

Bognor Advanced Landing Ground

The actual story started in 1942. The event started during the 2nd World War, after the Battle of Britain when plans were commenced for the invasion of France and it became apparent that many more airfields were required than those operated by the RAF. The plans came under the title of Operation Hadrian and initially there were plans for 82 Advanced Landing Grounds, in the South of England, ultimately 26 were constructed of which 7 were in Sussex, and they were actually satellite stations from Tangmere airfield. There was a master format used, with each airfield being intended for 50 aircraft, only a few buildings, with two runways that crossed each other. Each runway was 50 yds wide (45.7m), one strip at 1,600 yds long (1,463m) and the other 1,400yds long (1,280m).

The land used in most cases had previously been used for agriculture, but once acquired it had to be levelled, trees and hedges removed and a temporary surface installed with concrete bases for aircraft stands. In the case of the Bognor A.L.G. the land used, north of Chalcraft Lane was in fact used for agriculture, and when travelling along Chalcraft Lane between the Royal Oak and the roundabout junction of the B2166 there is a large section of the hedge missing just after the entrance to the cemetery, this was where one of the runways crossed over into the West Meads area. It is also known that numerous people have come across concrete bases in their gardens over the years, when planning extensions. These more than likely were the hard standing for the aircraft. The surface used for the airfield was known as Summerfield Tracking, which was a metal mesh, and again several people have told me how over the years they have found pieces of mesh or metal pegs in their gardens or fields.

The Canadian Royal Engineers carried out the work as part of a training exercise and some of the Canadians remained to be on hand to remove the tracks etc., at the end of the requirement for the airfield. The initial specification for the required work was £20,5000. The final layout requirement was produced only two months before the required completion date. However the work was completed and the first planes did arrive, as planned on the 1st June 1943. The final cost was £49,448 and 90% of bonuses were paid under the 'payment by results' scheme.

Who used the airfield, I am sure is one question? There were a number of British Squadrons, for example 66 Sqdn., 602 'City of Glasgow' Sqdn., 19 Sqdn, also 350 Belgian Sqdn. Finally

two Squadrons from Norway, 331 and 332 Squadrons. My research has resulted in contacts with the Norwegian Archive Department and Little Norway in Canada in addition to a number of people in this country. It is interesting researching a subject of which you have no previous knowledge, i.e. aircraft and airfields. Many of the people involved are of course enthusiasts and know everything about planes, their markings, serial No's etc., etc. for them there maybe a frustration that I do not require this information in quite their depth of knowledge, but what I am interested in is what is known about this airfield, just north of Bognor, which saw such activity for a short space of time, and which many people in the town are unaware.

At the time this airfield was in operation, the men were away in various service operations, so many of the memories come from people who were children, mostly boys and young men who were quite excited to have 'their own airfield' just down the road. There have been a number of people who have recalled watching the planes. Many families invited 'officers to tea on a Sunday' others allowed the men to use their bath, instead of the showers on the base. Another person remembered that his mother used to do some washing of clothes for the men on a Monday.

The records we have found to date, indicate that Morells Farm was used as the Officer's Mess, and that a number of their barns were used for storage and the telephone exchange for the airfield. On the other side of the airstrip the Old Chapel Forge, as it is known today, was used as the paymaster's office, and also their disused chapel in the grounds was used as a store, and for a time Spitfire engines were repaired there.

During the time that the Norwegians were here, Crown Prince Olav visited his men and slept under canvas with them in a field near the junction of the B2166 and Hewitts Lane. It was his practice, to live in a tent, whenever he visited the many sites of the Norwegians.

The airfield was used by a range of planes including Mustangs, Typhoons and Spitfires and it is incredible, today, to appreciate that at the height of it's use nearly 100 planes used the airfield. Avro Ansons were also brought in to deal with the casualties from D-Day and also to carry plasma to Normandy. There were approx. 100 tents used for the injured service personnel before they were ferried to various hospitals in Chichester, Petworth and Midhurst.

The airfield was finally closed in September 1945 and stripped of all its fixtures and fittings and the land returned to the landowners again for its previous agricultural usage. I am aware that at the exhibition about the airfield in North Bersted many people had memories of its existence, but due to the number of people present I was unable to gain this information. The plan is to produce a book to record the existence of the Bognor ALG but to complete this we need your memories and I would ask that you make a note of them with your name and address and drop them into the offices of the Bognor Regis Observer in Station Road, marked for my attention. If you are on email then send them to the address shown on this article. However I must thank all of you to date who have helped with information and research, without whom the display would not have taken place on Saturday 19th and 26th June.