

A New Forest Walk around Holmsley South Airfield

FONFA Members and visitors to our website may be interested in a video made by Dave Ford, about the wartime Holmsley South Airfield site. It is an interesting commentary on what remains around the area today, 75 years after the busiest period of the airfield's history. The link is at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ja7-KgEsEp8>

For historians, Dave Ford states that Operation Beggar/Turkey Buzzard had 'high losses'. However, compared with several other experimental long range Halifax and Lancaster missions, the losses were relatively light in percentage terms. Considering that this was an entirely new mission, which had never been attempted before, out of the 32 Horsa gliders which left Holmsley South and travelled on via Portreath, Cornwall, with their Halifax tugs, 27 (84%) arrived in Tunisia safely. in time to participate in the invasion of Sicily.

The training involved 295 Sqn Halifaxes towing the Horsas on long missions around the coastline of Britain, to see whether it could be done. However, during the training for the mission, four crashes killed thirteen men. On the mission itself, one Halifax and Horsa combination was shot down by a German long range Focke Wulf Condor patrol aircraft. Another Horsa snapped its tow rope and ditched, the crew being picked up by an Allied ship. Altogether, five Horsas and three Halifaxes were lost.

The Horsas were flown by three pilots, to prevent pilot fatigue, on the long mission. According to one of the Horsa pilots on the mission, whom I met several years ago, the flight from Cornwall to Tunisia took 14 hours in the air (3,200 miles), done in three 'hops'. The reason why it was not repeated was that there was no longer an operational need. (*Ed. Henry Goodall*).

Farther north in the Forest, for those who would like to know more about the Ashley Walk practice bombing range, east of Fordingbridge, there is a video by James Brown, New Forest National Park Archaeologist, at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ib3ayeo3Ptw>