Allies in Memory

Amidst the ruins of post-war Europe, and just as the Cold War dawned, many new memorials were dedicated to those Americans who had fought and fallen for freedom. Some of these monuments, plaques, stained-glass windows and other commemorative signposts were established by agents of the US government, partly in the service of transatlantic diplomacy; some were built by American veterans’ groups mourning lost comrades; and some were provided by grateful and grieving European communities. As the war receded, Europe also became the site for other forms of American commemoration: from the sombre and solemn battlefield pilgrimages of veterans, to the political theatre of presidents, to the production and consumption of commemorative souvenirs. With a specific focus on the processes and practices in two distinct regions of Europe – Normandy and East Anglia – Sam Edwards tells a story of post-war Euro-American cultural contact, and of the acts of transatlantic commemoration that this bequeathed.

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In recent years the field of modern history has been enriched by the exploration of two parallel histories. These are the social and cultural history of armed conflict, and the impact of military events on social and cultural history.

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Allies in Memory

World War II and the Politics of Transatlantic Commemoration, c. 1941–2001

Sam Edwards

Manchester Metropolitan University
For my girls: Nicola, Megan and Molly
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Acknowledgements

My interest in what I now refer to as the ‘politics of transatlantic commemoration’ began as a teenager, during the many cycling trips that my best friend – Dan Ribenfors – and I made to the old airfields of the US Eighth Air Force in the 1990s. In hindsight, I know it was a significant moment, for every summer saw a returning group of veterans visit their airfield. We passed them as we wandered round the museums at Seething and Parham, Flixton and Thorpe Abbots. I wish I had asked them more. My first debt of gratitude, therefore, is to the veterans of the Eighth Air Force and to the veterans of the D-Day landings in Normandy (also a place of pilgrimage for Dan and me in due course). Those I had the privilege of meeting (or corresponding with) were invariably kind and generous; they gave their time, and their stories. Special thanks in particular must go to Walter Hughes, Charles Walker, Edward Mikoloski, Bob Babcock, Roy Surrat, Ed Burke, Frank E. South and Manuel E. De Jesus. And I must of course thank Dan for agreeing that weekends were best spent cycling to old airfields, regardless of the weather and the wind.

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