



THE RATCLIFFE SPITFIRE P9503

Supported by The Leonard Stillwell Bursary and The Spitfire Society

July 2012
Dominic JH Berry

2

The Ratcliffe Spitfire Story

The purpose of this build was documented in the previous bulletin, but we have always wanted to have some tangible link to the College with a real MkI Spitfire. Not too long ago this missing link was established and the story can now be related here:

In the late afternoon of 28th November 1940, in the deceptively tranquil skies above the southern tip of the Isle of Wight, a flight of 609 (West Riding) Squadron Spitfires were making their patrol. Unbeknownst to them they had just been spotted by Messerschmitt Bf 109s of Jagdgeschwader 27 (JG 27—27th Fighter Wing); to make



matters worse, this was a crack unit of very experienced and decorated German pilots. Leading the attacking group was the Luftwaffe's highest scoring ace, and its youngest Wing Commander, 25 year old Helmut Wick. With height advantage, Wick's squadron

'bounced' the Spitfires and it wasn't long before one of them was seen to be trailing black smoke. The unfortunate pilot, Plt Off Paul A. Baillon, managed to release his harness and struggle from his crippled aircraft. His parachute opened successfully and he floated down into the waters south of the Needles. A comrade, Plt Off Keith A. Ogilvie circled above the ballooning silk canopy but saw no signs of life from the pilot. His body was later washed up on the shores of France and he is buried in

Bayeux War Cemetery. Minutes later Wick was shot down by Flt Lt John Dundas DFC who was himself then shot down by Wick's enraged wingman. A third Spitfire was also lost in the engagement bringing to a close just another incident in what was to become known as The Battle of Britain.

All of this may seem insignificant but for one detail, Plt Off Paul A. Baillon was an Old Ratcliffian. We have been in touch with his daughter, who has very kindly allowed us to build The Ratcliffe Spitfire as R6631, the aircraft her father was tragically flying on that fateful day. To the left is a superb painting depicting the moment Wick's aircraft pulls away having scored hits on Paul's Spitfire. Reproduced here with kind permission from the artist, Simon Smith.

Build Progress

With the recent demands academically, many students and staff have rightly had to put their energies into other areas. This has meant that in terms of construction, the Spitfire has not progressed very much since Easter. However, there has been a great deal going on in the background in terms of planning and talking to people.

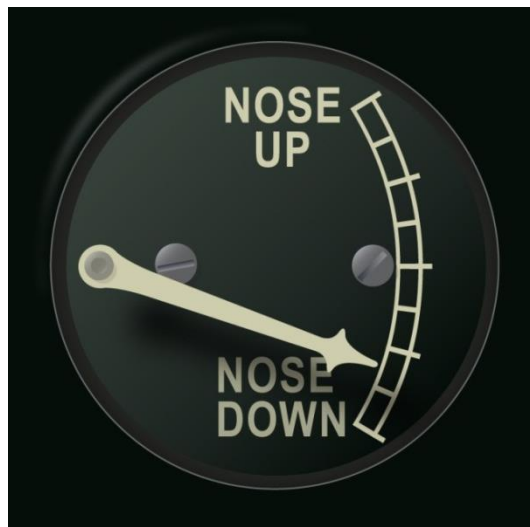
Looking at the build first, we have had a re-think about the materials we are going to use for the cockpit section. Frames 8 to 11 had already been measured and cut from 18mm ply. On reflection it was decided that in order to be able to create a better finish to these frames (they are exposed inside the cockpit), it would be prudent to re-cut them from MDF as this gives a much smoother finish when sanded and will look much more like the original aluminium, so a sheet of 30mm and 38mm MDF



were bought. Frame 5, the engine bulkhead essentially, has also been drawn out and cut from 18mm plywood as that will not be seen but forms the front section of the cockpit area we are currently concentrating on. We will make frames 12 and 13 from MDF as well as they can both be seen through the glazing that sits behind the pilot's head.

The Instrument Panel

Having very recently acquired a MkII instrument panel we have begun the process of turning it from a sheet of cut aluminium into the panel of R6631. The differences between the 'dashboard' of a MkI and a MkII Spitfire are minimal. Essentially we need to change one small round hole into a small square hole!



Despite over 20,000 Spitfires having been built, some of the instruments are extremely rare and therefore command very high prices, (in excess of £1500 for some). We have therefore decided to make some of our own instruments using the digital faces that have been drawn for us. We need to source blank instrument cases to sit them in and we will then add glass faces to those. The end result should be difficult to distinguish from the originals. There are some expensive parts however, that we cannot make: The Perspex canopy, rudder pedals and nose cone are some of these.



The dashboard with seven coats of matt black paint and the various switches and gauges we have been given.

Support

We have been introduced to, and made contact with a number of extremely helpful and generous people recently. It is humbling to know that there are so many people who are willing to support this project. A full list, detailing each donation, will be made available at the end of the build, but for the time being we are very pleased to be able to announce that we have already been given, or have been offered: A full set a wheels, three replica propeller blades, some instruments for the cockpit, newly made placards, a full set of digitally drawn instrument faces, highly detailed technical drawings, sheets and lengths of timber, as well as a huge amount of advice and support from enthusiastic friends and others who have built their own replica static and flying Spitfires.



Can you help?

We would love to hear from you if you are able to offer any help with this project. Be it through financial or material support please contact Mr Dominic Berry, Head of Art and Design Technology: dberry@ratcliffe.leics.sch.uk or 01509 817024