

Airborne Assault Duxford makes good progress

The winter edition of Pegasus announced some momentous news: the start of work on Airborne Assault, the museum of The Parachute Regiment and Airborne Forces, on its new site at the Imperial War Museum (IWM) Duxford, which will also house the new ParaData digital archive. The public announcement was covered in the national press in November with the Sunday Telegraph headline “Paras’ history to be told digitally”.

The vision for Airborne Assault Duxford is a new and unique attraction, bringing alive the history and modern reality of The Parachute Regiment and Airborne Forces, from the Second World War to the Falklands, Kosovo, the Gulf and Afghanistan. Much of the 68-year history is captured on film and veterans from the D-Day landings and Arnhem are actively involved.

Much as Airborne Assault will chronicle the proud history of Airborne Forces since their inception by Churchill in 1940, it is also about the present day, and those who are currently in the field “making history” with 16 Air Assault Brigade.

The decision to relocate the Museum from Aldershot to Duxford was first made after an exhaustive review of 17 UK sites. The vision was to go beyond the conventional regimental military museum: not only to provide a fitting tribute to our heritage and an inspiration to those currently serving but also to meet the varied demands of a wider public at an already successful venue that receives 470,000 visitors annually.

Progress on both museum and archive projects is encouraging and we are on schedule as we aim towards an opening in late autumn. The October 2007 agreement to start work was the signal for enormous amounts of detailed design and planning work by RWDP Ltd, museum design specialists who have long been our partners on the road to Duxford.

Under the direction of the Trustees of the Airborne Forces Museum (ABFM), chaired by Major General Dair Farrar-Hockley, two Project Boards have been established to manage this detailed work: the first under Major General Adrian Freer (see below); the second under Colonel John Crosland, overseeing, for example, the development of the archive building. Both operate in close consultation with Nik Boulting (MD of RWDP Ltd), who has been working flat out, developing the museum and archive plans, liaising with the IWM in Duxford and London, and inviting tenders for the different components of a very complex undertaking. At each key stage of this long-running project, the Regimental Council has been consulted and has given approval. We have also involved key people at the IWM at operational, directorial and trustee level.

Airborne Forces Museum Trustees

Chairman: Maj Gen Dair Farrar-Hockley MC (CO 3 PARA 1984-6)
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Lt Col John Handford OBE, Regimental Lieutenant Colonel (CO 4 PARA 2000-2), Ex-Officio Trustee
Maj Mike McRitchie MC MH (Coy Comd 1 PARA 1958-9)

First steps

Our first contractor went on site on February 25th to start building works to the archive centre, a former RAF barracks block. This centre will include the curator's office, reading room and library as well as improved archive storage. It will give researchers, historians and authors access to original historic documents in ideal working conditions. Precious and irreplaceable documents will now be conserved in acid-free archive storage boxes. Mobile racking has now been installed giving the archive four times the current capacity at Aldershot, and so making it future-proof as more material comes forward once Duxford is able to open. Minor works have to be completed and we look forward to opening this vastly improved archive facility later this year.

ParaData archive

In August 2007, the Trustees contracted the technical and content development of the ParaData digital archive project– under the stewardship of Major General Adrian Freer - to specialists Cogapp Ltd. Led by Alex Morrison, their track record includes responsibility for digital database projects as diverse as the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York, the National Portrait Gallery in London and Manchester United's museum at Old Trafford.

At their Brighton HQ the Cogapp team has been designing the software that will make ParaData work, both on 'touch screen' computer consoles at Duxford and on the internet online. Meanwhile, team members have been scanning and digitising material from the Aldershot archives, prior to it being packed away safely for the move to its new conservation-standard home. Over 11000 items have now been scanned from World War II and subsequent operations. In time, the digital technology will accept material fresh from the most up-to-date operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Alongside Historical Editor, Colonel Bob Kershaw, a Trustee and published military historian, they have developed historical timelines as a framework for the archive, and conducted recorded interviews with veterans, with those from World War 2 as priority. Their memories can now be preserved for posterity both in the museum displays and on ParaData.

Cogapp have also completed detailed work on the graphic style and content of the archive database, which will enable people to search by name those who have served with The Parachute Regiment and Airborne forces since 1940 up to the present day. Entries will cross reference with an Index of campaigns, and units, decorations and service history, as well as digitised material such as photographs, film, letters, interviews and citations.

During all this, they have also found time to redesign the Airborne Assault Appeal website which is well worth a visit at www.airborneassault-duxford.com. Through the website, you can keep in touch with progress towards the opening in late autumn.

We believe that ParaData is a unique creation in the military community, and its development work so far has excited much admiration from our partners at the Imperial War Museum – praise indeed from a world-renowned museum. Once again, Airborne Forces are leaders in the field, acting as pathfinders in harnessing modern digital technology, not just to preserve our heritage, but make it more openly available, and easily accessible to a worldwide audience.

When ParaData is launched, it will still be very much a **work in progress**, constantly evolving as new material is added. We will also invite contributions of memories and material from past and present members of Airborne Forces, their families and descendants, to ensure that coverage of their heritage is as complete and comprehensive as possible.

Bringing history alive

Also working with Bob Kershaw, RWDP have developed the historical framework for the museum displays. They have assessed the content of the current collections and are using a variety of modern multi-media techniques to tell the story of men who go to war from the air. These will provide a vivid and dramatic interpretation of the exhibits and artefacts, and convey the human experience behind them. Airborne Assault will present the story of today's airborne soldier, as well as taking us back over time.

The Airborne Forces Museum at Browning Barracks, Aldershot, officially closed its doors on December 21st 2007. Since then it has been a hive of unseen activity, as preparations get underway for the move. Artefacts have been inspected by specialists and decisions taken on conservation work prior to being installed in their new setting. For instance, the Regimental colours presented in 1950 by King George VI are in need of restoration by textile specialists, and this delicate work is in progress at their premises in Kent. Similarly, precious items of national importance like the original briefing models - miracles of wartime model-making produced under great time

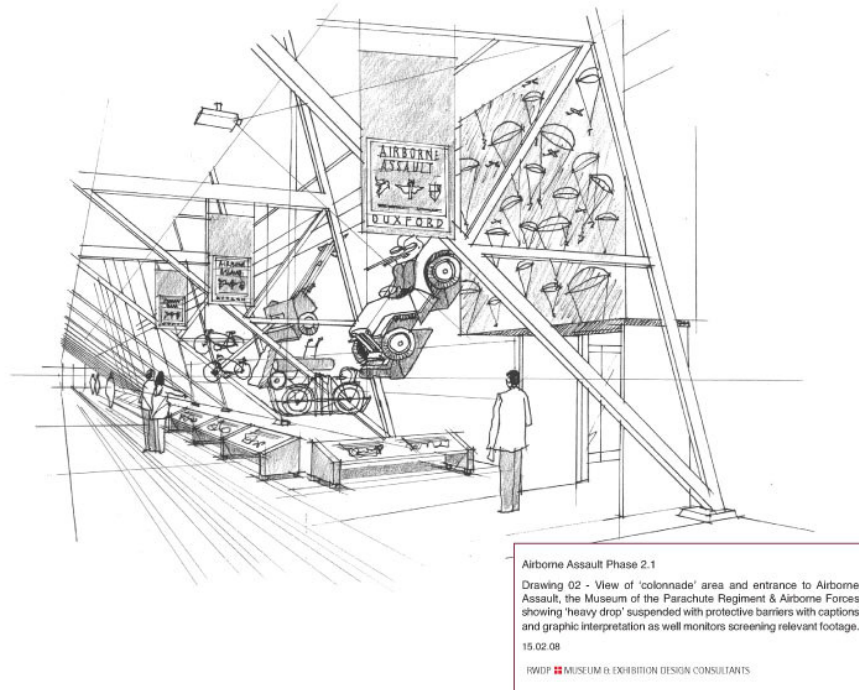
pressure - which we hold on behalf of the National Archive, need to be cleaned and repaired where necessary, prior to transportation.

Much thought has been given to how best to display them. Previously they have been encased in wooden-framed glass cases, laid out horizontally, with light reflections and their sheer scale making them difficult to view. It is planned to suspend the Normandy model at an angle, so that lighting effects can chart the progress of the vital actions at Pegasus Bridge and the Ranville area in June 1944. This will be accompanied by audio-visual material combining film, photography, sound commentary and recordings plus interviews with surviving veterans. Their story will be told as never before.

Historic collections

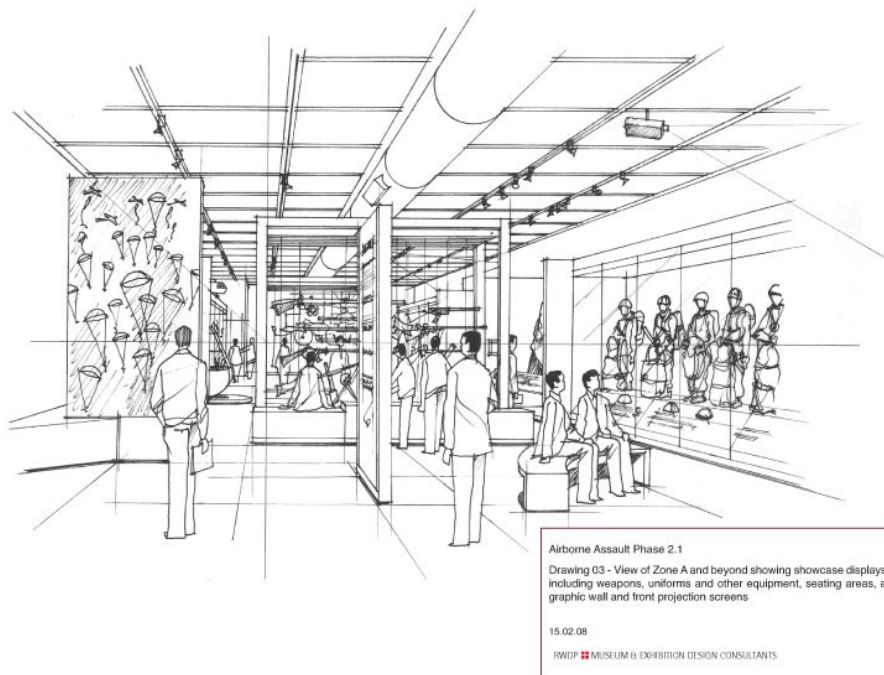
The museum collections will be displayed in a dedicated facility within IWM's AirSpace building. This latest spectacular development at Duxford houses the majority of the historic aviation collection in climate-controlled conditions, and is the biggest attraction on the site, thereby increasing the numbers of the general public who will be able to visit Airborne Assault.

Having inspected civil and military aircraft including Concorde and an Avro Lancaster, visitors' attention will be directed to Airborne Assault by a display of heavy drop equipment. The Willys jeep, field gun, motorbikes, folding bicycles and supply canisters will be suspended from a colonnade of structural stanchions, as if dropping by parachute. Banners will advertise Airborne Assault and monitor screens will show dramatic moving film footage to catch the eye.



The space inside is, according to Nik Boulting, a ‘designer’s dream’ – clean, dry, modern, with high ceilings, copious electrical points and with good interior ultraviolet-controlled lighting that avoids the conservation problems that strong daylight can bring. The valuable collections can be safely preserved here in a way not possible in the dated and ageing Aldershot building. The extra ceiling height means that the display volume is also greater than Aldershot, with room for tall floor-to-ceiling display cases – always useful for airborne exhibits! Weapons, equipment, briefing models and uniforms will be displayed to their best advantage, as will the more unusual exhibits like the Horsa glider cockpit and scale model, and Bing the Paradog, who dropped in Operation Varsity, Crossing the Rhine in March 1945.

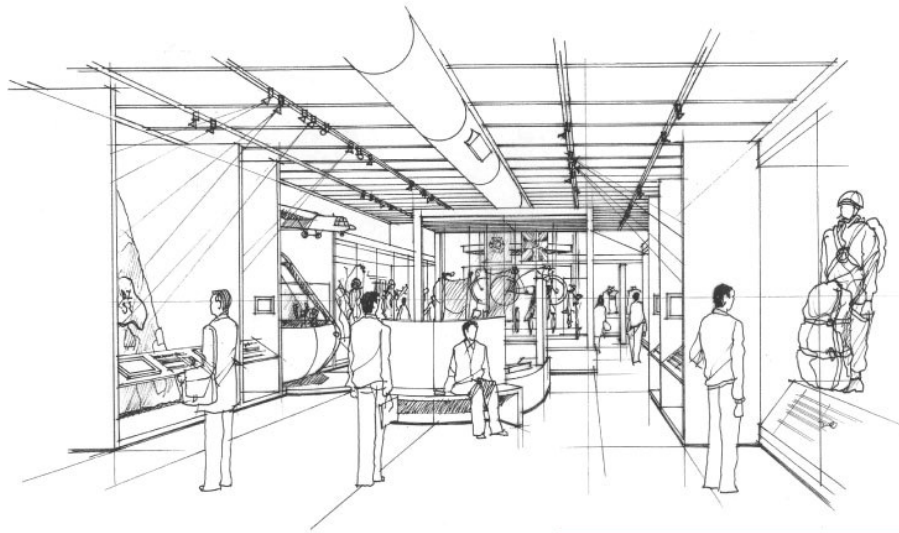
The museum will consist of three walk-through zones, with projection screens, and monitors for films, and seating to watch them. Zone A will feature today’s paratroopers, their weapons, helicopters and uniforms, their evolution to the present day, and contemporary film of recent and current engagements. A multi-media display will review the history of the parachute, from early sketches by Da Vinci to modern military use, and visitors can experience the weight of a packed ‘chute and other equipment.



Zone B covers history since 1940, with seminal actions from World War II, and subsequent operations including Suez, Northern Ireland, Falklands and Kosovo. The World War II displays focus on four original briefing models - Bruneval, Pegasus Bridge, the Normandy Landing and Rhine Crossing. The cleaned and restored models will be wall mounted at an angle to make viewing easier.

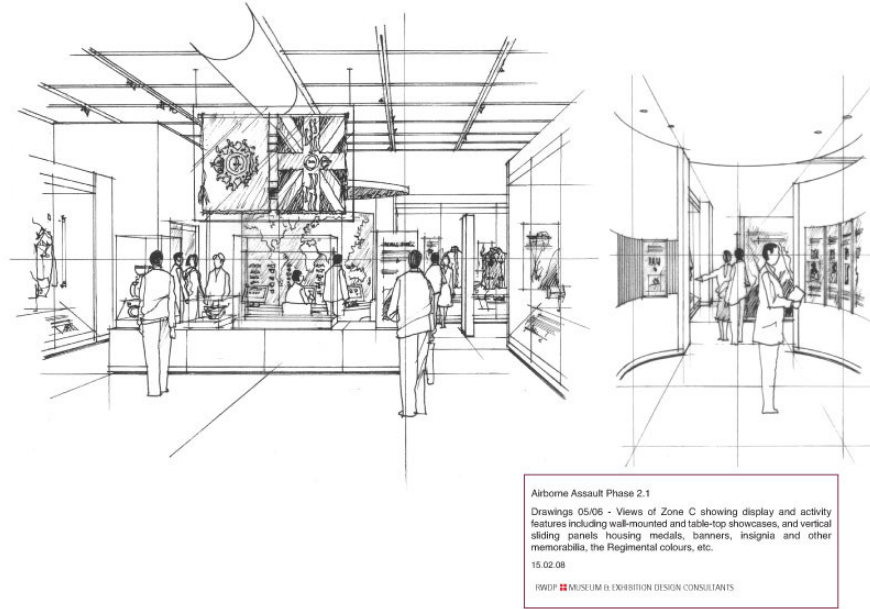
The Horsa glider nose-cone and Pegasus Bridge model will tell the story of the coup de main action and explain the key wartime role of gliders. The original Normandy briefing model will use sound and light techniques to explain how such models were used. Film footage will be complemented by explanatory text scrolling across the screen, by clips from interviews with soldiers and historians, and by theme music.

The central display feature of Zone B will be a complex model of Arnhem which explains the five key stages of the engagement from landing to withdrawal. Another imposing showcase will suspend weapons and other equipment.



Airborne Assault Phase 2.1
Drawing 04 - View of Zone B and beyond showing showcase and other display features including fully dressed mannequins, original briefing models, the Horsa cockpit and scale model, and suspended bicycles, motorbikes, supply canisters, etc.
15.02.08
HWDF MUSEUM & EXHIBITION DESIGN CONSULTANTS

Further showcases will cover the post World War II campaigns with artefacts, graphics and film. They will be complemented by a feature on the international Airborne brotherhood. This will include displays explaining the evolution of airborne forces among the Allies and elsewhere, emphasising those engagements where British and Allied forces have worked together.



The last zone, which will include the roll of honour, will focus on those who have served. It will include wall-mounted and table-top showcases, housing medals, citations, pennants, insignia and uniforms of notable figures. Readers will be interested to know that all medals at Aldershot will be fully displayed at Duxford on vertical sliding panels. In this quieter zone, dedicated In Memoriam, the ParaData touch-screen consoles will also provide the opportunity for visitors to research key figures from Airborne Forces history as well as their own family members

With great regret, due to the enormous amount of work required to clean, restore and prepare for the move to Duxford, the Airborne Forces Museum is closed until further notice and cannot receive artefacts, offers of material, or requests for information from the archives.

If you have heritage items or documents, please keep them safely until we are able to open again and normal service is resumed.

The website will give further details.

Admission concessions

Once Airborne Assault is open, admission at IWM Duxford will give Airborne Forces visitors access to the entire complex at Duxford, as well as our own museum. With attractions including the superb aviation collections in AirSpace, vintage planes flying above the operational airfield, the American Air Museum and the Land Warfare Hall and Normandy exhibitions, this is

easily a very full day's outing. I am pleased to tell you that an advantageous entry concession has been negotiated on your behalf with our IWM partners.

By prior notification to the Airborne Assault Duxford curator, visiting groups of 10 or more Parachute Regimental Association members, serving soldiers or cadets will be admitted FREE OF CHARGE to IWM Duxford. Groups are encouraged, where possible, to visit in uniform, or blazers and berets.

This applies to both Full and Associate members of The Parachute Regimental Association (PRA). Members of airborne units in the wider Airborne Forces brotherhood can join the PRA as lifetime Associate Members for a single one-off payment of £7.50.

Serving soldiers or Regimental Association members visiting in an individual capacity will be offered a 2 for 1 deal on presentation of their MoD ID card or Regimental Association Card at the main entrance to the IWM Duxford.

To convey the true value of this negotiated admission deal, at the time of writing, individual entry to Duxford costs £16.00, with concessions at £12.80 for over 60s and students, £9.60 for the disabled. If you wish to visit with children or grandchildren, those under 16 are admitted free to IWM.

This deal applies to all days other than Air Show and Event days. From time to time, as part of our new partnership with IWM, it will also be possible to hold Regimental Days at Duxford, with no cost of entry to those taking part. To that end while the Brigade is away on operations this summer, families have been invited to a day at Duxford free of charge under the auspices of RHQ The Parachute Regiment.

The Appeal continues

Additional plans and fundraising are underway to create the final phase of Airborne Assault. The goal is to build a unique stand-alone History of Military Parachuting centre with an Activity Zone, which we expect to construct in 2010. This will be built around The Regiment's military parachute training programmes and equipment. It will be open to the general public of all ages and abilities, as well as providing teambuilding and motivational training for corporations, professional and amateur sports teams and teamwork programmes aimed at older teenagers and young adults.

We continue to receive more generous donations from individuals and Charitable Trusts and Foundations. The drive to engage with the corporate community has brought immediate results with one marvellous six-figure pledge recently. All donors are honoured on our website. If you know of companies who might be interested, sponsorship and commercial involvement are welcomed.

Contact can be made to Stephen.cooper@airborneassault-duxford.com or by telephone to 07946 531139.

We are seeking just over £2m for this last key element of the project and every penny is vital to reaching our goal. If you pay income tax, then your donation will qualify for Gift Aid which will increase the value of your gift to us at no extra cost to you. Cheques payable to Airborne Forces Museum can be sent to:

Stephen Cooper
Airborne Assault Appeal Office
8 Langside Avenue
London
SW15 5QT

To make donating even easier, if you have internet access, you can now donate using your Credit Card online through our website www.airborneassault-duxford.com

Just click through to a secure payment service provided free to us by the Co-Operative Bank. A simple ticked box will also ensure that we receive the benefit of Gift Aid tax relief.