

# Fireballs and Flying Fortresses



## The story of 457<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group based at Glatton Airbase

Produced by Great Fen staff and volunteers, with the help of Ramsey Rural Museum, as part of the Great Fen oral history project.



# Fireballs and Flying Fortresses



457<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group sitting on a German Heinkel.

The 457<sup>th</sup> bomb group, also known as the Fireball Outfit was the 94<sup>th</sup> combat wing of the United States 8th Air Force.

The group was stationed at the air base in Conington from February 1944 until June 1945.

To avoid confusion with Coningsby 30 miles away, the base was officially known as Glatton, after a small village three miles to the west.

## Camping in the snow



When the men first arrived the weather was freezing and in spite of this many of them lived in tents!

Although it didn't bother veteran Will Fluman, "I didn't find the winter so cold. I'm from Pennsylvania, we're used to cold and ice and so forth. But they did have snow and it interfered sometimes with the flight arrangements and so

forth.”



They had to clear the snow from the runways with shovels and their superior officer would discipline them for having mud on clothes and equipment.

In exasperation one of the airmen called his plane “Disciplinary Action”.

Other planes had names like Lady Luck and Flak Dodger.

Right: An example of “nose art” on a B-17 bomber.





## **Memories of 457<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group veteran, Will Fluman.**

“We liked the landscape because it was flat and we didn't have to be concerned with hills and so forth.”

“We did fly a mission when we didn't bring the plane back. We got shot up so bad we left it in France.”



A B-17 Flying Fortress

## **Morphine, chewing gum and local pubs**

In addition to the tents, living quarters were the Nissen huts, which typically housed between 10 and 12 men.



**They carried morphine and chewing gum when they were flying out on a mission and were allowed only one bottle of Coca Cola each a week.**

But life wasn't all bad, especially after the men discovered three local pubs– the Crown and Woolpack, the Admiral Wells and the Railway Arms.

## How they helped the war effort

During the time they were in Conington, the group's B-17 bombers or "Flying Fortresses" flew **236 missions** to mainland Europe and played a crucial role in securing the air superiority necessary for the Allies' cross channel invasion on D-Day in June 1944.



Bombs being lifted from storage

## Still remembered today

The 457<sup>th</sup> flew their last mission on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1945 and were disbanded in August of the same year.



The survivors still return to the former air base and surrounding area on visits organised by the 457<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association, when they can relive their fond memories of afternoon tea and parties with local people.

**Our sincere thanks to the 457th Bomb Group for sharing their memories and photos.**

## **Local Memories project**

If you have a story, photos or objects that you'd like to share with us, please do get in touch:

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**You may also be interested in some of our other Local Memories booklets, including:**

- **Four generations on the Fen:**

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- **Family Life in the Fens**

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