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978-1-107-07457-6 - *Allies in Memory: World War II and the Politics of Transatlantic Commemoration, c. 1941–2001*

Sam Edwards

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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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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.

Several inspiring teachers nurtured my childhood interest in history. Dave Handy, surely the only Welsh nationalist in Suffolk’s Waveney Valley, was an early influence at Sir John Leman High School in Beccles. At the Lancaster University History department I was privileged to learn from a group of gifted teachers: Michael Winstanley, Thomas Rohkrammer, Corinna Peniston-Bird and Tim Hickman. Above all, though, Stephen Constantine and Patrick Hagopian have shaped my work. Professor Constantine supervised and guided my research from an undergraduate dissertation to a PhD thesis; he is that rare combination of brilliant scholar, wonderful teacher and unfailingly decent and generous human being. Dr Hagopian similarly advised and counselled, whilst also helping to develop and refine my doctoral research; it was a privilege to work with one of the leading figures in contemporary memory studies, from whom I learnt so much.

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such an outstanding group of scholars, so many of whom have become firm friends.

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Finally, I must thank my girls – Nicola, Megan and Molly. Molly, our ridiculously excitable labradoodle, ensures I get up early each and every morning, and she helps provide perspective at just those points when I need it (she is firmly of the opinion that most days should be spent walking up hills and through green fields). My daughter Megan, meanwhile, offered her own particular brand of criticism as I worked to complete this book (she’s not yet three). At one point, I left the manuscript – briefly – with her in the living room whilst I prepared lunch in the kitchen. When I returned, the pages had been scattered all over the floor, and two chapters in particular had been comprehensively rearranged. She remains a tough critic (her first word was ‘No’), and I continue to seek her advice on matters of structure and format. Nicola is my friend and partner, my inspiration and support. She is wonderfully understanding of my inadequacies (technology: a mystery), and she is yet to show a hint of despair when, during our summer holidays, I suggest we take a trip to an old battlefield. With her lies responsibility for this book’s completion: for one birthday, she took me to the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum in Savannah; for my thirtieth, she helped me organise a nostalgic cycling trip to several of the old bases of the Eighth. Just as importantly, she is a scholar herself and, as such, she has subjected this book to her keen and questioning eye. If it is better than it once was, this is the reason; if flaws remain, they are mine alone. Together, I refer to Nic, Megan and Molly as ‘my girls’ not as an expression of my inner misogynist, but in awe. I am unworthy of their love, support, advice, guidance and indulgence (the list might go on), and I live in fear that they will one day realise.