

10 Squadron (Shiny Ten) Melbourne Airfield 1940 – 1945

The airfield at Melbourne was originally only grass, beginning life in 1940 on a very temporary basis and the first bombers to arrive were twin-engined Whitleys. There were no permanent buildings and it became necessary that in order to carry on as a heavy bomber airfield, improvements had to be made. In 1942 the airfield was closed and concrete runways constructed to cater for the heavy four- engined Halifax Bombers. The main runway was 5500 feet long, which was well above the average runway length, and in addition permanent buildings were constructed. Melbourne airfield became the home of 10 Squadron playing a very important part in the RAF's strategic offensive during the Second World War. For the whole duration of the Second World War 10 Squadron operated from Melbourne being the only Squadron stationed there which was quite unique.

A major problem and hazard to the pilot and crews flying from Melbourne in World War 2 was fog. The Vale of York suffered with fog and still does to this day. Melbourne was unique in being the only base operational in Yorkshire to have the system of Fido (Fog Investigation Dispersal Operation). This was a system of using heat to clear the fog by burning petrol from pipes laid along the side of the runway. It was very expensive in the use of petrol – the first occasion at Melbourne used 102,000 gallons but was hugely successful by improving visibility.

Landing a Halifax bomber at night was no easy task even in good weather with the pilot relying on instruments until only a few feet from the ground. The tunnel of light created by Fido was a welcome friend on returning home after a bombing mission. Crews were lucky to last a dozen missions and thereafter lived on borrowed time. There were also the personnel who looked after the aircraft the "ground crew" who worked in all kinds of weather and often in winter in freezing conditions to service and maintain the aircraft. They formed a close link with the aircrews and often met in the local pubs at Melbourne and The Blacksmiths Arms in Seaton Ross, which was, renamed "The Bombers" after the war.

The Blacksmiths Arms at Seaton Ross was the firm favourite of the aircrews and ground crews. Aircrews would often talk of the delicious Sunday afternoon teas (Scones with Jam) served at The Blacksmiths Arms in Seaton Ross. 10 Squadron were the residents at Melbourne for the duration of the war and eventually transferred to Transport Command in 1945. 10 Squadron was replaced by 575 Squadron replacing Halifax bombers with Dakotas and joined by RAT flight (Radio Aids Training Flight). In late 1945, 575 Squadron moved to another base and in 1946 the RAT flight left and the airfield at Melbourne closed. Today the airfield is within a working farm and is private property. Several of the old buildings have been restored and the restoration of the control tower is a splendid job. The large aircraft hanger, which housed the bombers, can still be seen from Mill Lane.

A fitting and honourable memorial has been erected at the main entrance to the Melbourne airfield in memory of the very brave personnel who gave their lives in the service for their country during World War 2.

Malcolm Young – Seaton Ross - 2006