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GI'S WON THE BRITISH!

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In the last 300 years there has been nothing that has stirred the Midland earth so much as the Yanks in this war

For three years American boys have been winning friends in England — a victory you've never read in the headlines

A LITTLE over a year ago, England was so full of American soldiers that the papers used to run cartoons depicting one or two of them who had fallen off the sides of the island as an orange falls off a barrel that is too full. A few green acres of Midland England had become a segment of American history.

Now, only a year later, the material traces of all this are being swept away. The Americans are packing up. The land they temporarily appropriated from us is, strip by strip, airfield by airfield, coming back.

It is true to say, I think, that no single event has stirred or affected this piece of English Midland earth so much in the last 300 years as this late invasion of the Americans. Never at any other time have more than 1,500 men of another country had such short and swift success with the girls — for 1,550 in three years is the latest figure of American-English marriages in just this one small district.

And how did we, the English, feel about

all this? Setting aside the fact that at least 50,000 young girls thought it terrific and 1,550 of them accorded it a triumph, we went through four, perhaps five, phases.

We began with the period of excitement, curiosity, suspicion, slight resentment, the traditional English slow-opening reserve. That was the "gum-for-the-kids" era. We then detected in the raw, as yet untrained American boys, a touch of untidy swagger that did not look well against the trim sternness of British boys already trained in two years of war.

But we got over that; and we went into phase two. That was the great period of testing. It was the "Sunday-dinner-for-a-soldier" era. And it was shaken by a single terrific event — a day when fifteen American bombers took off from the local field to attack a ball-bearing plant at Schweinfurt and only two came back.

Cannot Record Tears

THAT was a bad and immemorial day. I do not suppose there is in the State Department at Washington any system for the recording of tears. All I can say is that on that day, perhaps the toughest in the history of that one American base, as many tears were shed by English eyes for American dead as were

ever shed there, before or afterwards, for Englishmen. After that day our few distinctions began to break down; we found we were looking at things with more of the same eyes and the same perspective.

And after that it became a clearer perspective, and we went into phase number three. That was the period of no illusions. It was the "we're-in-this-damn-thing-together" era. It was the time when the Americans had come to the realistic conclusion that one Fortress does not win a war, and when we on our side had begun to realize, painfully and reluctantly, that we were only halfway through this terrible war.

The Royal Air Force had only just begun its four-figure raids, and the Americans, still training under European conditions, had not yet reached that strength. It was a grim period, and it got gradually noisier as both the Americans and the RAF put more and more planes into the sky.

There was not quite so much to eat as we should have liked, and one of the things that people liked to do was to get themselves invited out to the American base for chicken on Sunday. No American could possibly think Sunday complete without chicken, and I daresay many a girl got married, about that time, over a wishbone.

During that third period I began to notice, perhaps because I had been for some time in the RAF myself, that the American flyers were trying to take on that likeable international sort of reticence that is common to flying men.

They were becoming refined in the common fire of combat, and I could see more and more of them becoming more and more constrained and matured, as thousands of British, Polish, Czech, Dutch, French, Norwegian and Dominion flying boys had done. The best of them hardly troubled to wear any decorations, and they liked using RAF expressions a little, and naming some of their aircraft, such as *You've Had It*, in an RAF way.

Heavy, Bewildering Days

THEN period four began: noisier and noisier, heavier and heavier, until all hell was let loose with the Allied invasion. Those days were bewildering in their heavy, violent magnificence. By that time practically all American bombers were unpainted — the paintwork on a Fortress made a difference, somebody discovered, of several hundred pounds in weight — and what we saw was a vast glitter of silver on the green hillsides, and an even vaster, more impressive glitter as thousands of them flew formations in the summer sky.

Continued on page 27

GI'S WON THE BRITISH!

Continued from page nine

At night we had the RAF and by day the USAAF, in about equal strength, so that the battle line was never still. But that, I think, was the great period: the period of success and sacrifice, of retribution and power, and of understanding between us brought very close and made more refined and enduring by death.

Tribute To Girls

MANY a young English girl, in that period, had an American husband for only a few days. And against that there is a record of an American flyer who made at least five attempts to escape from Germany, and was finally successful, simply because an English girl had said she would give him hell if he didn't come back to marry her. And if that isn't a tribute to English womanhood I shall give up looking for one in the future.

Now, in phase five, the men who made history here are going, or have gone, away. By June, only one field out of the whole group that sprang up among the native fields still showed its silver silhouettes on the bare hillside. Materially, as I write, the thing is practically at an end. But the indefinable spirit of it, the simple human unity of it, has sent its roots right down. An American achievement, on an English field, is something of an honor for us both to treasure.

Fresh Tradition

IT GIVES back to the fields that nurtured the families of Washington and Franklin and gave us *Pilgrim's Progress* a new richness and a fresh tradition. You will find it symbolized in the captured Schweinfurt Flag, in the names of battle targets written with smoky candles in the ceilings of the mess huts, in proud little articles released at last by censorship in the local press, and in casual anecdotes of many a returning American boy.

But its deepest and greenest survival will be, I think, in memory. With us it will long be wondered at, talked about, valued and remembered. It will become a legend. Among the barley fields, the woods of violets and primrose and the green pastures that are returning to us you may be sure we shall not forget it. Nor, I hope, will you.

The End



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Jeeps and GI's mix here