

The Beaulieu Connection

by Dom Alex Glanville, Resident Estate Manager, Beaulieu Estates.

The Beaulieu Estate is very pleased to be associated with the Friends of the New Forest Airfields. It is particularly relevant that the Estate should be as it played an important part in various aspects of the Second World War. I thought readers may be interested in some of the Estate's activities.

During the Second World War, the Beaulieu Estate, like much of the surrounding coastal land, was a restricted area. So much so, that even the young Lord Montagu required a security pass to enable him to travel home from school.

In the period following the fall of France, the main military preoccupation was the anticipated German invasion of our shores, known as Operation Sea Lion. Local defence committees were formed and preparations for the invasion began. Beaulieu was a "nodal point" to defend the main road and the head of the estuary. Boats were removed from the Beaulieu River, and various points at the head of the estuary were reinforced. The Mangold House within Beaulieu village, which is now a studio, became a reinforced gun point commanding the road bridge. The Dairy next to the Mill House and, indeed, the Tide Mill itself, became reinforced pillboxes commanding fields of fire over the head of the estuary. However, as fear of imminent invasion diminished, a more positive attitude prevailed, and the Beaulieu Estate became embroiled in plans for the return to France and the turning of the tides of war.

From the beginning of 1941 onwards, eleven large houses on the Beaulieu Estate were requisitioned by the military to serve as training centres for the Special Operations Executive. The Rings, since demolished, in the north of the estate, was used by the SOE as its main office and training headquarters, as well as a finishing school. The Vineyards provided training in elementary wireless, and telegraphy and the majority of the agents stationed there were French. Warren, now Blackwater House, taught microphotography and also served as a general finishing school, while Boarmans was used as a finishing school for women agents. In these and other houses, agents underwent intensive three-week courses that were the climax of their training before they were taken by air and sea to a variety of occupied countries. Beaulieu Airfield, just outside the estate, provided a departure point for Lysander aircraft capable of landing at night on rough temporary landing strips. Amongst the well-known names to receive their training here were Hardy Amies and Kim Philby.

Buckler's Hard Village was requisitioned for the use of workers who were constructing sections of the Mulberry Harbour at Clobb Copse on the Beaulieu River. Amongst the many items built here were large concrete barges and caissons which were to serve as floats for the roadways of the Mulberry. The most massive construction, built in the old oyster beds, was a floating dock. When the riverbanks were breached to float it out, the

Admiralty's contractors requisitioned the Estate's Harbourmaster, Mr. Downer, to pilot the monster out of the river.

Upstream at Bailey's Hard, Husbands shipbuilders were fitting out Acoustic Minesweepers. Meanwhile, deception units operating in the area constructed fake landing craft built of canvas and steel tubing and floating on 40-gallon oil drums. In the period leading up to D-Day, Nevil Shute, the author, could be found at the mouth of the river experimenting with the Swallow, a rocket -powered radio-controlled pilotless aircraft and also with the development of rocket landing craft designed to bombard the beaches before the D-Day invasion.

As D-Day approached, the woodlands of the Beaulieu Estate filled up with thousands of soldiers who were to form part of the invasion force. These comprised American and Canadian units and the battle-hardened units of the British Eighth Army, brought home after the successful desert campaign against Rommel and his Afrika Corps. The Beaulieu River filled up with landing craft of all kinds; these included gun landing craft, flak ships, rocket landing craft, tank and infantry landing craft. The vessels moored here moved in turn to Lepe beach where they loaded men and supplies before beginning the anxious wait for Overlord to be launched. A temporary air strip (*Needs Oar Point*) was laid on the southern shore on part of the Estate at Park Farm. This was to be used by Typhoons which were to provide close air support to the troops as they advanced from the D-Day beachheads.

All-in-all, like many other places in the country, the Beaulieu Estate played an important part in the war and today we are dedicated to remembering those activities. If readers, choose to visit Buckler's Hard Village; there is on display a short film that records further information about the Beaulieu Estate at war.