

East Anglia Air War Project

Special points of interest:

- The research phase for the EAAWP coming to an end
- A series of new documentaries have been released on the history of the 8th Air Force
- How you can be a part of the next phase, writing the books

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East Anglia Air War Newsletter



Fall 2013

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Eighth Air Force History Project Reaches First Milestone

In 2001 Dr. Vernon L. Williams began the East Anglia Air War Project to collect, preserve, and produce the definitive history of the men and women of the Eighth Air Force in World War II.

During the past dozen years, Dr. Williams has traveled across the United States, interviewing air and ground personnel stationed in England with the Eighth Air Force during the war.

Williams also spent the years since 2001 making numerous trips to England where he interviewed British family members who lived in the villages around the American air bases across East Anglia and west into the Midlands. Since beginning the research project, Williams has interviewed hundreds of

American Eighth Air Force veterans and British children and young adults who remem-



An orphan from London visits the 306th Bomb Group at Thurleigh where she christened a B-17 Flying Fortress, the "Sweet Pea." National Archives.

ber the war with clarity and with a sense of awe of the Americans. Now in their 70s and early 80s, these British children speak of the war years as if it were yesterday.

"The next step is to transcribe the oral history interview tapes and begin writing the first books to come out of the research effort," explained Williams.

"Donations and support from many patrons over these years have made it possible to produce this enormous library of oral history interviews across the globe. Now I hope many who are interested in the history of the Eighth Air Force will support the next phase of transcription and writing that will bring new and important books on the military and social history of the air war in the E.T.O." (see details on how you can help on page 8).



Conditions for ground maintenance crews in wartime England proved to be arduous at best. Cold and wet winter weather with aircraft parked on hardstands often placed hard-pressed ground crews in exposed positions as they labored to repair bombers and make them ready for the next mission. 401st Bomb Group (H), Deenethorpe flight line, circa winter 1944. National Archives.



The H. George Cupernall crew and the last flight of the *Dry Gulcher*

“... to preserve the history of both the men and women of the 8th Air Force and the story of the British families who lived and worked in the small rural villages surrounding the American bases in East Anglia.”

Harold Norris, Tail Gunner 532nd BS 381st BG



Search for a 381st Story Begins the East Anglia Air War Project



I had no real knowledge of what had happened to my uncle or anything about the bomb group to which he was assigned. Instead, for the past two decades, I had focused on research and writing history about the American empire period in the late 19th and early 20th century. That would quickly change.

On August 4, 1944 the Cupernall crew took off aboard the B-17 named *Dry Gulcher* for a mission to Peenemunde, Germany. Thirty minutes after takeoff, the plane caught fire while forming up. While the pilot struggled to keep the plane straight and level amid the smoke and fire in the cockpit, the bailout bell sounded and the crew began to exit the aircraft. All of the crew except Norris parachuted to safety, landing in the small village of Shalford, not far from Ridgewell. The aircraft came down not far from the village center, and Harold was found in the wreckage nearby, the only one of the crew to die that day. Today he lies with his comrades at Maddingly Cemetery near Cambridge.

My research on the last flight of the *Dry Gulcher* led to the creation of the East Anglia Air War Project

(EAAWP) and to efforts to preserve the history of both the men and women of the 8th Air Force and the story of the British families who lived and worked in the small rural villages surrounding the American bases in East Anglia. Out of that project have come countless oral history interviews, significant document and photographic archives, and a growing number of film documentary films that I have produced and directed. Soon a number of new academic books will appear, based on the EAAWP Archives.

Soon after I began work on the project, I found myself in rural England with a team of 18 university students, trying to follow the trail back to World War II. One of our first steps was to do an archaeological site survey of portions of the 381st Bomb Group's old Ridgewell base (see page 3). Who knew where it would lead next?

In October 2013 a new film, *Dry Gulcher Down: a B-17's Fiery End over Shalford Village*, will be released, the tenth film produced to date, with more scheduled for release later in 2014 (see page 7 for full details on the film project).

The Ridgewell Site Survey—2002



Part of a university survey team at Ridgewell in 2002.



East Anglia Air War fieldwork and research in England began in earnest in the summer of 2002 when Dr. Vernon L. Williams, together with a team of university students, arrived at Ridgewell in County Essex.

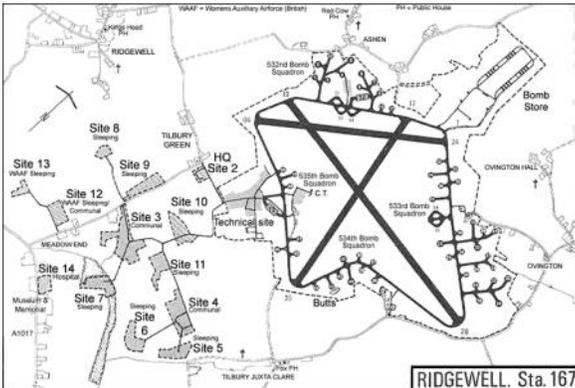
After a series of site visits to a number of World War II locations in England, Williams brought the team to Ridgewell where an archaeological survey was conducted at Sites 3 and 12 at the old base. “I selected a small part of the base to use for our survey work,” Williams explained. “I wanted the team to determine the state of deterioration of the World War II buildings and collateral infrastructure. This began a study of the sense of place that came to be home to the

men of the 381st Bomb Group during the war.” Williams indicated that it is important to track the conditions of the physical environment with the original plat drawings of the base. “To fully understand the people and their world during wartime air operations from East Anglia, it is necessary to know the place—the physical world in which they lived and worked. Today the airfields remain as a lingering reminder of the drama that played out there almost three quarters of a century ago.”

The archaeological studies begun in 2002 marked the beginning of an effort to identify the physical environment in a number of Eighth Air Force stations scattered among the farms and villages throughout East Anglia and west into the Midlands. These studies on the ground became just one part of the preser-

vation efforts of the East Anglia Air War Project. Today the oral history collections, the archives, and the documentary films provide a new basis for the study of the Eighth Air Force in World War II.

“Kinzer and his Tulsa 8th Air Force veterans group made a real difference for the East Anglia War Project at the beginning.”



Lt. Duane Grounds, the only P-51 fighter pilot interviewed at Tulsa in 2003.



Tulsa Eighth AF Group Hosts First EAAWP Oral History Rally

During the summer of 2003, Roland Kinzer of Tulsa and veteran of the 381st Bomb Group, invited Dr. Vernon L. Williams to come to Tulsa to give a presentation on the East Anglia Air War Project. It turned out to be much more.

The Tulsa group took up a collection to fund future in-

terviews and provided a hotel suite for two days of interviewing 8th AF veterans who lived in the Tulsa area. Kinzer organized a volunteer group who manned a check-in desk at the hotel, processed all the oral history release forms as each interview concluded, monitored an area for persons waiting

for their interviews, and assisted Dr. Williams in digitally copying many personal WWII photograph and memorabilia collections after the interviews were completed.

“The Tulsa group hosted the first formal oral history interview rally for the project,” explained Williams.

“They were so gracious and encouraging and their event created momentum for similar events to take place across the United States, England, and Germany. Kinzer and his group made a real difference at the begin-

Oral History—The Americans



Land Girl Ann Brodrick remembers the first Glenn Miller base concert at Thurleigh.

“... hundreds of hours of rich conversation and memory about those days long ago when the Yanks were over there.”

How do you find the thousands of men who flew as air crews or served on the ground in the Eighth Air Force in England over a half century later? The answer proved to be simple: send out a press release with photographs to every newspaper in every community in America—and that is what Dr. Vernon L. Williams did in 2001 and 2002.

The response was overwhelming. Thou-

sands of men or their families wrote, emailed, or called on the telephone.

In the years since that first press release reached the first newspaper, hundreds of digital video interviews have been completed in places across America. Other veterans completed extensive written questionnaires that described their service and the experiences they faced in England and in the skies over

occupied Europe.

What was their relationship with the British families who befriended them in the villages across East Anglia? What did the missions bring to their war experience? Describe bailing out and capture by the Germans. What was Schweinfurt like? Berlin? Dresden? Oschersleben?

These interviews answered many such questions and much more.

Oral History—The British

Where were the surviving British family members who lived in the villages and on the farms surrounding the American airfields in wartime England? Would they remember? Would they talk to me?

In early 2003 I arrived in Great Ellingham near the old Deopham Green

base of the 452nd Bomb Group. I knew no one there but had a single name, Martin Jeffrey. He led me to Ray and Maureen Beales at Hill House Farm. They hosted the next two days where I interviewed seventeen former children and young adults from families nearby. In 2003

they were in their 70s and early 80s. They remembered, and they talked to me.

There began a decade of interviews and hundreds of hours of rich conversation and memory about those days long ago when the Yanks were “over there.”

The Next Step—The Key

The next step is transcribing the oral history interview tapes onto the written page. Only then will this rich collection of memory find its way into the history books and

into the future.

These interviews are the key to preserving the history of the air war for generations of young Americans, many of whom are not yet born. What will they find in their history books about the air war and the victory won in the skies over

Europe? Will they know what was at stake? Will they know of the sacrifice paid? What of the fear of young men who died before they lived? Join with the army of donors who have brought the Project this far—and help take us to the next step. (See details on page 8)

Home Sweet Home



East Anglia Air War



Sweating out the return of aircraft from a mission. National Archives.

306th BGA Provides Momentum and Opportunity

In 2007 the 306th Bomb Group asked the EAAWP for help in keeping the Association independent as it struggled to make the transition from veteran leadership to one where second generation members could take the helm and lead the organization into the next phase of preserva-

tion and remembrance.

It was just the kind of work the Project was looking for. In the six years since taking over many of the responsibilities for the 306th BGA, the EAAWP has chaired 306th BG reunions in Ft. Worth, Washington, D.C., San Diego and Savannah.

Student interns and Dr. Vernon L. Williams began work on an extensive list of projects and activities designed to support the 306th BG organization.

- Design and establish a website for the bomb group
- Digitize and make available to the public an extensive array of historical materials relating to the 306th Bomb Group in WWII
- Create a memorial service video tradition of tribute to the unit's KIAs and those who recently folded their wings
- Establish a traditional Friday evening reunion event under the theme of First Over Germany
- Produce historical programming that emphasized the history of the bomb group

The project offered great experience for university interns and an opportunity to learn more about WWII, up close and personal. A more complete story on the 306th Bomb Group project will be featured in the next issue of this newsletter.

“Students learn history firsthand by doing historical work.”

Williams

Medics and surgeons stabilize a gunner aboard a fortress.



Memorial to the Dry Gulcher Crew at Shalford Village—2008

On June 28, 2008, Shalford citizens were on hand to welcome a small contingent of Americans arriving to dedicate a memorial stone to the crew of the *Dry Gulcher*. The Flying Fortress crashed in the village on August 4, 1944. The tail gunner, Sgt. Harold F. Norris was killed

while the other nine members of the crew successfully parachuted into the village. The last flight of the B-17 had lasted 30 minutes.

Family and friends assembled at the church yard where the memorial now stands, just yards away from the crash site. Afterwards the

village hosted the visitors to a lunch and the East Anglia Air War Project hosted a photographic exhibition on the *Dry Gulcher* and Shalford village during the wartime years. Dr. Vernon Williams offered the villagers a sneak preview of the upcoming film, *Dry Gulcher Down*.

The film is now in post-production and *Dry Gulcher Down* will be released in October 2013, one of two feature documentary films on the 381st BG to be available this fall. (see details on page 7).



Dr. Vernon L. Williams
Director
East Anglia Air War
Project

“... has traveled across the United States and throughout England, interviewing the WWII generation.”

About the Historian

Dr. Williams grew up in an Air Force family during the 1940s and 1950s. His father, M/SGT Andrew L. Williams, served first in the Army Air Force in 1942 and later retired from the U.S. Air Force in 1964. During World War II Sgt. Williams served in the Pacific war with the 509th Composite Group, the unit that flew the two atomic bomb missions from Tinian Island in 1945. Sgt. Williams was responsible for the modifications to the bomb bay of the *Enola Gay*, the B-29 aircraft assigned the first mission to Hiroshima. Later he named his only daughter after the famed aircraft, Enola Gay Williams Boyd. Interestingly, in recent years Enola Gay worked for Boeing Aircraft, the very firm that manufactured the B-29 bearing her name.

During the years growing up, Dr. Williams traveled with his family while his father served in assignments in England, Bermuda, Okinawa, Amarillo AFB, Westover AFB before returning to Amarillo AFB where his father retired in 1964. These early years nurtured a growing respect for the men and women who served in the military as the future historian grew up on air bases scattered across the globe. Later he would write of these World War II veterans whom he had encountered growing up

and eventually would dedicate his career to the preservation of the history of WWII America.

Professor Williams' uncle, S/SGT Harold F. Norris served as a tail gunner in the 381st Bomb Group at Ridgewell, England (see story on page 2).

A veteran of the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Army in the 1960s, Williams returned to civilian life to attend the university, the first person in his family to do so. In 1985 Williams received a doctorate in American military history from Texas A&M University. His dissertation focused on the history of the U.S. Navy in the Philippines during the Spanish-American War in 1898 and the years that followed. After graduation Williams began a long career of teaching and writing military history that continues to this day.

Early publications include chapters on naval history in several books, articles and essays in numerous publications, and papers presented at conferences for over twenty-five years.

Dr. Williams has taught military history for over twenty-five years. During the past five years Williams has moved his scholarship into World War II and all of his research and writing deals with the air war and the impact that conflict had on the people of that generation. He has written nu-

merous papers on the Eighth Air Force and wartime operations in Britain's East Anglia region. He is currently working on the first book coming from the more than decade long research on the Eighth Air Force in World War II, tentatively titled: *Crucible of War: The Anglo/American Cultural Exchange in World War II England, 1942-1945*

Professor Williams has traveled across the United States and throughout England, interviewing the WWII generation. In the United States he has interviewed hundreds of air and ground crews who served in the Eighth Air Force in wartime England. In England, Williams has sought out British family members who lived in the small rural villages that surrounded the American bases during the war. Young boys and girls, together with older brothers and sisters, have detailed their experiences living among the “Yanks” during the war. Using the growing archives and these extraordinary digital video interviews of both the Americans and their British neighbors, Dr. Williams has produced and directed ten documentary films about life in the East Anglia farm lands and the air front that extended from runways across England's heartland, deep into the darkness that was Hitler's empire in Europe.

THE AIR WAR COLLECTION

THE EIGHTH AIR FORCE

SUPPORT THE EAST ANGLIA AIR WAR PROJECT
Share the Past, Shape the Future

Proceeds benefit the preservation of Eighth Air Force History

The Air War Collection

A continuing series of historical documentaries on the Eighth Air Force and the air war in England during World War II. This series is produced and directed by historian and film maker Vernon L. Williams.

From Pyote to Fortress Europe

The 381st Bomb Group & the Air War in Europe
 58 minutes \$29.95 postpaid
Traces the story of the 381st BG from Pyote, Texas to Ridgewell, England where the group brought the war deep into Germany's heartland. Release: September 2013

Dry Gulcher Down

A B-17's Fiery End Over Shalford Village
 58 minutes \$29.95 postpaid
Details the last flight of the flying fortress named Dry Gulcher and explores the fate of the ten-man crew on that early August 1944 morning. Release: October 2013

Thurleigh at War

Bedfordshire and the Anglo-American Struggle for Victory in World War II 75 minutes \$29.95 postpaid
The story of British families and young Americans in Bedfordshire who joined together in the struggle for victory in WWII.

Deopham Green

The Saga of the 452nd Bomb Group in WWII
 58 minutes \$29.95 postpaid
Deopham Green tells the dramatic story of the men of the 452nd BG and the British families who lived on or near their base at Deopham Green in World War II England.

Thurleigh Memories

The 306th Bomb Group in World War II
 58 minutes \$29.95 postpaid
Explores the group's early training in the U.S. and includes a dramatic look at combat over occupied Europe and the extraordinary support provided by the ground crews.

Hell's Angels

The 303rd Bomb Group in the Battle for Europe
 58 minutes \$29.95 postpaid
Documents the remarkable record the group compiled on the air front against Germany--includes eye witness accounts and astonishing archival footage.

Liberators Over East Anglia

The Second Air Division in World War II
 58 minutes \$29.95 postpaid
Traces the story of the fourteen Liberator bomb groups in the Second Air Division and the victory won in the skies over Europe.

Target for Today

92 minutes. \$29.95 postpaid
A newly remastered digital preservation from the original film stock in the National Archives.

Deopham at War

The Anglo-American Experience in Wartime Norfolk, 1939-1945 58 minutes \$29.95 postpaid
This is the story of British families and young American airmen as they manned the air war in County Norfolk, East Anglia.

Deenethorpe

The 401st Bomb Group & the Quest for Peace, 1943-45 58 minutes \$29.95 postpaid
A unique look at the men who spearheaded the air war against Germany and the price that they had to pay.

New Documentaries Help Support East Anglia Projects

Grants and private donations have helped fund the preservation work of the East Anglia Air War Project since the beginning. More funding was needed to underwrite the ambitious program of oral history interviews that reached across the nation and the world. The documentary

films produced by Dr. Williams since 2004 have supported the interviews and the research that has been necessary to preserve the memory of those who served in the Eighth Air Force.

You can make a difference as we enter the new phase of transcription and

writing the Eighth Air Force story. Consider ordering these films for family, friends, your local schools and libraries. Each documentary presents Eighth Air Force personnel as they tell part of the story and offer some memories of their own role in the war

Support
 The East Anglia
 Air War Project





East Anglia Air War Project

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- ◆ P51 Mustang \$ 1,000
- ◆ P47 Thunderbolt \$ 500
- ◆ P38 Lighting \$ 250
- ◆ Rainbow Corner \$ 100
- ◆ Piccadilly \$ 50

Share the Past to Shape the Future

You can help save the history of the East Anglia Air War

All donations to the East Anglia Air War Project are tax deductible. Your donations will help make it possible to take the next step—transcribing and processing the oral history tape collection in support of a series of new books on the men who served in the Eighth Air Force in World War II. Your tax-deductible contribution will help save these precious memories for generations of Americans and Brits who are not yet born. Help them stay connected to the World War II generation. Send in your check or credit card contribution today.

~~Xerox this form and include with your contribution.~~

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