

# Redlynch & District Local History Society

## RAF Stoney Cross. Part 2 - USAAF Station 452

The US Army Air Force (USAAF) in the shape of the 367th Fighter Group (FG), comprising the 392, 393, 394<sup>th</sup> Fighter squadrons arrived on 1st April 1944. If ever there was a demonstration on the speed and must do attitude at this time the equipment of this Group on arrival with 75 twin engine P-38 Lightnings was it. The pilots had all trained on single engine aircraft in the States and were expected to start operational missions PRIOR to D Day in early June; needless to say, there were fatal crashes, often caused by engine failure on take-off or landing. A very experienced P-38 pilot was sent to demonstrate correct flying techniques, especially on single engine flying, and the accidents dropped. On the 9<sup>th</sup> May they started operational missions attacking airfields, bridges, rail junctions and strong points. During this period of operations, 7 pilots were lost.

On D Day, P-38's were the only fighters supposedly flying over the convoys and beaches as their unusual twin boom configuration was thought to facilitate friendly identification to trigger happy ships crews. The immediate hours before D Day were spent painting the aircraft with the top secret white and black stripes to further distinguish between friend or foe.



The most dramatic operation during the Stoney Cross period was the attack on the Cherbourg defences. Capture was extremely important to the allies due to the storm damage to the artificial port facilities on the invasion beaches. A major land attack was supported by all available 9<sup>th</sup> AF combat aircraft as well as RAF Typhoons; the 367<sup>th</sup> was to be the last fighter group over this highly defended area at low level and lost seven pilots killed in action (KIA). All but 11 of the returning aircraft had extensive battle damage which kept the 367<sup>th</sup> was out of action for several days. During the 17-day period since D Day, including the operations in the Cherbourg area, the 367<sup>th</sup> had 14 pilots killed and one taken prisoner. This was over 20% of the Groups fighter pilots. On the 7<sup>th</sup> July, the P38's moved temporarily to Ibsley and on the 22<sup>nd</sup> flew to a new base in France.

Stoney Cross received its new incumbents, the 387<sup>th</sup> BG on the 18th July, comprising around 1,000 personnel. The Group flew Martin B26 Marauders, twin engine medium bombers; unlike the 367<sup>th</sup> FG they had been in the UK since August 1943 and on operations for several months. The Group comprised the 556, 557, 558 and 559<sup>th</sup> Bomber Squadrons all with the "Tiger Tail" Group marking of yellow and black diagonal stripes on the tail fin. The standard formation was 6 aircraft in two vees, with three of these making an 18 aircraft box. Two or occasionally three boxes made a standard mission. The sight of these aircraft forming up over the New Forest must have been something to behold, not seen before nor since.



Their Group commander Col. Thomas M Seymour had died in an aircraft crash only the day before the move and was immediately replaced by Col. Glover C Brown from 9<sup>th</sup> AF HQ who stayed to the end of the war. Glover Brown implemented a number of training programmes and shuffled crews which initially made him unpopular; but the Group became more efficient and finished the war with by far the best bombing accuracy record in NW Europe. Flying at medium altitudes, loss rates were comparatively low; the 556<sup>th</sup> squadron had 4 aircraft that survived the entire European war with "Stinky" making 175 sorties. Twenty-two missions were flown from Stoney Cross commencing 23<sup>rd</sup> July until 26<sup>th</sup> August when they prepared to move to France.