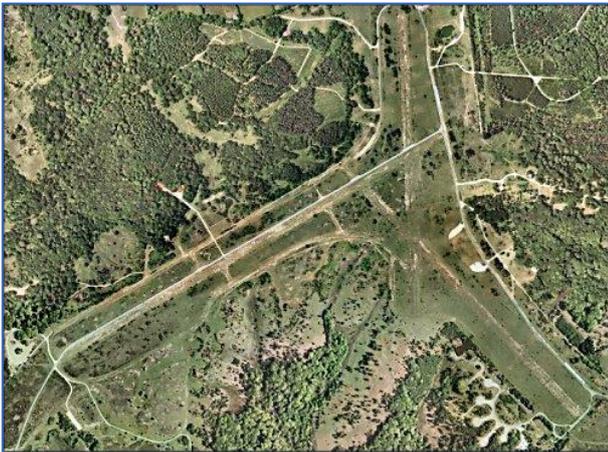


Redlynch & District Local History Society

RAF Stoney Cross. Part 1

Stoney Cross was originally planned to be a secret airfield devoid of the usual facilities and heavily camouflaged aircraft dispersal areas. Chattis Hill and Marwell Hall (now Marwell Zoo) were actually completed in this concept and were mainly used for aircraft assembly, The large sheds being hidden by trees. However in the case of Stoney Cross it was decided to make it an advanced airbase and emergency airfield due to its nearness to occupied France. Work commenced in 1942 and was still being finished off in 1944. Despite this, aircraft arrived in January 1943 and the airfield was operated by Army Co-operation Command RAF. Squadrons at various times in early 1943 were 239, 26 and 175 all operating the early Allison engined Mustang. This was a very fast, long ranging aircraft at low level and ideal for the reconnaissance and strafing role. Whilst operations were undertaken over France much time was spent working on exercises with the Army to prepare for D Day. In April 1943 Wimpey the contractors, were still finishing runways, taxi ways and dispersals when a Mustang crashed into a works lorry killing three civilians. This led to the aircraft leaving until work completed. In the interim USAAF B17's appeared dropping off operationally exhausted USAAF air crew for Rest and Recuperation at Broadlands.



RAF Stoney Cross



Armstrong Albemarle

When completed the airfield had four T2 Hangars plus extensive support and accommodation. Accommodation was to the South and East sides of the airfield. It was, and still is, very visible from the air and is quite distinctive with its unusual layout of 3 runways and their tightly wrapped taxi ways (perimeter track) caused by its location on a ridge with the ground falling away to the North, East and South. The current road to Lynwood is on the main east west runway whilst the road from Nomansland toward Minstead is the Eastern part of the perimeter track.

In August 1943 the airfield was judged ready for regular flying and 297 Squadron RAF arrived on 1st September with Whitley and Albemarle parachute dropping aircraft which delivered commandos raiding St Valerie that month. In November the squadron split into three, to form two additional squadrons, 299 Squadron at Stoney Cross and 298 at Tarrant Rushton.

In the autumn 1943 US personnel arrived to start the assembly of Hadrian gliders as part of the invasion preparations. The rapid pace of change did not slacken as 299 re-equipped with Stirling IV aircraft for the paratrooper role and 297 undertook supply drops to occupied France. Paratrooper exercises continued night and day until mid-March when both moved to the Oxfordshire-N Wiltshire area to free up Stoney Cross for USAAF use prior to D Day.