Chapter 3

ENGLISH ENVIRONMENT

— BRINSON'S HISTORY —

Aldermaston Royal Air Force Station (MF Station 467), 45 miles west of the center of London, and just south of the main road between London and Bristol, was situated in the rolling Berkshire countryside. Following the plan of most British air bases, Aldermaston was laid out in various "sites." Living sites, operational sites, and maintenance sites were dispersed for the purpose of limiting damage in the event of enemy bombing attacks. As a result of the dispersal, the RAF had learned that some form of personal transportation was needed. Bicycles were the most obvious solution. Almost every man was issued a bicycle shortly after he arrived at Aldermaston.

By jeep, truck, and on foot, the 315th quickly settled on the base. Each man drew his "biscuit" type mattress, his scratchy English military blankets and began to learn how to maintain fire in an English coal stove.

Group Headquarters and the two squadrons set up offices in designated areas during the days following arrival. In addition to Colonel McLelland, the Commanding Officer, the group Staff consisted of Major Estrumse, Executive Officer, Major Lyon, Operations; Major Gibbons, Engineering; Lieutenant Conquest, Supply; Major Parker, Adjutant; Captain Messenger, Intelligence; Lieutenant Peden, Communications; Captain Braden, Liaison; Lieutenant Coker, Chaplain; Captain Oakes, Flight Surgeon; and Lieutenant Shulman, Dentist, Sergeant Major Davis and Sergeants Stetson, Barnes, Staskiewicz, and Solomon were among those who ably assisted.

In postwar Britain, the former air station at Aldermaston became an atomic weapons facility somewhat similar to Oak Ridge in the U.S., and therefore, a restricted area. The British anti-nuke people, sometimes known as “The Aldermaston Marchers," began some of their protest marches to Trafalgar Square from Aldermaston.

The 34th staff: in addition to Major Dekin, was Hamby, Operations; Maugher, Transportation; Senzik, Engineering; Hedley, Communications; Rowland, Intelligence; West, Adjutant; Krakower, Surgeon; Miller, Supply; and DeArmond, Liaison. Captain Peterson's 43rd staff was Pate, Mandt, Means, Maize, Reust, McRae, Kimball, Saunders, and Kaffenburg.

A few days after arrival at Aldermaston, many of the planes and crews were sent to London's Hendon Airdrome to fly for the 8th Air Force Ferry Transport Service. Aircrews were rotated from time to time between Hendon and Aldermaston, but the majority of the flying the 315th achieved in England from December through April originated at Hendon. The 315th, with its two squadrons, was, in fact, the only troop carrier organization in the U.K. at that time.

There were no quarters at Hendon for the American officers on detached service; therefore, at night, or when not flying, most of the 315th officers could be found at the Jules Club in the West End of London. This small hotel, located at 85 Jermyn Street, along with the Cavendish Hotel next door, had been fashionable London stopping places during the Edwardian period. The Jules Club was operated during the war by the American Red Cross, with British woman volunteers. Lady Barkley, Mrs. Knight, and Miss Downes, who were often at the registration desk, soon became familiar sights to the Aldermaston bunch.

To discourage nonresidents from staying in crowded wartime London too long, a government regulation, then in effect, prohibited hotels with providing sleeping accommodations to anybody for more than five consecutive nights. Although this regulation was sometimes circumvented, the pilots and navigators at Hendon sometimes needed to locate other lodgings for a night or two, and then return to "The Jules." Hotel room prices during the war were not unreasonable, and, by government edict, they could not be raised. The problem, occasionally, was finding a room. If not at the Jules Club (or ater the Reindeer Club on Clifford Street), the 315th officers in London could usually be found staying at The Grosvenor House, The Park Lane, The Dorchester, The Savoy, or The Regent Palace.

Quarters were made available at Hendon for the enlisted men on the aircrews; very convenient quarters some of them commented, since they were directly across the street from the RAF Corporals' Mess. Wearing their leather jackets or flying suits most of the time, neither which normally displayed their insignia of rank, the crew chiefs and radio operators, most of

whom were one grade of sergeant or another, would arrive at the Corporals' Mess at the latest possible time to have breakfast. This went on for several weeks until one morning the 315th sergeants were stopped at the door by a very senior and irate RAF corporal who was in charge of the mess hall. He firmly informed (he Americans that he had just learned that they were not corporals; it was his further duty to acquaint them with the fact that in the RAF, sergeants did not mess with corporals. If they wanted to eat in the future, the corporal said, they would have to use the Sergeants' Mess, which was all the way across the airfield. Thus, the "Yanks" of the 315th learned that at British airfields a Corporals' Mess meant exactly what was printed on the sign outside the building. It was for corporals -- only.

Wartime London was a new experience for all. Daily activities quickly fell into a pattern. Crew members stayed overnight in the city, and would head for the nearest Underground station and board a train for the airfield. Stations named Tottingham Court Road, Chalk Farm, Camden Town, Euston, Hempstead, and Hendon Central became familiar sights on the journey. One left the train, not at Hendon Central, as one might guess, but at the station beyond there, if Hendon Airdrome was the destination. After a walk of about one quarter mile from the station to the airfield, crews reported to the crew room which was next to the office of Major Frank Crowley, the detachment commander at Hendon of the 8th Air Force's Ferry Transport Service. Sometimes all crews were scheduled to fly, other times, less than all. Those not scheduled were free to retrace their forty-minute journey to the heart of London, if they so desired -- until the following morning. There was no provision for telephoning to Hendon before going out to see if one was scheduled. That was not permitted. Everybody not in hospital reported.

Major Crowley, a New Englander, had been an executive pilot before the war. He had been recalled from the Army Reserve and soon found himself in London. He spoke very rapidly and was sometimes difficult to understand, perhaps as one lieutenant commented, because he seldom was seen without a large cigar in his teeth. Usually appearing to be in a hurry, the major would issue the daily trip assignments and then make certain that the crews were rushed to the planes to take advantage of as many daylight flying hours as possible. After the morning flight departed, to those pilots who stayed for awhile in the crew room, Major Crowley would occasionally narrate stories of his pre-war flight activities. These stories were always interesting, made even more so by what some listeners believed were slight exaggerations.

The majority of the flights from Hendon returned before night flight. Flights were usually made at altitudes of 2,000 feet or lower, and all of them were made under what were known as "Visual Flight Rules" -- or something reasonably close to those rules. There were no authorized "let-down" procedures for most British airfields, therefore flying without some positive reference point to the ground was not recommended; in fact, it was prohibited. At times, however, it was possible for pilots to find holes in the clouds through which they could make a descent, since English weather could be very changeable from one area of the country to another. Because winter at the latitudes of Britain offers only about seven hours of daylight, all flights were required to land prior to 4:00 PM. The normal haze that was prevalent at an airfield in a London suburb .when mixed with approaching darkness, made visibility very low at Hendon' in the late afternoon.

The British fields into which the 315th planes were scheduled most often were Burtonwood, a repair and modification facility between Manchester and Liverpool; Honington, a prewar RAF grass landing field in Cambridgeshire; St. Eval, on the Cornish coast; Langford Lodge, in Northern Ireland; and Prestwick, Scotland. Cargo and passengers flown were both British and American.

Situated around some of the airfields, especially those in certain industrial or port areas, were barrage balloon sites. It was explained that the purpose of these balloons was to be a hazard to low flying enemy aircraft that might slip into these areas. Hanging below these balloons were cables that could do major damage to the aircraft if struck. These air filled bags were not always aloft, but when they were in the air, and the visibility was marginal, the balloons could be heard even though not seen. There were radio transmitters on the balloons that transmitted a noise on a common frequency. The "squeakers" eventually became a noise that crew members became accustomed to, but they

would have preferred to do without. A pilot from the 43rd Squadron made a landing at Southampton one afternoon during a period of very poor visibility. One airport official could not understand how the plane could have made an approach with the number of balloons up in the area. The following morning, when the weather was clear, one or two balloons were pulled down to allow the planes to depart.

In a very short time almost everybody became acquainted with the occasional air raids, the London Underground, blackouts, fog, Westminster Abbey, the Tower, Piccadilly Commandos, the Coconut Grove Night Club, and the theaters of the West End.

At Aldermaston, there was local flight training, lectures by visiting British officers, menus generous with Brussels sprouts and mutton, the carrying of gas masks one day a week, the task of repossessing one's bicycle that had been "liberated" by someone else, and mail censoring. Dances were held every other Saturday night with feminine companionship arriving from Reading and other nearby communities.

Mail censoring was an onerous task that everybody disliked. Every day certain available officers were designated to read outgoing letters (they were posted unsealed). The censor then signed his name on the outside of the envelope certifying that the letter contained nothing that would be a security violation. While one could write that he had visited London or one of the larger cities, and perhaps that he had traveled there by train or bus, it was forbidden to mention exactly where one was based, and not much could be said about what one was doing. Such restrictions reduced considerably the .subjects that could be commented upon. As a result, letters written by husbands to wives often involved only family matters, and those penned by the unmarried men to their ladyloves usually contained the same expressions of undying devotion. One young officer stated "It embarrasses me to read another person's mail. Besides, it's downright dull. A steady diet of censoring soldiers' mail is the best way to die of boredom. I must have read, or hastily glanced over, more than a thousand letters and not yet have I seen anything approaching a security violation. Still, I suppose it's necessary."

In January, all Sergeant Pilots in the Group were advanced to the newly created rank of Flight Officer, which entitled them to exchange their chevrons for a blue bar with a gold stripe down the center. Flight Officers who held warrants wore the same uniforms as commissioned officers, with a different cap emblem.

Three airplanes were damaged during January and February during landing accidents -- one at White Waltham, another at Burtonwood, and a third at Hendon. At least two of the accidents could be attributed to landing during periods of limited visibility.

There were other occurrences involving flying during the winter and early spring that differed from the routine. Several Group navigators were lent to organizations ferrying planes to North Africa; a crew consisting of Lieutenants Brinson, Chapman, Flight Officer Wilson, Technical Sergeant Brown, and Sergeant Eiden went to Algeria and Tunisia for two weeks on a special mission with 8th Air Force officers; the group lost five pilots when Major. Estrumse, Lieutenants Pate, Steinbach, George Smith, and Blaney returned to the U.S. to be part of a cadre for a troop carrier group scheduled to be activated; Lieutenant Rylance and a crew were placed on detached service to Sherburn- in- Elmet RAF Station in Yorkshire to learn glider towing techniques from the British; and the first crates of American gliders, ready to be assembled, arrived at Aldermaston.

In April, the 34th Squadron set up a program of Commando Training." Certain officers and enlisted men were moved to a different area of the base where classes were conducted in chemical warfare, the Manual for Courts Martial, medicine in the field, and other basic military subjects. Close order drill, forced marches, obstacle courses, and daily calisthenics were not ignored. For a while, both the instructors and those being instructed thought that they were out of the Air Corps and in the "walking Army."

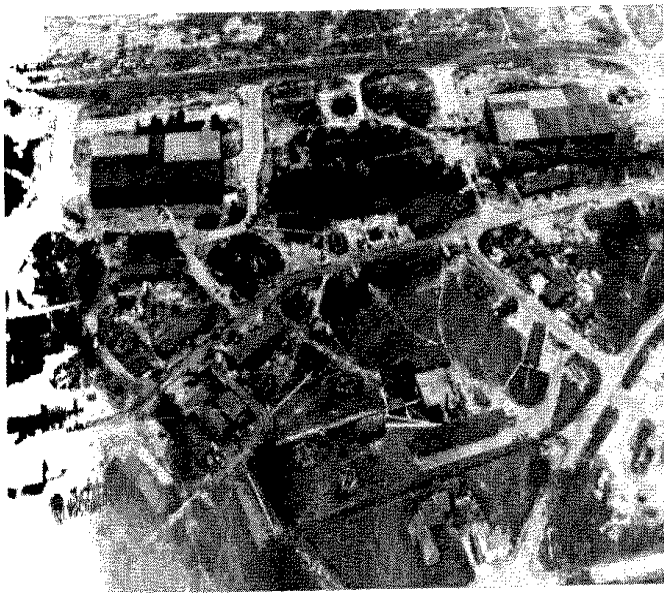
Training with the British Paratroop School not far west of Aldermaston, on the Salisbury Plain, became commonplace. Two or three planes would be sent over to Bascombe Down or Netheravon for the day to fly British soldiers qualifying as paratroopers. The procedure was to take fifteen or twenty trainees aloft, fly to the drop area, which was very close by, and give the signal for the trainees to jump. The plane would then land, and another group would climb aboard, and the procedure would be repeated. This went on for

hours.

On one occasion a 315th pilot flying one of these missions, asked the crew chief the whereabouts of the navigator whom he had not seen for a short period. Lieutenant Farese jumped with the paratroopers on the last pass we made over the jump field. The sergeant said "The lieutenant said he didn't have anything to do on these circling flights so he thought that he would try his luck at jumping."

And so it went.

With growing exposure to English airfields, cities, food, feminine companions, and comrades-in-arms, some of the 315th troops were soon going about speaking more of a British accent than the British.



The 315th's new home - Aldermaston Aerodrome, England

Photo courtesy of Dave Benfield

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ENGLISH ENVIRONMENT
— CHOLEWCZYNSKI'S "VOICES" —

Private First Class Edward M. Papp
Crew Chief, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

Just after we landed in Britain a fuel truck pulled up in front of the aircraft. I was shocked to see a tiny girl, she couldn't have been more than an inch over 5 feet tall, hop out of the cab. She ran to the back of the fuel truck, jerked the nozzle of the fuel hose out of its holder and dragged the hose toward the plane. I was kneeling on the leading edge of the wing and standing below me she shouted with a big smile, "OK, Yank, how much petrol do you need?" She was so short that I had to lay flat on the wing and reach down as far as I could to grab the nozzle.

I could hardly believe my eyes. She was such a little girl, and could not have been older than 19, and was handling a job I had only seen men doing before, and doing it efficiently. While the fuel was running into the main tank, I called down, "How much are you charging for this stuff." She looked up at me with an impish grin, "No charge Yank. This is Lend-Lease petrol you're getting."

I don't have to tell you how that encounter gave me a wonderful impression of Britain and the courageous people who had been fighting a war for over three years. Maybe that's what began my life-long love affair with Britain and its people.

1st Sergeant William Nagle
Headquarters, 315th Troop Carrier Group

We arrived at Greenock, Scotland after eight days. It would take the convoy that we left another eight days to reach Britain. After debarking the ship we boarded trains for Aldermaston. I could not help our notice that the Scottish lassies working in the station were very beautiful. When they began asking for soap, nylons, candy and cigarettes we began to realize that the war had really affected everyone. We had not been exposed to rationing or shortages of any kind. Standing on the station platform and finding a door into each compartment of the passenger coaches was new and unusual to us, but it also seemed very practical. We arrived at Aldermaston station, as usual, in the middle of the night. We had boarded double-decker buses for the ride to the base under a bright moon. It was in the early hours of the morning when we got all of the troops into their assigned barracks.

Private George N. Doll
Medical Technician, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

Thanksgiving 1942 found us feasting on cold ham and yams aboard the Queen Elizabeth. A week later the ground echelon and I docked in Scotland, and entrained for England. The train sped through the night on its bumpy way through the night, black-out curtains protecting us from regular bombing raids by "Jerry." At every hamlet let the whistle screamed like a woman in distress until finally we arrived at Reading, tired, hungry, and anxious for the trip to end.

We traded the cranky train for noisy, blacked-out double decker buses with slitted eyes where headlights should have been. After a rough trip, we saw finally saw our new home, RAF Station Aldermaston, and oh, so much mud. We settled in, strangers in a strange country, and got to know English currency, mostly ignored the "yellow" and "red" alerts broadcast over the Tannoy, and complained about the boiled food we received. We finally met our British counterparts at their version of our PX, the NAAFI, and found we were limited to two candy bars, seven packs of cigarettes, and a bar of soap a week.

Private Raymond M. Schwartz
Radio Mechanic, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

Aldermaston was our original base. They were always fixing up the area so we wouldn't have to walk in mud. The place was, after all, new. Everything was brand new. They constantly were fixing up everything with walkways in between buildings so you wouldn't be walking in mud.

I was a buck-private, and they told us that we must all say that we were sergeants. Talk about stratification! The British separated everybody by ranks, and we would all eat in the sergeants' mess. The weather was so cold in the winter of 1942, but they only gave us one bag of coal per barracks. They had wooden chairs in there, and somebody decided to bust up the wooden chairs and burn them. One by one they disappeared.

Staff Sergeant Richard L. Adams
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

When we landed in England, the British had been at war for over two years. I saw that they were a very sturdy people, and that they had already been through a lot. There wasn't anything in England that wasn't rationed, even matches. When we went on detached service to Hendon, we were living in London, We had no quarters on the station. We got to know a lot of those people. It was the tail end of the Blitz, and they were still bombing London. The people were spending their nights in the Underground. They would go down into the tubes to spend the night. I still think they were tremendous people.

Staff Sergeant James Alwood ("Seaweed") Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

I thought the English people were great. They were happy to see *us*, and were always inviting us into their homes. We flew all around England - hauling freight and personnel. We arrived in England so early that they didn't have many places for military people to stay, so we always stayed in hotels.

Private Raymond M. Schwartz
Radio Mechanic, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron,

I used to visit a family in London, somewhat related, or just very close to my family, so I visited them frequently. They lived on the fifth floor in at very nice neighborhood. When they had an air raid alert, they would always go down to the air raid shelter. I refused to go. They had such nice accommodations that I would think, "I'm not going to go down there ... " I was in a comfortable bedroom, while they went down to the shelter. Thar was my attitude.

When there was an air raid I think most Americans in London were more interested in going outside to watch what was happening than in hiding. 1 may have been the influence of Edward R. Murrow's reports combined wit youthful stupidity. The last is probably more correct. We wouldn't do that at our current age. Then we were interested in seeing something.

Staff Sergeant Richard L. Adams
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

At Hendon we were about 40 seconds off of the balloon barrage that circled London. If you took off in a certain direction, as soon as you were 01 the ground you had to bank, because you would be in the cables. One Sunday we were there, waiting around. It was right before lunchtime, and they would lower the barrage balloons for maintenance. They lowered two balloons that were off the end of the Hendon runway. The balloons had hardly touched the ground, and here comes a Ju-88, went right through the gap, and on to, downtown London. It was weird, it was as if they had some people then working for them. They hadn't even touched the ground, and ZOOM, that mother went right on through.

Private George N. Doll
Medical Technician, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

Finally, on December 20, 1942, we received our first long-awaited mail call overseas. A real pleasure was a local letter from a good high school friend from Chicago, Ed Gimbel. I saw him off on the train that took him to Windsor, Ontario, where he joined the RCAP long before

America entered the war. He won his wings as a flight sergeant, was sent to England where he flew Spitfires. He had been recently promoted to pilot officer. His letter included the name of his airfield less than 100 miles away, and a phone number.

Though it was late in the afternoon, on the spur of the moment my RAF pal Don Scopps and I got on our bicycles and raced to a public phone. An officer in the control tower answered, "403 Squadron." I asked for Ed, and then hear another plane fly past the tower. "No, that's not him," another roar, then "Nor that one." Finally I heard another plane over the phone, "That's Gimbel, he's back. I'll give him your number. A few minutes later, the phone rang, "Hey Doll, is that you? Where are you?" I told him, and he replied, "I'll get another kite and see you in about 30 minutes."

Don and I went to the runway and waited. The first Spitfire was going too high and too fast, not Ed. The second was lower, but had Polish markings.

The third Spitfire came in sedately and lowered its wheels. Don commented, "That's not a Yank!" However, the Spitfire circled, and landed, and then

taxied over to where we and our bikes were waiting in the mud.

Ed popped out, in flying boots, Mae West, and RCAF uniform, a real sight for sore eyes. He insisted that I try the Spitfire on for size. His was the latest model Spitfire with drop tank, twin radiators, the new high-powered Merlin engine and four-blade prop. I marveled at the maze of buttons and switches, sighted through the gunsight prism, and Don and Ed had to pry me out of the cockpit.

Like a man without a country, he had to try on my American blouse and cap, and then had to leave. All Allied planes had to be out of England's skies before dark or become targets for AA guns intent on blowing night raiders out of the sky. Just before he climbed onto the wing and into the cockpit, I told him, "Ed, you know Don here said it wasn't an American before you came in for a landing." "Why?" he asked. I replied, "Because he says all Yanks come in hell bent for election, and you didn't." he answered, "Oh, he did?"

The engine fired up, its loud throaty power vibrated the wings, and with a wave from Ed, the craft eased forward and then raced to the end of the runway. It lifted sharply into the evening sky as first one, and then the other wheel disappeared into the sleek belly of the fighter. Still flying away from us it seemed that Ed must have thought about Don's remark for suddenly the plane stood on one wing, swung around, and came roaring toward where we stood on the side of the runway.

He was only a few feet above the airfield. With one wing dropped almost touching the ground, the plane hurtled straight at *us*. Don and I dropped our bikes, and then ourselves into the mud as the Spitfire stood on its tail, groping for the sky. Then, with a final flourish, as if a curl on the end of a signature, the barrel-rolled off into the evening blue and a full moon. Don and I got up, our blouses covered with mud. As he brushed his chest with his muddy hands, Don's eyes followed the speck in the sky, "He's a Yank, all right, a REAL BLOODY YANK!"

My friend Ed was shot down over France in April 1943, but managed to get to Gibraltar aided by the Underground. He continued to fly with the Canadians until transferred to the USAAF's 336th Fighter Squadron, 4th Fighter Group. He was wounded by flak over Belgium in March 1945, and then shot down over Prague on April 16th, 1945, and was a POW until liberated the following month. He had shot down five enemy aircraft in aerial combat, was awarded both the US and British Distinguished Flying Crosses, the Air Medal with 5 OLCs, the Purple Heart, plus numerous Canadian, British and American service and campaign decorations.

Private Raymond M. Schwartz
Radio Mechanic 34th Troop Carrier Squadron,

In England, we set up what I called a "domestic airline." We flew allover the British Isles, from a London RAF field at Hendon, taking passengers, high ranking personnel, or supplies, and moving them from here to there. We went Belfast and up to Scotland a few times. I got to know the whole country that way. I was all over the place. Sometimes we went so far that we had to spend the night up there in Belfast or Scotland.

2nd Lieutenant Reginald C. Carnick ("Reg")
Pilot, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

About a week after arriving at our base in Aldermaston in late December, 1942, I was scheduled to fly to Salisbury in southern England to pick up a general and fly him to London. The weather wasn't very good, with a ceiling of about 1,000 feet with visibility of two miles and rapidly deteriorating. I don't remember the crew except for the navigator, whom I shall call 'Bart' to

protect the guilty. He advised me to follow the railroad. When the rail line split, I proceeded to take the right fork. Bart said, "No, go left." I was a neophyte in cross-country flying and as Bart was the navigator with previous experience flying in England, I relied on his judgment.

After flying a half-hour, we approached a large city. I thought it was too large to be Salisbury. I then heard warning signals in my radio headset indicating that there were barrage balloons ahead. I told Bart, "There are barrage balloons over that city and I'm not going to fly there. You don't know where you are, and I'm landing this airplane as soon as I can." I saw a grass RAF airfield below. It was relatively small for a C-47. Unable to contact the tower to find out the best way to land, I circled the field three times before setting down. As I taxied toward operations, I was surprised to see a large number of people lined up beside the hangers. Greeted by an RAF officer I joked, "Haven't those people seen a C-47 before?"

He replied, "It's not that," and pointed to a break in the clouds overhead revealing a barrage balloon. At base operations he showed me a local area map indicating the location of 24 balloons around the airfield. He said that the base was a Spitfire experimental station, and was frequently bombed. There had been a raid by German bombers an hour earlier, and as the silhouette of the *C-47* was very much like the Heinkel bomber, every anti-aircraft gun in the area was aimed at our plane. He then added that the approach I used was directly over an ammo dump. All the RAF fliers on the base came over to shake my hand, hoping that some of my good luck might rub off on them. Two of the station's pilots had been killed the previous year flying into balloon cables in clear weather.

We spent the night there, and when we took off the next morning there wasn't a cloud in the sky. They lowered seven balloons to allow us to take off When we returned to Aldermaston I told Bart, "If you ever put me in a situation like that again and I live through it, I'm going to kick your butt out of the airplane at 5,000 feet without a parachute." I never did find out how the general finally got to London.

1st Sergeant William Nagle
Headquarters, 315th Troop Carrier Group

I was really impressed with the British. They were laying concrete runways at Aldermaston, and they mixed the cement in hand-powered mixers, and I never saw an Englishman wearing a glove. They were out there in tile cold and the snow. They were wearing wrist warmers, but I never saw them wearing gloves. They were a hearty lot.

They had already been through a lot, but there were always 'invitations to their homes, and we would usually bring a large tin of Spam. Those people
were only rationed a few ounces of meat a week.

The only food that was any good that you could get over there was fish and chips. They roll up a newspaper into a funnel, fill it with French fries, and then put about five or six pieces of fish on top. We'd catch a bus back to the base on a six-hour pass, and eat fish and French fries, and the damned grease would run down your sleeve inside your blouse and make a hell of a mess. But we enjoyed it.

The beer was stronger than what we were used to in the states, and was good, even though drunk warm. One pub in Reading had a large picture of a big stone bridge behind the bar. I told the bartender, "Boy, that really looks familiar," He said, "That is the longest stone bridge in the world. Its right outside of Harrisburg Pennsylvania." I realized that I had crossed it on the train many times when I was stationed in Middletown.

Flight Officer Richard L. Adams
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

We were in England to do a job, but when it was fun time, it was fun time. Oh man, I can still remember London, even in the blackout. Some of
my favorite places I could not find in daylight because I had become very good at navigating at night.

My favorite part of London was Piccadilly Circus. One of the pilots, Sergeant Sam Peek, was a well-connected Californian, and a real swinger. When we went into London the first thing he did was to become acquainted with a lady who ran a bar in Piccadilly Circus. He hooked up with her.

Everything in England was rationed, even the booze. She would put some of the best booze under the counter. Whenever we came in, she would pull it out. Picadilly Circus was a fun place. Even when I was a sergeant pilot, they had a Red Cross club for enlisted personnel, "Rainbow Corner." They were nice people there. Looking back on it, I think that the enlisted people had more fun than the officers. Before too long, the sergeant pilots were all promoted to the rank of flight officer. We

were now required to wear officers' uniforms. I had my new uniforms made on New Bond Street, and even had the shoes custom made.

Private George N. Doll
Dental Technician, Headquarters, 315th Troop Carrier Group

I had been touring the Midwest leading a western band called "The Melody Rangers" for several years. I played the bass well, the trumpet badly, and did vocals. Things were coming along, we were getting more and more jobs, I married the singer, and then at the age of 24, I was drafted. I was assigned to the 315th Troop Carrier Group, and assigned as a medical technician. When I went overseas, I could not bring a bass with me, so I had to be satisfied with my trumpet, which I managed to practice every day after hours.

What saved me at Aldermaston from all manner of details and KP was that in addition to be a musician, I was also a decent artist. I started out earning a few cents here and there sketching the guys, who would send them home to their loved ones. The next thing I knew, a lieutenant took me to Reading where he bought all sorts of art supplies for me, and soon I was making signs that appeared all over the base.

There was a captain, a short guy, who didn't like large buck privates, and he made my life miserable, constantly gigging me for the mess around my bunk as a result of the sign painting. Major Parker then had me transferred to a room in an unused mess hall, where I had my own shower and stove. (I wonder how well that sawed-off captain lived?)

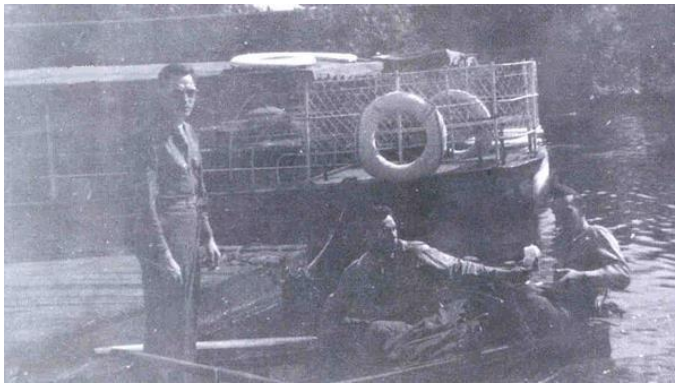
One day, the group dentist, Lieutenant Joe Schulman, was looking at my 201 file and noticed that I played a string bass. Schulman was a trained classical violinist who had paid to take music lessons, and had gotten his money's worth. I was soon transferred to him as his dental assistant.

It was not too long before Doc Schulman and I were joined by others with some musical talent in the mess hall. We got instruments through the Special Service Officer, volunteers to build a stage, and the next thing you knew, we were playing dances. During the day I worked for Joe Schulman, at night he worked for me.

Life was looking good for this private. There was an added bonus of working for Doc Schulman. I always took care of the cooks while they were in the dental chair, and they took care of me. I made a habit of dropping in on them late at night, after a pass or a gig, and they always managed to find me something good from the officers' mess.

— End of Chapter—

(Above) Heat for the quarters and buildings was fueled by coke or coal. When deliveries of fuel fell behind, the troops turned to the Spanhoe woods to chop their own, as depicted here.
Photo from https://315Group.org



(Above) 310th TCS 1st Sgt Bill Nagel and squadron mates on the river near Spanhoe.
Photo from https://315Group.org