



Spitfire Heroes

Ken Ellis our February speaker entitled his presentation Spitfire Heroes and I along with many others was expecting to hear about Johnny Johnson and the like, pilot heroes who were household names from their exploits during the Battle of Britain and beyond. But no, he took us completely by surprise on a different tact entirely by introducing us to:-

Reginald Joseph Mitchell the aircraft's designer.

R J Mitchell as he was effectually known was born in Stoke-on-Trent with an insatiable thirst for engineering knowledge. He applied to all aviation companies to find a suitable position within which he could expand his quest for engineering knowledge. In 1916 when he was 21 he was interviewed by Supermarine and offered a job on the spot. There was no time to return home so he sent a Telegram to his parents asking them to send his



Vickers Supermarine Works producing the Southampton Flying-boat

clothes down to Woolston.

The first aircraft he had a hand in was the Pemberton-Billing Nighthawk quadruplane Zeppelin-killer. Noel Pemberton-Billing was the founder of Supermarine. In 1918 aged 24 RJM became Supermarine's chief designer following the resignation of the current incumbent F J Hargreaves.

RJM went on to design beautiful flying-boats such as in 1925 the Southampton Flying-boat. The Sole survivor of this aircraft type is at RAF Museum Hendon. At this time companies were not used to producing large numbers of aircraft

but rather produced them in small batches. In 1928 Vickers took over Supermarine; injecting capital with Vickers gaining flying-boat knowledge and Supermarine gaining metal construction techniques. The Walrus benefitted from Vickers' production know-how (originally to have been called the Stingray) of 1938 serious orders came in for the aircraft bringing about the start of production line techniques. In addition at this time RJ Mitchell was involved with S-series floatplanes, a quantum leap in aerodynamics and performance. The S.4 designed was flown for five months for the 1925 Schneider Trophy. S.6 series won the Schneider in sequence 1927, 1929 and 1931 winning the trophy in perpetuity for UK. S.6B S1595. This along with the trophy can be seen in the Science Museum, The race was won at 340mph which was 195mph faster than the Sealion had achieved nine years previously.

Supermarine took the bold move to build a private venture fighter, this was the Type 300. 'Mutt' Summers the Chief Test Pilot flew it on March 25, 1936 came back grinning and said "Don't touch anything".

This was the prototype Spitfire. RJM only witnessed the first flight having been diagnosed with cancer. He died aged 38 on June 11, 1937.

Rolls-Royce

Like the Spitfire, the Merlin engine started life as a private venture. First flown in a Hawker Hart test-bed on February 21 1935, ultimately 160,000 -plus engines were built and went on to power most of the 'greats', Hurricane, Mosquito, Halifax, Lancaster and transformed the American Mustang, among others. Some say that without the Merlin the Mustang would have just been another fighter rather than the superb aircraft it became.

Joe Smith

Joe Smith took over from RJM as Supermarine's chief designer and went on to design all subsequent variants of the Spitfire, the Seagull amphibian, the Spiteful and Seafang, then the jets: Attacker, Swift and Scimitar.



It was 27 months before the next Spitfire flew on May 14th 1938.

The production soon got underway with fuselages being stock-piled at Woolston. Industrialising the Spitfire was proving to be a nightmare for the small company.

Serious thought was given to having Supermarine build the much easier Hurricane. One problem was that the beautiful elliptical wing which was very complex, especially the complex but gifted spar-within-a-spar that held it all together. Only with the advent of the Ministry of Aircraft Production under Lord Beaverbrook did the mass manufacture of the Spitfire become reality. The Castle Bromwich Aircraft Factory was vast and produced the majority of the 22,000-plus units that were built.

Continued on page 2





THE RUTLAND FLYING HORSESHOE

Alex Henshaw

Alex perhaps the second most important name associated with the Spitfire was born in Peterborough in 1912 and spent most of his life living on the family land at Sutton-on-Sea, Lincs. He learned to fly and loved it, bought an Arrow Active G-ABIX which caused his family concern so much that they decided to buy him a parachute. In December 1935 the Active caught fire in flight and the parachute proved very handy! Unfortunately as he descended to earth the burning aircraft came right at him and a collision looked to be inevitable, luckily they just missed one another! Or his story may have ended here.



Alex came to fame with the Percival Mew Gull G-AEXF which is still flying at Brighton airfield in Yorkshire. This aircraft won the King's Cup at Hatfield in July 1938 at 236 mph - this speed has still not been beaten in that contest.

Another of his amazing feats was, when in February 1939, he flew the Cape Dash to and from Cape Town where he achieved a sensational flying time of 106 hours, 16 minutes only beaten in 2010, several years after Alex's death in 2007.

Alex Henshaw became the Chief Test Pilot at Castle Bromwich, taking hundreds of Spitfires on their maiden flights along with a number of Lancaster's. During this period Alex had his moments it's alleged that in 1944 he rolled an unladen Lancaster around a startled Spitfire. During a serious crash in a Spitfire on test in July 1942 he found the only field in urban surroundings. It was very lucky the aircraft broke up with the engine ending up in the kitchen of a nearby house. No injuries.



Alex Henshaw with Sir Winston Churchill

As Chief Test Pilot he was invited by the Lord Mayor to the 'September 1940 Wings Day' in Birmingham and was asked for a memorable bit of flying. Henshaw arrived flying down New Street inverted alongside the mayoral balcony. Not what the Mayor had in mind and he was not pleased.

Ken finished his presentation with a story about D-Day when a Mk.IX spitfire was adapted to fly beer kegs under its wings.

I hope I have managed to capture the feel of the presentation. Many thanks to Ken Ellis for both coming along and lending me some notes from which to write this article.

Medal For Arctic Convoy & Bomber Veterans



Veterans who served on Arctic convoys and in Bomber Command during World War II are to be recognised for their bravery and service with a new medal and award.

The Ministry of Defence said it had agreed on a design for the new Arctic Star medal and Bomber command clasp. The honours could be sent out to veterans and their families as soon as next month. Surviving veterans and widows will be the first to receive the awards. The families of those who served will also be able to apply. More than 3,000 men died in the freezing waters of the Arctic as they worked to keep supplies flowing through German blockades to Britain's ally, the Soviet Union, in Operation Dervish. The death toll of those serving in Bomber Command was even greater with 55,000 airmen losing their lives.



Branch Associate Membership 2013

May I remind Branch Associate members that this year the subscription is £5 for the year, and I would be happy to receive your payment as soon as possible if you were unable to pay me at the AGM.

If you prefer to write a cheque – payee is Rutland RAFA, or cash is just fine. If you are doubtful whether your sub is due or not, I will have the members' list with me at all Branch Meetings.

Thank you again for all who bring their stamps along. These are much appreciated and are sent off regularly to raise funds for our cause.

Many thanks

Angie Humphreys

2013 Annual General Meeting

The Rutland RAFA Branch took place on Wednesday 6th March 2013 with 31 members attending. The Chairman in his report thanked all who had worked on the Committee for the past year and stated that most had agreed to remain (if elected) for the following year. Peter Hart was resigning as Speaker Coordinator and replacing Kathryn Manderson as Editor of the Flying Horseshoe. A volunteer was still required for Speaker Coordinator. If anyone is able to take this position please contact the Chairman. Peter Hart will willingly help anyone interested to get started. Duncan gave a brief synopsis of the year's events including many good speakers; Derek Bury's walking talk and joke evening and Air Chief Marshal Sir Clive Loader, Police and Crime Commissioner who was adamant that he would not join RAFA. The Treasure said our finances have continued to be very healthy and we are able to continue operating without any concerns for the foreseeable future.

THE RUTLAND FLYING HORSESHOE



Ministry of Defence Hospital Unit (Peterborough)

Editors note:- I have checked this out so, I know it's all true.



The MDHU at Peterborough was opened by The Hon Nicholas Soames, MP (then Minister of State for the Armed Forces) in 1996 after the closure of the majority of the UK military hospitals. The way an MDHU works is that a number of military medical personnel (around 250 at Peterborough) are embedded within the NHS in order to keep their clinical skills up to date should they be required to deploy in support of operations overseas. The old Service hospitals were delightful places but they lacked the acute medicine and trauma experience that our people needed.

At Peterborough we are spread throughout the hospital in a number of wards and departments. Nurses are mostly found in the acute areas (Emergency, Critical Care, Theatres) with some on general and orthopaedic surgical

wards. Our Consultants are a mix of physicians, surgeons and anaesthetists with a smattering of specialists such as ENT and Radiology. We also have Allied Health Professionals such as Radiographers, Biomedical Scientists and Healthcare Assistants in relevant areas.



The MDHU has a Commanding Officer (currently Wg Cdr Kevin Mackie and from 19 Mar 13 Wg Cdr Mark Shepherd takes over the reins) and there is an Officer Commanding Nursing (currently Wg Cdr Keith Gullidge) as well as around 30 command, administrative and support staff. We also manage

all regular military medical personnel in a catchment area that covers as far North as Hull, East to Norwich, West to Leicester and South to Dagenham (and everything in between).



The latest development to our working practices is the Surgeon General's vision to place our specialists in Major Trauma Centres where the highest skills can be maintained. MDHU Peterborough manages the first of these initiatives as we have nearly 50 personnel at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, itself now a Major Trauma Centre. It is to our advantage that the Surgeon General is Air Marshal Paul Evans, who used to be at Peterborough and Stamford NHS Foundation Trust, and so support from the very top is always well informed and wears the right colour uniform! The MDHU comprises around 80% RAF, 10% Army, 7% Navy and 3% Civil Servants and we

are usually referred to as the 'RAF MDHU' even though we operate under Joint Medical Command (JMC). JMC is a subordinate organisation of the newly formed Joint Forces Command which has an Air Chief Marshal, Sir Stuart Peach as its head, so more light blue support assured there!

The MoD has a contract with the host NHS Trust so that they pay a fee for our people to work for them and we rent office space from the Trust. The relationship is, therefore, mutually beneficial and has worked harmoniously since its formation.

Peterborough personnel are parented by RAF Wittering where we enjoy a close relationship and which provides messing, gym, medical and dental care, stores, RAF Regiment training and all of the military infrastructure that the NHS environment cannot provide. Oxford is similarly parented by RAF Halton, although to a lesser extent because of geography.

We have a Flight system for making sure there is regular interaction across the ranks and departments, a very well developed programme of development for all ranks and we also undertake regular Force Development and Adventure Training. If you see us in uniform around the hospital, please stop us and have a chat as we are always keen to speak with our Service and ex-Service colleagues.



Wing Commander Kevin Mackie MSc BA(Hons) RGN PMRAFNS



The Gazette

Dates For Your Diary



3rd April	Air Commodore Peter Gover, Chairman of VAR Rutland	Voluntary Action Rutland and it's services
1st May	Loughborough University Student RAF Officer Cadets	Defence Technical, Undergraduate Scheme (DTUS)
5th June	Squadron Leader Mark Hind Battery Commander 49 Inkerman Battery	A Squadron Leader has made History!!!!
4th December	Christmas Dinner	Greetham Valley Golf Club

What's on Forthcoming Events

Friday May 24th	Proposed visit to National Memorial Arboretum	If you are interested in going to this event contact Derek Bury for further details tel 01572755969, email rafarutland923@yahoo.co.uk
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Branch Meeting

Branch Meetings are First Wednesday every month
Venue: Cottesmore Sports & Social Club 7.00 for 7.30pm

Branch Committee Members

President: Air Marshal Sir John M D Sutton KCB (Retd)

Chairman: Duncan Manderson, Pickwell Grange, Whissendine, LE15 7ER, 01664 474274

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