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THEFT: ANGER AT FLAG THEFT FROM US MEMORIAL

A WAR memorial built in memory of American servicemen who died fighting for Britain's freedom has been targeted by vandals – only four weeks after it was unveiled.

Two flags – one British, one American – that had flown above the £42,000 monolithic symbol of the unity forged during the Second World War, have been hacked down.

The cowardly act was carried out during Friday at the site beside the Great North Road, in Conington, near Peterborough.

The memorial is dedicated to the 457th Bombardment Group of the US Army's Eighth Air Force, 1st Air Division, which was based at Conington airbase.

The news has been met with outrage by men who fought in the war, and Peterborough city councillor Ray Pobgee, who co-ordinated the project to get the memorial built.

John Hunter (80), of Carron Drive, Werrington, Peterborough, was one of the first servicemen to reach France in the early hours of D-Day, on June 6, 1944.

He said: "It's absolutely disgusting. It's an insult.

"The flags are no good to them. They daren't show them anywhere because people will know where they are from.

"There's a lot of meaning behind those flags. A lot of us veterans encourage the memorials. It is absolutely terrible to take them away."

More than 600 people had joined 60 American veterans at a special service dedicated to the 790 members of the bomber crew who perished while valiantly helping the Royal Air Force in defeating Nazi Germany.

Cllr Pobgee, who acted as host to the American veterans who made the trip across the Atlantic, said: "It is one of those things that is a great disappointment, and a great shame.

People can obviously see and know what the object of the memorial is.

"It is dedicated to people who fought and gave their lives for the freedoms that we enjoy.

"The same freedom that means these offenders can drive around and commit offences.

"It's not a great financial loss, but the fact is that those flags were brought over by American veterans to go on display.

"To cut the flags down and remove them is the ultimate in vandalism."

"If these offenders' consciences are pricked by what they have done and they want them to return them to me, just send them back.

"They will be replaced. we won't be defeated. It's just a pity that such a sacrilegious act should be carried out."

Gordon Townsend, the official representative of the 457th Bombardment Group in Britain, said: "I watched the aeroplanes take off and go on raids when I was a boy during the war. I have always had a love for the 457 group.



Cllr Ray Pobgee at the bare flagpoles (4PF0626401)

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"It's upsetting. That memorial is to men who died to give people their freedom.

"I'm thoroughly disgusted by it. You wonder about their mentality.

"It's as though people do not have any loyalty any more."

28 June 2004

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