



## THE RATCLIFFE SPITFIRE P9503

Supported by The Leonard Stillwell Bursary and The Spitfire Society

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Welcome to this fifth publication of The Ratcliffe Spitfire Bulletin. Since the publication of the last bulletin there has been significant progress, both on the build but also with other aspects of the project. The first thing to notice is the change in the title

to the bulletin, with the addition of the new serial for our aircraft – P9503.

### Operation Tally-Ho

I spoke of The Defence Archaeological Group and Operation Nightingale in Bulletin 4, with particular reference to the proposed dig on Salisbury Plain for Paul Baillon's Spitfire, P9503. Having now been on the dig I have decided, in consultation with Rosemary Baillon, Paul's daughter, that it is fitting to alter the identity of our aircraft.

If you have read the previous bulletins you will be aware that until now we had been building the aircraft in which Paul was killed; the reason being, we knew its identity. I am motivated to change the aircraft for a number of reasons: 1) We now know the confirmed identity of another of his aircraft. 2) We have been offered parts from the Salisbury Plain dig, so our build will have actual parts in it from P9503. 3) The story of



The view of the dig from above

R6631 is a tragic one whereas the story of his escape from P9503 is one he himself wrote about as being actually quite pleasant.

So, what about P9503? It was October 27<sup>th</sup> 1940 and this was Paul Baillon's first engagement with enemy aircraft. In a letter to his wife just after the event he describes how his oil tank had received a hit and this quickly began covering his windscreen with oil, preventing him from being able to see where he was going. With no other choice, his only option was to bail out, which he did successfully. He watched his plane crash in flames but said how enjoyable the parachute experience actually was. Paul returned to his unit that same day after a refreshing cup of tea at

Upavon airfield. P9503 plummeted to the ground almost certainly at a high rate of speed, and, given what we discovered at the site a few weeks ago, at quite a steep angle. There was evidence of a fire judging by the amount of powdered aluminium we



found. Directly after the crash all the substantial wreckage had been removed, as was the practice, to be recycled. This meant that our dig didn't recover any large items, although a substantial number of small parts, mostly bent and twisted aluminium fragments were excavated. Among these were some exciting finds, including the pitot tube in almost airworthy condition, a couple of instrument faces and many .303in machine gun rounds, some still in the clips. Parts of the engine were recovered too, but this was limited to the front hub and, the first Spitfire part I ever found, a broken section from inside the engine...oddly at the extremity of the dig site, perhaps further evidence of the speed of impact. The experience is one I shall never forget. I managed to meet Rosemary Baillon (Paul's daughter) at last, and spend the day



Rosemary Baillon and Richard Osgood





excavating the remains of a Battle of Britain Spitfire with servicemen who had been injured in Iraq and Afghanistan; what an honour. There has been a great deal of media interest in the story, both locally in the Southwest and nationally, and Richard was

kind enough to mention our project whilst being interviewed on television. Richard and the team will be coming up to give a talk to the college and they will be bringing the finds with them. I will forward details of this when we have arranged the date.

#### Charles Barrie

Charles Barrie builds replica Spitfires and came to the College with some parts, photographs and drawings. He spent time taking about how he builds his replicas and was very inspiring to the students and us. He has also given us a very nice replica bulb holder that goes inside the cockpit and continues to offer valuable advice.



#### Dunlop Aircraft Tyres

We have been very fortunate to have secured sponsorship from Dunlop Aircraft Tyres Ltd for our three tyres; David Skepper Sales and Marketing Director, and Stuart Hawker

the Marketing Manager have both been very enthusiastic about the project and the provision of tyres from them is one of our big ticket items we no longer need to worry about. A huge thanks to both of them.

#### Fuselage progress

We have been making good progress on the fuselage build, managing to cut frames 13-22 using Paul McVittie's excellent drawings. With these CAD drawings we simply need to stick them to our pieces of wood and once dry, run the jigsaw around the lines.



Our fin and some of the new frames

This sounds simple, but in reality we need to maintain our working tolerance of  $\pm 0.5\text{mm}$ .



I have been very impressed with the students who have wanted to give cutting a try, not one has deviated outside this tolerance! We have also made a good start on the fin, or tail section, cutting its profile from 18mm ply and drawing up the ribs. It surprises quite a few people to see how large this section is, and it is also good to offer up the rudder and see a whole unit beginning to take shape. About the rudder; having discussed our progress with Charles Barrie, we decided to scrap our previous construction because, building it in the same way as the fin, with a profile cut this time from 9mm MDF, would allow us to avoid the headache with the thin trailing edge. In other words, a profile creates the shape rather than trying to make it from

...and the real thing at Airframe Assemblies a great many pieces.



## Airframe Assemblies

Despite the summer holidays being long and hot, I managed two trips to see Chris Mitchell at Airframe Assemblies on the Isle of Wight. It really is wonderful (for me anyway), to walk around their workshops and see the parts we are trying to build being constructed by professional Spitfire technicians. I take the opportunity to photograph as much as possible as it will really help us as we progress through our build. Despite Paul Monforton's excellent book, there's nothing like seeing the relevant pieces in the flesh! Chris is always very obliging and answers my questions generously.



A MkV fuselage coming together in a jig

On one of my trips he handed me two prepared pieces of rolled aluminium. These two parts are the strengtheners that go on the inside of the cockpit door. We are aiming to make the door correctly from aluminium, and despite the fact that there are over 30 individual pieces that make up the door, it is a huge help to have these as a starting



An original wing at Airframe Assemblies. This is a part of the build we will leave until much later on

point, and particularly as we have no metal-working facilities with which to make parts like this.

### Ben Jackson – BBC Radio Leicester

Ben continues to be a great supporter of our project and has interviewed me on a number of occasions about our progress. It has been lovely to have the opportunity to promote the project to a wider audience.

I continue to meet and be contacted by people interested in the project. It is very encouraging to have such a unanimously enthusiastic response. Over the summer holidays we were very fortunate to receive two monetary donations towards the build. We continue to need funds and help, so do please contact me if you are able to support the project, or would like further information. Email: [dberry@ratcliffe.leics.sch.uk](mailto:dberry@ratcliffe.leics.sch.uk)