



**Friends of the New Forest Airfield members Doug and Marian Harrison from Baton Rouge, Louisiana visit the New Forest to walk in the footsteps of Doug's Father, Second Lieutenant (later Colonel) Jim Harrison DFC, who served with the 371<sup>st</sup> Fighter Group at Bisterne airfield in 1944.**

In 2019 my wife and I began planning a trip to the UK. One of the primary objectives of the journey was the former World War II airfield at Bisterne. It was from this site that my father, James K. Harrison, flew missions across the English Channel in a P-47 Thunderbolt with the 371st Fighter Group. As a child, I had heard my father - who was reared in west Texas - remember his two months stay in the area. He had very positive memories of the beauty of the English countryside, and the hospitality of its people.

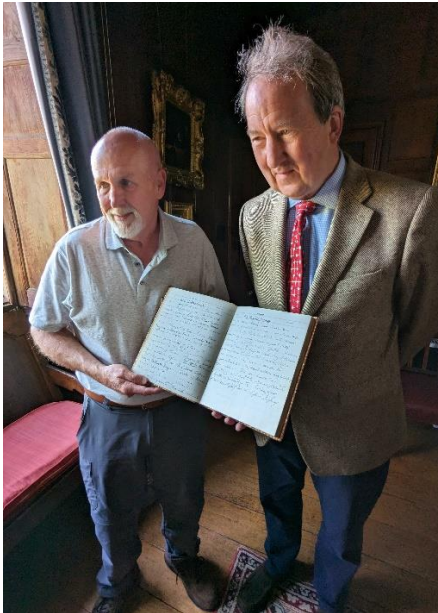


*Doug and Marian Harrison*



*Second Lieutenant James (Jim) Harrison DFC*

Unfortunately, our trip was delayed three years by the Covid pandemic. This May (2023) we finally realized our ambition. We were graciously hosted at the Bisterne Manor by its owner, Mr. Hallam Mills. Mr. Mills provided us access to the Manor's guestbook. The book was signed by many of the officers of the 371st. My father signed the book on 27 May 1944. In his papers I found a letter to his then-girlfriend, Elaine Pearce of Baton Rouge, Louisiana (my mother and his wife of 63 years), written on that same date. The letter described his visit to Bisterne Manor and his appreciation for the hospitality of the Mills family for making some of its amenities available to the officers of his unit. Seeing his signature in the guestbook and touring the property as Mr. Mills' guest was quite a thrill for us. Mr. Mills profoundly honoured us by asking us to sign the guestbook all these years later.



*Hallam Mills with Doug and the Guest Book*



*A page from the Bisterne Manor Guest Book from 1944*



*Hallam Mills with Doug and Marian on the steps of Bisterne Manor*

In addition to this wonderful visit, we were also graciously hosted by Mr. Martin Bailey. Mr. Bailey showed us the remnants of an electrical generating facility and air raid shelters, which remain on the former domestic site of Holmsley South airfield. These site visits were far beyond our expectations.



*Martin Bailey with Doug and Marian*



*Doug and Marian at the domestic site*



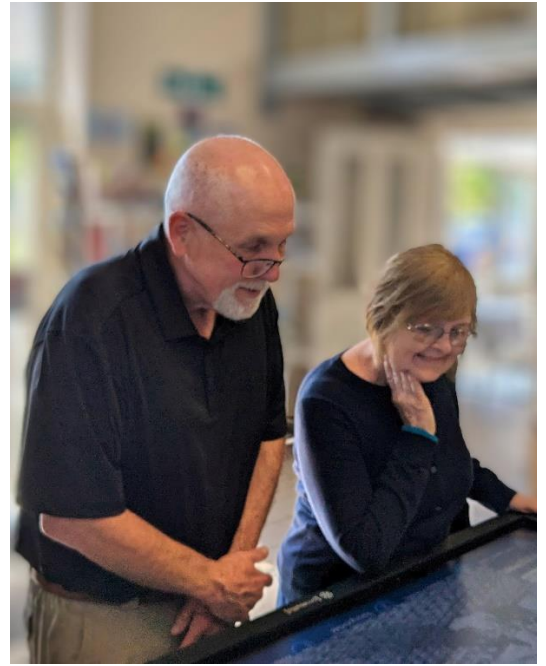
*One of the remaining bomb shelters*

Our visit to the FONFA Airfields Memorial and Heritage Centre was quite a treat. Henry Goodall, Sam Ruddy and Edwin Levett willingly answered any questions and generously shared their time with us.





*Doug and Marian at the Airfields Memorial*



*Doug and Marian's orientation briefing at the Heritage Centre*

A final thanks to Steve and Margaret Williams, who hosted us on the site visits and provided a wealth of planning information without which our trip would not have been possible.

The FONFA volunteers all demonstrated a heart-warming commitment to preserving the memory of the men who helped save the free world from the airfields in the New Forest.

Doug and Marian Harrison  
May 2023