

1st
Division



4th
Division



50th
Division



3rd
Division

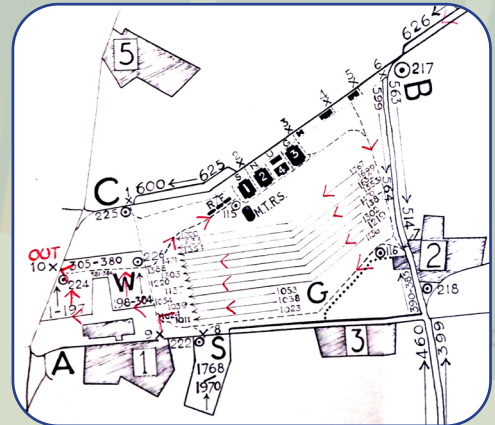


3rd
Division



RAF Old Sarum & Operation Overlord Part 2.

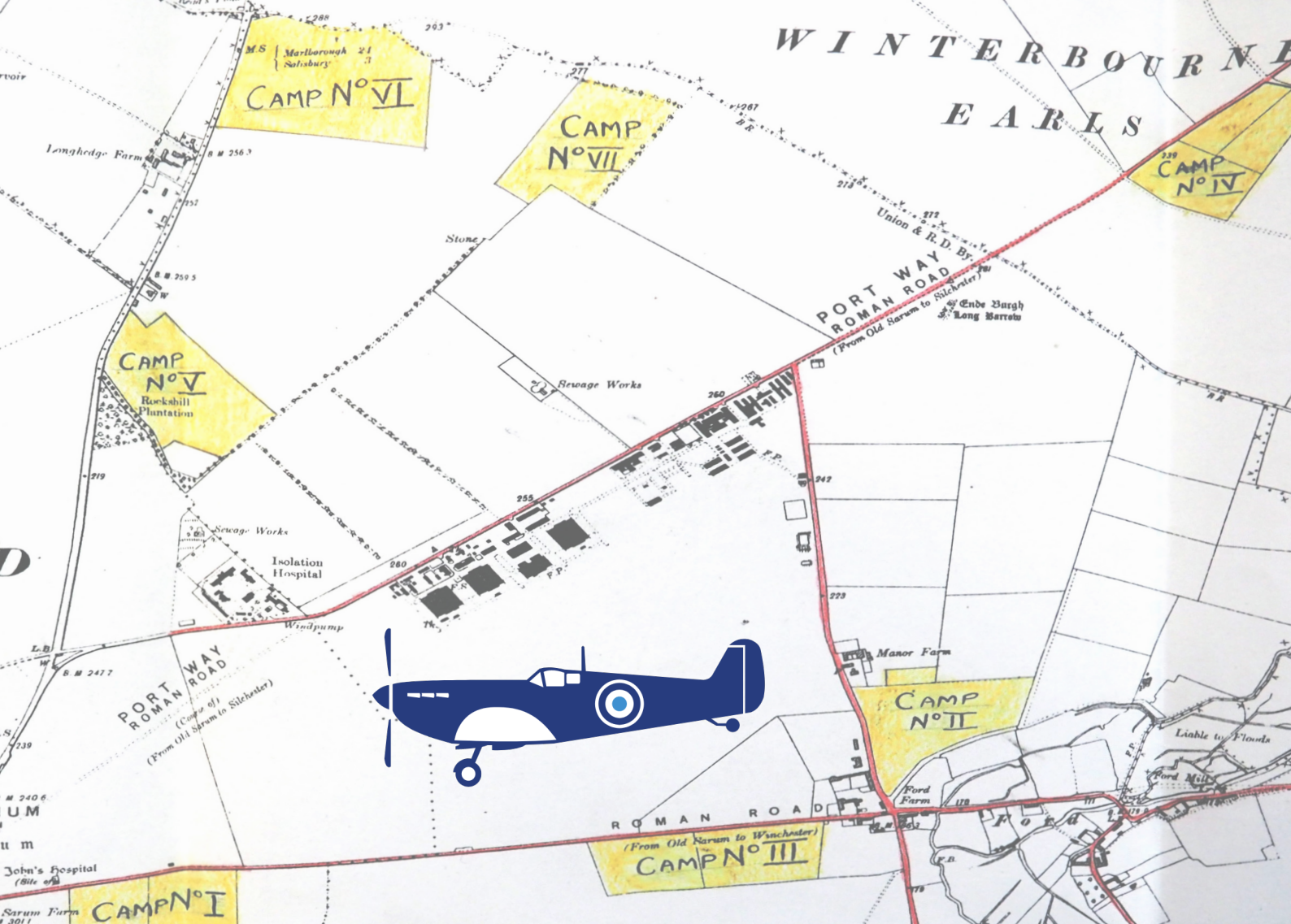
By Tim Cornish



Erecting of the Concentration Area commenced on February 26th 1944 in wintry weather with inexperienced personnel, although a tent erecting party of two Sergeants and one Corporal, plus three other ranks, arrived at Old Sarum about this time to assist in putting up tents. However, before long, airmen became accustomed to tent erection and by utilising twine and pegs, something resembling yardstick setting out, personnel were able to mark out centres accurately and setting out was followed by erecting parties. On 10th March 1944 one Officer, plus 35 Senior NCOs and 56 Other Ranks arrived at RAF Old Sarum from 4677 Airfield Construction Flight to further assist with the building of the Concentration Area. It speaks highly for the static staff that all camps were occupied within one month of tent erection, some even three weeks from tent erection.

To accommodate transit personnel it was decided to plan for the housing of 7,000 personnel in seven camps each capable of accommodating 1,000 all ranks Royal Air Force personnel; this necessitated planning for water supply, sullage (waste water) disposal, sewage disposal, and, last but not least, telecommunications.

At the outset it was devised to link all camps with a Tannoy system, and the circuit was so devised as to give sites independent control of their Tannoy systems and also to provide a master control in Reception Control to call all sites simultaneously or independently as required. The system was in frequent use throughout the day, passing on orders and calling transit personnel for parades, etc, and this proved invaluable throughout the operation of the Concentration Area at Old Sarum. The purpose of transit camps was to house personnel brought into the Concentration Area in their own vehicles, to rest and feed them, to exchange currency, to issue rations for the journey, both compo and packed rations, and to issue one blanket per man for the voyage to the continent.



RAF Old Sarum & Operation Overlord Part 2. continued

The Concentration Area was considered a "V.P." (Vulnerable Point) target; therefore, one RAF Regiment Squadron with 8 Bofors (40mm anti-aircraft guns) and 8 twin .303 Browning machine guns, later replaced by 20mm Hispano machine guns, were dispersed to strategic positions around the Concentration Area. Two pairs of twin Browning guns were sited on each camp and these, with the manning of four pairs of static guns on the perimeter of the Airfield, comprised total anti-aircraft and ground-to-ground defence. Provision was made for shelter from air attack by the digging of 1,000 yards of slit trenches on each Camp. These trenches were of standard depth, namely approximately 6', and 18' wide, and were zig-zagged along boundaries of camps. Digging of trenches was undertaken by mechanical diggers supplied through US Army sources.

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

