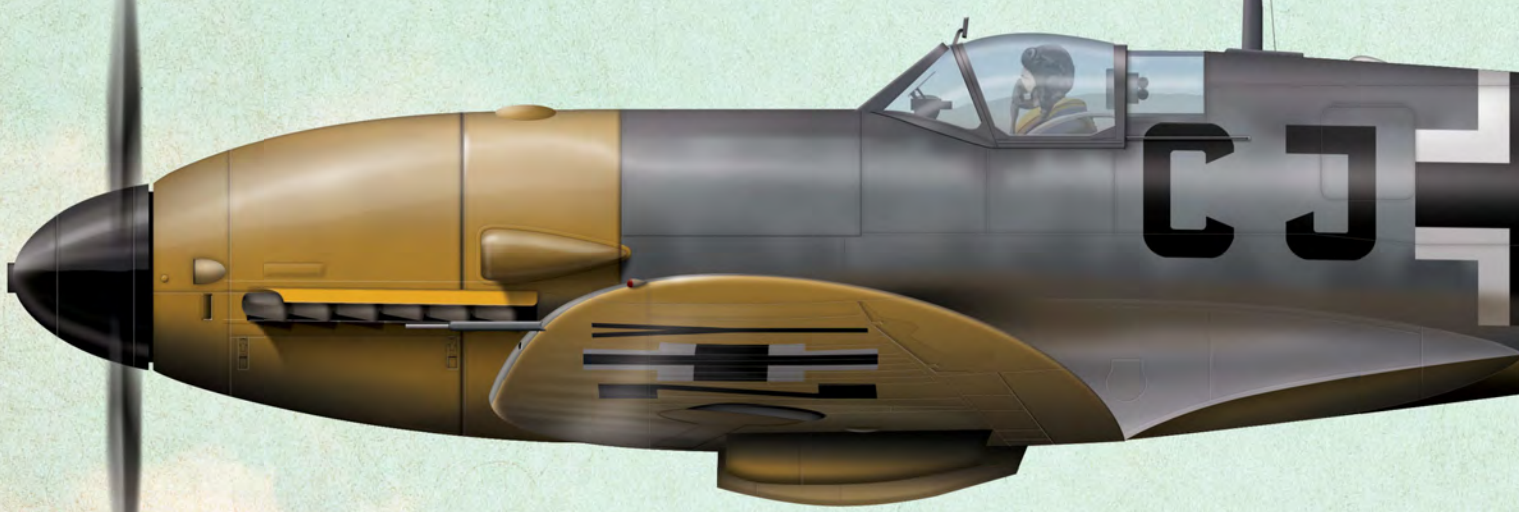


## IRON CRO



## SPITFIRES

IN AUGUST 1940 A SPITFIRE FORCE-LANDED AT A LUFTWAFFE AIRFIELD IN FRANCE; AT LAST THE

**Above**  
Spitfire Vb EN830 was fitted with a Daimler-Benz DB605A engine following its capture after a forced landing in November 1942. ANDY HAY-2017

**D**uring the 'Phoney War' and Battle of France the Hurricane was the RAF's only fighter in France. This changed in late May 1940 when the RAF was engaged over the Dunkirk beaches and Spitfires started to appear.

The Battle of France is regarded as ending on May 20. Operation 'Dynamo', the evacuation of Allied troops from France, began on the 26th.

Luftwaffe chiefs had been anxious to get their hands on a Spitfire since the war began, if not before. With Spitfires patrolling the French coast, it would only be a matter of time before one would force-land, almost intact. Obtaining one in good enough condition to be repaired and re-flown would be a massive intelligence coup for the Reich.

#### FIRST TO FALL

One of the first was K9977 'ZP-Q' of 74 Squadron on May 22. Damaged in combat with a Junkers Ju 88, Plt Off Dick Aubert crash-landed at Berck-sur-Mer, south of Le Touquet, where it was abandoned. Aubert got back to England, only to be killed in action three days later. When the Germans reached the coast, they were greeted with the sight of a Spitfire that

would never fly again.

Another, also from 74 Squadron, was K9867 'ZP-J' which came to grief the following day. Hit in the radiator by return fire from a Luftwaffe Henschel Hs 126 observation monoplane, which itself was shot down, Sqn Ldr Francis White carried out a forced landing at Calais and was rescued by a Miles Master flown by Flt Lt James Leathart of 54 Squadron. Again, the Germans obtained another battle-damaged Spitfire.

The final Spitfire retrieved was P9317 'ZD-A' of 222 Squadron. Damaged in combat on June 1, Plt Off Hugh Falkus (who later became a well-known naturalist and TV personality) force-landed at Le Touquet where he and his aircraft were captured.

Any German desires to discover a photo-reconnaissance Spitfire were satisfied when they captured Reims and found an example in a hangar. This was P9331 of 212 Squadron which suffered a glycol leak and landed there on June 6. The French were instructed to destroy it and although it was partially dismantled, they failed to finish the job.

A Spitfire had been based in France since July 1939. The Armée de l'Air had requested three examples in

the spring of 1938, but only one was delivered: Mk.Ia F.01, on July 17, 1939. It was at Orleans-Bricy airfield in June 1940 and as the Germans advanced it was burnt, but the hulk was salvaged and taken to Germany.

#### INCREDIBLE CLAIMS

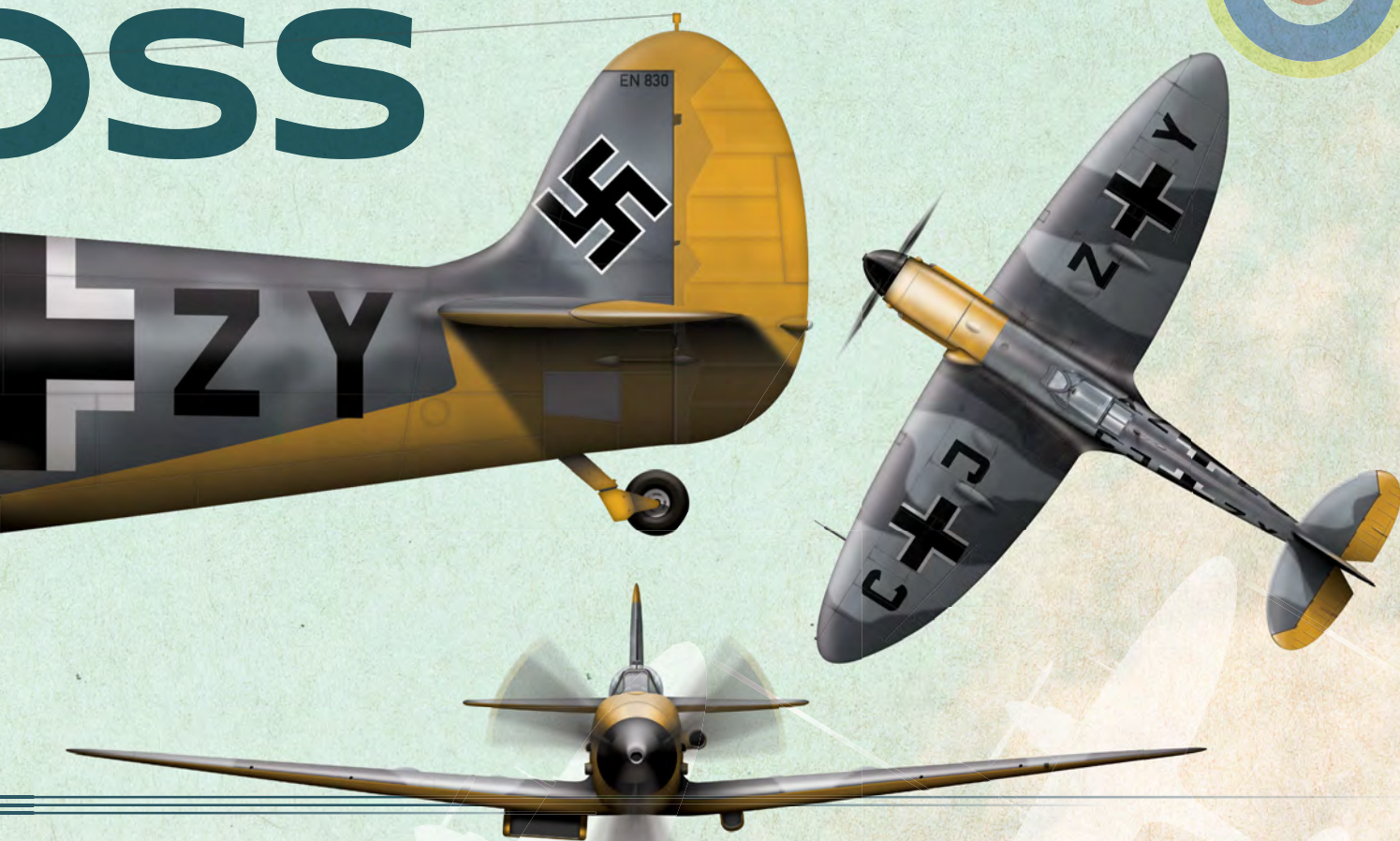
Despite having captured four RAF examples and the one-off French machine, the Luftwaffe did not have a flyable Spitfire. This changed on the evening of August 15, 1940, well into the Battle of Britain. That day, targets ranging from Northumberland in the north to as far south as Dorset were being attacked. The penultimate raid of the day was heading for Hampshire and Dorset.

Records state that 12 Ju 88s of I Gruppe, Lehgeschwader 1 (I/LG 1) took off from France at 16:15 hours (German time) bound for the airfield at Andover while 15 Ju 88s of II/LG 1 followed 30 minutes later en route for Worthy Down airfield. A quarter of an hour later, 27 Ju 87 'Stukas' of I Gruppe, Stukageschwader 1 (I/StG 1) got airborne to attack Portland, together with 20 Stukas of II/StG 2.

Part of the massive escort were Messerschmitt Bf 109s of I Gruppe,

# DSS

# ZY



## ENEMY 'SUPER FIGHTER' COULD BE EVALUATED. CHRIS GOSS TELLS HOW IT CAME ABOUT

Jagdgeschwader 53 (I/JG 53). The unit had moved from its base at Rennes to the forward airfield of Cherbourg Ost, also known as Thévillé. The rest of JG 53 was also involved that evening as were Bf 110s from Zerstörergeschwader 2 (ZG 2) and ZG 76.

In the combat that ensued over England, I/JG 53 claimed two RAF fighters: one by

Hauptmann (Hptm) Rolf Pingel of 2/JG 53 at an unknown location, the other by Hptm Hans-Karl Mayer of 1/JG 53, who claimed a Hurricane near Salisbury, probably that flown by Fg Off Gordon Cleaver of 601 Squadron who baled out wounded near Winchester.

Six of the 16 barrage balloons claimed by JG 53 fell to the guns of its first Staffel (1/JG 53). These stricken 'gas bags' alarmed the men of the Winchester Royal Observer

Corps who thought they were aircraft crashing in flames. Further west, II/JG 53's 6 Staffel pilots claimed a Spitfire and a Hurricane to Hptm Heinz Bretznütz, a Spitfire to Feldwebel Albrecht Baun and a Hurricane to Leutnant (Lt) Gerhard Michalski.

As the German formation headed back for France, RAF fighters including Spitfires of 234 Squadron, pursued them. Scrambled from Middle Wallop, ➔

**Below**  
*Spitfire I K9977 of 74 Squadron after being downed on May 21, 1940.*





**"PARKER CRASHED IN THE SEA OFF CHERBOURG WHERE HE WAS QUICKLY PICKED UP BY A GERMAN MOTOR TORPEDO BOAT. HE REMAINED A PRISONER OF WAR UNTIL 1945, FINISHING UP IN COLDITZ CASTLE"**

### OUT OF FUEL, OUT OF OPTIONS



Pit Off Richard Hardy after capture.

Pit Off Richard Hardy joined the RAF on a Short Service Commission and began training in February 1939, completing it at 6 Service Flying Training School at Little Rissington in Gloucestershire. He was posted to 234 Squadron at Leconfield, Yorkshire, on November 6, 1939.

Hardy had just one claim, a Dornier Do 17, damaged on August 8, 1940, seven days before he and N3277 were captured. He spent the rest of the war as a prisoner. He remained with the RAF until 1950, and died in September 1997.

**Top**  
Still carrying a letter from its 234 Squadron code 'AZ-H', Spitfire Ia N3277 was quickly painted in Luftwaffe markings and was the subject of considerable propaganda.

**Above right**  
Spitfire I K9867 of 74 Squadron was abandoned at Calais.

234 was actively involved in the subsequent battles, and returned claiming to have destroyed four Bf 110s and three, or possibly four, Bf 109s.

These assertions were optimistic as Luftwaffe records show they lost only four Stukas, seven Ju 88s and six Bf 110s that evening, but no Bf 109s. In addition to 234's claims, RAF fighters claimed a massive 33 Bf 110s, 10 Ju 88s, eight Stukas, a Heinkel He 111 and a Bf 109 destroyed. The 'probables' amounted to 10 Ju 88s, a Bf 109 and a Dornier



Do 215 with 5 Ju 88s, 2 Bf 110s and a He 111 damaged. German tallies were not much more accurate, claiming no fewer than 54 RAF fighters destroyed.

### THREE DOWN

Nevertheless, German records make specific mention of two RAF losses, which cannot be disputed: an RAF pilot being picked up by air-sea rescue and, unusually, a Spitfire landing at Théville, the pilot being taken prisoner.

That evening, 234 Squadron lost

three pilots. Having strayed too close to the French coast chasing a Bf 110, it appears that Australian Plt Off Vincent 'Bush' Parker fell victim to his intended prey. Unteroffizier (Uffz) Willy Lehner, radio operator/gunner to Lt Siegfried Hahn of Stab II/ZG 76, reported shooting down a Spitfire off Cherbourg before they crash-landed their damaged Bf 110 at Cherbourg-West.

Parker crashed in the sea off Cherbourg where he was quickly picked up by a German motor torpedo boat. He remained a



**Centre left**  
Personnel of 234 Squadron at St Eval, Cornwall, in July 1940



**Left**  
A Churchillian 'V' over a Nazi swastika was 234 Squadron's unofficial emblem.

**Below left**  
Hastily camouflaged with branches, N3277 following its capture.

**Below**  
The pilot who brought down N3277, Oblt Georg Claus of Stab III/JG 53, in a Bf 109. VIA WOUTERS



Spitfire. The pilot got out and surrendered to Hptm Rolf Pingel.”

It is believed that Hardy had strayed close to the French coast. Low on fuel and ammunition and with his return cut off by German fighters, he was forced to land at Théville; his capture was credited to Oberleutnant (Oblt) Georg Claus of Stab (headquarters flight) III/JG 53, recorded in the diary of Oblt Hans Von Hahn of 8/JG 53 as: “Claus brought a Spitfire to Cherbourg. He caught it in the middle of the Channel, the ‘Tommy’ made off to the south. Claus improved each of his turns with a brief burst of tracer and so it went all the way to Cherbourg. There the ‘Tommy’ lowered his undercarriage and luckily the flak failed to hit him. Then he landed safely and taxied in.”

prisoner of war (PoW) until 1945, finishing up in Colditz Castle. Sadly, on January 29, 1946 he was killed when his Hawker Tempest V of Millfield-based 56 Operational Training Unit crashed at Felkington, near Berwick-on-Tweed.

Meanwhile New Zealander Plt Off Cecil Hight tried to avoid crashing his badly damaged R6988 on houses in Bournemouth; his Spitfire impacted at Walsford Road, Meyrick Park. Hight was killed; his sacrifice led to a road being named after him.

The final 234 Squadron loss that day was Spitfire N3277 flown by Plt Off Richard Hardy – see the panel. He was commissioned at the

same time as Hight and had gone through training with the ‘Kiwi’.

### GLASS OF CHAMPAGNE

Uffz Werner Karl of 1/JG 53 was on the ground at Théville and recalled: “Somebody shouted ‘Spitfire!’ and I looked up to see a Spitfire coming over the airfield. The anti-aircraft guns opened fire and [it] banked around and landed. Having got over the shock, we crowded around the



### ROLLS-ROYCE TO DAIMLER-BENZ



Sporting a DB 605A, Spitfire V EN830 at Rechlin. KEY COLLECTION

Perhaps the best known of the captured Spitfires was Mk.Vb EN830. While being flown by Frenchman Plt Off B W M Scheidhauer of 131 Squadron on November 18, 1942 EN830 was hit by flak near Caen. Scheidhauer headed west, force-landing on German-occupied Jersey.

The Spitfire was taken to the E-Stelle at Rechlin, given Luftwaffe markings and the code 'CJ+ZY' and was flying again just a month after its 'arrival' in Jersey. It was then given radical surgery, its Rolls-Royce Merlin 45 was removed and a Daimler-Benz DB 605A - the powerplant of the Messerschmitt Bf 109G - was installed, along with a new electrical system.

In this guise, the Spitfire was flown in performance evaluation trials 'against' a Bf 109G, although the merits of such 'cross-matching' are doubtful. By April 1944 'CJ+ZY' had been grounded at Echterdingen, south of Stuttgart. It was destroyed there when USAAF B-17 Flying Fortresses targeted Stuttgart and Echterdingen on August 14, 1944.

Spitfire EN830 out-lived its pilot. Plt Off Scheidhauer ended up at Stalag Luft III at Sagan. On the night of March 24, 1943, he took part in the 'Great Escape'. He was captured and was one of the 50 escapees executed by the Gestapo five days after the famous break-out.



**Top right**  
Apart from damage behind the cockpit, Hardy's Spitfire was in good shape.

**Above**  
Beginning to paint the Balkenkreuz over N3277's roundel.

**Right**  
A German inspecting the hole caused by the cannon shell that wounded Hardy and led to the capture of N3277.

Another witness was Lt Karl Leonhard of 3/JG 53: "The English pilot slid back the hood and immediately raised his hands - he obviously expected to be shot at once otherwise. He was just as surprised when I asked him to lower his hands and instead to climb out and come to the pilot's mess and have a glass of champagne..."

Hardy, who was wounded in the back, probably by a cannon shell which entered the fuselage behind the cockpit on the port side, was quickly treated for his wounds and entertained by the Luftwaffe pilots



before heading off to become a PoW.

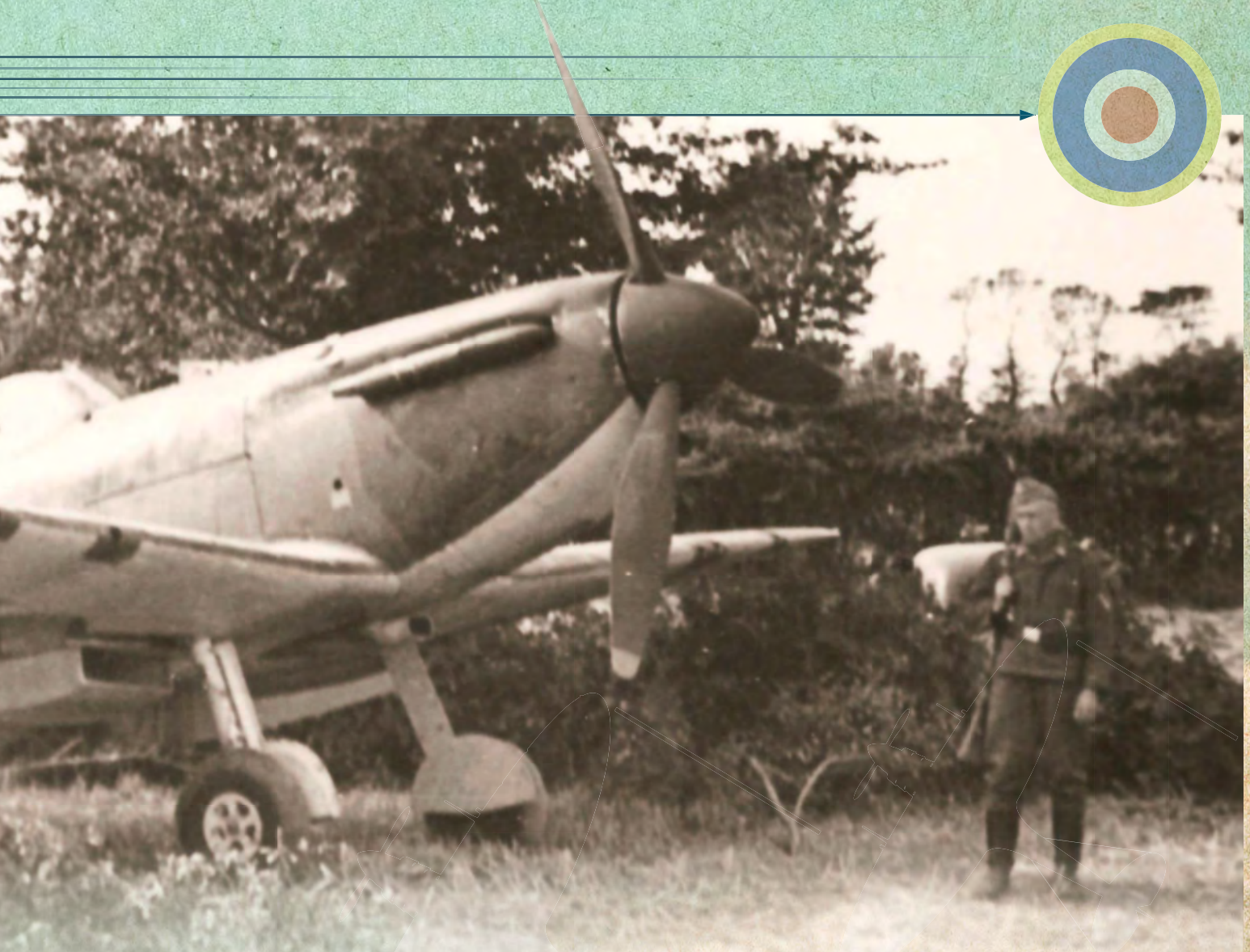
Spitfire Ia N3277 'AZ-H' was a source of great interest for German soldiers and airmen alike. It had first flown at Eastleigh, Southampton, on January 4, 1940. Twelve days later it was issued to 24 Maintenance Unit at Tern Hill, Shropshire, for pre-service checks and installations. It joined 234 on April 15, 1940 and was assigned to 'A' Flight; its operational career lasted exactly four months.

Given German markings, N3277 was ferried to Rechlin, northwest of Berlin, the home of the Erprobungsstelle (E-Stelle), the

Luftwaffe test and development centre. Given the E-Stelle codes '5+2' it was at Rechlin from late 1941 until at least the summer of 1942.

From the summer of 1942 the unexpected 'windfall' was back in France, allowing senior Luftwaffe pilots on frontline units to sample the type they were facing in combat daily. The 'Iron Cross Spitfire' was at Orleans-Bricy in March 1943 where personnel of JG 26 could become familiar with the Spitfire. What became of N3277 is not known, but it had been of inestimable value to the Luftwaffe. ●





*Retaining its basic RAF colours, N3277 was given a yellow rudder and undersides to help identify it as a captured type. ALL CHRIS GOSS ARCHIVE UNLESS NOTED*

