

Project Ruby

At the end of world war two all the laws which allowed US military aircraft to operate from British bases were rescinded apart from allowing aircraft to return home. Then there was a problem with US military aircraft visiting the UK being required to pay landing fees. This problem was remedied after the US Embassy took issue over some invoices they had been sent! Fearing trouble from the USSR which occupied much of Eastern Europe, the US requested permission to base some bomber groups in Britain. While this was under discussion it also asked that B29s could train in the UK. Following this a small number of B29s came to RAF Marham to train with the RAF on 'Project Ruby' which entailed fitting war surplus British H/E bombs to the B29s. Because of clearance problems under the B29s, bomb-loading pits had to be used similar to the ones used in the Pacific to load atom bombs. One such pit was built at Sculthorpe although more in anticipation for future use because Sculthorpe did not take part in 'Project Ruby'.

The B29s and the RAF then unloaded their ordnance over the U Boat pens in the Baltic. Nearby was the bombing range at Heligoland, here a Former Nazi Naval complex was blown up by the Royal Navy in what was the largest ever non-nuclear explosion which completely altered the topogphaphy of the island.

On a more peaceful note, the B29s joined with some from German Bases to make mock attacks on English Towns to give RAF fighters some experience. The older jets were found wanting while the newer piston engine aircraft performed well!

While this was going on, the USSR imposed a blockade on West Berlin and so the problem of basing US bomber groups in the UK was solved at a stroke and they arrived immediately, with Sculthorpe seeing three squadrons of the 92nd BG in early 1949.

Eventually the RAF got some B29s, they called them 'Washingtons' replacing the 'Lincolns and 'Lancasters' from a different technology. Joining that trio was the 'Shackleton' which outlived its jet engine replacement! The 'Washington' remained the 'pin up' of RAF Bomber Command until the 'Canberra' entered service.