No 8

The Chronicle

The Journal of the
Long Wittenham Local History Group

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Cover Illustration: Emblem of the 7th Photographic Reconnaissance Group. "The Eyes of the Eighth".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

After a most successful Exhibition held in the Village Hall last year, 'Long Wittenham At War', it was decided that all the written material used then to such good effect would furnish splendid contributions for future 'Chronicles' - which will come as good news to all members of the Long Wittenham History Group, I'm sure!

I would like to thank both Kathy Jewess and Jenny Garlick for the most interesting pieces we have chosen for this edition. We all know the amount of work that was put into their contributions and it was obvious how interesting our many visitors found them.

I would also like to extend our heartfelt gratitude once again to Linda Francis, without whose professional layout expertise we would have no 'Chronicle' each year.

I feel I must mention especially all the many American veterans, both here and in the States, who assisted me in my researches when writing up 'The 7th Photo Reconnaissance Group'. Not only did they give me generously of their time, but their Association in America donated a fascinating colour video, film shot by Americans based at Mount farm in the 1940s, which proved compelling watching. In particular I would like to thank Jim Hotaling who helped me in every way he could, both practically and by delving deep into his memories as well.

Elizabeth McDougall
Editor

WARS FROM THE IRON AGE TO THE NORMAN CONQUEST

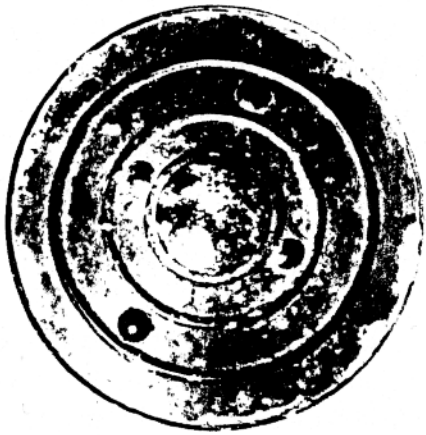
by

Kathleen Jewess

The area of the Upper Thames, in particular the areas abutting the river itself, suffered from repeated invasions, raids and war from the period of the early Iron Age - the Wittenham Shield in the Ashmolean Museum dates from about 1200 BC. - to the Conquest. One invasion route has been the pre-Roman road, the Icknield Way, which ran from Hunstanton on the Norfolk coast of the Wash via Thetford, Newmarket, Luton, Tring and Goring, thence across the Thames roughly along the A417, the road from Streatley to Wantage. The Thames River itself has also often served as an invasion route, but it has also served as a boundary between competing kingdoms. Long Wittenham itself, both the name and the post-Roman village, stems from one such invasion, and the fact that the land, because it is river-terrace gravels, was easily farmed as well as rich with river meadows for grazing, made it desirable. Reliable evidence is relatively scanty: all of the extant Anglo-Saxon documents for all of England, for example, fill only one book. Much of what we know, particularly from the earlier period, comes from archaeological evidence. Therefore for long periods, and on certain topics, conjecture rather than certitude dominates.

The Iron Age and The Romans

As far as can be determined by available evidence, life in the Upper Thames basin changed little from the Late Bronze Age, the period of the Wittenham Shield (c. 1300 - 1200 B.C.), until the Middle Iron Age, roughly 400 - 100 BC. Archaeological remains suggest that this period saw either an increase in trade



The Wittenham Shield

with the Continent, or invasions from Northern France. Evidence for the latter in this area includes the fact that the Sinodun Hill hill fort (on the middle of Wittenham Clump) dates from c. 750 - 500 BC, the period of the Early Iron Age (in Britain people began using iron around 700 BC). What is clear is that from about 100 BC. there were invasions by the Belgae, who came from near the Rhine delta, which gradually increased in size and number: beginning as groups of small traders and then of small raiding parties, the invasions eventually developed into what were essentially large groups of settlers.

This is the period in which groups of homesteads began grouping themselves into farming communities. Long Wittenham, situated as it is on the river-terrace gravels, was apparently one of them, being settled by Witta's people, Witta probably being the leader of a settler group or war-band.

There were, naturally, efforts by the native Britons to defend themselves against these Belgic invaders; thereafter, the new inhabitants needed to defend themselves against attacks upon their

livestock or their territory. Around 50 BC. defensive earthworks, such as the Iron Age hillfort on Sinodun Hill, were strengthened. At this point the Belgic tribe called the Atrebates dominated the territory south of the Upper Thames valley, the Belgicised Catuvellauni controlled east of the Cherwell and of the Thames at the Goring Gap, and the native Dobunni controlled the Cotswolds. The three tribes frequently invaded each others' territory, as well as the Thames lowland which lay between them.

At this point the Romans came to Britain. Julius Caesar invaded in 55/54 BC. and Claudius returned in 43 BC; within four years of the Claudian invasion the Romans by conquest or negotiation, controlled most of lowland England. They came to friendly terms with the Atrebates.

During the period of Roman rule, this area enjoyed relative peace and prosperity. The Iron Age village in Northfield Farm developed into a Romano-British village, and a Roman brooch has been found in Long Wittenham village itself. However, in 410 AD. the Romans told the British tribes that they now had to organise their own defences against the growing numbers of raids by Saxons from the Continent.

Roman brooch found in Long Wittenham

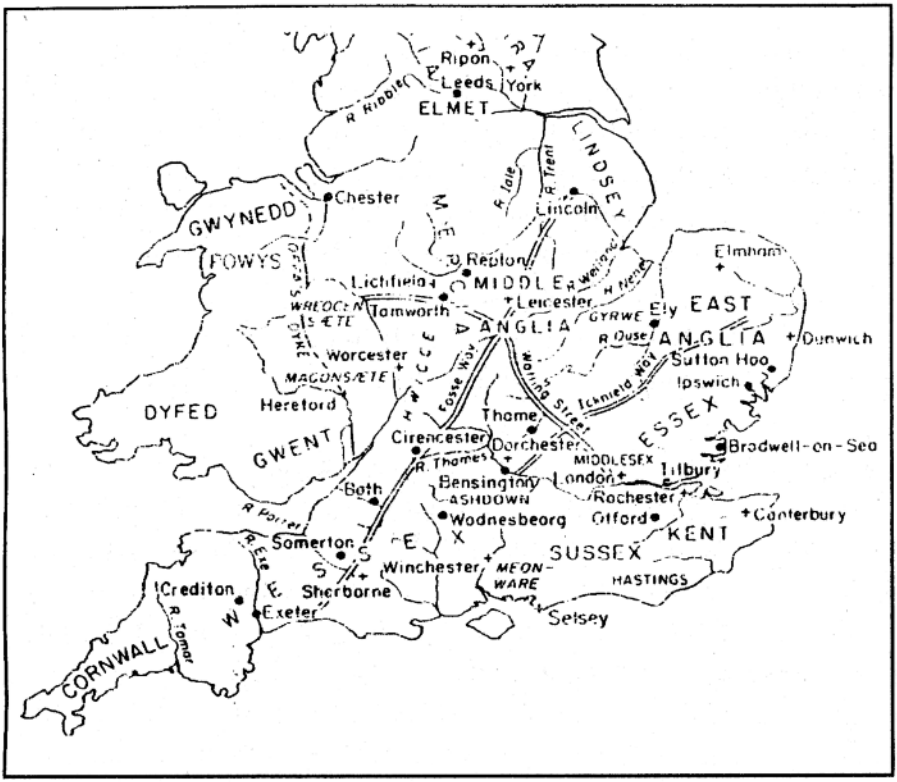
The Saxon Invasion and Early Anglo-Saxon England

This area was early on the focus of the new invasions: certainly by the late 5th century there were mixed burial grounds in Long Wittenham - natives buried while the pagan Saxons cremated. The invasions probably came from two direction. The Angles came from the Wash west along the lcknield Way, though smaller numbers came up the Thames itself; the West Saxons landed at Southampton and came north.

For the next four centuries this area was a battleground. The early centuries saw competition between what were essentially war lords: a lord attached followers to himself by his prowess in battle and by his generosity in gift-giving. In order to demonstrate the former and to carry out the latter, a lord had to fight particularly to gain land and booty to distribute amongst his followers. In the south Wessex, or the kingdom of the West Saxons, gradually emerged; in the Midlands various leaders of the Angles gradually consolidated the kingdom of Mercia.

In 57 l A.D. Ceawlin, king ofWessex, defeated the native Britons at Bedcan ford (unidentified) and gained control of present-day Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. During the following century the frontiers between Wessex and Mercia fluctuated widely. In 634 the West Saxons established their bishopric under St Birinus at Dorchester, but within a few years, because of Mercian pressure, had moved it to Winchester. (Indeed, there is evidence that between 675 and 685 there was a second bishopric of Dorchester under the protection of Ethelred of the Mercians.) In 666 Wulfhere, king of Mercia, drove the West Saxons south of the Thames, and within a few decades the Mercians had overrun Wessex. Yet in 752 Cuthred of Wessex revolted and recovered some territory by defeating the Mercians at Burford.

Nevertheless the 8th century was the period of Mercian power - their kingdom extended from the Humber to the Thames, and included Kent - and in 779 Offa, king of the Mercians, crushed the West Saxons at the battle of Benson, thereby recovering full control of Oxon and Bucks. Yet the tide turned once again, and between 825 and 830 Egbert, king of the West Saxons, defeated both the Mercians and the Northumbrians and for the first time united all of English Britain under a single ruler. For a short period relative peace returned to the Thames border country.



The early kingdoms south of the Humber

The Danish Invasions

The Danes first landed in England in 787, but only in 834 did they begin the series of large-scale invasions which resulted in their conquering most of the territory north of the Thames. They invaded Wessex in 871, defeating the forces of king Alfred at Wilton, and forcing him to make peace with them. Abingdon Abbey was a casualty of the invasion. If the monastery escaped the first attack of the army moving from Thetford to its new base at Reading, it lay in the path of one of the associated raids: the Danes drove the monks into flight and destroyed the monastery so that nothing remained except the walls. It is inconceivable that Wittenham could have escaped the attentions of the Danes, since it lay directly on the river. Furthermore, there is one piece of

positive evidence, the mid-9th century torque discovered in the village and now in the Ashmolean museum.

By 880, however, all of Wessex and English Mercia were free of Danish marauders and the territory from London to Chester became the Danelaw, where the Danes received tribute from the English in exchange for peace. Five years later, however, Alfred succeeded in recapturing and fortifying London, which became part of Wessex. During the period 892 to 897 Wessex defeated another Danish invasion and drove most of the survivors out of the country.

It is worth noting that Alfred the Great, during his time as king of Wessex, established a new system of military organisation which incorporated most able-bodied freemen in Wessex. First of all, the national militia, or fyrd, was reorganised into two halves which relieved each other, so that there was now a home army for defence as well as a field army. Secondly, substantial landowners were now obliged to maintain a stated number of warriors, supporting and arming them; this was the obligation of thegnhood, which had distinct resemblances to the post-Conquest feudal system, whereby a lord had to maintain a certain number of soldiers. And thirdly, Alfred caused to be built a system of strongly fortified bums (later boroughs) at strategic points which could be quickly defended by those living nearby in times of danger; one of these was Wallingford.

The End of Wessex and the Scandinavian Invasions

Edward the Martyr, King of Wessex, was assassinated in 978, and under AEthelred ll (Ethelred the Unready) England was subjected to successive large invasions from Scandinavia. AEthelred secretly ordered the Danes living in England to be massacred on St Brice's day, 2 December 1001. One of the victims, unfortunately for AEthelred, was Gunnhild, a Christian

and one of the hostages for an earlier peace treaty: she was the sister of Swein Forkbeard, king of Denmark and Norway. Swein swore revenge and from 1003 until 1014 he and his jarls periodically harried southern England. In 1006 Reading and Wallingford were burnt to the ground. From 1016 to 1035 England was part of the Danish empire under King Cnut, but after his death, and the defeat of his sons Harold and Harthacnut, Edward the Confessor was recalled from his exile in Normandy and became King, reigning from 1042 until his death in 1066.

The Norman Conquest

The main fighting between English and Normans took place at the battle of Hastings on 14 October 1066, but there were uprisings yearly from 1067 until 1070. The winter of 1069-1070 saw the most terrible of the Norman responses, with 'the harrying of the north'. The area around Wittenham tasted William's wrath early on: because he had met with opposition at London Bridge after Hastings, he decided to isolate London by devastating a wide belt of country around it on both sides of the Thames. With that aim he led his forces circuitously to Wallingford where they crossed the river by bridge and ford and made camp on the Oxfordshire side. The Archbishop there swore fealty to William, who with his forces left and, marching along the Icknield Way, entered London from the north.

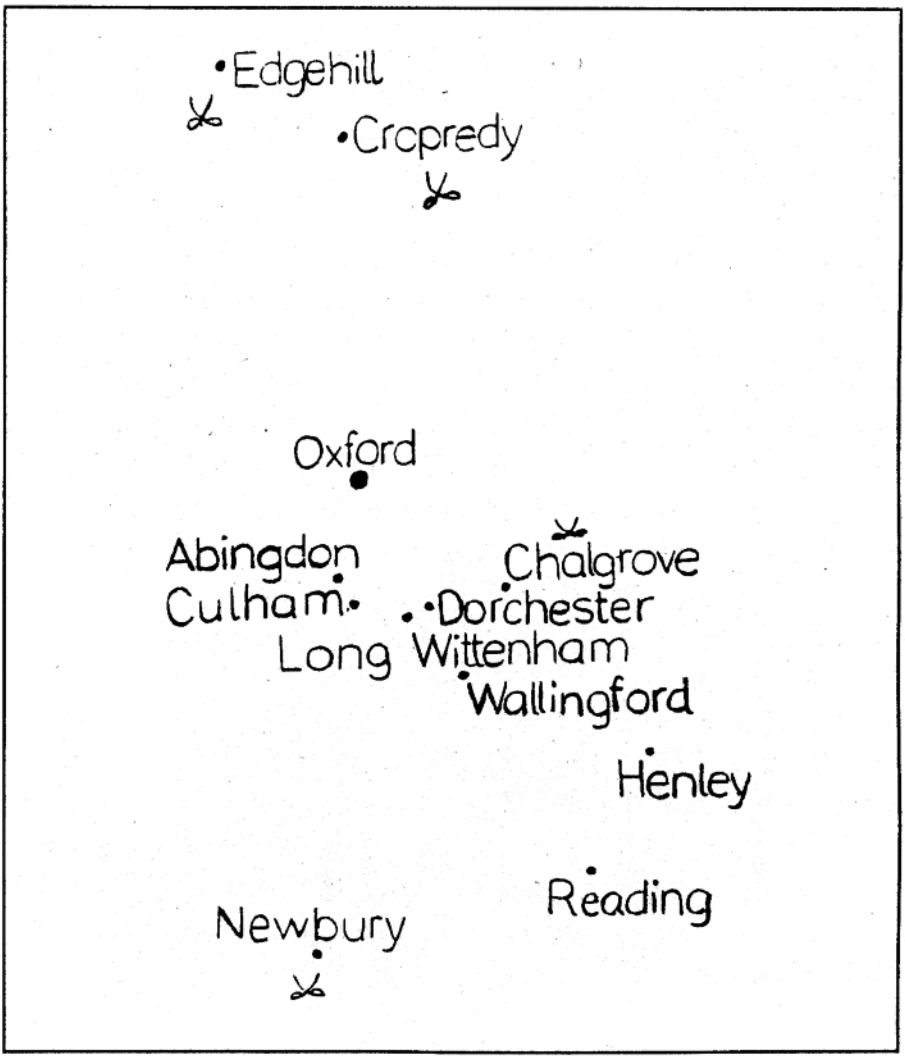
For some years the Normans lived like an army of occupation - there were only 10,000 of them amongst a hostile population of one to two million. Therefore they lived, ate and slept together in operational units, taking what they needed from the land and people and building castles to overawe and control the population. Two such castles were built at Wallingford and Oxford. This was the last successful foreign invasion until 1688 and the Glorious Revolution: for the succeeding centuries the people of the parish enjoyed only domestic raids and civil wars.

THE CIVIL WAR, 1642-1651

Events which took place in Long Wittenham
and surrounding towns

by

Jennifer Garlick



Causes of the Civil War

The Civil Wars. which began in 1642, were the result of the irreversible breakdown in the relations between King Charles I and his Parliament. Charles had acquired from his father, James I, a belief in the divine right of Kings - that the monarch was answerable to no-one but God - and did not like being dictated to by Parliament. Parliament responded by attempting to deny the King the money he demanded. Many quarrels ensued in which religion played a major part. The Puritans were unhappy with the Church of England. feeling that it retained too many of the trappings of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly under the rule of the Archbishop of Canterbury. William Laud. They suspected Charles of harbouring Catholic tendencies because his wife was a Catholic and his Court was colourful and flamboyant.

In 1641 Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, whom the King had made Governor in Ireland, raised an army to put down a rebellion of Irish Roman Catholics. Wentworth's army provoked a constitutional crisis as the King refused Royal Assent for the Militia Act which would have prevented him from raising troops for himself or his cause again. The final act which made King and Parliament absolutely irreconcilable was the King's attempted arrest of five Members of Parliament within Parliament itself.

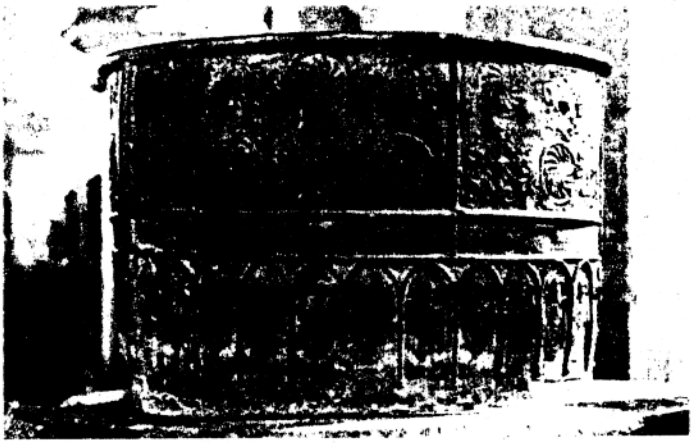
The King marched to the debating chamber to demand that the five men be turned over into his custody. They, having been warned, escaped and the King was forced to make an embarrassing withdrawal. As he left the members shouted "Privilege! Privilege!" meaning that their rights and privileges as Members of Parliament had been completely ignored. Shortly after this incident. which heralded the outbreak of war, the King left London never to return to his capital city again, until in defeat at the hands of the Parliamentarians.

Long Wittenham

Though no serious fighting actually took place, as far as we know, in Long Wittenham it can certainly not have remained unaffected by the Civil War lying as it did close to Oxford, where the King held court; to Abingdon, where a great deal of the Royalist army had its quarters for a large part of the war; and to Wallingford, which lay under siege.

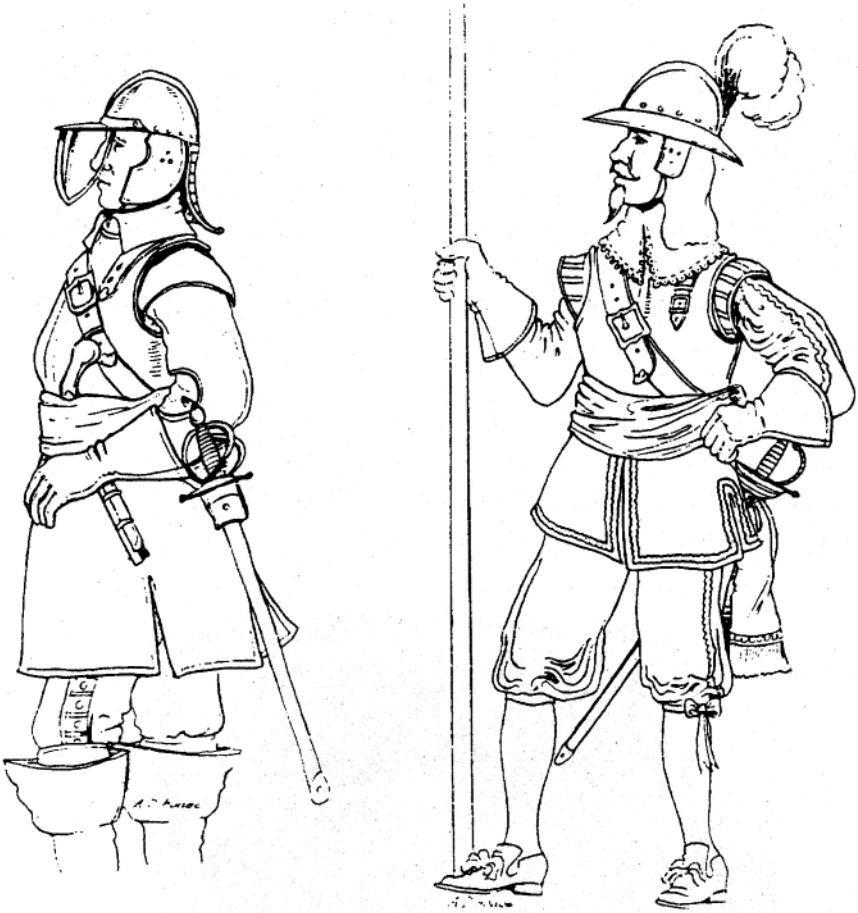
There must have been a great many troops passing through the village on their way to these towns, especially as there were few passable crossings on the river, and there were probably a great many deserters foraging around. Both armies were obliged to pillage the country for supplies and the poor farmers had little livestock or crops left as hordes of starved soldiers roved the countryside plundering farms, breaking and robbing houses and driving off sheep and cattle.

The lead font in Long Wittenham church was saved from being made into shot by the prompt action of the churchwardens. They encased it in a box where it remained undetected until 1839. The box is now used as a table in the church.



Lead Font

Legend has it that Oliver Cromwell visited Long Wittenham and partook of refreshment sitting under the mulberry tree in the garden of the Old Farm house. He was waiting to attend his niece‘s wedding at Little Wittenham. It is also possible that he was avoiding Cavalier soldiers who were busy round the church.



Left: A Cavalry Trooper of the 'New Model Army'
Right: A Royalist Pikeman

Edgehill - 23rd October 1642
The first pitched battle of the Civil War at Edgehill, between Banbury and Warwick, was indecisive. Both armies were ill-prepared and spent most of the day waiting around for the battle to begin. It resulted in a great loss of life.

The bearer of the King's standard, Sir Edmund Verney, was killed and the flag captured, but so tightly had he grasped it that to release it his hand had to be severed. John Smith, a Royalist officer, re-captured the Standard and, surviving the rest of the battle, was knighted the following day for his efforts.

Abingdon and Culham
During the early months of the conflict, in 1642, both Royalists and Parliamentarians passed through Abingdon several times.

The first battle was indecisive but the King was hailed as victor in Abingdon and the town bells rang to welcome him. The King returned to Oxford on 29th November while his nephew Prince Rupert's cavalry made Abingdon their headquarters, the Thames proving an important waterway for the provision of supplies. The King came often to confer with his sons and nephews in charge of the troops at Culham Hill the following spring, but by the summer the war had changed direction and many of the soldiers were moved further away. The first Battle of Newbury - on 20th September 1643 - brought back cart-loads of wounded to Abingdon. The King dined in the town on 22nd September and part of the Royalist army took up their winter quarters there and in surrounding villages.

On 10th May 1644 Essex and Waller marched out of London towards Oxford. Prince Rupert came south to advise on how to strengthen the garrisons of towns surrounding Oxford, including Abingdon, using all the infantry available and as many horses as

possible. The Royalist foot were quartered in Abingdon and the horse in North Berkshire villages for a few days then, after consuming all available provisions. they withdrew. As a result, on 26th May 1644, Essex entered Abingdon which was not defended. Waller's soldiers hacked down the market cross which had stood in Bury for two hundred years and defaced the parish churches. They then proceeded to plunder goods from the people of Abingdon. rich and poor alike. On 10th January 1645 Prince Rupert led forces from Oxford through the night in an attempt to regain Abingdon. The attack took place at dawn on Culham Bridge, the Causeway and Abingdon Bridge, but they were beaten back and forced to retreat. Further attacks took place but without success and the town remained a parliamentary garrison until the end of the war.

Thomas Trapham, an Abingdon surgeon, embalmed the body of Charles 1 following his execution. He commented that he 'had sown on the head of a goose'. He found favour with Cromwell and eventually became his surgeon.

Wallingford

Wallingford Castle, once one of the mightiest in the land, was falling into a state of decay, a process helped along by Queen Mary who, during her short reign, had the roofs of many of the castle buildings stripped of lead to make water pipes for Windsor Castle. When the Civil War broke out a century later it was hastily repaired and refurbished to form a Royal stronghold. Charles I inspected the new works in 1643.

It was besieged by Parliamentary forces and resisted a lengthy siege of sixteen weeks being one of the last Royalist strongholds to fall. In 1646 Charles I, realising his cause was lost, eventually ordered Colonel Blagge, Commander of the King's Troops, to surrender to Fairfax. Because of his valiant defence Blagge was

permitted, on surrendering, to march out of the Castle with 1,000 men with 'their colours flying, trumpets sounding, drums heating, matches lighted at both ends, bullet in mouth and every soldier with twelve charges of powder, match and bullet proportionate'. Cromwell considered the castle too great a threat and after it had served as a prison for a few more years it was literally taken apart, stone by stone, in 1652.

One of a set of cannon barrels cast about 1638 for Charles II as Prince of Wales by the Gunfounder John Browne.

Henley

Although plundering expeditions were not widespread at the beginning of the conflict, the behaviour of the Royalists at Henley-on-Thames was not exceptional. Here, a regiment under Sir John Byron was quartered at Fawley Court, a large house just outside the town which belonged to Bulstrode Whitelocke, a rich young lawyer and Member of Parliament for Marlow.

Whitelocke, who was in London at the time, had sufficient warning of the Royalists' approach to instruct one of his tenants, William Cooke, to hide as many of his valuable possessions as he could. The tenant and his servants 'threw into the mote pewter, brasse and iron things and removed into the woods some of (Whitelocke's) bookes, linnen and household stuffe, as much as the short warning would permit'. But enough remained in the house and outbuildings for the 'brutish common soldiers' to indulge in an orgy of plunder. Whitelocke recorded in his diary:

"There they had their whores. They spent and consumed in one night 100 loade of corne and hey, littered their horses with good wheat sheafes, gave them all sorts of corne in the straw, made great fires in the closes, and William Cooke telling them there were billets and faggots neerer to them (than) the plough timber which they burned, they threatened to burne him. Divers books and writings of Consequence which were left in (the) study they tore and burnt and lighted Tobacco with them, and some they carried away (including) many excellent manuscripts of (my) father's and some of (my own) labours. They broke down (my park fencing) killed most of my deere and lett out the rest. Only a Tame Hinde and his hounds they presented to Prince Rupert. They eate and dranke up all that the house could afforde; brake up all Trunkes, chests and any goods, linnen or household stuffe that they could find. They cutt the beddes, lett out the feathers, and took away the courtins, covers of chayres and stooles, (my) coach and four good coach horses and all the saddle horses, and whatsoever they could lay their hands on they carried away or spoyled, did all that malice and rapine could provoke barbarous mercenaries to commit."

Dorchester - April 1643

The King's troops, on their way to assist beleaguered Royalists under attack in Reading, clashed with a party of Parliamentary horse at Dorchester where, after a short but fierce fight in the narrow streets of the small town, the Royalists were driven off.

Reading

On 27th April 1643 the Earl of Essex, advancing from Windsor with a sizeable army, laid siege to Reading on his way to Oxford. King Charles marched from Oxford to its relief, but before he arrived the town had surrendered. The commander at Reading was court-martialled and condemned to death but reprieved after

an appeal to his father from the thirteen year old Prince of Wales (the future Charles ll).

While defending Reading, and realising they were last running out of ammunition, the Royalists despatched a young ensign, Rupert Flower, to Henley in order to obtain further supplies of powder. He succeeded in getting through the Parliamentary lines on Caversham Heights by swimming across the Thames and clambering through the branches of the trees at Caversham Park above the heads of the Roundhead soldiers bivouacked on the grass below him. When he arrived at Henley with his message, it was agreed that the powder should be sent up-river by barge under cover of darkness. On his return journey Flower was spotted as he swam back across the river by a patrol keeping watch upon a bridge. He was dragged out of the water and tortured. He revealed the plan in his agony and the barge was captured that night.

Chalgrove - 18th June 1643

The Earl of Essex (Parliament) moved from Reading to Thame preparatory to an attack on Oxford's defences, but a certain Sir John Urry decided to change sides and fled to Oxford bringing information to the Royalists about a pay train carrying £21,000 to Essex at Thame. Prince Rupert set out with an expeditionary force of 1,000 horses, 500 foot and over 320 dragoons to surprise and outmanoeuvre Essex whose troops were scattered. At Chinnor Rupert attacked the tiny garrison but this alerted the Parliamentarians to his presence and they followed him. At Chiselhampton they caught up with him and Rupert turned from his crossing of the bridge on the Thame and drew up his forces in Chalgrove Field, west of the road from there to Warpsgrove.

A skirmish took place on Chalgrove Field where Colonel John Hampden was mortally wounded. Although Hampden had been

fighting on the side of the Parliament, he was so highly thought of that the King offered to send his personal physician, but Hampden was beyond help. He managed to ride to his home at Thame where he died six days later.

A monument was later erected to Hampden‘s memory near the crossroads on the road from Chalgrove to Warpsgrove. After the skirmish Essex abandoned his attempt to blockade Oxford, while Rupert and his soldiers harried villages and Parliamentarian outposts round the Chiltern Hills, acting on further information from turncoat Urry.

Newbury

The main Royalist force met the Parliamentary army under Essex at the 1st Battle of Newbury on 20th September 1643 at seven o’clock in the morning. It lasted twelve hours. Essex wanted to get to the London road by passing to the south of Newbury. He occupied Round Hill which the Royalists Sir John and Sir Nicholas Byron attacked. Essex then tried to move his foot across Wash Common, but Prince Rupert attacked with his horse and drove Essex’s covering horse off the common. The Byrons forced their way onto Round Hill but the battle drifted to a close as night fell. On the following day the Royalists retired to Oxford, leaving the route to London open to Essex.

The second battle of Newbury was fought on 27th October 1644 to the north of the area covered by the first battle, at Shaw, Speen and Donnington Castle which had been held for over a year by the Royalists. It was described as a victory by the Parliamentarians because they held the field while the King was forced to retire or retreat, but the object of the battle was to prevent the King’s return to Oxford, and afterwards, because it was night and the Parliament’s cavalry tired, he was not pursued very far.

Cropredy
On 26th June 1644 a battle took place at Cropredy Bridge with two forces 9,000 men each moving north in parallel lines either side of the river. The Royalists heat off Waller‘s attack and the King returned to Oxford.

Oxford
On 29th October 1642, after the Battle of Edgehill, the King first entered Oxford. It remained his headquarters throughout the Civil War, turning it more into a garrison than a University town. He was joined by Queen Henrietta Maria in July 1643.

The undergraduates carried on their normal studies for a while but before long they were requested to leave to make room for the troops. Some, forsaking their books for spades, helped throw up new earthworks and fortifications. In the summer of 1643 all residents of the halls and colleges between the ages of 16 and 60 were ordered to do one day’s work a week building defences. Some scholars and professors joined the colours. The infantry were encamped between Oxford and Wolvercote. Drilling took place in Port Meadow and the College Quads.

Christ Church quad was used as a cattle pen. New College cloisters served as a magazine and munitions were stored in New College Tower. Uniforms were made at the Music and Astronomy Schools. Osney’s cornmill ground gunpowder. Frewin Hall was turned into a cannon foundry. Wood was carted in from Shotover for the construction of defences as well as white clay for the soldiers’ pipes.

The King held court in Christ Church, attended by his Privy Council and supported by his Law Courts. The Queen was installed next door in Merton College. All the other colleges were similarly taken over by courtiers or troops. The Royal Mint was

set up in New Inn Hall Street. The medieval defences, consisting of the old royal castle and a simple battlemented town wall, were transformed by artillery bastions and extensive earthworks.

Financially, the honour of being the capital cost the town dear. Once the mint had arrived in 1643, Charles began using the college plate to make coinage. He asked for a loan of £200 in the same month and a further £2,000 in June. Food gathered from the local area was stored in the colleges for distribution to the court and garrison. As the war turned against the King the collections became increasingly draconian: by 1644 all surplus foodstocks in the Oxford region had to be handed over. When the city surrendered in June 1646 there was an estimated six months' supply of food and other goods in the town.

At the same time, the life of the Court went on as though still in Whitehall. There were musical entertainments and plays; new sonnets and satires were published; new fashions were paraded through the streets and were copied by the citizens' wives; love affairs were conducted by the river bank and beneath the secluded walls of college gardens; fashionable ladies defied the 'terrible gigantesque aspect' and 'sharp grey eies' of the President of Trinity and walked into his chapel 'half dressed, like angels'; the King appointed a Master of Revels.

When off duty some soldiers brawled to such an extent that the sale of drink had to be prohibited after nine o'clock in the evening. Duels were so commonplace that scarcely a day passed without an officer being wounded. On 27th April 1646 Charles escaped from Oxford (which was now surrounded by Parliamentary forces) in disguise and surrendered to the Scots at a camp between Nottingham and Newark. The Parliamentary forces were slow to embark on a close siege of the formidable stronghold Oxford had become, and in fact it was the defeat of the King's field army at

Naseby in 1645, rather than fighting at Oxford itself, that really sealed the fate of the city. Oxford surrendered in May 1646.

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THE 7TH PHOTO RECONNAISSANCE GROUP
"THE EYES OF THE EIGHTH"
1943 - 1945

by

Elizabeth McDougall

MOUNT FARM

In November 1942 a group of tired, hungry and cold young Americans arrived at Culham Railway Station having survived an uncomfortable, over-crowded and, thanks to German U-Boats, dangerous sea journey over the Atlantic. These were the men of the 13th Photographic Squadron, the first American combat squadron to arrive at Mount Farm (today's Berinsfield) in World War II.

The 13th were soon joined by the 14th, 22nd, 27th and the 451st Squadrons who together made up the famous 7th Photo Reconnaissance Group based on the wind-swept ex-RAF airfield lying in the middle of the Oxfordshire countryside.

Today's Berinsfield lies beside part of that old airfield, and in the parish church are pews, chairs and two engraved windows dedicated to the memory of the 7th Photo Group.

Apart from the memorial, there is not much left to remind the present day residents of Berinsfield's American past - unless you know what to look for.

Mount Farm, Berinsfield

The farm house became the officers' accommodation and must look now much as it did then. For camouflage purposes hay stacks, fields of Brussell sprouts and other crops remained in situ, although the landing strips, parking bays, Nissen huts etc. must have made it fairly obvious what was trying to hide in the peaceful Oxfordshire countryside!

James Hotaling, (veteran of the 22nd Squadron who lives today in Stadhampton) can only remember one certain sighting - on the same day the film star Adolph Menjou was visiting Mount Farm of a German photo reconnaissance plane trying to turn the tables on the audacious Americans by photographing their air base. James never did hear whether the enemy plane was shot down or not, but the young German was a long way from home and everyone knew he was up there.

The old wind-sock mast (minus its sock) can still be seen on the horizon, and one of the wooden huts which housed the men (now used by the Scouts) was dismantled and lies, reconstructed. tucked away under the water tower. James Hotaling slept in a Nissen hut near the runway and vividly remembers how noisy it was. In fact, Mount Farm must have been an altogether turbulent place, given the numbers of aircraft constantly landing and taking off (on one day alone 58 missions were flown from this base).

There could not have been many private telephones in Britain at that time. To call Mount Farm itself in 1943 you just dialled Clifton Hampden 47!

THE MEN

The Pilots

The 7th Photo Recon Group is proud of its pilots - as well it might be. These young men took their lives in their hands every time they climbed into their planes - many lost their lives photographing far behind enemy lines.

One pilot flew so low, searching for a German flying bomb launching pad, that his propellors nearly cut the grass.

Another pilot - and his wingman - were ‘jumped’ by nine enemy fighters after photographing 20 targets. In defiance they photographed one more before streaking homeward.

In spite of being hit by a burst of flak over an important oil target, one pilot calmly radioed back a description of his objective before bailing out.

John Pratt can remember as a child the thrill of being occasionally invited by American pilots into their cockpits and being ‘driven’ around the base!

But if it had not been for the weather men, Lab technicians/photo men, mechanics, camera repairmen, communications personnel, supply men, drivers, typists, cooks, telephone operators, clerks, medical men, shop men and many others, the pilots could not have done their job. These are the unsung heroes of Mount Farm, the men who oiled the wheels and kept them turning.

The Military Police should also not be forgotten, although there must have been many a time when some miscreant would have liked to be able to do so!

The Lab Technicians

These were the men who rushed the films from the 'planes back to the labs to be developed, printed, sorted and then handed over to the various Intelligence groups for assessment. One of the biggest problems was drying the rolls of film, '… As the war progressed we had so many rolls of film to be dried that the air in the room soon became saturated with moisture and the film would simply not dry....' This problem was solved by raising the temperature of the room to 120 degrees with a gasoline heater making work for the operators a warm affair.

THE MISSION

March 28th 1943 saw the first photo mission flown by the 7th Photo Recon Group over German occupied Europe. By the end of the war it had:

- flown 5, 693 missions (17,570 flying hours);
- taken approximately 1,000,000 photographs - representing more than 360 miles of film, nine inches wide;
- produced 5,000 prints for intelligence purposes;
- covered nearly 3,000,000 square miles of enemy territory in Denmark, Holland, Austria, Italy and Russia.

Photographing the enemy's vital war industries to provide information for heavy bomber operations, and after these bombing attacks to furnish a record of the results, the Seventh Photo Group was the American Eighth Air Force's main source of intelligence.

In addition, the Group covered enemy movements by land and sea, and provided photo maps which were invaluable to the Ground Forces in the invasion of Normandy and subsequent land operations.

To obtain these photographs required a high degree of courage. It meant flying solo, hundreds of miles behind enemy lines. Where guns would normally have been mounted was a trimetrigon camera, leaving the aircraft entirely defenceless. The only way the Americans could escape unwelcome attention from the Luftwaffe was to fly too high for the enemy to intercept them. This invulnerability disappeared in September, 1944 with the appearance of the first German jets. A measure of how much the Germans feared the photo reconnaissance planes can be seen by the number of jets they were prepared to use against them. For the first time the Americans could not out-run the enemy.

The first sighting of a jet by an American pilot was - for him - a nasty shock. Nothing like it had ever been seen before. The implications of this new German aviation technology could, earlier in conflict, have been very serious for the Allied cause.

THE PLANES

The squadrons flew P-38 'Lightnings', the British Spitfire ('the Spit') and the P-51 'Mustangs'.

Spitfire

P-38 Lightning

Both pilots and mechanics were delighted when the 'Spits' were assigned to them. Its two cameras gave more exposures per roll of film and their hand-ground lenses were better for recording the details of bomb damage. This, plus its higher altitude performance and longer range, is why it was used almost exclusively for D A (Damage Assessment) missions.

Later the photo squadrons were given their own fighters to escort them on their dangerous missions. The P-51 'Mustang' had all the attributes of a good fighter; speed, fire-power, range and manoeuverability.

THE CAMERAS

The trimetrigon camera set-up in the P-38's made it ideal for mapping. This was amply borne out on D Day, when several sweeps of P-38's covered the entire Normandy beach-head landings. Prior to D-Day the 7th Photo Recon Group had mapped every one of the Normandy beaches.

In the nose of some 38's was a 'dicing' camera, particularly effective during battle against V-bombs, when some pilots flew as low as 50 feet to photograph launching sites.

Would it be too much to say that without the Mount Farm group, D-Day might never have been the success it was?

THE YANKS IN LONG WITTENHAM

"Overpaid, overfed, over-sexed and over here" may have been the oft repeated British grouse about the Americans during the war but it did not apply in Long Wittenham. (The Americans, it should be noted, had their own reply to this taunt. It went "Underpaid, underfed, under-sexed and under Eisenhower"!). Although our village does not appear to have been particularly well known by the young men at Mount Farm, we did have three faithful visitors - Sgt. Herbert Goldberg, S/Sgt. J.C. Angebrandt and Sgt. W.A. Jacobson.

Muriel Thorpe and the late Marjorie Edwards remember them as being lonely men, not as young as the pilots on base and very homesick for their families. They often brought small, welcome luxuries such as tinned food, coffee and even popcorn (not seen in Long Wittenham before!) in return for a little hospitality in a homely atmosphere.

The three sergeants favourite pub was The Vine, where they were obviously honoured guests - one contemporary snap was taken down in The Vine's cellar! Beer was restricted in Britain, so they would probably have made their way for an extra pint or two to the other pubs in the village, the already famous Barley Mow, The Plough, The Machine Man and even, perhaps, The Three Poplars - although this was at the far end of the village (where

today Pendon Museum can be found) and may have escaped their attention. One of the main grouses that the Americans had was WARM ENGLISH BEER! Cold beer came high on their list of things they most missed back home.

Bicycles, often bought in Didcot. cost between £13 - £15 each, a great deal of money in 1943. With these the men travelled for miles.

Long Wittenham seems to have had only one G.I. bride - Cissy Green. Her daughter Maureen also - years later - married an American from one of the Oxfordshire air bases and, in her turn, went to America.

CELEBRITIES WHO VISITED MOUNT FARM

Mount Farm had many famous film stars visiting it during the two years the Americans were based at Mount Farm.

Glenn Miller the celebrated trombonist, bandleader and founder of the Glenn Miller Army Air Force Band visited Dorchester in 1944. Shortly afterwards he was lost in mysterious circumstances over the English Channel.

Bob Hope (originally named Leslie Townes Hope) was born in 1903 in Eltham, London and raised in Ohio, USA. In 1920 he became an American citizen. Co-starred with Bing Crosby in the 'Road to ...' Films. Became an indefatigable entertainer of American troops, which he did both during World War II and for many years afterwards.

Bing Crosby was born in 1904 and christened Harry Lillis Crosby. He became famous for his 'crooning' style and very successful. 'White Christmas' sold over 30 million copies. He

won an Academy Award for 'Going My Way' in 1944. His 'Road to ...' films with Bob Hope were among the most charming of the era, and he entertained the American troops throughout the war.

Joe Louis was born in 1914 and became the world heavyweight champion in 1937. Known as the 'Brown Bomber', he held the title for a record 12 years, defending it 25 times. He too visited Mount Farm, strutting his stuff up and down the road for the entertainment of the entertainment of the residents (and particularly the children) - something that has become part of Berinsfield's history.

Mr John Pratt can remember that, in 1944 as a child living in Dorchester, he saw Joe Louis boxing at the Recreational Ground.

Marlene Dietrich (originally Maria Magdalena von Losch) was born in Germany in 1904. Famous for her performance in 'The Blue Angel', she left Germany in 1930 for the USA and a new career in American films. A vociferous opponent of Adolf Hitler, she went on extensive tours entertaining the troops in World War II, during one of which she visited Mount Farm.

Adolph Menjou was born in 1890 and died in 1963. He played in countless films, and received an Oscar nomination for his performance in 'The Front Page'. He too did his bit during the war, and visited Mount Farm.

EXTRAORDINARY EXPLOITS

The Shuttle Mission to Russia - flown by Ralph Douglas 'Ken' Kendall, Recipient of: D.F.C., Air Medal with 3 Oak Leaf Clusters; 6 Bronze Stars; Victory Ribbon; and the ETO Ribbon.

On the 15th June 1944 Lt. Ken Kendall took off from Mount Farm, in an unarmed Photo-Reconnaissance 'plane for the very first, non-stop, shuttle-photo mission to Poltava, in the Ukraine.

It was an especially hazardous flight - the weather was clear only as far as the Zuider Zee. From Holland to Russia cloud was dense and Kendall had only his instruments to rely upon. To cover the enormous distance to Poltava, Kendall had extra, 'drop' fuel tanks strapped to his aircraft.

Unfortunately, near Brest-Litovsk in Poland, one engine cut out, causing a reduction in speed and an increase in the time spent in the air. This forced Ken Kendall to abandon his original objective Poltava - and made finding an alternative air field on Russian territory on which to land imperative.

He came down to four thousand feet, and flew along a river, being fired at from every direction. He blinked his recognition lights and rocked his wings, at the same time getting out of range of the guns as quickly as possible. Seeing a landing strip he banked sharply and landed, turning his 'plane around to enable him to make a quick take-off if things turned nasty. Then he waited.

About twenty horsemen galloped towards him, as well as several people running on foot. After a certain amount of uncertainty he was directed to a dispersal area where his plane was quickly hidden.

Ken Kendall eventually reached Poltava, from where he flew photographic reconnaissance missions for the Eastern Command. On 30th June he left Poltava, crossed the Transylvanian Alps, Roumania, the northern tip of Bulgaria and Yugoslavia and across the Adriatic to San Severo. On July 3rd Kendall left Italy, flew across Occupied France and then home - to Mount Farm.

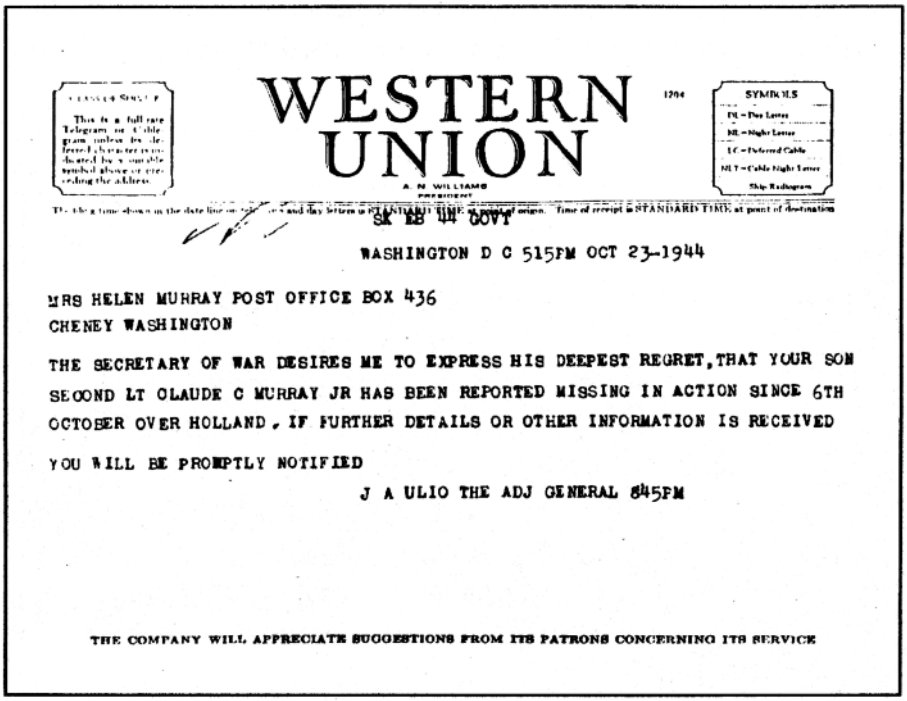
'The rare flying skill and great courage displayed by Lt. Kendall reflect the highest credit upon himself and the armed forces of the United States.' (WWII summary, with the CONFIDENTIAL imprint normal for such accounts at the time).

ESCAPES

One of the best documented (*'Flight Boots to Wooden Shoes'*) escape stories of WWII is that written by Lt. Claude C. Murray, Jr. who was shot down over Holland on the 6th October 1944. He took off from Mount Farm (having only just arrived in England) on his fourth mission - to photograph Hamm, Germany and various other targets.

Lt. Claude Murray flying out from Mount Farm

Also flying that day, to photograph targets in the same area, was Lt. Robert Hall, with whom Murray was in radio contact. Hall alerted Murray to the fact that enemy 'planes were on his tail. 'Bogies! There's Bogies at four o'clock'. It was the last American voice he was to hear for a long time. As Hall was speaking Murray was hit - by a German jet.



WESTERN UNION

SYMBOLS

SK WB 44 GOVT

WASHINGTON D C 515PM OCT 23-1944

MRS HELEN MURRAY POST OFFICE BOX 436
CHENEY WASHINGTON

THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS DEEPEST REGRET, THAT YOUR SON SECOND LT CLAUDE C MURRAY JR HAS BEEN REPORTED MISSING IN ACTION SINCE 6TH OCTOBER OVER HOLLAND, IF FURTHER DETAILS OR OTHER INFORMATION IS RECEIVED YOU WILL BE PROMPTLY NOTIFIED

J A ULIO THE ADJ GENERAL 845PM

THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

Missing in Action!
Telegram to Lt. Murray's mother from War Department 23 October 1944

He parachuted into the Zuider Zee, and after many adventures was eventually picked up by three Dutch boys in a fishing boat. Murray was handed over to the protection of the Dutch Underground (who gave him false papers in the name of Jan Smit, a so-called deaf and dumb Salesman) who kept him safe from the Nazis for seven dangerous months during the winter of 1944-45.

‘THEY RISKED THEIR LIVES TO SAVE MINE, WITHOUT THEM I WOULD NOT BE HERE TODAY’

On the 5th May 1945 Holland was liberated. With three other American airmen (who had also been hidden by the Dutch) Murray hitchhiked until picked up by some Canadian troops. After debriefing they were flown to Paris. and then back to Mount Farm. In Murray‘s group alone 65 pilots were killed in action.

CITATIONS

DISTINGUISHED UNIT CITATION

THE 7TH GROUP RECONNAISSANCE
IS CITED FOR EXTRAORDINARY HEROISM
IN ACTION AGAINST THE ENEMY
FOR THE PERIOD 31 MAY TO 30 JUNE, 1944.
DURING THIS 31 DAY PERIOD,
FROM D-DAY MINUS 7 TO D-DAY PLUS 24,
474 MISSIONS WERE FLOWN,
OF WHICH 426 WERE ACCREDITED SORTIES
AND 342 OR 80 PER CENT WERE SUCCESSFUL.

Awarded the 14th Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron. This squadron also flew the first USAAF photo mission to Berlin.

* * *

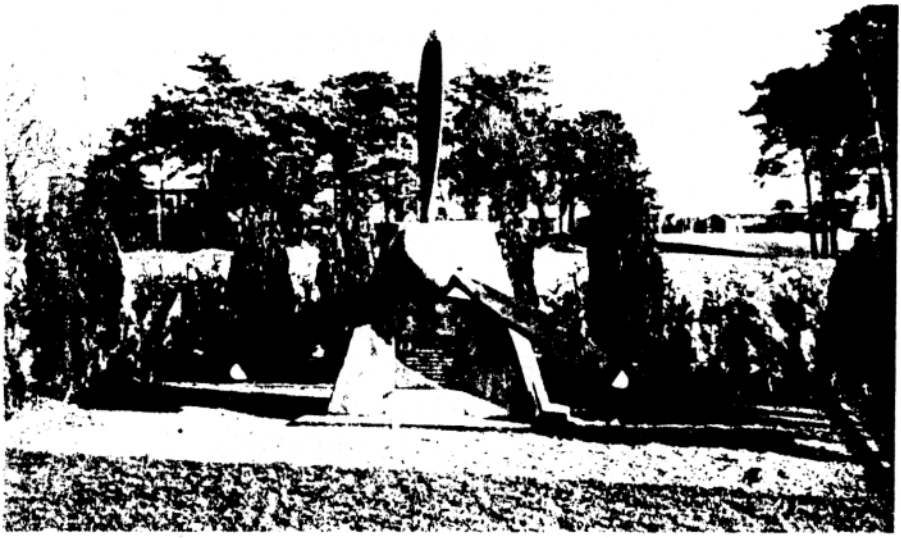
The 22nd Squadron flew the first combat mission on August 12th the pilot was Lt. Nesselrode.

August 1944 was busy. 528 successful missions were flown, 56 of them on August 14th. 441,480 photographic prints were processed during this month. On one day alone during the summer 59,000 prints were turned out in 24 hours.

* * *

On the day following the 8th Air Force's initial bombing of Berlin alone 'Spit' photographed the damage. Later, another pilot made seven runs across the capital of Hitler's Reich.

THE MEMORIALS
Berinsfield



'IN MEMORY OF
THOSE WHO
SERVED 7TH PHOTO GROUP
THE EYES OF THE 8th USAAF
MOUNT FARM
5693 MISSIONS
1943 - 1945.
DEDICATED 25th MAY 1985.'

On the 25th May, 1985, cars lined the road leading to Berinsfield. About 200 American and British guests were assembled to witness the unveiling of the new memorial dedicated to the memory of the 7th Photo Recon Group. Col. George Lawson (22nd Squadron, who unveiled the memorial), Michael Heseltine, the Vicar of Dorchester and the Sheriff of Oxford were among the dignitaries there to commemorate the extraordinary achievements of this extra-ordinary group.

The spinner, painted camouflage blue by Mr. Jackson (ex New Zealand Air Force, now living in Toot Baldon) actually came from a Constellation, very similar to that of a P-38 'Lightning', there being no P-38 spinner available. The propeller and blades did come from a P-38 'Lightning' and the memorial itself was mounted on a concrete plinth, the whole work being overseen by Mr Jackson.

Dorchester-on-Thames

IN MEMORY OF
THE AMERICANS OF THE
7TH PHOTO GROUP
WHO LOST THEIR LIVES FLYING
FROM MOUNT FARM 1943-44-45

This memorial can be found, clothed in ivy, in the Cloister Gardens behind Dorchester Abbey, together with a bench dedicated to the 7th Photo Reconnaissance Group.

Both these memorials were the result of an invitation to drink a very English cup of tea in a very English cottage in Dorchester! John Pratt (of Dorchester) was in the Abbey one day while his wife nursed a bad foot at home. Two Americans - Ed Hoffman (a 7th Photo Reconnaissance Group veteran) and his wife Jane

were on a visit and they were both longing for a cup of tea. John extended an invitation to his home. The two memorials are the result of an enduring friendship which has lasted many years and involved numerous visits between the States and England.

Chalgrove Airfield
Station 465

'TO THE MEMORY OF AMERICAN
SERVICEMEN WHO WERE BASED
HERE DURING WORLD WAR TWO.
THEY SERVED WITH THE 10TH
PHOTOGRAPHIC RECONNAISSANCE
GROUP AND TROOP CARRIER
PATHFINDER GROUP (PROV.) OF
THE 9TH UNITED STATES ARMY AIR
FORCE, AIRBORNE PATHFINDER
PARATROOPS OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY
AND THE 7TH PHOTOGRAPHIC
RECONNAISSANCE GROUP, THE
"EYES OF THE 8TH" UNITED STATES
ARMY AIR FORCE.

MAY THEY NEVER BE FORGOTTEN.
DEDICATED JUNE 18TH 1993.'

During March 1945 all American personnel were transferred from Mount Farm to Chalgrove.

On March 28th a large group marched on foot to their new airfield, passing through Stadhampton on the way. By prior arrangement they stopped for a refreshing drink of lemonade at 'The Crown' (still there today) and were served by the daughter of the landlord - Audrey (Roberts). She was already friendly with

one of the Mount Farm Americans, and subsequently left for the States, a G.I. Bride, where she has lived ever since.

This memorial can be found in Warpsgrove Lane, Chalgrove, opposite that of John Hampden (1594-1643), English parliamentarian and patriot, who died in Thame as a result of a wound to the shoulder inflicted during the Civil War.

'They threw their strength into this task far from their homeland. They gave everything....the very breath of life.....'

'MEMORIES OF ENGLAND'
by
M/Sgt. H.W. Roof

E is for the eggs; they're always powdered.
N is for the Naafi and their tea,
G is for the gum the kids all want, chum,
L is for the lights you never see.
A is for the ack-ack always acking,
N is for the nights you never sleep,
D is for the dampest weather ever.

Life is rough in the ETO!
[European Theatre of Operation]

*** * ***

References:

1. 'With the Eyes of the Seventh Photo Group.'
2. 'The Journals of the 7th Photo Recon Group, Vallejo, California.
3. 'Flight Boots to Wooden Shoes' by Claude Murray ('*Jan. Smit'*).