



THE RATCLIFFE SPITFIRE P9503

Supported by The Leonard Stillwell Bursary and The Spitfire Society

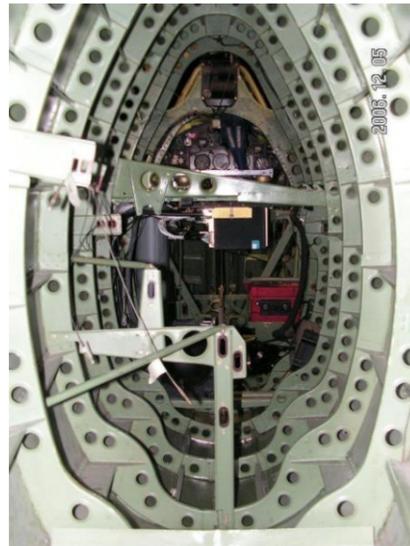
March 2015

Dominic JH Berry

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Well the idea at the outset of the year was to really try and make a good dent in the project. By doubling the after-school time I allocated to the build, I was hoping that we would have a chance of making 2014-15 really count in the timeline of what we were doing. I am very pleased to say that, now being half way through the year, we are on target to fulfil that ambition. In the back of our minds we must always be conscious of the impending events that will take place this September to remember the Battle of Britain, 75 years ago.

A Spitfire fuselage is made up of 24 different frames which form cross-section slices along the length of the aircraft, which when skinned, create its unique shape. Oddly these start at Frame 5 (1-4 don't exist as that is the area where the engine sits). Our collection of 3000 blueprints unfortunately doesn't give us all the information we need to make all of these, but Chris Mitchell at Airframe Assemblies has once again come up trumps for us. For the frames we have struggled with, he has taken actual ones and traced them onto paper for us.



This has meant that in the last 4 meetings, we have managed to cut out 5 frames completely. In man-hours, we estimate that this has saved us in the region of 60 hours of work.



Presentation to Ratcliffe of the remains of P9503

On December 12th last year, the day many of us had been waiting for, finally arrived; Richard Osgood, (Senior Archaeologist with the MOD) and Sgt Paul Turner, (formerly of The Rifles and now with the Army Air Corps), came to the college and presented us with the remains of P9503 as recovered from Salisbury Plain in September 2013, (See Bulletin 5 Oct 2013). The event was attended by Rosemary Baillon, as well as George Mobbs and a host of other people who have had, and continue to have a integral part to play in our project. Unfortunately, logistics meant that I was unable to invite everyone who deserved to be there, for which I apologise, but I would welcome anyone who wishes to come and see the finds. We are currently spending Monday lunchtimes examining what we have, and cleaning parts up. It is fascinating to slowly reveal the history of P9503 through careful observation, for instance, we have found many panel clips, see below, which were fixed on the top and underside of both wings. By looking carefully at the remaining paint on all of them, it is possible to discover that P9503 wore, as expected, the green and brown camouflage of the period. However, on the underside the story becomes fascinating; she wore light blue at the time of her demise, but beneath this we can clearly see the remains of black on some, and white on others. This fact

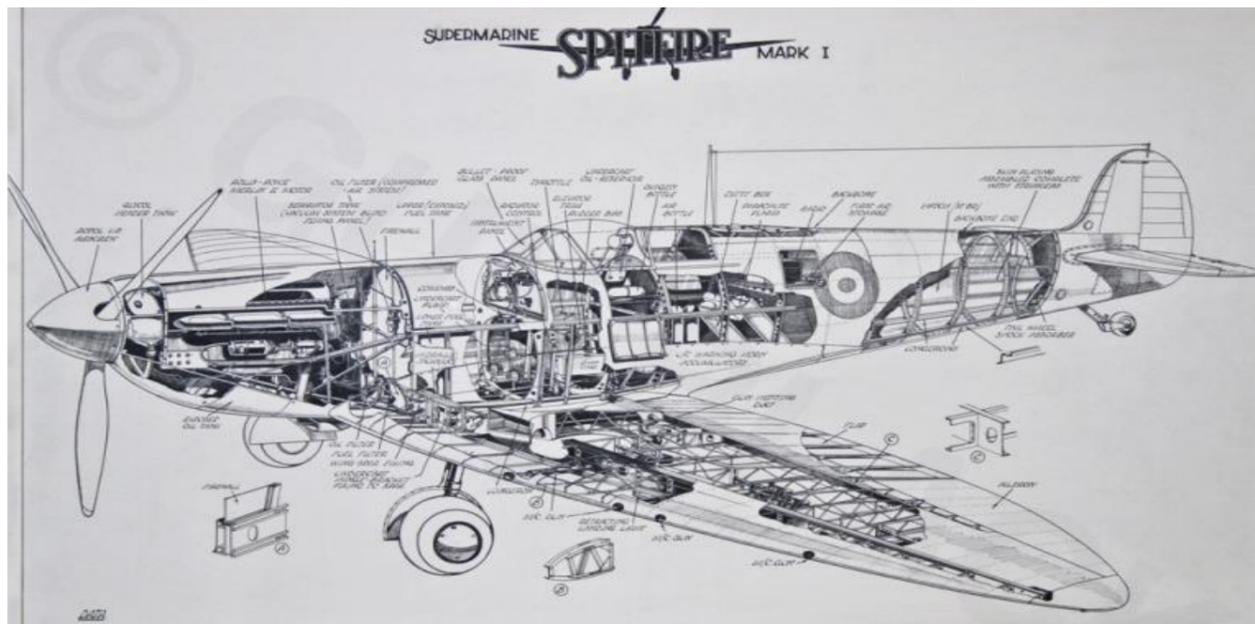




means that P9503 wore the Night and Day camouflage on her underside at some point prior to October 1940. According to some sources this scheme was used until June 1940, which would place P9503 with either 9MU or 257 Sqn. The image below shows P9374, painted on her underside with the striking Black and White finish, apparently done to help identification with our own anti-aircraft positions. I would suggest that the move to the Sky Blue was due to the fact that the B&W also helped the enemy to spot them!

Ok, so a Spitfire is an ambitious project; why not make two?

One of the fundamental parts of the project has always been to create a convincing replica of a Spitfire that anyone can sit in, and interact with as a pilot would have done. It will clearly never be airworthy, but I have always liked the idea of giving people an opportunity to experience some of the thrill of taking to the air in arguably



the most iconic aircraft of all time. For that reason, I have at last dropped the bombshell to the students that it is my goal to build a second Spitfire that we will use as a simulator. For this we will build it just as the cockpit section, probably from Frames 6-13, and will have it mounted on a wheeled trolley. There will be no wings or undercarriage, but we will try to be authentic inside. I have come across a pretty accurate flight simulator called IL2 Cliffs of Dover which seems to have excellent graphics and should be fairly straightforward to integrate, at least initially, into a cockpit. Of course a simulator can be as complicated as one wishes to make it, with all switches and controls being hard-wired into the simulator, but this all costs, so we will keep things simple to start with and see how we get on. Any advice or recommendations, or donations of equipment would be gratefully received as this is an area outside of my knowledge.



The Ratcliffe Spitfire Education Centre – Get Involved!

Regular readers will be well aware of our desire for a permanent home for our project once it is completed, as well as a workshop where we can complete the assembly. We have toyed with a number of different options for this, and a number of different locations. Nothing has yet been decided upon, and funding is, as to be expected, the biggest hurdle. If you would like to help us financially we have established a JustGiving site which can be found at: <https://www.justgiving.com/RatcliffeSpitfire> Any donations will be very gratefully received.



Jeffrey 'Dicky' Bird DFC 72 Sqn

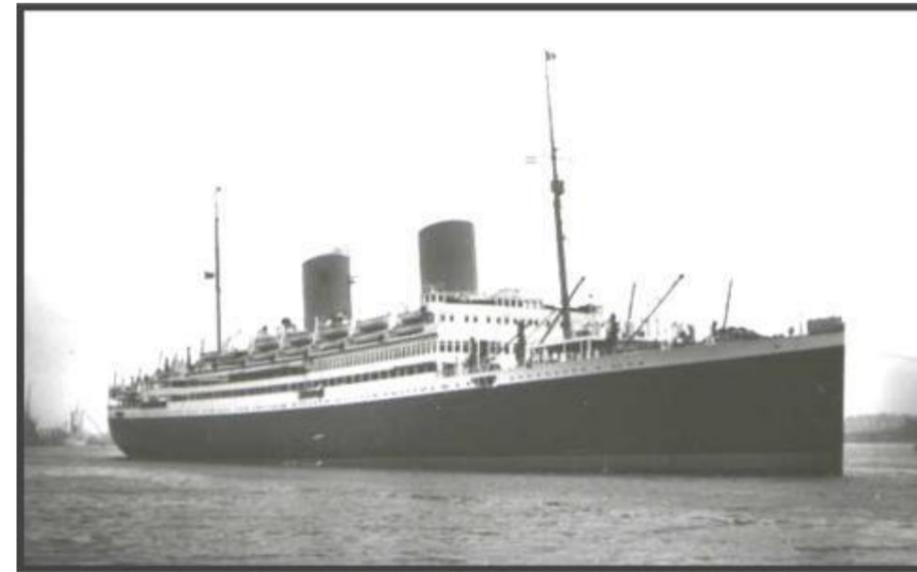
On Wednesday 11th March 2015, we welcomed a number of guests from the Leicester branch of the Royal Air Forces Association, (RAFA) amongst which the guest of honour was WWII Spitfire pilot, Jeff 'Dicky' Bird. The group had come to see our



project and the progress we had been making. Dicky had heard about the project some time ago, and had been keen to visit, but it wasn't until now that mutual times could be arranged. Dicky and our visitors were very impressed with the Spitfire as she stands currently, and were also interested in the original parts we have from P9503. He has already expressed an interest in returning for one of our Sunday workshops so that he can meet the boys, and watch them at work on it.



Dicky signed up for the RAF in 1939 following the outbreak of the war, and was sent to South Africa for his advanced training. I asked him how he had spent his time whilst on board the ship heading south for five weeks, to which he replied that he had passed the time earning lots of money! It transpired that Dicky had got to know an Australian professional Bridge player who taught him, and as a pair they cleaned the ship of their competition, disembarking in the southern hemisphere with their pockets bulging with £10 notes! In many ways Dicky was fortunate to do his training in South Africa, the weather was certainly



more favourable than Canada which was another place where large concentrations of commonwealth pilots received their training. Following his training, where he accrued some 300 hours on Spitfires, he prepared to be sent into battle. The troopship prior to his was torpedoed on its journey north, with the loss of many trained pilots, so Dicky elected to head to the front across land. At one point he found himself on board a train where the only form of exercise was, in the morning, to make ones way to the front carriage just behind the locomotive and jumping down, run alongside



the train. It was of course moving at a faster pace than a running man, but as long as you grabbed the last carriage before

the whole thing passed you by, you were alright!

Dicky was posted to join 72 Squadron and fought in Tunisia, Malta, Sicily and was on the Italian mainland at the war's end. At 95 years old Dicky still manages to captivate his audience, and I could happily sit and listen to his stories all day long.

