AN AERO LEGEND

A NEW SUPERMARINE SPITFIRE T. Mk. IX DUAL-CONTROL TRAINER WILL HIGHLIGHT THIS COMPANY'S AMBITIOUS PLANS FOR 2018

BY RICHARD PAVER

Few backgrounds are more iconic for a Supermarine Spitfire than the white cliffs bordering the English Channel.

Aero Legends Vickers Supermarine Spitfire T. Mk. IX NH341/G-CICK is the latest Spitfire to fly in the United Kingdom. The aircraft was rolled out by Historic Flying Limited at Duxford on 11 March 2017 for its first public appearance. On that day, it had made its first post-restoration flight — this was a short test hop early in the morning in the hands of John Romain.

The Spitfire was then presented by the Aero Legends and HFL teams to the press and public and although it didn't fly again that day due to a carb issue, a full test flight program commenced shortly afterwards. Following the completion of the test program at Duxford, a Permit to Fly was issued by the CAA during early April 2017 and immediately the aircraft joined the Aero Legends fleet at Headcorn in Kent to commence a busy program of Spitfire experience customer flights.

The wreckage of NH341 (along with the wreckage of Spitfire ML295) had been on display at the *Musee Memorial de la Bataille* at Bayeux in Normandy after being recovered from its wartime crash site in 1996. At that time, it was owned by Jean-Pierre Benamou and placed on loan for exhibit in the Bayeux Museum. Then, in June 2003, it was moved to be displayed at the Juno Beach Museum at Courseulles sur Mer. In 2010, this Spitfire wreckage was then moved to the home of the owner to be placed into storage. Both ML295 and NH341 had been allocated to the same unit — No. 411 (Grizzly Bear) Squadron in June 1944 based at Advanced Landing Ground B.4 at Beny-sur-Mer.

Spitfire NH341 was built at Castle Bromwich as a Spitfire Low Level Fighter Mk. IXE (LFIXE) and delivered to 8 Maintenance Unit on 28 April 1944. The fighter was then sent to Miles Aircraft for modifications to be added before delivery.

NH341 only flew with No. 411 Squadron, where several pilots flew the fighter. On the 29 June 1944, NH341 downed a Bf 109G some five-miles west of Caen, France. NH341 then destroyed another Bf 109G on the evening of 30 June over Thury Hurcourt.

However, by 2 July, NH341 was lost in action. The aircraft was flying a morning patrol when it was engaged by Focke-Wulf Fw 190s from *JG26* southeast of Caen. Hit numerous times by the enemy fighters, the pilot knew he was not going to make it back to friendly territory so he took to his parachute and successfully evaded capture.

In 2011, Keith Perkins — owner of Aero Legends — purchased the remains of NH341 and moved the aircraft to Duxford during 2014 for restoration to airworthy condition as a T. Mk. IX dual-control trainer.

Airframe Assemblies initially completed much of the longerons and fuselage frame work. The Spitfire was registered G-CICK on 4 June 2014 and the fuselage of the aircraft arrived at HFL in July 2014. By September, work was well underway on the fuselage and wing components. Brand new main spars were delivered to the project in January 2015 — having been manufactured by Airframe Assemblies — and they were then drilled by the HFL team.

The HFL team at Duxford rebuilt the whole aircraft — the company has the specialist wing and fuselage jigs to enable all new fuselages and wings to be built. (See photos of the start of both the fuselage and wings in the jigs in March 2015). An original engine motor mount was acquired and completely stripped down. All parts were then assessed for reuse and where required new T50 spec tubing was manufactured, cadmium plated, and installed along with a new central horseshoe frame. Engine mounts can suffer from internal corrosion where moisture collects in the tube interiors, but the example acquired had been well inhibited before going into storage.

For the next 2.5-years, the team at Historic Flying led by Project Manager Martin Overall carried out a meticulous restoration of this wreckage to create an all new two-seat T. Mk. IX specifically for use in the Aero Legends customer flights program. A

Spitfire Mk. IXEs of No. 411 "Grizzly Bear" Squadron at Heesch during 1945. (RCAF)