a field constructed for them by the RAF, they found everything ready for occupation and operation’.<sup>236</sup> While this appraisal may have served to appease allied relations, the reality was that most US personnel arriving at new English bases in 1942 and 1943 touched down at what were essentially glorified construction sites.<sup>237</sup> RAF Shipdham was no different. After the base was designated for use by USAAF in Summer 1942, work began at a pace to ready the incomplete, mud-covered airfield for the arrival of heavy B-24 Liberators; a process that was only half complete by the time the main contingent of the 44th touched down on English soil in October 1942.<sup>238</sup> As winter set in, the new arrivals found themselves competing against a quagmire of thick, cloying mud; a situation made worse by half-finished ablutions and barracks. ‘The quarters are worse than ever - no running water and poor sanitation facilities. It’s very cold at night making it necessary to use five blankets,’ recorded Lt Howard F. Adams shortly after arriving at Shipdham.<sup>239</sup> The prescribed rubber overshoes did little to ease the two-mile walk from the living sites to the airfield. ‘The mud even carried over into the two main roads between the Community Site and the Flight Line. It truly was a mess through which many of us were forced to walk at least four times a day’, bemoaned one veteran.<sup>240</sup> Once at the airfield, the battle against the elements continued, as ground crew worked to get the group’s B-24s operational. ‘It was bad enough for the individual to navigate the ooze of the mud, but to get one of our big birds off the hard surface of a runway, taxi strip or a hardstand was truly trouble,’ remembered 44th veteran Bob Lenhausen.<sup>241</sup> The pervasiveness of mud, which saturated verbal and written accounts of the men in those early months at Shipdham, allude to its significance as an identifying feature of this new base, ‘roads of mud, rivers of mud, and lakes of mud plague construction crews and operating crews alike’, recounted one USAAF journal.<sup>242</sup> Mud, long considered a hindrance to the success of military operations and the bane of the fighting man in combat situations, had brought the reality of war to Shipdham.<sup>243</sup> ‘Grizzled veterans swear they have never seen anything like it - since the last war,’ reported one

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<sup>236</sup> US Army, “Army Talks for the Eighth Air Force: Day and Night”, Vol.1, No.2 (10 February 1945).

<sup>237</sup> Airfields were handed over to the US Army Air Force as part of the reverse lend-lease agreement.

<sup>238</sup> Steve Adams and Ron Mackay, *The 44th Bomb Group in World War II: The "Flying- Eight-Balls" Over Europe in the B-24*. Atlgem, PA: Schiffer Military History, 2003), 18.

<sup>239</sup> Gerald Astor, *The Mighty Eighth: The Air War in Europe as Told by the Men Who Fought It* (New York, NY: Penguin Publishing Group, 2015), 5.

<sup>240</sup> Will Lundy, *History of the 67 Bombardment Squadron, 44th Bomb Group, The Flying Eight Balls* (CA: Walt Disney Productions, 1982), 18.

<sup>241</sup> “8 Ball Tails”, Vol.3, No. 7 (Spring 2001), 27.

<sup>242</sup> *National Aeronautics*, Vol.22 (1944), 21.

<sup>243</sup> C.E. Wood. *Mud: A Military History* (Nebraska: Potomac Books, Inc., 2006), xiii-xvi.

Eighth Air Force journal.<sup>244</sup> For the new crews arriving at the base, the evocation of primitive trench warfare was at odds with the modern methods of strategic air power that they had anticipated. The similarities to the experiences of soldiers in the trenches of the First World War extended to the sensory aspect of mud, which seemed to coat the memories of the first arrivals at Shipdham with a patina of despair. 'The base had just been constructed, coupled with the ever-present rainfalls, combined to present an overall effect of depression', remembered veteran William R. Cameron.<sup>245</sup> By smothering the soldiers, machines and the landscape with mud, the visual sense was denied, replaced with enhanced senses of smell, sound, and touch.<sup>246</sup> It was an experience replicated at other newly occupied Eighth Air Force bases. At Grafton Underwood (quickly renamed Grafton Undermud), home to 384th Bomb Group, Colonel Dale E. Smith was dismayed to find that 'the station was a quagmire of mud...And instead of attempting to get rid of the mud, the troops seemed to use the mud as an excuse for their sloppy behaviour.'<sup>247</sup> A similar disciplinary problem arose at Shipdham, with severe operational consequences. After several missions had to be scrubbed in May 1943 due to the high number of B-24s swerving off the runway into the mud, Col Leon Johnson declared that the next pilot to 'accidentally' teeter off the tarmac would be awarded an 'Iron Cross'.<sup>248</sup> Col Gen. Johnson's concern with the affects of mud, and its subsequent effects on the performance of his group, allude to the understanding that the group's morale was intrinsically connected to its surroundings. Performance in the air, it was feared, could be severely hampered by the affects emerging from the untamed landscape of the base.

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<sup>244</sup> *National Aeronautics*, Vol.22 (1944), 21.

<sup>245</sup> "Memoir of William R. Cameron". MC 376/434, USF 1/1, *American Library*.

<sup>246</sup> Nicholas Saunders, *Matters of Conflict: Material Culture, Memory and the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2004), 9.

<sup>247</sup> Mark Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare: The Allied Aircrew Experience in the Second World War* (London: Routledge, 1995), 170.

<sup>248</sup> Kiefer, *The Green-nosed Flying 8-balls*, 62.



Figure 6 A line of boots belonging to personnel of the 44th Bomb Group. Passed for publication in February 1943. (Source: American Air Museum, FRE 3451)

Col. Gen. Johnson's comments illustrate the complex nature of morale as a phenomenon that has the power to affect, as well as be affected. As a type of affect, morale is not something that lives exclusively within the individual, or outside of it. Anthropologist Ben Anderson emphasises the omnipresent nature of morale in relation to what he describes as the 'affective geographies' of war. According to Anderson, morale as 'a diffuse potentiality rather than a fixed, locatable target' is a type of collective affect that is distributed throughout life, meaning that efforts to attack morale make every aspect of life a potential target, while attempts to boost a group's morale must consider every aspect of its existence.<sup>249</sup> The all-encompassing nature of morale and the myriad of threats against it were recognised by the US military establishment on the outbreak of war. No longer merely considered a synonym for *esprit de corps* or 'fighting spirit', morale was 'the thinking of an army...the whole complex body of an army's thought,' according to US Army historian S.L.A. Marshall.<sup>250</sup> Concerted efforts to record and evaluate morale in real-time were made by the Research Branch of Special Services (formerly the Morale Branch), whose vast array of soldier surveys directly shaped military policy.<sup>251</sup> Statistical analyses, questionnaires and studies were carried out throughout the Eighth's time in England in an effort to chart the morale of American airmen.<sup>252</sup> Meanwhile, flight

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<sup>249</sup> Seigworth, Gregg, *The Affect Theory Reader*, 182.

<sup>250</sup> S.L.A. Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command* (Eumenes Publishing, 2019).

<sup>251</sup> "American Soldier in WWII Series, 1942-45", March 25, 1992, 3-330-80-001, NARA, 5.

<sup>252</sup> Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare*, 90.



surgeons were attached to each flight squadron, whose role as ‘morale builder’ was just as important as his expertise in the physiological problems of high-altitude flying.<sup>253</sup> On many bases, daily morale reports gauging the emotional welfare of the group were produced by the medical staff. For the flight surgeons and the commanders who acted on their recommendations, Eighth Air Force bases became precarious communities, constantly threatened by internal and external factors, ranging from mail delays and combat losses to inclement weather and venereal disease cases.

Just as the mud seeped onto every floor, path, and boot in the winter of 1942, concern with morale consumed the commanders at Shipdham as the group prepared to fly its first combat missions. While little could be done to allay the anxiety produced by the mystique of an unknown enemy, the commanders could attempt to quell discontent over the inadequate, unfamiliar living conditions, and the homesickness it provoked. Ensuring that the base was comfortable, navigable, and familiar was one way in which the ‘sticky’ affects of the mud, and its synonymy with ‘sloppiness’ and ‘depression’ could be controlled and subdued. The efforts made by Shipdham’s occupants to improve the terrain did not simply amount to a landscaping project; the physical acts also had phenomenological significance. Engagement with the landscape through physical alteration, motility, or simply protesting about its unfavourable features, equated to both direct and indirect acts of placemaking. By understanding, taming, and marking the land, Shipdham’s occupants were able to build emotional connections with the landscape, in turn marking themselves out as local subjects.<sup>254</sup> Through these interactions, subjects were participating in what Appadurai terms ‘the spatial production of locality’.<sup>255</sup> As Appadurai argues, the production of a neighbourhood is reliant on the ability of local subjects to reproduce locality under conditions of anxiety and flux.<sup>256</sup> Importantly, neighbourhoods ‘are always historically grounded’ in that they ‘are opposed to something else and derive from other, already produced neighbourhoods’.<sup>257</sup> At Shipdham, the reproduction of the reassuring contexts of ‘home’ in opposition to the troubling affects of the mud was vital to the production of the new neighbourhood.

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<sup>253</sup> Office of the Surgeon General, *Medical support of the Army Air Forces in World War II*, 196.

<sup>254</sup> Christopher Tilley and Kate Cameron-Daum, *An Anthropology of Landscape: The Extraordinary in the Ordinary* (London: UCL Press, 2017), 291.

<sup>255</sup> Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 180.

<sup>256</sup> *ibid*

<sup>257</sup> Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, p.183.

A concerted effort was made in 1943 to improve taxiways, dispersal areas and accommodation on the base.<sup>258</sup> One 44th veteran recalled how ‘Colonel Dent poured tons of concrete to alleviate the mud problem we had when we arrived’.<sup>259</sup> After the mud had been tamed, local labourers were brought onto the base to sow grass seed and plant flower beds. A British journalist described his experience of visiting Shipdham airfield in Spring 1943, conceding that the Americans were living a ‘spartan life’. Despite these material hardships, he was left marvelling at how the countryside had ‘been transformed into a bit of the United States in England’.<sup>260</sup> This transformation into ‘Little America’, while seemingly complete from the perspective of the British outsider, was still very much ongoing, as men attempted to demarcate and domesticate their immediate surroundings. Daisy Miller, a civilian Air Ministry employee at Shipdham, recalled how the men planted flowers outside their Nissen huts to create the illusion of ‘a home from home’.<sup>261</sup> A duck pond was also carved out from the mud close to the Red Cross club (although veterans are quick to point out that no ducks ever made use of the feature). The pond served a ceremonial function during the group’s ‘mission parties’, when high-ranking officers were ceremoniously thrown into the water.<sup>262</sup> The beautification of the base extended beyond the domestic site - where the base’s 3,000-strong population was housed - to the technical site, where the runway and aircraft hangars were situated. Once the flying control section realised that ‘the aerodrome is the front door to the base for most flying personnel...a beautiful flower garden was created around the Control Tower’.<sup>263</sup>

Basso suggests that one of the first, and most effective, ways that people relate to place is by giving it a name.<sup>264</sup> It is perhaps no surprise then that the base at Shipdham was colloquially renamed ‘Shipdham-under-Mud’ by its occupants.<sup>265</sup> Even the adoption of the village name ‘Shipdham’ marked a rejection of military terminology (Shipdham had been officially designated Station 115 by the USAAF) that was repeated on practically all Eighth Air Force bases.<sup>266</sup> By recognising the presence of mud, it was no longer an unknown enemy, but an incorporated part of the base landscape and the group’s collective identity. Signage also provided a physical means of marking territory, especially at

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<sup>258</sup> Ursel P. Harvell, *History of 44th Bomb Group “Flying Eight Balls”* (East Anglia Books, 1982), no p.n.

<sup>259</sup> Brother R. J. Marotta. *Second Air Division Association Newsletter*, Vol.15 No.1, 3.

<sup>260</sup> “Life at the Base”, *Norfolk News and Weekly Press*, April 10, 1943.

<sup>261</sup> Interview with Daisy Miller, former Air Ministry secretary at Shipdham, 29 July 2019.

<sup>262</sup> *2nd Air Division Association Journal*, Summer 1995, Vol. 34, No.2.

<sup>263</sup> “Flying Control”, December 1944, *History of 44th BG*, BO137

<sup>264</sup> Keith H. Basso, “Speaking with Names”: Language and Landscape among the Western Apache” in *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol.3, No.2 (1988), 99–130.

<sup>265</sup> Ron Mackay and Steve Adams, *The 44th Bomb Group in World War II: The ‘Flying- Eight-Balls’ over Europe in the B-24* (Pennsylvania: Schiffer Military History, 2003), 17

<sup>266</sup> Miller, *Eighth Air Force*, 61

USAAF bases, which were typically entangled in the geographic features of the rural landscape.<sup>267</sup> Although the physical boundaries of the base were marked by little more than hedgerows, the erection of large metal signs and picket posts (guard houses) at entry points delineated the spaces between the airfield and the surrounding countryside, in turn dictating and regulating movement within the confines of the base. Clear signs, written in the same lexicon and type font as those found in US bases, provided a sense of familiarity, as well helping the personnel to navigate their new surroundings. The importance of this type of identifying signage, not only as a landmark, but as a mark of territory, is expressed in John McClane's description of his living site, 'At the 68th Squadron area, there was a machine gun mounted on a rack. Not far away was a wood sign in the shape of Air Crew Flying Wings. The symbol announced that this was the home of 'The Fighting 68th'.<sup>268</sup>

Another means by which personnel formed connections with the local landscape at Shipdham was through movement. Christopher Tilley has argued that the temporality of motility and the ways in which people move through their environment is pivotal to how people experience landscapes, in turn affecting how they feel about them.<sup>269</sup> At Shipdham, restriction to motility was one of the most frequent complaints of personnel. While 'mud splattered men' plodded over 'mud-slogged roads' in the first months on the base, over time, new modes of transport and a growing familiarity with the terrain improved both movement and the men's morale. The 67th Squadron history records that with 'the construction of adequate bathing facilities, and the establishment of a regular transportation system between the 'billets' and the line, general morale improved'.<sup>270</sup> The use of bicycles increased mobility and independence, at the same time as improving interconnectivity between the dispersed sites of the airfield. Bicycles – acquired by men in the local towns at their own expense – were so prevalent that an announcement in the Daily Bulletin for 31 August 1944 ordered that they should be ridden single file only.<sup>271</sup> For some, the bicycle not only offered freedom of movement but an outlet for creative expression. T/Sgt Wade F. Bond spent the summer of 1944 rigging a radio, lights, horn and other accessories to his tandem bicycle.<sup>272</sup> By mid-1943, the general

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<sup>267</sup> Philip Kaplan and Rex Alan Smith, *One Last Look: A Sentimental Journey to the Eighth Air Force Bases of World War II in England* (Artabras, 1983), 43.

<sup>268</sup> John W McClane Jr., "Non-Combat Activities while attached to the 44th Bomb Group", in *World War II: An Experience by an Army Air Force Navigator* (Unpublished memoir, National Mighty Eighth Museum).

<sup>269</sup> Christopher Tilley and Kate Cameron-Daum, *An Anthropology of Landscape: The Extraordinary in the Ordinary* (London: UCL Press, 2017), 3.

<sup>270</sup> Lundy, *History of the 67 Bombardment Squadron, 44th Bomb Group, The Flying Eight Balls*, 32.

<sup>271</sup> "44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group History", BO137, *Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell*.

<sup>272</sup> *ibid*

opinion of replacements arriving at Shipdham were favourable, with many commenting on the good facilities and living arrangements.<sup>273</sup>

While the base commander oversaw the improvement of formal roads and paths between buildings and sites, personnel also carved their own routes through the terrain, despite the creation of shortcuts being expressly forbidden. At the 67th Bomb Squadron area at Shipdham, spread over two sites located a mere 150 yards apart from one another, servicemen complained at having to walk over half a mile rather than being allowed to cut through the fields. The squadron history proudly recalls how the men took matters into their own hands by creating a new path along the hedgerow that 'was all but invisible from the road or air'.<sup>274</sup> Norm Kiefer provides a similar account of insubordination, describing how on mission days, trucks would transport crews between the living sites and the airfield. Rather than driving all the way into the site, the truck would circle around a tree off the main road. When the driver was accosted by a Lieutenant over this unsolicited route, the base commander stepped in to defend the driver's actions, understanding how important these simple acts were to the morale of his men.<sup>275</sup> For air crews, the base was experienced and identified from an entirely different perspective: the air. From this vantage point, the sprawling air base was contextualised and reconfigured in the imagination. The various communal sites, nestled in the natural features of the landscape became interconnected, while the dis-jointed strips of concrete that made up the technical site were transformed into a neat 'A'-shape that cut through the ancient fields and hedgerows. Most distinctive of all was the control tower - the tallest feature of the landscape - which was the first to come into view as crews departed from and returned to Shipdham.

The physical improvements enacted at Shipdham during their first months of the 44th BG's occupation allude to the importance of familiarity to the morale of the unit. However, the phenomenological significance of these spatial acts extended into the social fabric of this new community. By interacting with the physical landscape of the base, the occupants inscribed meaning onto their surroundings, creating a localised space embedded with individual and collective memories. In turn, for the personnel who perpetuated them, these interactions with the land fostered their own sense of belonging and identity, creating ties with the landscape that would persist long after the war had ended.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> "Recorded memoir of Don Jenkins", MC 371/882/26, *American Library*.

<sup>274</sup> Lundy, *History of the 67 Bombardment Squadron, 44th Bomb Group, The Flying Eight Balls*, 19.

<sup>275</sup> Kiefer, *The Green-Nosed Flying 8-Balls: A History of the 506 Bomb Squadron*, 61.

<sup>276</sup> Nadia Lovell, *Locality and Belonging* (London: Psychology Press, 1998), 1.



Figure 7 The main gate at Shipdham (Source: National Museum of the Mighty Eighth)

### The Art of War: Recreational buildings and the production of affective atmospheres

Just as the terrain of the air base was negotiated through acts of placemaking, so too were the interior spaces of the bases claimed and domesticated in an effort by base superiors to improve the morale of their men. The production of affective atmospheres aimed at replicating a sense of home and 'the local' was not merely a consequence of a haphazard beautification project, but rather the result of a silent shift in military culture and strategic thinking that originated in Depression-era America, specifically the utilisation of muralism as an affective tool in the production of locality. A starting point for understanding the contextual history of this artistic and social movement is the story of Paul Magriel, a 36-year-old librarian at the Museum of Modern Art, who, to his surprise, received orders to report to Keesler Field in Mississippi for army training in 1942. Activated the previous year, Keesler Field was fast becoming one of America's largest basic training camps, providing a reception hub for enlisted men and women from across the United States.<sup>277</sup> For most

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<sup>277</sup> Keesler Field contained both a basic training centre and a technical training centre, specialising in aviation engineering. Women were trained at Keesler from 1943, while in the autumn of 1943 7,000 African American personnel were receiving training. Source: "History of Keesler Air Force Base", USAF,

recruits, Keesler Field was a transitional posting – four weeks in total – followed by a transfer to another station for a period of specialist training, and subsequent deployment. Due to the restraints of time and resources, basic training at Keesler was stripped back to the essentials, delivered 24-hours a day. Despite this conveyor belt speed, the four weeks personnel spent at Keesler were pivotal in the process of transforming civilians into soldiers. At basic training centres around the country, men and women from a vast array of backgrounds were homogenised and indoctrinated into the traditions, values and disciplines of the military. For Magriel, the round-the-clock regime of drill, lectures, physical training, and assessments was a far cry from the solace of the Museum of Modern Art's library. Paul Magriel, a dance critic and art collector, was the first Museum of Modern Art employee to be drafted - an occasion recognised by the chairman of the museum's board, who wrote to the base's commanding officer asking him to 'take care of our Paul'.<sup>278</sup> Perhaps it was these words of kindness that prompted Colonel Goulrick to ask the newly-arrived Magriel what he wanted to do during his time in the army. Magriel replied that he hoped to start an art department and - astonishingly - Goulrick enthusiastically signed off on the request.

Despite the seeming incongruity of the situation, Goulrick's approval of Magriel's request was not without precedent. Art had played a recognised role in the United States' armed forces during the First World War, when eight artists were commissioned into the Corps of Engineers to record the American experience of combat. During the Depression-era, artists commissioned by the Federal Art Project (working under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration) produced murals to adorn the interiors of military buildings. At the prestigious West Point Academy, for example, civilian artist Thomas Loftin Johnson painted a seven by thirty-five foot egg tempura mural on the wall of the Cadet Mess Hall. Depicting gallant scenes from history's greatest battles, the huge classical-style mural was as much a training aid in the West Point officer selection course as it was a decorative feature, reproducing the successes of the past in the present, with the hope that their ideals would be carried into the future by the new generation of officers. The psychological significance of muralism as a means of boosting *esprit de corps* through the display of patriotic imagery and symbols of group identity extended beyond the vaunted halls of West Point. In civic buildings across the US, artists commissioned by the Federal Art Project produced wall art depicting regionalised images, intended to quell the anxiety caused by the Depression with reassuring images of a glorified past of prosperity.<sup>279</sup> In a Post Office in the small Texan town of Lampassas, Ethel Edwards painted a ranch corral, while William Gropper set to work on representing the slick

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<https://www.keesler.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/360538/history-of-keesler-air-force-base> [accessed 14th October 2021].

<sup>278</sup> "Oral history interview with Paul D. Magriel", 12-25 Nov 1970, *Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution*.

<sup>279</sup> Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University, 1984), 29.

efficiency of an automobile factory in his Detroit mural - just two of the thousands of federal-funded murals produced between 1933 and 1943. For a nation struggling with the emotional burden of the economic Depression, the murals' celebration of an idealistic small-town America became affective tools in the emotional recovery of the country.<sup>280</sup>

The psychological potential of muralism and interior decoration was of particular interest to the Morale Branch of the United States Army (renamed Special Services in 1942), whose job it was to 'study, devise and put into effect psychological measures among the troops to produce and maintain good morale'.<sup>281</sup> As draftees conscripted into the military through the Selective Service Act of 1940 began filing into the ranks, the potential for artistically talented personnel to contribute to the beautification of prefabricated buildings was quickly realised. In August 1941 an experimental soldier art scheme was established by the American Federation of Arts and College Art Association at Fort Bragg 'to explore the possibilities, advantages, and limitations of a recreational programme employing the arts for the enjoyment and participation of soldiers at the camp'.<sup>282</sup> Similar schemes emerged at Camp Barkley in Texas and Fort Riley, Kansas. By the time United States entered the war in December 1941, the potential of art - as a means of both recording the war and as a method of curating the lived environments of military personnel - had been recognised. At Keesler Field, Paul Magriel's new department grew to twenty-two recruits, tasked with a broad range of creative pursuits, from painting murals and portraits, to landscaping, interior decoration, and uniform design. Just as regionalised images were intended to reinforce a sense of locality for Post Office customers, the cultivation of *esprit de corps* through the proliferation of symbolic, historical, and identifying images utilised the artistic form as a socialisation aid. At Keesler, a painted B-17 loomed over the recreation hall, while a series of murals depicting aviation engineers cheerily going about their work. By displaying images of combat, the murals were intended to create an aura of excited anticipation by giving recruits a glimpse into an idealised version of their future. This forward-looking gaze was pivotal to the ethos of US military training, which encouraged recruits to transfer their loyalties from their home life to the military, a type of emotional conditioning designed to cut ties with the past. Pivotal to the success of the Soldier Art scheme was the role of the enlisted soldier in the design and execution of the artwork. By drawing soldier artists from the ranks, Klum argued that 'the work of talented individuals' would not be 'lost in the masses'.<sup>283</sup> This justification reveals a new dynamic between the group and the individual. By giving ordinary soldiers agency in shaping their training

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<sup>280</sup> Park and Markowitz, *Democratic Vistas*, 29.

<sup>281</sup> Peter Harrington, "The 1943 War Art Program", *Army History* (2002).

<sup>282</sup> Ann Murray (Ed.), *Constructing the Memory of War in Visual Culture Since 1914: The Eye on War* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2018).

<sup>283</sup> Paul Magriel, *Art and the Soldier* (USAAF Special Services Division, 1943), 3.

environment, the military emphasised the importance of collective creativity and visual identity in the maintenance of morale.

The positive effects of art and interior decoration was disseminated further by the publication of *Art and the Soldier*, authored by Paul Magriel. This image-laden publication commends the role of art in enhancing the daily life of the soldier, using photographs of murals, portraits and posters created at Keesler Field to exemplify art as ‘an instrument of education, an aid to morale...and a present reminder of the freedoms and culture for which all men fight’.<sup>284</sup> Copies of the book were sold in the base’s Post Exchange as a glossy souvenir for soldiers to send back to loved ones at home. In 1943, the War Department produced its own manual based on the training camp schemes, *Interior Design and Soldier Art*, which offered practical advice on how to ‘improve interiors of recreational buildings...and to produce an atmosphere that will be conducive to the development of *esprit de corps*, a spirit of sacrifice and a will to win’.<sup>285</sup> The principles established by these stateside interior decoration projects arrived in England with the Eighth Air Force, upheld at an individual level through the men’s own encounters with the decorated training camps in the US and at a Bomb Group level by the Special Service officer responsible for the base’s morale. Each base had its own Special Service Office, whose primary concern was maintaining ‘the mental and physical well-being of the command through careful planning and full utilization of all available welfare, recreation, orientation, information, off-duty education, and morale activities’.<sup>286</sup> Morale was, as clearly stated in the branch’s 1942 Technical Manual, ‘the foundation upon which the Special Service is built’.<sup>287</sup> Art and interior decoration was an important part of Special Service’s remit, and it was advised that each base establish an arts and crafts programme to provide a creative and productive outlet for servicemen’s energies.<sup>288</sup>

At Shipdham, the base’s recreational areas, including the Officers Club, NCOs Club and Red Cross Club, provided ideal canvasses for improvements, not least because of their perceived importance as places of rest and recuperation between missions. Amy Milne-Smith has argued that institutional clubs have historically acted as surrogate homes for their members; domesticated environments where men could seek out the emotional comfort associated with family.<sup>289</sup> These familiar and homely associations encouraged men to form emotional attachments to their surroundings; pride that materialised in a desire for improvement. Colonel William Cameron remembered how the

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<sup>284</sup> Magriel, *Art and the Soldier*, 4.

<sup>285</sup> Clipping from *Special Service Digest*, 1943, entitled ‘Book on soldier art tells how camp interiors can be improved’, *Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library*.

<sup>286</sup> United States Army Air Forces War Department, *Air Force in Theaters of Operations, Organizations and Functions*, (USAAF, 1943), 1-3.

<sup>287</sup> United States War Department, *Technical Manual: Special Service Officer* (USAAF, 1942), 8.

<sup>288</sup> “Athletics and Recreation: A 60-Day Program”, *War Department Pamphlet*, No. 28-30, (December 1943).

<sup>289</sup> Amy Milne-Smith, “A Flight to Domesticity? Making a Home in the Gentlemen’s Clubs of London, 1880–1914”, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol.45, No.4 (2006), 798.



Officer's Club at Shipdham was transformed by the purchase of new furniture and accoutrements by the men themselves, 'In the early days of powdered eggs and Brussel sprouts, we carried our Mess gear to the club. Beer was served from a barrel on a rickety table, using our mess kit cups. At the end we had a fine club, linens, silver and all the rest, which we paid for, but it was never so welcome.'<sup>290</sup> As the technical guidance issued to Special Service suggested, soldier-led decoration projects were not only intended to assist 'the soldier artist in maintaining and utilizing his abilities in his leisure time, but it will also help to provide a restful atmosphere both stimulating and restful'.<sup>291</sup> At Shipdham's Red Cross Club - reserved for the group's enlisted men - a committee was established to decorate and furnish the building's games room, snack bar and lounge. As well as giving the club 'an aura of newness', the ARC director hoped that the changes would 'break the monotony of sameness that hangs over everything for the GIs, after two years in the same place'.<sup>292</sup> As well as serving as a distraction from the anxiety of their work, the involvement of the base's personnel in designing and implementing these changes gave men agency in the production of the 'atmospheres' of the base. A wartime photograph of the officer's lounge at Shipdham shows the results of these communal home-making efforts.

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<sup>290</sup> Bowman, *Echoes of England*, 239.

<sup>291</sup> *War Department Technical Manual*, Vol.21, No.205 (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1940), 151.

<sup>292</sup> "March 1945", B0137, *Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell AFB*.



Figure 8 The Officers Club at Shipdham (Source: Steve Adams)

The 44<sup>th</sup>'s Flying Eightball insignia, painted on either side of the stage and incorporated into a centrepiece on the table, reinforces the collective identity of the bomb group. Writing about paramilitary murals in Northern Ireland, Neil Jarman argues that 'all murals create a new type of space, they redefine mundane public space as politicised place and can thereby help to reclaim it for the community.'<sup>293</sup> The proud display of group insignia in this communal area transformed the space merely occupied by the 44<sup>th</sup> into a place that belonged to the 44<sup>th</sup>. While sofas, armchairs and curtains demarcated the space as a domestic setting, the reuse of bomb fins as ash trays, presents an incongruous juxtaposition between the homely and the martial. Shipdham was not unique in this appropriation - the repurposing of bomb fins as ash trays, light fittings, or waste-paper baskets, was common across all Eighth Air Force bases. While Nicholas Saunders views the domestic reuse of ordnance as 'redolent with irony', the inclusion of these objects of destruction in Eighth Air Force recreational spaces was part of a complex process of meaning-making intended to counter the anticipation of missions and the charged materiality of the bomb.<sup>294</sup> 44<sup>th</sup> BG Ordnance Officer, Hyam Plutzik, articulated the affectivity of the bomb for those tasked with loading them onto the planes,

<sup>293</sup> Neil Jarman, "Painting Landscapes: the place of murals in the symbolic construction of urban space", in Anthony Buckley (ed.), *Symbols in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, The Queen's University of Belfast), 27.

<sup>294</sup> Saunders, Nicholas. *Trench Art: Materialities and Memories of War*. Taylor & Francis, 2020, 72.

'They [the ground crew] worked as though fiends were pursuing them. Then when the bombs were up in the plane's belly, we fuzed them and threaded the arming wire. It was such a routine task, yet to think that this was a load of death for the enemy. The men are almost nonchalant in their work, except for their haste, yet even still they have a detestation for the fragmentated bombs.'<sup>295</sup> The lacing of an otherwise routine exercise with feelings of detestation for the destructive capabilities of the fragmentation bomb (designed to explode into a mass of small, fast-moving metal fragments) demonstrates the power of the bomb to affect those who handled it every day, provoking men to imagine its devastating material effects. Focusing on the process of repurposing, Holly Furneaux argues that the creative reuse of ordnance served a reparative function. By remaking an object associated with death and maiming, the manufacturer asserted control over the object of fear.<sup>296</sup> The alteration of the materiel of war also served as an important distraction from the act of waiting. Will Lundy explains how many of the men of the 44<sup>th</sup> 'found that working with our hands helped keep the mind off the returning planes and lowered the tension. So we usually carried something around in our pockets to work on wherever we had to wait – even in the mess lines.'<sup>297</sup> Many of the men worked with plexiglass, salvaged from the windscreens of battle damaged bombers, to fashion pendants, rings and letter openers. Lundy even spent several weeks making a cigarette lighter from a lump of plexiglass. He never used the lighter, 'but it served its purpose very well passing the time so that waiting was less painful.'<sup>298</sup> The notion of 'passing time' is particularly relevant to this study of temporality and the relationship between past, present and future. The pastime had an important function on the base by easing base occupants through time by distracting them from other demands on their consciousness. Historically, pastimes are the 'self-generated filling-up of space of that time not taken up by the routines of nature'.<sup>299</sup> On the base, pastimes were also valuable as a personal act that (temporarily at least) relieved men from communal time and space.

Elsewhere on the base, buildings were redesignated to suit the pastimes favoured by their young American occupants. In September 1943, work began on the conversion of a Nissen hut into a 35mm cinema and theatre with seating for 500 men. The theatre, completed in February 1944, included dressing rooms for men and women, plush seats rented from a local bombed-out cinema and professional lighting. Lt Col Goodman Griffin, Shipdham's Group Executive Officer, was awarded the Bronze Star (usually only awarded for valour in combat) for initiating, supervising, and

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<sup>295</sup> "World War II Letters", Hyam Plutzik, [://www.hyamplutzikpoetry.com/ww2-letters](http://www.hyamplutzikpoetry.com/ww2-letters)

<sup>296</sup> Holly Furneaux, *Military Men of Feeling: Emotion, Touch, and Masculinity in the Crimean War*, (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2016), 186.

<sup>297</sup> Lundy, *History of the 67 Bombardment Squadron*, 345.

<sup>298</sup> *ibid*

<sup>299</sup> David Knights, "Passing the Time in Pastimes, Professionalism and Politics: Reflecting on the Ethics and Epistemology of Time Studies", *Time & Society*, Vol.15, No.2-3 (2006), 256.

completing the theatre, which was deemed one of the best examples in the Eighth Air Force and an essential asset to the morale of the bomb group.<sup>300</sup> As well as replicating the familiar surroundings of an American movie theatre, the Shipdham base cinema was an important transmitter of affect. Not only did the viewing of new Hollywood releases provide a cultural link to the United States - helping to allay feelings of isolation and homesickness - but it also offered a welcome distraction from the realities of war. Despite the escapism associated with film viewing, it is interesting to note that six out of ten of the pictures shown at Shipdham's base cinema in October 1944 could be categorised as war movies, alluding to the military's role in carefully curating the films shown at its overseas bases.<sup>301</sup> In fact, the US military worked closely with Hollywood to provide entertainment and educational content for its service personnel, as emphasised by its arrangement with studios to provide motion prints in 16mm reels for screening on portable projectors overseas.<sup>302</sup> Scott argues that cinema 'was an essential tool used to disseminate psychiatric ideas and practices among millions of personnel in the US military.'<sup>303</sup> It could be argued that the screening of martial imagery helped to foster an atmosphere of belonging at overseas bases by normalising the role of the military in everyday society and reminding personnel that they were part of a larger war effort. Morale, as an affect, was communicated through the screen via images showing allied military successes. A perfect example of this is William Wyler's *Memphis Belle* (1944), which used real combat footage to tell the story of one of the first Eighth Air Force crews to complete their required 25 missions. Presented as a documentary, the film depicts the realities of air combat - enemy flak, fighters, and damaged aircraft - building anticipation as the crew approach the end of their final mission. The anxiety felt by those waiting on the ground is articulated by the narrator, 'Ask anyone who's been to a field in England or anywhere else our bombers are based, and he'll tell you there's drama here too - waiting - to see who's coming back.' The elation of the crew as the *Memphis Belle* lands presents an affective template, reorientating the anticipation of the audience from a position of anxiety to one of excitement, giving hope that they too can complete their missions.

Attempts to reconceptualise the experience of combat can also be found in the use of humour to satirise base life. Adorning the walls of Shipdham's Enlisted Men's Club, which adjoined the cinema, were cartoon murals depicting humorous scenes of military life, as captured in a photograph showing two 44<sup>th</sup> BG servicemen adding the finishing touches to one of the artworks. While the local population of Shipdham were responsible for the faithful reproduction of the work, the

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<sup>300</sup> "Opening of the theatre and enlisted men's club, Shipdham", MC 371/34, *American Library*.

<sup>301</sup> "Weekly Report of Special Service Activities, 8 October 1944", B0137, *Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell AFB*.

<sup>302</sup> Haidee Wasson and Lee Grieveson (Eds.), *Cinema's Military Industrial Complex* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 116.

<sup>303</sup> *ibid*

signature at the bottom of the image attributes the design to the 'Stars and Stripes' cartoonist, Sgt Dick Wingert.<sup>304</sup> Wingert was one of many artists who supported the war effort by drawing illustrations at the request of personnel, as shown by the creation of a vast number of unit insignia and nose art by Walt Disney Studio artists. The commission at Shipdham shows Dick Wingert's famous 'Hubert' character - a short, plump American G.I – who in this instance is being shown around the base by bedraggled G.I. Depicted in the same satirical vein as Bruce Bairnsfather's 'Old Bill' character of the First World War, the appeal of Hubert lay in the panel's witty takes on everyday army life in England and the idiosyncrasies of war for the civilian-turned-soldier.<sup>305</sup> Whereas the murals of training camps at Keesler had depicted idealistic images of war, the cartoons painted in the recreational buildings at Shipdham show the unglamorous reality of life in wartime England for the average enlisted man. The collective acceptance of mud, sloppy uniforms, and Nissen huts into the visual culture of the group can itself be seen as an expression of collective identity.

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<sup>304</sup> "Opening of the theatre and enlisted men's club, Shipdham", MC 371/34, USF PH 1/1, *American Library*.

<sup>305</sup> Moira Davison Reynolds, *Comic Strip Artists in American Newspapers, 1945-1980* (McFarland, 2015), 139.



Figure 9 A Wingert-designed mural being painted onto a wall of the Enlisted Men's Club at Shipdham (Source: MC 371134, American Library)

As well as making light of the austere realities of the present, a surviving mural in the former 14<sup>th</sup> Combat Wing Headquarters serves as an example of how muralism was used to anticipate futures beyond the war. Commanded by former 44th BG Commanding Officer and Medal of Honor winner Leon Jackson, the 14th Combat Wing oversaw the operations of three bomb groups from the Headquarters at Shipdham. Within these buildings, men issued orders that would determine the lives of thousands of men under their command. In stark contrast to its utilitarian function, the headquarters office was also the location of a large colourful mural depicting a post-war scene in a US milk bar.<sup>306</sup> A character resembling Dick Wingert's Hubert drinks milkshakes with fellow veterans at the counter, while his son asks, 'Hey Paw, tell me again how you and the boys were

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<sup>306</sup> United States Army Air Forces, "14th Combat Bombardment Wing (H)" (1945)", *World War Regimental Histories*, 105.

sweatin' it out in the E.T.O back in '42, '43'. The caption refers to the emotionally fraught period of 'sweating out the mission' (anxiously waiting for the aircraft to return). The mural is significant as a caricature of the emotional community at Shipdham. It not only recognises, but jokes about, the significance of anticipation in the wartime experiences of the 44<sup>th</sup> BG, and how this experience might be perceived by those outside of the community. In reality, the act of 'sweating it out' was fraught with tension and stress. Flying officers spent missions in the control tower, awaiting the return of the group's bombers. As such, they were the first to know how many aircraft were missing and had the affective task of scrubbing out the names of pilots and aircraft from the status board. With no set limit to a tour of duty, ground officers spent years at the airfield, seeing familiar faces – and in turn, names - come and go from the base and the status board.<sup>307</sup> The pivotal role that this period of waiting played in the experiences of the ground officers is reflected in post-war newsletter of the Flying Control Veterans Association, titled 'Sweating Them In'.

As a visual identifier, the affect of community is transmitted from the artwork through the shared state of anticipation. The mural also addresses anticipation in another way, by offering a vision for the future, and a safe return to the United States. The mural therefore shared an important message for the ground personnel, reassuring them that in the future the war would be resigned to a fond memory. Appropriately then, it was in a veteran's newsletter that an explanation of the origins of the mural were published. According to the account, the idea came from group's adjutant, Major William B Taylor, who wrote a letter to cartoonist Dick Wingert requesting a sketch showing 'all of us after the war'.<sup>308</sup> While a contemporary photograph of the mural includes the date of '42, '43, pinpointing the date of its production, the finished caption has been amended to '42, '43 + '44, '45'. The temporal evolution of the caption is a minor detail that marks the passing of time, and more importantly, the continued relevance of the mural to the emotional community it served.

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<sup>307</sup> "Sweating Them In", *Newsletter of the Flying Control Veteran's Organisation*, June 1989.

<sup>308</sup> *44th BG Veterans Association, 8 Ball Tails*, Vol.1 No.2 (1995), 16.



Figure 10 Mural designed by Stars and Stripes cartoonist Dick Wingert and reproduced in the 14th Combat Wing Headquarters at Shipdham (Source: Author)

Just as the Wingert-designed murals acknowledged and made light of the group's military culture, wall art also presented an opportunity for groups of the Eighth Air Force to visually portray and consolidate their collective identities. An interesting example can be found on the walls of the former NCO club at Horham, home of the 95<sup>th</sup> BG. Base artist Nathan Bindler painted murals depicting quasi-Medieval scenes, including a mounted knight waving the Texan flag. In his helmet is a red feather – the emblem of the 95<sup>th</sup> BG. The conflation of an American home (in this case Texas), the group's current home ('Merry Old England'), and the 95<sup>th</sup> as a collective identity, into one mural, expresses the temporal and spatial complexities of the group's identity.

In other cases, the demarcation and identification of space was as simple as painting the 'Flying Eight Ball' insignia onto a communal wall, as shown in the officer's lounge at Shipdham. In other instances, the culture of the group was represented through less obvious, but no less identifying, images. Paintings of women in various states of undress can still be seen in some of the base's buildings. These particular examples have been attributed to 44<sup>th</sup> BG ground crewman, Jack Loman.<sup>309</sup> Like many soldier-artists, Loman's artistic talents were identified by his commanding officer, who in 1943

<sup>309</sup> Martin Bowman, *2nd Air Division Eighth Air Force USAAF 1942-45: Liberator Squadrons in Norfolk and Suffolk* (Aviation Heritage Trail, 2007), 179.



commissioned him to paint murals in various buildings across the base.<sup>310</sup> With little time to carefully compose his designs, Loman chose the most popular subject of art among the US armed forces – the ‘pin-up’. Loman’s figures take their stylistic cue from the famous ‘Varga Girl’; the creation of Alberto Vargas, a Peruvian painter whose pinup girls first started appearing in Esquire magazine in the 1940s. The popularity of Varga’s pin-ups was such that between 1942 and 1946 Esquire printed nine million copies of their magazine to send to American troops stationed overseas free of charge.<sup>311</sup> Vargas described his creations as ‘so beautiful, so perfect, so typical of the American girl, that I can put that picture in any part of the world, without any signature...and they will say: that is the Vargas Girl’.<sup>312</sup> Despite the ironies of the Varga girl’s Peruvian origins, the commodification of the pin-up girl as a symbol of America illustrates the importance of a national cultural identity to the morale of US personnel fighting overseas. By combining ‘allure with patriotic spirit’, the paintings became such intense affective transmitters that, entertainer Bob Hope quipped, ‘our American troops are ready to fight at the drop of an Esquire’.<sup>313</sup> The reverence of the pin-up – not simply as a ‘morale booster’ – but as a symbol of collective identity, is illustrated in an honor roll mural at the Eighth Air Force fighter base at Raydon, listing the names of the group’s pilots killed in action. Framing the scroll are two naked Varga-style women, who look mournfully down at the names of the dead. The incorporation of the women into the memorial piece is evidence of the extent in which pin-ups were not simply surrogate objects of sexual desire, but important symbols of collective identity. As a cultural identifier, it can be argued that the pin-up girl affected morale through her entwinement with notions of obligation and duty. Viewing an image of the ‘All-American’ girl compelled men to fight, in line with their traditional gender role as ‘protector’.<sup>314</sup> However, the pin-up girl also related to men on a much more personal level. As the famous model, Betty Grabel, contemplated, ‘A lot of guys don’t have any girlfriends to fight for. I guess you could call us pin-up girls an inspiration’.<sup>315</sup> The importance of the pin-up girl to the material culture of the Eighth Air Force is perhaps best demonstrated in the countless examples of aircraft nose art bearing depictions of female figures. In these instances, the pilot has often renamed the pin-up painted on the aircraft with the name of his wife or sweetheart, thus entwining the collective image of the pin-up with his own personal

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<sup>310</sup> David Higgs, “American Graffiti”, *American Heritage*, Apr 93, Vol. 44, Issue 2 (1993).

<sup>311</sup> Maria Elena Buszek, *Pin-Up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 210.

<sup>312</sup> Bowman, *Echoes of England*, 180.

<sup>313</sup> Melissa A McEuen, *Making War, Making Women: Femininity and Duty on the American Home Front, 1941-1945*. GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 85.

<sup>314</sup> Westbrook, Robert B. “‘I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl That Married Harry James’: American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II.” *American Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (1990), 595.

<sup>315</sup> *ibid*

attachments. 381<sup>st</sup> BG chaplain James Good Brown's own experiences at an Eighth Air Force base supported this conclusion, musing that 'the pinup Varga Girl in the fox-hole or in the barracks represents all that is beautiful in life...The Varga Girl represents his girl, his home, his family... If he does not have a girl of his own back home, then he thinks of the Varga Girl as his hope of finding a pretty girl'.<sup>316</sup> As well as representing the women left behind in the States, the pin-up girl - stuck to a wall or painted in mural form - can be seen as an object of anticipation. For many men, fighting came with the problematic promise that there would be a girl waiting for the men's return. So too could the superficiality of the scintillating pin-up and its failure to ever completely substitute the absent woman allude fully to the potential for a disappointing return to the States. The image of the pin-up can therefore be interpreted as a 'screen', hiding absence, yet simultaneously conveying the hope of a future coupling.



Figure 11 'Pin-up' mural at Shipdham, photographed in 1986 (Source: MC 371/54, American Library)

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<sup>316</sup> James Good Brown *The Mighty Men of the 381st, Heroes All: A Chaplain's Inside Story of the Men of the 381st Bomber Group* (Publishers Press, 1994), 318.

## The affective assemblage of the barrack hut

Half-brick constructed Maycrete huts and metal clad Nissen huts served as barracks at Shipdham, with each building accommodating men from two to four combat crews. Officers (pilots, co-pilots, navigators, and bombardiers) would be housed in separate accommodation from the group's enlisted personnel (waist gunners, ball turret gunners, flight engineers, radio operators and tail gunners), but living conditions were similar across the ranks. Norman Kiefer described moving into one such hut, shortly after its construction.

*'When we entered our new metal home, we found a number of beds and a round stove that was to provide our central heating. It looked somewhat like a cast iron milk can with a chimney running out of the top. Outside the door was a small bushel basket sized pile of coal. Along each inside wall was a small shelf that was about face high over our beds. There were no other furnishings...'*<sup>317</sup>

Arriving at these spartan barracks, 44th BG personnel quickly began a campaign to claim and adapt their surroundings. For many men at Shipdham, barracks represented a sanctuary; a private space that housed personal objects and motifs connecting them to their homes in America. A journalist visiting an Eighth Air Force base in 1942 described how 'A map adorned one wall, a map of the United States with the signatures of the flyers scrawled over their home states.'<sup>318</sup> Photographs of sweethearts and souvenirs were displayed on the shelf space above the bed. At Shipdham, the shelves became so cluttered with trinkets that an executive order was issued demanding men to clear their shelves of all but essential items.<sup>319</sup> Gilly Carr emphasises the significance of the private territory of the bed space to the internees of Second World War Prisoner of War camps. For these interned men and women, bunks were often the closest thing to 'home' within the camp, owing to their potential for physical identification and domestication, as well as a space for dreaming.<sup>320</sup> While this argument resonates with the experiences of many Eighth Air Force personnel, the perceived stability and safety of the bunk space could also be easily compromised by the accumulation of negative affects related to the anxiety of combat. The rapid turnover of barracks occupants as a result of combat losses made the bed a precarious object. After Squadron Headquarters received notification that a combat crew had been lost, a clean-up crew would be sent to the barracks to remove any personal effects belonging to the missing men. While this procedure was intended to

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<sup>317</sup> Kiefer, *The Green-nosed Flying 8-balls*, 32.

<sup>318</sup> Redding and Leyshon, *Skyways to Berlin*, 95.

<sup>319</sup> "Jan 1945, History of the 44<sup>th</sup>", B0137, *National Mighty Eighth Museum*.

<sup>320</sup> Carr and Mytum, *Prisoners of War: Archaeology, Memory, and Heritage of 19th- and 20th-Century Mass Internment* (New York, NY: Springer New York, 2013), 195.

remove painful reminders of deceased comrades, as well as to fend off any would-be thieves, the removal process became an affective practice in its own right; the empty bed serving as a poignant reminder of the precarity of the survivors' situation. 'We came in one day after debriefing to find four of the beds stripped clean. When I say clean, I mean clean. Nothing was left, not so much as a fine-tooth comb', recalled John McClane.<sup>321</sup> The image of the stripped bed, devoid of any tangible reminder of its previous occupant, served as a visceral connection between the supposed safety of the barracks and the imminent danger of the skies over Germany. Flying a particularly dangerous mission, Donald Chase prayed, 'Oh how I wished I could shoot back...please, don't let them strip my bed...'<sup>322</sup> For Chase, the image of the empty bed was synonymous with a sense of powerlessness, and death. Worse still was the idea that the bed would soon be filled with nameless replacements; all traces of their previous occupants having been erased, 'Their beds are stripped and the thin mattresses folded. Soon newly assigned young men will arrive and the beds will be made again', mused Chase.<sup>323</sup> The stripped bed, like the mural in the HQ building, can therefore be seen as an object of anticipation. However, unlike the mural imagining a safe future in the post-war world, the bed invoked feelings of anxiety and fear as a symbol of an uncertain future. Writing about the unfinished migrant houses that populate the landscape of Mexico, Ivan Sandoval-Cervantes argues that these affective structures represent multiple 'uncertain futures'.<sup>324</sup> Entangled in the emotions of anxiety and hope, the houses are characterised by their presence and absence. For some, they serve as aspirational objects of migrant prosperity, while others view them as ruined symbols of the futility of the migrant dream. For the occupants of the barracks at Shipdham, it was not knowing whether the occupants had been killed, wounded, or taken prisoner that added to the unsettling range of potential futures.

The idea that objects of affect can simultaneously represent multiple futures is particularly pertinent to the materiality of the bed space. As well as transmitting negative affects as an object of anxiety-inducing uncertainty, the bed could also be interpreted as a place of hopeful anticipation. An example of this is the permanence offered through the production of graffiti. While the demolition of the former barracks at Shipdham has ruled out any chance of documenting extant examples of 44th BG graffiti, the barrack hut walls at nearby Rackheath offers some interesting examples of combat crew etchings. Here, the names of the hut's occupants fill the walls of the derelict building. Alongside these identifying marks are mission tallies, where crew members have marked off each completed

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<sup>321</sup> John McClane, "The War Years as Experienced by an Army Air Force Navigator", MC 371/62, USF 1/7, *American Library*.

<sup>322</sup> "Combat record of T/Sgt Donald V. Chase, 44th Bomb Group". MC 376/801, USF 23/8. *American Library*.

<sup>323</sup> "Combat record of T/Sgt Donald V. Chase, 44th Bomb Group". MC 376/801, USF 23/8. *American Library*.

<sup>324</sup> I. Sandoval-Cervantes, "Uncertain Futures: The Unfinished Houses of Undocumented Migrants in Oaxaca, Mexico", *American Anthropologist*, Vol.119 (2017), 212.

mission with a bomb symbol in anticipation for the end of their tour. In this sense, the mission tallies support Carr's idea that bunk spaces were indeed places to dream. They offered a space for men to tangibly record their individual achievements and look forward to the end of their tour of duty; an affective practice that allayed the fear that combat flying produced. Indeed, the US Army Air Force's decision to set a required number of missions was intended to allay the anxiety caused by the realisation that an airman's missions would only end by becoming a casualty.<sup>325</sup> This view is reinforced by results from a wartime survey, which showed that 74 per cent of Enlisted Men believed that having a set number of missions to complete was an effective way of reducing their anxiety.<sup>326</sup> As famous war reporter Ernie Pyle observed, the men of the US army would 'fire all day and move all night...if they could only keep going forward swiftly. Because everywhere in our army, 'forward', no matter what direction, is toward home.'<sup>327</sup> While the etching of markings could comfort the individual, the continuation of this act over time, by multiple individuals, created an unsettling tableaux. Famous war correspondent Andy Rooney recalled talking to a B-17 gunner during a tour of an Eighth Air Force base. On noticing that there was a tally of 17 missions above the man's bunk, Rooney remarked on the man's considerable combat experience. 'No, that was the guy before me', was the gunner's reply.<sup>328</sup> In some cases, graffiti was purposefully left as a vernacular memorial to those who had failed to return.<sup>329</sup> 44th BG pilot Norm Kiefer recorded how 'On the wall in our hut, I had scrawled the names of men and ships of the 506th with the dates and places that they had gone down...This faced me each morning when I got up and each morning when I retired.'<sup>330</sup> Kiefer's graffiti acts as a reminder of the impermanence of the mortal body. 'Now I would frequently look at my limbs in the morning when I dressed and wonder if they or even I would be there by evening', remembered Kiefer. Here, temporality is itself an affect, creating the sense that the future is haunted by the pasts of others.

This small daily act of remembrance is typical of personnel's response to grief at Shipdham, in the absence of official acts of collective mourning. While there were some attempts by base commanders to demarcate site for group commemoration (Edwards describes the erection of a memorial plaque at Great Ashfield, for example), at Shipdham the dead are eerily absent from the

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<sup>325</sup> Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare*, 103.

<sup>326</sup> *Aviation Psychology Program Research Reports* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947), 132.

<sup>327</sup> Ernie Pyle, *Ernie's War: The Best of Ernie Pyle's World War II Dispatches*. (London: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 178.

<sup>328</sup> "Andy Rooney on covering the Eighth Air Force in World War II". The Interviews: An Oral History of Television. *Google Arts & Culture*, [https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/andy-rooney-on-covering-the-eighth-air-force-during-world-war-ii/BQE1aP7Q\\_NhNvQ?hl=en](https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/andy-rooney-on-covering-the-eighth-air-force-during-world-war-ii/BQE1aP7Q_NhNvQ?hl=en) [accessed 15 May 2022].

<sup>329</sup> *ibid*

<sup>330</sup> Kiefer, *The Green-nosed Flying 8-balls*, 275.

official record of base activity.<sup>331</sup> Instead, it is through the materiality of the base – empty beds and scribbled graffiti – that the dead of the 44<sup>th</sup> ‘speak’.

For the mechanics on the ground, whose own mortality was not at stake, the anticipation related to combat was not evoked by the image of the empty bed, but rather the empty concrete hardstand, representing a plane that had failed to return. For mechanic Will Lundy, it was the unknown fate of air crews that weighed most heavily on his mind. After the war he would carry out decades of research to find out the fortunes of each of the 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group’s 1,000 losses, publishing a 500-page tome, titled *44th Bomb Group Roll of Honor and Casualties*. In the introduction, Lundy explains his motivation,

*‘As a ground crewman in the 67th Squadron for most of the time the 44th BG was at war in England, I watched most of the 44th Bomb Group planes, heavily laden with bombs, ammunition, fuel and crewmen take off, headed for action against the enemy. I was there, too, when the formations returned, too often learning that not all of them came back. The emotions were always present; at times elated with a successful attack, but upset when one aborted and very depressed when we had losses.*

*“If I had worked on a plane that went missing, I along with my crew buddies, felt a personal responsibility for the loss. There was always that nagging doubt inside us that I seldom ever voiced that asked, ‘Could I have been responsible for this loss? Could I, or should I, have done something that would have brought this plane and crew back? Are these crewmen now dead because I failed them?’”<sup>332</sup>*

The empathy felt by the ground crew was heightened through their interactions with the material effects of the war. The morbid task of cleaning out planes between missions and picking through the human remains of aircraft accidents inflicted its own anxieties on the personnel involved, who were powerless to prevent the carnage, but nevertheless felt the responsibility of ensuring that their plane was mechanically sound.<sup>333</sup> ‘The crew chief knows the tricks of his plane, its temperamental weaknesses and the history of its ailments.’<sup>334</sup> In addition to the human loss was the damage to the plane itself. Anticipation among ground crew was, in many respects, amplified by the knowledge that - unlike combat personnel - they would not be able to return home until the war’s completion. One flight surgeon noted that in Winter 1944 neurotic cases among ground crew who had been overseas for more than two years increased due to the realisation ‘that they would again be away from home

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<sup>331</sup> Edwards, *Allies in Memory*, 40.

<sup>332</sup> Will Lundy, *44th Bomb Group Roll of Honor and Casualties* (Marshfield, MA: Green Harbor Publications, 1987).

<sup>333</sup> C.P. Symonds and Denis Williams, *Psychological Disorders in Flying Personnel*, Section 2 (Air Historical Board, 1947), 50.

<sup>334</sup> ‘On Base: Striking Arm of the Eighth’, *Army Talks*, p.8.

during the holiday season.<sup>335</sup> The anticipation for a homecoming that they were powerless to secure prompted some ground crew at Shipdham to transfer to combat roles, 'Good gunners were constantly being graduated from the ranks of ground crew men, youth anxious to have a crack at Jerry.' The opportunity to fill battle-torn crews with replacements from the group's ground echelon, already socialised in the culture of the unit, was an attractive prospect for the 44th BG's commanders. 'These lads made excellent combat crew men because they had absorbed the *esprit de corps* of First Wing and already were a part of the family', recorded one 1943 source.<sup>336</sup>

How could personnel counter the negative affects of anticipation created by the material reminders of uncertain futures? In some cases, the unruly affects of their assigned barrack huts prompted men to leave in search of more private and homely spaces. These unofficial barracks allowed crews to live in a small family-like unit, under the notion that if anything happened to one of them on a mission, then the whole crew would likely meet the same fate. Kiefer recorded how he and his fellow crew members took up residence in an empty drying room behind the latrines. He wrote the following in a letter to his wife: 'Well we are fully moved into our new domicile. There are three of us in here. They are Mark (Mark Morris), Ag. (Albert G. Kerns) and myself. We have a place to hang our clothes, two one hundred watt light bulbs, a radio and a hot plate to heat water on. We call it our apartment.'<sup>337</sup> Meanwhile, on the technical site, ground crews quickly abandoned the mile-long walk between their assigned barracks and the dispersal site and set up semi-permanent homes on the airfield itself. In the early days, these shelters took the form of pyramid tents, which provided some protection from the unforgiving elements. The resourcefulness of the ground personnel, coupled with a desire for more hospitable shelters, led to the creation of 'line shacks', built from wooden bomb crates and surplus materials. By Spring 1943, it was noted how 'some of the more enterprising occupants had constructed and furnished them more comfortably than the barracks. They all had 'oil' heaters, some had bed and mattress, some with bunks and mattresses, some even with food. Had we not been in one-story zones some would have been multi-level.'<sup>338</sup> As well as serving a practical function, line shacks also allowed ground crews to live separately from combat crews. For many, their separation was intended to ease the emotional trauma of seeing friends fail to return. 44th navigator John McClane 'noticed that there was no effort from the ground crew to get close to us. Anyone could tell there was mutual admiration between us but I suspect we flying men lived in

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<sup>335</sup> Mae Mills Link and Hubert A. Coleman, *Medical support of the Army Air Forces in World War II*, (Office of the Surgeon General, 1955), 666.

<sup>336</sup> Redding and Leyshon, *Skyways to Berlin*, 77.

<sup>337</sup> Kiefer, *The Green-nosed Flying 8-balls*, 81.

<sup>338</sup> Lundy, *History of the 67 Bombardment Squadron*, 161.

our dream world and that the ground crew had seen too many of their 'friends' not return.<sup>339</sup> For the most part, group commanders turned a blind eye to the requisition of airfield supplies for these individual homes. In some cases, the ingenuity of their builders was even celebrated. A January 1945 entry into the official 44th BG records remarked on the home-making efforts of Crew Chief J. M. Miller and S/Sgt S. D. Miller, who had converted a disused bomb shelter close to the dispersal site into 'a luxurious and most habitable home'.<sup>340</sup> Photographs of the interior show the occupants sitting around a fireplace, the mantle of which is adorned with framed photographs of one of the men's children. A curtain separated 'the den' from the bedroom, furnished with two cots and a dresser. As Ahmed argues, 'the accumulation of affective value shapes the surfaces of bodies and worlds'.<sup>341</sup> By coating their living areas in the affects of 'home' - not only in terms of physical comforts but also fraternal companionship - the unruly affects of the barrack huts were tamed.



Figure 12 Crew Chief J. M. Miller and S/Sgt S. D. Miller's 'luxurious and most habitable home' in a bomb shelter at Shipdham (Source: Reel B0147, Air Force Historical Research Agency)

The social alignment of personnel into smaller family-like units reflected the importance of the primary group. The emergence of 'primary group theory', first espoused in the late 1940s by S.L.A. Marshall in his study of US morale during WWII, enshrined the notion that men's core motivation

<sup>339</sup> John W McClane Jr., "Non-Combat Activities while attached to the 44th Bomb Group", in *World War II: An Experience by an Army Air Force Navigator* (Unpublished memoir, National Mighty Eighth Museum), 18.

<sup>340</sup> "Jan 1945, History of the 44<sup>th</sup>", B0137, *National Mighty Eighth Museum*.

<sup>341</sup> Ahmed, *Affective Economies*, 121.



for fighting was their immediate circle of comrades – their ‘primary group’.<sup>342</sup> While the perceived over-reliance on this theory has been criticized by some military theorists, who argue that it ignores the multitude of other factors that contribute to morale, the focus on the connections formed between military comrades is particularly relevant to this study of the 44<sup>th</sup> as an emotional community.<sup>343</sup> In late 1944, a report based on surveys of aircrew personnel in the Eighth Air Force concluded that ‘the primary motivating force which more than anything else keeps these men flying and fighting is that they are members of a group in which flying and fighting is the only accepted way of behaving.’<sup>344</sup> The advisory report, written by the Psychological Branch of the Air Surgeon Headquarters of the Army Air Force, viewed each bomb group as an inward-looking unit, held together by a shared set of values and a common identity. Each member ‘takes great pride in his membership in the group...He is especially sure that the personnel and special operational procedures of his group are superior to those of other groups.’<sup>345</sup> According to the anonymous study, this sense of belonging was such that members of a bomb group felt next to no connection to other bomb groups, even if located only a few miles away from the base. The bomb group, it was argued, was the largest unit ‘with which there was an intimate sense of belonging’. It was therefore vital, the report argued, that leaders create and maintain *esprit de corps* at a group level to keep men flying and fighting.<sup>346</sup>

This loyalty is confirmed in many veteran accounts. 44<sup>th</sup> BG gunner Donald Chase wrote about the attachments he felt to the rest of his bomber crew, ‘Those who did fly combat...did so with a self-determination, an unspoken pride in contributing to the effectiveness of the ten-man unit that each B-24 carried. I’m sure men of the 44th were not unique in this respect, but it did make for unit cohesion that was not equaled in civilian life.’<sup>347</sup> As Chase mentions, unit cohesion served a practical purpose in helping crews to work effectively as a group in the air. At Shipdham a visiting journalist remarked how ‘There is a clearly understood working agreement between crew and pilots that permits maximum effectiveness with the least expenditure of work, time and effort. Only crews that gain such ability survive long, for the Nazis are quick to take advantage of any slip’.<sup>348</sup> While the close ties between the crews were tested in the air, it was on the ground that these emotional attachments were formed and maintained. For Jacob T. Elias, the sense of camaraderie he felt in his

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<sup>342</sup> S.L.A. Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command* (Eumenes Publishing, 2019).

<sup>343</sup> Hew Strachan, “Training, Morale and Modern War”. *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol. 41, No.2 (2006), 212.

<sup>344</sup> Psychological Branch, Research Division, “Report on survey of aircrew personnel in the Eighth, Ninth, Twelfth, and Fifteenth Air Forces”, (Office of the Air Surgeon, Headquarters of the Army Air Forces, April 1944), 64-65.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>347</sup> “Combat record of T/Sgt Donald V. Chase, 44th Bomb Group”. MC 376/801, USF 23/8. *American Library*.

<sup>348</sup> Redding, *Skyways to Berlin*, 174.

barracks transformed his overall emotional experience of the war from one of fear to love and kinship, 'I don't want my sons to experience war. But I wish they could experience that complete camaraderie that I had at Shipdham-in-the-Mud... That is why my mind often goes back to Shipdham, finds comfort in going back to Shipdham, and most likely will keep going back to that barracks full of love.'<sup>349</sup> While the notion of a fraternal 'band of brothers' is a recognised trope in the accounts of WWII veterans, camaraderie's place in the affective economy of the 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group was not simply a post-war mis-remembering, but an important part of the social architecture of the base, and a vital factor in the maintenance of morale.<sup>350</sup> Reporting on the camaraderie between crews at Shipdham in the first months of 1943, journalist John M. Redding was impressed by the extent to which crews had bonded, emphasising the role of the private living space as a setting for homosocial relationships.

*'The crews of the Little Beaver and the Suzy Q eat apart from the squadron mess. They have fostered a feeling of oneness among themselves to a point where they not only live together but they eat together, fight together and when the time comes, if it must, they will die together. Part of that feeling, that esprit, comes from their crew mess. The private mess they operate began because of the dislike of these men to 'foofaraw'.<sup>351</sup> They didn't want to wear their blouses to dinner in the officers' mess. They came to England to fight a war...'<sup>352</sup>*

Redding's account of the barrack hut scene is in many ways contradictory. While the establishment of a 'private mess' in their barracks implies a desire for domesticity, emphasised in the 'pleasantly smoky atmosphere' that comes from 'the crackle of spattering grease as the potatoes fry merrily on the top of the little stove', the stated reason for the crew's rejection of the formal officers' mess is so that they can *feel* like they're fighting a war. For the aircrews, the notion of fighting as part of a bonded unit – a 'happy few' to quote Shakespeare's *Henry V* - was vital to their wartime identity. Redding's account of the barrack hut scene emphasises the place of Shipdham at the intersection between the domestic and the martial; a juxtaposition that is enlivened in the intermingling of the mundane – cooking and eating – and the militaristic – fighting and dying. The affectivity generated by these homely interactions countered the troubling affects provoked by the materiality of the barracks' association with uncertain futures. As 44<sup>th</sup> BG veteran Reginald Phillips remembered, 'There were warm 'around the stove in the barracks' times, while talking about our newly found

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<sup>349</sup> Jacob T. Elias, *2nd Air Division Association Newsletter*, 1978.

<sup>350</sup> Frances Houghton, *The Veterans' Tale : British Military Memoirs of the Second World War* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 171.

<sup>351</sup> 'Foofaraw' is a term originating in the American West to describe frills and over-the-top finery and ornamentation. In this context, it denotes the seemingly unnecessary military pomp and tradition enforced on army officers.

<sup>352</sup> Redding and Leyshon, *Skyways to Berlin*, 173.

combat experiences, and trying to tell ourselves and each other that we did have a chance to make it through all this that we were going through.<sup>353</sup> The barracks were not necessarily spaces to escape the horrors of war, but places where a sense of belonging was fostered through commensality and problem sharing. Affects circulated between bodies in the barracks, orientating the occupants into an affective alignment where the past was shared, the present secured, and the future can be faced together.<sup>354</sup> As Ahmed argues, ‘In such affective economies, emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments.’<sup>355</sup>

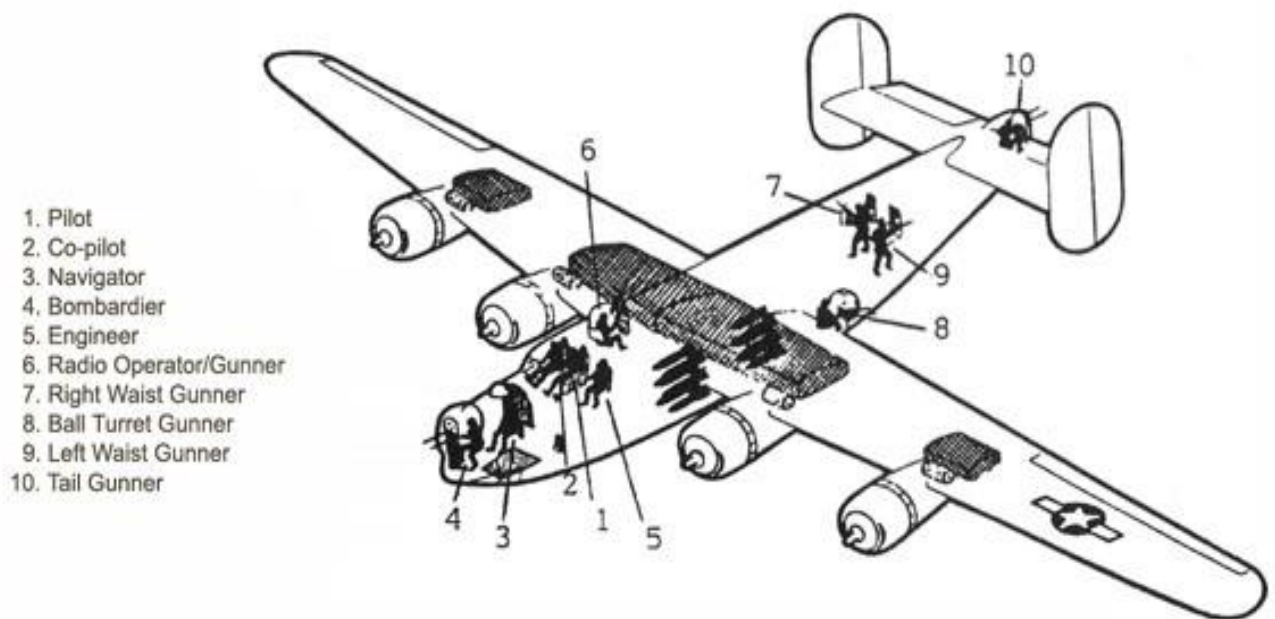


Figure 13 Crew positions in the B-24 Liberator (Source: *Always Out in Front*, Unpublished memoir, 1999)

As well as helping to counter the demoralising affects of combat, this affective alignment also had important repercussions in the air. At the most basic level, the positive affect generated on the ground, articulated as camaraderie, loyalty and *esprit de corps*, motivated men to fight – not just for a common cause, but for each other. The affective alignment of bodies around the barrack’s potbellied stove was replicated in the belly of the B-24, where ten-man crews were required to work together

<sup>353</sup> Hamilton, *The Writing 69<sup>th</sup>*, 57.

<sup>354</sup> Noemi Tousignant, “Broken tempos: Of means and memory in a Senegalese university laboratory”, *Social Studies of Science*, Vol.43, No.5 (2013), 729–753.

<sup>355</sup> Sara Ahmed, “Affective Economies”, *Social Text*, Vol.22, No.2 (2004), 119.

in synchronicity to improve their chances against the enemy. The army training parlance for this alignment was 'air discipline'. In a 1943 article in *Air Force*, Brig. Gen. Frank A. Armstrong defined the term as 'the complete dependence of one crew member upon another, of plane upon plane, squadron upon squadron, group upon group.' According to Armstrong, air discipline started on the ground and was maintained in the air through the complete synchronicity of the crew.<sup>356</sup> As Armstrong emphasises, air discipline was not at odds with congenial camaraderie, rather it is maintained by informality. He argues that 'discipline breeds comradeship, best illustrated, perhaps, by the talking that goes on over the interphone...Not only is it good for morale but it serves as a means of keeping crewmen alert.'<sup>357</sup> The interphone, which connected all members of the crew during the flight, served as a means of continuing the informal 'bull sessions' that took place around the barrack stove in the air. This was a novel concept. As Armstrong concedes, 'to associate discipline with informality, comradeship, a levelling of rank, and at times a shift in actual command away from the leader, may seem paradoxical'. However, Armstrong had his own evidence for the success of his approach to discipline. Known as a 'trouble-shooter', Armstrong was sent to two under-performing bomb groups to improve discipline, results and morale; the story of which became the basis of the novel and film, *Twelve O'Clock High*.<sup>358</sup>

Evidence for the importance of the affective orientation of the primary group is made apparent in the prominence of the 'outsider' as an almost apocryphal figure synonymous with death. 44<sup>th</sup> BG gunner Forrest Clark recalled sharing a hut with 'Red' - a frightened, sexually immature, and timid gunner (emasculating details that suggest that he was placed outside the fraternity of the barracks hut). Clark vividly recalls the moment that Red's plane was shot down, only a few weeks after he had arrived at Shipdham, 'I can still remember the spiral of smoke coming from the wings as the plane went into a fatal dive.'<sup>359</sup> Clark also recalled a sergeant called Glenn Barton who was terrified of flying and dreamed of a transfer to an entertainment branch, where he could perform for his fellow troops. One day, Barton failed to return to the barracks, never to be seen again. Clark never found out if he been shot down or transferred. Either way, Clark ends the story by saying that Barton fell victim to the problem of 'misclassification' by recruiting officers, equating his 'otherness' with his mysterious disappearance.<sup>360</sup> In these apocryphal stories, the 'missing' airman is distinguished as outside of the emotional community of the bomb group. As this exploration of the material culture of Shipdham has shown, the production of locality was as much about the localisation of subjects as

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<sup>356</sup> Frank A. Armstrong, 'Air Discipline', *Air Force*, November 1943 p.5

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>358</sup> Miller, *Eighth Air Force*, p.26

<sup>359</sup> Memoir, 'Tales of the 44th' relating to Forrest S. Clark and the Griffith's Crew: part one, MC 371/13, USF 1/2. *American Library*.

<sup>360</sup> While Clark would never discover Barton's fate, it is interesting to note that a 1944 program for the Special Service musical *Skirts* includes a photograph of a 'Glenn Barton' dressed in drag, having been cast as one of the chorus 'girls' in the army production.

it was about physically altering the materiality of the base. To quote Appadurai, this socialisation produced 'actors who properly belong to a situated community of kin, neighbours, friends, and enemies'.<sup>361</sup>

As has already been discussed, the affect of home was generated through the proliferation of a common identity, the personalisation and domestication of space, and the alignment of individuals into primary groups. In terms of morale, these acts of locality production helped the community to resist the negative affects of fear and anxiety associated with its constant anticipatory state by grounding it in the present. From the group's home base, uncertain futures could be tackled together through collective action.

### Rest, recreation and the reproduction of home

The locality produced at Shipdham air base was shaped by a multitude of influences that stretched well beyond the perimeter gate. As geographer Doreen Massey argues, place 'derives not from some mythical internal roots nor from a history of isolation... but precisely from the absolute particularity of the mixture of influences found together there'.<sup>362</sup> Despite earning the British nickname 'Little America', US airfields were by no means homogenised, but rather distinctly influenced by interactions with people and places beyond their boundaries. The assumptions, values, goals, feeling rules, and accepted modes of expression that tied the 44th Bomb Group together as an emotional community were in many cases shared, borrowed, or adapted from other communities. As Rosenwein explains, an emotional community can be considered as a large circle within which are smaller circles. This larger circle also intersects with other large circles at one or many points; a rhizomatic map that continually shifts and converges as emotional connections are formed.<sup>363</sup> The air base at Shipdham was tethered to the United States by the countless emotional ties that connected personnel to the people and places of their former civilian lives. These lingering connections and experiences of home inevitably shaped how men related to their new home at Shipdham. Similarly, base life was influenced by interactions with local English people and places. An apt material symbol of the complex web of connections is the 'short snorter'. A popular souvenir among aircrew, 'short snorters' were bank notes adorned with signatures, collected in the US and on overseas service. For 44<sup>th</sup> veteran Forrest S Clark, his prized snorter collection represented the entirety of his wartime experience. 'It is a record of more than 25,000 miles of travel from bases to bases, from duty assignments to more. If all the short snorters were pasted together they would

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<sup>361</sup> *ibid*

<sup>362</sup> Massey, 1999: 22, cited by Castree et al., 2006: 310.

<sup>363</sup> Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, 24-25.

stretch around the world many times and the entire fabric of thousands of lives of military service in all corners of the world.<sup>364</sup> Clark's short snorters contained autographs from his fellow crew members, ground personnel, British locals and Red Cross workers. At the same time as representing his individual experience, it also embodied the shared experiences of war. Like a Venn diagram, the short snorter represented the interactions and connections between different, but interlocking, emotional communities. This final section will explore how interactions with bodies outside the affective economy of the air base, including Red Cross workers and loved ones in the United States, reproduced the affects of home in the present, allowing personnel to orientate themselves towards a secure future beyond the war.

Returning once more to the Red Cross Rest Homes, it was the way in which the establishments evoked the 'familiarity' of home by returning airmen to 'a world they knew before' that was commended by the visiting flight surgeon, Dr Wright. By reproducing the familiar affects of home, the canny countered the uncanny and an idealised past replaced the troubling affects of an uncertain future. Of course, it could be argued that the diverging experiences of pre-war life meant that a universal definition of 'home' was impossible to reach, let alone to reproduce in the confines of a rest home. However, according to the men themselves, it was the very vagueness of the 'home' experienced that accounted for the scheme's success. One gunner remarked that the rest home was not 'just like home. None of us ever had a home like this...It is the kind of home we dream about. It is great.'<sup>365</sup> The abstract nature of the 'home' reproduced by the Red Cross was not restricted to the organisation's rest homes, but also to its service clubs set up across England. American Red Cross Club assistant Patricia Hartnett remarked on her seemingly circular journey from the States to a club in England, 'we were whisked through the foggy English countryside to our respective clubs, which looked as if we were right back where we started from. That is the impression an American Red Cross club is supposed to give, not only a *home away from home*, but the fraternity house, the Elks Club, the corner drug store and Mom's front parlor all wrapped into one.'<sup>366</sup>

Following the popularity of American Red Cross Clubs set up in English towns and cities, the USAAF invited the organisation to set up 'aeroclubs' at each of its bases. The first Red Cross aeroclub opened in February 1943 and was quickly followed by over a hundred more. Invited to visit one such club in early 1944, a reporter explained why they were so important, 'Every American air base is a tense place these days...Under these circumstances many might reach the point of jitters or of diminishing efficiency had not the wise commanders long since prepared to meet just these

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<sup>364</sup> "Forrest S Clark Griffith Crew Memoirs", MC 376/430, *American Library*.

<sup>365</sup> "U.S. Fliers Rest at a King's Estate", *New York Times*, March 23, 1944

<sup>366</sup> "Girls 'Over There'", *New York Times*, March 7, 1943.

conditions.<sup>367</sup> The article goes on to commend the Aeroclubs as the antithesis to this accumulated tension. At Shipdham, the Aeroclub was situated on the Communal Site, adjacent to the Dining Room, Officers Mess and Sergeants Mess. Located within a short walk of all six living sites, the club was the closest thing to the heart of the base as the airfield's dispersed layout allowed. Housed in adjoining Nissen huts, the aeroclub accommodated a large snack bar with room for dancing; a games room furnished with card tables; a room with two table tennis tables; a library stocking American magazines and hometown newspapers, and a lounge with a brick fireplace.<sup>368</sup> Although clubs were officially open from about 3pm until midnight, it was commonly accepted that ARC staff would welcome service personnel at any time of the day. Similarly, while the clubs were intended for use by enlisted men, their doors were often opened to men of all ranks. Offering snacks, reading rooms, tea dances, button sewing services and attentive ears, the ARC club served as a beacon of domesticity within the drab militaristic surroundings of the air base. As one article commented, 'the Aero Clubs are homes away from home for the enlisted men. With a cozy atmosphere – fires in grates, chintz curtains at the windows, books and American magazines all around, and girls from home to tell troubles to – they are just what they were planned to be, namely, the greatest possible relaxers for tired and tense men.'<sup>369</sup> At Shipdham, the aeroclub provided a neutral space for group bonding and socialising, as shown in the establishment of the 'Hot Stove League', held once a week as an opportunity for men to 'sit around the fire and swap stories on various and sundry subjects – ghosts, hunting, etc.'<sup>370</sup> As well as the visual affect of the domestic decor, clubs also provided a sensory experience of home through taste. In January 1945, the aeroclub at Shipdham served 133,919 snacks at an expenditure of £927, equivalent to about £40,000 today. The Director notes that the month's expenditure was slightly higher than usual as the club had managed to secure a large shipment of Coca-Cola – a favourite among the club's patrons. The Director also recorded how 'hot soup and macaroni seem to be great favorites in the snack bar.'<sup>371</sup> The comforting childhood associations of macaroni were rivalled only by the joy of eating a freshly cooked donut – the Red Cross's most famous culinary offering. Armed with a tray of doughnuts and an urn of fresh coffee, Red Cross staff would await the arrival of exhausted crews in the interrogation room. For those returning from long, arduous missions, the refreshments were well received as something more than sustenance. The Red Cross doughnut, or 'sinker' as they were affectionately known, was cooked from a special mix shipped over from the US, providing an evocative taste of 'home'.<sup>372</sup> These refreshments were dispensed to ground personnel working on the flight line via the Red

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<sup>367</sup> "Red Cross Clubs – Havens of Fliers", *The New York Times*, March 19, 1944

<sup>368</sup> "The American Red Cross Club at Wendling", B24.net, [accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb 2022].

<sup>369</sup> "Red Cross Clubs – Havens of Fliers", *The New York Times*, March 19, 1944

<sup>370</sup> "American Red Cross Report for the Month of December", January 1945, B0137.

<sup>371</sup> "Social report for the month of October", 7 October 1944, B0137, *Air Force Historical Research Agency*.

<sup>372</sup> James H. Madison, *Slinging Doughnuts for the Boys: An American Woman in World War II* (Indiana University Press, 2008), 45

Cross 'Clubmobile' service, which operated from a fleet of converted buses. A Clubmobile visited Shipdham twice a week to hand out coffee and doughnuts to men on the flight line.<sup>373</sup> Named after US cities, each Clubmobile was fitted with a small lounge area, furnished with a Victrola and a selection of popular American records, adding to the sensory experience of being 'at home'.



Figure 14 Airmen of the 44th BG enjoy coffee and doughnuts from a Clubmobile. (Source: American Air Museum: FRE 635)

While the Clubmobile offered familiar tastes, it was the work of another charitable organisation - the USO (United Service Organization) - that offered the sights and sounds of America. During the war, the USO's camp shows extensively toured Eighth Air Force bases, playing host to a stream of American stars during the war, from Bob Hope to Glenn Miller. A visiting USO show performed to a large crowd of 800 at Shipdham in the first week of October 1944.<sup>374</sup> It is estimated that between 1941 and 1945, the USO put on 293,738 performances, seen by more than 161 million servicemen and women across all theatres of the war.<sup>375</sup> An article in *Look* magazine from the time described the transformative qualities of these performances, 'For the little time the show lasts, the men are taken straight to the familiar Main Street that is the goal of every fighting American far away from home...The entertainment brought home to the boys. *Their home.*'<sup>376</sup> This popularity revealed

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<sup>373</sup> "Weekly Report of Special Service Activities", 8 October 1944, B0137

<sup>374</sup> Weekly Report of Special Service Activities, 8 October 1944, B0137

<sup>375</sup> Holsinger, Paul *War and American Popular Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, Greenwood Publishing Group (1999)

<sup>376</sup> *Movie Lot to Beachhead by the Editors of Look*: New York: Doubleday, 194585



something of the extent that Hollywood and the American mass media had played, before and during the war, in the proliferation of shared images and ideals. The 'home' that the USO exported was an ideal constructed in the music halls and movie studios of America, buoyed in the public imagination through magazines, film and radio. For the young men of the Eighth Air Force, growing up with these national cultural identifiers made the commodification of 'home' as a set of shared cultural values, possible. Appadurai expressed a similar sentiment in his argument that mass media has caused people to view their lives through the prisms of the possible lives proliferated on screen.<sup>377</sup> Like the affective briefing map, the USO performers conducted the atmosphere of the base theatre for the duration of its performance, replacing anxiety and fear with the familiar and comforting affects of an idealised future.

The role of individuals as transmitters of affect also applied to the Red Cross staff who organised and ran the aeroclubs. According to Dr Wright, it was not merely the material comforts of the Red Cross rest homes, aeroclubs and clubmobiles that accounted for their homeliness, 'but it is the Red Cross girl, who on a morally acceptable plane serves as a release and establishes a family feeling.'<sup>378</sup> The notion that Red Cross volunteers were important agents of affect in the assemblage of the Red Cross rest home or club is repeated in multiple accounts by outsiders, observers, servicemen, and the women themselves. Patricia Hartnett mused, 'my career as a staff assistant in an American Red Cross Club is largely one of being atmospheric, making the boys think they're back home in Oshkosh instead of just a stone's throw away from Piccadilly.'<sup>379</sup> The idea that the women were themselves 'atmospheric' recognises their roles as generators of affect, which circulated around the spaces they inhabited through their interactions with the club's customers. Hartnett's comment also implies that the women's affectivity was not simply related to their femininity, but something that had been purposefully instilled in them through training. This is confirmed by Red Cross assistant Rosemary Norwalk, who remembered how 'always, wherever we were sent, we were expected to be the friend, the girl next door, the kid sister, the funny aunt, Mom, advisor, sympathizer; to listen, commiserate, cajole, and cheer up the guys [...] We were not nurses; our job was to nurse morale.'

<sup>380</sup> As conductors of an affective orchestra, bringing together multiple renditions of home, it was essential that Red Cross staff were suitably recruited and trained for the role. As well as requiring a college degree, candidates were also expected to be well-travelled. During recruit Ruth Register's

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<sup>377</sup> Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. India: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. P.54

<sup>378</sup> Mae Mills Link and Hubert A. Coleman, *Medical Support of the Army Air Forces in WWII*, Office of the Washington D.C., Surgeon General, 1955, P.662

<sup>379</sup> "Girls 'Over There'", *New York Times*, March 7, 1943

<sup>380</sup> Norwalk, Rosemary. *Dearest Ones: A True World War II Love Story*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1999, x.

ARC interview, she was asked how many American states she'd visited. Answering that she'd been to all of them - bar Maine - she was immediately sent for her physical. Once approved, candidates undertook a six-week training course at national headquarters, followed by a provisional placement as a domestic military post before deployment overseas. Training began, as with all military socialisation, with instruction on the correct wearing of uniform. By removing indicators of their individual personalities, the uniform helped to morph the women into the unanimous 'Red Cross Girl' - a template onto which men could project their own imaginings of home. The military-styled uniforms also conveyed the women's professional status, demarcating them as 'off-limits' to the men of the base.<sup>381</sup> As well as lessons on discussion techniques, training involved classes on crafts, music, dancing and activity planning. At the end of the course, recruits were assessed on their competency in small talk.<sup>382</sup> This training was intended to furnish the women with the practical skills needed to organise and run recreational activities, but more importantly, it taught them how to be effective communicators, capable of verbally and non-verbally transmitting the affect of home.



*Figure 15 A Red Cross assistant serves coffee to men at the Thorpe Abbots aeroclub*

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<sup>381</sup> Madison, James H.. *Slinging Doughnuts for the Boys: An American Woman in World War II*. United States: Indiana University Press, 2007. P.29

<sup>382</sup> Madison, James H.. *Slinging Doughnuts for the Boys: An American Woman in World War II*. United States: Indiana University Press, 2007. P.16

The transformative effect that the women's interactions had on personnel is emphasised in the account of Birdie Schmidt, the Field Director at Wendling's aeroclub, located a few miles from Shipdham. Remarking on the arrival of a new assistant from Long Island, New York, Schmidt explained that 'the boys were glad to see someone so recently from home. Her effect was magically nostalgic.'<sup>383</sup> As affective reminders of wives and girlfriends back home, the women arguably served a similar function as the pin-up girl, as explored earlier in this chapter. However, such comparisons to the superficial Varga girl ignore the women's agency in their own affectivity. While the women were trained to be, to quote General Eisenhower, 'the friendly hand of this nation, reaching across the ocean', they were more than just conduits of the homes the men had left behind.<sup>384</sup> In fact, it could be argued that the primary role of Red Cross workers was to help situate men in the present by creating a substitute home within the bounds of a club; a familial environment where men could bond with each other away from the anxiety of the airfield. While memories of home could offer comfort, they also threatened to disrupt the careful alignment of the base's bodies by reorientating men towards the past, thus removing them from the affective economy of the air base. Evidence for this argument lies in the US military's attitudes to nostalgia as a threat to the morale of fighting men. Writing about the significance of homesickness to the American cultural identity throughout history, historian Susan J. Matt argues that the Second World War signalled a turning point in attitudes towards home. Whereas previous wars had seen attachments to home as a source of martial strength, by the outbreak of war, nostalgia for home was detrimental to the emotional health of service personnel.<sup>385</sup> Instead, soldiers were encouraged to transfer their loyalties to their immediate comrades within their units. A telling example of this attitude can be found in a 2<sup>nd</sup> Air Division Headquarters memorandum from November 1943, which included a letter describing how things were 'not as rosy as they seem for men who return to the US at the end of their missions. Many get stuck in dull jobs and look back fondly on their time in the army.'<sup>386</sup> The memorandum ordered copies of the letter to be posted on bulletin-boards at Shipdham, presumably to counter any nostalgic longing for home.

Red Cross staff played a pivotal role in easing men's attention away from the any troubling affects conjured by their past. As Patricia Hartnett explained, the most important job of the Red Cross worker was to provide an attentive ear to men's problems, 'which, in the case of the homesick soldier, usually means just listening while he tells about the girl he left behind.'<sup>387</sup> By alleviating anxieties of home through conversation, the women of the Red Cross acted as liaisons between the

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<sup>383</sup> "The Way It Was with Birdie Schmidt", *B24.net*, <https://www.b24.net/storiesBirdie.htm> [accessed 30th March 2022].

<sup>384</sup> Dwight Eisenhower, *Selected Speeches of Dwight David Eisenhower, 34th President of the United States* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), 7.

<sup>385</sup> Susan J. Matt, *Homesickness: An American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 203.

<sup>386</sup> Reel A1712, 2nd Air Division Headquarters History, *American Library*.

<sup>387</sup> "Girls 'Over There'", *New York Times*, March 7, 1943

past and the present, therefore allowing men to feel more secure in their future. Each month, the Red Cross Field Director reported the results of its counselling service to headquarters. In October 1944, Shipdham's Field Director dealt with 88 problems, ranging from applications for loans to pay medical bills for loved ones back home, divorce enquiries, and requests for 'Health and Welfare Reports' on elderly relatives.<sup>388</sup> The Red Cross also encouraged and aided communication between men and their families back home by providing letter writing rooms and stationery. While seemingly counterintuitive to the attempt to detach men from their home loyalties, letter writing was in fact deemed an essential factor in morale.<sup>389</sup> Commander of the Eighth Air Force, Lt General Jimmy Doolittle, described mail from home as the 'greatest morale builder in the E.T.O'.<sup>390</sup> The US Postal service concluded that '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'.<sup>391</sup> As well as reproducing the affects associated with familial interactions, letters from home served an important reminder that there was a permanent home waiting for men once they'd finished their service.<sup>392</sup> By maintaining emotional connections with home through letter writing, men were not left to long for a nostalgic, idealised past, but a tangible future. Anticipation for a post-war world was harnessed and employed as a motivating factor, urging men to fight, not just for their comrades, but the future they hoped to build after the war. For example, when asked if he thought about his wife and newborn son during combat, 44<sup>th</sup> BG navigator Ed Mikolowski replied, 'Yes, I think of them every time I'm up there; anything I can do over here is primarily for them. On that trip I seemed to think of everything between times. I remember remarking to Lieutenant DeVinney, the bombardier, that I was sweating it out for them.'<sup>393</sup>

The importance of a stable home life is emphasised by the detrimental effect that relationship break-ups had on morale, as shown by the significance of break-up letters, nicknamed 'Dear Johns'. A 44<sup>th</sup> veteran recalled how 'the thing that had an important impact on the morale of those concerned was the receipt of a "Dear John" letter. This was the notification from the fiancé, wife or girlfriend at home that they had found someone else. Termination of an engagement or a marriage was

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<sup>388</sup> "Oct 1944, History of the 44<sup>th</sup>", B0137, *National Mighty Eighth Museum*.

<sup>389</sup> Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith, "Will He Get My Letter?" Popular Portrayals of Mail and Morale During World War II", *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol.23, No.4.

<sup>390</sup> Geoffrey Butcher, *"Next to a Letter from Home": Major Glenn Miller's Wartime Band* (London: Sphere Books, 1987), 234.

<sup>391</sup> "Annual Report of the Postmaster General for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30 1942" (Washington D.C., US Government Printing Office, 1942), 3.

<sup>392</sup> Monica J. Cronin, "U.S. Combat Morale in the World Wars: The European Theater of Operations", *Undergraduate Honors Theses* (2017), 50.

<sup>393</sup> Redding, *Skyways to Berlin*, 138.

something very difficult to deal with from so far away.’<sup>394</sup> Remarking on the negative effect on morale that a lack of mail caused, a Navy typist explained that ‘Only a ‘Dear John’ letter was worse – we felt, mawkishly, no doubt, that with no one to come back to, a man was less likely to come back.’<sup>395</sup> One apocryphal tale emerged at Thorpe Abbots air base of ‘Eddie’ – the ghost of a man who had taken his own life after receiving a ‘Dear John’ letter. The superstition that an uncertain future at home translated into an uncertain future in combat emphasises the importance that men placed on the emotional connections between their martial identities and their civilian ones. To allay the emotional impact of uncertain futures at home, the Red Cross offered programmes intended to prepare personnel for life beyond the war. In 1945, the Shipdham Red Cross Field Director reported that ‘Our thought was to get the men more involved with programming in the club - especially educational programs that could apply to their future. They had been away from home too long and needed a positive, hopeful attitude for their futures.’<sup>396</sup> Activities included educational lectures and classes on accounting, current affairs, farming, and business management. While the success of these programmes is difficult to gauge, they are nevertheless illustrative of the gradual alignment of Shipdham’s occupants towards the future, rather than the past. By reproducing an idealised image of home through the provision of food and recreation, and communication networks, the base at Shipdham attempted to redirect personnel’s anticipation away from the uncertainty of combat towards a future beyond the war. The affect of home can therefore be defined as the affect of hope.

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<sup>394</sup> “Research by Mrs Jackie Stuart and personnel photographs”, MC 371/796, USF 17/4, *American Library*.

<sup>395</sup> W. D. Snoodgrass, quoted in “How World War II’s ‘Dear John’ Letters Changed American Society”, *Time* (14<sup>th</sup> February 2022).

<sup>396</sup> Reel B0137, *Air Force Historical Research Agency*.

## Conclusion: Shipdham as a 'Final Home'



Figure 16 A briefing map in the archives of the National Mighty Eighth Museum (Source: Author)

There is an interesting object in the storage room of the National Museum of the Mighty Eighth Air Force. It is a briefing map that has been carefully removed from the wall of an English base and decoupage onto a large piece of plywood. On the map are yellowed labels with the names of industrial towns and cities: Cherbourg, Nazaire, Schweinfurt, among others. The largest label, positioned over East Anglia, bears the words 'Home Sweet Home'. The object is a rare surviving example of a wartime briefing room map. The scarcity of these artefacts is not surprising when one considers the effort that must have gone into peeling the fragile segments from the wall, transporting them across the Atlantic, before carefully reassembling them for display. It is easy to conclude that the map had special significance to the individual who undertook the task, especially considering the object's historic significance as an affective conductor within the briefing room assemblage. The object still bears the material scars of these missions in the tiny holes created by drawing pins that once held pieces of string marking out the day's target. Reminiscent of the briefing map and the red string displaying the day's mission route, emotional connections bound veterans to their base and each other. Like the drawing pins stuck to the map, once removed from these places, the indentation of the encounter remained as visceral memories still capable of affectivity decades after the war. As one 44th BG veteran remarked, 'It seems to me looking back that these places are bits and pieces of myself left long ago but always waiting to return to me. The farmland around

Bradenham and Shipdham... From a small village in New Mexico, to a tiny mountain village in Switzerland and to the wet dampness of East Anglia I am always in these places.<sup>397</sup> For 44<sup>th</sup> flier Jacob T. Elias, it was the affective memories of the war that he carried with him into old age. Ruminating on these visceral memories, he asks, 'Why? I often wonder why. It is now over thirty-eight years since I left Shipdham-in-the-Mud, and yet, in those half-real moments before I fall asleep, my mind flies over the sea to that place I was happy to leave. A potpourri of memories slowly floats through my consciousness. People, places, smells, violent scenes, rain, hoar-frost on overhead wires, muddy tires on a bicycle.'<sup>398</sup> Even after the war, remembrance was not confined to a deliberate mental activity, but rather an embodied experience, brought to life in familiar smells, sounds and sensations.

In the post-war years, uncertain futures characterised the agenda of the 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Veterans Association, established shortly after the war. For this band of veterans, whose community convened at annual reunions and through the group newsletter '8 Ball Tails', the purpose of their gathering was as much about securing the 44<sup>th</sup>'s future legacy as it was about ruminating on the past. Shipdham played an important role in the group's memorialisation efforts, as a place where the past and the present intersected. For Jacob T. Elias, who returned to Shipdham in 1955, the familiar site of the runway evoked a long-buried feeling of anticipation of watching a mission depart. 'Up in the control tower, broken glass covered the floor, an open door creaked eerily in the breeze... I stood looking out at the world that seemed deserted by humans. And my mind saw once again the slow moving lines of lumbering bombers... the ground crews watching warily as their ships made their run and lifted off, worrying and praying.'<sup>399</sup> Forrest Clark expressed similar sentiments when he returned to Shipdham in the 1980s, 'We returned to Shipdham to view again the tower from which our signals sent us to Hamburg, Berlin and death in Europe. The concrete was eroding in the harsh English climate yet the images of youth were still there in the remaining hangars, barracks, and in the murals painted on the 14<sup>th</sup> Combat Wing walls.'<sup>400</sup> The derelict Shipdham, seemingly untouched since the end of the war, became a place where veterans could return, not just to remember, but to *feel* the past. While the vast majority of the 44<sup>th</sup>'s casualties lost their lives over Europe, Shipdham became significant as a launching point – the last stop before men flew off into the uncertain future. It is the image of the departing bombers, replayed in Jacob Elias' mind's eye during his visit to the control tower, that affected the returning veteran, as the 'faces flitted through my mind, faces of men – boys, really, but men ahead of their time... Where were they, those wonderful kids?' mused Elias.

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<sup>397</sup> "44 BG Association Return to the UK", *National Museum of the Mighty Eighth*.

<sup>398</sup> Jacob T. Elias, Second Air Division Association Newsletter, Vol 16, No.2, June 1978, 1.

<sup>399</sup> "Bedtime Ramblings", Second Air Division Heritage League Journal, June 1978, 2.

<sup>400</sup> Forrest S. Clark, "Return to UK", *National Museum of the Mighty Eighth*.

Today, the control tower at Shipdham is little more than a hollowed-out shell; a square brick-clad structure with large rectangular sockets, their window frames removed to expose the bare interior of the building. Despite plans announced in 2018 to restore the building for use as offices, as of 2022, work has only extended as far as erecting hoardings and clearing the site of the abandoned cars that have amassed there over the years. Despite its derelict state, the tower lacks the patina so frequently associated with airfield structures – the swathes of ivy, the rusting metal and shattered glass. This is due, in part, to the restoration efforts of a group of volunteers in the early 1990s, who had been on their way to achieving a tower that was ‘letter perfect for authenticity’ when work ground to a halt stopped over a disagreement with the landowner. Despite funding amassed by the American-led ‘Save our Tower’ campaign, work to establish a heritage centre in the old control tower never resumed. Back when the control tower’s restoration was steaming ahead, a veteran commissioned a large granite memorial stone to mark the 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group’s losses. Several years later, when the control tower’s fate hung in the balance, the veteran was asked if he would like the plaque to be removed for safe keeping. He declined, asserting the importance of the stone being viewed in relation to the historic airfield buildings. The veteran’s demands emphasise the significance of the orientation of objects in the affective assemblage of the airfield. Just as airmen were aligned in collective anticipation of the future, visitors to the site are encouraged to orientate themselves towards the past.



*Figure 17 The former control tower at Shipdham in 2020 (Source: author)*



The symbiotic relationship between the memorial and its location is emphasised by another veteran-led commemoration effort, which sought to extend the base's memory-scape beyond the parameters of the airfield. In 1981, the deteriorating remains of the airfield site prompted efforts by veterans to establish a permanent memorial within the grounds of Shipdham churchyard – 'this being the one place in Shipdham that is visited by all who return', according to veteran C. Joseph Warth.<sup>401</sup> The monument's location next to the local war memorial was also deemed significant, especially as Shipdham was the only parish church to have added an addendum to its village war memorial, commemorating the 'Fallen 8<sup>th</sup> Bomb Command U.S.A.A.F' alongside the names of its dead of the First and Second World Wars. Having consulted with the Diocese on the matter of a new memorial, Shipdham's vicar Rev. Irwin relayed the concerns of his Chancellor, who did not 'accept that Shipdham was the 44<sup>th</sup>'s "home base". He points out that the home base is in Texas or Arizona or the like where there are appropriate memorials to persons.'<sup>402</sup> Refuting this statement, Warth issued the following reply: 'I do feel that your Chancellor may have forgotten a bit of his WWII history—the 44<sup>th</sup> BG lost over a thousand men (killed & MIA) flying from SHIPDHAM so this was their FINAL HOME.' Unlike the uncertain futures that had dogged the occupants of Shipdham during the war, now it was the finality of the site that defined its character. By presenting the base, and its wider environs, as the eternal resting place of the dead, and thus hallowed ground for the descendants of its victims, the veterans were ultimately successful in persuading the diocese to erect the memorial. At a service marking the unveiling of the headstone-style monument, Reverend Irwin displayed none of his Chancellor's reservations, instead commending the symbolic location of the memorial in the shadow of the 900-year-old Christian church, which ensured that the memorial was 'associated with the Christian past and the Christian present in this village.'<sup>403</sup> Continuing his reassurances, Irwin explained that the memorial 'will be a permanent, visible, reminder of those memories and of those years in the life of Shipdham – above all of US servicemen who died on active service...now and in the future.'

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<sup>401</sup> Letter from Charles J. Warth to Rev. F. W. Irwin, 25 March 1981, PD 337/835, *Norfolk Record Office*.

<sup>402</sup> Letter from Rev. F. W. Irwin to Charles J. Warth, 19 October 1981, PD 337/835, *Norfolk Record Office*.

<sup>403</sup> "Parish Records of Shipdham", PD 337/835, *Norfolk Record Office*.



Figure 18 War memorial in Shipdham Churchyard, 2022  
(Source: Author)



Figure 19 44th BG Association memorial, Shipdham Churchyard, 2022 (Source: Author)

By reorientating the memory of the group within the secure narrative of the ancient parish church and the village's own memorial practices, Shipdham's veterans put to rest the anxieties caused by the uncertain future of the airfield remains. As Edwards argues, the memorial at Shipdham 'was intended to 'bury' the disappeared dead within a distinctly English sacred landscape'.<sup>404</sup> As the next chapter will show, the Eighth Air Force memory-scape of East Anglia would be negotiated and shaped by countless interactions between veterans and local people, a discourse that contracted the past and the present, and offered a new definition of 'home' in the post-war landscape.

<sup>404</sup> Edwards, *Allies in Memory*, 157.



*Figure 20 44th BG veteran William Cameron looking out over the former runway at Shipdham, 1988 (Museum of the Mighty Eighth, 2005.0804.0577).*

## Chapter Two: Translocality, affect, and the ghosts of Thorpe Abbots

### Introduction

There was a sense of anticipation in the air as the volunteers of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Memorial Museum waited for the arrival of their American visitor, Mike Faley. At mid-day, the door of the Museum's Varian Centre swung open, and Mike entered, a child-like smile beaming across his face. 'I'm home!' he loudly proclaimed, before greeting each of the assembled volunteers with a warm handshake and genial embrace. I had been told before Mike's arrival that this gesture was repeated every time he returned to Thorpe Abbots. Mike, an American record producer based in Los Angeles, has been the Chairman and 'Official Historian' of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Foundation for close to twenty years. During this period, he has made many pilgrimages to Thorpe Abbots. While his visits are not always announced (apparently, he once made a surprise trip in January just to see what 'it would have been like' for the men working through the long, cold English winters), he always arrives in style. On this occasion, he turned up at the gates in an old American WWII staff car, wearing aviator sunglasses and a 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group baseball cap.

Over the years, Mike has established himself as the middleman between the members of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Foundation - comprised mainly of veterans and their families - and the work of the museum at Thorpe Abbots. During the afternoon of his visit he met with Ron Batley, the museum's curator, to make copies of wartime photographs he had brought with him from the States. In turn, Mike regularly posts photos of his trips to Thorpe Abbots to the Foundation's Facebook page, encouraging others to support the work of the museum. This fostering of Anglo-American relations, particularly through the platform of online social networks, has been incredibly fruitful. In 2019, US donations to the museum exceeded UK ones for the first time, providing funds for renovations and improvements.<sup>405</sup>

'It's good to be home', reiterates Mike at several intervals over the course of the afternoon as he darts between the control tower, the museum archive, and the tables where volunteers sit and enjoy their lunch. At one point someone bemoans the weather, which is unseasonably cold and grey. 'This is how it should be', replies Mike, 'this is Eighth Air Force weather'; a reference to the poor conditions the men of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group worked through during their stay at Thorpe Abbots. While there is no meteorological evidence that Norfolk experienced excessively inclement weather in 1943-45, Mike's observation is indicative of the impact that collective and imagined memories have had on the collective memory of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. The formation of wartime cultural geographies resonates with historian Pyrs Gruffudd's

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<sup>405</sup> 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Memorial Museum, Annual Report, 2018-2019.

argument that the symbolic wide-open skies and distinctive light of south-eastern England has become synonymous with the RAF in collective memories of the war.<sup>406</sup>

‘Battle of Britain skies’ and ‘Eighth Air Force weather’ are just two of the many myths circulated within the cultural imagination of the Second World War, not least the persistent representation of the conflict as ‘The Good War’, fought by the ‘Greatest Generation’.<sup>407</sup> Even in the context of late-twentieth century memorialisation and politicisation, the ‘legend of the Bloody Hundredth’ is remarkable in the extent to which myth-making has featured in the production of the group’s cultural memory. During the war itself, it was felt that ‘the Bloody Hundredth was already the group about which legends were developing’.<sup>408</sup> At the centre of the myth was the reputation of the ‘Bloody Hundredth’ as a ‘hard-luck’ outfit; a description it earned after suffering particularly heavy casualties during the group’s first few months in England. Of all of the hard-fought missions in those early months, the 10th October 1943 raid on Münster went the furthest in solidifying the ‘Bloody Hundredth’ legend.<sup>409</sup> On this day, 21 B-17s departed Thorpe Abbots, with just 13 reaching the target in Germany. Of these, only one - *Rosie’s Riveters*, piloted by Lt Robert Rosenthal - returned to base. Theories quickly emerged as to why the 100th was seemingly bearing the brunt of the Luftwaffe’s might, including a story that one of the group’s planes had lowered its wheels (a sign understood as an act of surrender), only to open fire on the Luftwaffe fighters escorting it to the ground. Despite historical analysis showing that the group’s casualty rates over the course of the war were no higher than the Eighth Air Force average, the ‘Bloody Hundredth’ nickname and its associated mythology has stuck.

As the Official Historian for the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group (a title bestowed by the 100<sup>th</sup> BG Foundation), Mike Faley has immersed himself in the personal, collective, and imagined narratives of the unit. He is a prominent figure in the activities of the Foundation, acting as the gatekeeper for donated collections and veteran interviews, whilst also disseminating this knowledge in the form of books, symposiums, and web articles.<sup>410</sup> Unlike the majority of 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Foundation members, Mike has no family ties to the Eighth Air Force, but was instead drawn to the Group by a historical fascination with the air war over Europe and a childhood delight in the Hollywood picture *Twelve O’ Clock High* – the storyline of which (according to the Foundation) is loosely based on the exploits of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group.<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>406</sup> Pyrs Gruffudd, “Reach for the Sky: The Air and English Cultural Nationalism” in *Landscape Research*, Vol.16, No. 2 (1991), 19–24.

<sup>407</sup> Kenneth Rose, *Myth and the Greatest Generation: A Social History of Americans in World War II* (Taylor & Francis, 2012), 1-9.

<sup>408</sup> Horace Varian (Ed.), *The Bloody Hundredth: Missions and Memories of a World War II Bomb Group* (100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association, 1979), iv.

<sup>409</sup> Ian Hawkins. *The Munster Raid: Bloody Skies Over Germany*. (AERO, 1990), 18.

<sup>410</sup> Interview with Mike Faley, 10 October 2019

<sup>411</sup> Donald L. Miller. *Eighth Air Force*, (London: Aurum, 2008), 8.

Mike's involvement with the Foundation began in the early 1990s, at a time when the group's demographic still consisted primarily of veterans and their immediate family members. This geographically dispersed group came together at annual reunions to renew old friendships and recount shared experiences. Mike described his first experience of attending one of these reunions, remarking how he felt as if he was 'on the outside looking in' as he peered at the room of unfamiliar faces.<sup>412</sup> It raises the question of how Mike, and others who have no personal memories of the war, have become such integral features of this veteran community. An exploration of this question illustrates the gradual shifts within the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group community from a small group of war-wearied veterans, united by their personal memories of the war, to a multi-generational and trans-national community immersed in the collective memorialisation of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. The increased involvement of the Foundation in the creation of heritage discourses at Thorpe Abbots, and the development of the group's own affective practices, such as reunions, 'pilgrimages' to England and intergenerational storytelling, have all been integral to strengthening the identity of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group as a translocal community, and in fostering a sense of belonging within its membership.

Appadurai uses the term 'translocality' to describe the ways in which situated communities become extended by the diaspora of their inhabitants.<sup>413</sup> Translocal communities are not necessarily based around national identities but can refer to groups brought together by shared religious, work or – in the case of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group - military loyalties. This reconfiguration of the social architecture of a community does not automatically mean that the locality of their former home is eroded, but instead, the distinctiveness of the situated place is often reinforced as an anchored source of meaning and identity for its dispersed subjects. This is what allows the proverbial 'homeland' to gain such resonance within diasporic narratives. Paul Basu has provided a particularly insightful example of the continued significance of place in the imagination of diasporic communities in his presentation of the Scottish Highlands as an 'imagined homeland' that continues to play an integral role in the configuration of self-identities.<sup>414</sup>

As Appadurai emphasises, the production of locality is a constant struggle; a statement that applies as much to translocal communities as it does to situated neighbourhoods. Social actors must work hard to define, produce, and maintain locality by engaging in both physical and intangible localisation practices. Referring to the challenges to locality posed by globalisation, new technologies, and forced migration, Appadurai suggests that 'the many displaced, deterritorialized, and transient populations that constitute today's ethnoscapas are engaged in the construction of locality, as a structure of feeling'.<sup>415</sup> Several questions emerge from Appadurai's ideas about translocality, particularly in relation to the case study presented in this thesis. The

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<sup>412</sup> Michael Faley, "Outside Looking In", *100<sup>th</sup> BG Foundation*, [https://100thbg.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=265:outside-looking-in&catid=25:group-history&Itemid=581](https://100thbg.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=265:outside-looking-in&catid=25:group-history&Itemid=581) [accessed 15 December 2019].

<sup>413</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 7.

<sup>414</sup> Paul Basu, *Highland Homecomings: Genealogy and Heritage Tourism in the Scottish Diaspora*, Routledge, 2007.

<sup>415</sup> Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 199.

first question concerns the extent to which the 'structure of feeling' constructed and maintained by the translocal 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group community derives from the locality produced at Thorpe Abbott during the wars? If it is indeed a perpetuation of the affective connections established between members of the 100<sup>th</sup> BG and their base during the war, how exactly has this structure of feeling been maintained and transmitted when the relationality and ethnography of the community has shifted over space and time?

While there are no hard and fast answers to these questions, it is easier to interrogate them by reframing the translocal community of the 100<sup>th</sup> BG, not as a 'structure' of feeling, but as a 'network'. Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of the rhizome provides the theoretical framework for such an approach.<sup>416</sup> The rhizome is an ontology that allows for multiple, lateral entry and exit points, as opposed to the root-tree system, which by its nature focuses on chronology and hierarchy. This relational perspective is particularly useful for assessing the relationship between place and communities within the context of translocality. Rather than viewing Thorpe Abbotts as the trunk of a tree and the members of the translocal community as branches, it is perhaps more productive to see the former base as a node in a complex, ever-changing network of relations, connecting people, places, material culture and contexts. Borrowing Appadurai's terminology, translocality can be viewed as a network of interconnected contexts 'in which other meaningful social actions can be generated and interpreted'.<sup>417</sup> The spatial-temporal context of wartime Thorpe Abbotts plays an important role in the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group network, one which (as discussed in Chapter One) is itself formed of a myriad of contexts, and in turn produces new contexts.

Researchers of translocality have also found Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblage to be particularly pertinent to the study of networks and flows between people and places, particularly the emphasis on translocality as something that is constantly emerging, rather than a finished product. Assemblage also stresses the importance of spatiality and temporality and the shifting connections between people and places, which will always appear slightly different according to the viewpoint of the subject within the assemblage.<sup>418</sup> As Freitag and von Oppen argue, translocality is a phenomena that is never static, rather it is the outcome of a multitude of circulations and transfers of people, objects, ideas and symbols across physical, cultural and political boundaries.<sup>419</sup> It is by assessing these movements and interactions that the nature of the translocal community can be better understood.<sup>420</sup>

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<sup>416</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 3-26.

<sup>417</sup> Appadurai, 1996, 184.

<sup>418</sup> Colin McFarlane, "Translocal assemblages: Space, power and social movements", *Geoforum* Vol.40 (2009), 562.

<sup>419</sup> Ulrike Freitag and Achim Von Oppen, "Translocality': An Approach To Connection And Transfer In Area Studies", *Translocality*. (The Netherlands: Brill, 2010), 5.

<sup>420</sup> While aware of the differences in the theory of assemblage (as presented by Deleuze) and ANT (Latour), in this thesis I will use the terms assemblage and network interchangeably for the purposes of theorising a dynamic, fluid socio-material world. See Muller and Schurr for an in-depth discussion of the similarities and differences of both approaches: Martin Muller and Carolin Schurr, "Assemblage thinking and actor-network theory: conjunctions, disjunctions, cross-fertilisations", *TIBG*, Vol.41, No.3 (2016), 217-229.

Research into the activity of the 100th Bomb Group community reveals a web of circulatory processes, ranging from the physical circulation of bodies at reunions and the transfer of objects to the museum at Thorpe Abbots, to the circulation of collective and imagined memories through newsletters and social media channels. The performance of such practices not only reinforces the integrity of the translocal community, but also stabilises the individual's position within the assemblage, fostering a sense of belonging and kinship. This chapter will begin by exploring the transformation of the diasporic post-war veteran community into a distinct translocal network, brought together through an affective language of storytelling that framed the individual veteran as both a survivor and a witness. Taking a chronological approach, it will argue that the creation of the 100th Bomb Group Association in the late 1970s provided the impetus for a range of affective practices that have helped to maintain the emotional connections between members of the '100th Bomb Group Family' and the former base at Thorpe Abbots. As well as analysing how these emotional connections have been passed down to descendants through intergenerational transmission, I will explore why the military commanders of the 100th Bomb Group's US Air Force descendants – the 100th Air Refueling Wing at Mildenhall – have worked diligently to secure their own place within the translocal community.

In the second half of the chapter, I will turn my attention to Thorpe Abbots and the absent presences that permeated the landscape after the departure of the Americans at the end of the war. For the local people who were forced to live among the ruins of the US occupation, the materiality of the airfield seethed with personal and imagined memories. Through the theoretical lens of hauntology, I will evaluate how relationality between object and subject was pivotal in determining how absence and presences were conjured and processed at Thorpe Abbots, by local people and returning veterans alike. Lastly, I will show how both groups came together in the late 1970s in an effort to rebalance the site's absent presences through the restoration of the control tower and its dedication as a memorial museum. As part of a transnational heritage narrative, the control tower facilitates 'the return' of veterans and their descendants through the careful entwinement of memory, identity and affect.

### The post-war diaspora and the role of storytelling in the creation of a translocal 100th Bomb Group community

The transformation of the 100th Bomb Group from a situated wartime community to a tight-knit trans-local network was by no means instantaneous. Like the 44th Bomb Group at Shipdham, the men who served in the 100th were plucked from every state and stratum of the US. Unsurprisingly, the diaspora of its members during and after the war was equally far-reaching. Even at Thorpe Abbots, the population of the base



fluctuated and shifted over time, as a result of casualties, replacements, reassignments and discharges.<sup>421</sup> Only a minority of the group's members had been professional soldiers at the outbreak of war, and few desired to extend their time in uniform, with an army survey finding that a mere three per cent of soldiers planned to pursue a military career beyond the war.<sup>422</sup> Demobilisation brought with it new horizons, whether through the offer of a free college education and low business rates via the G.I Bill, or the chance to finally put down roots with wives and sweethearts. For the majority of those who served at Thorpe Abbots - a figure estimated at around 7,000 people - peer relations forged during the war were inevitably weakened, or dispatched or completely, as men found themselves relieved of the common mission and *esprit de corps* that had brought the group together in the first place. Despite the dramatic shift in the group's social architecture, there is evidence that at least some relationships between primary groups were maintained in the immediate post-war years, particularly between men who had served together in close combat. As veteran Harry Crosby noted, 'no matter how far apart they were, crews tended to keep in touch and stage frequent reunions'.<sup>423</sup> Indeed, research conducted during the war found that 85 per cent of army personnel were considering joining a veterans organisation in peace-time.<sup>424</sup> When asked what activities these organisations should engage in, the most common answer was to offer help and counselling, followed by opportunities for social activities and recreation.<sup>425</sup> The importance of inter-veteran relationships as a way of easing the transition from military to civilian life is explained in a 1946 pamphlet 'Why do Veterans Organize', which asserted that 'Friends in war are friends you learn to depend on. They have gone through the same mill. Talk the same language, have a common stake in the future.'<sup>426</sup> The importance of a shared language is important to understanding how the veterans of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group regrouped after the war. In her study of imperial German military culture, Isabel Hull argued that to understand organised behaviour within military institutions 'one must begin by examining [not only] the patterns in their practices...but also the group's language...myths, explanations of events, standard operating procedures, and doctrines'.<sup>427</sup> The notion that veteran groups circulate a shared mythology is emphasised in more recent sociological research, which has suggested that former service personnel can often bridge 'a cultural gap' between military and civilian worlds through collective storytelling, which allows veterans to 'shape their experiences of well-being by fostering camaraderie, stimulating deeper connections and countering the negative effects of post-

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<sup>421</sup> "1141<sup>st</sup> Quartermaster Co. Log, 1942-1945", ed. Marion D. Fulton and Edward J. Conway, [https://100thbg.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=60&Itemid=137](https://100thbg.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=60&Itemid=137) [accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2019].

<sup>422</sup> Samuel A Stouffer, *The American Soldier: Combat and its Aftermath. Volume II.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 598,

<sup>423</sup> Harry H Crosby, "Epilogue" Manuscript 1989, 100<sup>th</sup> BG Memorial Museum.

<sup>424</sup> Stouffer, *The American Soldier*, 623.

<sup>425</sup> *ibid*

<sup>426</sup> Dixon Wecter, "Why Do Veterans Organize?", *GI Roundtable Pamphlets, Vol.I* (1944), 2.

<sup>427</sup> Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca, 2004), 2.

traumatic stress disorder'.<sup>428</sup> Storytelling, as a relational act that emotionally binds veterans together can 'call individuals into groups, and they call on groups to assert common identities'.<sup>429</sup> Just as the Wingert mural at Shipdham transmitted affect by circulating the shared emotion of anticipation ('sweating it out') through visual imagery, post-war texts sought to canonise the identity of the bomb group through the use of affective language.

Indeed, the practice of storytelling, performed in print and in-person, has been central to the establishment and maintenance of the 100th Bomb Group as a translocal community. As rapid post-war demobilisation moulded one-time distinctive military units into a homogenous mass of returned ex-personnel, myth-making provided a means of creating the unique cultural identity and collective memory of the 100th Bomb Group. As veteran Harry Crosby mused, 'The 100th has always provided the stuff of history and legend. During the war and since, airmen have told and retold the 100th stories'.<sup>430</sup> By the end of the conflict, the group's notoriety as a 'hard-luck' unit had gone some way to ensuring its place within the public consciousness, even if this fame was based on the unit's military failings.<sup>431</sup> A 1946 article in the *Daily Iowan*, for example, announced that eight veterans of the 100th Bomb Group were attending the University of Iowa, going on to describe how 'the heavy casualties suffered by the 100th helped create the famous 'jinx' legend - but even more fantastic is the fact that there are eight survivors of the 'jinx' now attending class at Iowa.'<sup>432</sup> The article's focus on what it describes as the 'legend of the Bloody Hundredth' is indicative of the role that the imagined memories of the group played in the creation and maintenance of the 100th Bomb Group translocal community as a band of survivor-witnesses, as well as veterans. The symbolic significance of the 'story' of the Eighth Air Force is illustrated in a campaign by bomb groups of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Air division to create a memorial library in Norwich. A fundraising pamphlet, distributed across air bases during the last months of the war, asserted that the 'Memorial must be a spiritually living thing...for when the airfields are plowed up, and all vestiges of the chaos of war have disappeared in time, this will remain a perpetual tribute to their memory - to their faith in an ideal.'<sup>433</sup> The notion of the memorial as 'a haven wherein the flame of their principles must burn brightly and eternally, wherein the bewildered, stumbling footsteps of succeeding generations can be unerringly placed on the right paths' advocates the significance of the veterans' word in guiding the actions of future generations.<sup>434</sup> By investing in a memorial library, the memory of the Eighth is quite literally preserved in its stories. 'It will have a Roll of Honor of all those killed in our division, and some

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<sup>428</sup> N. Caddick N, C. Phoenix C, B. Smith, "Collective stories and well-being: Using a dialogical narrative approach to understand peer relationships among combat veterans experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder", *Journal of Health Psychology*, Vol 20, No.3 (2015), 286-299.

<sup>429</sup> W. Arthur, "Health stories as connectors and subjectifiers", *Health*, Vol.10 (2006), 421-440.

<sup>430</sup> Harry H Crosby, "Epilogue" manuscript 1989, *100<sup>th</sup> BG Memorial Museum*.

<sup>431</sup> Varian, *The Bloody Hundredth*, iv.

<sup>432</sup> "Bloody 100th: 8 of the famed group attend SUI", *The Daily Iowan*, 8th May 1956.

<sup>433</sup> "The Flame Must Burn On" MC 376/380/4, USF 20/6, *American Library*.

<sup>434</sup> *ibid*

busts of our big wheels etc,' remarked veteran Rudolph Howell in a letter, 'but what I like most of all is that it will have an individual short history of each group', he concluded.<sup>435</sup> For many veterans who supported the campaign, it was the notion that the actions of their bomb groups would be immortalised and sanctified within the vaunted shelves of the memorial library that attracted them to support the project.

The transition of these stories from oral tradition to historical folklore occurred in the immediate post-war years with the compilation and circulation of printed histories, starting in 1946 with the self-publication of John Nilsson's *The Story of the Century*, a literary work which provides an overview of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group's noteworthy missions and anecdotes of base life. Presumably written during the last months of the war, the text is by no means nostalgic. The realities of aerial warfare are laid bare on each page, in the divulging of graphic details of injuries and deaths suffered in combat, and sexual liaisons whilst on leave: 'the niceties of civilization had become hallucinations, for the women sold themselves, and rockets fell on London', wrote Nilsson.<sup>436</sup> By the end of the book, the events of VE Day only served to highlight the loss suffered by the original members of the group, most of whom had been killed, taken prisoner or demobilised, 'After V-E Day, the barracks were deserted of 'old men' of the 100th; in the S-2 building, clerks shuffled papers which had been sent by the graves registration service in Germany, a pile of hundreds of papers. They told where the broken bodies lie. The war was over.'<sup>437</sup> The limited print run of Nilsson's book, coupled with its inclusion of a list of contact details for some of the group's former members, suggest that the publication was primarily intended for distribution among veterans. Indeed, the copies that occasionally crop up for sale typically bear the inscription of the book's original owner and the bomb squadron to which they belonged.

While *The Story of the Century* began to articulate the shared experiences of the war years, it was a work published the following year that solidified the importance of collective storytelling in re-establishing emotional connections between the men of the 100th. Resulting from more than two years of effort by the Headquarters section, both on the base at Thorpe Abbots and in the months after the war, *Contrails, my war record* (1947) set out to 'commemorate and memorialize the heroic deeds' of the 100th through a year-book style collection of photographs, stories and poems contributed by the group's own members.<sup>438</sup> The title 'my war record' implies that the book's purpose was not only to provide an overarching account of the Group's wartime activities, but also provide a surrogate diary that could supplement or stand-in for an individual's personal memories. While the inclusion of submissions from across the Bomb Group's personnel presented *Contrails* as a pluralistic document, the books' forewords were provided by the US Army Air Force's most prominent leaders, including Henry H. Arnold - the wartime chief in command of the US Army Air Force. It

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<sup>435</sup> Frank Meeres, *Norfolk at War: Wings of Freedom* (Amberley Publishing, 2012) 150.

<sup>436</sup> John R. Nilsson. *The Story of the Century* (California: self-published, 1946), 93.

<sup>437</sup> Nilsson, *The Story of the Century*, 108.

<sup>438</sup> John F. Callaghan (ed), *Contrails, my war record: a history of World War Two as recorded at U. S. Army Air Force Station #139, Thorpe Abbots, near Diss, county of Norfolk, England*. United States: Contrails Publications, 1947), V-VI.

had been Arnold who, in 1942, had ordered trained historians to be placed in every Air Force unit, understanding the need to create a historical record as events happened.<sup>439</sup> Arnold's approval of *Contrails* in the form of his congratulatory foreword endorses the book as an authorised biography of the unit's actions, and a product of his own historicising efforts. Despite Arnold's own emphasis on providing unbiased historical accounts, *Contrails* perhaps unsurprisingly presents a much more sanitised version of events compared to Nilsson's work.

Whereas Nilsson's account ended with a lament on the 'broken bodies' of his comrades, *Contrails* begins with a poem, asking Saint Peter to 'let them in...Let them wake whole again to new dawns fired/With sun not war. And may their peace be deep. Remember where the broken bodies lie...'<sup>440</sup> The introspective exploration of the mental and physical costs of the war in *The Story of the Century* is discarded in *Contrails* in favour of a collective narrative that celebrates, rather than commiserates, the actions of the hard-luck group. While the statistical losses of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group were soon proven to have been no worse than other Eighth Air Force units, the decision to embrace the 'Bloody Hundredth' nickname as a badge of honour rather than a symbol of military futility would prove vital in preserving the distinctive identity and culture that the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group had worked hard to cultivate. The proliferation of the term Bloody Hundredth exemplifies the affective language that developed after the war; a lexicon that reframed the veterans as resilient survivors, and 'broken bodies' as sanctified spirits.

It was a sense of group distinctiveness that prompted Group Adjutant Horace Varian to write, 'it may be that all Bomb Groups were much alike. Certainly their day-to-day lives and missions were similar. People who were in other Groups and know of our friendships, the visiting, the reunions and the continuing esprit, tell me that the 100<sup>th</sup> may have had something different. It did.'<sup>441</sup> While an abundance of written histories and memoirs helped to circulate and canonise the group's distinctive cultural identity (approximately twenty books about the 100<sup>th</sup> had been published by 1988), it was physical reunions that facilitated the strengthening of inter-personal connections.<sup>442</sup> With origins in the regimental rallies organised for Civil War veterans, military reunions have played a recognised role in US veteran culture since the late nineteenth-century.<sup>443</sup> As well as attempting to reconstruct the distinctive social networks of the wartime group, these reunions have historically offered physical and mental support for attendees, as well as opportunities for reflection and commemoration. As Connerton argues, memories are not only inscribed through the production and circulation of cultural texts but are also embedded into the body.<sup>444</sup> Reunions, as a

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<sup>439</sup> "Redefining History: Air Force embraces the past for a more efficient future", *Airman*, <https://airman.dodlive.mil/2018/10/09/redefining-history/>, [accessed 20 April 2021].

<sup>440</sup> *ibid*

<sup>441</sup> Varian, *The Bloody Hundredth*, viii.

<sup>442</sup> "100<sup>th</sup> BG Reference Guide", *100<sup>th</sup> BG Foundation*, [https://www.100thbg.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=260:100th-bg-reference-guide&catid=25&Itemid=581](https://www.100thbg.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=260:100th-bg-reference-guide&catid=25&Itemid=581) [accessed 20 April 2021]

<sup>443</sup> Wecter, *Why Do Veterans Organize?*, 2.

<sup>444</sup> Paul Connerton. *How Societies Remember*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), 72-104.

convergence of memory-inscribed bodies that interact with one another in familiar social arrangements, helped to reaffirm affective connections and foster a sense of belonging within the group's diasporic population. For 100<sup>th</sup> veteran John Clark, it was not until his reconnection with his former 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group comrades that he had 'a place to share his feelings, which were still expressed in strong feelings that few can understand.'<sup>445</sup>

For 100<sup>th</sup> veteran Harry H. Crosby, what made the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group's bond 'special' was not the arbitrary factors that forced them together, such as a common cause and generational dispositions, but the distinct culture that emerged within the group.<sup>446</sup> Crosby argues that during the 100<sup>th</sup>'s time overseas, it was the 'witty conversations' and shared humour that helped sustain the men through the reality of conflict and ensured that their post-war friendship was built on more than just shared nostalgia-laden memories, but rather a mutual shared language and genuine friendships. For Crosby, post-war reunions not only provided a venue for the exchange of war stories, but also opportunities to fall back into familiar conversation and mutual affections. This dual purpose is reflected in the itinerary of the first ever 100<sup>th</sup> BG reunion, held in New York City in 1947. The culmination of two years' work by the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Reunion Committee, whose planning had begun as soon as the war ended, the event invited men to 'join hands with our old wartime buddies once again'.<sup>447</sup> The schedule for the reunion included an official welcoming, talks from former base commanders, followed by the main event – the reunion dinner. For those wanting a material reminder of the event, souvenirs bearing the emblem of their former group were available from the reunion 'PX' (Post Exchange is the name given to retail stores found on US air bases).

The structured format, which allowed for periods of informal socialising, followed by formal commemorative duties and receptions, aimed to strike a balance between the military formalities of the war years and the camaraderie of a family reunion. An unfortunate consequence of the rigidity of the reunion format and its emphasis on the shared experience of combat, was that its attendees were disproportionately weighted towards air crews. While organisers never actively discouraged the attendance of ground personnel, wartime prejudices which placed 'gravel-agitators' at the bottom of the base hierarchy and pilots at the top, persisted for decades after the war.<sup>448</sup> The collective memory of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, constructed and circulated through limited channels, never fully represented the social make-up of the wartime unit; a failing that persists within the

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<sup>445</sup> 'John A. Miller, the youngest airman of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, p.16

<sup>446</sup> Letter from Harry H. Crosby to Frank Murphy, November 30 1993, 2005.804.369, *National Museum of the Mighty Eighth*.

<sup>447</sup> "New York 1947 Reunion", *100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Foundation*, [https://www.100thbg.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=28&Itemid=174&gallery=50](https://www.100thbg.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=28&Itemid=174&gallery=50), [accessed 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020].

<sup>448</sup> Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare*, 149.

community, which remains disproportionately made up of air crew veterans and their descendants.<sup>449</sup>

It goes without saying that the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group community between the years 1945 to 1970 never encapsulated the entirety, or even the majority, of the group's veterans. Limited communication methods and the wide dispersal of its members meant that opportunities to renew wartime bonds were limited to a core nucleus of veterans, most of whom had served together in bomber crews. However, it was during these post-war years that the beginnings of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group as an affective translocal community took place. Emotional communities, Rosenwein argues, have their own discourse of emotion which provides a common vocabulary for feeling, articulating, and evaluating the passions of its members.<sup>450</sup> By developing an affective language based on wartime connections, mythicised stories, and collective memories, a small sub-section of 100<sup>th</sup> BG veterans were able to propagate the beginnings of a post-war veteran community, creating the impetus for the network's expansion from the 1970s onwards.

### 'The gift of belonging': Intergenerational transmission within the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Foundation

The 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association (renamed the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Foundation in the 1990s) was officially established in 1969 for the purposes of publishing newsletters and organising group reunions.<sup>451</sup> The growing desire for an organisation that would formalise and expand the relatively small, but close-knit, network of 100<sup>th</sup> Groupers reflected the shifting priorities of the veteran population in the US. As one military commentator noted, for the veteran of war, both temporal and geographic 'distance leads to enchantment'; a truism that was the root cause of a wider trend of participation in Eighth Air Force veterans' organisation in the 1970s and 80s.<sup>452</sup> One of the main functions of the Eighth Air Force Historical Society, established in 1975, was to maintain 'a clearinghouse that reunite[d] "lost" Eighth Air Force veterans with their unit veterans organization'.<sup>453</sup> This change in attitudes was driven by the nostalgia-laden realisation that, for many, the war was a touchstone of memory and the pinnacle of their achievements. As one 100<sup>th</sup> BG veteran noted,

*'nothing in my life has ever compared to those months that seem so short now, but seemed like an eternity at the time. Everything in life that has followed has been an anti-climax. No friends have ever*

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<sup>449</sup> Interview with Nancy Putman, 100<sup>th</sup> BG Foundation secretary, 19 August 2020.

<sup>450</sup> Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the early Middle Ages* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2007), 25.

<sup>451</sup> Varian, *The Bloody Hundredth*, 1979.

<sup>452</sup> Wecter, *Why Do Veterans Organize?*, 4.

<sup>453</sup> "First reunion", Folder 11, 70693, *Eighth Air Force Archive*, Penn State.

compared to the buddies I had then. The sensation of life has never been so keenly experienced and the experience of death has never been so keenly regretted.<sup>454</sup>

The importance of nostalgia in the renegotiation of wartime memories is particularly apparent when veteran recollections are compared to the findings of a 1945 government survey, which deduced that more than 80 per cent of US army personnel felt that their time in uniform had been a 'negative' experience; a dislike that had seemingly shifted by the 1970s, as veterans increasingly re-framed their personal memories in an affective language congealed by nostalgia and collective remembrance.<sup>455</sup> Part of this renegotiation of the past involved attempts by veterans to contextualise their experiences into the wider history of the Eighth Air Force. This trend is reflected in membership of the Eighth Air Force Historical Society, which had grown from 390 members in 1975 to 14,273 by 1984.<sup>456</sup> An important motivation for these preservation efforts was the sense that the collective memories of the war years were fading with the attrition of veterans. 'The 100<sup>th</sup> is history. What are we going to do about it?', asked the headline of an article in *Splasher Six*, the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association's newsletter in 1988.<sup>457</sup>

An obvious solution to this population decline was to encourage younger generations to join the translocal community, in the tradition of other US hereditary military organisations, such as the Sons of the Revolution and the Children of the Confederacy.<sup>458</sup> Through active participation in the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association, it was hoped that the sons and daughters of veterans would perpetuate the collective memories of the Group. As *Splasher Six* reported, 'many members have enrolled their sons and daughters as Associate Members in the hope that they will carry on [the legacy], and they urge all members to do the same'.<sup>459</sup> Shaking off their reputation as masculine environments, the reunions of the 1970s were increasingly attended by wives and children; their numbers helping to swell a 'small get-together' of several 100<sup>th</sup> Groupers in the late 1960s to large-scale reunions attended by over 300 in the following decade.<sup>460</sup> This figure had increased three-fold by 1987, when 924 members attended the California reunion.<sup>461</sup> While some young people may have been less willing, others actively embraced the opportunity to learn about their father's wartime experiences. Gary Christopher recalled how reunions were the place where his father, Dewey Christopher, came alive as he met wartime friends and resumed decades-old conversations.<sup>462</sup> As well as providing an important bonding activity, Gary's inclusion at reunions allowed him to form his own long-

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<sup>454</sup> Letter from John A Miller, 1979, 2005.804.369, *National Museum of the Mighty Eighth*.

<sup>455</sup> Stouffer, 1949, 623; Edwards, *World War II and the Politics of Transatlantic Commemoration*, 146.

<sup>456</sup> Edwards, *World War II and the Politics of Transatlantic Commemoration*, 138.

<sup>457</sup> "The 100<sup>th</sup> is history. What are going to do about it?", *Splasher Six*, Spring 1988.

<sup>458</sup> W E Davies. *Patriotism on Parade: Story of Veterans and Hereditary Organizations in America 1783-1900* (Boston: Harvard Historical Studies, 1974), 1.

<sup>459</sup> "The 100<sup>th</sup> is history. What are going to do about it?", *Splasher Six*, Spring 1988.

<sup>460</sup> Varian, *The Bloody Hundredth*, 15.

<sup>461</sup> *Splasher Six*, Vol. 19, No.1.

<sup>462</sup> Interview with Gary Christopher, October 2019.

lasting affective connections within the 100<sup>th</sup> BG community, culminating in his current role as a Foundation board member. For other descendants - particularly those whose fathers refused to relate their wartime experiences - gravitation to the translocal 100<sup>th</sup> BG community resulted from what could be described as a 'genealogical connection' fostered after their parent's death.<sup>463</sup> Drawing on the work of Paul Connerton, Vikki Bell argues that these intergenerational dispositions are not necessarily transmitted human-to-human, but between humans and their environments, including interactions with photographs, text, and embodied practices of remembering.<sup>464</sup> As a felt disposition, these connections also have affective potential, particularly when subjects encounter specific historical environments and objects linked to their family's past.<sup>465</sup> The discovery of a wartime photograph in her late father's possession, for example, prompted one veteran's daughter to seek out information about his service, leading her to become a member of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Foundation and a regular attendee of reunions.<sup>466</sup>

As an intergenerational organisation, the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Foundation provides a framework for descendants to explore and strengthen genealogical connections. As well as assisting members by providing historical information from their archives, the Foundation actively encourages members to contribute to the group's collective knowledge by relaying the wartime experiences of their fathers and grandfathers. *Splasher Six*, the Foundation's quarterly newsletter, has been a place for members to share historical accounts and news since its launch in 1970. Its title, rather aptly, refers to the wartime homing beacon 'Splasher Six', which transmitted signals to guide the group's planes back to Thorpe Abbots. It is a title that is symbolic of the process it now facilitates within the post-war community. Just as *Contrails* offered a 'collective' narrative of the war, *Splasher Six* provided veterans with the chance to 'tell the world about your story, how you felt, whom you respected, and what you did', as one call for articles stated.<sup>467</sup> In turn, it was hoped that these personal memories would provide an emotional history of the air war, providing historians with 'the real view, the smell, the sweat, the fear'.<sup>468</sup> As well as helping to shape the historical record, the publication of wartime experiences on the same page as letters, poems, and bulletins chronicling the present day lives of the 100<sup>th</sup> community, ensured that the events of the war were never strictly consigned to the past; rather, they lived on in the present as a continual reminder of the purpose and guiding principles of the Foundation. These emotional histories served as the pulse of the translocal community, reinforcing the group's purpose and re-affirming the affective connections that its members felt to each other, and the places that these events unfolded.

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<sup>463</sup> Vikki Bell, *Culture and Performance: The Challenge of Ethics, Politics and Feminist Theory* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2007), 33.

<sup>464</sup> *ibid*

<sup>465</sup> Ana Dragojlovic, "Affective geographies: Intergenerational hauntings, bodily affectivity and multiracial subjectivities", *Subjectivity*, Vol.8 (2015), 316.

<sup>466</sup> Interview with 100<sup>th</sup> BG reunion attendee, October 2019.

<sup>467</sup> "The 100<sup>th</sup> is history. What are going to do about it?", *Splasher Six*, Spring 1988.

<sup>468</sup> *ibid*



Whereas *Splasher Six* had been populated by the first-hand recollection of veterans, more recently it is the retelling of war stories by children and grandchildren that fills its pages. Over time this inter-generational weaving of historical narratives has become integral to the Foundation's identity. *Splasher Six*'s founding editor, 100th veteran Harry Crosby, asked readers in 1985, 'How can we do our part to keep those memories alive, to retain the spirit we had when we fought and died for something that was bigger than any of us could quite understand?'<sup>469</sup> Quoting Crosby's question in an editorial letter in 2020, current editor Nancy Putman asserted the continued significance of *Splasher Six* to this preservation effort, asserting that through 'its range of history, biography and generational perspectives, *Splasher* remains focused on telling the stories of the 100th, then and now.'<sup>470</sup> The significance of these 'generational perspectives' as the hinge between the 'then and now' of the 100th Bomb Group is demonstrated in another article in the same edition, titled 'What I want my sons to learn from their great-grandfather's WWII survival'. In this piece, the author relays the wartime stories that her grandfather had recounted to her as a child. This is followed by an account of her own emotional experience of visiting Thorpe Abbots, and her efforts to share her grandfather's stories, along with her own experiences, to her young sons, in order to 'pass on their greatness to the next generation'.<sup>471</sup> The packaging of wartime experiences within the lexicon and traditions of commemoration not only teaches the next generation what to commemorate, but also how they should remember. The positioning of second generations as 'witnesses' to the events of the war (as a result of their direct connection with veterans) affords them an important place in the translocal community, and in turn, a daunting responsibility to share their knowledge with others as an act of preservation. A similar burden is placed on the shoulders of the offspring of Holocaust survivors, argues Berger, who suggests that the writing of second-generation witnesses must comprise a particularistic and universalistic dimension in its attempts to transform genocidal history into story for the benefit of others within the community and those outside of it.<sup>472</sup> Adopting the notion of 'voluntary covenant' put forward by rabbi and theologian Irving Greenberg, Berger suggests that the second-generation negotiate their own Jewish identity by wilfully writing about the Holocaust. For the offspring of 100th BG veterans, the act of engaging with wartime history through structured channels of articulation has the power to bind identity and foster a sense of belonging.<sup>473</sup> Literature addressing 'nostalgic belonging' has discussed the idea that our sense of being in place is driven by our memories, personal and imagined. The act of remembering past events is an important cultural practice that anchors us in society.<sup>474</sup> Engagement with the 100th Bomb Group's history, through research, writing, and even re-enactment, has allowed members of all generations the opportunity to contribute to the group's

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<sup>469</sup> Nancy Putman, "A Note From the Editor", *Splasher Six*, Winter 2020.

<sup>470</sup>"What I want my sons to learn from their great-grandfather's WWII survival", *Splasher Six*, Winter 2020.

<sup>471</sup> *ibid*

<sup>472</sup> Alan L. Berger, "The Holocaust, Second-Generation Witness, and the Voluntary Covenant in American Judaism." *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, Vol.5, No.1 (1995): 25.

<sup>473</sup> Anne-Marie Fortier/ "Re-Membering Places and the Performance of Belonging(s)", *Theory, Culture & Society* 16, no. 2 (1 April 1999): 42

<sup>474</sup> Vanessa May, "Belonging from Afar: Nostalgia, Time and Memory" in *The Sociological Review* Vol.65, No.2 (2017), 403.

collective memory, in turn securing their own place within the translocal network. In turn, these practices have produced 'texts of memory'; a body of literature that while failing to provide a direct representation of the past, reveal a great deal about the cultural memory of the war and its modes of transmission. Marianne Hirsch developed the term 'postmemory' to describe the ways in which the Holocaust continues to shape the lives of survivors' descendants. For Hirsch, 'Postmemory' describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before-to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right.<sup>475</sup> While Hirsch refers to the afterlife of trauma, the transmission of affects through practices of intergenerational 'remembering' among 100<sup>th</sup> BG descendants suggests that the war continues to shape identities and feelings of belonging across veteran communities.

100<sup>th</sup> BG Foundation chairman Mike Faley suggests that it was his engagement with the history of the group, particularly his work in capturing veterans' memories that allowed him to transition from a position on the 'outside looking in' to what he calls the 'inner sanctum' of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group community.<sup>476</sup> Faley, who has no family connection to the 100<sup>th</sup>, attributes his place within the network to his willingness to collate, preserve and disseminate the group's shared history. As well as strengthening the group's sense of identity, the production and dissemination of what Geertz might describe as 'local knowledge' has helped Mike to foster his own sense of belonging.<sup>477</sup> The process of collating wartime stories about life at wartime Thorpe Abbots has helped him to undergo a process of socialisation that has contracted the spatial and temporal distance between himself and his subject. Rather than being a stranger to this distant landscape, Mike has become a trusted source of historical information about all aspects of the base – an embodied knowledge that he proudly displays during his visits. The uniqueness of Mike's position is clearly reflected in his own narration of the 100<sup>th</sup>'s history. As we talk during his visit to Thorpe Abbots, his pronouns seamlessly switch between those of a non-partisan historian, to those of an active participant in the events of the past. During these latter moments - like a football supporter discussing his team's performance - Mike refers to the time that 'we completed a mission' and the moment that 'our bombers made it home'. Mike Faley's lexicon is typical of the kinship expressed by other members of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Foundation. A recent Facebook post advertising the benefits of membership encourages the reader to 'give yourself (and the historians you love) the gift of 'belonging', while another urges people to join 'the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group

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<sup>475</sup> Marianne Hirsch, "Postmemory", <https://postmemory.net> [accessed 9 September 2022]

<sup>476</sup> Michael Faley, "Outside Looking In", 100<sup>th</sup> BG Foundation, [https://100thbg.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=265:outside-looking-in&catid=25:group-history&Itemid=581](https://100thbg.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=265:outside-looking-in&catid=25:group-history&Itemid=581) [accessed 15 December 2019].

<sup>477</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2016.

family'.<sup>478</sup> It is interesting to note that whilst membership of many veteran groups, such as the Eighth Air Force Historical Society, has fallen with the passing of the older generations, the membership of the 100<sup>th</sup> BG Foundation has grown exponentially; a contrast that the Foundation's president puts down to the group's willingness to recruit outside of veterans and their descendants.

### 'The Legacy Continues': The 100<sup>th</sup> Air Refueling Wing and the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group

The intergenerational transmission of affective connections between people and places has helped sustain the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group as a translocal community. However, the filiality of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group's heritage not only figures in the self-identification of veterans and their children, but also to the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group's military successors. Designated by the US Air Force as the official descendants of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, the 100<sup>th</sup> Air Refueling Wing is notable for the extent to which the unit's wartime heritage has influenced its present-day culture and identity.<sup>479</sup> By fostering close relationships with both the 100<sup>th</sup> BG Foundation and the museum at Thorpe Abbots, the Wing has become a valued member of the translocal network and lauded by both the Foundation and the Memorial Museum for its role in perpetuating the 'legacy' of the 100<sup>th</sup> BG through its involvement in current military actions.

The 100<sup>th</sup> ARW's designation as descendants follows a complicated military lineage, involving multiple inactivations and mergers in the fifty years between June 1942 and the group's most recent reactivation, as the 100<sup>th</sup> ARW, in February 1992. In the decades after the Second World War, the 100<sup>th</sup>'s Air Force descendants carried out a range of missions, from bombardment training in the 1950s to strategic reconnaissance during the Vietnam War, and global refueling missions from 1976 onward. Since its final reactivation in 1992, the 100<sup>th</sup> ARW has used KC-135 Stratotankers to provide air-to-air refueling for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and more recently, in Eastern Europe in support of Ukrainian defence efforts.<sup>480</sup> RAF Mildenhall, an air base located approximately 25 miles from Thorpe Abbots in Suffolk, has been the permanent home of the Wing since 1992.

Despite operating out of Mildenhall for three decades, and participating in multiple military engagements, it is the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group's three years at Thorpe Abbots that is heralded as an integral facet of the 100<sup>th</sup> Air Refueling Wing's identity as a military unit. The prominence of the Second World War in the culture of the 100<sup>th</sup> ARW is the result of sustained and relatively recent efforts by a succession of commanders to position the present-day Wing within the historical narrative of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. As well as establishing a relationship with the museum at Thorpe Abbots and the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Foundation,

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<sup>478</sup> Chip Culpepper to *WW2 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group* page, Facebook, 25 November 2019

<sup>479</sup> Interview with Rob Paley, 100<sup>th</sup> ARW historian, 14 April 2020.

<sup>480</sup> "100<sup>th</sup> Air Refueling Wing History", *Royal Air Force Mildenhall*, <https://www.mildenhall.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/270390/100th-air-refueling-wing-history> [accessed 20 April 2021].

these efforts have resulted in the permeation of wartime history into the material and cultural fabric of Mildenhall, as former 100th ARW commander Col. Thomas Torkelson describes,

*'The reminders of the 100th Bomb Group are everywhere – beyond the black-and-white Square D that colors all we see, there is the Bloody Hundredth crest on the 100th ARW flagship KC-135 tail number 58-0100... There's Rovigno Conference Room that serves the 100th MXG, and streets all over the base named after famous B-17s: 'Our Gal Sal,' 'Piccadilly Lily,' and 'Squawkin' Hawk,' just to name a few... Every time we see these reminders, or when we order our 'Square D' sandwich or 'Bloody Hundredth Ale' at the Galaxy Club, we should think of and thank those Bloody Hundredth heroes that came before.'*<sup>481</sup>

Col. Thomas Torkelson, 100th ARW commander (February 2017)

Through the evocation of wartime history, personnel at Mildenhall are encouraged to participate in everyday acts of remembrance, whether crossing a street named after a B-17 or eating a 100th BG-branded sandwich. The most obvious vestige of the war is the display of the 'Square D' patch on the arms of 100th ARW members and on the tails of its aircraft. During the Second World War, the symbol was an identifying marker of the 100th Bomb Group and its replication in the material culture of today's Wing serves both a commemorative and identifying purpose. Commenting on the display of unit insignia on airmen's uniform, official Air Force historian Jack Waid argues that 'wearing the squadron patch completes the family group, you have your name tape and then you have the greater family, the Air Force, but now these patches give Airman an opportunity to show how extended their family is and how rich their heritage is by wearing their unit's emblem.'<sup>482</sup> Like the attempts by Eighth Air Force commanders to boost morale and foster *esprit de corps* through localisation practices intended to bind people and places, the heritage strategies of today's commanders attempt to forge affective connections between the past and the present, legitimising the work of the individual within a broader historical assemblage.<sup>483</sup>

The choice of the Second World War as the touchstone for memory and identity is qualified by the intensive process of mythicisation that has transformed the conflict into 'The Good war', fought by 'the Greatest Generation'.<sup>484</sup> Just as the painting of medieval knights waving Texan flags on the wall of the NCOs Club at the Eighth Air Force base at Horham was intended to bestow the 95th Bomb

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<sup>481</sup> "100th Air Refueling Wing celebrates a historic 25 years", <https://www.mildenhall.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1066584/100th-air-refueling-wing-celebrates-a-historic-25-years/> [accessed 19 April 2021].

<sup>482</sup> Bennie J. Davis III, "Redefining History", *Airman Magazine* (2018) <https://airman.dodlive.mil/2018/10/09/redefining-history> [accessed 20 April 2021].

<sup>483</sup> Alastair Finlan, *Contemporary Military Culture and Strategic Studies: US and UK Armed Forces in the 21st Century* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2013), 54.

<sup>484</sup> Kenneth Rose, *Myth and the Greatest Generation: A Social History of Americans in World War II* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2012), 1-9.

Group with the virtues of chivalry and honour, the appropriation of WWII culture draws on an imagined past to legitimise the Wing's actions in the present. In an era where military action of any kind is met with increased scrutiny, the evocation of the 'Good War' also serves a public relations function. In a video posted on RAF Mildenhall's Youtube page, the Secretary of the Air Force Heather Wilson commends a recent operation conducted by the Wing. Illustrating this speech are clips of KC-135 Stratotankers taking to the air, overlaid by ghost-like footage of B-17s in flight. The visual effect of this video manipulation is that it appears that the modern planes are refueling the B-17s, a contraction of history that leaves no doubt of the intended message as one of legacy and filiation, sanctified within the context of the Second World War.<sup>485</sup>

Other heritage strategies are more conspicuous and symbolically complex. In March 2021, the 100<sup>th</sup> ARW announced that it would be launching an 'Adopt-a-Jet' initiative at RAF Mildenhall. Described as 'an opportunity to get squadrons and units from across the wing more involved in our wing heritage', the scheme encourages squadrons within the 100<sup>th</sup> ARW to sponsor one of the Wing's KC-135 Stratotankers; a commitment that involves helping with the aircraft's maintenance in return for 'bragging rights'.<sup>486</sup> The planes up for adoption are all jets adorned with 'heritage nose art', typically featuring a name inherited from a wartime B-17, along with WWII-inspired artwork. The press release stated that the 100<sup>th</sup> Civil Engineer Squadron had already committed to adopting 'Boss Lady' – an aircraft that takes its name from two B-17s who flew with the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group during the war.<sup>487</sup> Aside from appropriating the name of its predecessors, the 'heritage nose-art' that adorns today's 'Boss Lady' bears no reference to the original B-17s of the same name, discarding the derogatory pin-up girl style for an emblem portraying 'Rosie the Riveter', a figure that has become synonymous with the contribution of women to the war effort. Indeed, Lt. Col. Raymond Elmore, 100<sup>th</sup> CES commander, explained that his unit's decision to adopt 'Boss Lady' was based on the image of Rosie as a symbol of 'strength, resiliency and women's rights.' Unsurprisingly, it was 'Boss Lady' that was chosen to be the first KC-135 to be flown by an all-female crew, an event publicised to coincide with International Women's Day.

The naming, branding and subsequent adoption of 'Boss Lady' serves multiple agendas through its layered symbolism. At once a public representation of the Air Force's inclusivity and an emblem of its dutiful commemoration of its history, the insignia also legitimises the present actions of the Air Force by embodying the past. By offering the opportunities for individual groups within the Wing to attach themselves to this layered motif by actively participating in the upkeep of the aircraft, the 'Adopt-a-Jet' scheme knowingly establishes emotional connections through affective practice. 'From a historical perspective, it's clear that

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<sup>485</sup> "Bloody Hundredth's Legacy", RAF Mildenhall Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMAa-T1zM3I> [accessed 18 April 2021].

<sup>486</sup> "Lightbulb moment": passion for aircraft gives opportunity to reenergize nose art heritage of 100th BG", RAF Mildenhall, <https://www.mildenhall.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/2518733/lightbulb-moment-passion-for-aircraft-gives-opportunity-to-reenergize-nose-art> [accessed 18 April 2021].

<sup>487</sup> *ibid*

‘the iron’ is not just an inanimate object,’ confirmed Rob Paley, 100th ARW historian. ‘To these Airmen, the aircraft have their own personalities and characteristics, and by assigning a nose art from World War II, it entirely changes the way the crew – whether maintenance or flight crew – see the aircraft, because it becomes personal to them.’<sup>488</sup>

Central to this anamorphism has been the adoption of not only the visual and material symbols of the war, but the affective language and mythology of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. For example, the reuse of the nickname ‘Bloody Hundredth’ – a moniker intended to convey the substantial losses of the original group – has helped to distinguish the Wing from its numerous Air Force counterparts as a group of battle-hardened survivors. For the Wing’s commanders, sharing the emotional history behind the name has been pivotal to strengthening these affective connections. Writing about his first visit to Thorpe Abbots, 100<sup>th</sup> ARW’s unit historian, Rob Paley, described the transformative impact that the museum had on his understanding of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. ‘As I walked through the museum and saw the incredible artifacts, I tried to glean the secrets which they held. I tried to imagine them not as they are now, but as they were then. Could I still smell the smoke, the oil, the sweat, the excitement, the fear...the sadness?...How could I share what I was feeling with the Airmen I wondered.’ Having been affected by the material remnants of the 100<sup>th</sup>, Paley phoned 100<sup>th</sup> BG Foundation historian Mike Faley to hear the ‘heartfelt, heartwarming and sometimes funny’ stories of the Group; personal anecdotes that drew Paley ‘deeper and deeper into the mystique of the Bloody 100<sup>th</sup> legacy...*I must share their story!* I concluded, after Mike and I finally hung up’.<sup>489</sup> Inspired by his experience, Paley has organised historical lectures for airmen and contributed to the production of a virtual tour of the museum. In his spare time, he has been working on a detailed scale model of Thorpe Abbots control tower and regularly visits the museum to take measurements for his project. Encouraged by Paley, 100<sup>th</sup> ARW airmen regularly visit the museum, often helping with the maintenance of the museum’s buildings; a restorative practice intended to form affective connections between today’s airmen and their ancestral home through the act of repairing.

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<sup>488</sup> *ibid*

<sup>489</sup> Rob Paley, “I must tell their story”, *Splasher Six*, Vol. 51, No.3, Fall 2020.



Figure 21 An airman of the 100th Civil Engineering Squadron, part of the 100th Air Refueling Wing, paints a shed at the 100th BG Memorial Museum in 2012 (Source: 100th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs, Department of Defense)

The success of these heritage strategies in producing meaningful connections between individual airmen and their predecessors is difficult to evaluate. For some, the lineage of the unit is clearly an immense source of pride and an important part of their identity as Air Force personnel. ‘I love this unit because of that Box D’, remarked S/Sgt Jonathan MacManus as he escorted 100th BG veterans on a tour of a KC-135 in 2004, ‘this is the reason why most of us got in the Air Force’.<sup>490</sup> However, the nomadic lifestyle imposed by the US Air Force ensures that postings to the 100<sup>th</sup> ARW rarely last more than a few years, leaving one to question the extent to which individuals can translate the rhetoric of ‘lineage’ and ‘legacy’ into the type of embodied connections shared by the familial descendants of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group.

Despite these limitations, the close relationship that exists between the 100<sup>th</sup> ARW and the 100<sup>th</sup> BG Foundation is evidence of the expanding parameters of the translocal community. For the 100<sup>th</sup> BG Foundation, the affiliation with an active USAF Wing endorses the heritage activities of the organisation by bestowing them with relevance in today’s military, articulated in messages of gratitude thanking 100<sup>th</sup> ARW personnel for ‘continuing the Mission’.<sup>491</sup> As the present and future of the Air Force, the serving personnel of the 100<sup>th</sup> ARW play an important role in the translocal network. As a former 100<sup>th</sup> ARW commander

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<sup>490</sup> Ron Jensen, “RAF Mildenhall”, *Stars and Stripes*, Fall 2004.

<sup>491</sup> Post by 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Foundation Facebook page, June 5 2020.

articulated to this airmen, ‘those veterans view you as an extension of their sacrifice. When I first met veteran Frank ‘Bud’ Buschmeier a few years ago, he was in a wheelchair and I was in service dress. I told him, ‘Sir, I just want to meet you and introduce myself. I consider you a hero and airpower legend’ – he got all teary and grabbed my service-dress sleeve and said, ‘You guys are the heroes! You are MY hero!’<sup>492</sup>

### The 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Reunion

The notions of ‘belonging’ and ‘legacy’ were recurring themes during my experience of attending one of the Foundation’s biennial reunions in October 2019. Although I had introduced myself as both a museum volunteer and PhD researcher, it was the former title that garnered the most attention from my fellow attendees. At the group dinner on the first evening, I felt a surge of both pride and embarrassment as myself and the other museum representatives were asked to stand to receive a round of applause; an honorary reception that continued throughout the reunion. In consciously registering my own emotions during the reunion dinner, I was also acutely aware of the affective atmosphere that circulated around the tables over the course of the evening. In one moment, lively chatter imbued the space with the air of a family get-together, only to be temporarily replaced with a solemn reverence as candles were lit and prayers read aloud in memory of ‘absent friends’. I soon realised that the affective intensities that characterised the reunion weekend emerged from moments that had been a feature of the itinerary since the very first reunion in 1947; repeated affective practice that had worn grooves and ruts into the attendees’ bodies, and had in turn been inscribed into the habits of subsequent generations.<sup>493</sup>

Of the 300-plus attendees at the reunion, only seven had served in the wartime 100<sup>th</sup> BG (although sadly one of the veterans, 96-year-old T/Sgt Dewey Christopher, passed away on the second day of the event). While the loss served as a poignant reminder of the diminishing WWII veteran population, the overall atmosphere over the course of the reunion was one of excitement, camaraderie and belonging. Dewey’s son, who had also been attending the reunion, conceded that there was nowhere that Dewey would rather have died than among his 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group ‘family’.<sup>494</sup> At Thorpe Abbots, which Dewey had visited only months earlier, the flag was flown at half-mast. Following the tradition of previous reunions, a hospitality room in the hotel was rented for use as the PX. In this curated space, stalls displaying original 100<sup>th</sup> BG memorabilia sat alongside merchandise stands selling reunion t-shirts and hats. The visible role of the 100<sup>th</sup> Air Refueling Wing in the assemblage of the 100<sup>th</sup> BG community was very apparent in their physical presence at the Colorado reunion. In one corner of the function room, uniformed representatives from the 100<sup>th</sup> ARW, who had travelled from their base at RAF Mildenhall in Suffolk to attend the reunion, sold coffee

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<sup>492</sup> “Bloody Hundredth Shares Proud Heritage as 100th ARW Airmen Join WWII Heroes at 100th BG Reunion”, *Splasher Six*, Vol.52, No.4, 24.

<sup>493</sup> Campbell, Smith and Wetherell, *Emotion, Affective Practices, and the Past in the Present*, 28.

<sup>494</sup> Interview with Gary Christopher, 12 March 2020.



mugs and bookmarks printed with the slogan 'The Bloody Hundredth: The Legacy Continues'; a motto that alludes both to the historical preservation work of the Foundation's members and the ongoing military mission of the 100<sup>th</sup> ARW.

Today's reunions are also an opportunity for those with non-familial links to the 100<sup>th</sup> to immerse themselves in the history of the group. Jan, who has established his own private museum in the Czech Republic, brought along items from his own collection to display. His museum commemorates the Battle of Kovarska; an aerial melee which took place over his hometown on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1944. Finding remnants of crashed aircraft belonging to the 100<sup>th</sup> BG as a child inspired a life-long affinity with the unit; a passion which he has now passed on to his two young sons. At this reunion, Jan hands out 'Bloody Hundredth' branded 'dog tags' (identification disks) for every attendee. Just as wartime dog tags contained soldiers' personal identifying information, these commemorative tags serve to visually, materially and affectively identify each attendee as belonging to the Foundation and by extension, the quasi-historical narrative of the 'Bloody Hundredth'.

As attendees shared anecdotes passed down from their grandfathers, and the few remaining veterans signed autographs for enthusiastic Czech and American teenagers, the translocal community of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group converged in one room for a few hours. In these close quarters, affect circulated between bodies primed by the shared memories of events that took place 80 years ago, in a place thousands of miles away from the Colorado hotel. Within this assemblage, the significance of Thorpe Abbots, as a historical and imagined locality connecting the group's participants in the past, present, and future, became clearly apparent. At one table, a group of attendees huddle over a collection of wartime photographs of the base, their conversations mingling with a couple excitedly discussing a future trip to Thorpe Abbots with one of the museum's volunteers. As Duineveld and Van Assche explain, 'within networks, absence functions as the negation of presence in the past or future: something is only absent when it was or could be observed to be present.'<sup>495</sup> The absence of Thorpe Abbots makes itself felt throughout the reunion in the material objects and imagined traces of the base that circulate at the event.

In turn, it is the absent presence of the base's former occupants and the collective and imagined memories that they left behind, that have haunted Thorpe Abbots since the last American left the base in 1945. As a network that interweaves contexts across spatial and temporal dimensions, the balance between the real and imagined, the absent and the present, has been integral to defining and maintaining the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group as a translocal community. Thousands of miles from Thorpe Abbots, the absent presences circulate in newsletters, videos, and social media posts shared by the

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<sup>495</sup> Martijn Felder and Kristof Van Assche, "Absence/presence and the ontological politics of heritage: the case of Barrack 57", *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Vol.21 (2015), 460-475.

descendants of veterans, echoing from the screen like disembodied voices captured and replayed in EVP boxes. The pervasion of the spectral in the culture of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group is evocatively represented in an article titled 'Home of the 100<sup>th</sup>, Then and Now', published in a recent edition of *Splasher Six*. The article recounts the post-war history of the airfield and the establishment of the 100<sup>th</sup> BG Memorial Museum in the late 1970s. Alongside the chronology of the control tower's restoration are the voices of the 'spirits' left behind at Thorpe Abbots, which haunt each page in the form of italicised sentences that materialise throughout the text.

*'After 2 1/2 years of active duty operations, the 100th BG packed its bags, pulled up stakes and departed in December 1945. Outwardly it was silent once again, but spirits lingered untouched by military orders to move on...On May 1981, Horace Varian, dedicated the newly restored Control Tower Museum. And it was just the beginning. The spirits were heard, their 'home' restored'.<sup>496</sup>*

The description of Thorpe Abbots' ghosts as wayward spirits free from the repercussions of military disobedience is significant. Not only does it establish the autonomy of the spirits as humans, rather than martial bodies, but also reinforces the idea that the ghosts are not tied to Thorpe Abbots by virtue of their unfortunate end, but by their conscious decision to remain. As I will discuss later in this chapter, their stubborn presence at Thorpe Abbots, despite the departure of their living comrades to the US, validates the notion of the base as a 'home' to the ghosts of the bomb group.

The significance of the base as a 'home' is integral to the legend of the 'Bloody Hundredth' and the identity of the translocal community beyond the spectral. Just as the affective language of the translocal community weaves personal and emotional histories, wartime myths and historical fact, 'home' in the context of Thorpe Abbots is multifaceted, taking on different meanings depending on one's position within the assemblage. Simultaneously a 'wartime home' for veterans, a 'final home' for the dead and an 'ancestral home' for descendants, the signifier 'home' serves as a metaphor for the types of relationships individuals and groups have formed with the base. For many, this bond to Thorpe Abbots is not based on discursive rhetoric, but rather, a milieu of affective connections interwoven with personal, collective, and imagined memories that register emotionally as feelings of belonging. As one 100<sup>th</sup> BG veteran emphasised, Thorpe Abbots seems to have its own gravitation pull, drawing veterans in for 'one last look'.<sup>497</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> "Home of the 100<sup>th</sup>, Then and Now", *Splasher Six*, Winter 2020.

<sup>497</sup> *Splasher Six*, Winter 1986.

## 'If there are ghosts, they are here': Absent presence and the phantasmic at Thorpe Abbots

There are many who believe that Thorpe Abbots is haunted. The museum's volunteers share wry smiles as they recount some of the paranormal encounters that visitors have 'experienced' over the years. Pale-faced and trembling, one woman was certain she had heard the ghostly rumblings of a B-17 flying overhead, whilst another fled the control tower in terror after seeing a uniformed airman strolling along the corridor. Both stories end with the same revelation, as the volunteers reassure the visitor that the aircraft noise was not paranormal phenomena, but a recording played from a CD player. Likewise, the uniformed 'ghost' was in fact a member of a local re-enactment group perusing the museum displays.

Other sightings have less clear-cut explanations. Over the years, several witnesses have reported seeing a figure standing at the first-floor window of the control tower.<sup>498</sup> Ron, the museum's curator, has even admitted to scouring the building after glimpsing movement in the tower, believing that he had accidentally locked a member of the public in the building when closing up for the night. Some of the museum volunteers have suggested that this apparition is 'Eddie the ghost', a figure from the annals of wartime folklore.<sup>499</sup> The story of Eddie is corroborated by the group's own historical record, which includes reports by personnel of a ghostly airman, eight or nine foot tall, who patrolled Thorpe Abbots' barrack huts at night. Rumour had it that the unfortunate soul had been killed during one of the group's mission to Berlin and was destined to return to the base in search of 'his next victim'.<sup>500</sup> Fear among the base's personnel grew to such an extent that men began hanging their carbines above their bed - a response that prompted base commander Colonel Jeffries to ban all talk of Eddie on penalty of court martial. No doubt Jeffries knew that the spectral airman was little more than a 'flak story' - a form of initiation designed to both scare and socialise the group's new members.<sup>501</sup> As with any 'flak story', the ghostly tale earned its affective power by invoking the untested aircrew's own, very real fears: death over the skies of Germany. One participant in a 'flakking' described how the barracks became animated with the sights and sounds of war as the storytelling intensified. 'The flak started popping. In very few minutes, B-17s were strewn about the barracks...planes were crashing into mountain-sides...into the east in France and in Germany.'<sup>502</sup> The maelstrom of past experience, articulation, anticipation, and heightened emotion converged, contracting time and space to animate the hyper-realities of war in the confines of the barracks. For the newly-arrived aircrews immersed in this storytelling, it was the ghosts of an uncertain future, rather than the past, that haunted the barracks in that moment; a malevolent

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<sup>498</sup> Richard le Strange, *Century Bombers: Story of the "Bloody Hundredth"*, (Norfolk: 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Memorial Museum, 1989).

<sup>499</sup> Nillson, *The Story of the Century*, 60.

<sup>500</sup> *ibid*

<sup>501</sup> John F. Callaghan (ed), *Contrails*, 69.

<sup>502</sup> *ibid*

presence amplified by the material absence of missing comrades whose bunks lay empty. As potent affective forces, presence and absence are catalysts for memory, shaping present and future experiences.<sup>503</sup>

The figure of the ghost as something that is neither present or absent, dead nor alive, guides hauntological theory, a portmanteau coined by Jacques Derrida to examine the eerie way in which the past - and future - haunt the present.<sup>504</sup> For Derrida, hauntology refers to the atemporal nature of Marxism and its tendency to 'haunt Western society from beyond the grave'.<sup>505</sup> More recently, hauntology has been used as a critical lens to explore the paradoxes of postmodernity and the recycling of the past in aesthetics, music and literature.<sup>506</sup> The persistence of the past in everyday life has also guided ideas about place, particularly the potential for personal and collective memories to create an accumulative palimpsest layered with temporalities. As Michael De Certeau observes, 'there is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can 'invoke' or not'.<sup>507</sup>

The layering of memories is given a material metaphor in Dawdy's exploration of the patina of post-Katrina New Orleans, which bears the remnants of a past that 'is both spectral and real'<sup>508</sup>. Concerned with the profane archaeology of the city, Dawdy describes the social stratigraphy of New Orleans as an assemblage comprising material objects and human memories, meanings and habits, which shift, surge, fade and re-emerge over time and space. Like De Certeau's assertion that we can choose to 'invoke' the spirits of place, Dawdy asserts the agency of local subjects in negotiating their own sense of belonging. By engaging with the past through historical research, storytelling, and preservation of material culture, local residents become archaeologists, able to excavate the past and invoke the ghosts of the present.

Despite their uncanniness, spirits are an important, and arguably necessary, feature of our everyday experience of place, becoming 'a familiar and often homey part of our lives', according to Bell.<sup>509</sup> As well as inhabiting the mundane places of the everyday, ghosts also animate spaces that are no longer inhabited. Edensor argues that confrontations with ruins, as marginal sites where presence and absence intermingle most acutely, conjure 'affective and sensual' memories compared to the more ordered and normative ways in the which spirits are invoked in familiar places.<sup>510</sup> The indeterminacy of these sites and the absent presences of the people who once inhabited them account for their uncanniness. As Fisher emphasises, a

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<sup>503</sup> Sarah De Nardi. *The Poetics of Conflict Experience: Materiality and Embodiment in Second World War Italy* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 10.

<sup>504</sup> Colin Davis, "Hauntology, spectres and phantoms", *French Studies*, Vol.59 (2005), 373.

<sup>505</sup> Andrew Utterson, *Persistent Images: Encountering Film History in Contemporary Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 45.

<sup>506</sup> See Mark Fisher, "What Is Hauntology?", *Film Quarterly* 66 (Fall 2012): 16-24.

<sup>507</sup> Michael De Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 108.

<sup>508</sup> Shannon Lee Dawdy. *Patina: A Profound Archaeology* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2016), 8.

<sup>509</sup> Michael Mayerfeld Bell, "The Ghosts of Place", *Theory and Society*, Vol.26 (1997), 816.

<sup>510</sup> Tim Edensor, "The ghosts of industrial ruins: ordering and disordering memory in excessive space", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* Vol.23, No.6 (2005), 829.

'sense of eerie seldom clings to enclosed and inhabited domestic spaces; we find the eerie more readily in landscape partially emptied of the human'.<sup>511</sup>

The notion of a landscape only 'partially emptied' prompts us to question the experiences of those forced to live among ruins. In Navaro's case study of Northern Cyprus, the author recounts feeling an eeriness at walking through the destroyed buildings of the border zone; a sense of uncanniness not shared by those who lived among the ruined dwellings, for whom the 'melancholic' and 'phantasmic' objects of conflict formed a daily part of their existence.<sup>512</sup> Likewise, I argue that relationality and subjectivity is pivotal to understanding the emergence of ghosts at Thorpe Abbots during the post-war period. Affect is not exuded by ruins, nor is it simply projected by subjects; but rather, the production and transmission of affects emerge from the precise relationality between the subject and object.

*'Only Memories Remained': The end of the war and the American exodus*

On a sunny day in May 1946, L. J. Burrows collected the last of his equipment, plucked his hat from its hook, and left the administration building that had been his office since late 1945. Burrows was an Air Ministry Works employee responsible for vacating RAF Thorpe Abbots, transitioning the site from an active airfield to a redundant one. Burrows described the scene, 'As I turned the key in the lock of the last building in use on the site for the last time and stepped into the waiting vehicle, Thorpe Abbots was officially added to the list of redundant airfields. Only memories remained'.<sup>513</sup>

The American exodus from Thorpe Abbots following the declaration of peace in Europe in May 1945 had been hasty. Within a week of VE Day, most of the unit's air crews had boarded their B-17s and taken off from Thorpe Abbots for the last time, returning to camps in the US to await re-mobilisation to the Pacific Theatre or discharge. The ground personnel who had not amassed enough points for immediate demobilisation remained at Station 139, which operated with a skeleton team until the base was returned to the Air Ministry in December 1945. Like the majority of vacated USAAF aerodromes, Thorpe Abbots was placed into Care and Maintenance status whilst the Air Ministry decided what to do with the base. Along with the hundreds of other wartime airfields in its portfolio. While most of airfield buildings at Thorpe Abbots remained untouched during this post-war period of redundancy, others were brought back into service as a temporary solution to the housing crisis raging across Britain. Nissen huts on the former living sites were insulated, partitioned, and rented out to local families. Despite the primitive surroundings of the air base, a new community flourished among the squat tin huts and blast shelters. On a visit to the 100th Bomb Group museum in 2019, one of the post-war residents tearfully recalled how the years she spent

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<sup>511</sup> Mark Fisher. *The Weird and the Eerie*, (London: Watkins Media Limited, 2017), 11.

<sup>512</sup> Yael Navaro-Yashin, *The Make-Believe Space: Affective Geography in a Postwar Polity*, (Brigham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 129.

<sup>513</sup> Letter from L. J. Burrows to Control Tower Museum, *100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Memorial Museum*.

living on the airfield had been the best of her life.<sup>514</sup> She was devastated when her family were eventually forced to leave their Nissen hut in the 1960s. The appearance of daffodils each Spring, which recurrently bloom in neat rows in front of the concrete foundation pads, is testament to the buildings' post-war civilian use and the everyday acts of domestication undertaken by their inhabitants.

Thorpe Abbots was not the only redundant airfield to welcome families affected by wartime displacement. RAF Shipdham was used as a holding camp for German Prisoners of War up until 1947, whilst RAF Marsworth in Hertfordshire, occupied during the war by an assortment of USAAF units, became home to around 900 people in 1948 as one of forty camps established to house displaced Polish refugees.<sup>515</sup> Not all post-war occupation was sanctioned and in many cases airfield buildings and amenities, such as those at RAF Halesworth in Suffolk, were requisitioned by homeless people, referred to as 'squatters' by the local authorities.<sup>516</sup> Despite the continued civilian use of former USAAF bases by residents, agricultural workers, local businesses and the Military of Defence, this period is rarely more than a postscript in the written histories of Second World War airfields. While this dismissal of the seemingly mundane, transitory period in the afterlives of airfield structures is to be expected, it nevertheless ignores the continued significance of airfield sites to the local communities that existed alongside them and within them. As the tears of the woman reminiscing about the years that she spent in her Thorpe Abbots Nissen hut show, powerful affective connections were established between local people and the materiality of the airfield in the years after the war.

While some of these local memories concern the domestic re-use of buildings on the airfield, most of the recollections from this period speak not of presence, but of absence. The atmosphere of the base during the war years - defined in many oral histories by the brash sound of Hollywood accents, the smell of engine oil and the taste of American foods - was punctuated by the haunting silence and abandoned objects that remained after the US Army Air Force's sudden departure. This absent presence in the years after the war was felt most keenly by Thorpe Abbots' local children, who by 1945 had come to accept the Americans as an everyday part of their existence. Local boy Sam Hurry remembered the arrival of the Americans as 'the best thing that happened to us because we suddenly had a new life,' and their departure was just as impactful.<sup>517</sup> 'The Americans were suddenly gone', recalled Paul Meen, who was only twelve years old when the 100th Bomb Group left Thorpe Abbots.<sup>518</sup> For many, the departure signalled a definitive, even traumatic, end to childhood. 'It took a long time to get back to normal. I don't think it ever did', remarked Sam Hurry, who had been a regular visitor to Thorpe Abbots air base as a child. Teenager Patricia Everson recounted how she spent VE Day in her bedroom crying because the

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<sup>514</sup> Interview with visitor to 100<sup>th</sup> BG Memorial Museum, August 2019.

<sup>515</sup> "3,000 Poles still live in camps after 12 years", December 19 1958, *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*.

<sup>516</sup> Oral History with Sheila Roberts, conducted 12 June 2015, Eighth in the East, *Suffolk Record Office*.

<sup>517</sup> Sam Hurry, interviewed for "Stories of the Bloody Hundredth – Childhood Memories" (released 2005).

<sup>518</sup> Kevin Wilson, *Blood and Fears: How America's Bomber Boys and Girls in England Won Their War* (London: Orion Publishing Group, 2016), 455.

end of the war meant that the Americans - a central part of her childhood existence - would leave.<sup>519</sup> The grief at this prospect over-rode the fact that the end of hostilities also signalled the return of her own father from overseas duty.

For these children, the materiality of the air base in the post-war years evoked personal and imagined memories that were laced with both nostalgia and melancholy for the loss of the Americans, as depicted in Paul Meen's account of visiting Thorpe Abbots airfield,

*'Just after the war I used to bike up to the airfield to work the farmland and think about all that had happened there. Sometimes there would be a certain smell as you worked some ground where engine oil from the plane engines had been poured away in a ditch and it would all come back to me what had happened in that place. Norfolk was dead after the Americans went.'*<sup>520</sup>

A few miles away at Seething airfield, Pat Everson picked cowslips from the runway shortly after the war, later recalling how 'you could feel the atmosphere. The runways stretched into the distance, empty yet so full. I swore out loud that I would never forget them.'<sup>521</sup> In both recollections, there is a clear paradox between a landscape that is simultaneously 'dead' and yet alive with the sensuous memories of the past. As Everson described, fields bristling with recollections were 'empty yet so full'.

In a speech at Thorpe Abbots, local historian Roger Freeman attempted to explain the base's post-war presence by drawing on his own experience of visiting the airfield after the war. Rather than serving as a mnemonic for his personal memories, Thorpe Abbots is articulated as a container and transmitter for the emotional residue of those who served there:

*'...there was nobody there except the rabbits. And I walked on through the woods up onto the airfield proper. There were oil stains, still, on the dispersal points. There were signs of heavy braking still on the runways. The hangars were empty, gone, silent. The whole place had an atmosphere. I am not a religious man. I am not a superstitious man. I don't believe in ghosts. But that place had an atmosphere. There was a presence. Somehow it was if all the emotion, all the action of the long-gone days were being radiated.'*<sup>522</sup>

The ghostly inflections in Everson, Meen and Freeman's accounts are echoed in post-war cultural representations of the airfields. In one of the first and most influential books to focus on the infrastructure of the Eighth Air Force, *Airfields Then and Now*, Roger Freeman depicts the 'bleak, windswept and mouldering' airfields and the 'aura of ineffable sadness that hangs over memorials to fighting men.'<sup>523</sup> The melancholia of these sites seep through the subsequent pages, which recount the achievements of each

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<sup>519</sup> Interview with Pat Everson, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2020.

<sup>520</sup> Wilson, *Blood and Fears*, 455.

<sup>521</sup> Patricia Everson quoted in Edwards, 2015 p.224

<sup>522</sup> "Roger Freeman speaks at Thorpe Abbots", *Splasher Six*, Summer 1986.

<sup>523</sup> Roger A. Freeman, *Freeman Airfields of the Eighth: Then and Now*, (London: After the Battle, 1978), 7.

bomb group alongside black-and-white photographs of the 'ghost-like' remains of the abandoned airfields. It is perhaps unsurprising that Freeman - who popularised the term 'Mighty Eighth' - developed his interest in the subject as a plane-obsessed school-boy living next to the USAAF airfield at Boxted, Essex. Like Meen and Everson, his childhood memories are articulated as a 'presence'. Clearly inspired by Freeman's work, Martin Bowman's *Echoes of East Anglia* and *Ghost Fields of East Anglia*, comprise almost solely of quotes from veterans, juxtaposed with images of rusting Nissen huts and flaking wall art; a layout in which the memories of veterans visually haunt their former abodes.<sup>524</sup> By the 1980s, work published by American authors, including *From Somewhere in England* by D.A. Lande and *One Last Look* by Philip Kaplan had adopted this spectral language, describing the 'brooding stillness' of the English bases, which nevertheless 'seem full of voices, the clump of boots, laughter from an Aeroclub and shouted orders over the thunder of 1200 horsepower engines'.<sup>525</sup> As well as echoing the sights and sounds of war, the 'forlorn and empty' buildings took on their own spectral forms in these works, as silent witnesses to the past where 'haunting memories cling'.<sup>526</sup>



Figure 22 The control tower at Thorpe Abbots in the 1970s prior to restoration (Source: Roger Freeman, American Air Museum, IWM)

<sup>524</sup> Martin Bowman. *Ghost Fields of East Anglia: Capturing Fading Memories of the Aerial War 1942-45*, (London: Halsgrove, 2007); Martin Bowman. *Echoes of East Anglia*.

<sup>525</sup> D. A. Lande. *From Somewhere in England*. USA: Airline Publishing Ltd, 1991: 8

<sup>526</sup> Lande, 1991: 10



Historian Sam Edwards has argued that this post-war romanticisation invested the old bases 'with the ghosts of memory and with the atmosphere of the past'<sup>527</sup>. The origins of this mnemonic template and discursive form, according to Edwards, can be partly found in the 1949 film *Twelve O'Clock High*. In the film's iconic opening scenes, an American veteran returns to his former air base - now derelict - where he experiences the ghostly sounds of B-17s roaring overhead. There is no doubt that cultural works, including *Twelve O'Clock High*, have provided a phantasmic framing device for the articulation of affective encounters at wartime bases; Freeman himself concedes that the events in *Twelve O'Clock High* 'pre-empted' many of the evocative encounters experienced by veterans when returning to their former bases.<sup>528</sup> Indeed, Paul Meen's description of disturbing a patch of engine oil, which in turn released memories of the war, is remarkably similar to events in the film, which depict the fictional veteran kicking an oil stain and recoiling at the embodied memories that the act conjures.

However, the suggestion that the sites have been 'invested' with the 'atmosphere of the past' merely through the tropes of popular culture dismisses the significance of the materiality of the sites in the formation of this semiotic landscape. The ghosts that reside at Thorpe Abbots have not been inserted into the landscape like props on a movie set but have emerged as affects; the result of a surfacing of personal and collective memories, discourse, materiality, presence and absence. The importance of the relationship between the immaterial and the material in the staging of pilgrimage is articulated by Lande, who argues that for many Eighth Air Force personnel, English bases were the

*'worn footlockers that contain life's fondest memories and greatest tragedies. Although now ghost towns, the stations live on in the minds of those who survived - composite scenes re-created from diaries now disintegrating at their folds, brittle yellow newspaper articles, threadbare uniforms with winged-eight shoulder insignias, and old songs'*<sup>529</sup>

For many veterans who revisited these 'worn footlockers' after the war, the void between their imagined memories, increasingly congealed by nostalgia on the one hand, and the 'disintegrating' materiality of the site on the one hand, presented an uncanny disjuncture. This feeling of disassociation is similar to the experiences of Holocaust survivors returning to Auschwitz. Esther Jilovsky, for example, argues that the discrepancy between the vivid memories of survivors and what they discovered on their return to the camp, emphasises the temporal distance between the object and subject.<sup>530</sup> At airfields where wartime buildings were torn down, runways torn up, and the land returned to agriculture, the reactions of returning veterans were palpably different from those who return to bases where efforts have been made to preserve wartime

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<sup>527</sup>Edwards, *Allies in Memory*, 202-203.

<sup>528</sup>Freeman, *Airfields of the Eighth*, 5.

<sup>529</sup>Lande, *Somewhere in England*, 12.

<sup>530</sup> Esther Jilovsky. *Remembering the Holocaust: Generations, Witnessing and Place* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 27.

features. When Hiram Drache, a veteran of 457th Bomb Group returned to his former base at Conington, he was disappointed to find that nothing had been preserved, 'I stood stunned as I observed a ploughed field with not one memento of those days that were once a highlight of the lives of so many. We kicked the grass and looked among the trees in search of one small token of those days. There was nothing.<sup>531</sup>'

The accounts of veterans returning to Thorpe Abbots in the 1960s and 1970s suggest that even with the survival of many of the base's wartime structures, the incompleteness of the assemblage and the lack of any type of interpretation was enough to produce a sense of pathos and disappointment amid the disordered memories that arose from the ruins. 'I walked around with a map of the base and tried to identify the buildings' recalled 100th BG veteran Roger Lyons, 'I found the hospital. Couldn't find the barracks site for sure, but when I got near it I remembered how we played ball there in the evenings.<sup>532</sup>' In the anthology *Bloody Hundredth*, published in 1979, 100th veteran Horace Varian explains that 'many 100th Groupers have visited the old base at Thorpe Abbots. Only a few have written about it, always nostalgically and often with a note of disappointment because they could not orient themselves.<sup>533</sup>' The sense of being lost in a landscape that is familiar and yet vastly changed is evident in the account of a return visit Horace Varian made in 1972. Varian notes the survival of most of the runways, hardstands and a few Nissen huts. But even these features do not seem to match their corresponding memories, 'The control tower stands just as we remember, though it seems smaller', recalled Varian, noting that 'the whole Base, surprisingly, seemed larger than it was in my recollection'.<sup>534</sup>

One of the earliest veterans to record a visit to the base after the war was John A Clark, who made his first return to Thorpe Abbots in 1962, seventeen years after leaving the base. Despite being somewhat perplexed to find that there were no signposts, Clark realised that he was able to 'recall virtually every path and road'. After giving his wife a tour of the airfield, he set out for the domestic site,

*'one place I especially wanted to show her was the old Nissen Hut where I lived. I found its location easily but discovered that only a few days before it had been dismantled... This was great disappointment as I had hoped I might have recovered a 'mural' I had drawn in black crayon on a wall panel above my bed.'*<sup>535</sup>

In Clark's experience of the return, the disappointment did not arise from being unable to orient himself within the landscape, as other veterans had expressed, but rather from the realisation that the building that contained his most personal memories of the war had been demolished. As well as reinforcing the significance of muralism in connecting personnel to their living space through the identification practices and creative expression, it also speaks to the enduring importance of the living quarters as the places where

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<sup>531</sup> Lande, *Somewhere in England*, 13.

<sup>532</sup> Lande, *Somewhere in England*, 12.

<sup>533</sup> Varian, *The Bloody Hundredth*, 118.

<sup>534</sup> Varian, *The Bloody Hundredth*, 120.

<sup>535</sup> John A Clark. *An Eighth Air Force Combat Diary* (First Page Publications, 2005), 247.

enduring memories were formed. On a return visit to Thorpe Abbots in 2017, Joe Urice revisited his former living site, over seventy years after he departed his barrack hut. Despite the passage of time, Joe was able to identify the exact location of his hut (now just an imprint in the grass) and even the position of his bunk.<sup>536</sup> Despite the enduring imprint of the affective map on the memory of some veterans, the sense that the American veterans could do little to halt the onslaught of time on the airfield landscape, and indeed their own fading memories, is nevertheless prevalent in accounts of visits made prior to the restoration of the control tower. The airfield landscape in the post-war years can therefore be defined by its jarring absence. For the locals who inhabited the landscape, the absent presences pervaded the landscape in the decaying material remains. Meanwhile, for the returning Americans, memories of the war which had been so firmly articulated through the affective language of the translocal community, were dissonantly disjointed by the



*Figure 23 100th BG Cew Chief Dewey Christopher points out the location of the hardstand he worked on at Thorpe Abbots, June 2019 (Source: Author)*

physical absences in the landscape; a disorientation which served to highlight the passage of time.

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<sup>536</sup> "Joe Urice giving a tour of his barracks site", *100<sup>th</sup> BG Foundation Youtube Channel*, Uploaded 17 May 2017 [accessed 9<sup>th</sup> August 2022].

## From Haunted to Hallowed: Rebalancing absent presences through restoration and transnational memorialisation

Heritage and museum studies have increasingly engaged with the co-existence of absence and presence in the production of 'affective heritage', a process which places the impetus on visitors 'to *feel* meaning as it is produced through embodied encounters with and within memorial spaces.<sup>537</sup> As sites where visitors are encouraged to *feel* absence and *sense* presence, memorial museums are defined by their affective spaces that aim to simultaneously contextualise, curate and commemorate trauma.<sup>538</sup> This task is paradoxical, for at the same time that trauma 'hauntingly calls for its articulation; on the other hand, it is absent since it cannot be completely represented/articulated', in the words of David Kerler.<sup>539</sup> The representational elusiveness of trauma, and indeed of affect, has had a significant impact on the decisions regarding how sites trauma and loss are memorialised.<sup>540</sup> Despite this inherent challenge, the absent presences at memorial museums have created possibilities to engage with visitors on an emotional and intellectual level. At the World Trade Center Memorial Museum, for example, research has shown how visitors trace the emotional geographies of the site through confrontations with the absent presences of the twin towers.<sup>541</sup> The importance of negotiating affective experiences has also become increasingly important in the commemoration of war, and the multiple registers of emotion that it represents, particularly for conflicts that have passed beyond living memory.<sup>542</sup> Waterton and Dittmer have interrogated how representation, including the use of lighting, sounds and movement, combine to create an affective assemblage at the Australian War Memorial that serves to highlight the uncanny absence of the nation's war dead and the presence of its ghosts.<sup>543</sup>

At Thorpe Abbots, the creation of the memorial museum did not seek to emphasise the uncanniness of the absence/presence that existed in the ruins of the base, but to resolve it. The physical restoration of the control tower by the British volunteers, in tandem with the preservation of collective memories by the translocal community, worked to rebalance the absence/presence inflicted by temporal and spatial distance. Whilst *Splasher Six* circulated the emotional history of the Bomb Group - filling the silence left by deceased veterans - the memorial museum redressed the absence left by the departed Americans by creating a

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<sup>537</sup> Jacque Micieli-Voutsinas, "An absent presence: Affective heritage at the National September 11th Memorial & Museum", *Emotion, Space and Society*, Vol.24 (2017), 93-104.

<sup>538</sup> *ibid*

<sup>539</sup> David Kerler, "Trauma and the (Im)Possibility of Representation: Patrick McGrath's *Trauma*", *Cult. Land. Represent* Vol.11, No.2 (2013), 84.

<sup>540</sup> Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (London: Berg, 2007), 6.

<sup>541</sup> Jacque Micieli-Voutsinas, 'An absent presence: Affective heritage at the National September 11th Memorial & Museum', *Emotion, Space and Society* Vol. 24 (2017), 93-104.

<sup>542</sup> Jay Winter, "Museums and the Representation of War", *Museum and Society* Vol. 10, No.3 (2012), 23.

<sup>543</sup> Emma Waterton and Jason Dittmer, "The Museum as Assemblage: Bringing Forth Affect at the Australian War Memorial", *Museum Management and Curatorship*, Vol.29, No.2 (2014), 122–39.

sanctioned reminder of their presence. Indeed, at Thorpe Abbots, the desire to preserve and curate the affective landscape of the former air base and its so-called 'presence' were what Freeman described as the 'soul of the beginnings' of the control tower museum project in the late 1970s.<sup>544</sup> Just as Pat Everson vowed that 'she would never forget' the Americans who had long since vacated the landscape, the beginnings of the museum at Thorpe Abbots were to be found in a promise made by Mike Harvey - the museum's founder - to commemorate 'the sacrifice made by the men of the 100<sup>th</sup> for America and England' as he stared out from the derelict control tower at Thorpe Abbots<sup>545</sup>. Within a few months, Harvey and a group of like-minded enthusiasts had secured a 1,000-year lease of the control tower and had begun restoring the building to its wartime condition as 'a living memorial to American personnel who served at the base'.

The decision to commemorate the American presence at Thorpe Abbots in the form of a 'living memorial' was made amid what Winter calls the 'memory boom' of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>546</sup> It was during this period that the children of veterans set out to learn from the trauma of the Second World War, particularly the atrocities of the Holocaust. While the fear of forgetting certainly lay at the heart of commemoration efforts in East Anglia, the trajectory of these volunteer-led projects can more closely be associated with the 'living' war memorials of earlier decades, where grieving communities sought to sanctify the memory of their own dead. As sites that are both profane (museum) and sacred (memorial), the purpose of these memorials was multi-functional: to educate and inform, commemorate, and affect. By restoring buildings and curating personal and collective memories of the war, the local communities who established and supported the airfield museums and memorials were incorporating the history of the Americans into their own commemorative landscapes, as seen in the incorporation of the 'Fallen of 8<sup>th</sup> Bomber Command USAAF' into the parish war memorial at Shipdham. At Thorpe Abbots, a sense of ownership is perhaps best shown in the initial reluctance of the local museum volunteers to accept financial help from the 100<sup>th</sup> BG Association, eventually relenting when the Americans reassured them that the museum 'was theirs, their way of paying their gratitude'.<sup>547</sup>

During the 1970s and 1980s, memorial museums sprang up at several other former Eighth Air Force bases, including Parham, Flixton, Seething and Rougham. As well as preserving fading collective memories of the air war, these commemorative efforts provided a personal means of preserving the affective connections that individuals had established with the Americans and the materiality of their presence during the war. Childhood nostalgia lay at the heart of these efforts to pull the past into the present. For Pat Everson, one way of restoring the absence of the Americans at Seething was to fill the void with memories – her own and others. Beginning in the 1980s, Everson began writing to American veterans asking for wartime photos and stories. Through this correspondence, she was able to get answers to the questions she never had the

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<sup>544</sup> "Roger Freeman speaks at Thorpe Abbots", *Splasher Six*, Summer 1986.

<sup>545</sup> "100<sup>th</sup> establishes museum memorials", *Splasher Six*, Summer 1986.

<sup>546</sup> Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (Yale University Press, 2006), 1.

<sup>547</sup> *Splasher Six*, Spring 1988.

chance to ask as a child, at the same time as keeping the promise she had made on the runway that she 'would never forget' the Americans.<sup>548</sup> Everson's account is representative of the role that restoration, rather than preservation, played in commemoration efforts during this time. The urgency to restore the fading presence of the Americans is not only captured in Everson's attempt to collate their memories of the war, but in the ardent efforts of volunteers to repair the disappearing material remnants of this presence.

The decision to renovate the derelict control tower at Thorpe Abbots, rather than one of the many other abandoned structures on the airfield site, is itself testament to the symbolic importance of the building as a 'silent witness' to the events of the past. Archaeologist John Schofield argues that control towers, as the nerve centres of wartime bases, are important signifiers of the air war, whilst also serving as catalysts for memory.<sup>549</sup> The inherent role of these buildings as mnemonics and memorials has made them the focus of national preservation efforts. According to English Heritage, fifty per cent of control towers that existed during the Second World War survive in some form today; a percentage much higher than is seen with other forms of wartime structures.<sup>550</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that it was a control tower chosen as the subject for replication by a group of veterans involved in the Eighth Air Force Memorial Museum Foundation, Inc, during the 1990s. Built to original RAF plans, the control tower was constructed in Dayton, Ohio as a memorial museum to the Eighth Air Force.<sup>551</sup>

Despite attempts to harness the symbolic significance of the control tower in its reproduction, it could be argued that the significance of these buildings lies not only in their presence as looming symbols of the air war, but in the absences that exist in the wider assemblage of the airfield landscape. As veteran Earl Benham noted, the control tower can never be fully comprehended without remembering those 'who did not return'.<sup>552</sup> As a touchstone of memory and a tangible link between the past and present, the control tower is inherently tied to the wider airfield landscape. As a structure designed for the purpose of looking out, the building offers those who climb onto its balcony an unrivalled view of the airfield vista. From here, the 'dismembered and haphazard' layout of the base – a topography that is purposely difficult to orientate on the ground - comes into focus.<sup>553</sup> Despite the incremental loss of the runway and surrounding buildings, the ability to identify where features once were -whether in the form of gaps in the treeline or depreciations in the landscape – combined with the unencumbered open skies and flat terrain, invites the events and emotions of the past to come alive. As Mike Faley described on one of his trips to Thorpe Abbots, 'When you stand on that tower and look over the fields... you can almost hear those engines struggling to take off,

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<sup>548</sup> "One woman's devotion keeps memory of WWII unit burning brightly", *Stars and Stripes*, <https://www.stripes.com/news/one-woman-s-devotion-keeps-memory-of-wwii-unit-burning-brightly-1.239644> [accessed 1st February 2020].

<sup>549</sup> John Schofield. *Aftermath: Readings in the Archaeology of Recent Conflict* (Springer Science & Business Media, 2009), 55.

<sup>550</sup> Schofield, *Aftermath*, 56.

<sup>551</sup> "Control tower correspondence", Box 130, Eighth Air Force Archive, *Penn State University*.

<sup>552</sup> Earl Benham, "The Control Tower", 2004.886.2, *National Museum of the Mighty Eighth*.

<sup>553</sup> Kaplan, *One Last Look*, 43.

the squeak of the brakes as they follow each other down the perimeter track towards take off position. Most of all, you feel you are at a special place.’<sup>554</sup>



*Figure 24 The glasshouse at the top of the control tower, 2020 (Source: Author)*

The control tower therefore serves an important role as a signifier and a mediator within the spectral landscape. By not only preserving the structure, but actively reversing the process of ruination that had rendered it derelict in the first place, the volunteers renegotiated the balance between absence and presence. In turn, the act of restoration served as an affective practice, playing a commemorative and emotional function as much as it did a practical one. This is emphasised by the endless nature of the refurbishment. Forty years after beginning building work, Ron Batley, the museum’s curator, emphasises that the restoration of the site will never be entirely complete. ‘It’s never-ending... It’s like the Forth Bridge, because by the time you’ve finished and got to one end you have to start again.’<sup>555</sup> At Thorpe Abbots, the experiences of carrying out regular maintenance combine with the volunteer’s own personal history and the collective narrative of the site to produce a predictable set of emotions, a sense of belonging being chief among them. One volunteer, who makes the 100-mile round trip to Thorpe Abbots every week to cut the grass outside the control tower, views his physical contribution as a way of personally remembering those

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<sup>554</sup> “Echoes of the Mighty Eighth”, Michael Faley, [https://100thbg.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=500:echoes-of-the-mighty-eighth&catid=8&Itemid=120](https://100thbg.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=500:echoes-of-the-mighty-eighth&catid=8&Itemid=120), [accessed 20<sup>th</sup> March 2021].

<sup>555</sup> “A Virtual Discussion with Ronald Batley and Richard Gibson”, *100<sup>th</sup> BG Foundation Youtube Channel*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjLDEc1unwk>, uploaded 4 December 2020, [accessed 20<sup>th</sup> March 2021].

who served at the base. In turn, he describes how the camaraderie of the volunteers makes him feel 'like part of a family'.<sup>556</sup>

The discovery of physical traces of the past, still made from time to time as volunteers strip back the patina of the post-war years, can produce unexpected moments of affective intensity, when time seems to contract. One day while working on the exterior of the tower, volunteer Richard Gibson remembered a story he had heard about the malfunction of a ball turret on the airfield, which had resulted in bullets being fired uncontrollably in the direction of the control tower. The restoration 'suddenly got much more exciting' as Gibson realised that the pockmarks he was repairing in the building's render may not have been caused by frost damage, but by stray bullets.<sup>557</sup>

The strengthening of affective connections between volunteers and the materiality of the base, through restorative practices that have ingrained locality onto the bodies of the participants as well as the social and material fabric of the site, has played a significant impact on the articulation of the spectral at Thorpe Abbots. The uncanniness that once arose from interactions with the absent presences of the base vanished as volunteers familiarised themselves with the fine details of the control tower. As well as compiling an inventory of the building, volunteers were also amassing historical information about the base, aided by the increased interest shown by US veterans, such as Bob Spangler, who made several trips to Thorpe Abbots during the restoration. Spangler was impressed by the hard work and dedication of the volunteers, writing that they 'all work like they are building a house for themselves'.<sup>558</sup> The idea that the volunteers were carrying out a process of home-making at Thorpe Abbots has more resonance than Spangler's comment was intended to imply. While the museum at Thorpe Abbots is rarely conceptualised as a home by the volunteers, the restoration and maintenance of the control tower nevertheless represents an important act of domestication. By transforming the ruin into a habitable building, furnishing it with powerful memory-objects, and dedicating it as a memorial, the volunteers have built a perpetual home, not for themselves, but for the personal, collective and imagined memories that once haunted the base.

For the American visitors, expressions of gratitude that punctuated letters between the stateside Association and the British museum suggested that this process itself represented a symbolic act of memorialisation to the Americans, as much as it did to the British. As Edwards argues, it was the act of marking a place as 'different, special, *sacred*' that helped to transform the former bases into hallowed ground.<sup>559</sup> As well as contributing to the aura of the memorial museum as a sacred space, the process of restoring and dedicating the memorial museum contributed to the sense that the volunteers were resisting, and in some cases, contracting time. As Edward Casey argues, honouring 'seeks to preserve and stabilize the

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<sup>556</sup> Interview with museum volunteer, 10 November 2020.

<sup>557</sup> "A Virtual Discussion with Ronald Batley and Richard Gibson", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjLDEc1unwk>, uploaded 4 December 2020.

<sup>558</sup> "Home Base' Thorpe Abbots", *Splasher Six*, Spring 1988.

<sup>559</sup> Edwards, *Allies in Memory*, 205.



memory of the honoree, and to do so in a time-binding, invariant manner'.<sup>560</sup> Whereas some veterans had been struck by the disorientating sense of the decades passing, the preservation of the tower helped to contract this temporal distance, and the 'fear of forgetting' that hung over the Second World War veteran community in the 1970s and 80s.<sup>561</sup> Schacter and Welker argue that the preservation of 'memory serves to connect individuals not only to their pasts but also to their futures.'<sup>562</sup> Indeed, letters and memorandum from American veterans on the future of the memorial museum suggest that a great motivation for the preservation of their wartime base and associated artefacts was not only the desire to maintain connections with the past, but also with each other. During his speech at the 1981 dedication of the control museum, veteran Horace Varian remarked that it was the relationality between the veterans, the dead, and the local British people that was at the heart of the commemoration process.

*'It seems to me that that which endures is human relationships...the instruments of war...are tremendously important, but they are passing, they are transitory. The things that endure, that matter, I'm convinced, are the human relationships.'*<sup>563</sup>

The transformation of the site from a spectral ruin seething with uncontrolled memories to a 'living memorial' where affect was to some extent curated, is brought to life in the 'ghost stories' that emerged during the restoration process. Sam Hurry, who had lived on the airfield as a boy during the war, described an encounter he had experienced while working in the control tower,

*'I was alone in the Tower in the ground floor front room, at about 1:45 p.m, paint brush in hand, a breeze came through the room then noises started, with aircraft engines, radios (RT) followed by men shouting.'*<sup>564</sup>

Other volunteers reluctantly came forward with their own stories of unexplained phenomena and of a forlorn presence that pervaded the tower during the restoration. It was the museum's official dedication, presided over by Thorpe Abbotts' vicar and the 100<sup>th</sup> BG Foundation's Horace Varian, that brought about 'a different atmosphere at the Memorial'. 'Who knows...', volunteer Sam Hurry pondered, 'perhaps our long-departed friends of the 100th are now finally at rest, knowing that we in England have made this Memorial to them. May they rest in peace. All is now quiet indeed.'<sup>565</sup>

Edensor argues that the organisation of museums imprints memory onto space through regulatory

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<sup>560</sup> Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1987), 336.

<sup>561</sup> Edwards, *Allies in Memory*, 132.

<sup>562</sup> Daniel L. Schacter and Michael Welker, "Memory and connection: remembering the past and imagining the future in individuals, groups, and cultures," *Memory Studies*, Vol.9, No.3 (2016), 242.

<sup>563</sup> "Horace Varian speaks at the dedication of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Control Tower", audio recording from May 1981 dedication of the 100<sup>th</sup> BG control tower, *100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Foundation*.

<sup>564</sup> "A Strange Experience at Thorpe Abbotts", *Splasher Six*, Spring 1982.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid*

regimes which determine where and how things, activities, and people should be placed.<sup>566</sup> These organisational efforts exorcise ghosts that might otherwise wander freely in ruinous, disordered sites.<sup>567</sup> In the case of Thorpe Abbots, it could be argued that the authorisation of the site as a memorial and museum by its dedication into both the local memory-scape (represented by the parish vicar's involvement in the dedication) and the assemblage of the translocal veteran community (legitimised by the attendance of veterans at the ceremony) resolved the uncanniness that characterised post-war experiences at the base. This transformation was not achieved by forcefully evicting the ghosts from the building, but by domesticating them. The presence that had previously unnerved visitors was qualified as a 'special atmosphere' and the ghosts legitimised as an important justification for the museum's memorial function as a final and lasting home for the dead of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. Indeed, as De Certeau asserts, haunted places are the only ones that are habitable.<sup>568</sup> Among the volunteers, there is the sense that the ghosts are at home in the control tower. Some even greet the ghosts with a curtesy 'Hello, Boys' when entering the building.

The significance of the base as the site where memories endure is illustrated by the support shown to the museum when veterans were consulted on the possibility of creating a state-side repository for 100<sup>th</sup> BG memorabilia. 'I ask where should a state-side museum be?' exclaimed veteran Arthur Edmonston, 'The best home the 100th Bomb Group ever had was T/A!!! Let's keep all memorabilia there.'<sup>569</sup> Charles Thompson elaborated, arguing that 'the 100th earned its distinction in England at Thorp Abbot [sic] with English life and nostalgic memories of friendly people, strange money, warm beer, bicycles, etc. This location and atmosphere creates a mood that enhances the value of this museum'.<sup>570</sup> By ingraining these nostalgic memories onto the fabric of the control tower through the acts of restoration, organisation and interpretation, the British caretakers presented the US veterans with a permanent focal point for commemoration. The creation of a local 'living memorial' fits in with a wider trend in American commemoration practices. 'The memory of war', Susan Sontag argues, 'is mostly local', referring to the role of the community in memorialising the war to fit its own needs.<sup>571</sup> For the American veterans, it was the vernacular, community-focused preservation, rather than monumental construction, that led the translocal community to concentrate their commemorative efforts on the living memorial at Thorpe Abbots, as opposed to the nationally sanctioned Eighth Air Force at the American Battle Monuments' cemetery in Madingley, Cambridge. The significance of the 'sacred' battlefield in the American psyche is one of the reasons why Thorpe

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<sup>566</sup> Tim Edensor, "The ghosts of industrial ruins: ordering and disordering memory in excessive space", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol.23, No.6 (2005), 833.

<sup>567</sup> Edensor, 2005: 829.

<sup>568</sup> Michael de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Oakland, University of California Press, 2002), 108.

<sup>569</sup> Letter from Arthur D. Edmonston to Charlie Wilson, c. 1990, *100th Bomb Group Memorial Museum archive*

<sup>570</sup> *ibid*

<sup>571</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Status and Giroux, 2003), 23.

Abbotts, rather than Madingley, is the designated 'hallowed ground' of the 100<sup>th</sup> BG. This viewpoint was articulated by Abraham Lincoln in relation to the battlefields of the Civil War, when he asserted that 'we cannot consecrate – we cannot hallow - this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract'.<sup>572</sup> The sentiment was reaffirmed by 381<sup>st</sup> BG veteran, John Comer, who asserted that 'to me this ground was a hallowed as Lincoln's Gettysburg [...] it was from here that so many of my friends, some of them the finest men I have known, began their last flight'.<sup>573</sup>

Rather than standing as a witness to ceremony, the memorial museum at Thorpe Abbotts offered veterans the chance to participate in vernacular commemorative efforts. In the museum's memorial chapel, situated in an arched alcove on the ground floor of the museum, is a book listing the names of the 750 men of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group who died during the war, most of whom have no final resting place. Like other 'Memorials to the Missing', the carefully transcribed names of the dead play a symbolic role as the material presence that compensates for the absence of their bodies.<sup>574</sup> It is a function that has historical precedent, a seminal example being the commemoration of the British First World War dead at the Cenotaph in Whitehall, a structure intended to symbolise each and every soldier. The unveiling of the permanent memorial in 1920 occurred in unison with the interring of the body of the Unknown Soldier in Westminster Abbey; a synchronous act that emphasised the importance of the individual in national commemorations of the Great War and the relationship between the absent and the present.<sup>575</sup> At Thorpe Abbotts, the affectivity of the memorial museum emerges from the entanglement of the individual and the collective. While the names of the dead and the display of personal objects serve as an important recognition of individual sacrifice, it is in correlation with the semiotic airfield landscape that they gain their true affective power. This may explain why it is not the sanctified setting of the memorial chapel that most visitors experience as the transformative moment of their trip, but at the top of the tower, where the affect of home is transmitted through the entwining of materiality, personal and collective memories.

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<sup>572</sup> Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, quoted in Michael A. Stern, *Places of Commemoration: Search for Identity and Landscape Design* (Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2001), 108.

<sup>573</sup> John Comer, *Combat Crew: The Story of 25 Missions Over North West Europe* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown Book Group Limited, 1993), pp. xi–xii.

<sup>574</sup> Lisa M. Budreau, *Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America, 1919-1933* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 29.

<sup>575</sup> Thomas W. Laqueur, "Memory and Naming in the Great War" in John R. Gillis, *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 150-167.



Figure 25 The Memorial Chapel at the 100th BG Memorial Museum, 2020 (Source: Author)

The sanctity of the affective assemblage at Thorpe Abbots is demonstrated by the decision of some veterans to have their remains ‘returned’ to the site. For former 100<sup>th</sup> BG Commander John Bennett, the performance of this ‘return’ was carefully choreographed for maximum symbolic value. Following his death in 1994, the veteran’s ashes were ceremoniously released from a plane flying low over the runway. According to Bennett’s daughter, her father’s ‘return to Thorpe Abbots’ took place ‘at precisely 1500, exactly after the last words of the eulogy were spoken. It was perfect. He loved it! And now, he is at peace in England’.<sup>576</sup> For others, it was the dedicated space of the control tower that presented the most fitting resting place. Joe Armanini was one of the few airmen assigned to his squadron to survive the war. Despite his harrowing experience (or perhaps because of it), Armanini requested that his ashes be brought back to Thorpe Abbots on his death. Catalogued within the museum’s collection, the urn is situated in the museum’s memorial chapel next to the book containing the names of the missing. The position of Armanini’s human remains alongside the names of his dead comrades is a direct replication of the US practice of burying veterans in military cemeteries alongside the bodies of comrades killed in action, most notably at Arlington National Cemetery, a site vaunted within American society as ‘the Nation’s most hallowed

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<sup>576</sup> “Return to Thorpe Abbots”, *Splasher Six*, Summer 1994.

ground'.<sup>577</sup> Marked with uniform headstones, the graves of those who died in combat are indistinguishable from those who survived the war, taking their place within the sanctified narrative of national commemoration. The egalitarian remembrance of US service personnel, demonstrated in the display of Armanini's human remains alongside the names of his dead comrades, creates an affective assemblage that gives equal weight to the veteran as it does the fallen soldier.



Figure 26 Dedication plaque at the entrance to Thorpe Abbots control tower (Source: Author)

It could therefore be argued that it is the opportunity for veterans to shape how the dead are remembered at Thorpe Abbots – and indeed, how their own lives are immortalised that has helped secure the site's continued significance within the translocal community. In her book *Memorial Mania*, Erika Doss suggests that in the post-war years the commemoration of the war was focused on the creation of 'living memorials' that would both 'honor the dead and serve the living', including hospitals, parks, stadiums, libraries, and museums.<sup>578</sup> The localisation of commemoration provided the opportunity for veterans and their communities to influence how the war was remembered. Through the network of translocality, Thorpe Abbots also became the recipient of its translocal

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<sup>577</sup> Robert M. Poole, *On Hallowed Ground: The Story of Arlington National Cemetery* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009)

<sup>578</sup> Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 191.

commemoration efforts. The easiest and perhaps most impactful means of influencing this transnational memorial narrative has been through the donation of objects to the museum. In 1985, four years after the dedication of the 100th Bomb Group Memorial Museum at Thorpe Abbots, a rallying cry was published in *Splasher Six* requesting that veterans do their 'part to keep' to keep wartime 'memories alive' by donating memorabilia to the newly-created museum.<sup>579</sup> 'We can all serve in our ways. We can send pictures, medals, diaries, our stories on cassette tapes...or whatever memorabilia we still retain,' remarked the editor<sup>580</sup> For those unable to send items, monetary donations were encouraged, 'Americans are criticized for materialism, but there is a material way we can all help, and it is a good way. We can sign checks'.<sup>581</sup> Like the remittances paid by diasporic communities to relatives in their homeland, the donation of money to the museum served as a symbolic gesture that simultaneously legitimised and assisted the work of the museum, conveying the donor's allegiance to the translocal community.

One object that is particularly illustrative of the transnational commemorative efforts at Thorpe Abbots is a wooden grave marker on display in a recess of the chapel. The cross was discovered in the attic of a German church in 2014, having previously served as a marker for the graves of two 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group crew members killed during a 1944 mission to Schweinfurt. The bodies of the men had been repatriated to the US and the curate, keen to find an appropriate home for the now defunct marker, contacted the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Foundation, who in turn arranged for the 100<sup>th</sup> ARW to transport the grave marker to Mildenhall. The cross was then ceremoniously 'returned' to the museum at Thorpe Abbots, where it was placed on permanent display in the memorial chapel.<sup>582</sup> The circulatory nature of this process and the involvement of multiple bodies in its enactment is a fascinating example of the complex processes of commemoration that continue to take place at Thorpe Abbots. Research into the return of temporary grave markers to Britain from the battlefields of the First World War has demonstrated that the repatriation of these crosses symbolised the return of the dead to their home communities.<sup>583</sup> In turn, the display of the object (usually within a public memorial setting) tangibly connected the grieving community with the distant burial site. The grave marker at Thorpe Abbots not only overcomes the distance to the aerial battlefield of Germany, but also to the human remains that had been repatriated to the US. The involvement of the US Foundation, the 100<sup>th</sup> ARW, and the Memorial Museum in facilitating the return served as an important transnational form of

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<sup>579</sup> "The Thorpe Abbots Museum and the 100th Association: A Grand Friendship", *Splasher Six*, Winter 1985-86.

<sup>580</sup> *ibid*

<sup>581</sup> *ibid*

<sup>582</sup> "Bloody Hundredth' members' grave marker returned to Thorpe Abbots", *RAF Mildenhall*, <https://www.mildenhall.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/728925/bloody-hundredth-members-grave-marker-returned-to-thorpe-abbotts> [accessed 10 March 2021].

<sup>583</sup> "The Grave Markers", *The Returned*, <http://thereturned.co.uk/the-grave-markers> [accessed 29 April 2021].

commemoration, reinforcing the position of each organisation within the memorial landscape of Thorpe Abbots.

Paul Williams argues that memorial museums fulfil their role by bringing together communities in the process of commemoration and heritage production. This collaboration can go some way to healing individual and collective trauma.<sup>584</sup> The return of personal memory objects, ranging from wartime letters to medal collections, acted as a vernacular act of memorialisation that helped veterans come to terms with their own grief. In 1983, former 100th Bomb Group mechanic Virgil Smith donated a watch he had found while cleaning a B-17 after a mission.<sup>585</sup> The watch belonged to the deceased navigator, Lt Harold Becker, who had received fatal wounds to the head. While the psychological experience of the Eighth Air Force's ground personnel has not been the subject of any thorough analysis, oral testimonies, recalling harrowing accounts of mechanics hosing out brain matter from the interior of aircraft, suggest that encounters with the aftermath of air combat were often traumatic experiences for those left to clear up.<sup>586</sup> Attached to Smith's donation letter, was an article describing the frantic scene as ambulance crews brought out the body of Lt Becker from the plane. Although it stops short of describing the full horrors of the scene, the final, poignant line reads: 'The ground men, waiting to get into the plane and make the repairs, watched silently.'<sup>587</sup> By repatriating an item imbued with the memories of that tragic event to its final home at Thorpe Abbots, Smith - no longer the silent bystander - took autonomy over his own grieving. Like the repatriation of war dead, the agency to determine the final home of memory objects amounted to a commemorative and personal ritual for dealing with loss. In her study of war souvenirs of the First World War, Higonett suggests that 'people use such objects to tame death itself. Vehicles of the uncanny, souvenirs symbolize a memory of that which cannot be known except by those who are already dead.'<sup>588</sup> With the memories of the watch's original owner silenced, Becker may have been able to inscribe his own trauma onto the object. Its symbolic disposal signifies an effort to lay both his, and Becker's, memories to rest. As a hallowed site given reverence by the events that had unfolded within its sightline, the control tower served as a mnemonic for the group's collective loss. However, it was through the affective assemblage of material objects displayed within, each relating to the lives of individuals who had served at the base, that the notion of the memorial as a spiritual and perpetual home for the collective memories of the imagined community was realised.

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<sup>584</sup> Paul Williams. *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (London: Berg, 2007), 25.

<sup>585</sup> Letter from Virgil Smith to the 100th BG Memorial Museum, 14 March 1983, *100th BG Memorial Museum*.

<sup>586</sup> Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare*, 149.

<sup>587</sup> Letter from Virgil Smith to the 100th BG Memorial Museum, 14 March 1983, *100th BG Memorial Museum*.

<sup>588</sup> Margaret R. Higonnet, "Souvenirs of Death", *Journal of War & Culture Studies* Vol.1, 77.

## ‘They Went Back’: The ‘Return’ to the 100th BG Memorial Museum

In a 1986 speech made at Thorpe Abbots, 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group veteran Robert Rosenthal told the assembled crowd that ‘we have come home...this was our base during the war. We lived here. We fought from here. We flew from here. We spilled our blood here and died here’.<sup>589</sup> For Rosenthal, returning to the English base where he had spent two years of the war amounted to - in his words - a ‘pilgrimage’. This was a sentiment echoed by countless other Eighth Air Force veterans who made the journey back to East Anglia from the 1980s onwards, following a tourist trail that had become well-trodden. Indeed, Rosenthal’s speech came at a pivotal moment in the post-war chronology of Thorpe Abbots. Although the ghosts of the past still clung to the airfield, transatlantic commemoration efforts meant that the landscape they inhabited was no longer haunted, but hallowed - the one-time ethereal and eerie ghosts having become sanctioned features in the collective narrative of the 100th. Likewise, the journeys made by veterans to Thorpe Abbots had undergone their own process of sanctification, becoming ‘pilgrimages’ steeped in symbolic meaning and emotional sentiment.

As battlefield pilgrimages, the return journeys of US veterans to the airfields of East Anglia follows an American tradition that was born out of the visits of Civil War soldiers to Gettysburg in the late nineteenth-century and cemented by the mass pilgrimages of Great War veterans to the battlefields of the Western Front.<sup>590</sup> As tour companies battled for business and souvenir stands emerged from the ruins of Ypres and Arras, commercialisation and commemoration became interwoven into the cultural representation of ‘the return’ in the interwar period, which Mosse describes as the moment when ‘battlefield pilgrimages met battlefield tourism’.<sup>591</sup>

While the return of Second World War veterans to Europe in the immediate post-war years never equalled the mass pilgrimages undertaken by Great War soldiers in the 1920s, the narrative of the return had re-emerged by the late 1970s, as Eighth Air Force veterans began to descend on the East Anglian landscape in increasing numbers.<sup>592</sup> The surge in visits by US veterans in this period can be explained by a series of push and pull factors. On the one hand, there was the growing desire among retirement-age veterans to capture nostalgic memories of their youth; while on the other, the intensive commercialisation and commemoration of the American presence, represented in tourist brochures and newly dedicated memorials and museums, encouraged and facilitated the return of veterans. At Thorpe Abbots, the opening of the museum provided a focus for commemorative efforts, reframing the return from a wandering journey through the decaying airfield landscape to a purposeful pilgrimage as survivor-witnesses.

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<sup>589</sup> “Rosie makes speech at Varian Dedication”, *Splasher Six*, Fall 1986.

<sup>590</sup> Edwards, *Allies in Memory*, 211.

<sup>591</sup> George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 126.

<sup>592</sup> Edwards, *Allies in Memory*, 132.



By the early 1980s the itinerary of 'the return' had become canonised in popular memory through literature and film, including the iconic opening scenes of *Twelve O'Clock High* and the evocative introduction to Len Deighton's novel *Goodbye Mickey Mouse*, where a busload of American veterans return to their old base.<sup>593</sup> Even as Rosenthal gave his speech at the 1986 reunion at Thorpe Abbots, a camera crew was on hand to capture the day's events, following veterans as they explored the control tower and met with local people. Copies of the finished film, *The Yanks Return to England* - narrated by none other than Roger Freeman - were sold by mail-order through the 100th Bomb Group Association, providing the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group with a visual representation of the return to Thorpe Abbots. With this discourse in mind, it could be argued that veterans increasingly experienced their homecoming through a pre-defined, nostalgia-tinted lens, which framed a tamed landscape now devoid of ghosts. While many of the returnees to Thorpe Abbots described their experiences in terms that echoed the imagery and registers of *Twelve O'Clock High*, that is not to say that their encounters with the materiality of the base were any less affective. Rather, the cultural memory of the return is better viewed as a context in a much larger assemblage, informing how visitors view the site, but not necessarily obscuring it. Writing about medieval pilgrims to Jerusalem, Ousterhout argues that words and images, as embodied memories, played a pivotal role in encouraging the construction of meaning, explaining that 'pilgrims went to these sites not just to see the actual place but, using it as a powerful cue, to 'see', 'refresh' and *locate* the recollective images from their reading, which they already carried in their own memories'.<sup>594</sup> Jerusalem, as a 'powerful locus of memory', was the place where imagined memories came together with the material to profound effect. Like the medieval manuscripts and images that guided pilgrims to Jerusalem, the imagined and collective memories of Thorpe Abbots that circulated in films, literature and at stateside reunions, emotionally informed the experience of the return.

Twenty-five years after his first return visit to Thorpe Abbots, a now-retired John Clark found himself in England once again.<sup>595</sup> During an overnight stay in Norwich, he visited the Second Air Division Memorial Library, where he learnt that the control tower at Thorpe Abbots had recently been restored as a museum. The following day he and his wife set out to visit the old base. Whereas his first trip had involved careful navigation and memory-work to locate the airfield, on this visit 'we were not prepared for the great surprise awaiting us...This time the way was clearly marked by an attractive signboard at the edge of the highway'.<sup>596</sup> Clark was met with a warm welcome from a group of volunteers, who gave him a personal tour of the museum. While the 1962 visit had revealed the depressing site of his demolished barracks, this trip yielded only praise for the volunteer's efforts to 'preserve an important part of their history and to honor the memories of the American airmen who served with the 100th Bomb Group'.<sup>597</sup> Perhaps inspired by the

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<sup>593</sup> Len Deighton, *Goodbye Mickey Mouse* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), 7.

<sup>594</sup> Robert Ousterhout, "Sweetly Refreshed in Imagination": Remembering Jerusalem in Words and Images", *Gesta* Vol.48, No.2 (2009), 153.

<sup>595</sup> John A Clark, *An Eighth Air Force Combat Diary* (First Page Publications, 2005), 247.

<sup>596</sup> *ibid*

<sup>597</sup> Clark, *An Eighth Air Force Combat Diary*, 251.

memorialisation efforts in England, or in a bid to mark out his place in the affective community, Clark became a lifetime member of the 100th Bomb Group Association on his return to the States.

The transformation of the return, from an encounter tinged with melancholia, unfamiliarity, and disorientation as veterans roamed the ruined airfield landscape, to a homecoming set within the familiar bounds of the restored control tower, was facilitated by the restoration of the tower. The newly renovated building, which offered veterans a complete view of the airfield landscape, as opposed to the decontextualised glimpses of derelict Nissen huts and chunks of moss-covered runway that visitors had reported in previous decades, served as an important aide-memoire by directing the veterans' gaze to a recognisable and evocative landscape. In stark contrast to the profanity of the rusted metal and torn-up concrete found elsewhere on the airfield, the hallowed control tower encouraged and legitimised the personal, collective, and imagined memories of veterans, paving the way for affective encounters as these embodied memories converged with the airfield vista laid out before them. For Captain 'Bucky' Elton, the convergence of memory and materiality during his return to the control tower shortly after its unveiling in 1982 unleashed an affective encounter that seemed to contract time,

*'One day while I was there, I went out to the tower alone. It was raining, and the low clouds raced by. I climbed up to the top where we used to wait for them to come back. I must have been there for a half hour, and then - I swear - I heard them all come back. Patrick, Adams, Schmallenback, Barnhill, Knox, Biddick, all of them. I couldn't see them up there in the clouds, but their engines made the old tower tremble - one slow pass - and they were gone. I do not expect you to understand this, but you must believe it. I have the feeling they will return because they are being remembered.'*<sup>598</sup>

Elton's experience emphasises the significance of the process of remembering to the purpose of the memorial museum as a site of affective heritage. Williams argues that memorials only gain their cultural significance through the social practice of being visited and as Duineveld and Van Assche explain, absences becomes non-existent within a network when they are no longer remembered.<sup>599</sup> The act of visiting Thorpe Abbots can therefore be seen as an affective practice that reinforces the purpose of the memorial museum by summoning its ghosts to return to the airfield, no longer with the wispiness of spirits roaming forgotten ruins, but with the assured sense that the ghosts are 'returning home'. Through the orientation of visitors in an assemblage of landscape, objects and bodies, affect is transmitted and circulated. In turn, the act of embodied remembering 'wears grooves or ruts in people's bodies and mind, just as walking particular routes over the grass year after year produces new paths'.<sup>600</sup> For many visitors,

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<sup>598</sup> "The Museum at Thorpe Abbots", *Splasher Six*, Winter 1982.

<sup>599</sup> Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (London: Berg, 2007), 5.

<sup>600</sup> Smith, Wetherell and Campbell, *Emotion, Affective Practices, and the Past in the Present*, 28.

particularly the descendants of veterans, the journey to Thorpe Abbots is an affective tool in consolidating their own identity as members of the translocal community.<sup>601</sup>

The granddaughter of a veteran described the transformative experience of visiting Thorpe Abbots; a trip she made soon after discovering that her grandfather had cancer.

*'I'll never forget the museum's caretaker Carol Batley walking me into the air traffic control tower on the base which is now filled with uniforms in glass cases and personal belongings of the men who were stationed here - including my grandfather's. We walked in and she said 'Hello, boys,' as if they were all still standing there in the control tower. The hair on my arms stood straight up, it's a moment I'll never forget. I then found myself on the runway where I called my grandfather from my tiny little pre-paid Vodafone. At 84 years old, it was the first and last time I ever heard him cry.*

*'I'm here,' I said to him. He broke down responding, 'That's where it all began.' He died that next summer almost to the day. Going to Thorpe Abbots was one of the best decisions I've ever made.*<sup>602</sup>

During this moment of affect, the physical and temporal distance between grandfather and granddaughter contracted, strengthening the emotional connections between the two people and the place that had brought them phenomenologically closer. This anecdote therefore illustrates the significance of 'the return' as a cyclical event capable of reorientating the translocal rhizomatic network. Despite the veteran unable to make the journey to Thorpe Abbots himself, the visit by his granddaughter is enough to quantify a symbolic return, encapsulated in the notion that the base was 'where it all began', and in the implication that the visit was in some way connected to his death 'the next summer almost a year to the day'.

Interestingly, the woman's transformative experience occurred after she had visited the museum (and brushed shoulders with the building's sanctioned ghosts). The agency of the control tower to shift the relationality between subject and object through the production of a heritage narrative that weaves identity, memory and affect is pivotal to understanding how transformative moments emerge during visits to Thorpe Abbots. Speaking at the museum shortly after its establishment, Roger Freeman asserted that

*'when strangers come to that airfield and they go to the Tower and learn something about those young men from a foreign land who once served there, and when they have learned, they will walk out on the field and they too will experience that certain presence which I maintain is there.'*<sup>603</sup>

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<sup>601</sup> Divya P. Tolia-Kelly, Emma Waterton, and Steve Watson (Eds.) *Heritage, Affect and Emotion: Politics, Practices and Infrastructures* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 3.

<sup>602</sup> "What I want my sons to learn from their great-grandfather's WWII survival", *Splasher Six*, Winter 2020.

<sup>603</sup> "Roger Freeman Speaks at Thorpe Abbots", *Splasher Six*, Summer 1986.

Freeman's suggestion that the site's affective atmosphere is transmitted through the control tower's interpretative role as a museum, in conjunction with its commemorative function as a memorial, emphasises the status of the 100<sup>th</sup> BG Memorial Museum as an affective heritage site where visitors are encouraged not merely to remember the past but to become active agents in its invocation in the present. While the 'heritagisation' of the tower has helped to domesticate the ghosts through the restoration of the tower, the curation of personal stories and mementos, and the translocal sanctification of the building, Freeman confirms a notion that has pervaded this chapter – these ghosts, however well contained in the tower, will always escape. This is perhaps itself representative of the fact that heritagisation and memorialisation will always be incomplete processes. For those 'strangers' with no personal connection to Thorpe Abbots – a demographic that makes up the majority of the museum's visitor base – Freeman's words have surprising resonance. From observing the journey of visitors through the tower - as they make their way from the small memorial chapel at the entrance up to the large first floor room adorned with uniformed mannequins and personal trinkets - the affective ebbs and flows of the visit become apparent, peaking as the individual summits the tower to gaze out over the airfield vista. 'There's a special atmosphere here', one visitor remarked, 'I feel like a ghost could come through the door at any minute...'

## Chapter Three: ‘A Place to Call Home’: Heritage management and affective placemaking at Alconbury

### Introduction

Situated in front of Alconbury Weald’s new Enterprise Campus, the olive drab WWII-era control tower (or ‘Watch Office’, as it is referred to on RAF plans) is juxtaposed against the glass facade of the neighbouring Cambridgeshire County Council headquarters. This area is a small island of calm amid a sea of construction, as new build houses rapidly populate the skyline of Britain’s largest housing development. Alconbury Weald, as the new settlement has been named, lies a short distance to the north-west of Huntingdon in Cambridgeshire. The eastern part of the former airfield, known as RAF Alconbury, is still in use by the USAF and is separated from the new development by a tall, barbed wire fence. The base is home to a support wing, which offers administrative aid to USAF forces in the UK.<sup>604</sup> The continued presence of American airmen makes Alconbury one of only two wartime Eighth Air Force bases still in active use by US forces - a historical continuity that has spanned over seven decades. Temporally, these years of occupation during the Second World War represent only a fraction of the site’s military history. Indeed, it is the base’s association with the Cold War that has largely shaped how the site is remembered today, as this chapter will discuss.

The 1,452 acre Alconbury Weald site, which formed the flying part of RAF Alconbury from 1938 until the cessation of flying operations in 1995, has planning permission for up to 6,000 new homes, almost 1,000 of which have been constructed as of Spring 2022. Included in Phase One of the development is the construction of Memorial Green - an expanse of carefully manicured lawn in front of the Watch Office, dipped slightly to offer reverent views of the tower, and intersected by two poles carrying the flags of the US and the UK. In the future, this space will contain a memorial to the 19 men of the 95th Bomb Group who were killed when a bomb accidentally detonated in May 1943 - the single greatest loss of life in the airfield’s history. The roof of the former Briefing Room, which adjoins the Watch Office, bears the designation of one of the destroyed B-17s as a memorial to its crew. The incident left other tangible indentations on the material fabric of the Watch Office in the form of incendiary damage, which made the building’s pain-staking restoration significantly more difficult for the contractors hired to carry out the renovation work in 2019. Like the rogue machine gun fire that pockmarked the render of Thorpe Abbots’ control tower, the effects of war have left a permanent reminder on Alconbury’s material fabric. But while the patina of conflict may have had a profound affect on volunteer Richard Gibson during his restoration work on the tower at

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<sup>604</sup> “501<sup>st</sup> Combat Support Wing”, USAFE, <https://www.501csw.usafe.af.mil/About-Us/Newcomers/RAF-Alconbury-RAF-Molesworth> [accessed 5th April 2022].

Thorpe Abbots - when he was suddenly jolted by the tangibility of the past in the present - it would be presumptive to suggest that interactions with the fire damage had the same affect on the builders tasked with the restoration of Alconbury's watch tower. Unlike the team of volunteers at Thorpe Abbots, who have dedicated years of their lives to the careful restoration of the control tower, the work at Alconbury was undertaken by professional contractors employed by development company Urban & Civic. While considerable expense has been invested in the sourcing of bespoke metal work, fittings and Crittal windows, the restoration was brought about by obligation rather than a passionate desire to bring the former building back to life. As one of four listed buildings on the site, the Watch Office is protected from demolition by statutory legislation.<sup>605</sup>

However, the developers had another reason for investing considerable expense into the restoration of the Watch Office. Speaking about the refurbishment in late 2019, Urban & Civic's Head of Communities and Partnerships made the following statement: 'Sitting as it does in a venerated position – within Memorial Green and opposite the Cricket pitch – it is truly at the heart of the first phase of our commemoration of the airfield's role in the Second World War. More than anything though, the restoration enables the new community to use and have a sense of ownership of that history...It has a real opportunity to become a vibrant cultural and heritage hub – not just for Alconbury Weald but for the wider area.'<sup>606</sup> While the building's commemorative function is recognised by Urban & Civic, it is the Watch Tower's potential as a focal point for the new community and a marker of Alconbury's collective identity that is clearly of most significance to the developer's overarching placemaking vision for the site. The affect of the refurbished building is not intended to be one of solemn reverence for the past, but a 'place to call home', to quote Alconbury Weald's marketing tagline.<sup>607</sup> By repurposing the historic building as a community space, the past is meant to offer a sense of permanence and identity to the fledgling locality, with the intention of imbuing a feeling of belonging to those who live in its vicinity. The decision to include the refurbishment of the watch tower in the first phase of the 25-year development can also be seen as an attempt to quell the anticipation and uncertainty over the future of the site. In the face of seemingly unending planning applications, proposals and building work due to be undertaken over the next 25 years, the Watch Office helps to situate the fledgling community within an-already established locality, contributing to the site's much-vaunted 'sense of place'.

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<sup>605</sup> "Watch Office and Operations Room at Alconbury Airfield", *Historic England*, <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1067832> [accessed 14th October 2022].

<sup>606</sup> "New life for Listed Watch Office at Alconbury Weald", 12 December 2018, *Alconbury Weald*, <https://www.alconbury-weald.co.uk/news/new-life-for-listed-watch-office-at-alconbury-weald> [accessed 10<sup>th</sup> May 2022].

<sup>607</sup> "Alconbury Weald: A place to call home" 1<sup>st</sup> September 2017, *Urban&Civic plc Brochure*, <https://www.urbanandcivic.com/media-library/documents/alconbury-weald-place-call-home> [accessed 10<sup>th</sup> May 2022].

The redevelopment of the former airfield at Alconbury, which was occupied by Eighth Air Force groups between 1942 and 1945, and by the US Air Force from 1951 until 1995, has enlivened debates about the significance of the base's material culture, and the role that this materiality can play in creative placemaking. The Watch Office was one of approximately 250 structures left on the brownfield site when Urban & Civic purchased the redundant airfield in 2009. A wide-scale clearance began in 2013, with most of the extant buildings being earmarked for demolition. The blanket policy of 'record and remove' has raised objections from members of the Airfield Research Group (ARG), a historic preservation group who have their headquarters at Alconbury. Despite the seemingly cut and dry nature of the planning process, the site's potential to affect has been invoked by those on both sides of the argument. From calls by the ARG to recognise the site's emotional significance in the listing process, to the developer's attempts to create a unique locality that 'feels like home', the site's affectivity continues to be recognised, debated, and re-imagined in the redevelopment of the site at multiple levels. Employing affect theory to study the social geographies of Eighth Air Force bases means viewing the relationship between bodies, not as something temporally linear or topological, but as a web of encounters between the human and non-human, with affective connections sedimenting in the human body to be encountered again through future interactions with the materiality of the site. How then, can affect theory help inform how former military bases should be managed in the future?

Arguing that the production of affect, and indeed locality, relies on the orientation of humans primed to be affected, and non-human bodies with the power to affect, this chapter will suggest that the production of affective localities relies on the production of local subjects who feel emotionally connected to the site's past. Taking this viewpoint, this final chapter will explore the role of affect in the redevelopment of Alconbury, from its recognition (or lack of) in the planning and listing process, to the differing affects associated with the remains of the Cold War compared to those of the Second World War, and how these attitudes have shaped the values assigned to Alconbury's military remains. Building on the notion of 'rescue geography' put forward by Phil Jones and James Evans, the chapter will explore ways in which affective connections can be creatively captured in the recording process, prior to the demolition of built fabric.<sup>608</sup> Finally, the chapter will examine the steps that the developers have taken to invoke, curate, and in some cases, counter, the site's affect to benefit their placemaking efforts. In doing so, it will question to what extent the affect generated by human and non-human interactions during the war years and re-encountered in the post-war return (as evidenced in the first two chapters), can be re-enlivened by encounters between the site's new residents and the extant materiality of the airfield.

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<sup>608</sup> Jones and Evans, *Rescue Geography*, 2316.



Figure 27 The restored Second World War Watch Tower at Alconbury, April 2022 (Source: Author)

## Heritage placemaking and the production of locality at post-war air bases

The production of locality is about the creation of affective connections - what Appadurai calls 'structures of feeling'.<sup>609</sup> A community of local subjects are bound to each other and the places they inhabit by how they *feel* about their surroundings. The act of producing locality not only concerns what people do to the spaces they inhabit, but what these places do to them - their affect. Following Spinoza, Brian Massumi suggests, affects 'are basically ways of connecting, to others and to other situations...with intensified affect comes a stronger sense of embeddedness in a larger field of life.'<sup>610</sup> As has been discussed, the locality at Shipdham was as much influenced by the affective anticipation of air combat as it was by the tangible and intangible home-making practices that went on there. The relationality of its subjects - their orientation within the affective economy of the air base community - dictated how Shipdham's occupants experienced their surroundings. To be a local subject at Shipdham was to orientate oneself towards an uncertain future as part of a collective group.

<sup>609</sup> Appadurai, *Globalization*, 52.

<sup>610</sup> Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, 6.



At Thorpe Abbots, this temporality is in many ways reversed. The affective intensity of the base no longer lies in the energy of anticipation for the future, but in the hopeful anticipation of the past. Veterans and their families, primed for an emotional 'return' to the base, are affected through their physical interactions with the materiality of the airfield. Orientated towards the former runway in the collective practice of remembrance, the 'ghosts of the past' - enlivened in the absent presence of the surviving material culture - are experienced and felt. The locality of Thorpe Abbots is maintained through translocal and intergenerational practices of storytelling, commemoration and interpretation that aims to present the base as a spiritual home for the community. Through the conscious efforts of the 100th Bomb Group Memorial Museum and Foundation, affective connections forged during the war are transmitted beyond the original wartime bomb group. Through this assemblage, Thorpe Abbots offers an example of how the affectivity of military heritage sites can be preserved, even after the materiality of the base has been significantly eroded.

But to what extent does this template for the maintenance of affect apply to Second World War air bases that have been subject to a markedly different post-war trajectory than Thorpe Abbots or Shipdham? While many Eighth Air Force bases were left to a gradual process of ruination after the war, the romanticised image of the forlorn, abandoned control tower was not replicated at every airfield. Owing to their utilitarian and temporary purpose, the survival rate of Second World War structures is relatively poor.<sup>611</sup> Seeing their economic potential as sites of industry, many landowners transformed the former USAAF airfields into centres of poultry production and light industry (Halesworth), motorsport (Snetterton), or civil aviation (Stansted) in the post-war years. Others continued their function as active military airfields, adapted to meet changing geopolitical threats. Some, such as Martlesham Heath, were quickly earmarked for housing developments, transforming the airfield landscape into residential suburbs, and subjecting the sites to a new process of meaning-making.

Simultaneously, there was no guarantee that the wartime communities that had once called the bases home would survive after they had physically dispersed across the United States. While reunions, newsletters and return visits to Thorpe Abbots helped the 100th Bomb Group forge a translocal community of veterans and their descendants, for other groups, time and distance has eroded the fraternity forged during the war. The future of airfield sites, and their associated communities, is therefore precarious. As new uses are continually sought for redundant bases, (particularly in light of the ongoing housing crisis and the subsequent pressure to redevelop sites

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<sup>611</sup> Reading, Holborow, Lake et al., *Historic Military Aviation Sites: Conservation Guidance* (United Kingdom: Historic England, 2016), 3.

designated as ‘brownfield’), improving our understanding of the social, as well as the material, fabric of military bases has never been more relevant. By viewing former Eighth Air Force bases as affective localities that are continually made and remade through meaningful interactions between people and places, future redevelopment has the potential to not only capture, but also to preserve and invoke, the intensities of these former bases through affective placemaking.

In 2020, Urban & Civic was shortlisted for the ‘Best use of heritage in placemaking’ award at the annual Planning Awards; an accolade which recognises schemes that ‘capitalise on the history of a place/and or community’.<sup>612</sup> While the notion of ‘capitalising’ on heritage serves as a reminder of the commercial focus of development, the awards nevertheless implicitly commend the use of the historic environment in the production of locality. Urban & Civic were commended for developing ‘a place that has harnessed the power of landscape to transform a dusty airfield into an established community.’ Explaining the significance of heritage in placemaking efforts at Alconbury, Urban & Civic emphasised that they ‘wanted to explore the many ways in which details, alignments, structures and historical events can be interwoven into the fabric of the development.’<sup>613</sup> The intertwining of tangible historic fabric and intangible historical events into the fabric of the new community reinforces the notion that heritage placemaking should be concerned not only with the preservation and reuse of material historic fabric, but also the immaterial.

In recent years, the potential for heritage to actively contribute to how people feel about their surroundings has been addressed in a growing body of placemaking literature. This increase in the number of studies has revealed how cultural heritage is important for individuals, groups, and communities in forming collective identities and for the construction of a sense of belonging.<sup>614</sup> Transcending interdisciplinary academic debate and entering the public realm, placemaking has been endorsed as a method of preserving the historic environment through the incorporation of tangible and intangible heritage values into redevelopment projects. In turn, the potential for historic places to add value to developments has been increasingly realised. In 2018, Historic England’s published its own placemaking guidance, promoting the role of heritage as the place making ‘glue’ that holds together the social fabric of communities through the promotion of collective identity and a shared stake in the historic past.<sup>615</sup> An important part of this model of strategic engagement is the ‘heritage

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<sup>612</sup> “Alconbury Weald, shortlisted for ‘Best use of heritage in placemaking’”, 11<sup>th</sup> May 2020, *Bradley Murphy Design*, <https://www.bradleymurphydesign.co.uk/4649-2> [accessed 8<sup>th</sup> May 2022]; “Planning Awards 2022”, <https://www.planningawards.com/categories> [accessed 9 September 2022].

<sup>613</sup> *ibid*

<sup>614</sup> Veysel Apaydin (Ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Cultural Memory and Heritage: Construction, Transformation and Destruction* (London: UCL Press, 2020), 1.

<sup>615</sup> Clive Fletcher, *Historic England Places Strategy* (United Kingdom: Historic England, 2018), 5.

cycle', defined as a virtuous cycle of understanding, valuing, caring, and enjoying.<sup>616</sup> By educating local people about the past, Historic England argue that they will in turn value it, and actively contribute to its preservation as a result. Forming affective connections between people and historic places is therefore deemed essential to the production of local subjects, and by virtue, the creation of meaningful localities.

While the importance of engaging local people on an emotional level is an integral part of placemaking, the relationship between affect and place is underdeveloped in literature on the subject. As Jones and Evans argue, understandings of placemaking can be usefully extended through the lens of non-representational theory, particularly the idea of affect.<sup>617</sup> Indeed, the very notion of 'sense of place' alludes to pre-cognitive embodied experiences that are invoked by interactions between people and places. Low takes this a step further by suggesting that these encounters form affective connections, which in turn give 'culturally shared emotional/affective meanings to a particular space or piece of land that provides the basis for the individual's and group's understanding and relationship to the environment'.<sup>618</sup> The production of locality is therefore a process that takes place in the body as well as outside of it. Affective placemaking, in the context of redevelopment schemes, should therefore acknowledge and record the existing place associations already established between people and their locality, and strive to develop new affective connections through sensitive development and community involvement.<sup>619</sup> The complication at a place like Alconbury, which has been subjected to a process of complex meaning-making involving multiple communities over seven decades, is that these identities have a tendency to shift and overlap. As Massey argues, the convergence of these social relations at a particular location can give a place its richness - places that are 'sticky' with affect – whilst also maintaining the potential for conflict.<sup>620</sup> At Alconbury, one of the most significant challenges is reconciling the intended 'affect of home' with the site's multivocal affects as a former military base.

### A Cold War legacy: Living among the ruins of uncertainty

Unlike the bases at Thorpe Abbots and Shipdham, RAF Alconbury was home to several bomb groups during the war. Opened in 1938 as a satellite airfield to nearby RAF Wyton, the base's first occupants were Bomber Command squadrons flying Bristol Blenheims and Fairey battle bombers,

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<sup>616</sup> Fletcher, *Historic England Places Strategy*, 10.

<sup>617</sup> Phil Jones and James Evans, "Rescue Geography: Place Making, Affect and Regeneration", *Urban Studies*, Vol.49, No. 11 (November 2012), 2316.

<sup>618</sup> Irwin Altman, *Place Attachment* (Sl.: Springer US, 2012), 165.

<sup>619</sup> Jones and Evans, "Rescue Geography: Place Making, Affect and Regeneration", 2316.

<sup>620</sup> Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

and later Vickers Wellingtons.<sup>621</sup> By summer 1942, RAF personnel had flown over 650 operational sorties from Alconbury, at a cost of 67 aircraft. It was at this time that a new chapter in the base's history began when the station was chosen to become one of the first bases to accommodate the newly-arrived Eighth Air Force, prompting improvements to the airfield's infrastructure to prepare it for the arrival of the heavy B-24 Liberators of the 93rd Bomb Group in September 1942. However, this group's stay would be short-lived and in November of that year, the 93rd was replaced with the 92nd Bomb Group, who were briefly joined by the 95th Bomb Group in the summer of 1943. In September 1943 the 482nd Bombardment Group arrived, occupying the base until the end of the war. Known as 'Pathfinders', the 482nd was a composite group, mainly made up of experienced crews drawn from other bomb groups. Armed with cutting-edge radar technology, the 482nd's B-17s and B-24s flew at the front of the Eighth Air Force armada, guiding the huge aircraft formations over the mission target.

The composite nature of the group reduced the opportunities for the type of locality production and community building seen at other bases. Many of the crews had already completed their required missions before arriving at Alconbury, and allegiances to their original bomb groups may have been more influential than those formed at Alconbury. Due to their use of classified Radar technology, the work of the 482nd was relatively secretive and there seems to be some disconnect between various sections of the group. As one veteran noted, 'Usually one group did not know what the Others were working on'.<sup>622</sup> This also had repercussions on what the veterans were allowed to discuss after the war. While the 100th BG was expanding its membership in the post-war years, the 482nd BG was noticeably absent from the Eighth Air Force veteran network. While a 482nd BG Association did exist, its output and membership was not to the same scale as other groups.<sup>623</sup> The last large-scale group reunion to Alconbury occurred in 1992, when veterans were given a tour of the operational base.<sup>624</sup> The half century before this visit had brought about significant alterations to the airfield, as it was adapted to meet the technological developments and new threats of the Cold War world. 'Alconbury is still operational but unrecognizable', remarked one returning veteran, alluding to the disappointment that many must have felt at finding only scattered reminders of their wartime experiences in the material fabric of the base.<sup>625</sup> 'It looks different with new buildings added and some old ones taken away. The hangars are still here. Base headquarters is new, but located where our old headquarters site was. The dispersal area is now lighted tennis courts and baseball

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<sup>621</sup> Martin W. Bowman, *1st Air Division Eighth Air Force USAAF 1942-45: Flying Fortress Squadrons in Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Essex, Hertfordshire and Northamptonshire* (London: Pen & Sword Books, 2007), 21.

<sup>622</sup> Peter F. Ardizzi, 'The Eighth Air Force Historical Society' correspondence", undated. 1538, Eighth Air Force Archive, Penn State.

<sup>623</sup> "Pathfinders Notes (482 BG)", *Eighth Air Force Archive, Penn State*.

<sup>624</sup> "482BG Reunion at Alconbury", Series 5, *Mighty Eighth Archive, Penn State*.

<sup>625</sup> Lande, *From Somewhere in England*, 12.

diamonds. And our old mess hall has been removed, possibly up the street and converted to a club', recalled Ralph Ballinger,<sup>626</sup> following a return visit to Alconbury. Ballinger's attempts to mentally navigate the Cold War base by describing the changes to the landscape represent the memory work that returning veterans were forced to when faced with a topography that was no longer 'theirs'.

This long period of post-war USAF occupation, from 1951 until 1996, is an obvious reason for the relatively scant accounts of returning veterans. Rather than the evocative Twelve O'Clock High landscapes found at many of England's abandoned airfields, RAF Alconbury presented a symbol of modern warfare, closed off to outsiders. Within the bounds of the barbed wire fence, wartime Nissen huts were torn down and replaced with concrete bunkers, while the cracked runways were resurfaced and expanded for a fleet of TR-1 (U-2) reconnaissance planes. From the late-1970s to mid-80s, the base went through a particularly far-reaching overhaul, which led to the removal of most of the Second World War-era buildings.



Figure 28 '482nd Pathfinder Plaque Dedication' (Source: 70688, Eighth Air Force Archive, Penn State)

Just as the physical landscape of the base was altered by these improvements, so too was its affective meaning. While occupying the same footprint as its Second World War predecessor, the Cold War base was a world away from the nostalgic 'Fields of Little America' that East Anglia's Second World

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<sup>626</sup> Lande, *From Somewhere in England*, 12.

War airfields had become synonymous with in the public imagination. While civilians had often been invited onto US bases for work and social events during the war years, the Cold War era heralded the construction of barbed wire fences and the installation of security forces, leaving locals to imagine the purpose of the impenetrable blast proof structures that emerged from the airfield landscape.

Defined as a period when 'the world held its breath', the years between 1945 and 1991 were characterised by paranoia, suspense and anticipation.<sup>627</sup> Prys Gruffudd compares the differences between the Second World War and Cold War in the public imagination, arguing that in the post-war years the pastoral blue skies and Spitfires associated with the Battle of Britain were replaced with the uncertainty and foreboding of Cold War militarisation, 'the sky has been dispossessed of its Englishness, by American missiles and Soviet fallout...now the sky is anything but reassuring, and a whole new realm of symbolism is attached to it.'<sup>628</sup> Unlike Thorpe Abbots, where the past peacefully resided in the pastoral present, Cold War Alconbury stood as a symbol of an uncertain future. Exploring the concrete structures of the former nuclear research establishment at Orford Ness, twenty years after its desertion, writer W. G. Sebald mused, 'I imagined myself amidst the remains of our own civilization after its extinction in some future catastrophe.'<sup>629</sup> The ability of Cold War installations to affect visitors was amplified by their secretive functions. At Alconbury, the Avionics Building (nicknamed Magic Mountain) is a subterranean bunker built to process the photographic intelligence gathered by the TR-1 spy planes. The pyramidal blast cap is designed to withstand a nuclear strike, while the large tanks would have contained enough oxygen to keep its occupants alive for four weeks - enough time for them to send their intelligence back to the US.

*Figure 28 '482nd Pathfinder Plaque Dedication' (Source: 70688, Eighth Air Force Archive, Penn State)*

From the outside, the grass-covered bunker is reminiscent of an ancient monument, a cross between an Egyptian pyramid and a Neolithic burial mound. A concrete driveway leads into a warren of empty rooms and decontamination chambers. Like the Doomsday Clock, designed to warn the world's population how close we are to mutual destruction, the bunker serves as an ominous symbol of the proximity of annihilation. Understanding the building's Cold War purpose pulls into focus the decisions that would have been made in the event of nuclear war. The decontamination chambers, for example, are not merely examples of military technology, but powerful reminders of the environmental destruction that defenceless civilians would have been subjected to should nuclear weapons have been deployed by either side.

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<sup>627</sup> Jeremy Isaacs, Taylor Downing, *Cold War: For 45 Years the World Held Its Breath* (London: Bantam, 1998).

<sup>628</sup> Prys Gruffudd, "Reach for the sky: the air and English cultural nationalism." *Landscape Research*, Vol.16, No.2 (1991), 24.

<sup>629</sup> W. G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, (New York: New Directions, 1998), 237.



Figure 29 The Avionics Building, nicknamed 'Magic Mountain' (Source: Urban & Civic)

The decision by the U.S. Air Force to reopen Alconbury in 1951, along with other wartime bases, came at the beginning of a period defined by defence experts as 'Mutually Assured Destruction'. The threat of an all-out nuclear war dictated the massive building programme that took place across the country, as Britain and America sought to construct military edifices that symbolised their anticipation of future conflicts. This atmosphere of suspense would last until at least the 1970s, when the doctrine of Flexible Response reframed the air base's role as that of deterrent. While the threat of nuclear destruction was not quite so immediate in the 1970s and 1980s, Alconbury was nevertheless a site shrouded in uncertainty, epitomised by the unique extra-wide hardened aircraft shelters and bunkers constructed to house and maintain the U-2/TR-1 reconnaissance aircraft. A far cry from the simplistic 'good' vs 'evil' narrative of the Second World War bombing campaign, the American's surveillance role at Alconbury represented the blurred geopolitical lines of the Cold War. Its secretive purpose and fortified appearance made it a target for disarmament and anti-American militarism protests, despite no nuclear weapons ever being stored on the base. In 1966, a contingent from the Lynn and District C.N.D. staged a protest march against the Vietnam War from Huntingdon to Alconbury.<sup>630</sup> By 1983, Molesworth peace campers were

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<sup>630</sup> "Lynn C.N.D. in Protest March", *Lynn Advertiser*, 17 May 1966.

staging a monthly protest at Alconbury, aimed at blockading the base's gates.<sup>631</sup> In 1985, twenty peace protesters were arrested for attempting to storm their way onto the runway at Alconbury.<sup>632</sup> Close to the southern part of the perimeter fence a concrete plinth still bears anti-war graffiti, including the phrases 'No US Base Here', 'Remember Hiroshima' and 'Nuclear Graveyard'. Alconbury, like other Cold War military installations, became a conduit for socio-political tensions that have lingered long after the threat has passed. As Navaro-Yashin argues, it is 'the subjectivities and residual affects that linger, like a hangover, in the aftermath of war or violence'.<sup>633</sup> For Navaro, neither the ruins of war, nor the people who live among them are not affective on their own, but both produce and transmit affect *relationally*. Discussing the 'melancholia' experienced by Turkish-Cypriots living among the properties and objects appropriated during war from members of the so-called 'enemy' community, Navaro-Yashin argues that 'they [the inhabitants] put the ruins into discourse, symbolize them, interpret them, politicize them, understand them, project their subjective conflicts onto them, remember them, try to forget them, historicize them, and so on'.<sup>634</sup>

Exploring the British Army's presence at Aldershot, Jackie Tivers argues that military landscapes are 'iconic' in that they 'have a meaning which goes much further than their overt presence'.<sup>635</sup> Using Ley's existential dimensions of meaning, she suggests that such landscapes should be read as a text, complete with 'markers' which serve to give meaning to the landscape. As a multivocal topography of meaning, defence icons can simultaneously be perceived as places of security/places of stress; places of stimulus/places of ennui; and places of status/places of stigma.<sup>636</sup> Following the removal of cruise missiles from the decommissioned Greenham Common USAF base in 1992, artists Jane and Louise Wilson were invited to record their impressions of the site. Their resulting Turner-nominated work - a series of video projections showing different aspects of the abandoned GAMMA silos - is intended to unsettle the viewer, suggesting that a malevolent presence remains even after the departure of the object of threat.<sup>637</sup> The notion that Cold War heritage is 'fearsome' is arguably an inherent part of its social fabric, and by extension, its significance. As multidimensional topographies of meaning, military sites have an added layer of complexity when assessing their future uses. While a monument of war may have historical value, its affectiveness as a reminder of a painful past can in some cases support the argument for removal. Another debate is whether the recency of Cold War heritage sites makes them less historically significant, or more, given their relevance to

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<sup>631</sup> "30 Years Ago: Peace Camps Round-Up", *Peace News*, <https://peacenews.info/node/7144/30-years-ago-peace-camps-round>, [accessed 9th February 2022].

<sup>632</sup> "Base Protest", *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 11 April 1985.

<sup>633</sup> Navaro-Yashin, "Affective Spaces, Melancholic Objects", 5.

<sup>634</sup> Navaro-Yashin, "Affective Spaces, Melancholic Objects", 15.

<sup>635</sup> Jacqueline Tivers, "'The Home of the British Army': The Iconic Construction of Military Defence Landscapes", *Landscape Research* Vol.24, No. 3 (1999), 303.

<sup>636</sup> Tivers, "The Home of the British Army", 310.

<sup>637</sup> Jane and Louise Wilson, "Gamma", Video, 4 projections, colour and sound (1999), *Tate Gallery*.



present communities? These are just some of the issues that equates the assessment of military heritage's significance to unpicking a complex web of meaning, enveloped in folds of material, discourse, and affect.<sup>638</sup>

In its guidance note on the research, evaluation and recording of historic military aviation sites, Historic England recommends that 'any decisions about the management of individual historic aviation sites and structures should be based on a proper understanding of their special archaeological, architectural or historic significance.'<sup>639</sup> As well as assessing their tangible heritage values, inspectors should also consider a site's 'local and communal values', such as any associations with particular squadrons or groups, or personal links that may have developed between the site and the local community.<sup>640</sup> Given the potential for divergent meanings at military sites, particularly those associated with a controversial past, it could be argued that this guidance does not go far enough in acknowledging the range of interpretations, which are often polarised and conflicting, but nevertheless vital to understanding the layers of meaning invested in military heritage. Indeed, Erica Avrami questions what would happen 'if conservation principles focused on how people engage with decision-making about heritage and the process of participation'.<sup>641</sup>

The idea that military sites can take some of their meaning from those opposed to their existence is exemplified at the former USAF base at Greenham Common. The Berkshire base, which was home to Ninth Air Force fighter groups during the war, was reopened in the late 1950s as a US Strategic Air Command bomber airfield. In 1980, Greenham Common was selected as a site for the US Air Force's mobile nuclear armed Launched Cruise Missiles. In protest to the arrival of nuclear weapons, Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp was established, occupied by a community of thousands of protesters over a nineteen-year period. When the base eventually closed, stakeholders debated whose voices should be heard in the future use and commemoration of the site. Who did the heritage 'belong' to? The base's wartime occupants, its Cold War stewards, the local community, or the protesters? Indeed, how does this significance change over time, as perceptions shift? The 2022 invasion of Ukraine, for example, has arguably altered the affects generated by Cold War heritage, particularly given the seemingly increased threat of nuclear war and the re-emergence of old adversaries. When residents were asked whether current events had changed their attitudes to Alconbury's Cold War heritage, one respondent stated that 'it is more relatable now I am living

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<sup>638</sup> English Heritage, *Monuments of War: The evaluation, recording and management of twentieth-century military sites* (United Kingdom: English Heritage, 1998), 1.

<sup>639</sup> Reading, Holborow, Jeremy Lake et al. *Historic Military Aviation Sites: Conservation Guidance*, 10.

<sup>640</sup> *ibid*

<sup>641</sup> Erica Avrami, *Values in Heritage Management* (J. Paul Getty Trust, 2009), 182.

through it'.<sup>642</sup> Rather than being an obsolete relic of the past, the buildings' perceived defensive function has been given new significance. Another Alconbury inhabitant replied how it 'makes you think why they were removed from use!'<sup>643</sup> No longer an obsolete relic of a past conflict, the bunkers' simultaneous symbolism as sites of ominous threat and impenetrable protection have been revitalised in light of current events.

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<sup>642</sup> Responses from online survey conducted in April 2022.

<sup>643</sup> *ibid*



Figure 30 Aerial view of Alconbury Airfield, taken in 1945 (Source: Urban & Civic)



Figure 31 RAF Alconbury in 1966 (Source: Urban & Civic)



Figure 32 RAF Alconbury in 1991, at the end of an expansive building program which took place between 1977 and 1990 (Source: Urban & Civic)



Figure 33 Alconbury in 2020, after seven years of construction work (Source: Google Earth)

The multivocal and multi-faceted nature of military remains therefore makes an all-encompassing assessment of their heritage values inherently problematic.<sup>644</sup> At Alconbury, as with most large-scale developments, the 'significance' of the site's historic fabric has been evaluated in the project's Heritage Statement, produced by a firm of professional heritage consultants.<sup>645</sup> In support of its Outline Planning Application, submitted in 2012, Urban & Civic commissioned CgMs to produce its Heritage Strategy. Identifying the site's heritage assets and significance, the document was intended to provide a 'detailed strategy for the preservation of the site's significance which incorporates benefits arising from the design and layout of the scheme, the re-use of assets, and the involvement of the general public in heritage and archaeology projects.' Based on archival and desk-based research undertaken by CgMs, the report begins with an overview of the site's historical development, detailing how changes in personnel and purpose shaped the evolution of the airfield. This is followed by an assessment of Alconbury's heritage assets. The assessment is based on the National Planning Policy Framework's definition of 'significance' as 'the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. The interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic, or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.'<sup>646</sup>

The summary of the Heritage Statement concluded that Alconbury airfield was 'predominantly, a Cold War site, with some disjointed elements remaining from the Second World War, frequently with a Cold War context imposed upon them.'<sup>647</sup> The belief that the site's Second World War heritage has been overlaid by the later additions appears to suggest that the significance of the Second World War built fabric has been in some way diluted by the Cold War interjections. Their setting eroded by later adaptations and additions, the Second World War structures are presented as being out of place. This is reflected in the Statement of Significance, which argues that many of the site's buildings are of 'no significance' due to the erosion of their wartime contexts.<sup>648</sup> Their removal, therefore, would not be detrimental to an understanding of the site's history. Historic England's argument is essentialist in its implication that the destruction of the Second World War setting renders the surviving building as being out of place in the landscape - its *genius loci*, or 'spirit of place', having been lost.<sup>649</sup> This approach fails to take into account the argument made in this thesis, that

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<sup>644</sup> Arthur J. Schofield and Wayne D. Ccroft (Eds.) *A Fearsome Heritage: Diverse Legacies of the Cold War* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 24.

<sup>645</sup> "Alconbury Weald: KJ Heritage Strategy", *Urban & Civic*, (July 2012).

<sup>646</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *National Planning Policy Framework* (2012), 72.

<sup>647</sup> "Chapter 11: Archaeology and Cultural Heritage", *Urban & Civic* (July 2012), 20.

<sup>648</sup> "Alconbury Weald: KJ Heritage Strategy", *Urban & Civic*, (July 2012).

<sup>649</sup> Maria Lewicka, "On the essentialism of places: Between conservative and progressive meanings", *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, Vol.65 (2019), 2.

bodies never live in isolation, but are always connected to other bodies in a complex assemblage that have the capacity to generate affects.

The comparatively low significance given to most of the airfield structures contrasts with the WWII-era Watch Office, which is designated as having ‘national significance’ owing to its Grade Two listed status as the ‘best-preserved example of a standard type built for bomber satellite stations during the Second World War’.<sup>650</sup> In contrast, the 1950s control tower, which is itself a relatively unique example of its type, was not listed, despite petitions by the Airfield Research Group to protect it. This omission resulted in the building being deemed as being of ‘local significance’.<sup>651</sup> Without statutory protection, the tower was demolished in 2015, to the disconcertion of many of Alconbury’s Cold War veterans. The tower, which was in use from the 1950s until the base’s closure, was a focal point in the airfield landscape, allowing panoramic views of the sprawling base. Its longevity meant that it had witnessed multiple aircraft take off from and return to Alconbury over the course of 40 years – an operational life that far exceeded that of the listed Second World War Watch Office. Commenting on a video showing the demolition of the building, one veteran remarked, ‘Worst video I’ve EVER SEEN! Grab a BOX of Kleenex! I was stationed there 527th Aggressor SQ part of 10th AGS from 1984-86...these were the BEST 2 years of my life, hard to let it go!’ Another commented, ‘I was stationed there for 6 years in the 1970s. My heart sunk when I viewed this. I loved it there.’<sup>652</sup>

Considering the weight given to listed buildings over undesignated assets in the planning process, it could be argued that decision-makers need to look beyond the function, rarity, or operational value of military heritage. Explaining the set of criteria for selecting control towers for preservation in England, Historic England’s Head of Military Programmes, John Schofield, argues that towers should be protected if they met any, or a combination, of the following four reasons: the control tower is in good condition and has retained its original features; the tower is situated on a site of operational significance, such as a base with strong ties to the Battle of Britain; the site has historic interest that is not connected to its operational history, such as Twinwood Farm, where band leader Glenn Miller flew from on his fateful flight. The final reason is if the control tower retains an obvious and visual relationship to contemporary surviving fabric or the flying field.<sup>653</sup> While Schofield’s criteria allow for the appreciation of historic events in the significance of an otherwise architecturally

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<sup>650</sup> “Watch Office and Operations Room at Alconbury Airfield Official List Entry”, *Historic England*, <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1067832?section=official-list-entry> (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> March 2022)

<sup>651</sup> “Chapter 11: Archaeology and Cultural Heritage”, *Urban & Civic*, (July 2012), 52.

<sup>652</sup> User comments on “ATC Tower Demolition 15<sup>th</sup> June 2015, *Youtube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTBXKegHDWQ> (accessed 21<sup>st</sup> April 2022)

<sup>653</sup> Schofield, *Aftermath*, 56-57.

unremarkable building, there is no value assigned to the everyday encounters that occurred at these sites, and the myriad of memories ingrained in the building's fabric. As the preceding chapters have shown, it was the repeated actions of base personnel, rather than extraordinary events, that produced sites thick with affect and meaning. Examining the link between history and heritage, Raphael Samuel suggests that the 'dreamscapes' and 'theatres of memory' created by encounters with heritage are essential to our understanding of a site's history, 'the sense of past, at any given point of time, is quite as much a matter of history as what happened in it'.<sup>654</sup> One could certainly argue that the 'special atmosphere' at Thorpe Abbotts is part of the site's historical identity, just as the memories of veterans constitute the social fabric of Alconbury's Cold War control tower.

This is certainly the belief held by Paul, a board member of the ARG and an expert on the history of Alconbury, who gave me a tour of the air base on our first meeting. Driving around the deserted site, Paul pointed out the buildings that were due to be demolished later that week. One structure – a prefabricated airfield building – was of particular concern. He claimed that the listing officer who had 'condemned' the building had failed to see its value as anything more than a typical airfield structure of its period, deemed to be of 'no significance'. Had he inspected the interior, or indeed talked to veterans, then he would have learnt that the building was integral to operations at Alconbury, from the Second World War all the way through to the 1990s. As we stood in front of the brick workshop, Paul encouraged me to imagine the hustle and bustle of people who would have passed through the building's doors during the base's Cold War heyday. It is Paul's view that the heritage consultants do not appreciate the attachments that people have formed with these buildings over the years - not only those who used them during their operational life, but also those who have dedicated years painstakingly researching their history. He questioned how someone with limited knowledge of twentieth century military architecture could ultimately decide the fate of a building without even leaving their car for a thorough inspection. Whether or not this criticism is founded, Paul's disgruntlement represents a view that the planning and listing processes place too much emphasis on airfield buildings' aesthetic and architectural value rather than viewing them as a rich memory-scape. As most airfield buildings are prefabricated, temporary, and utilitarian, their overall significance is often underestimated as a result. While the incorporation of the more-than-representational into the evaluation of airfield remains is something of a contradiction given affect's pre-cognitive attributes, there is nevertheless the potential for the recognition of the significance of memories in the construction of a place's social identity. Differentiating between history and memory, Pierre Nora argues that 'Memory is life, borne by living societies found in its name. [...] History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history

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<sup>654</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso, 1996), 259-444.

is a representation of the past'.<sup>655</sup> Memory is, according to Nora, an 'affective and magical' link directly anchoring us to a past that is constantly evolving and continually coming-into-being.<sup>656</sup> As a memory space, Alconbury's significance not only lies in its historical past, but in its value to the communities who have formed affective connections with the site, and in doing so, imbued it with a complex web of meaning.

### Affective recording and the technologies of memory

When discussing the demolition of Alconbury Weald's airfield buildings with Urban & Civic's Head of Communities and Partnerships, I was quickly reassured that the loss of the built fabric would be mitigated by a thorough recording process being undertaken by a team of building archaeologists.<sup>657</sup> The photographs taken prior to demolition will be collated and eventually donated to the Huntingdonshire Archives, where they will be made publicly available. Urban & Civic's approach follows the advice laid out in the Heritage Strategy, in line with Historic England recommendations. However, the process of producing a visual record of the material, as a substitute for the *in-situ* material culture, is itself problematic. The role of the archive as a storehouse for memory is criticised by Nora, who sees the traditional archive as 'the deliberate and calculated secretion of lost memory. It adds to life – itself often a function of its own recording – a secondary memory, a prosthesis-memory.'<sup>658</sup> Despite the apparent detriments of the photograph as an affective recording tool, Watson has argued that the silence of the photograph is one of its strengths in the reproduction of Cold War memory. 'To represent the world in a still and silent way creates a contemplative space for the viewer to observe and reflect on the transient nature of time and the notion of history.'<sup>659</sup> In respect to photographs of Cold War architecture, they have the potential to capture the 'solitude and silence of these sites which still evoke the terrifying noise of conflict.'<sup>660</sup> De Jong and Rowlands describe photographs as a 'technology of memory' that when combined with other technologies, such as ritual and oral tradition, can create a palimpsest memory.<sup>661</sup> Despite the potential to record and preserve the 'atmospheres' of places through prosthetic memory, the

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<sup>655</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire", *Representations*, Vol.26, No.8 (1989), 8.

<sup>656</sup> *ibid*

<sup>657</sup> Interview with Rebecca Britton, Urban & Civic, 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

<sup>658</sup> Nora, "Between Memory and History", 26.

<sup>659</sup> Frank Watson, "The noise of war, the silence of the photograph" in Cocroft & Schofield, *A Fearsome Heritage*, 239.

<sup>660</sup> Watson, *Heritage, Affect and Emotion: Politics, Practices and Infrastructures*, 251.

<sup>661</sup> Ferdinand de Jong, Michael Rowlands. *Reclaiming Heritage : Alternative Imaginaries of Memory in West Africa*. (Routledge, 2007), 23.



reliance on recording as mitigation of the loss of historic fabric has frustrated the ARG, who feel that those doing the recording work have often failed to report their findings so that steps can be taken to preserve any historical features. A piece of Cold War-era wall art, for example, was destroyed before the ARG was given the opportunity to rescue the artefact.

A potential solution can be found in the attempts by researchers across disciplines to develop methodologies for capturing affect.<sup>662</sup> Of most relevance to this chapter is Phil Jones and James Evans' notion of 'Rescue Geography' as a technique for 'capturing the embodied relationship between communities and urban spaces prior to redevelopment.'<sup>663</sup> Employing a research methodology involving walking interviews around Birmingham's Eastside district, Jones and Evans conclude that capturing connections between people and places can lead to more 'authentic regeneration schemes which respond sympathetically to landscapes already soaked in affective connections.'<sup>664</sup> By not merely recording the material remains of a site, but also capturing how people *feel* about a place, the socio-cultural connections that transformed spaces into places can be, to some extent, preserved.<sup>665</sup> The potential for these affective recording methods have already been exercised within a military context. In 2005 a group of archaeologists and artists were given permission by English Heritage and the Ministry of Defense to create a series of records in the months prior to the closure of RAF Coltishall in Norfolk.<sup>666</sup> Rather than simply recording the built remains of the base after its desertion, the practitioners used film, photography and sound recording, along with conventional heritage methodologies, to create a series of complementary multi-vocal records of the site during its final months of operation. Like Jones and Evans' research in Birmingham, the participants were able to record how the base's inhabitants felt about their environment. Their conclusion was that 'reverie, alertness, instant response and a deep sense of historical continuity formed a constellation of feeling and allegiance at RAF Coltishall.'<sup>667</sup> As well as recording the connections between military personnel and Coltishall, the team were also driven by a desire to understand to what extent 'the atmosphere could be "archived"'.<sup>668</sup> Aware that the lives of military sites do not end with their functional operation, the authors argue that these places are always 'becoming', and that the atmosphere of the base would inevitably change following its abandonment.<sup>669</sup> Rather than the mysterious, uncanny absent presences recorded by artists working

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<sup>662</sup> See Britta Timm Knudsen and Carsten Stage, *Affective Methodologies: Developing Cultural Research Strategies for the Study of Affect* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

<sup>663</sup> Jones and Evans, *Rescue Geography*, 2315.

<sup>664</sup> *ibid*

<sup>665</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 232.

<sup>666</sup> John Schofield, Wayne Cocroft, Angus Boulton, Gair Dunlop, and Louise K. Wilson. "The Aerodrome": Art, Heritage and Landscape at Former RAF Coltishall', *Journal of Social Archaeology*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2012), 120-42.

<sup>667</sup> Schofield, Cocroft et al., "The Aerodrome", 129.

<sup>668</sup> Schofield, Cocroft et al, "The Aerodrome", 133.

<sup>669</sup> *ibid*

in abandoned Cold War sites (such as those recorded at Greenham Common and Orford Ness), the atmosphere at Coltishall during its occupation was defined by its neatness and order. This fundamental paradox in the recording of military sites presents an inherent difficulty for those seeking to record the affective connections associated with a site once it has ceased to operate. The abandoned ruins of Cold War-era military architecture, for example, have been typified as being uncanny and haunting; unsettling affects related to an awareness of the site as an unknown, secret and concealed place.<sup>670</sup> Nevertheless, these subjectivities are significant in their own right as testimony to the meaning-making that continues to shape the social fabric of military sites after their operational use has ended. Capturing these evolving affects at the former AWRE site at Orford Ness has been the aim of environmental artist Antony Lyons, who produced an assemblage of layered recordings presenting the site's 'atmospherics'.<sup>671</sup> Explaining his methodology, Lyons describes how he 'set out to absorb some of the light and dark poetic atmospherics and spaces of Orford Ness, playing with contact-mic and other sonics in this eerie wind-swept shingle landscape of fluid and contested futures. Beginning to explore the challenges of communicating affect and atmosphere via film-based creative research.'<sup>672</sup> The series of videos take viewers across Orford Ness, pausing in concrete bunkers and Second World War huts to capture the acoustics of the space. When combined with the walking interviews employed by Jones and Evans, this type of affective mapping has the potential to contribute to a record of the site that goes beyond its material form, instead incorporating the ethereal and sensory to create a multivocal archive.

While the focus of the formal recording process at Alconbury has been the creation of a photographic and written record, an alternative, almost accidental, archive has nevertheless emerged that has combined a record of personal memories with a multi-dimensional recording of the base's tangible heritage. During the Covid-19 lockdown, for example, Urban & Civic commissioned the production of a virtual reality tour of the Cold War Avionics building. Using 3D mapping, the video allows users virtually 'walk' through the deserted building's warren of rooms.<sup>673</sup> At various points, there is an option to hear more about the purpose of the space from an ARG representative. These interjections provide context to the bare rooms of the bunker. While the tour lacks the affective intensities reported from residents who have visited the Avionics Building in the flesh, technology nevertheless offers accessible opportunities for engagement with the site's material culture. Contributing to this multi-media record has been the recording of memories and stories associated

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<sup>670</sup> Luke Bennett (Ed.), *In the Ruins of the Cold War Bunker: Affect, Materiality and Meaning Making* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), 190.

<sup>671</sup> Antony Lyons, "Orford Ness Atmospherics 1", <https://vimeo.com/142825286> [accessed 21st November 2021]

<sup>672</sup> *ibid*

<sup>673</sup> Alconbury Weald Cold War VR Bunker Tour, *Alconbury Weald*, <https://www.alconbury-weald.co.uk/about/heritage/bunker-tour/> [accessed 19<sup>th</sup> May 2022].

with the site's history, from the Second World War through to the present day. This project has been curated by the Airfield Research Group and supported by Urban & Civic through the donation of an airfield building of the former weapons storage area of the site to house their growing collection chronicling Alconbury's history. In May 2022, ARG board members, Paul and Jeff, welcomed a visit from the daughter of a 92<sup>nd</sup> BG veteran, who was based at Alconbury during the Second World War. Her visit included a tour of the former base and a visit to the Airfield Research Group archive building. During her time at the base - and prompted by the objects in the collection - she imparted some of the anecdotes that her father had shared with her about his time at Alconbury. At Thorpe Abbots, these type of informal walking interviews, shared with volunteers as American veterans and their descendants walk around the site, has been integral to the preservation of embodied memories of the base.<sup>674</sup> Indeed, one long-standing volunteer has begun writing down the stories he has been told by visiting veterans over the years. Engagement with those who are affectively connected to Alconbury is therefore vital to the creation of a palimpsest memory of the former base. The ARG is also making efforts to record the memories of those based at Alconbury during the Cold War years, as well as the serving personnel who operate from the active part of Alconbury airfield. While the connection between the units based at RAF Alconbury and the heritage that remains on the former flying field is not as celebrated as the 100<sup>th</sup> Air Refueling Wing's ancestral relationship with their 'spiritual home' at Thorpe Abbots, there is nevertheless a continuity of military tradition that adds another layer of meaning to the site. Interestingly, some of the Americans stationed at Alconbury have chosen to rent homes on the Weald, further contributing to the complex meaning-making process and cementing links between the site's military past, present and future. Collecting these memories, old and new, is vital to the preservation of Alconbury as a place that has been 'home' to countless individuals and communities, all of whom would have established their own emotional connections with the landscape of the base. By developing creative methods to record these multi-vocal accounts, there is an opportunity to contribute to what Lafluer calls a new 'vocabulary of war...one which mimics and can thus highlight the very terrain war occupies: the everyday, the virtual, the banal, the immanent'.<sup>675</sup>

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<sup>674</sup> Interview with Rob Batley, Curator of the 100<sup>th</sup> BG Memorial Museum.

<sup>675</sup> Marc Lafluer, "Life and death in the shadow of the A-Bomb" in *Nico Carpentier (ed.) Culture, Trauma, and Conflict*, (2015), 225.

### Re-Use

The first and most prominent reuse of Alconbury's material heritage has been the restoration of the Grade-II listed Watch Office, completed in late 2019. In 2021, it was announced that the Watch Office would be leased to restaurant chain and coffee roasters, Bohemia, to offer a new dining experience to the residents of Alconbury. The Nissen hut has subsequently been transformed into a cafe and restaurant, while the adjoining tower is available for private function hire. The cafe has proven to be extremely popular since opening. The metal-clad walls of the Nissen hut reverberate with the sound of chatter as customers enjoy cappuccinos and plates of smashed avocado. The cafe is also popular with US service personnel based at the active part of RAF Alconbury; their accents serving as a reminder of the building's former use and its continued connection to the US military. The stencilled silhouettes of aircraft and decorate the interior of the Nissen hut, above a painted timeline of the base from its construction in 1937 until its closure in 1995. Despite these efforts at heritage interpretation, the affective atmosphere of the building is markedly different from the purported 'special atmosphere' of control tower museums like Thorpe Abbots. Online reviews praise the 'quirky building' and 'funky décor' of the 'cute little establishment', but none pause to comment of the building's commemorative function.<sup>676</sup> The transformation of the site stands in opposition to Schofield's argument that watch towers 'are often sacred sites and as such should engage the visitor, evoking some response which brings the events of 60 years ago into sharp focus.'<sup>677</sup> While the building is not replete from historical interpretation, the provision of information about the site's history lacks the personal stories found at typical Eighth Air Force memorial museums. Outside, the Memorial Green that fronts the building has been purposefully dipped to create 'reverent views' of the building. It could be argued, however, that the Watch Office's affective value lies not in its material form, but in the opportunity it offers to look outwards onto the airfield landscape. The restricted access to the upper floors of the control tower therefore threatens to disrupt the symbiotic relationship between the tower and its setting; a landscape already eroded by the demolition of all other Second World War-era buildings on this part of the site.

Despite the commercial reuse of the building, one interviewee believed that Bohemia presented a sustainable use for the historic structure. While most residents would only visit a museum or memorial on the site once or twice, a coffee shop offered a place to return to time and time again,

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<sup>676</sup> Examples of Google Reviews for "Bohemia Alconbury Weald" (accessed 19<sup>th</sup> May 2022)

<sup>677</sup> Schofield, *Aftermath*, 57.

she argued.<sup>678</sup> This opinion appears to be shared by the majority of those questioned. Of the 20 people surveyed, only one disagreed with the decision to convert the Watch Office to a cafe.<sup>679</sup> The fact that 90 per cent of respondents had visited Bohemia is itself indicative of the building's appeal within the local community. Taking the argument that the production of locality begins with the affective orientation of local subjects, then these repeated encounters wear 'grooves or ruts into people's bodies and minds', causing the building to take on a new meaning to those who frequent it, even if this value is not directly related to its historic use.<sup>680</sup> When asked what they thought was the most prominent reminder of Alconbury Weald's history, three quarters of respondents mentioned the Watch Office in their answer. Perhaps because of its isolation as a last remnant of the Eighth Air Force base, juxtaposed amid a plethora of new development, the Watch Office has established itself as a historical landmark within the new locality. While the reuse of the control tower breaks the commemorative mould established in the post-war years for the restoration and sanctification of Eighth Air Force control towers, it nevertheless serves as a collective mnemonic of the site's wartime past and a space for the production of new emotional connections.

While the restoration of the Watch Office was not without its difficulties, its associated connotations as a Second World War-era building has arguably made its incorporation into Alconbury Weald's landscape more straightforward than its Cold War counterparts. Situated within a well-established national code of remembrance, the heritage of the Second World War is cemented in the cultural memory of the US and the UK – its meaning relatively unchallenged.<sup>681</sup> In contrast, the Cold War is part of a contested memory still inherently linked to world politics, its significance constantly shifting as a result. The future of the Cold War buildings on the site has understandably presented a myriad of challenges for the developers, not least finding a suitable use that will complement the unconventional size and form of the military structures. Nevertheless, the designation of the Avionics Building and two Extra-Wide Hardened Aircraft Shelters (built to house U-2 spy planes) as Grade II\* has made finding suitable new uses for the buildings essential. At the Outline Planning stage, Urban & Civic proposed the creation of a 'Cold War Heritage Area' around the listed buildings and the building surrounding them. This area will be designed to 'tell the unique story of this place's role in intelligence gathering at some of the most frightening periods of our history.'<sup>682</sup> It is the potentially troubling affects that this 'frightening' heritage may have on residents that has encouraged Urban & Civic to offer this question to local residents: 'Given the military

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<sup>678</sup> Interview with Alconbury Weald resident, April 2022.

<sup>679</sup> Responses from online survey conducted in April 2022.

<sup>680</sup> Waterton, Watson, Tolia-Kelly (eds). *Heritage, Affect and Emotion*, 118.

<sup>681</sup> Jorg Echtenkamp and Stephan Jaeger (Eds.), *Views of Violence: Representing the Second World War in German and European Museums and Memorials*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 256.

<sup>682</sup> "Heritage Area", Alconbury Weald, [https://consultation.alconbury-weald.co.uk/heritage-area/#gf\\_2](https://consultation.alconbury-weald.co.uk/heritage-area/#gf_2) [accessed 20<sup>th</sup> May 2022].

nature of this area in the development, how do we ensure it is engaging, positive and reflective?’<sup>683</sup> Suggested uses have ranged from a cinema, bowling alley and art studio, to an archery range and laser quest arena. Others have called for the creation of a museum or heritage centre to share the story of Alconbury’s role in the Cold War. The divergent uses of the Cold War buildings, ranging from leisure venues to commemorative spaces, has only added to the problems of building a diverse new community within the ruins of a military past. However, Schofield reminds us that the heritage of conflict gains much of its significance through its ‘discord value’, and its ability to trigger debate about the past and inspire thoughts of the future.’<sup>684</sup> Situating the Cold War bunker in the present therefore requires ‘an adept blending of the affective (making the place touch the visitor), world-embracing materiality and an openness to meaning-making.’<sup>685</sup> Some degree of provocation in the re-use of these spaces can be seen as an essential part of encouraging affective experiences that engage people with the materiality of the buildings on a more personal level.<sup>686</sup>



Figure 34 1991 aerial photograph of the U2/TR-1 hangars at RAF Alconbury, with the extent of the Heritage Area identified (Source: Urban & Civic)

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<sup>683</sup> *ibid*

<sup>684</sup> Schofield, *Combat Archaeology*, 111.

<sup>685</sup> Luke Bennett, (ed.) *In the Ruins of the Cold War Bunker: Affect, Materiality and Meaning Making* (Landham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), 240

<sup>686</sup> *ibid*

In order to mitigate against the loss of the site's built fabric, the developers have emphasised their commitment to preserving the 'memory' of Alconbury's military use, through architectural details, street names, landscaping, and the reuse of certain recovered airfield artefacts, such as wall art and approach lights.<sup>687</sup> The most prominent example of this preservation is the decision to retain the linear space of the runway as a public park. The protection of this footprint is intended to maintain a visual link between the surviving historic buildings and the iconic runway, enabling the area's historic function to be read in context. While not explicitly mentioned, the creation of a type of memory-scape through the retention of certain fragments of the airfield's wartime form resonates with the notion of the absent presence discussed in the previous chapter. The plans to retain the 'ghost' of the runway in the landscape allude to the attempts to cultivate the spectral into the everyday landscaping of the development, in what Edensor might use as an example of the 'mundaneity of haunting, which arises through both banal and spectacular processes of urban change and production of obsolescence.'<sup>688</sup> Of course, in this context, the runway is not becoming obsolete, unlike the rusting Nissen hut or fading wall art of the typical Eighth Air Force base, but rather transformed and regenerated after decades of abandonment. Will these attempts at curating memory through careful landscaping, memorialisation and appropriation invoke the airfield's ghosts or banish them? As this thesis has alluded to, perhaps the question is not so clear cut. 'Ghosts' and the affective intensities they generate do not always follow orders; their presence can be captured and transmitted through everyday technologies of memory, ranging from photography and archiving, to sharing memories on a community Facebook page (the 'mundaneity of haunting', to quote Edensor). Through the prosthetics of memory, Alconbury's ghosts are allowed to walk on crutches, even if their demesne is restricted.

## Interpretation

As part of my research, I interviewed a town planner who bought a house on Alconbury Weald in 2020. Our conversation was particularly insightful as she'd previously written her Masters dissertation on the consultation of stakeholders in the planning process at Alconbury Weald.<sup>689</sup> When asked what persuaded her to move to the Weald, particularly after gaining an inside knowledge of the site's development through her own research, she explained that it was Urban & Civic's commitment to landscaping, its design policies, and community engagement that confirmed her choice. She was impressed with small planning details, such as the planting of mature trees to make the development feel like it was an established community, and the incorporation of traditional

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<sup>687</sup> Heritage Strategy (July 2012), *Urban and Civic*, 19.

<sup>688</sup> Tim Edensor, "Mundane Hauntings: Commuting through the Phantasmagoric Working-Class Spaces of Manchester, England", *Cultural Geographies* Vol.15, No. 3 (July 2008), 314.

<sup>689</sup> Interview with Alconbury Weald resident, April 2022.

materials into the design of the houses and apartment blocks, such as the use of limestone typical of the Cambridgeshire area. The vernacular also extended to the adoption of wide streets reminiscent of American neighbourhoods. These touches set Alconbury apart from the 'boxy' rows of new builds found on other new estates. Alconbury's 'sense of place', to quote her terminology, was also influenced by its historic past. She commended the sensitive restoration of the control tower, which serves as a focal point for the new community, while she found the naming of roads after individuals associated with Alconbury's history a fitting nod to the site's past. For example, on the Enterprise campus, streets have been named after engineers, aircrew and aeroplanes that flew from Alconbury. These markers often force her to think about the site's military history, compelling her to find out the story behind the names. However, she admitted that she is 'always looking for those types of things' and other residents might not actively seek out the meaning behind these gestures. She suggested that understanding among residents would improve once the developers had installed historical interpretation and way-markers. Returning to Chapter One and the phenomenological importance of identifying and navigating the topography of the base, it could be argued that the significance of orientating residents through familiarisation with the geography of the base has come full circle.

In recent years, heritage scholars have explored how affect theory can be applied to interpretation to offer 'more-than-representational' experiences for visitors.<sup>690</sup> This process involves engaging visitors with the past on a sensory and emotional level, through interpretative content that encourages visitors to engage with the intangible, as well as the tangible. Alongside traditional methods of conveying information, curators can attempt to transmit a place's atmosphere through sensory experiences that make people feel the past. Smith, Wetherell and Campbell argue that affective interpretation should be 'flexible, contextual, contingent and [an] ongoing construction and assembling of bodily sensations, events, meanings and consequences'.<sup>691</sup> Affective interpretation should not necessarily make people feel a set emotion, such as joy or sadness, but a multitude of sensations as they co-construct their encounter with their own memories and personal relationship to the past.<sup>692</sup> The final section of this chapter will evaluate the extent to which the delivery of the Alconbury Weald has resulted in more-than-representational encounters for the new residents at Alconbury.

Urban & Civic are in the process of consulting with residents about the form that Alconbury's historical interpretation should take. On the developer's website, members of the public are invited

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<sup>690</sup> See Campbell, Smith and Wetherell (Eds.) *Emotion, Affective Practices, and the Past in the Present*, 2018.

<sup>691</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>692</sup> Anna Fielding, "'Going Deeper than "Emotional Impact": Heritage, Academic Collaboration and Affective Engagements"', *History* Vol.107, No. 375 (2022), 413-4.



to select from various examples of waymarking, such as totem information boards, curved walls, engraved floor tiles, or contemporary sculptures, which would be used to convey historical information as part of a site-wide heritage trail. Public art has been promoted in Urban & Civic's design policy as a method of engaging and inspiring local residents. The favoured medium is muralism, due to its potential to visually mark the location of demolished airfield structures. The developers explained that 'the former airfield activities provide many points of reference for art work including the iconic typography and murals painted on runways and building elevations.'<sup>693</sup> The incorporation of wall art into Alconbury Weald's design code draws inspiration from the type of wall art produced at Eighth Air Force bases, where paintings were used to reflect the collective identity and values of the group, such as in the Wingert 'sweatin' out the mission' mural discussed in Chapter One. In Urban & Civic's proposals, muralism will attempt to evoke pride, or at the very least, awareness of the site's history, reminiscent of the Depression-era Post Office murals, which were designed to reinforce a particular set of local values through the invocation of a glorified past.

Despite the planned efforts to engage residents with the site's military history, it could be argued that it is not the tangible heritage that is most affective, but rather the intangible resonances that pervade the new development. One informant enjoyed how the routine of the Americans based at RAF Alconbury seeped into the everyday lives of Weald residents. For example, at 5pm every day the sound of the UK and US national anthems reverberates across the Weald from the base's loudspeakers to coincide with the daily flag lowering ceremony. This patriotic infraction takes most new residents by surprise, but has quickly become part of Alconbury Weald's daily rhythm and a sensory reminder of its continued links with the US military. Along with the presence of US military jets in the skies overhead, many residents interpret the anthems as a reassuring disturbance. 'I enjoy it, it's like the school bell - hear the national anthem and you stop work' commented one resident, 'it always makes my day but I couldn't say why', remarked another.<sup>694</sup> Reminiscent of the synchronisation of the air crew's watches prior to a mission, the daily sound collectively orientates the new community and its military neighbours in the present.

Several times a year, the base practices its emergency security drills. During these exercises an air raid siren is played through the base's tannoy system, loud enough to be heard on the Weald. One informant described her confusion at hearing this 'spooky' sound for the first time. She was affected by the drone and felt a chill as she was reminded how 'this must have been what it felt like to have lived here before'.<sup>695</sup> Every few months the Alconbury Weald community Facebook group receives post from confused residents (many of whom are new arrivals to the estate) asking about the

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<sup>693</sup>Heritage Strategy (July 2012), *Urban and Civic*, 238.

<sup>694</sup> Alconbury Weald Living Facebook Group, replies to post dated 23 April 2020

<sup>695</sup> *ibid*

strange noises. 'I've been hearing an old fashioned siren this morning. Can anyone tell me what it's about please?' asked one resident. One reply suggested that it was coming from the local primary school, which had been holding a Second World War educational day, while others believed it was another drill being conducted by the USAF base. The transcendent quality of the noise has a powerful affect on the community, although its interpretation varies from individual to individual. While some see it as a nostalgic reminder of the past life of the base, others view it as a foreboding omen of uncertain futures, particularly given the development's location amid the ruins of the Cold War. 'Very apocalyptic!' wrote one resident. Another agreed with her, 'that's such a good description of it! I can't get that image out of my mind'.<sup>696</sup> Others are quick to reassure their unsettled neighbours that they will soon get used to the noises, arguing that the strange sounds from the base should in fact be seen as reassuring reminders that Alconbury Weald has one of the world's most powerful security forces on its doorstep. 'At least we will be the first to know in the event of attack. Really find it quite interesting living here. It beats so many other places,' commented one Facebook user, while another joked about being able to use one of the Cold War bunkers in the event of a nuclear attack.<sup>697</sup> The celebration of the auditory leaks as a part of community life at Alconbury is emphasised by the praise for the US Air Force's decision to sound the base sirens during the national 'Clap for Carers' event to show support to frontline workers during the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>698</sup> The relationship between the base's past, its present, and future is enlivened by the military activity that takes place at RAF Alconbury; a sensory experience that was not foreseen in the planning process. The possibility that the US base may soon close (although current world events have put any plans on hold for the foreseeable future) raises questions about how the affective relationship between the two sites should be recorded and preserved.

The impact of these daily auditory reminders of the base's military connections emphasises the affective potential of sensory encounters with the site's military past and present. Jay Winters explains the potential of 'immersive history' to 'bring visitors into virtual contact with the past' by reproducing and projecting the sights, sounds and smells of the wartime experience.<sup>699</sup> One of the most creative attempts at engaging new residents with the site's Cold War heritage is an ongoing collaboration with a local drama group. In 2016, 40 young people designed and performed an immersive performance, titled *Top Secret*, in the former Avionics Building. A local audience enjoyed a show featuring animation, sound, film, and performance revealing the 'secrets' of RAF Alconbury.<sup>700</sup> As part of the performance, young people dressed in military uniforms took members of the public

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<sup>696</sup> Alconbury Weald Living, Facebook, August 5 2020

<sup>697</sup> Alconbury Weald Living, Facebook, 24 September 2020

<sup>698</sup> Alconbury Weald Living, Facebook, April 2 2020

<sup>699</sup> Jorg Echtenkamp and Jaeger Stephan (eds.), *Views of Violence: Representing the Second World War in German and European Museums and Memorials* (Berghahn Books, 2019), 255.

<sup>700</sup> "Top Secret at Alconbury Weald", *New International Encounter*, <https://nie-theatre.com/projects/top-secret-at-alconbury-weald>, [accessed 24<sup>th</sup> May 2022].

on guided tours of the bunker. The immersive tours were part of a schedule of events organised each year for Heritage Open Days. Other events aimed at connecting people to the site's heritage included Lindy Hop dancing and Big Band music; Second World War reenactor displays; a 'Voices from the Past' reading, and a showcase of artefacts uncovered from the airfield by the Airfield Research Group. Held every year, these events are typically well-attended, with tickets for the free bunker tours selling out in a matter of hours. In 2021, Urban & Civic launched its own podcast to share the history and archaeology of Alconbury Weald.<sup>701</sup> Fronted by a public historian, the podcast featured interviews with residents, developers, and experts to promote and disseminate the site's heritage. All of these attempts at conveying Alconbury's history are connected by their utilisation of storytelling to engage the community with the history of the site. As evidenced in the previous chapter, storytelling has the potential to transmit and solidify affective connections between communities and places. From the sharing of war stories around the barrack stove at Shipdham to the intergenerational dissemination of anecdotes in the 100<sup>th</sup> BG Foundation newsletter, storytelling has orientated wartime and post-war communities through the sharing of common experiences and collective memories. The continuation of this affective practice across generations and geographies offers the potential to weave Alconbury's military past into the cultural memory of the new community.

However, it is also worth thinking about how the site's silences can be utilised in the affective practices of contemplation and commemoration. Arguing that there are elements of war's knowledge and experience that cannot be technologically reproduced, or talked about, Winters emphasises the importance of 'communicative silences' as a means of conveying the traumatic, incomprehensible parts of war.<sup>702</sup> When thinking about the Cold War - a period punctuated by archival, cultural, and social silences - it is arguably silence that enables the true contemplation of their meaning and significance. Deleuze argues that the encountered sign is often more affective than the explicit testimony because it engages a subject in different ways, both emotionally and sensorially.<sup>703</sup> Amid discussions about the installation of go-kart tracks, cinemas, shopping centres and museums into the Cold War buildings, perhaps there is an argument to be made for incorporating the emotive power of silence into the presentation of Alconbury's wartime relics. Like the cracked Eighth Air Force runway and forlorn control tower, it is in these moments of stillness that the sensory experience of the past most often comes alive the present.

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<sup>701</sup> "Alconbury Weald Stories" Podcast, *Urban & Civic*, released in July 2020.

<sup>702</sup> Jay Winter, *War Beyond Words: Languages of Remembrance from the Great War to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 202.

<sup>703</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, trans R. Howard (New York: Georges Braziller, 1964).

## Conclusion

This thesis illustrates the complexity, resilience, and at times, ambiguity of East Anglia's Second World War bases and the communities that call them 'home'. By viewing each airfield as a rhizomatic network of people, places, objects, and temporalities, I have shown why these sites are not static mnemonics for the past, but complex localities that derive their meanings from an entanglement of the discursive and the pre-discursive. Through the historical and anthropological study of a precarious community shaped by the peculiarities of air combat, this thesis has shown the various ways that affect – in this case morale - shapes placemaking practices, in turn producing distinctive localities that are 'thick' with affect. Countering the assumption that Second World War military communities fell apart at the end of hostilities, I have shown how the bomb groups of the Eighth Air Force were maintained through translocal practices that strengthened and aggravated the affective connections that continued to hold the assemblage together. Through the affective practices of storytelling, myth-making, and memorialising, the group transmitted and circulated affect across time and space.

To reach these conclusions, this thesis has first set out to understand how and why airfields have become sites that have – from their earliest beginnings - made people *feel* something. Chapter Two focuses on two concepts rooted in phenomenology - 'morale' and 'home' - to explore the establishment of affective connections between bodies primed for war. It has shown how morale, defined in this thesis as an affect, was generated and maintained on the ground as a means of fortifying men against the emotional trauma of events in the air. Home, meanwhile, has been proven to be a complex, multidimensional - and above all – affective construct comprising a web of emotional connections to people, time, places, and objects. For the commanders, and the men themselves, the production of familiar, domesticated localities was necessary for alleviating the fear and anxiety brought about by the unique character of bombing warfare, which asserted enormous physiological and psychological strain on the human body through the relentless proximity of death and the unnerving anticipation of each mission. However, the 'homes' produced at Eighth Air Force bases were unique in that as much as they were produced in opposition to the uncanniness of war, so too were they the product of its affects. This is reflected in the distinctive material culture that emerged at each base, such as the incorporation of airfield detritus into furnishings (bomb fin ash trays, for example) and the carving of mission counts onto the walls of a barrack hut.

The routine of flying missions wore grooves in the minds and material of the base, coating the airfield with lingering residual affects. Of most significance, was the notion of 'the return' as an affective practice that was enacted by those in the air and by those 'sweating it out' on the ground. This routine, repeated day after day, helped to cement the affective connections between men, their unit, and the airfield landscape. To be a local subject at Shipdham equated to the orientation of the

individual towards an uncertain future as part of a collective group. As an article in *Army Talks* (a series aimed giving the U.S soldier 'psychological preparation for combat') explained, 'a bomber base is something like a mining town back home. Each day a large part of its population sets out on the one big and dangerous job for which it exists. The rhythm of its life, like that of the mining town, follows the pace of the one industry.'<sup>704</sup> It was through this syncopated rhythm -exercised through training, *esprit de corps*, and communal living - that the 'affect of home' was produced as a means of countering the negative affects of anticipation. Within this collective narrative, the absent presences of the dead were overcome by hope of the future, while the yearning for the pre-war past was replaced by the camaraderie and familial relations of the present.

The homes produced at Eighth Air Force bases therefore comprise an assemblage spread across multiple temporal and spatial contexts. Indeed, it was the personnel's positioning within this web that dictated how they would interpret the affects that circulated around the base. To emotionally sustain this fragile military community, it was essential that its members were tightly bound in the present and orientated towards a collective goal in the future. The base therefore earned its affectivity as the epicentre of this rhizomatic map, where contexts shifted, emerged, and overlapped. Home could at once be the distant shores of America or the immediate safety of the barrack hut, however it was at the base that these nodes surfaced as a home in the present. The emotional effects of multiple homes are apparent in the recollections of 44<sup>th</sup> BG veteran Jacob T. Elias, who recalled the scene in his Nissen hut on the completion of his final mission,

*"I look at the guys, stretched out on their bunks, reading, or sitting on the edge, writing a letter. Van Rogers is heating water for tea, dropping a extra piece of wood down the insatiable throat of that little stove to hurry up the heat. Harry Ricketts is sowing a button on his jacket, almost as though he knew what he was doing. Elvin Scheetz is writing a letter. How I hate to leave them, as much as I want to go home! What a wrench to go from them. That scene made a mark on my consciousness that has faded but never gone."*<sup>705</sup>

For Elias, and thousands of other veterans, the passing years prompted a yearning to return to the scenes of their youth. This return would be facilitated in the decades following the war through the structured pilgrimage of veterans and their families to the abandoned airfields of the Eighth. As Chapter Three argues, the ruined airfield sites were populated by absent presences, articulated by veteran returnees and local people as 'ghosts'. Just as the buildings of Thorpe Abbots became dilapidated by years of neglect, the social fabric of the base became weakened and distorted by the diaspora of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group community and the sedimentation of memories onto airfield

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<sup>704</sup> 'On Base: Striking Arm of the Eighth' *Army Talks for the Eighth Air Force*, Vol 1. No. 3, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1945, p.4

<sup>705</sup> Jacob T. Elias, Second Air Division Association Newsletter, Vol 16, No.2, June 1978, 1.

objects, buildings, and landscapes. These phantasmal apparitions were not supernatural in nature, but rather the result of a locality tangibly and intangibly eroded by the passage of time.

This rupture was overcome by the establishment of a translocal community, brought together in reunions; through the circulation of written accounts; and in trans-national preservation efforts at Thorpe Abbots. Through this framework, myth and memory entwined to strengthen the identity of the Bloody Hundredth. In doing so, Thorpe Abbots became a focal point of commemoration as the 'final home' of those who lost their lives, and as an eternal home for the material culture and memories of the survivors left behind. A visit to the museum involves an orientation of the visitor towards the past, physically enacted in their positioning towards the pastoral airfield landscape from the control tower balcony, where their imagination, memory work and materiality combine to bring the past alive in the present. The restoration and sanctification of the control tower as a memorial museum attempted to tame the ghosts of the airfield, curating them among the personal memory objects housed in the museum. The control tower has therefore become an authorised home to the ghosts, reflecting the significance invested in Thorpe Abbots by the veteran community. However, ghosts by nature can never be fully domesticated, as shown by their potential to spill out into the ruined airfield landscape at Thorpe Abbots.

Building on the case study of Thorpe Abbots, which shows how affect can be transmitted and curated, Chapter Four explores the potential of affect to be utilised and managed in the redevelopment of former airfield sites, to create localities that make people *feel at home*. Based on the conclusions reached in the first two chapters, this thesis has shown that the production of a new, meaningful locality can only be achieved through the fostering of affective connections between people and places. The case study of Alconbury Weald is an insightful example of how a developer has adopted 'heritage placemaking' schemes in an attempt to produce a locality that resonates with those who live there. The chapter concluded by looking to the future to consider how the affectivity of military Cold War sites is likely to shift in response to the changing geo-political situation.

The interdisciplinary scope of this thesis offers abundant opportunities for further research; for example, a project which addresses the affective qualities of First World War trenches would allow for a more complete assessment of the evolution of a site's affectivity once a conflict has completely passed from living memory. Likewise, a study of affect in relation to more recent wars, such as the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, opens opportunities for comparing how veteran networks are mobilised in today's societies, particularly considering the role of new technologies of memory. It is hoped that this thesis will encourage further research into the production of locality during times of conflict, and the enduring connections forged between those who once called military bases home.

In conclusion, the bases of the Eighth Air Force reveal significant information about what it means to 'feel at home' in times of war. It proves the resilience, creativity and emotional sensitivity of military communities primed by fear and anxiety, and the importance of the concept of home in countering the negative affects of war. It shows their bases as distinctive localities constructed through complex processes of meaning-making that span time and distance.

## Epilogue

November 2021

It is a misty, dank November day and 'the English countryside, so wan and haggard, [wears] a dismal cloak', to borrow John Nillson's evocative description of Thorpe Abbots air base in 1943.<sup>706</sup> The insistent drizzle quickens our group's steps towards shelter. As Mike Faley would say, 'it is Eighth Air Force weather'. I step inside one of the barracks and survey the scene. Metal beds - neatly made - line the walls of the Nissen hut. By each bedside are an assortment of trinkets and mementoes; framed photographs of sweethearts; handwritten letters from home; baseball cards. Fignments of a previous life. In the centre of the room is a pot-bellied stove, smudged with coal dust. I knock on the flue, expecting to hear the clang of iron. To my surprise, there is only a dull thud. The stove isn't metal at all, it is made from fibreglass.

I sit down on one of the thin mattresses and examine the bed spaces. There is something missing that I can't quite put my finger on. Then it hits me. For all the ephemera scattered nonchalantly on the shelves, the walls themselves are pristine. Having studied photographs of barrack huts and visited surviving buildings - still marked with fading murals and graffiti - I know that the walls of Eighth Air Force bases are canvases for personal expression. Indeed, Chapter Two outlines some examples of how graffiti and communal artwork transmitted affect through the reorientation of those who created and viewed it.

For a moment, this absence in the otherwise convincing recreation of an Eighth Air Force barrack hut reorientates me back into the present day. This time jump is only temporary, for the next stop is the Group Headquarters building, where the realistic piles of hand-typed Missing Aircrew Reports and ashtrays full to the brim with Camel cigarette butts - transports me back to 1943. Like the opening scenes of *Twelve O'Clock High*, I almost expect to hear the rumble of assembling B-17s overhead. This is a film set after all - a little bit of movie magic is to be expected.

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<sup>706</sup> John R. Nillson, 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, *The Story of the Century* (1946), p.25

Our group of 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Memorial Museum volunteers has been graciously invited onto the set of *Masters of the Air*, a new nine-part miniseries co-produced by Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg – the team who created the award-winning WWII series *Band of Brothers* (2001) and *The Pacific* (2010). The production is based on the non-fiction book of the same name, which tells the story of the Eighth Air Force with a particular focus on the exploits of the Bloody Hundredth. The production team have spent years of painstaking research to ensure that the set is an ‘authentic’ reproduction of Thorpe Abbots. It is no surprise then that we all wince when we spot crews dismantling portions of the set behind us. Filming has wrapped up and the site needs to be cleared and returned to the farmland from which it emerged.

However, not every object is destined for the scrap heap or props store. In fact, many items will be donated to the museum at Thorpe Abbots, which is expected to benefit from an influx in visitors following the series’ planned 2023 release. This predicted increase in footfall would follow the precedent set by *Band of Brothers*, which continues to draw visitors to the series’ key locations, two decades after its release. As Sam Edwards has noted, popular retellings of the liberation of France, such as those in *Saving Private Ryan*, the *Call of Duty* video game franchise and *Band of Brothers*, have been integral to reshaping the cultural memory of the Battle of Normandy and its post-war landscapes. In doing so, it has produced a ‘mythic framework’ that orientates visitors in a way that is reminiscent of the influence of *Twelve O’Clock High* on structuring the return of Eighth Air Force veterans to East Anglia.<sup>707</sup> With these precedents in mind, how will the release of the *Masters of the Air* series impact the affective experiences of those who visit the bases? Will the intricate intergenerational transmission of memory within the 100<sup>th</sup> BG community be replaced by a mass-dissemination of dramatised images through the screen? Will visitors arrive at Thorpe Abbots expecting to be entertained by props and movie magic rather than the half-glimpsed ‘ghosts’ that lurk in the shadows of the airfield?

Based on the evidence offered in this thesis, I would argue that the production and consumption of cinematic portrayals of the bombing war do not threaten the affectivity of sites like Thorpe Abbots. Instead, the popularisation of the ‘Mighty Eighth’ narrative has the potential to contribute to the rich web of myth, emotion and experience that makes up the affective assemblage of Eighth Air Force bases. Instead of clouding the visitor’s appreciation for the materiality of the airfields, these mediated images can add to their emotional and historical readings of the site. Indeed, the entwining of history, memory, and myth has been integral to the evolution of how the sites are perceived, viewed, and felt since the war years. Like the influence of *Twelve O’Clock High* on the cultural memory and affective practice of veterans returning to the airfields, a new dramatisation of the Bloody Hundredth may well shift how the base’s materiality is experienced and interpreted. As

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<sup>707</sup> Edwards, *Allies in Memory*, 242.



Roger Freeman hoped, viewers turned visitors may well 'learn something about those young men from a foreign land who once served there, and when they have learned, they will walk out on the field and they too will experience that certain presence which I maintain is there.'<sup>708</sup> As the Second World War slips from living memory, debates are ongoing about how the war and its material legacy should be remembered. In Normandy, criticism has been levelled at the proposed construction of a multi-million-euro immersive audio-visual visitor experience which is stated to 'bring to life to as many as possible this piece of our common history with exactitude, sensitivity and precision'.<sup>709</sup> While its critics have branded the project 'D-Dayland' in reference to its supposed commercialisation of Second World War history, the creators of 'Tribute to Heroes' describe it as a vital 'memory project' that will engage visitors with the site's emotional history long after D-Day has passed from living memory.<sup>710</sup> As this thesis has shown, the affective assemblage at Second World War heritage sites are ambiguous and complex assemblages, represented in the continually shifting balance between absence/presence; memory and myth. Indeed, this thesis has shown that wartime bases are not simply mnemonic backdrops onto which meanings are ascribed. Instead, their material culture is situated within an affective assemblage that combines a complex web of materiel, memory, people, and places. Discussion of the future uses of such sites must consider them as such. To understand and ultimately preserve the emotional significance of these sites, it is essential to get among these affective connections in order to unpick their complex strands.

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<sup>708</sup> "Roger Freeman Speaks at Thorpe Abbots", *Splasher Six*, Summer 1986

<sup>709</sup> "D-day tribute or theme park? Battle rages over Normandy plan", *The Guardian*, 29 August 2022.

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## Interviews

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Interview with Daisy Miller, former Air Ministry secretary at Shipdham, 29 July 2019

Interview with Gary Christopher, 12 March 2020

Interview with Gary Christopher, 5 October 2019

Interview with Mike Faley, 10 October 2019

Interview with Nancy Putman, 100th BG Foundation secretary, 19 August 2020

Interview with Pat Everson, 12th December 2020

Interview with Rob Paley, 100th ARW historian, 14 April 2020

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