



New Forest
World War 2
Airfields
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Advanced Landing Grounds

The New Forest's Temporary Airfields

RAF Lymington

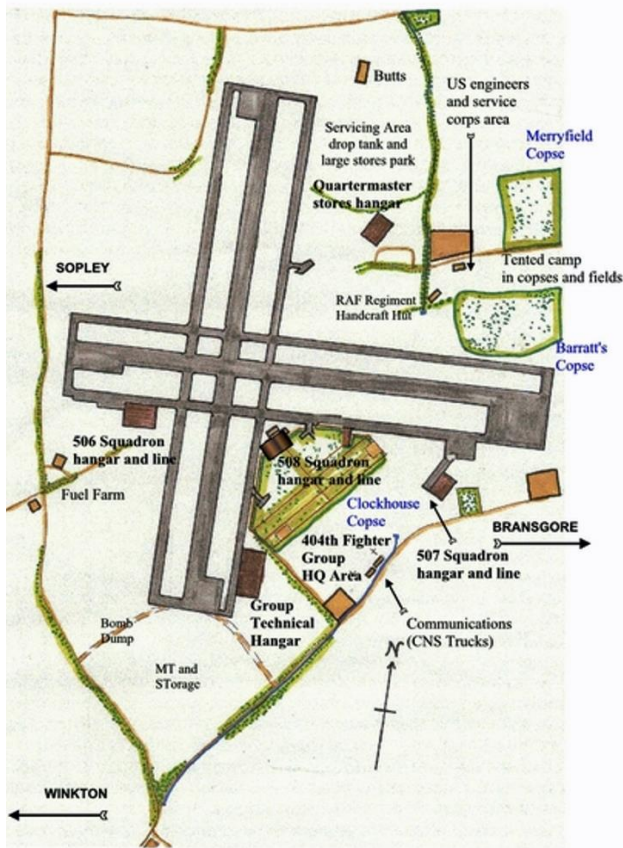
by Steve Williams

During 1942, when planning started for Operation Overlord, the invasion of Europe, it became clear that significant additional airfield capacity would be required in the period running up to the invasion, to destroy defences, rail and road bridges, military formations and factories producing military equipment. This additional capacity was also required during the invasion to provide support to the Landing and the troops on the ground. This required the provision of temporary airfields. These temporary airfields became known as Advanced Landing Grounds (ALG). The ALGs provided vital additional capacity to operate aircraft as near to the front line as possible, initially in England and then through France and the Low Countries towards Germany, as the front line advanced.

Characteristics of an Advanced Landing Ground

ALGs were built on requisitioned farmland with very basic facilities. Most of the accommodation was under canvas or in trailers. Where available, local buildings were requisitioned to provide headquarters and other specialist accommodation. Two or three blister hangers were provided for aircraft maintenance. ALGs had two runways of 1,400 to 1,600 yards long set at right angles to each other. The runways, taxiways and aircraft dispersal were made from Sommerfeld Mat or a similar form of metal mesh that was laid on the prepared ground.

Advanced Landing Grounds typically provided a base for three squadrons who together would require space for around ninety aircraft and 1,000 service personnel. Each squadron would be allocated an area on the airfield and there would be a central headquarters area. Space would be needed for quartermaster stores, fuel storage and ammunition storage.



The layout of a typical Advanced Landing Ground, this is RAF Winkton

Most accommodation was under canvas or improvised out of trailers or glider packing cases. Where possible, the cover provided by trees would be used and there would be several anti-aircraft gun batteries. At some ALGs existing buildings were requisitioned for use as headquarters or officers mess accommodation.

The life cycle of a typical ALG

- September 1943 – Site cleared.
- December 1943 – runways laid.
- March 1944 – Camp prepared.
- Early April 1944 – Unit take up residence.
- Early May 1944 – Start of operations.
- Early July 1944 – Unit relocates to France.
- September 1944 – returned to agriculture.

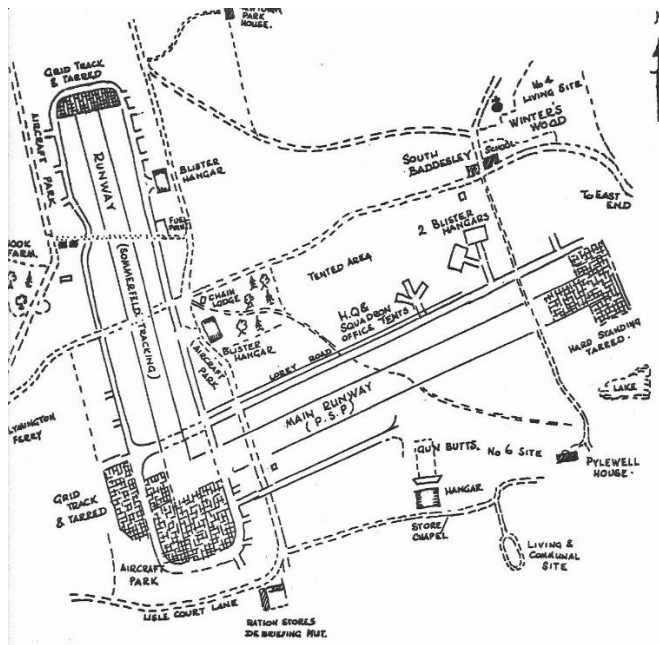
The New Forest ALGs

Four Advanced Landing Grounds were built in the New Forest at Bisterne, Winkton, Lymington and Needs Oar Point. A fifth ALG type of airfield, with a single runway, was constructed on the East side of Christchurch airfield. Apart from Needs Oar Point, these ALGs were used by the USAAF flying the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt. Needs Oar Point was base for four RAF squadrons flying Typhoons.

RAF Lymington Advanced Landing Ground

RAF Lymington, known by the USAAF as Station 551, was located about a mile east of Lymington near to Pylewell House. Construction began in the Summer of 1943 and the camp was built in early 1944. Two runways were constructed, the main East/West runway was 1600 meters long and the North/South runway was 1400 meters. Both were originally laid using Sommerfeld Tracking but the main East/West runway was changed to Pierced Steel Plank before the airfield opened. These are both types of metal sheets that are pinned to the ground using large pegs. Five Blister hangars and one Butler Combat Hangar were constructed, but the living sites, which were hidden in nearby woods, were all tented accommodation.

The USAAF 50th Fighter Group, comprising the 10th, 81st and 313rd Fighter Squadrons, arrived at Lymington from Orlando, Florida on the 5th April 1944 with their Republic P-47 Thunderbolts. After a period of intensive training, they started operations on the 1st of May. They were initially engaged in escort and dive-bombing missions, and then went on to provide air cover and close air support during the D-Day invasion.



The following extract from the Group's log gives a feel for how intense the operations were.

June 5th, 1944

No missions were assigned. Early evening all pilots and other officers were briefed on the invasion plans that were now in place for the 6th June. The 50th Fighter Group would provide fighter cover over Omaha and Utah beaches at medium and high altitude from 04:30.

June 6th D-Day

03:36 48 P-47s plus three spares airborne to provide cover over the beaches at 5-6000' and 8-12,000' from 04:30.

08:44 46 P-47s airborne to patrol over Gold, Juno, and Sword beaches at 3-7000'.

14:05 48 P-47s airborne to patrol over the beaches. Squadrons had varying patrol areas and heights – all five beaches covered between the three squadrons.

18:59 48 P-47s airborne (plus four spares). More beach patrols, over Gold, Juno, and Sword.

June 7th

08:57 48 P-47s plus four spares airborne on beach cover. The first Luftwaffe fighters seen and engaged. Lt Bryan is credited with one probable, one destroyed. Lt Ragland is missing in action, Lt Woodside is damaged by flak, has fuel starvation and force lands but evaded capture and is back with his squadron on June 9th.

13:56 48 P-47s plus four spares airborne over Gold, Juno, and Sword beaches.

18:59 48 P-47s plus three spares airborne on more beach patrols.

The 50th Group finally left Lymington on the 24th June for the newly constructed ALG A-10 at Carentan in Normandy. The Lymington site was used as a Navy Storage Area until 1946, when the land returned to agriculture. One of the original, but refurbished, blister hangars remain today, and there is a private airstrip, using part of the original North/South runway. There is also an information board at the entrance to one of the farm tracks.



One of the original Blister hangers and the North/South runway



The information board with some old Pierced Steel Plunk underneath

It is impossible to calculate the impact that these temporary airfields had on the outcome of Operation Overlord, the D-Day invasion, and the advance through Normandy, but I think everyone would agree that it was considerable, given the presence of over four hundred aircraft and 5,000 servicemen and women. Today there is little but information boards to mark these sites.

Directions to RAF Lyminster and the other airfields are contained in my Guide to the New Forest World War 2 Airfields, which can be downloaded from my website nfww2airfields.info My website also contains links to other sources of information about the airfields.