

“The Mighty Eighth”



During the Second World War the United States 8th Army Air Force dispatched 3,000 bomber and fighter aircraft on daily operations involving more than 20,000 airmen, flying from airfields in East Anglia; the largest offensive air force in history.

Strategic bombing involved campaigns to destroy the industries and communications that directly or indirectly supported the enemy's war effort. RAF Bomber Command concentrated on night attacks while its American counterpart, the 8th Air Force, operated mainly in daylight.

The first official bombing raid by the 8th Air Force took place on American Independence Day, July 4th 1942, when six American crews joined No. 226 Squadron flying from RAF Swanton Morley in a low level attack on four Luftwaffe airfields in the Netherlands.

The Second Air Division

At full strength the 2nd Air Division, one of the Eighth's three divisions, controlled fourteen heavy bomber airfields in Norfolk and northeast Suffolk, and five fighter airfields. Ketteringham Hall, to the south of Norwich, served as the Division's headquarters. They were equipped with B-24 Liberator heavy bombers, and P-51 Mustang and P-47 Thunderbolt fighter aircraft.

Nearly 7,000 men serving with the 2nd Air Division lost their lives during the conflict. At one period the chance of an individual airman completing a tour of operations (25 missions, later 30-35) was as little as one in three, so formidable was the flak (anti-aircraft artillery) and fighter defences of the German Luftwaffe.

For every man in the air there were another seven to ten on the ground engaged in support – cooks, clerks, mechanics, armourers, medics and a score of others performing duties, many of them menial, but essential to the functioning of the group.