

.....(VA)

had gone and great hideous camouflaged hangars stood on land now barren almost to the skyline and a wide airstrip seemed to extend almost to infinity.

My wife and I were making good progress down the lane that led to the farm when round a blind corner at fast speed came an American Serviceman on a bicycle on the wrong side of the road. He careened towards us, saw us at the last moment, and, to avoid a collision, swerved violently to the right and crashed into the ditch. We dismounted and went to see if he had hurt himself in the fall. He climbed hatless out of the ditch with a rueful smile and began to straighten a slightly buckled front wheel. He had just been posted to Podington from the U.S. and we pointed out to him that vehicles kept to the left side of the road in England. He apologized for his mistake and we left him retrieving his hat from the sodden ditch.

When we came to the next corner in the lane we were stopped by a huge, bearded, black American.

'Your passes, please!'

'Passes! we haven't any.'

'I can't let you through without passes.'

We explained that we often came this way and had not needed passes before.

'Well you'll need them now,' he exclaimed, 'part of this lane is now inside the base.'

'Where can I get the passes,' I asked him.

'From the Provost-Marshall,' he replied, 'come with me and I will take you to him.'

We parked our bicycles and were marched off to headquarters.

A few minutes later we were brought before Colonel Lee Jordan, an immaculately clad officer with a row of medal ribbons, whom we learned afterwards was the base commander. He was inclined to treat us as interlopers and adopted a rather lofty attitude.

'What are you doing here without passes?' he exclaimed as the black sergeant told him why we were here.

We told him our errand and that we had never been asked for entry passes previously.

'Well you'll have to wait for the Provost-Marshall to make them out for you.'

A telephone rang on his desk. He picked it up. 'What, no

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## 1944 PODINGTON

*by William Abingdon*

April 1944. War had been raging for over 4½ years and food was in very short supply. Hens' eggs were extremely scarce, and, as it was a Sunday and the spring sunshine made us restless to be out and about, my wife and I decided to cycle to a neighboring farm to try to get some.

The Allied invasion of Europe was looming and almost every copse and spinney contained armaments of some sort - bombs, tanks, lorries, guns were concealed among the budding foliage and overhead the ceaseless roar of aircraft from the numerous local airfields signified the softening up of enemy bases before the invasion.

Our venue was Hinwick Lodge Farm and the route took us through the outskirts of Podington U.S.A.F. airfield where some 2000 American airmen were stationed with their Flying Fortresses. The countryside was completely different to how I remembered it at the beginning of the war. Trees and hedges

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## 1944 Podington *continued*

fighters?' he exclaimed angrily into the phone, 'do you expect me to send my boys to that damned place without protection?' And he slammed the phone down. This interruption did not improve his temper.

'Who are you, where do you come from and what are you doing on my base?' He flung the questions at us angrily. I said we were from Rushden and that I was a tailor and in the course of the conversation mentioned that my firm were making uniforms for Colonel Bowles, base commander at Molesworth and that he had recommended Clark Gable to us and we were making out-fits for the great man.

'Are you, by Jove!' he exclaimed and his attitude immediately softened towards us and he asked us if we would like to see his planes of which he was very proud. He escorted us around the base and we received numerous salutes from air crews working on the Fortresses. All around us was the thundering roar of engines warming up for a raid over Germany. Crew members were bombing up the planes and this was no doubt the raid for which Colonel Jordan was demanding fighter protection. The target was probably Stettin, as I heard the word mentioned by the air crews. Back at his headquarters we were regaled with two cups of coffee and passes arrived from the Provost-Marshal.

Our air attacks at this stage of the war were really hurting the Nazis and this part of the country was occupied by the American Eighth Bomber Group flying Liberators and Fortresses. Vast air fleets rose in the early morning sky and added fuel to the already blazing towns in the Ruhr and Central Germany.

The Royal Air Force by now had tremendous power and as spring sunset darkened into twilight, slowly great armadas rose over the horizon and the tops of trees. Their clustering formations headed for the continent, the roar and drone filling the sky for hours on end. One began to wonder whether one would ever live under quiet skies again. It was an awe-inspiring spectacle, this gigantic concentration of death-dealing power moving off to kill. I could not help contrasting them with the out-numbered battles of our fighters in the same skies some two or three years ago.

I must admit that one had an uneasy feeling when one remembered the great weight of bombs carried by our own

planes in the semi-darkness of the early mornings and evenings. There were the inevitable collisions and crashes and hundreds of our airmen and those of our Allies lost their lives before the bombers left our shores.

## MEMORIES OF THE '8th'

*Through the early mists of sunrise  
Glides a wide-winged, silver bird  
"Frost are off again" we murmur  
As another plane is heard  
Roaring closely o'er the roof tops  
With a cataclysmic sound  
That assails our shrinking ear-drums  
As it shakes the quaking ground.*

*Gaining height and swift momentum  
Scores of war-planes gem the sky,  
Casting plumes of feathered vapour  
Through ethereal regions high  
Then, like brightly coloured rain-drops  
Groups of crystal flares we see  
Portent of another Fortress  
Battering of Germany.*

*Then when evening sun is crimson  
Comes a slowly swelling roar,  
As the first returning aircraft  
Round the Chelveston widely soar  
Slanting sunrays paint the wing spread  
As they're banking for descent  
And on many a gleaming surface  
Shows a jagged gaping rent.*

*Oft an air-screw, still and crumpled  
Proves the enemy has scored  
Red lights twinkling in the belly  
Warn that wounded are aboard  
And these massive, weary war-hawks  
Battle-scarred, touch down once more  
As another crusade's over  
In the war to end all war.*

*The Podington story and the poem "Memories of the '8th' were furnished by Adrian M. Fett.*

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