

RAF Old Sarum & Operation Overlord Part 1.

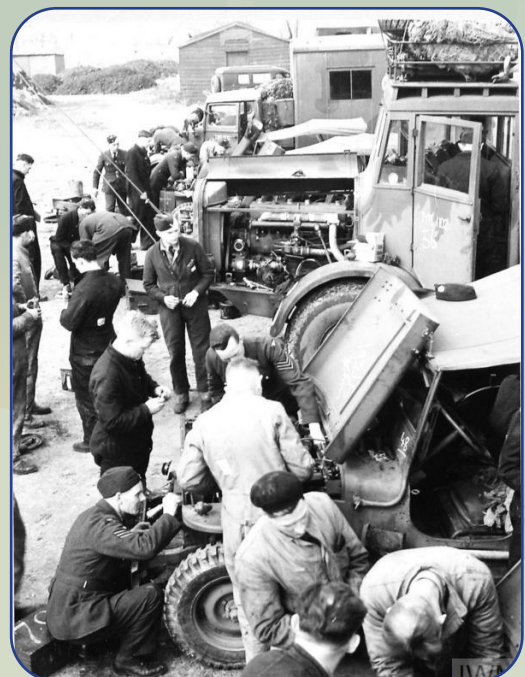
By Tim Cornish

It was decided to establish an RAF Concentration Area at Old Sarum for the purpose of concentrating the RAF ground personnel, RAF Regiment, and Air Formation Signals, with their mechanical transport, prior to movement to Western Europe through marshalling areas. Detailed planning was proceeded with following a conference at Air Ministry on February 9th 1944, the conference presided over by the Director of Organisation, Air Vice-Marshal Sir George Pirie.

Broadly, the Concentration Area was planned for the following purposes: -

- a) Waterproofing of vehicles
- b) Housing of personnel in transit and preparing such personnel for the Continent
- c) Centralising a pool of Motor Transport (M.T.) vehicles of all types (prime movers and trailers) including Signals and other vehicles, together with a pool of Army vehicles for Army Fire Service (AFS)
- d) Setting up an organisation for the servicing and replacement of vehicles proceeding to Western Europe

It was arranged that waterproofing was to be undertaken in existing hangars at Old Sarum, and the capacity of these hangars to be estimated at 350 vehicles. In order to provide extra room for servicing M.T. vehicles at Old Sarum, three World War One-era Bessoneau hangars were erected in the vicinity of the existing hangars, these existing until the 1980's at the airfield.



Bayeux

D-Day Objective

Caen

RAF Old Sarum & Operation Overlord Part 1. continued

Provision was made in planning for waterproofing of vehicles prior to the time when dry landings could be undertaken in north-western Europe. An enormous amount of equipment and materials were required for waterproofing, and it took several Departments some 9 months to build up sufficient materials for Operation "Overlord". In view of difficulty in obtaining replacements, steps were taken in the Concentration Area to disperse most of the equipment round the Airfield.

In view of the size of the task, some 1,100 officers, NCO's and men, mainly of M.T. trades and all of fitter trades were drafted to Old Sarum for waterproofing. It was decided that Stage A of 90% waterproofing was to be done in the Concentration Area at the Station, and some 22 Flights were organised, divided into two Squadrons. The composition of each flight was roughly 1 Flight Sergeant, 35 skilled tradesmen, plus 2 electricians, and it was estimated and eventually proved that the average time to complete a vehicle was 28-man hours, i.e. 2 men 14 hours, including lapsed time.

To find out more about activity at old Sarum Airfield visit the Boscombe Down Aviation Collection and speak to one of their volunteers, to uncover a wealth of information of the history of aviation and insights into activity around the airfield in the first and second world wars

www.boscombedownaviationcollection.co.uk

