



# Advanced Landing Grounds

## The New Forest's Temporary Airfields

by Steve Williams

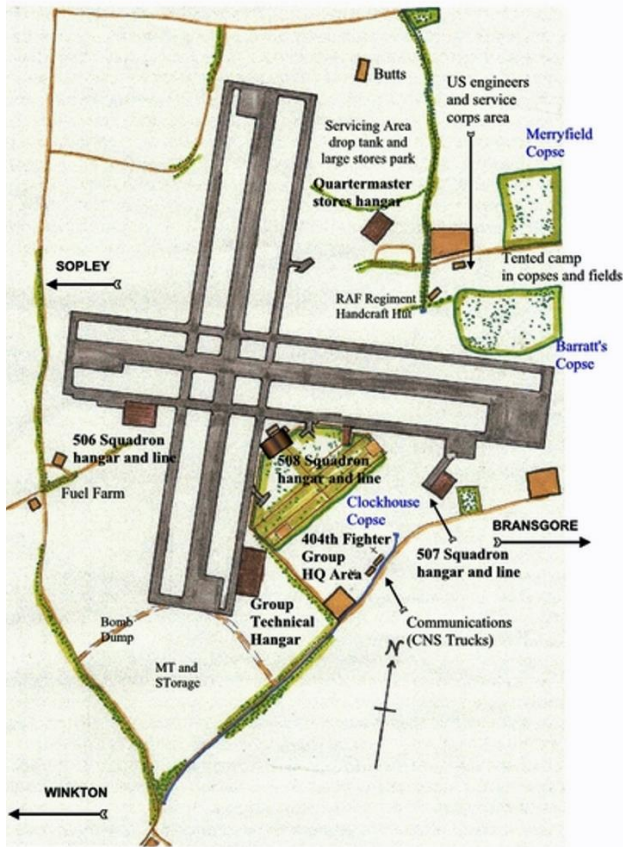
The fall of France in 1940 meant that England's South and East coast became our front line of defence. This coupled with the bombing of Britain during the early part of The War provided the stimulus to build many new airfields across the South of England. Five concrete runway airfields were built in the New Forest at Stoney Cross, Ibsley, Holmsley South, Beaulieu and Hurn. These became operational in 1941 or 1942 and provided a base for additional fighters, Coastal Command as well as bombers, glider operations and some special operations.

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 and factories producing military equipment. This additional capacity was also required during the invasion to provide support to the troops at sea and on the ground. A key element of the planning in the months leading up to the invasion, was the conduct of a substantial military deception, codenamed Operation Bodyguard, to mislead the Germans as to the date and location of the main Allied landings. This required the provision of temporary airfields along much of the South Coast of England. These temporary airfields became known as Advanced Landing Grounds (ALG). The ALGs provided vital temporary 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.

### Advanced Landing Grounds

Advanced Landing Grounds were temporary very basic airfields built on requisitioned farmland with most of the accommodation under canvas, with two or three blister hangers for aircraft maintenance. Each would have two runways of 1,400 to 1,600 yards long set at right angles to each other. The runways of most of the ALGs built in England were made from Sommerfeld Mat, with taxiways and aircraft dispersal areas made from Pierced Steel Plank, two different types of metal track that were laid on the ground. There were four Advanced Landing Grounds 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. A further 23 ALGs were constructed along the South coast in Hampshire, Sussex, and Kent.

## Characteristics of an Advanced Landing 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. 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.  
April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1944 – Unit take up residence.  
July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1944 – Unit relocates to France.  
September 1944 – returned to agriculture

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

## The New Forest Advanced Area Landing Grounds

### RAF Bisterne

RAF Bisterne ALG was located on land belonging to the Bisterne Manor estate, just to the south of Ringwood. Bisterne hosted the 371<sup>st</sup> Fighter Group of the US 9<sup>th</sup> Airforce consisting of the 404<sup>th</sup>, 405<sup>th</sup> and 406<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadrons, flying the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt, primarily in the ground attack role. Most accommodation was under canvas, but Brixey's Farm was used as the Group Headquarters and for some officer accommodation. The 371<sup>st</sup> Fighter Group left for another ALG at Beuzeville au Plain - La Londe in France at the end of June 1944 to continue providing close support to the advancing troops.





Republic P-47 Thunderbolt, also primarily in the ground attack role. Most accommodation here was under canvas with blister hangers for aircraft maintenance. The 10th Fighter Group left for another ALG at Carentan in France towards the end of June 1944 to keep them in range of the advancing front line.

There is not a great deal to be seen at Lymington, however it is possible to detect the lines of the runway and one of the blister hangers remains in the North-East corner of the airfield.



There is also a New Forest Heritage information board with some old Pierced Steel Planking below it at the entrance to a bridleway that crosses the airfield and the North/South runway.



## RAF Needs Oar Point

RAF Needs Oar Point ALG was built on part of the Beaulieu estate, close to the coast of the Solent. By contrast with the other ALGs in the New Forest, Needs Oar Point was operated by the 146 wing of the second tactical Air Force RAF. Needs Oar Point was the temporary home of four RAF Squadrons, Nos. 193, 197, 257 and 266, all flying Hawker Typhoon fighter bombers. There were reported to be up to 150 aircraft at Needs Oar Point at its busiest time with a take-off or landing every 45 – 60 seconds. At its peak it was reported to be the busiest airfield in England. Most accommodation here was under canvas with blister hangers for aircraft maintenance. The four squadrons moved to RAF Hurn for two weeks at the start of July 1944 before moving to an ALG at St. Croix Sur Mer, near Ryes in Normandy. The Royal Navy then used the site as a storage depot until 1946 when it was returned to the Beaulieu Estate. There is a New Forest Heritage interpretation board alongside the road where one of the runways used to be.

## RAF Christchurch

RAF Christchurch started life as a civilian airfield in 1926 and after a brief closure at the start of the War was requisitioned for military use. Several research and special development teams were at Christchurch, so their Special Service flights used Christchurch. Airspeed also set up a shadow factory to construct Airspeed Oxford training aircraft and nearly 700 Horsa gliders. In 1943 construction started on a temporary airfield (ALG) on the East of the airfield near Bure Homage House. This part of Christchurch hosted the 405th Fighter Group of the US 9<sup>th</sup> Airforce consisting of the 509<sup>th</sup>, 510<sup>th</sup> and 511<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadrons, flying the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt, primarily in the ground attack role.

Much of the accommodation was in tents in the woods and the grounds of Bure Homage House which was used as the Headquarters. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1944, the Group moved to an Advanced Landing Ground to the west of St Mere Eglise near Picauville in Normandy. Christchurch is remembered for the disaster that took place on June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1944, when three P-47 Thunderbolts crashed onto houses in Foxwood Avenue in two take-off accidents. Sixteen people were tragically killed and twenty-four injured. Two of the aircraft were flown by the same pilot.

The airfield returned to civilian use after the war and finally closed in 1966. It is now covered by housing estates, retail parks, and industrial units.

**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 nearly 5,000 servicemen and women. Today there is little but information boards to mark these sites.**

Directions to these airfields can be found in my Guide to the New Forest World War 2 Airfields which is available from my Website [nfww2airfields.info](http://nfww2airfields.info)