

# MEMORIES OF THE AIR WAR IN EAST ANGLIA

## A Nostalgic Tribute to the US 8th Air Force in Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire & Beyond

Martin W. Bowman

*'I was born in London but at the height of the war my family moved to the coastal town of Ipswich in Suffolk. It was there that I gained my first impression of real live Americans. There were about five of them who were very much under the influence of alcohol. Their hats were on the backs of their heads and their ties were every way but the right way. Two of them were sitting on the kerb and the others were holding up a lamp post. They were singing. My immediate thought was, "If this is a sample of the Americans who have come over to help us, heaven help us!"* **M.L. Bury St Edmunds**

*'...It was at 'The Dog' that we were officially welcomed to England... When we entered the little pub, it was almost empty. We went into the room with the dartboard and ordered beer. "What kind of beer?" asked the man behind the counter, a ruddy, pleasant man whose name was Mr. Watson. "Oh just beer" we said. "Is this American money any good?" We conferred about the money and Mr. Watson finally decided to accept it after counsel with his wife. We tried the mild beer. It was weak, watery and warm. "Haven't you anything stronger?" we asked.* **Robert S. Arbib Jr**

These are just two of the huge number of reminiscences of people in East Anglia looking back at the war years, when this peaceful English back-water became 'Little America', home to one of the most intensive military operations ever staged – the air war in Europe. In this fascinating book the author chronicles the lives of ordinary people, of the airmen and others who were involved in the desperate struggle to free Europe from Nazi tyranny. Illustrated with many photographs, taken at the time, and since, this is a superb evocation of a period when two nations were suddenly thrown together in mutual cause, the resultant cultural clash, and the unbreakable bonds that were formed, lasting to the present day.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Martin W. Bowman's interest in Second World War and contemporary aviation was fired by the proliferation of US and RAF air bases in his native East Anglia. He is a widely respected military historian who has written over seventy books on aviation and other related subjects based on years of painstaking and fact-finding research, interviews and correspondence. His quest has taken him to all parts of the world, to twenty-one countries, including the USA, Africa, Australia and Russia and the world's war zones of Mogadishu, Somalia, and Bosnia.

Martin lives in Norwich, Norfolk, England and is active in historical research concerning East Anglia and the many RAF and USAAF squadrons that were based there during the War. He also has a passion for flying in military aircraft and driving British Racing Green sports cars.

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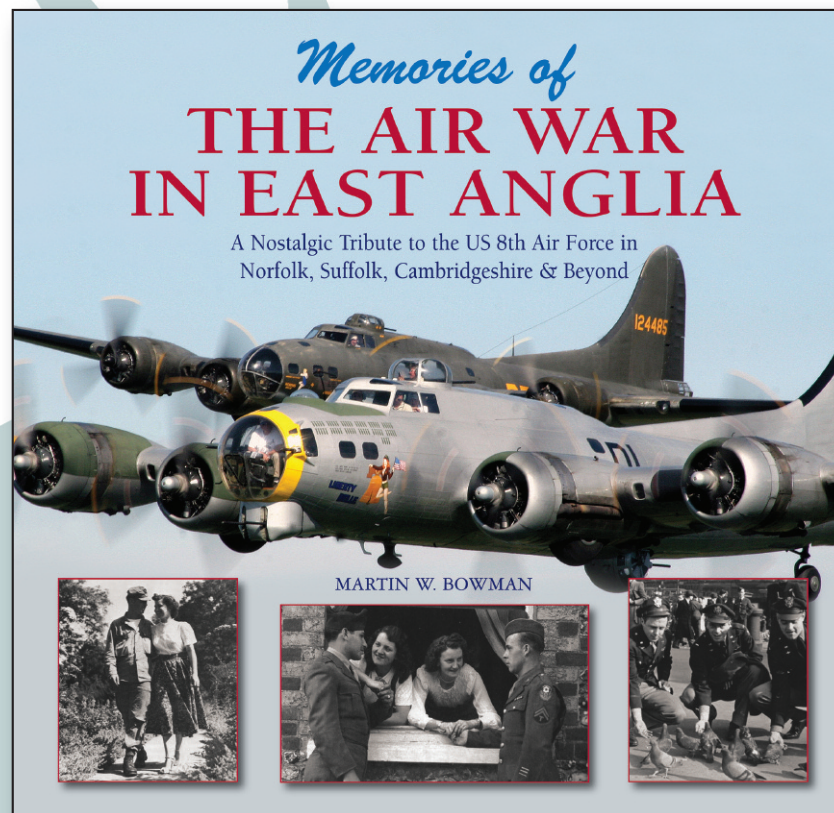
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## HALSGROVE TITLE INFORMATION



**Format:** Hardback, 128 pages, 214x230mm, including over 150 colour photographs  
**Price:** £14.99  
**ISBN:** 978 1 84114 938 7  
**Imprint:** Halsgrove  
**Published:** June 2009



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RAF and American airmen's signatures in the Swan Inn at Lavenham, Suffolk.



These local girls appear to be more happy with their catch than do the Americans.



As with most warm-blooded young men, the US servicemen dreamed of women. This piece of wall art was found at Shipdham.



Framlingham airfield was built in 1942 and was used by the United States Army Air Force Eighth Air Force. It later became an RAF station (Parham).

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Bury St Edmunds from the air, as it looks today.

BURY ST EDMUNDS

Places that I grew to frequent with my English soldier friends were the Atheneum, the Salvation Army Centre in Abbeville Street, where one could get a cup of tea and a sandwich at any hour of the day and the YMCA Hostel where one could have tea in the garden, overlooking the gentle valley to the south and the hill rising beyond it.

The Atheneum Centre was a unique contribution of the people of Bury St Edmunds to the entertainment of the troops stationed there. In peacetime Bury is a grammar town, the headquarters of the Suffolk Regiment. In wartime, Bury Camp was enlarged and made an Infantry Training Centre. Consequently the streets were thronged with fresh-faced recruits, still awkward in their unfamiliar uniforms, as well as with members of the Royal Air Force and the Eighth Air Force, who had many fields in the vicinity.

The Atheneum Club formed the south side of Angel Hill, the large square before the Abbey Gate. On the ground floor of the Club was a large and gracious Right Honourable Assembly Room, used for subscription dances, lectures and the like in peacetime. A group of townpeople, headed by the Mayor, Mr. E. I. D. Lake, converted the room into a canteen for the troops. Committees of volunteers manned the refreshment counter where one could get tea, sand-

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wiches and cakes and a lending library and a mending service occupied each corner of the room. The fare provided by the "Atheneum" as it came to be called was recognized as the best in Bury and it was so cheap that no one could eat a whole shilling-worth, no matter how hungry he was. One afternoon the Reverend Vicar, I sat with a healthy appetite, and I as an experiment, ate the largest tea we could possibly hold, and at the bitter end we found that we had spent only one-and-six between us.

When the Atheneum Canteen was closed at the end of September 1945, it was computed that almost a million and a half servicemen and women had entered its doors. When that figure is multiplied into tea and sandwiches, and then into the cutting of bread, the spreading of jam, and the washing of cups, one can form an idea of the work of these noble women.

Suffolk Summer, John T. Appleby

TREATS

I remember well the artful, the busy streets, the dances, the bomber jackets and especially the indestructible room often besetted on us by the tanks, chocolate, which in luxury-starved

Example of a double-page spread.



Searchlights on Norwich Cathedral celebrating VE Day in 1945.