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Exeter Skypark Devon RGF Site Clearance and Landscaping

Historic Building Record



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May 2014



**Exeter Skypark, Devon
RGF Site Clearance and Landscaping**

Historic Building Record

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Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by St Modwen Developments Ltd on behalf of Skypark Development Partnership LLP (the Client) to carry out historic building recording prior to the removal of remnant WWII buildings and structures and redevelopment at the Exeter Skypark (Exeter Airport), Clyst Honiton, Devon.

Exeter RAF Station, during World War Two, saw action from the early years of the war and the threat of German invasion, to the preparation and transport of airborne troops on D-Day and beyond to the Japanese theatre. A study of existing archive and historical material, including aerial photographs from the 1940's, and after, has assisted in creating a detailed understanding of the surviving structures at Exeter. This, together with an accurate GPS survey of the structures, as well as high resolution digital photographs, has also created a lasting record of the remains prior to their demolition.

Historical images have shown the development of the airfield during the war and, in particular, how the buildings worked in relation to one another. The standard dispersal pattern of fighter aircraft relates directly with the defensive structures for a fighter base of the time. Important research work was also carried out at Exeter by the Gunnery Research Unit (GRU). This included important development of a gyroscopic gun-sight for heavy bombers. By 1944 the airfield was occupied by the American Air force who prepared the runways and perimeter track with 'looped' hard-standings in preparation for the arrival of the transport aircraft carrying paratroops to northern France.

It is understood that at least one of the surviving structures from this time, a twin-engined fighter pen, complete with earthen embankments, hard-standing and shelters will be preserved as a memorial to those who served at Exeter throughout the war. It is also hoped that this record of the other buildings and structures serves also to inform those interested in Exeter Airport's history.



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Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by St Modwen Developments and Wessex is grateful to Ian Guy in this regard. Thanks are also extended to Tony Hooper and Luke O'Brien of Wakemans and the staff of Hawk Contractors, for their practical assistance. The historic background and gazetteer entries of the airfield structures were gleaned from the report on Exeter written by Paul Francis.

The site survey, including GPS and photography was carried out by Matt Rous and Bob Davis. The aerial photographs were viewed at the English Heritage Archives, Swindon and assessed by Bob Davis. This report was compiled by Bob Davis and the illustrations prepared by Karen Nicholls. The project was managed for Wessex archaeology by Andy King.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by St Modwen Developments Ltd on behalf of Skypark Development Partnership LLP (the Client) to carry out historic building recording prior to the removal of remnant WWII buildings and structures and redevelopment at the Exeter Skypark (Exeter Airport), Clyst Honiton, Devon.
- 1.1.2 As part of the proposed redevelopment works, which are covered by three existing Planning Applications (Planning Application numbers 14/0197/MFUL & 14/0198/MFUL & 14/0332/MFUL) it is necessary to remove a number of remnant WWII and post-war buildings currently situated at the western extent of the Skypark Site. Whilst generally in poor condition these structures are associated with the historic use of the Site as an RAF and USAAF airfield and are regarded as heritage assets of regional significance.
- 1.1.3 The work was undertaken in accordance with a 'site-wide' Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (Wessex Archaeology 2014) which was agreed in advance by Stephen Reed of the Devon County Council Historic Environment Team (HET), the archaeological advisor acting on behalf of the LPA. The WSI set out proposals for an enhanced English Heritage (EH) Level 2 record of twelve known remnant airfield structures and any others which may have been revealed during site clearance. Levels of building recording are defined in the document Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice (English Heritage 2006).
- 1.1.4 The twelve structures had been identified during a condition assessment of the west side of the airfield carried out by Wessex Archaeology in February 2014.

1.2 Site location and description

- 1.2.1 The Site was formerly part of Exeter Airport and is located to the north-west of the main International airport terminus and runway and is centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 299617 94227. Along the north side of the site runs the (B3174) London Road and to the west are the Village of Clyst Honiton and the recently constructed Clyst Honiton bypass.
- 1.2.2 The Site comprised areas of open grassland/scrub and relict field divisions amidst a concentration of remnant WWII taxiways, aprons, buildings and structures including fighter pens, defence posts and other ancillary buildings (**Figure 1**). It is evident that there have been episodes of extensive landscaping, in particular due to ground-levelling for the WWII airfield and for the creation of a football pitch. In recent times the area has become increasingly overgrown with rabbit and badger burrows damaging what remains of the earthworks associated with the fighter pens.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The aims of the Historic building recording as set out in the WSI were to:

- Make a permanent photographic record of the remnant WWII and post-war structures prior to their demolition.

2.2 Site visit

2.2.1 Two site visits were made on 3rd and 4th of April 2014. During these visits each building was located accurately using a Leica Viva GPS system. During the site visits 140 digital images were captured using a Canon 5D MkII Full Frame DSLR. Digital survey data has been overlaid onto original aerial photographs for comparison (see **Figures 2** and **3**)

2.2.2 A selection of the images has been reproduced in this report (**Plates 1-50**).

2.3 Aerial photography

2.3.1 A visit was made to the English Heritage Archives at Swindon, Wiltshire to view a series of aerial photographs of Exeter Airport dating from 1940's to 2000. A full record of images viewed is shown in the reference section.

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3 HISTORIC BACKGROUND

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 This report focuses on the remaining structures located within the present development area and which relate to the Second World War. In June 1999 a detailed report on the history and surviving wartime structures of Exeter Airport was commissioned by Devon County Council and East Devon District Council (Francis 1999). A summary of significant historical dates and development during the war, taken from the Francis report, is presented below. Where mentioned feature numbers are used from the Francis gazetteer.

3.1.2 The Exeter Corporation was one of the first Municipal authorities (January 1932) to identify a suitable site for the location of a Municipal Airport. After a Public Inquiry, a start was made on preparing the landing ground and the Air Ministry duly granted a Licence on 31st May 1937.

3.1.3 The airfield was taken over by the National Air Communications in 1939 seeing both experimental and operational service. In preparation for the planned transfer of the Central Gunnery School, Exeter was formally taken over by the RAF on 1st June 1940 and logically placed under the control of Flying Training Command. In the event the CGS never came to Exeter but a second research detachment did. This transferred from Boscombe Down on 3rd June as 'A' Flight of the Aeroplane & Armament Experimental

Establishment (A&AEE) Armament Testing Squadron, and on arrival was immediately given its own independent status as the Gunnery Research Unit (GRU). As such it was to become one of the stations longest resident units and during its stay flew virtually all types of fighter aircraft used by the RAF. To carry out its task it also had a small aircraft fleet.

- 3.1.4 On 8th July, Exeter was taken over by Fighter Command and henceforth became one of the most important RAF stations in the West Country.
- 3.1.5 During the late summer of 1940, as part of an Air Ministry enquiry into formulating an airfield defence policy, an inspection was carried out at 41 RAF stations by Major General G. B. O Taylor (Inspector General of Fortifications at the War Office). During September 1940, Taylor's conclusions were published in a paper known as the 'Taylor Report' and this became the main guide for the planning of airfield defences. He divided his proposals into three main categories according to the likely scale of attack from German forces. The three classes were as follows:
- Class 1 - Airfields located within 20 miles of a port that could potentially be used by German parachutists who could capture the landing ground for use by their troop-carrying aircraft.
 - Class 2 – Airfields defined as those 'liable to intensive attack, but mainly confined to air and parachute attack'
 - Class 3 – All remaining RAF airfields
- 3.1.6 Exeter was classified as a Class 1 station because of its close proximity to the port of Exmouth. Due to its classification the plan layout and configuration of aircraft dispersal was laid out to a standard pattern.
- 3.1.7 On the outbreak of war it became standard RAF policy not to store aircraft in hangars but instead to disperse them around the airfield perimeter track. On fighter stations special blast pens, each housing two aircraft were constructed in a number of groups or clutches, spaced around or close to the perimeter track. The number of fighter pens on a fighter station depended on how many squadrons (or flights) were to be based on the airfield.
- 3.1.8 Wherever possible straight lines were avoided by positioning the pens around a curve of perimeter track. Another method was to build a separate loop of track off the main perimeter track and locate them around it (this was the 'ideal' arrangement for defence from enemy aircraft).
- 3.1.9 Both methods were adopted at Exeter, the separate track loop (further to the east) being the dispersal area for 307 Squadron. Provision of this form of blast protection was therefore, provided for two flights for each of two squadrons (making a total of 24 operational aircraft). The western perimeter track clutches were increased from six to eight pens during late 1941 when two larger pens were constructed to house twin-engined aircraft for the Gun Research Unit.
- 3.1.10 While both types of fighter pen share a similar plan-form being 'E'-shaped with the outer arms curved instead of being straight, the materials used in their construction are quite different. The earlier pen (11070/40) is built from sandbags and has an air-raid shelter at the front of the central arm. The larger pen of 1941 for twin-engined aircraft (FCW 4514), has arms constructed of earthwork traverse covered with turf. A prefabricated concrete (9-

bay) Stanton type shelter is located at the rear of the central arm which has an access point from both bays.

- 3.1.11 In addition to a clutch of three fighter pens corresponding to a single flight, are brick-built sleeping shelters for the ground and aircrew on scramble duty. There would also be a flight office and a combined latrine and drying room, while other structures might include electric transformer plinths and accommodation for a defence post party.
- 3.1.12 Taylor's report recommended a mixture of defensive works for Class 1 Stations including Pillboxes for both inward and outward defence, disappearing pillboxes located on the landing ground, Dummy pillboxes, Rifle pits, Armoured vehicles, Perimeter wire and Anti-aircraft defence posts.
- 3.1.13 Exeter continued to act as a fighter base until 1944, when it was decided to use the base as a temporary American station to provide an aerodrome for the transportation to France of the US airborne troops stationed in Devon. On 13th April, Beaufighters (stationed at Exeter) were therefore re-deployed to the little used airfield at Winkleigh, whilst the GRU joined other fighter research units at Collyweston.
- 3.1.14 Exeter became USAAF Station 463 and flying in from Bottesford came no less than 80 C47 Dakotas of the 440th Troop Carrier Group. For much of the next six months Exeter was busier than ever before. It was at this time that work began along the north perimeter track on the construction of 'loop' type hard-standings built to provide marshalling areas for the Dakotas.
- 3.1.15 After lengthy preparation, the D-Day invasion began on the 6th June. In the early hours of that day the 440th despatched 47 Dakotas, each carrying paratroops of the 10st Airborne Division and dropped them near Carenton on the Cotentin peninsular.
- 3.1.16 After the invasion and by September, Exeter became available to the RAF. Exeter was no longer needed as a fighter station but again became responsible for several redundant airfields.
- 3.1.17 From October 1944 Exeter was used mainly by the Anti-Aircraft Co-operation aircraft of 286 Squadron for air sea rescue. The last operational resident to be based here was 26 Squadron, whose Mustangs and Spitfires were engaged in 'shooting' practice with French naval vessels. In the final weeks before VE Day, only a few replacements were required in the European theatre, but Exeter's final contribution to the war effort was to turn out a large number of newly trained glider pilots for the final campaigns against the Japanese in the far-east.
- 3.1.18 The post-war career of the airport began with its transfer to the Ministry of Civil Aviation on 1st January 1947.

3.2 Aerial photography

- 3.2.1 The earliest available aerial photograph is dated 7th May 1942 (**Plate 1**). Fortunately, this surviving image covers the north-west sector of the airfield and has been taken when the area has been developed primarily for fighter aircraft. The image also covers the north sector and the two northern runways. To the north can be seen two large aircraft hangars with painted camouflaged roofs. The airfield and runways have been painted with dark lines to mimic field boundaries as an attempt at camouflaging the runway strips and to break-up the formal lines of the airfield. Perimeter fencing has been erected around the airfield and can be seen as a wavy line around the north-west boundary.

- 3.2.2 The operational fighter section is clearly shown along the west edge of the perimeter track. Blister hangars, single engine fighter pens of 11070/40 type, with aircraft in-situ and, possibly belonging to 307 Polish Squadron but, more likely the Czech 310 squadron (Francis 1999). The western area is divided into two 'flights', the north 'flight' is referred to as 'CK' and the south 'flight' as 'DK' (**Figure 2**). The large fuel store is shown to the north-west and standing between two blister hangars. Also clearly visible are the CK and DK flight officer's buildings and other dispersed buildings and shelters. There are many single engine fighter aircraft (possibly spitfires or hurricanes) standing either along the dispersal hard stands along the perimeter track or in the defended fighter pens.
- 3.2.3 The photo shows many criss-crossing tracks and pathways leading between all of the buildings and features suggesting that it was a very busy time for the air base. Alongside the operational structures can be seen the defensive posts. The two pill boxes are built, one between fighter pens 85 and 81 to the east and the second along the field boundary which effectively divides the west side of the site in-half. An aircraft is shown close to the more northerly of the two pill boxes (45) and, just to the north of this and built within the boundary hedge is a small structure with an open east side. This is thought to be gun-pit 45a.
- 3.2.4 The area of the GRU is partly incorporated within this area but seems to occupy the south-west corner (**Figure 2**). The GRU has at least one twin engined aircraft standing in the open and the large, long buildings 74 (Armoury) and 75 (Workshops) stand close-by. The two larger twin-engined fighter pens have not been constructed at this time so, must date from after May 1942. The photo does show at least one twin engined aircraft standing in the open in the position of fighter pen 67.
- 3.2.5 The next available aerial photograph is dated 24th March 1944 (**Plate 2**). This detailed photo reflects some of the changes between the earlier, more defensive role of the airfield in 1942, to the more offensive preparations in the spring of 1944. Still recognisable are all of the features on the 1942 aerial photo, but there have been significant additions, particularly along the south-west edge of this sector (**Figure 3**). The single engined fighters have been removed in preparation for the arrival of the American transport aircraft.
- 3.2.6 The earlier camouflage hedgerows painted on the airfield have become faint. This is probably due to the fact that, by this time, there was less threat from enemy attack. Resources were being focussed on developing the airfield for transport aircraft for the American 101st Airborne Division.
- 3.2.7 The characteristic 'loop' type hard-standings along the east side of the airfield are under construction at this time. Built to provide marshalling areas for Dakota C47 transports. Further to the west, two larger twin engined aircraft pens of FCW 4514 type have been constructed close to the GRU buildings.
- 3.2.8 The single engine fighter pens have been altered by this time. The characteristic curved rear bank appears to have been removed from all of the visible pens leaving only the masonry and brick structures standing. There are no longer single engined fighters in any of the pens and two larger four engined bombers (possibly Halifax's or Lancaster's) are parked on the landing area apron. However, the GRU was obviously still operational at Exeter and, it is possible that these two aircraft were being used by the GRU. At this time, the GRU was developing the Mk IIc gyro gun site used with bomber aircraft gun turrets. As a result of these trials, it was found that this type of sight could be used during daylight with exceptional accuracy against all types of attack from enemy fighters (Francis 1999).

There are other smaller single engine aircraft (probably used by the GRU) in or close to the larger pen 66.

- 3.2.9 An aerial photograph taken in November 1946 (**Plate 3**) reflects, perhaps, a third significant phase for the airport. This photo shows the north-west sector as disused with no standing aircraft or other signs of activity. The photograph also confirms that the blast banks to the single engine fighter pens have been removed. It is likely that all of the associated structures are still maintained for future possible use but not occupied.
- 3.2.10 Taken soon after the end of the war, this photograph shows the extent to which the airfield had been rapidly adapted to serve, first a protective role and second, to serve as an offensive base for the D-Day landings supported by airborne troops.
- 3.2.11 By 1963 the airport was back in civilian hands and an aerial photo from this time (**Plate 4**) indicates that, at least some of the RAF buildings had been removed. The general layout of war-time features is largely unchanged except for the blister hangars which are not shown.
- 3.2.12 **Plate 5**, an aerial photo dated 1966 also shows that many war time features were still recognisable at this time. The flight offices were still standing and the fighter pens were still well defined. The pattern of vehicle marks across the grass areas also suggests that some of the extant buildings were being used. In particular, the old GRU workshops (number 75).
- 3.2.13 By 1988, an aerial photograph shows that the south flight offices (69 DK) were partly demolished and a football ground constructed on the east side of the GRU workshops (75) (**Plate 6**). Also visible in this photo is the small Direction Finding (DF119) caravan to the south of the flight offices (87). This suggests that this feature was in place after 1966.
- 3.2.14 Since this period the area has been in gradual decline and until recently had become overgrown and derelict. Some surviving fighter pen shelters had been used for storage but were otherwise redundant.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 For clarity the 1999 numbering sequence used in the Francis report has been retained. For locations of the individual numbered features see **Figure 2**.

4.2 Single engine fighter pens 68, 71, 81, 85, 90, 92

- 4.2.1 This series of fighter pens were dispersed along the west side of the air field and orientated in such a way as to minimise the effects of bomb blast. They were all built to the standard Air Ministry pattern 11070/40 and consisted of a forward or front crew shelter at the end of the central spine wall. The entrances to the shelter could be gained from either side and from the aircraft standing area.
- 4.2.2 The 1942 aerial photograph (**Plate 1**) suggests that the centre spine wall and forward shelter area was originally uncovered with no earthen embankment. Pens 92 and 91 are typical of this type of early fighter pen. Two flanking entrances, from the hard-standing for the aircraft providing access to a strong shelter at the north end (**Plate 7**). The Brick protective walls were constructed in hard red brick laid in English bond with a staggered or baffled entrance (**Plate 8**). This was to provide blast protection and reduce the risk from

ricochet. Symmetrical in plan the centre of the shelter comprised a Stanton type of pre-cast concrete sections of nine bays (**Plate 9**). The individual sections of concrete were bolted together and bitumen poured between the joint to seal from water ingress. Originally there was a door at both ends set in a wooden frame. Pen 92 was identical and orientated in the same direction as pen 91 (**Plates 10-12**).

- 4.2.3 Of the six original single-engined fighter pens, only five have survived, number 68 has been demolished. Of the remaining five, two have been built to the standard pattern but with the addition of a defended wall at the opposite end to the shelter. The Francis report has suggested that fighter pen 85 had a defended wall but there was no evidence of this once the surrounding area had been cleared (**Plates 13-15**). Due to the amount of ground clearance it is possible that this feature has been demolished in the past.
- 4.2.4 The two fighter pens with identified defended walls were 71 and 81 (**Figure 2**). The orientation of these two fighter pens would appear to have been designed to provide additional cover to the defensive posts 45, 45a and 32. The defended walls with characteristic rifle loop holes are angled to supplement the west side of the air field.
- 4.2.5 The shelters of pens 71 and 81 were built to the same basic standard pattern as the other pens. The defended walls were constructed in hard red brick 9 inches thick and laid in English bond (**Plates 16-20**). The defended wall had two angle faces each with three rifle loop holes. Above each loop hole was a thick concrete lintel. It was not possible to see the complete interior of the rear enclosure as they were filled with debris.

4.3 Flight offices 'CK' 'DK'

- 4.3.1 The flight offices were located between each flight of three fighter pens so that scrambled pilots could get to the planes in the quickest possible time (**Figure 2 Plates 21-25**). Built to a standard plan form with three co-joined rectangular elements. The building was subdivided into office accommodation for flight officers, flight clerks and stores.
- 4.3.2 The walls were of single brick thickness which was then cement rendered (this was considered by the Air Ministry as 'of temporary brick build'). Additional support was provided for the walls by a series of external brick buttresses. The roof (which had collapsed) was made from light weight steel trusses and was originally covered in corrugated asbestos sheeting. Original windows were identified and consisted of simple metal casement frames.
- 4.3.3 The north flight office (CK) was almost completely demolished with only low brick walls and floor surfaces remaining. The floor was of poured concrete and visible in the surface was the impressions of internal partition walls.
- 4.3.4 The south Flight offices 'DK' had mostly been demolished leaving only the overgrown floor surfaces. But, the north section of office was still standing with roof (**Plate 26**). Of single storey and open light weight roof trusses the building was originally covered in asbestos sheeting and rendered externally (**Plates 27-28**). The asbestos sheeting had been removed recently but, the wooden softwood sheet purlins were still in-situ.
- 4.3.5 Attached to each of the Flight offices was originally a free standing small building referred to as 'Latrines and Drying room' (gazetteer numbers 86 and 70). Both of these buildings had been demolished in the past and only their respective footprint survived (**Plates 29-30**). This consisted of a rectangular base with poured concrete floor. At the south end of building 70 was a small foundation and floor suggesting that originally there was a porch entrance.

4.3.6 It is not possible to say how the buildings were arranged internally but, the north building (86) appeared to have been divided into four sections and the south building (70) was divided down the middle into two.

4.4 Defence post 45 45a

4.4.1 Along the west side of the fighter pen area, two defensive posts were located (45 and 45a **Figure 2**). These features form part of a wider defence system which includes the defended walls to fighter pens 71 and 81. Number 45 consisted of a concrete pillbox located along an existing hedge line. It was orientated to cover the western approaches to the airfield and was built to a Type 24 ground plan (CBA 1995) (**Plates 31-33**).

4.4.2 Constructed from poured concrete walls and roof, it was hexagonal in plan with a rear east wall having a single entrance. Each side of the hexagon has an embrasure and the main entrance is flanked by two such embrasures. Internally, there was a characteristic blast protection wall. This was also constructed from poured mass concrete and on a 'Y' plan. The original internal firing shelves have been removed but, overall this feature was in good condition.

4.4.3 Defence post 45a has been identified by Francis as an 'Anti-aircraft gun-pit'. Francis had identified this feature as a brick-built machine-gun post that faces south-east (**Plates 34-38**). It has also been identified as similar to those at Culmhead airfield. The difference is that this example, at Exeter, has a windowless permanent brick shelter located to the rear or west side of the gun-pit.

4.4.4 This small structure was plain inside with no original fixtures or fittings left. However, a small circular hole was noted in the rear ceiling (**Plate 37**). This was thought to be the aperture for a stove pipe so that the interior could be heated. The gun-pit would appear to have been constructed by 1942 as an inscription was recorded in the surface of one of the small vent apertures in the east side of the shelter (**Plate 38**).

4.4.5 At the base of the gun-pit there was a circular series of iron bolts. This feature was a 'hold-fast' formed to bolt down the plinth for the machine gun. The small magazine recess was located on the east side of the gun.

4.5 Defence post 32

4.5.1 This defence post was a second type 24 pillbox facing east for inward defence of the airfield. It was located between fighter pens 81 and 85 and was orientated to cover the inward part of the airfield in the event of an airborne assault by paratroopers (**Figure 2**). Constructed in a similar manner to Defence post 45 from poured concrete with internal 'Y' shaped blast protection wall (**Front cover** and **Plates 39-40**). This pillbox was slight variant from the standard pattern in that it had a covered entrance on its west side. A small flight of steps led down to the interior.

4.6 Sleeping shelters 91, 83, 72

4.6.1 These structures were located to provide shelter for personnel belonging to each of the flights within a dispersal area (**Figure 2**). Francis describes these structures as the first design of a sleeping shelter. They were very strong and robust structures being able to withstand nearby bomb blast. Their construction was from a reinforced concrete framework and roof with 13.5 inch permanent brick wall infilling.

4.6.2 Shelter 91 was located at the north end of CK flight and could originally sleep 33 (**Plate 41**). Internally, these structures had a narrow central walk-way with bunk beds arranged in

bays down each side and in three tiers (**Plate 42**). Original light fittings survived and consisted of standard electrical iron conduit and circular light fittings. The original covers for the light fittings were missing.

- 4.6.3 It would appear that the sleeping shelters were originally heated. Each bay of bunk beds had a thin plated channel with vents at corresponding levels to each bunk (**Plate 43**). These features may be a later addition or up-grading, further research may indicate this.
- 4.6.4 Shelters 72 and 83 were intended for flights 'CK' and 'DK' respectively and were constructed in a similar manner. Shelter 72 intended for 33 personnel and shelter 83 for 18 (**Plates 44-45**).

4.7 Twin engined fighter pens 66, 67

- 4.7.1 The two twin engined fighter pens were located within the area of the GRU and to the south and west of the main 'CK' and 'DK' flight areas (**Figure 2**). Study of aerial photographs has confirmed that they were constructed after May 1942. Fighter pen 66 had been demolished recently and fighter pen 67 is the subject of a programme of restoration and retention. Due to environmental issues, in the form of live badger sett and scrub coverage, fighter pen 67 was recorded from a distance.
- 4.7.2 Fighter pen 67 remains largely intact with its plan form discernable and central and rear arms intact (**Plate 46**). The low central brick wall was visible and the two entrances into the central shelter were also visible. The 1944 aerial photograph does not show any defended wall to the rear south-east side of the pen so it is likely that this feature remained un-defended. It is also likely that the two twin-engined fighter pens were used by the GRU.

4.8 Direction Finding caravan 119

- 4.8.1 This small caravan was located just to the south of Flight offices 'CK' (**Figure 2**). Aerial photographs have suggested that this feature was placed here between 1966 and 1988. This is not certain and the caravan may have been moved several times. The present structure is badly decayed and Francis wrote of this feature in 1999 'Red and white chequered caravan divided into two rooms, one houses a Direction Finding (DF) aerial and its motor and the other appears to be the control room for a type of blind approach aid such as Ground Controlled Approach. The control desk and some of the valve driven electrical fittings are present but the oscilloscope and some other vital components are missing'.
- 4.8.2 The present structure has decayed considerably since Paul Francis saw it in 1999. It was still recognisable as a DF caravan and its aerial was still in place (**Plate 47**).

5 DISCUSSION

- 5.1.1 The opportunity to research and record the remaining WWII airfield structures at Exeter Skypark has enabled a better understanding of the development of the airport, particularly during the war. A combination of site observation, survey and photography, together with detailed research using secondary sources and original aerial photos, has created a clearer picture of the rapid changes at that time.
- 5.1.2 A detailed understanding of the history of Exeter airport by Paul Francis has also enabled a more focussed approach to the present project. The additional research and site survey, carried out after site clearance, has provided a valuable physical element to the project,

while the aerial photographic evidence obtained, has created an informative visual 'snapshot' to the historical element. Although, over the years, there has been a gradual decline in most of the WWII airfield structures, this historic record attempts to provide a lasting record of them before they are demolished.

- 5.1.3 Exeter airport was an important RAF station during the war and was used, in the early years, primarily in a defensive role. The rapid change from civilian to military role was swift with the station being formed by July 1940. The physical changes to the airport were immediate, with characteristic standard type dispersal arrangement built to house single-engined fighters. The airfield also needed defending from what was, at the time, a very real threat of invasion. The station was the subject of many air raids in the early years of the war but, like other stations, remained active throughout.
- 5.1.4 It has also been illustrated that the whole airfield was the subject of camouflage techniques in the form of painted hedgerow and boundaries which, included the runways themselves as well as buildings.
- 5.1.5 While the business of defending Britain's air space was on-going, the station also had an important role to play in researching ever ingenious ways of fighting wars in the air. The Gunnery Research Unit was an ever present occupier at the station until 1944 and the take-over by American Airborne Divisions. Evidence of their research work was identified in the early photographs and, they would seem responsible for the construction of the later twin-engined fighter pens built between 1942 and 1944 or, at least the main users of these features. Even when the fighter aircraft had been moved to other airfields to make room for the American transport aircraft, they have been identified as carrying on vital gun-sight research on bombers before they, themselves, were re-located.
- 5.1.6 By 1944 the war had changed direction and, an active role in preparation for allied invasion has also been clearly seen in the aerial photographs of this time. At this stage the fighters had been removed, loop hard-standings are under construction to take the large numbers of transport aircraft and the single-engine fighter pens had some of their blast defensive walls removed. This may have been to use a readily available source of earth and hard core in the construction of the concrete hard-standings.
- 5.1.7 After the very busy period of D-Day and towards the end of the war, the airfield gradually reduced its RAF capacity and returned to civilian use. However, most of the WWII structures remained. The first casualties appear to be the five blister hangars which were demolished by 1963. The other structures remained however and continued to be used in a minor capacity throughout the cold-war period but in gradual decline.
- 5.1.8 The presence of a Direction Finding caravan is perhaps, a small reminder of the technical advances made after the war. Modern air traffic control began with features such as these and, although forgotten until recently, forms a visual reminder of a less technical age. The remains of the air field structures also are reminders of a significant period in Exeter's history.
- 5.1.9 The pilots, air crews, ground crew and operational staff including the anti-aircraft defensive personnel of many nationalities are long gone but, the record of the structures and buildings they served in form part of their legacy.



6 REFERENCES

6.1 Bibliography

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Francis Paul 1999 *Exeter Airport.* Historic Airport Survey for Devon County Council & East Devon District Council by Airport Research Publishing

Wessex Archaeology 2014 *Exeter Skypark, RGF Site Clearance and Landscaping Written Scheme of Investigation for Historic Building Recording, Archaeological Evaluation and Further Mitigation.* Unpublished client report reference 100863.01



6.2 Aerial photographs

Sortie number	Library number	Camera position	Frame number	Held	Centre point	Run	Date	Sortie quality	Scale 1:	Focal length (in inches)	Film details (in inches)	Film held by
RAF/106G/UK/996	127	RVp4	6299	P	SX 993 936	9	12 NOV 1945	A	2800	12	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NMR
RAF/106G/UK/996	127	RVp4	6300	P	SX 997 936	9	12 NOV 1945	A	2800	12	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NMR
RAF/106G/UK/996	127	RVp4	6301	P	SX 999 936	9	12 NOV 1945	A	2800	12	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NMR
RAF/106G/UK/996	127	RVp4	6302	P	SY 002 936	9	12 NOV 1945	A	2800	12	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NMR
RAF/106G/UK/996	127	RVp4	6303	P	SY 005 936	9	12 NOV 1945	A	2800	12	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NMR
RAF/106G/UK/996	127	RVp4	6304	P	SY 007 936	9	12 NOV 1945	A	2800	12	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NMR
RAF/106G/UK/1412	250	RS	4430	P	SX 990 929	18	13 APR 1946	A	9800	20	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NMR
RAF/106G/UK/1412	250	RS	4431	P	SX 996 929	18	13 APR 1946	A	9800	20	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NMR
RAF/106G/UK/1412	250	RS	4432	P	SY 001 930	18	13 APR 1946	A	9800	20	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NMR
RAF/106G/UK/1412	250	RS	4433	P	SY 006 930	18	13 APR 1946	A	9800	20	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NMR
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RAF/CPE/UK/1823	508	RP	3068	P	SY 001 944	2	04 NOV 1946	AB	10000	20	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NMR
RAF/CPE/UK/1823	508	RP	3069	P	SX 995 943	2	04 NOV 1946	AB	10000	20	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NMR



RAF/CPE/UK/1823	508	RP	3070	P	SX 989 943	2	04 NOV 1946	AB	10000	20	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NMR
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RAF/543/2332	2166	2F21	26	P	SX 999 938	20	26 JUL 1963	AB	12300	20	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	MOD
RAF/543/2332	2166	2F21	27	P	SX 993 938	20	26 JUL 1963	AB	12300	20	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	MOD
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BKS/2822	2343	V	3032	P	SX 998 948	8	14 MAR 1967	A	10000	6	Black and White 9 x 9	BKS
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OS/89277	13550	V	125	P	SY 005 930	5	14 JUN 1989	A	8300	12	Black and White 9 x 9	NMR
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OS/92197	13966	V	71	P	SY 010 937	3	14 JUN 1992	A	5300	12	Black and White 9 x 9	NMR
OS/92197	13966	V	72	P	SY 006 937	3	14 JUN 1992	A	5300	12	Black and White 9 x 9	NMR
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OS/00981	15749	V	30	P	SY 006 943	1	19 MAR 2000	A	7500	6	Black and White 9 x 9	NMR
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OS/99622	23123	V	70	N	SX 994 935	3	18 JUL 1999	A	7000	12	Black and White 9 x 9	NMR
OS/99622	23123	V	71	N	SX 990 935	3	18 JUL 1999	A	7000	12	Black and White 9 x 9	NMR
ADA/707	26951	V	112	N	SX 992 933	3	05 AUG 1996	A	7500	6	Colour 9 x 9	NMR
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ADA/707	26951	V	114	N	SY 006	3	05 AUG	A	7500	6	Colour 9 x 9	NMR



ADA/BKS/2706	27431	V	114	N	935 SX 997 928	4	1996 20 MAY 1977	A	10000	6	Black and White 9 x 9	NMR
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ADA/BKS/2712	27434	V	5	N	SX 987 944	1	MAY 1977	A	10000	6	Black and White 9 x 9	NMR

Total Sorties

19

Total Frames

71



APPENDIX 1: OASIS REPORT

OASIS ID: wessexar1-179082

Project details

Project name	Exeter Skypark, Devon
Short description of the project	<p>Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by St Modwen Developments Ltd on behalf of Skypark Development Partnership LLP (the Client) to carry out historic building recording prior to the removal of remnant WWII buildings and structures and redevelopment at the Exeter Skypark (Exeter Airport), Clyst Honiton, Devon. Exeter RAF Station, during World War Two, saw action from the early years of the war and the threat of German invasion, to the preparation and transport of airborne troops on D-Day and beyond to the Japanese theatre. A study of existing archive and historical material, including aerial photographs from the 1940's, and after, has assisted in creating a detailed understanding of the surviving structures at Exeter. This, together with an accurate GPS survey of the structures, as well as high resolution digital photographs, has also created a lasting record of the remains prior to their demolition. Historical images have shown the development of the airfield during the war and, in particular, how the buildings worked in relation to one another. The standard dispersal pattern of fighter aircraft relates directly with the defensive structures for a fighter base of the time. Important research work was also carried out at Exeter by the Gunnery Research Unit (GRU). This included important development of a gyroscopic gun-sight for heavy bombers. By 1944 the airfield was occupied by the American Air force who prepared the runways and perimeter track with 'looped' hard-standings in preparation for the arrival of the transport aircraft carrying paratroops to northern France.</p>
Project dates	Start: 01-02-2014 End: 25-02-2014
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	100863 - Contracting Unit No.
Type of project	Building Recording
Site status	None
Current Land use	Other 15 - Other
Monument type	BUILDING Modern
Significant Finds	NONE None
Methods & techniques	"Photographic Survey"
Prompt	Planning condition

Project location

Country	England
Site location	DEVON EXETER EXETER Exeter Skypark, Devon



Postcode	EX5 2DX
Study area	0 Hectares
Site coordinates	0 0 299239 00 00 N 93930 00 00 E Point

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Wessex Archaeology
Project brief originator	Wessex Archaeology
Project design originator	Wessex Archaeology
Project director/manager	Andy King
Project supervisor	Bob Davis
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer
Name of sponsor/funding body	St Modwen Developments Ltd

Project archives

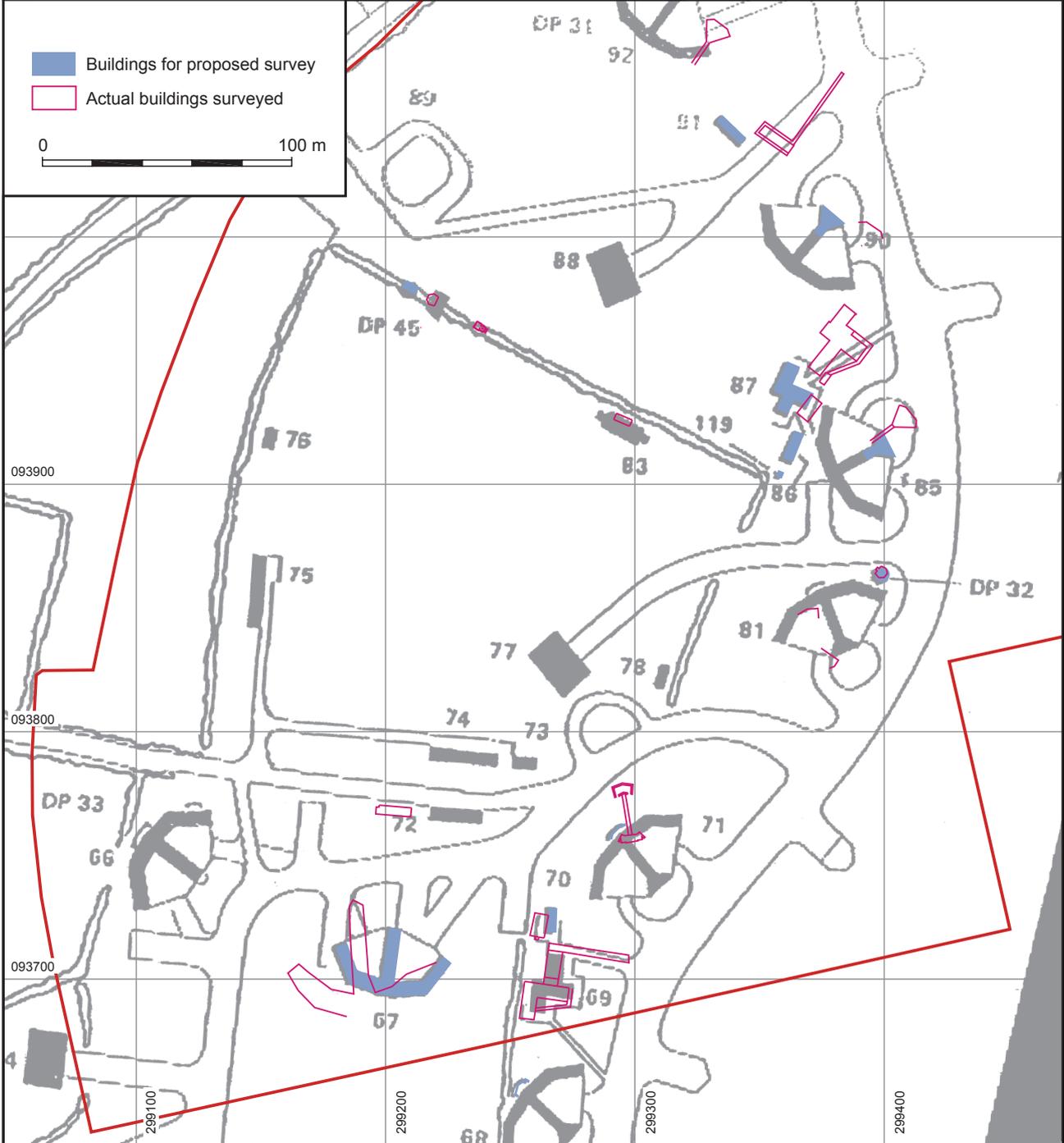
Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	ADS
Digital Archive ID	100863
Digital Contents	"none"
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography","Survey","Text"
Paper Archive Exists?	No

Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Exeter Skypark, Devon: RGF Site Clearance and Landscaping. Historic Building Report
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Davis, B



Other bibliographic details	100863.02
Date	2014
Issuer or publisher	Wessex Archaeology
Place of issue or publication	Wessex Archaeology, Salisbury
Description	A4 illustrated report



Based on the 1944 RAF plan

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Date: .8/05/2014

Revision Number: 0

Scale: 1:2500 @ A4

Illustrator: KMN

Path: X:\PROJECTS\100863\Graphics Office\Report figs\HistBuildRec\2014_05_08

Site location

Figure 1



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ CK flight buildings ■ DK flight buildings ■ GRU buildings 		This material is for client report only © Wessex Archaeology. No unauthorised reproduction.		
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			Scale: 1:2500	Illustrator: KMN	
			Path: X:\PROJECTS\100863\Graphics Office\Report figs\HistBuildRec\2014_05_08		

Annotated interpretation showing surveyed features over aerial photo dated 1942

Figure 2



- Buildings surveyed
- CK flight buildings
- DK flight buildings
- GRU buildings



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Annotated interpretation showing surveyed features over aerial photo dated 1944

Figure 3



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Aerial photo dated 1942 showing airfield camouflage and west fighter flights



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Detail of 1942 aerial photo showing west sector fighter flights and associated structures



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Aerial photo dated 1944 showing construction of 'loop' hardstandings to right of image



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Detail of 1944 aerial photo showing empty fighter pens and GRU aircraft



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Aerial photo dated 1946



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Aerial photo dated 1963



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Aerial photo dated 1966



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Aerial photo dated 1988



Plate 7: View of shelter to fighter pen 92



Plate 8: Standard shelter entrance to fighter pen 92

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Plate 9: Interior of shelter to fighter pen 92



Plate 10: Exterior of fighter pen 90

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Plate 11: Shelter entrance to pen 90. Note 'sand' bags on top of central wall



Plate 12: Interior of shelter fighter pen 90

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Plate 13: Exterior of pen 85



Plate 14: Entrance to shelter pen 85

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Plate 15: Interior shelter of pen 85



Plate 16: View of fighter pen 81 shelter and defended wall

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Plate 17: Defended wall with loop holes fighter pen 81



Plate 18: View of fighter pen 71 defended wall and shelter in background

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Plate 19: Detail of defended wall exterior fighter pen 71



Plate 20: View of interior of defended wall fighter pen 71

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Plate 21: Remains of Flight offices 'CK' viewed from north



Plate 22: Remains of Flight offices 'CK' viewed from west

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Plate 23: Interior of Flight offices 'CK' showing evidence of internal partition



Plate 24: Remains of original metal framed windows to Flight offices 'CK'

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Plate 25: Interior view of remains of Flight offices 'CK' showing south corridor



Plate 26: Flight offices 'DK' viewed from south

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Plate 27: Flight offices 'DK' viewed from north-east



Plate 28: Interior of Flight offices 'DK' showing roof truss and sheet purlins

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Plate 29: Remains of Flight office 'CK' Latrines and Drying room



Plate 30: Remains of Flight office 'DK' Latrines and Drying room

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Plate 31: Defence post 45 exterior



Plate 32: Defence post 45 exterior

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Plate 33: Defence post 45 interior blast protection wall



Plate 34: Defence post 45a exterior viewed from north-east

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Plate 35: Defence post 45a exterior showing gun-pit, magazine and shelter entrance



Plate 36: Defence post 45a view of gun-pit and magazine from inside shelter

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Plate 37: Defence post 45a interior roof showing stove pipe aperture



Plate 38: Defence post 45a detail of dated inscription to small aperture to right of doorway

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Plate 39: Defence post 32 exterior showing covered entrance



Plate 40: Defence post 32 interior showing embrasures and blast protection wall

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Plate 41: Exterior of sleeping shelter 91



Plate 42: Interior of sleeping shelter 91

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Plate 43: Detail of typical bunk bed bays (bunks removed) in sleeping shelter showing heating vents



Plate 44: Exterior of sleeping shelter 83

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Plate 45: Exterior of sleeping shelter 72



Plate 46: Twin-engine fighter pen 67 viewed from north

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Plate 47: Twin-engined fighter pen 67 viewed from north-west



Plate 48: DF caravan 119 exterior

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Plate 49: DF caravan 119 aerial and motor housing below



Plate 50: DF caravan 119 remains of interior

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