

ROUGHAM AIRFIELD

Rougham Airfield Complex was built by Richard Costain, was completed and opened in 1942. The Airfield itself covered 250 acres of requisited farmland and the 3 runways were linked by a perimeter track some 3 miles in length. There were 38 hardstandings following the arrival of the 94th American Bomber Group with their B17 Aeroplanes. The main runway was 2000 yards long and 50 yards wide, it ran East/West to favour the prevailing winds.

The Rougham Tower is one of the few Control Towers to have suffered damage during enemy action when it was attacked by a ME 410 on the night of 3/4 March 1945. Fortunately it sustained no serious damage.

The speed of the Boeing B17 going down the runway, the wind under the wings and the thrust of the engines lifts it off the ground. You may well ask why was the B17 called the 'Flying Fortress'. When it was built and came out of the hanger the people gasped:- "It looks like a Flying Fort". It bristled with guns of 50 caliber. The aircraft had an operating speed of 215 miles per hour at an altitude of 27,000 feet with a range of 1,300 miles when carrying a bomb load of 4,000 pounds. The plane carried crew of ten:- Pilot, Co-Pilot, Navigator, Bombardier, 2 Waist Gunners, 1 Belly Gunner, 1 Tail Gunner, 1 Nose Gunner, 1 Engineer. Each man was expected to do 25 Flying Missions, then extended to 30 missions - not many crew made it home.

The Officers stood on the balcony of the Tower. All the planes then took off one by one circling the airfield getting higher and higher, then getting into formation and heading for Europe. The Germans mostly knew they were coming from their radar, or contrails from the planes were a dead giveaway. The planes met a lot of flack fired from the ground. They looked like puffs of black clouds but were deadly sharp with metal bits exploding and of course big guns who's shell could reach far into the sky, hoping to hit a plane and bring it down- and it did bring planes down or damaged them badly. But a lot of planes did make it home and it was the mechanics who changed engines and mended the planes generally for the next raid. It was always sad when a plane didn't come home for the mechanics, who worked many hours in freezing wet cold English weather.

Without the help and dedication of Rougham Squadron and all the other Squadrons we would not be having the freedom choice we have now.

We are hoping that this small information will inform our children, grandchildren and future generations of the values of these men, who gave their lives, so we could keep our country safe and free from treachery that would have prevailed our country 'England' if the Germans had won the war.

We are very much indebted to these young American Servicemen who came to England to fight- it was not their war.