



First Departures to England

All war fronts of the Second World War fall under acknowledged areas of war-designations for united effort. They were known as a theatre of war operations.

In the land of knighthood, medieval castles, Irish jaunting-cars, teas and cakes, kings and queens, Great Britain's long lineage of great songs, legends, laws and way of life, the first Army divisions from the United States landed in the European Theatre (Theater) in 1942—the parlance of the time.

For the record, each theater comprises land, air and sea areas invaded or defended, including involvement of what is necessary for administrative establishments and agencies pertaining to the forces in the theater, according to an old war book. A theater is divided normally into a combat zone, the area required for direct active war operations, and a communications zone; all were fixed by the War Department. In these zones millions of Americans were stationed during the Second World War.

The very first troops arrived in Europe quietly and remotely in Belfast at Duffering Quay in No. Ireland in January. They were not very much less than five thousand. To most of these soldiers who later went to England, "overseas" did not initially appear bombed-out as the news pictures sent back home portrayed her to be. But, this was partly because few troops actually ventured

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into places such as London.

Forthwith are all the Theaters from all around the world and related commands: The European Theater of Operations; the Pacific Theater of Operations (divided into the S.W. and the Central Pacific); the China-Burma-India Theater of Operations; the Army Forces South Atlantic Theater; the Mediterranean Theater of Operations; the Caribbean Command; the North-East and central Canada Commands; the Greenland Command; the Iceland and the Labrador Commands; the Alaskan Commands; the Persian Gulf Command; and the Bermuda Command.

By June of 1942, the intensity of American involvement to counter the Nazi menace at the expense of the Far East took precedence and deepened with more Lend-Lease and heavier overseas involvement of American military. As of mid-June, well over 38,000 American soldiers were in Great Britain and, with the passing of each month, the numbers were reaching new heights.

U.S. GIs arrived by air or ship. If by ship, they customarily disembarked from small transport liners (the *Queen Mary* at this time was on the other side of the world). The troops moved into houses, bivouac areas, and honest to goodness ancient stone castles with long stony corridors, dark high ceilings and gloom-gray armor, because there were hardly any barracks set up. One must say it was a sterling example of the shiny cooperation between the allied United States and England. After the invasion of North Africa proceeded, the majority of this advanced guard moved out, only to be replaced by more. For a long time the U.S. and England would seem to be breathing down each other's neck, but moreso they stood to become great working partners, becoming very close, as never thought possible.

The famous Air Force of WW II stationed in England was a big "nothing" until Lieut. General H. H. Arnold

Two P-40 pursuit planes, inferior to British Spitfires and German Messerschmitt BF 109s. Top speed P-40: 360 m.p.h. Tops for Messerschmitt 109(E): 382 m.p.h.



designated Maj-General Carl A. Spaatz to command the U.S. Army Air Force in Great Britain. In April, the month that GIs were allowed to open bank accounts in British banks, Gen. Ira C. Eaker arrived in High Wycombe, England to set up HQ. VIII Bomber Command was set up in a famous old school for girls. In May, the 15th Air Bombardment squadron began training with the British to fly the Douglas A-20 medium bombers. In that month, the first Army Nurses were also welcomed.

The movement for increased U.S. participation was titled "Operation Bolero". Since the air forces were mighty important—a correlation between airplane shipment and Bolero was nothing out of the ordinary. Bolero called for a mass shipment of aircraft—1000 planes a month—to Britain over the North Atlantic; nothing of such magnitude had been tried before in the history of the human race. The U.S established a novel lifeline of radio and refueling outposts before thousands of American and Lend-Lease air crews began flying. The system setup involved two routes. Four-engined bombers kissed the U.S.A. good-bye on Presque Isle, Maine, then took a short refuel on Gander, Newfoundland, before their long over-ocean trip to the U.K.

Twin-engined mediums and single-seaters began on Maine also, short hopped for Goose Bay, Labrador, then Greenland, to Iceland and finally for Scotland. People pay too little attention to communication. Building the highways in the sky that connected the various points on the routes entailed fighting trick interference of the aurora borealis which dubbed out all radio signals, fighting a treacherous winter the North Atlantic had not seen for some time, and keeping radio sets working with hairpins for antenna wire and Coca Cola bottles for tubes—Greenland almost went out of operation early in 1942 due to lack of parts—and somehow manned the

Airmen stationed to Eighth Bomber Command Headquarters at high Wycombe received the distinguished situation of being able to read a plaque in each cubicle-bedroom, "Push bell for Mistress." Wycombe Abbey School for Girls in the Chiltern Hills of Buckinghamshire was requisitioned for Eighth Bomber Command of the U.S. 8th Air Force. Wycombe Abbey, dates back to 1896, is situated in about 160 acres of land.



U.S. 8th Air Force
England

Airmen receive the Distinguished Flying Cross from Maj. General Carl Spaatz, commanding general of the U.S. 8th Air Force. Quite often, American crews were so low on training and skills that RAF facilities had to be critically provided, on orders from British Air Marshall Harris, to train. Spaatz became Allied Air Forces Commander in North Africa in November 1942.

The bulk of the U.S. Air Force in Great Britain, designated the 8th Army Air Force, at first were in fact to be the B-17 Flying Fortress bombers and the A-20 Havocs; later supplemented with the B-24 Liberator, B-26 Marauder, and the Little Friends: P-38 Lightning, P-40 Tomahawk (Warhawk), P-47 Thunderbolt and the P-51 Mustang.



airway stations for non-stop 24-hour service with above-draft-age Americans, hundreds of them over 38, averaging at least 12-hour days.

In summer, the first Boeing B-17 bombers from the States were welcomed. The bomber "Jarring Jenny" touched down at Prestwick airfield in Scotland, in July.

In the ensuing summer and winter, the aviators and crews gained bomber experience and became accustomed to the cool, nippy weather of the British Isles.

Contrary to popular belief, the first U.S. combat mission launched from the British Isles was not made by the B-17, but by the A-20 bomber, directed against well defended Nazi airfields in Holland. Although militarily accomplishing little, the raid did foster the first American hero of the 8th Air Force—a pilot from Oklahoma by the name of Captain Charles C. Kegelmann. He received the Distinguished Service Cross by reacting coolly and perspectivevely during the mission as his bomber was being peppered by flak from a nearby tower. At the same time his shaking plane was flying crippled as one of his propellers was badly shot up. His plane actually struck the ground, but he managed to bring it up and back home. Obviously, it was not as easy as it sounds.

The first B-17 combat mission over Europe took place in summer when twelve B-17s, accompanied by RAF Supermarine Spitfires, flew to the enemy railroad marshalling yards at Rouen-Sotterville. After summer, good weather dropped so much, air activity shrunk dramatically, even with the secretive precision Norden Bombsight. It was said only 60 to 90 days out of 365 prevail with favorable weather and cloud conditions for this theater. It was the first high altitude attack using a secretive precision Norden Bombsight over Europe.