

Interview with Ken Arnold, 1990 ([SA 1/635/1](#))

I think people in Ongar must've thought we were German soldiers when we were coming through with all our helmets on and everything. I don't suppose they'd seen many Yanks.

And down there we just worked constantly in mud, mostly up to our knees, and in the morning you used to get up out of the tent and put your feet in water. There's not much that you can say that's good about being in an air force construction area, because it is nothing but mud and sweat and dirty work. Concrete flying all over the place, and lorries running up and down runways which are partly built. Knocking down trees with bulldozers, and those they couldn't bulldoze down they blew up.

The good things were, we had the liberty of runs to Brentwood, Chelmsford, Ongar, and it seemed at each town we went to they had dances for the soldiers. Also we had our own people come over, like Jack Manning and Benny Goodman and people like that, which gave us pleasures. But most of it was damned hard work. It was a case of up and doing your shift, and getting your pleasures when you could.

And when you used to go to dances in the Corn Exchange, and at times they had a little bit of ruckus with the British soldiers, because I think the Yanks were making a little bit more money than they were, and that wasn't very popular.

But from Willingale we went to Boreham, and we just, sort of, did a little bit of touching up over there. But Willingale itself, the base was three runways, two a mile long and one six thousand feet long, five mile of perimeter track, and they were all done in 86 days. The engineers from all over the country came to see this work, because nothing like it had ever been done in this country, which makes me feel a bit proud.