

Two P-40 pursuit planes, inferior to British Spitfires and German Messerschmitt BF 109s. Top speed P-40: 360 m.p.h. Tops for Messerschmitt 109(E): 382 m.p.h.



designated Maj-General Carl A. Spaatz to command the U.S. Army Air Force in Great Britain. In April, the month that GIs were allowed to open bank accounts in British banks, Gen. Ira C. Eaker arrived in High Wycombe, England to set up HQ. VIII Bomber Command was set up in a famous old school for girls. In May, the 15th Air Bombardment squadron began training with the British to fly the Douglas A-20 medium bombers. In that month, the first Army Nurses were also welcomed.

The movement for increased U.S. participation was titled "Operation Bolero". Since the air forces were mighty important—a correlation between airplane shipment and Bolero was nothing out of the ordinary. Bolero called for a mass shipment of aircraft—1000 planes a month—to Britain over the North Atlantic; nothing of such magnitude had been tried before in the history of the human race. The U.S established a novel lifeline of radio and refueling outposts before thousands of American and Lend-Lease air crews began flying. The system setup involved two routes. Four-engined bombers kissed the U.S.A. good-bye on Presque Isle, Maine, then took a short refuel on Gander, Newfoundland, before their long over-ocean trip to the U.K.

Twin-engined mediums and single-seaters began on Maine also, short hopped for Goose Bay, Labrador, then Greenland, to Iceland and finally for Scotland. People pay too little attention to communication. Building the highways in the sky that connected the various points on the routes entailed fighting trick interference of the aurora borealis which dubbed out all radio signals, fighting a treacherous winter the North Atlantic had not seen for some time, and keeping radio sets working with hairpins for antenna wire and Coca Cola bottles for tubes—Greenland almost went out of operation early in 1942 due to lack of parts—and somehow manned the

Airmen stationed to Eighth Bomber Command Headquarters at high Wycombe received the distinguished situation of being able to read a plaque in each cubicle-bedroom, "Push bell for Mistress." Wycombe Abbey School for Girls in the Chiltern Hills of Buckinghamshire was requisitioned for Eighth Bomber Command of the U.S. 8th Air Force. Wycombe Abbey, dates back to 1896, is situated in about 160 acres of land.



U.S. 8th Air Force
England

Airmen receive the Distinguished Flying Cross from Maj. General Carl Spaatz, commanding general of the U.S. 8th Air Force. Quite often, American crews were so low on training and skills that RAF facilities had to be critically provided, on orders from British Air Marshall Harris, to train. Spaatz became Allied Air Forces Commander in North Africa in November 1942.

The bulk of the U.S. Air Force in Great Britain, designated the 8th Army Air Force, at first were in fact to be the B-17 Flying Fortress bombers and the A-20 Havocs; later supplemented with the B-24 Liberator, B-26 Marauder, and the Little Friends: P-38 Lightning, P-40 Tomahawk (Warhawk), P-47 Thunderbolt and the P-51 Mustang.



airway stations for non-stop 24-hour service with above-draft-age Americans, hundreds of them over 38, averaging at least 12-hour days.

In summer, the first Boeing B-17 bombers from the States were welcomed. The bomber "Jarring Jenny" touched down at Prestwick airfield in Scotland, in July.

In the ensuing summer and winter, the aviators and crews gained bomber experience and became accustomed to the cool, nippy weather of the British Isles.

Contrary to popular belief, the first U.S. combat mission launched from the British Isles was not made by the B-17, but by the A-20 bomber, directed against well defended Nazi airfields in Holland. Although militarily accomplishing little, the raid did foster the first American hero of the 8th Air Force—a pilot from Oklahoma by the name of Captain Charles C. Kegelmann. He received the Distinguished Service Cross by reacting coolly and perspective during the mission as his bomber was being peppered by flak from a nearby tower. At the same time his shaking plane was flying crippled as one of his propellers was badly shot up. His plane actually struck the ground, but he managed to bring it up and back home. Obviously, it was not as easy as it sounds.

The first B-17 combat mission over Europe took place in summer when twelve B-17s, accompanied by RAF Supermarine Spitfires, flew to the enemy railroad marshalling yards at Rouen-Sotteville. After summer, good weather dropped so much, air activity shrunk dramatically, even with the secretive precision Norden Bomb-sight. It was said only 60 to 90 days out of 365 prevail with favorable weather and cloud conditions for this theater. It was the first high altitude attack using a secretive precision Norden Bombsight over Europe.

Dr At Midway? Dr At Midway?

Against a squally 35 mile-an-hour wind, six-hundred and twenty-four miles east of Tokyo...sixteen B-25 bombers lifted off the U.S. carrier, the *Hornet* and ventured into Japan. The story is related inside this chapter. Closer to China, but in the Indian Ocean, two British cruisers were also sunk that April. Earlier, the army transport, the *Royal T Frank*, which had left the West Coast, was sunk near Maui. The *Elcano* luckily met no enemy contact and supplied beleaguered Corregidor. Such were the fortunes of war.

By the end of May, a grand total of six British warships had been sent to Davey Jones' locker, yet also an allied semi-victory swept the world: a sea-battle, a forerunner to Midway, took place. The Battle of Coral Sea. It's end result, though neither the allies or Japanese won hands down, was momentous, for it created a slowdown of the up-until-then invincible, unstoppable Japanese Navy. Naval history was made at Coral in that surface ships did not exchange a single shot. It was all aircraft. But, in June, history's play was parted like some great curtain to show one of war's greatest stories, if not the most famous, and certainly more important than the engagement at Coral Sea.

The curtain was drawn by Japanese strategist Admiral Isoru Yamamoto. Chosen for its locale—it lay right in the center of the Pacific Empire—it could be easily remapped

