

The most important unit on Tiree was 518 Squadron, which flew Halifax bombers 500 miles out into the Atlantic to collect weather information. Their 11 hour flights took them up to 20,000 feet where ice on the aircraft wings was a hazard, and down to sea level where they could be hit by enormous waves. In 1944 alone the squadron lost eight planes and 64 crew. The information they gathered, however, pinpointed the one day in June 1944 on which the D-Day invasion of France could go ahead.

There were a number of accidents. In 1944 two Halifaxes collided in cloud while undertaking a test run before their night flight. One of the airmen killed that day was Leonard Revilliod, grandson of Tomáš Masaryk, the founder of Czechoslovakia.

*'I was on the top of Ben Hynish and it was a lovely day. And one got up off the 'drome there and the other one was coming in and they were heading straight for each other. I was seeing them before they crashed and they seemed to come so close to each other that they tipped wings... and the next thing the two of them went up in flames and you could see the wheels with the tyres burning and falling right to the ground... one of the engines fell at the pillar box at Island House.'* DAVID MCCLOUNNAN.



The crew of a Waback on Tiree in 1944



Members of the Crossapol NAAFI, which ran a canteen, bar, cinema, entertainment and sporting competitions for the servicemen on the base



A Halifax aircraft from RAF 518 Squadron over Tiree during World War II



Tiree WAAF, members of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, on the steamer Lochearn in 1942

During the war there were a number of Italian prisoners of war on Tiree. They were held in wooden huts in Crossapol but were generally free to walk around the island.

*'They started digging there [a water pipe at Balephuil]. It was prisoners and you couldn't see right along the place, they were so near to each other... There were about four or five hundred of them... I remember I was shepherding out there at Hugh MacLean's. I used to take the cattle down from there, and this [POW] bloke came... I had a watch on a chain, and he was talking to me in Italian and I was talking to him in Gaelic. Eventually he gestured that he also had a watch on a chain and the watch wasn't wound. I knew then that he wanted to know the time.'* DAVID MCCLOUNNAN.

A Home Guard unit was established on the island to defend Tiree from possible attack. But in contrast to the fictional 'Dad's Army', when challenged to a shooting match by the RAF, *'We gave them beans... I tell you it was a great day... We hammered them soft'. 'I'm not surprised,' said Jack Graham [the estate's game keeper]. 'You buggers were born with guns in your hands. You know – poaching!'* HUGH MACLEAN, BARRAPOL.

Mines were another hazard at the shore. One came in below the banker's house in Scarinish. It was inspected by the authorities and found to be safe. *'That's all we needed, 'cause on the way home we were like mice on top of a lump of cheese! I remember myself bending the prongs we wanted to take as trophies and we had big boulders hammering away at these pins on the mine. A few weeks later a gale floated the mine and it crashed against the rocks, exploding violently...The key fell out of the door of Adavale, half a mile away!'* HUGH MACKINNON, BAUGH.

The Second World War was one of the great turning points of Tiree's history. Tarmac roads and three huge runways were built. More than two hundred islanders left Tiree to serve in the forces. 2,000 servicemen and women from England, Australia, Poland and Canada were stationed on the island. English suddenly took over from Gaelic as the dominant language. Films were shown and many wartime romances started.

*'There were dances everywhere, it was marvellous...I remember getting up and it was the tango and this RAF bloke lifted me up...He was really good...They could do things like that...They were more sophisticated, Oh yes!'* JANET WILSON.



This Halifax overtook the runway at Tiree and tipped into a ditch