

Willingale Airfield (RAF Chipping Ongar)

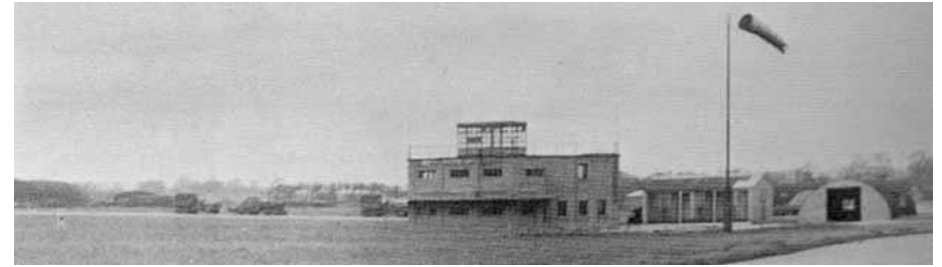
Willingale Airfield was built in 1942 on open farmland and was one of 15 airfields in Essex allocated to the USAAF. It was built by the US Army 831st Engineer (Aviation) Battalion and on 25 June 1943 the 387th Bombardment group arrived from Kentucky assigned to the 3rd Bomb Wing flying Martin B –



26B/C Marauders. They began combat on 15 August 1943 attacking coastal defences on the French coast. During eight months of operations from Willingale Airfield the 387 flew 204 missions and lost 10 aircraft. While stationed in Willingale the airmen used St Andrews Church as their Parish church, organised dances in the Village Hall and were generous to the children of the village who were living under tight rationing.

In July 1944 the 387th Group moved to RAF Stoney Cross in Hampshire leaving only a small USAAF station complements unit. A few transport and light aircraft were occasionally seen but there was little flying. During September 1944 the airfield was used by the IX Troop Carrier Command as an advanced C-47 base during Operation Market-Garden. In March 1945 Troop Carrier Group used the airfield for British paratroops as part of Operation Varsity, the airborne crossing of the River Rhine. Of the 80 aircraft dispatched one Pathfinder C 47 was lost.

Willingale Airfield was returned to the RAF Bomber Command on 18 April 1945. It was transferred to RAF Technical Training Command on 11 June 1945 becoming a satellite of RAF Hornchurch. It was unoccupied until handed over to the War Office on 25 April 1946. It was finally relinquished on 28 February 1959 when it reverted to agricultural use.



The main runway was 6000 feet long with two secondary runways of 4200 feet and an encircling perimeter track with 51 hard standards, 48 loops plus two large loops and a pan type loop. Alongside the hangars there were various field maintenance shops to keep aircraft airworthy and quickly repair light and moderate battle damage. Severely damaged aircraft were sent to a repair depot. The buildings were largely constructed of Nissen huts and all the facilities were all connected by a network of single path support roads. Communal accommodation was provided for 2770 personnel and included sick quarters.

Rubble on the former airfield is worthy of mention as it is the remains of East End of London dwellings destroyed during the Blitz in 1940/41 and was used as hardcore for the airfield foundations. In the mid-1960s the runway and other concrete areas were broken up for use as hardcore, much of which was used for the Brentwood bypass section of the A12. One of the large T2 hangars was dismantled and re-erected at North Weald airfield (the one nearest the M11 motorway).



This leaflet has been produced by Willingale Community Archive funded by heritage lottery fund.

A permanent display of airfield information can be seen in St Andrews church Willingale .



