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They Have Left The Farm

By SQUADRON LEADER H. E. BATES

A LITTLE over a year ago, when England was so full of United States soldiers that the papers used to run cartoons depicting one or two of them who had fallen off the side of the island rather as an orange will fall off a barrel that is too full, I wrote an article about American airmen and my native country, calling it *My Grandfather's Farm*.

In that short piece I tried to show how a few green acres of Midland England had become a segment of American history. I wrote of how the old violet woods of my boyhood had been shaved off the hillside, how the brooks had been dammed and the brown furrows levelled, so that places which had long been dear to me had gradually become an American town. I wrote of how American Fortresses, so beautifully silver in the cool English light that they somehow never looked like the weapons of violence they were, replaced on that hillside the plough, the harrow and the horse, and how the local citizen gave up for a time his unalienable right to walk freely on about a dozen miles of the King's Highway without providing a pass to a man from Texas or Colorado who carried a gun.

I wrote of fine and undying perform-

ances in the air which had begun and ended on the piece of earth where I, as a boy, had found skylarks' nests and primroses and had seen my first aircraft hover like an ugly young bird above the misty earth. And I wrote finally of the dead: of the American dead, and of the youthful dead, to whom this piece of my own earth had been a home, a starting place and a resting place, and who by the manner of their dying had blessed this fragment of England.

They Are Packing Up . . .

I want to write now of how, only a year later, the material traces of all this are being swept away. The Americans are packing up. The land they temporarily appropriated from us is, strip by strip, airfield by airfield, coming back. The same soil which, two hundred years ago, nourished the families of Washington at Sulgrave and Franklin at Fetton, in this same county, is becoming entirely English again. The churches at which John Bunyan preached three hundred years ago are no longer going to know the voice of a young American bombardier reading the lesson on an English Sunday. The plough and the tractor are gradually beginning to creep in towards those vast perimeters

of war that, in the climax of the European fury, held anything up to a hundred bombers apiece, and the harrow is silently breaking down the oil-stained earth for next year's corn. And it is by the silence, mostly, that you feel the change. It is the silence after battle, the immemorial silence of the ploughshare taking the place of war, but mostly, perhaps, the silence after the revolution.

For it is true to say, I think, that no single event has stirred or affected this piece of Midland England earth so much in the last three hundred years as this late invasion of the Americans: that is, since about the year 1640, in the last English civil war. Never, during all that time, have some thousands of men of another nation, speaking English, come here to make their homes while they prepared for war. Never at any other time have more than 1,500 men of another country had such short, swift success with the girls—for 1,550 in three years is the latest figure of American-English marriages in this one small district. And never before have so many men died in battles for which these green upland valleys were the bases of operations. It is very true, therefore, to say that a great revolution has come and gone.

"Gum for the kids," and then—

And how did we, the English, feel about all this? Setting aside the fact that at least 50,000 young girls thought it terrific and 1,550 of them accorded it a triumph, we went through four, perhaps five, phases. We began with the period of excitement, curiosity, suspicion, slight resentment, the traditional English slow-opening reserve. That was the "gum-for-the-kids" era. We then detected in the raw, as yet untrained American boys, a touch of untidy swagger that did not look well against the trim sternness of British boys already trained in two years of war.

But we got over that; and we went into phase two. That was the great period of testing. It was the "Sunday-dinner-for-a-Soldier" era. And it was shaken by a single terrific event; a day when fifteen American bombers took off from the local field to attack a ball-bearing plant at Schweinfurt and only

two came back. That was a bad and immemorial day. I do not suppose there is in the State Department at Washington any system for the recording of tears. All I can say is that on that day, perhaps the toughest in the history of that one American base, as many tears were shed by English eyes for American dead as were ever shed there, before or afterwards, for English men. After that day our few distinctions began to break down; we found we were looking at things with more of the same eyes and the same perspective.

And after that it became a clearer perspective, and we went into phase number three. That was the period of no illusions. It was the "we're-in-this-dam-thing-together" era. It was the time when the Americans had come to the realistic conclusion that one Fortress does not win a war, and when we on our side had begun to realize, painfully and reluctantly, that we were only half-way through the war. The Royal Air Force had only just begun its four-figure raids, and the Americans, still training under European conditions, had not yet reached that strength. It was a grim period, and it got gradually noisier as both the Americans and the R.A.F. put more and more aircraft into the sky.

There was not quite so much to eat as we should have liked, and one of the things that people liked to do was to get themselves invited out to the American base for chicken on Sunday. No American could possibly think Sunday complete without chicken, and I daresay many a girl got married, about that time, over a wish-bone.

During that third period I began to notice, perhaps because I had been for some time in the R.A.F. myself, that the American flyers were trying to take on that likeable international sort of reticence that is common to flying men. They were becoming refined in the common fire of combat, and I could see more and more of them becoming more and more constrained and matured, as thousands of British, Polish, Czech, Dutch, French, Norwegian and Dominions flying boys had done. The best of them hardly troubled to wear any decorations, and they liked using R.A.F. expressions a little and naming

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some of their aircraft such as *You've Had It* in an R.A.F. way.

Bewildering Days

Then period four began: noisier and noisier, heavier and heavier until all hell was let loose with the Allied invasion. Those days were bewildering in their heavy violent magnificence. By that time practically all American bombers were unpainted—the paintwork on a Fortress made a difference, somebody discovered, of several hundred pounds in weight—and what we saw was a vast glitter of silver on the green hillside and an even vaster more impressive glitter as thousands of them formed in the summer sky. At night we had the R.A.F. and by day the U.S.A.A.F. in about equal strength so that the battle line was never still. But that I think, was the great period: the period of success and sacrifice, of retribution and power, and of understanding between us brought very close and made more refined and enduring by death.

Many a young English girl, in that period, had an American husband for only a few days. And against that there is a record of an American flyer who made at least five attempts to escape from Germany, and was finally successful, simply because an English girl had said she would give him hell if he didn't come back to marry her. And if that isn't a tribute to English womanhood I shall give up looking for one in future.

Now, in phase five, the men who made history here are going, or have gone, away. By June, only one field out of the whole group that sprang up among my native fields still showed its silver silhouettes on the bare hillside. Materially, as I write, the thing is practically at an end. But the indefinable spirit of it, the simple human unity of it, has sent its roots right down. An American achievement, on an English field, is something of an honour for us both to treasure.

A Fresh Tradition

It gives back to the fields that gave Washington and Franklin and *Pilgrim's Progress* a new richness and a fresh tradition. It is symbolised in the captured Schweinfurt flag, in the names of battle targets written with smoky candles in the ceilings of mess huts, in proud little articles released at last by censorship in the local press, and in casual anecdotes of many an American boy who, when he talks of England, will mean this Midland countryside of river-valleys, stone cottages, simple ale-houses and bright flower-gardens that he helped, for a short time, to revolutionize.

But its deepest and greenest survival will be, I think, in memory. With us it will long be wondered at, talked about, valued and remembered. It will become a legend. Among the barley fields, the woods of violet and primrose and the green pastures that are returning to us, we shall not forget it. . . .

Songs the Service Sings

By SQUADRON LEADER C. H. WARD-JACKSON

IN their songs airmen have written their own history, and the scenes of their attempts at composition are scattered across the world: around an iron stove in a Nissen hut in Iceland, in a bivouac on a Sudan landing ground, in a canteen in Kent on a Naafi "com-mando" piano, on the banks of the Tigris, in a flying training mess in Saskatchewan, in an aircraft apprentices' school in beechy Buckinghamshire, in a stony waste of the North West Frontier, squatting on a petrol tin in the Libyan sand, in the Cadet College at Cranwell, in the hot-flannel heat of the Gambia, back of barbed wire in a German *stalag*, in an *estaminet* in Flanders over a bottle of *vin blanc*.

What is an airman's song? I would define it as a lyric by, for and about airmen or their activities. I exclude the bawdy smoking concert song sung wherever stag parties foregather; it is not peculiar to airmen. I exclude professional scripts written for the theatre and radio like *Coming in on a Wing and a Prayer*, *Johnnie's Got a Zero*, *He Wears a Pair of Silver Wings*, and such stuff. These are the commercials of Charing Cross Road and Broadway, and have no connection with R.A.F. tradition and spirit. The words must be by, for and about airmen, but the tune may come from anywhere.

It is natural that most airmen's songs

are not sung to original music but are put to, or are parodies of, hymns and airs like "The Tarpaulin Jacket," "She'll be Coming Round the Mountain," "A Little Bit of Heaven," and the like. The reasons are clear. There are so many excellent tunes to select from that it is not difficult to find one that fits the desired mood; rhymesters are commoner than music composers; it is easier to record and memorize original words than an original tune (if such a thing as an original tune exists); and so many songs are written as an outcome of and under conditions where the only instrument is the plebeian mouth-organ.

Four Types

It may be said that there are four classifications of airman's song: Squadron, Concert Party, Training and Camp Songs. The first and pre-eminent is born out of the mess parties of pilots and other air crew of fighter, bomber, coastal, reconnaissance and army co-operation squadrons. Most have been written while on operations, and typical are *The Bold Aviator* (pre-1914); *So Early in the Morning* and *I Left the Mess Room Early* (first World War); *The Ballad of Sulaiman* and *Those Shaibah Blues* (the "Peace" Years); *The Benghazi Mail Run* and *The Firth of Flaming Forth* (second World War),

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