

## New models added to Heritage Centre displays

Two new models were added to the Centre displays during summer 2020. Together they form a Short Stirling Mk IV and a Horsa Mk I glider towing combination.



Stirlings were used extensively as glider tugs at Holmsley South, Stoney Cross, Hurn and at Christchurch, where the Horsa gliders were assembled in early 1944, during the run up to D-Day. Training operations continued throughout the spring of 1944, with many mass practice landings on all the large airfields. The Stirling depicted is a 295 Squadron aircraft, seen in the wartime photograph below.



Originally designed as a bomber and specified to drop large numbers of smaller bombs (maximum bomb size 2000 lb) due to the bomb bay construction, and having a height limitation (a service ceiling of 16,500 ft) the Stirling was soon relegated to other duties, when Lancasters and Halifaxes, which flew higher and had a longer range with larger bombs, became available in large numbers.



Many Stirling bombing missions were flown at 12,000 ft, well within the range of enemy flak. However, the thick wing made it possible for the aircraft to out-turn the Ju 88 and bf 110 night fighters that they faced. The Mk IV was developed specifically as a glider tug and therefore takes its place as an important aircraft, in the history of the New Forest Airfields. The nose and mid upper gun turrets were removed in the Mk IV and a towing apparatus installed under the tail section.



The Horsa glider could carry 28 fully equipped troops, or a Jeep and small artillery piece, with accompanying crew. They were built at many locations across the UK, commonly by furniture manufacturers, with an individual factory making one part of the aircraft. The pieces were then trucked to the main assembly airfields, such as Christchurch and Brize Norton. From there, they were air towed to operational airfields, initially for crew training and then for offensive operations, on D-day in June 1944, Operation Market Garden (Arnhem) in September and in March 1945, Operation Varsity (the crossing of the Rhine).