

# US airman comes to Norfolk for 60th anniversary of first bombing run

# War hero returns for a nostalgic mission

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AN AMERICAN airman, who risked his life on wartime bombing missions from Norfolk, is making an emotional first return this week.

Walter "Bert" Clausen is visiting his wartime airbase in south Norfolk to mark the 60th anniversary of his first bombing raid.

The former B24 co-pilot is to be whisked off into the skies above Norfolk, France and Germany to recreate one of the 30 operations he says he was lucky to return from.

The former first lieutenant with the USAAF's 2nd Air Division, based at Hardwick, near Long Stratton, will fly from another former American base, Horsham St Faith — today Norwich International airport — to revisit the skies above Dijon-Longvic, Wittmundhafen, Hamburg, Berlin, Munster, Buchen and Magdeburg.

The 83-year-old, from Emeryville, just outside San Francisco, California, said: "I am an emotional person. I know it will be emotional, but I don't know how I am going to feel."

"When we were coming up to the 60th anniversary of our first flight, I wanted to do something special. I've never been back to Norfolk so I got the dumb idea somehow to charter a plane and fly some of my missions."

He said that on each raid he and his colleagues would think: "We're never coming home. We're not going to land this plane."

It was an attitude he believes helped him cope while serving in the 93rd Bombardment Group of the USAAF at Hardwick in 1944-45.

"We were pretty fatalistic as a crew. We simply didn't plan to come back. We thought if we had that attitude, it was a way to protect ourselves," he said.

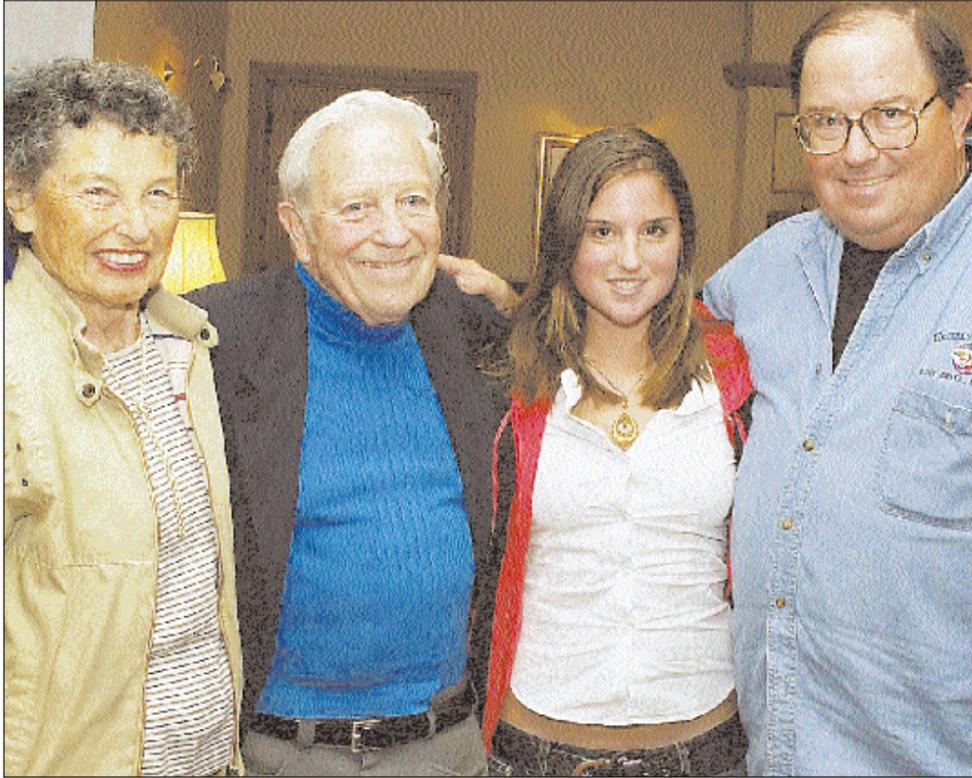
Mr Clausen's first sortie was 60 years ago on Saturday and yesterday he arrived in Norfolk for the first time since.

He thought some of the surviving members of his crew might come, but they decided against it.

Mr Clausen brought his wife Muriel, one son Ronald and his granddaughter Catrina to Norwich. They will visit the 2nd Air Division USAAF Memorial Library at The Forum and also go out to Hardwick.

Asked about the men who did not come back from the war, Mr Clausen's voice wavered. "I do think of them," he said quietly, "I do".

He lost one close friend who



MEMORIES: Walter Clausen, his wife Muriel, son Ronald and granddaughter Catrina; right, the memorial at Hardwick today; below, a wartime picture of the airmen at Hardwick.

Photos: PAUL HEWITT AND COURTESY OF 93rdbombardmentgroup.com



## AN AMERICAN INVASION

AT the Origins attraction in the Forum, the American airmen who came over to East Anglia to fight in the Second World War are classed as one more invasion — one that came after the Romans, the Anglo-Saxons, the Vikings and the Normans.

More than 50,000 members of the 2nd Air Division were based in East Anglia at the height of the war, flying bombing and supply missions. The area became known as the Fields of Little America.

The 2nd Air Division Memorial Library website describes the missions from Hardwick Airfield this way:

"Hardwick's first American aircraft were the B-25 Mitchells of the 310th Bombardment Group (September to November 1942), but the B-24 crews of the 93rd Bombardment Group (Heavy) which followed made it their base for the rest of the war



and achieved fame on various counts.

"It was the oldest B-24 group in the Eighth; it flew more missions than any other bomb group in the Eighth; 'Boomerang' (sic) was the first Eighth Air Force B-24 to fly 50 missions; dubbed 'The Travelling Circus', it was the Eighth's most travelled group. The 93rd flew a total of 391 combat missions, including 41 from North Africa, and lost 140 Liberators in action."

Hardwick Airfield is farmland today (see picture). A memorial is there for those killed in action.

didn't come back from a bombing raid. But all nine of the crew he flew with survived the war.

"We only ever had one small bit of shrapnel hit a plane," he said. "We were lucky."

They also had a technique. Mr Clausen believes that made the difference.

"I met a pilot on his way home when I was going over to England. I bought his bedding from him," Mr Clausen said.

"And he told me to try to get on the lead ship, which I did. He said the best thing to do is to head into the flack. The enemy would readjust for 20 seconds after they fired and they wouldn't aim for the same place."

So, that's what Mr Clausen did — always aimed for the flack. He made it back, went to the University of California, Berkeley, raised two sons and founded a successful engineering company.

Even now, at the age of 83, he continues to go into the

## AIR POWER



ROGER Freeman, 2nd Air Division Memorial Trust governor, wrote on the 2nd Air Division Memorial Library website:

"In the Second World War, air power was a decisive force in securing the Allied victory. When the United States of America entered hostilities in December 1941, it was agreed with the British that until such time as an invasion of continental Europe could be undertaken, the Royal Air Force and the United States Army Air Force would engage in strategic bombing against Nazi Germany.

"Strategic bombing involved campaigns to destroy the industries and communications that directly or indirectly supported the enemy's war effort. In the event, RAF Bomber command concentrated on night attacks while its American counterpart, the Eighth Air Force, operated mainly in daylight.

"The US Eighth Air Force was, in terms of men and aircraft, the largest offensive air force in history. Indeed, had not much of its planned strength been diverted to other American air forces fighting the Nazis and their supporters, it would have comprised almost two-thirds of the total USAAF combat strength."

office. He has found over the years that his crew became closer friends than they were when they were flying missions out of Norfolk.

"Right after the war it didn't seem important to stay in touch," he said. "But over the years it has become important."

"All our targets were military targets. They were bases or power stations or transportation hubs."

The experience was life-defining in such a deep way that Mr Clausen said he was not even sure why he wanted to recreate it in the skies over Europe this week.

"There is a lot of talk here about mine being the 'greatest generation' and I don't mind being in it," he said. "But it was a time where someone said 'do it' and we just did it. I was opposed to American involvement in the war at first. But as time went on, I realised it was important. I signed up and said I'll do what I can."

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## News in brief

### Puppet fun for children

CHILDREN can find out how to make different kinds of puppets in three workshops this month.

The Norwich Puppet Theatre, in Whitefriars, is hosting classes in creating colourful miniature characters for youngsters aged five and above.

Tomorrow, there will be a workshop in how to make a "table-top" puppet.

On Thursday, the workshop teaches how to create a "pop-up" puppet.

And on Tuesday, August 24 the subject is the "Sicilian rod".

Each of the workshops begins at 10.30am and lasts about 90 minutes. Each session costs £6.

For more information, call (01603) 629921.

### Maritime festival

A FESTIVAL to celebrate the sea-faring history of a Norfolk town is being held next month.

The Great Yarmouth Maritime Festival will take place on September 11 and 12.

There will be events throughout the town and especially the quay.

It is a chance to learn more about the role of this ancient port and how important it has been to the town.

For more information, call (01493) 842195.

### Boat trip offer

HICKLING Broad is the site of another Family Friday this week.

An hour-long family boat trip, an observation tower and nature walks offer several opportunities to view wildlife in its natural habitat. Craft projects will also be taught.

Book in advance for the programme, from 11am to 4pm, by contacting Norfolk Wildlife Trust on (01692) 598276.

The cost is £3 for adults, £2 for children. Crafts are £1 per child.

### Amnesty meeting

THE next meeting of the Norwich branch of Amnesty International takes place tomorrow night.

The meeting, which starts at 7.30pm, will be held in the Charing Cross Centre in Norwich.

Further details are available on (01508) 538353.

### Musical treat

MUSIC fans can enjoy a night of Peking opera and Chinese music at the Norwich Playhouse this weekend.

A group of Chinese children will perform at the event on Saturday.

The concert will start at 7.30pm and tickets are available on (01603) 598598.

### Clothing blaze

CLOTHES caught fire in an industrial drier at Campling's Laundry Ltd in Portland Lane, Great Yarmouth.

Firefighters were called at 12.16pm yesterday and took 20 minutes to bring the blaze under control.

No one was injured.

## News in brief

### Police in hunt for three men

POLICE are hunting three men who smashed the windscreen of a car after getting involved in a row at a house in Cringleford.

The men shouted and then one of them broke the windscreen of a red Rover Metro, which was parked in the driveway, with a long metal implement. Bowthorpe Police are appealing for witnesses to the attack, which happened on Wednesday, August 11, at about 10.45pm in St Peters Close, Cringleford. The three men, all believed to be in their late teens to early 20s, became involved in an argument with the victim, who had been attending a barbecue. One of the offenders is described as being between 6ft 2in and 6ft 4in tall with a completely shaven head.

Information to Bowthorpe police on (01953) 424242 or Crimestoppers on 0800 555111.

### MP praises service

NORWICH North MP Ian Gibson has visited a new facility in Taverham which offers advice and guidance for families.

Dr Gibson visited the Taverham Help Shop as part of his work to promote improvements to community services in the city.

The Help Shop offers free advice and guidance for people in North Norwich. It deals with problems ranging from bereavement support and debt advice, to smaller issues such as help with children's homework. Dr Gibson said: "This is a wonderful initiative, showing the prospects a new community centre brings to the Taverham, Thorpe Marriot, and Drayton area."

### New equipment

THE Wensum Valley Birdwatching Society has been awarded a £1,150 lottery grant to buy equipment. Members of the Costessey-based club are now eagerly waiting for a new photocopyer and extra pairs of binoculars. The group is holding an outdoor meeting today at 5pm at Sculthorpe Moor Nature Reserve.

Details on (01603) 740548.

## US bomber back for a last mission of peace

IT WAS a sentimental journey in every way when an 83-year-old war veteran made an emotional return to the places he flew over during the Second World War.

Walter "Bert" Clausen took off from Norwich International airport yesterday at 8am and for the next 11 hours, he flew over most of the places over which he led bombing missions when he was an American airman based at Hardwick Airfield.

This time, his wife Muriel was beside him. Her letters helped sustain him through the war. His grown son Ronald and his granddaughter Catrina also went along in the Sterling Aviation Beechcraft King Air 200.

This week marks exactly 60 years since the first of Mr Clausen's 30 missions.

"We told him it only took him 60 years to do 31 missions," son Ronald said.

All told, the flight was 1,800 nautical miles — around 2,100 miles. The Clausens flew over the former Hardwick Airfield, then across the water and along Omaha beach, then into France and Germany and ultimately Berlin.

Then, the plane headed back towards Norfolk, as Mr Clausen had done 30 times before.

"It was great," the former Second World War aviator said, grinning.

But it was also emotional. Even though the weather was not great, Mr Clausen was determined to get to Magdeburg, Germany, where he flew three missions. He had lost some planes, and some comrades there. Mr Clausen, 83 wanted to go back and pay tribute to their memory.



A VERY SPECIAL JOURNEY: Above and left, American GI Walter "Bert" Clausen setting off to visit the places he flew missions over during the Second World War. Bottom left, Bert and his wife Muriel enjoy some good service on the memorable flight.

Photos: SONYA BROWN/ RONALD CLAUSEN

"He is very understated," son Ronald said. "But it was very emotional for him."

On a re-fuelling stop in Dijon, Mr Clausen found some World War II-era hangars and inside discovered an old B-25.

"It was great to see all the old bunkers and hangars still intact," he said.

Mrs Clausen, who met her future husband on a blind date just before he went to war, kept track of everywhere the flight went.

"I wrote it all down, right down to the minute," she said.

Many World War II veterans have had a similar impulse to return to the places they served.

Spectra, the destination management company that arranged Mr Clausen's trip has a growing business in American vets returning to Europe.

"Over the course of this summer I have organised visits to Portsmouth and London for several hundred WW2 veterans from all over the US in connection with the 60th Anniversary of the D-Day Landings," said Dawn McCormick, manager of special markets.

Derek James  
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# Airport chiefs hail new flights as a major coup

BOSSES at Norwich International airport today hailed the newly launched direct flights from the city to Dublin and Cardiff as proof the airport was ready to tackle the might of Stansted.

Trevor Eady, commercial director at the airport, said yesterday's announcement that Air Wales will provide flights to the Welsh and Irish capitals could woo passengers away from the Essex airport and convince them to fly from Norwich.

Airport bosses revealed how the service will initially operate on three days of the week — but could become more regular if there is heavy demand for the flights.

Passengers will be asked to pay from £80 for return flights to the two cities — and Mr Eady said people could find themselves at their

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destination in the amount of time it would usually take them to catch a plane from Stansted.

He said: "This is one of the most exciting developments to happen at Norwich International for some time. We are fully aware that something like 100,000 travellers a year from our catchment area fly from Stansted to Dublin.

"The introduction of the route at the fare levels quoted will provide the region with its first low cost operation from Norwich.

"In addition to Dublin, the ability to book through to Cardiff will be a useful additional route for many passengers. Users will find themselves in Dublin in less time than many could access Stansted."

Mr Eady said the airport had long

tried to get a route up and running to the Republic of Ireland and he was delighted one had finally been secured after a deal collapsed about 18 months ago.

He said: "Air Wales have listened to our presentations and see an opportunity to expand their network. They have ideal sized aircraft for the route and have confidence they will be able to increase frequencies within a short time. I think it will become a daily service within a few months."

Roy Thomas, Air Wales chairman, said: "As an airline we pride ourselves on offering competitively priced high demand services from domestic airports.

"We've been in discussions with Norwich Airport for some time and we're confident that this is a much-needed service for Norwich and we're hopeful that it will receive strong support from travellers in

East Anglia. While initially we will only be operating the service at three days a week, we are hopeful in time, that we will be able to increase this to a more robust six days a week service which will open up countless opportunities for business and tourism in the area."

Flights, which start in November, can be booked by calling Air Wales' call centre on 0870 777 3131 or via the website at [www.airwales.com](http://www.airwales.com).

Flights will depart from Norwich to Dublin at 2.10pm on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Travellers on those flights can then continue from Dublin to Cardiff. Flights from Dublin to Norwich will take off at 12.10pm. In addition a direct Cardiff to Norwich flight will depart at 10.40am on Saturdays with a direct Norwich to Cardiff flight at 4pm.

Saturdays will also see a Norwich to Dublin flight at 12.10pm and a Dublin to Norwich flight at 2.10pm.