

A re-enactment of a Duxford scramble.



Spitfire Vb BM597 and Mk.IX RR232 getting airborne.



Below and right

A formation of Spitfires and Seafires flying over the BBMF line-up at Duxford.

ALL DARREN HARBAR

The BBMF's Spitfire Vb flying with Eurofighter Typhoon ZK349.



The Many Remember The Few

After several spectacular Battle of Britain commemorations at such historically significant places as Biggin Hill and Goodwood (formerly Westhampnett), anticipation was certainly high for Duxford's climatic, end of season event. Held over the weekend of

September 19 and 20, tickets for the Sunday show sold out several weeks up front, with Saturday's sales not far behind.

Thankfully blessed with fine weather, the scene was set for a glorious and immensely emotional salute to The Few, the relatively

small band of pilots who valiantly fought off the Luftwaffe in the summer and autumn of 1940. With numerous Supermarine Spitfires and Hawker Hurricanes participating, the weekend certainly did not disappoint - highlights included dramatic scrambles, evocative flypasts and

stirring solo displays.

It's almost impossible to single out particular aircraft or pilots for special praise. All played an equally significant part, ensuring that this special tribute will live long in the memory. The opening 'Messerschmitt attack' and



The RAF's Red Arrows display team flying with the BBMF.



Tickets for Duxford's Battle of Britain Anniversary Air Show sold out weeks in advance - and the event lived up to **Steve Beebee's** expectation

consequent 'scramble' is one image that has stayed in the mind of this writer, along with the concluding Spitfire formation flypasts and tail chases, but everyone will have their favourites.

On the Sunday, six Battle of Britain Memorial Flight (BBMF)

fighters departed Duxford to fly over Westminster Abbey, where a service attended by several veterans had just taken place. Ultimately, this salute was staged not for us, the many, but for these gentlemen and of course their brothers-in-arms who are no longer with us.

From the men and women who built and maintained the aircraft in 1940, plus those who battled to keep communication links and radar operational, to the tactical genius of the 'top brass', all played an invaluable role in a conflict that ranks among the most significant

events in British history.

If The Few are fading, then the embers of their achievement leave us with a glow of reassurance. An understanding that when anything less would result in tyranny and hatred, people can and will stand together. And that once, we did. ●

A HARD DAY'S

PARTICIPANTS AUGUST 18, 2015

AIRCRAFT:

Spitfire I X4650
 Spitfire I 'P3708'
 Spitfire Vb EP120
 Spitfire Vb BM597
 Spitfire Vc EE602
 Spitfire IX TA805
 Spitfire IX MK356
 Spitfire IX MH434
 Spitfire IX RR232
 Spitfire Tr.9 MJ627
 Spitfire Tr.9 SM520
 Spitfire Tr.9 ML407
 Spitfire XI PL965
 Spitfire XIV MV268
 Spitfire XVI TEL84
 Spitfire XVI RW382
 Seafire III PP972
 Hurricane I 'P2921'
 Hurricane I R4118
 Hurricane IIc PZ865
 Hurricane XII 'P3700'
 Sea Hurricane Ib Z7015

OWNED OR OPERATED BY:

Comanche Warbirds
 Spitfire The One
 The Fighter Collection
 Historic Aircraft Collection
 Biggin Hill Heritage Hangar
 Biggin Hill Heritage Hangar
 RAF Battle of Britain Memorial Flight
 Old Flying Machine Company
 Martin Phillips
 Biggin Hill Heritage Hangar
 Boulton Flight Academy
 Carolyn Grace
 Hangar 11 Collection
 The Fighter Collection
 Biggin Hill Heritage Hangar
 Biggin Hill Heritage Hangar
 Air Leasing
 Biggin Hill Heritage Hangar
 Peter and Polly Vacher
 RAF Battle of Britain Memorial Flight
 Historic Aircraft Collection
 Shuttleworth Collection

Also present was North American P-51D Mustang G-SHWN (painted to represent Mustang IV KH774 of the RAF's 112 Squadron).

The aircraft flew a series of flypasts at several locations. DARREN HARBAR



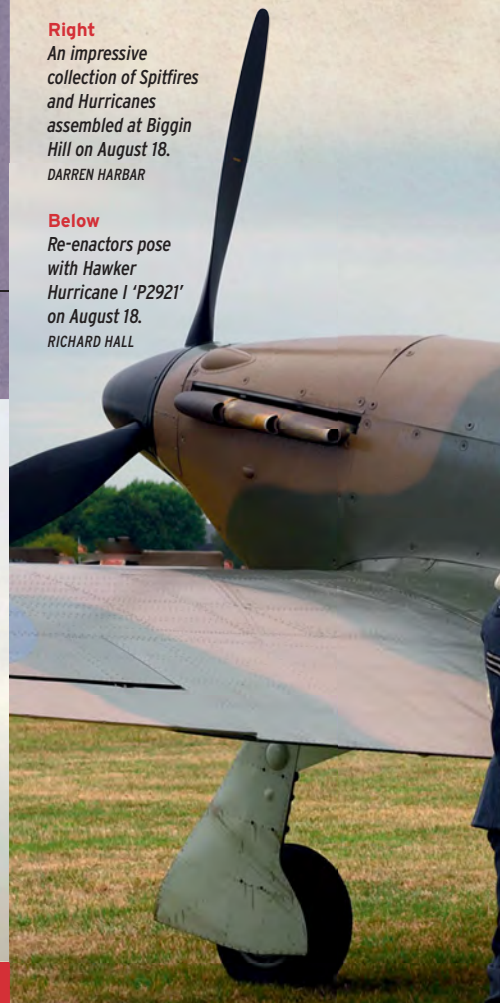
Despite some inclement weather, 17 Supermarine Spitfires and five Hawker Hurricanes got airborne from Biggin Hill on August 18.

The event was staged to mark the 75th anniversary of 'the hardest day', a gruelling series of air battles that resulted in the greatest number of casualties to both sides during the Battle of Britain. Several veterans – including Sqn Ldr Tony Pickering, who flew from Biggin Hill with 32 Squadron in 1940 – were among around 3,000 visitors attending the Greater London airfield.

Formations of aircraft subsequently flew over several locations that were key to the battle, including Gravesend, the Solent and Dover, before returning to Biggin Hill. ●

Right
An impressive collection of Spitfires and Hurricanes assembled at Biggin Hill on August 18.
 DARREN HARBAR

Below
Re-enactors pose with Hawker Hurricane I 'P2921' on August 18.
 RICHARD HALL





FLIGHT

A LARGE FORMATION OF SPITFIRES AND HURRICANES TOOK OFF FROM BIGGIN HILL TO COMMEMORATE AN IMPORTANT ANNIVERSARY



DAY OF DAYS

A record-breaking number of Spitfires and Hurricanes turned out to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the day Hitler's invasion plans finally crumbled to dust

WORDS: TONY HARMSWORTH



ABOVE: Black Section, with John Dodd flying Karl Grimmer's Hurricane IIb 'AG244'/G-CBOE, and Chris Lorraine in Spitfire IX MK732/PH-OUQ from the Royal Netherlands Air Force Historic Flight at Gilze-Rijen. This may well have been the first time a silver Hurricane and Spitfire have ever been pictured together air-to-air.

RICHARD PAVER

The second of the three big late-summer Battle of Britain 75th anniversary events saw the largest gathering of Spitfires and Hurricanes of this or any other year since the war coming together at Goodwood aerodrome in Sussex on 15 September. Bracketed between the Biggin Hill 'Hardest Day' salute and the Duxford show (see pages 22-25 of *Aeroplane* November 2015 and pages 26-30 of this issue), the Goodwood Battle of Britain Day tribute attracted a grand total of 32 examples of these two wonderful fighter aircraft to participate in a series of flypasts over various locations in southern England, many of which have strong links to the greatest air battle in history.

The event was the brainchild of Matt Jones, co-founder and managing director of the Goodwood-based Boulton Flight Academy (BFA), the operators of Spitfire IXT SM520/G-ILDA. Matt says: "Like all in the historic aviation industry, we realised the 75th was the last 'big number' commemoration that most of the remaining veterans — the people who we fly in honour of — will be around to witness. I had the idea about 18 months ago, at the time that Prince Harry flew in SM520 down here. I put the idea to Harry, who responded with an unequivocal 'yes'. The Royal household was also hugely enthusiastic. So the chairman of BFA, Steve Boulton-Brooks, and I took the idea to Lord March here at Goodwood."

Every September the Goodwood circuit hosts the world's largest historic motor racing meeting, the Goodwood Revival. Matt explains, "With Battle of Britain Day falling this year just two days after the Revival, it was a perfect fit. What with all the infrastructure that would be on site, it wouldn't be a case of having to start from scratch."

While the 2015 Revival was blessed with good weather, 14 September saw almost an inch of rain falling in the Goodwood area, and the morning of the 15th dawned wet and blustery. Seventy-five years earlier, overnight rain had given way to a fine morning at RAF Westhampnett. The RAF Tangmere satellite airfield — now Goodwood aerodrome — was home to just one fighter squadron in September

1940, No 602 (City of Glasgow) Squadron. The unit, led by 25-year-old Glasgow-born Sqn Ldr Sandy Johnstone, had seen extensive action since arriving at Westhampnett from Drem on 13 August. One particularly busy afternoon came on 25 August, when 602 was scrambled to 'Angels 15' over Weymouth, Dorset, to intercept a large force of Junkers Ju 88s and Dornier Do 17Zs, complete with fighter escort. Johnstone shot down a Messerschmitt Bf 110 followed by a Bf 109, which went into an uncontrollable flat spin. He recalled: "I followed him down until he crashed into a spinney on the outskirts of Dorchester and burst into flames."

Another Scot, Flt Lt Donald Jack, became embroiled in a dogfight with five Bf 110s, shooting one down. 602 ended the day with 14 confirmed kills, four probables and two damaged, for the loss of two Spitfires. Happily, their pilots baled out. Fg Off William Coverley escaped from his burning Spitfire over Dorchester at 17.47hrs, while Sgt Melvyn Sprague, who was shot down by Messerschmitts south of Dorchester, jumped out over the sea and was picked up by a Supermarine Walrus. Both men were unhurt.

A few days after his dunking Sprague got married, returning to Westhampnett on 7 September. At 16.10hrs on that sunny Saturday, 12 Spitfires from 602 were scrambled to patrol over Hawkinge at 15,000ft, where they encountered a huge German formation. During the running dogfights that ensued, William Coverley attacked a Bf 109 near Biggin Hill, but his Spitfire was soon plummeting to the ground in flames. He was seen to bale out, before his aircraft crashed at Fosters Farm near Tonbridge.

Plt Off Archibald Lyall, another Glaswegian, shared a Bf 110 and damaged a Do 17Z, and Plt Off Ellis Aries shot down a Do 17Z near Biggin Hill. After taking return fire from the bomber, and with his Spitfire trailing black smoke, Aries had to make a forced landing close to the A20 near Wrotham, Kent. Plt Off Harry Moody — who had been shot down on 17 August off Bognor Regis, baling out after suffering



ABOVE: Purple Section, including Aero Legends' Spitfire IX, the IWM's Spitfire Ia and the Historic Aircraft Collection Spitfire V and Hurricane, set course for the coast, along which they flew as far as Hastings. They turned north, heading for Royal Tunbridge Wells, Gravesend and Chelmsford, skirting west of Colchester before landing at Duxford. PETER R. ARNOLD

BELOW: For the first time in the preservation age, two airworthy Seafires appeared side-by-side. In the foreground is Kennet Aviation's MkXVII, while Dave Puleston taxis in MkIII PP972. PETER R. ARNOLD

burns to his hands and landing near Arundel — was last seen late that afternoon in combat over Biggin Hill, after which no trace of either him or his Spitfire was found. It is thought he may have crashed into the Thames Estuary.

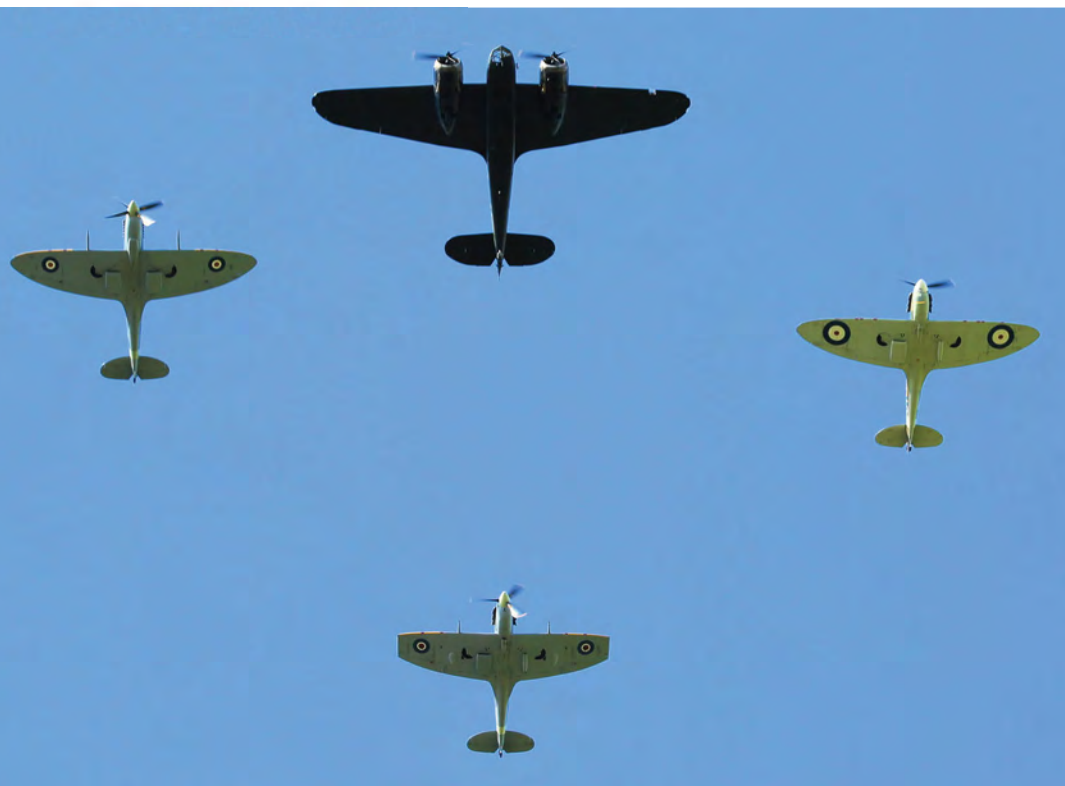
Four days on from returning to Westhampnett following his honeymoon, 30-year-old Melvyn Sprague and his colleagues from 'B' Flight intercepted a group of Bf 110s over Selsey Bill. After pressing home his attack, Sprague's Spitfire was hit by return fire from the rear gunner and crashed into the sea, trailing black smoke. For the next three weeks his stunned widow was seen every day sitting in a car by the airfield, gazing for hours on end at the 'B' Flight huts. Exactly a month later, Sprague's body was washed up on Brighton beach.



The Luftwaffe incurred its greatest losses for nearly a month on 15 September. Scrambled at 14.20hrs, No 602 Squadron intercepted a formation of Heinkel He 111s and Do 17s over Edenbridge, Kent. Four Dorniers were soon despatched, the remainder jettisoning their bombs

BELOW: On the evening of 14 September, royalty, veterans and flypast pilots were among the guests for a banquet at Goodwood House. BOULTBEE





ABOVE: Yellow Section, composed of the Blenheim and three Spitfires (MH434 at left, AR213 on the right, and EP120 behind), flies over Goodwood after forming up.

PETER R. ARNOLD

and heading for cloud cover before setting course for home. 602's Plt Off Archibald 'Par' Lyall chased a Dornier towards the coast, finally sending it down in flames five miles north of St Leonards. While returning along the coast, Lyall attacked and damaged another Dornier near Beachy Head.

The only 602 casualty on 15 September was Sgt Cyril Babbage. At 15.20hrs, the Merlin engine in his Spitfire sustained damage from a Dornier gunner over Beachy Head, and Babbage made a successful forced landing at Shoreham. One of 602's

Beachy Head, and crashed at Alfriston. And on 26 October, 21-year-old Sgt Douglas Elcome was reported missing upon failing to return from a routine patrol.

One of 602's most successful pilots on 15 September, Archibald Lyall, who had three confirmed kills during the Battle with at least eight more damaged and several probables, was shot down over the Isle of Wight on 28 November 1940. The 27-year-old Scot died after baling out at too low an altitude.

Fortunately, in view of the poor morning weather, most of the

'Seeing the other aircraft in close formation brought back a lot of memories'

OPPOSITE: Glorious Goodwood on 15 September, with Orange Section, comprising Comanche Fighters' Spitfire Ia X4650 and Air Leasing-operated Spitfire IX ML407 and Seafire III PP972, in the foreground. They flew the most easterly route, passing over Ipswich before heading back to their bases.

PETER R. ARNOLD

new pilots that day was Fg Off Paddy Barthropp, who noted in his logbook, "thousands of them". His following logbook entry read, "Still thousands of them!"

On 16 September, William Coverley, missing since 7 September, was found dead, caught up in a tree near Tonbridge. Before baling out he had been badly burned.

During the Battle of Britain, No 602 Squadron pilots scored 35.5 victories for the loss of 15 aircraft. Sandy Johnstone had eight confirmed kills, with two shared, one probable and six damaged. Sadly, before the end of the Battle, two more of 602's pilots were dead. On 7 October Sgt Basil Whall — who had flown Gloster Gladiators with No 263 Squadron from HMS *Furious* during the Norwegian campaign in April 1940 — took hits from a Ju 88 gunner off

75th anniversary tribute aircraft had arrived at Goodwood prior to the start of the Revival on 9 September. The original take-off time of 12.00hrs had to be postponed until 14.00, but as the weather began to clear during the late morning of 15 September, several more aircraft arrived, including Peter Teichman in his Spitfire PRXI from North Weald and Spitfire XVI TE184, coming in from Biggin Hill with owner Stephen Stead at the helm. Sadly, one other expected arrival from Biggin, Spitfire IXT MJ627, stayed at its base with magneto problems.

Matt Jones says: "Everyone was so positive about getting here, but, inevitably, a few aircraft didn't make it. Jan Roozen, whose Hurricane I P3351/F-AZXR was damaged on 25 May when it nosed over at the end of the runway at its Dijon base, did everything he could to get the aeroplane repaired in

time, but just a week before the event he called to say that, sadly, it wouldn't be ready. But we did get John Sessions' Spitfire IX from Seattle, and the MkVIII from Germany. The Battle of Britain Memorial Flight brought along all their airworthy fighters, and their CO, Sqn Ldr Duncan Mason, oversaw the flying safety programme."

The most eagerly-awaited participant was Hurricane 'AG244'/G-CBOE, which first flew after a lengthy restoration at Thruxton, Hampshire in July 2014, and was making its UK public debut at Goodwood. Acquired by Karl-Friedemann Grimminger in December 2014, the silver-painted machine is based at Schwäbisch Hall, 45 miles north-east of Stuttgart. John Dodd, who has 200 hours on Spitfires and displays many other historic aircraft, was nominated to fly it. He says: "Looking at the post-event pictures, I can't believe it was me flying a Hurricane at such a great event. When we were children, my brother had a large-scale Keil Kraft flying model Hurricane. He wouldn't let me touch it. I have always wanted to get into a Hurricane: there is something very special about it."



The Hurricane was part of Black Section, one of 10 individual formations that would fly different routes round southern England, travelling as far as Exeter in the west and Ipswich in the east. "We never set out to put on an airshow", says Matt Jones. "The idea was to give as many people as possible the chance to see the aircraft in their individual formations, looking much as they did back in the summer of 1940."

The ever-enthusiastic John Dodd adds: "If you sat me down with a map and asked where I would like go in a Hurricane accompanied by two Spitfires, the route that Black Section was allocated would be it. We had all the choice places: from Goodwood to



Shoreham, Beachy Head, the Battle of Britain memorial at Capel-le-Ferne, Dover, Headcorn, Tunbridge Wells, over the Kent Weald, turning south to avoid Gatwick, the Ashdown Forest and back over the South Downs to Goodwood.”

Appropriately, the first aircraft to get airborne in front of the all-ticket, capacity 32,000 crowd was Battle of Britain survivor Spitfire IIa P7350, flown by Sqn Ldr Dunc Mason. He was leading Red Section, comprising four Spitfires and two Hurricanes from the BBMF, who were joined for the first part of the sortie by Matt Jones in Spitfire IXT SM520 and John Romain in PV202. In the rear cockpit of SM520 was 95-year-old Battle of Britain pilot Tom Neil, who, exactly 75 years earlier, flying a No 249 Squadron Hurricane from North Weald, shot down two Bf 109s and a Do 17Z, sharing another Do 17Z and probably destroying a He 111. Tom remembers 15 September 1940: “It was a lovely sunny day, with big thick rolls of cumulus cloud. I flew four times, but in combat it was total confusion: the people at the sharp end know least what is happening.”

Taking advantage of a brief few hours of sunshine 75 years later, White and Red Sections flew together out around the southern coast of the Isle of Wight and inland up to Salisbury, where the BBMF turned north-east to head for the next turning point at Bristol. From there they went east to land at RAF Northolt, later transiting back to Goodwood. After Salisbury, the two IXTs proceeded up to Basingstoke, turned south over Dunsfold and then back to Goodwood.

After landing, Tom Neil reported: “It was a bit bumpy down low, but seeing the other aircraft in close formation brought back a lot of memories. It was quite an emotional business.”

Back on 7 July this year, the author was privileged enough to sit in on an interview that historian James Holland was conducting with No 92 Squadron



ABOVE: Mission accomplished. Tom Neil in the back of Spitfire IXT SM520, with some of the team that made it happen: HRH Prince Harry, SM520 pilot Matt Jones, Spitfire PV202 trainee/back-seater and former paratrooper Nathan Forster, and Steve Boulton-Brooks. Matt Jones said: “Flying Tom in the Spitfire is the greatest honour I will ever have in my flying career.” BOULTBEE

veteran Fg Off (later Sqn Ldr) Geoffrey Wellum, who flew as Brian Kingcombe’s wingman. The interview was being recorded for the excellent Channel Four programme ‘Battle of Britain: the Day the War Was Won’. Remembering 15 September, Geoffrey said: “You offer up a little prayer, you know. ‘It’s going to be a very busy day, oh Lord, and if I forget you, don’t forget me. Just give me this day please. Please, please give me this day.’”

Somehow, the organisers of the 75th anniversary tribute also had their prayers answered. Within an hour of the last aeroplane landing back at Goodwood, the wind got up dramatically and the clouds rolled over. So, on 16 September, with no Spitfires overhead, it was once again raining stair rods over Sussex.

The Goodwood participants

Section/ number	Aircraft/serial	Operator	Pilot(/passenger)
White 1 2	Spitfire IXT SM520 Spitfire IXT PV202	Boulton ARC	Matt Jones/Tom Neil John Romain/ Nathan Forster
Red 1 2 3 4 5 6	Hurricane IIc PZ865 Spitfire IIa P7350 Spitfire LFVb AB910 Spitfire LFXb MK356 Spitfire LFXVle TE311 Hurricane IIc LF363	BBMF BBMF BBMF BBMF BBMF BBMF	Gp Capt Jez Attridge Sqn Ldr Dunc Mason Wg Cdr Justin Helliwell Flt Lt Antony Parkinson Sqn Ldr Andy Millikin Sqn Ldr Mark Discombe
Green 1 2 3	Spitfire PRXI PL965 Hurricane I R4118 Sea Hurricane Ib Z7015	Hangar 11 Peter Vacher Shuttleworth	Peter Teichman Stu Goldspink Chris Huckstep
Blue 1 2 3	Spitfire FRXIVe ‘MV268’ Spitfire LFXVle TD248 Spitfire LFIX SL633	TFC Spitfire Ltd Historic Flight Foundation	Carl Schofield Ian Smith John Sessions
Orange 1 2 3	Spitfire IXT ML407 Seafire IIc PP972 Spitfire Ia X4650	Air Leasing Air Leasing Comanche Fighters	Richard Grace/ Cpl Alan Robinson Dave Puleston Brian Smith
Yellow 1 2 3 4	Blenheim IF ‘L6739’ Spitfire LFIX MH434 Spitfire Ia ‘P7308’ Spitfire LFVb EP120	ARC OFMC Comanche Fighters TFC	Lee Proudfoot Steve Jones Pete Kynsey Stephen Grey
Purple 1 2 3 4	Spitfire Ia N3200 Spitfire LFVb BM597 Spitfire HFIXe TD314 Hurricane IIa ‘P3700’	IWM HAC Keith Perkins HAC	Cliff Spink Paul Bonhomme Dave Ratcliffe Dave Harvey
Pink 1 2	Seafire XVII SX336 Spitfire HFIXc RR232	Kennet Aviation Martin Phillips	Lt Cdr Chris Götke ‘Willy’ Hackett
Brown 1 2 3	Spitfire LFXVle TE184 Hurricane X ‘P2921’ Spitfire LFXVle RW382	Stephen Stead BHMH BHMH	Stephen Stead Clive Denney Dan Griffith
Black 1 2 3 4	Spitfire LFIX MK732 Spitfire HFVIlIc ‘MT928’ Hurricane IIb ‘AG244’ P-51D Mustang ‘KH774’	Royal Netherlands Air Force MaxAlpha Aviation Karl-Friedemann Grimminger Shaun Patrick	Chris Lorraine Maxi Gainza John Dodd Eskil Amdal



DUXFORD'S BIG SHOW

The flying display director's viewpoint on planning a truly great Spitfire spectacular for the Battle of Britain anniversary

WORDS: JEANNE FRAZER

BELOW: IWM Duxford's 'Big Wing' – 15 Spitfires, two Seafires – roars overhead, as the six BBMF fighters prepare to start.

DARREN HARBAR

Reaction in 2010 to IWM Duxford's 16-ship of Spitfires which roared around in trail — serendipitously against the perfect backdrop of a 'Wootton' sky — left little doubt as to public expectations for the Battle of Britain Anniversary Air Show in 2015. The agreed aim with the IWM was to mount a

formation of 20 of these iconic aircraft to mark the 75th anniversary.

This was not to ignore the mighty Hurricane, which any Battle of Britain historian will argue warrants more than equal recognition for having deterred Hitler's invasion attempts. Whatever the reality, the influence of wartime propaganda ensured that the public's imagination

was well and truly captured by the Spitfire, and the reputation of the real workhorse suffered. Seventy-five years on, purists and Hurricane enthusiasts will continue to despair whilst the majority clamours for Spitfires.

The summer of 2015 promised a country-wide Battle of Britain 75th bonanza, and a dream period for all



those who relished the sight of elliptical-winged formations and the unmistakable growls of Merlins and Griffons in the skies overhead. From the first large gatherings in July at the Flying Legends Air Show and RIAT, the senses reeled from a series of fabulous commemorative flypasts organised by Richard Lake from Humberside, then by Peter Monk from Biggin Hill, and finally by Matt Jones and Boulton Aviation from Goodwood. Each of these directed sections to fly over as wide an area as possible, so ensuring that sites such as the Battle of Britain Memorial at Capel-le-Ferne in Kent, which Geoffrey Page founded and fought so hard over many years to finance and establish, were rightly saluted. A week prior to Duxford, Spitfire owners were enticed to Goodwood for static display over the Revival weekend, in preparation for the mass launch on Battle of Britain Day, Tuesday 15 September — where the added presence and active participation of Prince Harry ensured headline media coverage. Predictably, although other Battle of Britain types also flew on most of these occasions, it was the Spitfires which once again attracted the glory.

Operators of Spitfires range from individuals who own and fly one, to others who manage and crew as many as six on behalf of various owners. For me as flying display director, this entailed constant

monitoring and re-checking of their nominated pilots for individual aircraft, to ensure that the operators of the ‘many’ did not elect one who might be flying for one of the ‘few’. The exciting addition of ever more airframes to the UK airworthiness register is not necessarily paralleled by the number of pilots granted a CAA Display Authorisation on high-performance piston-engined types — or, at least, not by those whose display CV includes the magic experience of massed formation flying and tailchasing.



Which leads on to the question of a formation leader: for me, there was no debate. In the heydays of the Tiger Club at Redhill Aerodrome — famous for decades as more or less the only place in the UK where like-minded individuals could be sure of finding the essential combination of enthusiasm for sport flying and suitable aircraft for hire — Brian Smith was senior check pilot. Run along rather charmingly old-school lines, the Tiger Club appointed its most competent members as check pilots, responsible for flying with newcomers and eventually sending them solo in a Tiger Moth. From his youth as a ‘hangar rat’, Brian rapidly qualified for the British Aerobatic Team to fly in the World Championships, and in his day job also likely became the youngest four-engined commercial captain in UK history, flying CL-44s and Boeing 707s.

In the 1980s, when I was given the opportunity to organise the Club’s airshows (loos, litter, traffic systems and all that good stuff), Brian sorted the display participation, wrote the flying programme and ran it on the day. The

title ‘flying display director’ had yet to be coined by the CAA, so Brian held a stand-up briefing in the hangar, communicated any necessary updates on the flightline, flew in at least three different acts, and then led the ‘finale’ mixed formation Balbo, which in one year boasted 37 aircraft. Every display programme ran like clockwork, with all aircraft non-radio and hand signals employed air-to-air.

By the time I was seeking a Spitfire formation leader for Sea Wings 2000 over Southampton Water, Brian had notched up considerable warbird flying experience, initially in the Old Flying Machine Company’s legendary MkIX MH434 but subsequently in a range of types operated by other Duxford-based organisations. His design and leadership of the 14-ship at Southampton, where a lone

ABOVE: Some of the modern-day ‘Few’ walk to their mounts on the Duxford flightline.

DARREN HARBAR



The Duxford ‘Big Wing’

Section/ number	Aircraft/serial	Operator	Pilot
Blue			
1	Spitfire LFIX MH434	OFMC	Brian Smith
2	Spitfire LFXVle TD248	Spitfire Ltd	Cliff Spink
3	Spitfire Ia N3200	IWM	John Romain
4	Spitfire Ia X4650	Comanche Fighters	Dan Friedkin
5	Spitfire Ia ‘P7308’	Comanche Fighters	Paul Bonhomme
Yellow			
1	Seafire IIIC PP972	Air Leasing	Pete Kynsey
2	Seafire IXT ML407	Air Leasing	Dave Puleston
3	Spitfire IXT SM520 (Sat)	Boulton	Matt Jones
	Spitfire HFIXc RR232 (Sun)	Martin Phillips	Matt Jones
Green			
1	Spitfire LFBv BM597	HAC	Charlie Brown
2	Spitfire LFBv EP120	TFC	Dave Southwood
3	Spitfire HFIXc RR232 (Sat)	Martin Phillips	‘Willy’ Hackett (Sat)
	Spitfire IXT SM520 (Sun)	Boulton	Chris Hadlow (Sun)
Red			
1	Spitfire IXT PV202	ARC	Steve Jones
2	Spitfire HFIXc TD314	Keith Perkins	Dave Ratcliffe
3	Spitfire LFIX SL633	Historic Flight Foundation	John Sessions
White			
1	Spitfire FRXIVe ‘MV268’	TFC	Stu Goldspink
2	Spitfire FRXVIII SM845	Spitfire Ltd	Ian Smith
3	Seafire XVII SX336	Kennet Aviation	John Beattie



ABOVE: A mass of Spitfires, plus Seafire III, taxiing out. This required careful planning of its own, for instance keeping the engine start of the Spitfire Ias until last to lessen the risk of their overheating.

BEN DUNNELL

Hurricane pleasingly integrated itself behind 13 Spitfires, demonstrated his aplomb in the role. He was subsequently responsible for numerous Spitfire formations at IWM Duxford, culminating in the 16-ship staged there in 2010.

Booking of Spitfires (and Hurricanes) for September 2015 began more than 12 months earlier,

initially with those based at Duxford and then widening to encompass other operators. The population of airframes and the ownership and/or operation of others is subject to regular fluctuation, with the result that some listed 'confirmed' were later relegated to 'possibles', and others withdrawn for reasons such as unserviceability.

Since staging what emerged as the 'post-RAF' record formation of 13 Spitfires for Southampton Salutes the Spitfire in 1996, I've had the joyful task on several occasions of trying to round up all the airworthy Spitfires for an airshow. Initial expectations tend to become tempered over the months of planning, and adoption of a philosophical attitude is essential for sane survival. Ambitions stated at the outset ultimately have to be balanced with un-seen operational considerations. It remains vital to prioritise flight safety and the 'comfort zones' of the leader and participating pilots over any other issue, particularly when a massed formation is envisaged. It was good fortune for Duxford in late September that many of the pilots had benefited from an unprecedented number of hours on type throughout the anniversary year, with a good deal of formation flying thanks to all the earlier 'Spitfests' around the UK.

In endeavouring to gather 20 to fly together for the 75th, it was vital to keep the leader abreast of how this was to be populated in terms

THE SHOW REVIEWED

No wonder so much spontaneous applause rang out at IWM Duxford's Battle of Britain Anniversary Air Show on 19-20 September. A hugely enthusiastic, capacity crowd, the most appropriate of venues, marvellous early autumn weather, and one of the finest routines seen at any recent display in the 17-ship Spitfire and Seafire highlight – it had everything.

To be there was to immerse oneself in exploring the events of 75 years ago. Living history groups re-enacted activities at a typical Fighter Command dispersal point, while the museum had a new 'Duxford's People in the Battle of Britain' exhibition featuring personal details and mementoes from seven individuals based there in 1940.

Take the diaries of Guy Mayfield, the RAF Duxford station chaplain. On 5 September, he recorded: "Got back here at 16.30 and heard, with a great shock, that Pinkham, the CO of 19, had been shot down and killed near Snodland at 10.15. This news cast a gloom over us, for we liked him very much. He was young for his

command but a great man who evolved the new fighter tactics. He will find friends from his squadron waiting for him."

Pinkham was Sqn Ldr Philip 'Tommy' Pinkham, appointed as No 19 Squadron's commanding officer on 3 June 1940. Flying Spitfire I P9422, he lost his life following combat over the Thames Estuary against Dornier Do 17s and their escorting Messerschmitt Bf 109s. Pinkham and his colleagues were in mind as the programme opened with the sound of air raid sirens, the airfield under attack by Spitfire Ltd's and the Aircraft Restoration Company's Buchóns accompanied by the ARC-operated, ex-Lindsey Walton Bf 108. The ringing of a scramble bell, with re-enactors running to the flightline, preceded the Hurricane and Spitfire defenders – respectively Peter Vacher's R4118 and the IWM's N3200 – taking to the air before engaging in a series of tailchasing dogfights. It set the atmosphere well for what was to follow.

On Saturday it had seemed doubtful that proceedings would start on time, as traffic queued back from an accident on the M11.

BELOW: The scramble bell sounds, and Fighter Command leaps once more into defence of Duxford. DARREN HARBAR



of aircraft and pilots. The leader, in putting together a safe and workable formation, has to consider and plan for a plethora of options: performance of an individual aircraft; where each would be best positioned within the formation; whether or not a pilot who has been nominated to fly a particular airframe has section-leader experience; and even whether or not all the same pilots are available to fly on two consecutive days of a display.



I've no idea how many different 'plots' Brian must have devised over the weeks leading up to Duxford, but strongly suspect that his constantly re-edited document must have grown to several gigabytes. At one stage, with only a month or so to go, our target of 20 was reached; in fact, we had the back-up of a 21st in case of one going unserviceable on start-up. In a matter of days, this happy situation evaporated, and subsequent sourcing of one further aircraft was then offset by the eleventh-hour withdrawal of another due to unserviceability.

Throughout all this rollercoaster of aircraft participation — and with pilots still changing a matter of 24 hours prior to the first day's display — Brian projected an enviable air of cool. And he produced what can only be described as the best.

The end result of a 17-ship, albeit short of the original ambition, was so good that that I doubt anyone was still counting. For those interested in record-keeping, another four Spitfires were also present at Duxford both days courtesy of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. On Sunday they staged what Brian Smith described as a "show-stopper", an immaculate six-ship formation display with their two Hurricanes, culminating in a mixed flypast with the fighters tucked in closely to the nine Hawks of the Red Arrows.

All other activity on the airfield ceased as the 17 Spitfires started engines, taxied, lined up and took off in stream to the west. This in itself was a spectacle, but as the formation later re-approached from the east and flew along the crowdline, a 'Mexican wave' of appreciative applause followed



ABOVE: Turning over the tail of the Chilterns, a characteristic Duxford backdrop now as in 1940. BEN DUNNELL

Revised safety rules in the wake of the Shoreham tragedy meant that the show would be paused in this situation. Under official guidance, flying was allowed to continue, and the traffic began to clear. Shortly afterwards there was another serious (ultimately, fatal) crash on the motorway, this time very near the airfield. Once again flying was permitted to carry on, but with an increased minimum altitude and a need to avoid overflying the M11 for a time, to reduce aircraft noise over the scene and allow the arrival and departure of the Essex & Herts air ambulance. Several participants had to revise their routines to take this into account, and it is to the credit of all involved that the impact on the show was minimised.

The successful Duxford practice of putting together displays to illustrate aspects around the central theme continued. The outbreak of the Second World War was commemorated by a truly superb formation led by John Romain in the ARC's Blenheim ahead of a trio of Hurricanes — Peter Vacher's aircraft in the hands of Carl Schofield, the Shuttleworth Sea Hurricane with 'Dodge' Bailey at the controls, and Dave Harvey in the Historic Aircraft Collection's example. They presented a series of four-ship passes before a Hurricane tailchase and an extended solo from the Blenheim.

Tableaux spread across the afternoon continued the story. A quartet of Stearman, Jungmann, Stampe and Tiger Moth brought together primary trainers used by different nations in period, while three Harvards moved things on to the advanced stage. The Fighter Collection put up its Gladiator and Hawk 75 on Saturday in remembrance of the Battle of France, unfortunately having to substitute the P-40F for the Hawk on Sunday. Pete Kynsey's solo performance in the Gladiator was really spirited, offering its own reminder of how the Gloster biplane clung on in front-line RAF and Fleet Air Arm service throughout the Battle of Britain.

An interesting attempt was made to illustrate the function performed by a variety of types in the testing and calibration of the radar chain. From Duxford had been flown Avro Rota autogyros, here represented by Peter Troy-Davies in his modern Calidus, alongside impressed light aircraft such as Mark Miller's DH87B Hornet Moth. By an unlikely coincidence, this Moth had been damaged exactly 75 years earlier, on 19 September 1940, by blast from a German parachute mine during a raid on Heston

aerodrome. In depicting the employment of gliders we saw a true 1940 veteran, at least in part, for the wings of the Kirby Kite owned by David Bramwell were used on the so-called 'Radar Kite' (see *Aeroplane* September 2015).

Unique to Saturday was a loose formation flyby from two Lakenheath-based USAF 492nd Fighter Squadron F-15E Strike Eagles leading Comanche Fighters' Spitfire la pair in tribute to the American volunteer pilots who were among 'the Few'. Aboard AR213 and



LEFT: The Fighter Collection put up this Battle of France-themed pairing of Gladiator and Hawk 75. DAVID HALFORD

BELOW: Blenheim and Hurricanes made for a fine combination.

JOHN DUNNELL





ABOVE: Brian Smith in Spitfire IX MH434 leads Blue and Yellow Sections during Saturday's finale.

BEN DUNNELL

it. Brian's unexpected choreography then brought the formation back on a 45-degree line towards the airfield, before breaking into sections. An exuberant, high-wingovers tailchase of eight aircraft was flown to the south of the display 'box', with another seven thundering past straight and level at speed closer to the crowd, and the

three remaining aeroplanes performing perfect formation aerobatics higher above.

Thanks are due to 'the Few' at Duxford on 19-20 September, who ensured the stunning presentations enjoyed by 'the Many': Brian Smith, Cliff Spink, John Romain, Dan Friedkin, Paul Bonhomme,

John Beattie, Charlie Brown, Dave Southwood, Steve Jones, John Sessions, Dave Ratcliffe, Pete Kynsey, Dave Puleston, Stu Goldspink, Ian Smith, Matt Jones and 'Willy' Hackett (Chris Hadlow substituting for the latter on Sunday). The debt extends to every Spitfire owner, operator, engineer and groundcrew, without whom... **A**

X4650, Paul Bonhomme and Dan Friedkin broke into lyrical and close aerobatics that they reprised on Sunday. The RAF's camouflaged No 29(R) Squadron Typhoon and the BBMF Spitfire Vb performed part of their Synchro 75 routine, unfortunately coinciding with the restriction over the motorway. A modified sequence necessarily missed out the opposition manoeuvres.

An at first sight less appropriate modern visitor than the Typhoon had arrived on Saturday, in the form of a No 32 (The Royal) Squadron BAe 146. In fact, 32 had been the most successful Hurricane unit in the early months of the Battle, operating from Biggin Hill. Upon moving north to recuperate at the end of August 1940 it was credited with 102 victories. The 146's spirited departure mid-show on Sunday was a welcome, and rare, contribution.

But all eyes were on the Spitfires and Seafires, and no wonder, for their salute to Duxford's 'Big Wing' was an emotive, soul-stirring triumph. The sight of this mass formation bearing down on Duxford was unforgettable. Watching and hearing them in the distance over the familiar skyline as they positioned for a second pass was no less so.

Then they tailchased, and how. It was easy to watch for quite some time before realising that three more 'Spits' were flying formation aerobatics over the top of the whole thing. An amazing performance, for me, this was one of the most outstanding and memorable airshow moments ever.

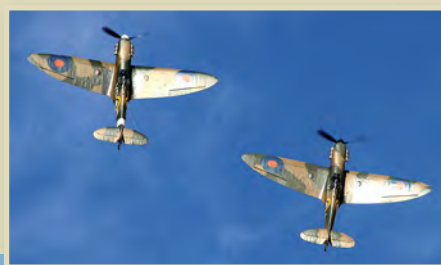
Many who were returning on Sunday perhaps wondered whether having the Red Arrows conclude the show rather than the Spitfires would quite hit the mark. Thanks to the six-ship of BBMF fighters and their formation with the Reds, they need not have worried.

Numerically, and in terms of spectacle, this weekend was all about the Spitfires, which maybe runs the risk of seeing everything else as supporting acts. Just as well, then, that these were of such a high standard, and included five Hurricanes, the Gladiator and the Blenheim to remind us that the hard-won victory in 1940 had not solely been down to the glamorous 'Spit' and its pilots.

Let the final word go to another of Duxford's 'People in the Battle of Britain', its station commander Gp Capt A. B. 'Woody' Woodhall, fighter controller par excellence. "From May to October

1940", he wrote in his memoir 'Soldier, Sailor and Airman Too', "we were all stretched to our limits of endurance, but we were not in the least downhearted or pessimistic... During that long summer of 1940 when even the weather seemed to favour the Germans, everyone on the station was working hard and in spite of the threats of invasion, bad news of sinkings by U-boats and reverses in Greece and Crete, morale was high. Our casualties in the air were not light, but our victories outweighed them and we knew that, man for man, we were superior to the enemy". The embodiment, one might say, of why Duxford recalls the events of 75 years ago.

John Dunnell



LEFT: Paul Bonhomme and Dan Friedkin loop Comanche Fighters' Spitfire Ias AR213 and X4650 in close concert.

DAVID HALFORD



ABOVE: A centrepiece of Sunday's finale – Red Arrows and BBMF fighters in a 15-aircraft flypast. PHIL WHALLEY