

# **AIRFIELDS OF SUFFOLK**

A Visitors guide

by

DUNCAN R SKEELS

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D.R Skeels

## Foreword

The purpose of this small work, is to provide the visitor/veteran with up to date information about the Airfields of Suffolk. I have purposely left out small private airfields, such as Elmsett, Crowfield, Milden and Nayland as access to these is very restricted. As most of the old 2WW airfields are in private hands also, it is sometimes difficult to gain access to record accurately what remains. Other sites like Rougham, are in the process of being restored and will eventually be outstanding "living" memorials to the service personnel stationed at these bases. The fact that people are prepared to voluntarily work on such projects shows the esteem with which the veterans of both the Royal Air Force and the United States Army Air Force are held. The inspiration for this work came from my meeting a pilot/veteran of the 487th BG(H), Robert 'Bob' Densmore, who has, over the interceding years become a good family friend and this small tribute is for him and others of the same ilk.

## Lavenham (Alpheton) Station 137:

The wartime home of the 487th Bomb Group (Heavy) United States Army Air Force (USAAF). Initially B24 Liberators were flown, these however were soon replaced by the now famous Boeing 817 "Flying Fortress". The 487th is famous for amongst other things leading the entire USAAF 8th Air Force attack group on December 24th 1944, the raid during which Brig/Gen Frederick Walker Castle lost his life. Gen. Castle, who was an observer and the aircraft pilot Lt. Robert W. Harriman stayed with the stricken B17 until the crew were out, but by this time it was too late for Harriman and Castle. Gen. Castle was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, America's highest award for bravery.

What remains of the airfield lies about 1.5 miles north of Lavenham just off the A1141 Bury-St-Edmunds road. Unfortunately, most of the runways and much of the dispersal/hardstand areas have been returned to agricultural use in the past few years. However the Control Tower/Ops room and the majority of the domestic site remains intact. The airfield is privately owned, arrangements to visit the site must be made through the Lavenham Tourist Information Centre, where a booklet may be purchased on the airfield's history.

The memorial plaque dedicated to the 487th BG is situated in the Market Place in Lavenham itself.

Aircraft types flown. B24H, J & B 17G

## Sudbury (Chilton) Station 174:

The sister group to Lavenham, the 486th Bomb Group (H) occupied this airfield. They also flew B24 Liberators H and J models and then converted over to the B17 Fortress. The site itself is still relatively intact it now houses a small agricultural/industrial estate. Parts of the runways and perimeter track are also intact but there is a sad lack of buildings. The B1071 Lavenham/Sudbury road cuts right across what used to be the main runway, during the war the road would be closed to traffic when the aircraft were taking off or landing, the concrete barrier posts are still in place beside the road. There is a small memorial to the 486th BG at the main entrance to the site.

Aircraft types flown: B24H, J & B17G

## U.S Hospital Acton:

This was the main USAAF hospital in this area. The infirmary and a large proportion of the ward buildings remain and are in use for light industry. The site is situated just out of the village of Acton on the Acton/Long Melford road.

## Raydon, Station 157:

353rd, 357th and 358th Fighter Group, US 8AF territory, flying P47 Thunderbolts and P51 Mustangs. Colonel Glenn E. Duncan, Commanding Officer of the 353rd was shot down in July 1944 and reported as 'missing in action' (MIA). He managed to survive and evade capture, eventually making his way back to allied lines. Upon his return to the UK, he once again assumed command of the 353rd. The 357th FG were the first to be equipped with the P51 Mustang.

A striking new memorial has recently been dedicated at this site and stands at the runway intersections. Some domestic buildings, engineering sheds and parts of the runways/perimeter track remain amongst the crops. Other buildings have been utilised for light industry. The airfield sits just off the B1070 Hadleigh/East Bergholt road. Upon entering the village from Hadleigh take the first left hand turning at the sharp right hand bend posted to Hintlesham, this will bring you up onto the airfield.

Aircraft types flown: P51C,D & K. P47D

## Rougham (Bury-St-Edmunds) Station 468:

Originally the home of the 322nd Bomb Group (medium) flying B26 Marauders. The group and the aircraft were superseded by the 94th Bomb Group (Heavy) with the B17F Flying Fortress. The 94BG carried out a total of 325 missions, dropping some 19,000 tons of bombs for the sad loss of 153 aircraft missing with a further 27 lost through accidents. Rougham was attacked by Me 410's of the Luftwaffe during the night of 3/4 March 1945, however, no serious damage was caused. This airfield is once again the site of much aerial activity due to the work of the Rougham Tower Association (HTA), a group dedicated to the restoration of the Control Tower/Operations room and much of the rest of the airfield. Many buildings remain intact, some in use for industrial purposes others awaiting restoration. Recently the under ground command post has been cleared with the help of the present day USAF from RAF Mildenhall, it is hoped that this will be open to the public during 1998. There is now just under 1000m of grass runway enabling Rougham to operate again, as it meant to, as a much needed venue for aviation, in a county where more and more historic small grass airfields are being forced to close. The RTA holds three major shows/fly-ins each year culminating with the Air show/Open day where once again the sound of 'War Bird' engines can be heard in the skies above Rougham.

If you wish to visit the Tower or make enquiries about the RTA please contact:

The Rougham Estate Office, Tel; 01359 270238. The airfield is situated two miles east of Bury-St-Edmunds just off the A1 4. Aircraft types flown: B2OB, B26 & B17F

## Wattisham Airfield, Station 377 & RAF:

Now home to the Army Air Corps (AAC) flying Gazelle and Lynx helicopters. Wattisham has been an active military airfield since the 1930's. Both the RAF and USAAF utilised this base during WW2. The USAAF groups stationed here were, the 68th Observation Group, 479th FG 8AF "Riddle's Raiders" and the 10th Air Depot Group. During the cold war Wattisham was at the cutting edge, its Lightning, then Phantom aircraft flying intercept missions out over the North Sea. 23, 54 "Firebird's" and 70 "Tiger" Squadron RAF were the resident flying squadrons during the 1970's and 80's. 23 Squadron was later moved down to Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands. Along with RAF Bawdsey, West Raynham and Rattlesden, Wattisham was also home to Anti Aircraft Bloodhound missiles. The last RAF F4J's and F4 Phantom IIs departed in 1992 for the scrap yard and the Royal Hellenic (Greek) Air Force, the following year the AAC moved in. The RAF however are still represented at Wattisham by the Air Sea Rescue Seaking helicopters. In 1996 the base hosted the first of what will hopefully be an annual Air show. The British Government has recently signed a contract with the USA to supply the AAC with 60+ 'state of the art' Apache attack helicopters, most of which will be stationed at Middle Wallop and Wattisham. There is a small, but very interesting museum which has recently been moved "off base" and can be visited. The base is situated 2 miles east of Bildeston off the Needham Market road. Aircraft types flown: Blenheim, P39, P38J, P51D, Beaufighter, Hurricane 1, Meteor, Javelin, Hunter, BAC Lightning, RF4 Phantom, F4J Phantom, Gazelle, Lynx, Seaking.

## Rattlesden, Station 126:

This one-time USAAF bomber/ RAF missile base is still extensively used for gliding. The USAAF groups housed here were the 322nd BG (M) 8AF and the 447th BG (H). The main runway and much of the perimeter track is intact along with the old control tower. There is good viewing area at the west end of the main runway on the Felsham/Preston road. The site is run by the gliding club so permission should be sought before any explorations conducted! Various gliding activities are offered by the club, for more information and to arrange a trial flight, phone Helen Page on 01787-881 855. The airfield lies just to the south east of the village of Felsham. There is a fine memorial to the USAAF groups just outside the base on the Rattlesden/Brettenham road, situated on the left hand side of the road, just past the entrance to the airfield.

Aircraft types flown: B26B, B17G & Bloodhound missiles

### Stradishall:

Another very famous RAF station, it closed in the 1960's and the site is now occupied by HM Prison Highpoint. Most of the domestic/mess buildings are still intact and in use. The main Bury-St-Edmunds/Haverhill (A1 43) road cuts straight through the site.

Aircraft types flown: Blenheim, Lancaster, Lysander, Wellington, Whitley, Maryland, Stirling, Heyford, Wellesley, Hudson, Anson, Halifax, Battle, Meteor, Varsity, Lincoln, Venom, Javelin, Dominie I

### Bentwaters:

Until 1992 this base was home to the USAF(E) 81st Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW) flying A10 Thunderbolt II's. During WW2 the base was occupied by RAF Fighter Command squadrons. The base is currently (1997) up for sale and the site is guarded. As of November 1997 it looks as though the base has been sold to a corporation based in Thailand, they have stated that they intend to reopen Bentwaters as a strictly business airfield serving the near continent. The site is situated to the north east of the town of the picturesque town of Woodbridge, situated on the lovely River Deben.

Aircraft types flown: Spitfire, Mustang, Meteor, F101, F84F, F4D and A10A

### Woodbridge ( Sutton Heath):

A satellite field of Bentwaters, was also used by the 81st TFW for training and deployment, it is currently used by the Army Air Corps for the same purposes. The 67th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron (USAF) was also stationed here. This airfield was used during WW2 as a "lame duck" field for damaged allied aircraft returning from missions over Europe. Its most recent claim to fame, is that it was the site of the most documented and unexplainable UFO encounter ever in December 1980. Witnesses included the Base Commander and most of the Security Police Squadron also members of the local constabulary, several excellent books have been recently published about these events!

Aircraft types flown: HC130C, HH53, F101, F84F, F4D and A10A

### Orford Ness:

This site, until recently was home to the Ministry of Defence's Atomic Weapons Research Establishment and the U.S (CIA's) 'Top Secret' radar research base, code named 'Cobra Mist'. The site is now owned by the National Trust, who operate a ferry service to the Ness from Orford quay. There was an airfield established on the Ness during WWI and it has seen many a strange visiting aircraft. Up until the 1970's Polish mine experts were employed here to defuse and destroy the many mines that were being washed up or caught in fishermen's gear.

The muffled 'crump' of the detonations were are common sound along the Suffolk coast. The ownership of the Ness is a novel, but welcome departure for the National Trust, who aim to preserve the many interesting buildings/structures left from nearly eighty years of military occupation. The Ness is also renowned for the presence of 'feathered' aviators and bird watchers can be assured of some rare treats if they visit. There are also various boat trips around the Ness.

#### RAF Mildenhall:

Home of the 100th Air Refuelling Wing and HQ 3rd USAF, the site of the annual Air Fete's, the largest Air show put on by an Air Arm outside the USA. Originally built in the early thirties the base was opened by King George the Fifth in 1935. The RAF had procession during WW2 the Americans arrived in the late forties and have been in residence ever since. The most famous aerial resident of Mildenhall was the Lockheed SR71A Blackbird reconnaissance aircraft, capable of speeds in excess of Mach 3 the Blackbird was indeed an awesome machine, flown by Detachment 4 (Det 4) 9th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing. The day the SR71 left was a sad day indeed for Mildenhall. The base also played a vital role during operations "Eldorado Canyon", Desert Shield/Storm", "Provide Comfort" and "Deny Flight" amongst others. Currently Mildenhall is home to the Special Operations Group (SOG), flying MC53 Helicopters and MC130 Combat Talon & Combat Shadow aircraft, their mission to infiltrate and exfiltrate special forces in hostile territory. RAF Mildenhall Public Affairs office can organise tours of the base for groups of 15+ people as long as they provide their own bus/coach and meet other criteria, for more information telephone 100ARW/PA 01638-542654.

Aircraft types flown include: Wellington, Stirling, Lancaster, Lincoln, Ventura, Heyford, Gladiator, Hind, Blenheim, Fortress, Washington, EC/RC/KCIQCI35's, C/HC/EC/KC/MC130, VT29B, T39A, C97, C118, C124, C133, C141, C5A, C12, 017, U045J, RC12, C117D, C131, C1A, CV440, SR71A, MC53, Sherpa, C137, T55.

#### RAF Lakenheath:

Like its sister base Mildenhall, Lakenheath has recently been provided with a handsome viewing area for interested parties. Unlike Mildenhall however, this base is dedicated to the tactical fighter role and as such the 48TFW is in residence. In the early 1990's the 48th converted from the General Dynamics F1-11F to the F15E Strike Eagle, probably the most potent fighter aircraft in existence. Prior to the conversion, the 48th leapt to fame on April 14th 1986 when the F1-11's from Lakenheath attacked

Libya the raid was called "Operation Eldorado Canyon". Tanker aircraft from Mildenhall supported the mission. In recent years the 48th has taken part in operations in the former Yugoslavia and in the No fly" zones of Iraq. This is another base that can trace its lineage back to WW2 when both the RAF and USAAF occupied the site.

Aircraft types flown: Stirling, Wellington, B29 Super Fortress, F100D, F4D, F1-11E/F and F15C/D/E.

Parham (Framlingham) Station 153:

The tower at Parham has been restored and houses a museum which is worth a visit. There is a memorial plaque on the tower dedicated to the 95th/390th "Wittan's Wallopers", Bomb Groups USAAF. The 390BG has the distinction of having the only person to fly 100 missions with the USAAF, his name was Hewitt Dunn. The museum houses a unique collection of aircraft parts, photographs, uniforms, documents, paintings and other memorabilia associated with the 8th Air Force. A new museum has recently been opened dedicated to the forgotten men of the ultra secret, British Resistance Group, who's job it would have been to sabotage the Nazi invasion of England. The best access to the airfield is from A140 Norwich road. The town of Framlingham itself is well worth a visit with a wealth of mediaeval buildings and a fabulous castle.

Aircraft types flown B17F & G.

Great Ashfield, Station 155:

Home to the 385th "Vans Valiants" Bomb Group USAAF, flying B17F & G models. Situated just to the north east of Stanton off the A143 Bury-St-Edmunds/Diss road, the site is now utilised for industrial/agricultural purposes.

RAF Honington, Station 375 & RAF:

Alas the Tornados are gone! Now a "non flying" base for the RAF Regiment. Honington can also trace its military history back to the 1930's. The airfield was used by the RAF and USAAF (364th Fighter Group 8AF) during WW2. In the 1950's it was a 'V' bomber base, the airfield was used as the shore base for HMS Ark Royal's Buccaneer aircraft during the 1960/70's. When the 'Ark' was pensioned off the Buccaneers moved to Scotland and were replaced by Tornado Gr1's. The airfield is maintained and is often used by visiting aircraft or Squadrons on deployment. Rumour has it, that full time RAF flying will soon return to the station. Aircraft types flown: Wellington, Heyford, Auster, P38J, P51 D, Harrow, Blenheim, Whitley, Wellesley, Battle, Valiant, Victor, Canberra, Shackleton, Buccaneer, Tornado GR1/A.

## Ipswich (Nacton):

This wonderful grass airfield (also known as Nacton airfield) has just been forced to shut so that the Borough Council can sell the land to property developers! Thankfully the Heritage Secretary just Listed the terminal building so at least that will still stand. It was at airfields such as Ipswich that the young men who became the "Few" learned their basic flying skills lets hope that with the demise of the airfield and its resident flying schools that the need for another "Few" will not arise again. Interestingly, a 'Free French' Squadron ,340(F) RAF flew Spitfire Vb's from this field.

Aircraft types flown: Blenheim, Tiger Moth, Spitfire, Martinets, Hurricanes, Barracudas, Vengeance

## Martlesham Heath, Station 369 & RAF

Ironically this airfield was going to be Ipswich's airport when the RAF vacated in 1963, but local politics at the time decided that the Nacton road site (Ipswich Airport) would better serve the needs of the town! Now the HQ/Technology centre for British Telecom, and the site of a huge industrial estate/out of town shopping centre. This was probably the most famous fighter station in Suffolk. The airfield came into being in the latter part of WW1 and was used extensively as an experimental and trials airfield for all the major RAF fighter aircraft, many hundreds of designs were tested here. During WW2 many famous names flew from Martlesham, these include: S/Ldr Peter Townsend, S/Ldr Douglas Bader, S/Ldr Bob Stanford-Tuck, S/Ldr "Al" Deere to name but a few.

Experimental work continued after the war, the RAF finally moving out in 1963. For more information read 'Martlesham Heath' by Gordon Kinsey, published by Terence Dalton Ltd of Lavenham.

Martlesham lies 4 miles north east of Ipswich on the A12.

Aircraft types flown: pre 1939 too numerous to mention, WW2 types: Spitfire, Hurricane, Defiant, Blenheim, Lysander, Anson, Walrus, Typhoon, P47D, P51D/K, Whirlwind.

## Metfield, Station 366:

Another USAAF field, housing the 353rd Fighter Group and 491st "The Ringmasters" Bomb Group 8AF. The 491st had the highest operational rate of all the B24 Groups. Metfield lies on the B1123 Harleston / Halesworth road.

Aircraft types flown: P47D, B24H/J/L & M

Mendlesham(Wetheringsett) Station 156:

RAF this time, although the 34th Bomb Group(H) USAAF shared the station. The 34th had the distinction of not losing a single bomber to enemy fighter action over enemy territory. Only a few buildings remain and odds and ends of track way. There is a fine monument to the men of the 34th sited on the side of the A140 trunk road.

Aircraft types flown: Spitfire LF IX, Spitfire IX, B24H & J, B17G

Eye ( Brome )Station 134:

American station, 490th Bomb Group, 8th Air Force, flying 224 Liberators and later the B17G. They flew their first mission from Eye on 31 May 1944 and their last on 20 April 1945. The site is now home to the annual Eye Show and also home to a revolutionary chicken manure fired power station! There is a light aircraft landing strip. The airfield lies just to the east of the main A140 at Eye.

Aircraft types flown: B24H & J, B17G

Bury-St-Edmunds (Westley):

Sited on the opposite side of Rury to Rougham field, the airfield site, sits just across the A14 from the modern Crematorium, it has all been returned to agriculture. This was an interesting British Army Cooperation flight airfield with the following types flown: Lysander, P40 Tomahawk, Austers of various marks.

Beccles ( Ellough )Station 132:

Situated about two miles out of the border town of Beccles on the B1127 Beccles/Southwold road, this airfield was again utilised by both the USAAF and the RAF during WW2. Interesting aircraft based here included the Warwick Air Sea Rescue model with a life boat carried beneath the fuselage. In recent times the field was home to the North Sea gas industry's helicopter operations. Aircraft types flown: Warwick ASR, B24H, B17G, S61N, S76, Westland W30, Boeing Chinook (civil).

## Bawdsey Manor:

During WW2 this 'non flying' base was the home of Prof Watson-Watts Radar research, as such it was a highly secret establishment. The course of WW2 owes its final outcome undoubtable to the work carried out here. After the war, research continued on various projects. The base also acquired an active deterrent role with the arrival of the 'Bloodhound' anti-aircraft batteries in the 1960's. The base was operational up until the early 90's when it was deemed to be surplus to requirements and sold off by the MoD. There are some lovely walks in this area, a car park is provided. Follow signs out of Woodbridge town.

## Felixstowe:

A prewar RAF 'Flying Boat' station, and home of the Marine Aircraft Experimental Establishment, the flying boat equivalent of Martlesham heath. In more modern times the Whirlwind helicopters of the RAF's air-sea rescue were based here. The site is now occupied by the Port of Felixstowe's container park and the HM Customs & Excise offices. Aircraft types flown include: Singapore III, Fokker T8W, Short S21, Mercury, various balloons and Whirlwinds.

## Bungay ( Flixton )Station 125:

Now home of the Norfolk & Suffolk Aviation Museum, housing many aircraft. The museum itself is set just off the old airfield site and is a 'must' for aviation enthusiasts, it also houses the Royal Observer Corps museum, which being a past member of, I thoroughly recommend as an insight into this very important and often forgotten job. The USAAF were here during WW2 with the 446th Bomb Group, 8th AF known as the "Bungay Buckaroos" They led the 8AF and the 2nd Air Division on the first heavy bomber raid of 'D Day'. Aircraft flown: B24H. J. L & M.

## Halesworth (Holton) Station 365:

Another base seeing both the Americans and the British. The Fleet Air Arm flew from this base firstly with Oxfords and Beaufighters and then into the infant jet age with the Sea Vampire. The USAAF was represented by the 5th Emergency Rescue Squadron flying P47D's, QA1QA's and B17G's the 56th Fighter Group, 489th Bomb Group and finally the 496th Fighter Training Group. Holton is just off the B1 124 Halesworth/Brampton road. Recently a very interesting new museum has been opened at this airfield.

## Horham, Station 119

A USAAF 12th Air Force station. Two Bomb groups were based here, the 47th and the 95th also the 323rd Bomb Squadron. Horham is on the Bill 7 Eye/Halesworth road.

Aircraft types flown: A2QB, BI7D, B26B

## Newmarket Heath

Renowned more for the sound of horses galloping these days than the roar of horsepower, Newmarket was very much a front line air station during WW2. RAF Bomber Command was in residence with various squadrons. Also clandestine 'spy' drops were carried out from here by the 1419 (SD) flight and the 1483 flight, flying Lysanders. Whitleys. Ansons and Wellingtons. During the racing season light aircraft still use the grass strip. Several hangars still remain along with the odd building. The race course and airstrip are situated just off the A1 304 Newmarket/Cambridge road.

Aircraft types flown: Stirling, Wellington, Blenheim, Hudson, Whitley, Lysander, Anson.

## Shepherds Grove:

One of the RAF's cold war Thor ICBM (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile) base and as such a target for immediate retaliatory/first strike by the then Warsaw pact, so quiet and rural Suffolk was definitely on the Kremlins 'hit list'. The airfield had seen less sinister days during the war with 299(B) Squadron RAF flying Stirling V's. In the late 1940's 90 Group Signals moved in with their Lancasters, Ansons, Oxfords Mosquito's and a solitary Lincoln. In 1949, RAF Training command spent six months operating Meteors and Vampires from the field. The 1960's saw Gloster Javelins heralding in a permanent move to the jet age into Shepherds Grove, these being followed by a change of occupier in the shape of the USAF with F84F's. As with most old airfields, Shepherds Grove is now the site of an industrial estate.

## Tuddenham

RAF bomber base, squadrons present being, no's 90. 138. 149. 186 and 207 all flying Lancasters of various marks. 90 Sqdn also flew Stirling B1's. During the 60's another more ominous sight could be seen in the form of a squadron of Thor ICBM's. The base is sited about 4 miles south east of RAF Mildenhall just outside the village of Tuddenham, some interesting small buildings still remain along with sections of runway and pen track.

Chedburgh;

Sited just off the main Bury-St-Edmunds/Haverhill road (A143), this old airfield is again the site of an industrial complex. The PAP called the base home during WW2, two 'Polish' (301(B) & 304(B) ) and one 'Gold Coast' (214(B)) squadrons were based here along with other RAF squadrons. Aircraft flown: Stirling, Lancaster, Halifax, Liberator, Wellington.

Debach, Station 152:

493rd BG 8AF "Helton's Helicats" flying B24H and B1 7G aircraft. They were the last group in the 8AF to become operational. The airfield site is just off the B1078 Needham Market/Wickham Market road at Debach.

Hadleigh:

Established during WWI as a training field for the Royal Flying Corps, this airfield saw active use up until the 1930's. Air shows were held here during the late 1920's. The only evidence for its military lineage is the old water tank that still stands vigil opposite what is now an engineering works. The field is sited just off the Hadleigh/Hintlesham old road about 1.5 miles outside Hadleigh. The town of Hadleigh is also worth a visit, many mediaeval buildings remain including the Guildhall.

Knettishall, Station 136:

Home of the 388th Bomb Group (H), flying B17F,G and B17, B24 "Aphrodite" aircraft, from their satellite airfield at Fersfield (Winfarthing). The code name "Aphrodite" (U.S Navy designation "Anvil") refers to radio controlled B17/B24 aircraft packed full of Amatol/Torpex high explosive which were piloted out over the coast where the aircrew would bale out, allowing the aircraft to fly on under the radio control of a 'mother' aircraft to act as a guided missile against strategic targets in occupied Europe. The most famous casualty of these highly dangerous missions was one Lt Joseph Patrick Kennedy Jr, the elder brother of John the future U.S President. He and his co-pilot, Wilford "Bud" Willy, were killed when their B24 exploded in mid air over the parish of Hinton near Blythburgh on August 12th 1944.

## Leiston (Therberton) Station 373:

A very famous USAAF fighter station, the home of the 357th & 358th Fighter Groups flying P51 Mustang and P47 Thunderbolt aircraft. Charles "Chuck" Yeager, the first man to exceed the sound barrier in level flight was stationed here. The 357th FG destroyed some 609 enemy aircraft in aerial combat during 313 missions.

It is interesting to note that the P51, would not have come into existence had it not been for a British design and order request to the Americans early in the war. The RAF named the aircraft the "Mustang". Although originally a good low level fighter it was not until the original Allison engine was replaced by the tried and tested Rolls Royce Merlin in a moment of pure inspiration, that the P51 became the apex of allied fighter development during WW2. With the addition of paper drop tanks which allowed the P51's to escort the bombers all the way to the German heartland and back, the German population of Berlin and the Luftwaffe were hit a knock out psychological blow when Mustangs were seen over their city!

Any correspondence concerning this publication should be addressed to:

Mr DR Skeels  
c/o Babergh District Council  
Corks Lane  
Hadleigh  
Ipswich  
SUFFOLK

[tourism.skeels@babergh-south-suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:tourism.skeels@babergh-south-suffolk.gov.uk)

Further reading:

The Mighty Eighth- by Roger A. Freeman. Arms & Armour Press  
Mighty Eighth War Diary- by Roger A. Freeman. Arms & Armour Press  
Aeronauts & Aviators- by Christopher R.Elliott. Terence Dalton  
Martlesham Heath- by Gordon Kinsey. Terence Dalton  
Aviation, Flight over the Eastern Counties since 1937- By Gordon Kinsey.  
T Dalton  
Lavenham/Alpheton Airfield, A Brief History-By DR Skeels, Babergh D.C  
Suffolk Summer-by John Appleby, EADT Magazine

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