



Spitfire Vb BM597 (G-MKVB)



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Combat veteran, Spitfire Mk.Vb, (G-MKVB), BM597. One of 1000 aircraft built at Castle Bromwich against contract B981687/39, BM597 was delivered to No.37 M.U. at Burtenwood on 26 February 1942, being assigned to 315 Sqdn on 7 May 1942 and on to 317 Sqdn on 5 September 1942, both at Woodvale. On 1 February 1943, it suffered Cat B damage when F/O Birtus lost brake pressure whilst taxiing and overturned the aircraft; it was removed for repair on 28 February. It was ready for collection again on 2 June when No. 33 M.U. took delivery and on 9 June it was allocated to Vickers Armstrong for an undisclosed purpose. It returned to No.39 M.U. Colerne on 23 November before moving to No. 222 M.U. High Erroll (Packing Depot) on 4 January 1944 and then back to No. 39 M.U. on 14 April. It was stored there for almost a year until it was issued to No. 58 OTU, its last operational unit from which it was retired on 16 October 1945. It was then transferred to instructional airframe status at No. 4 S of TT, St Athen as 5713M

Following St Athen, BM597 was assigned as gate guardian to Hednesford (1950-1955), Bridgenorth (1955-1960) and Church Fenton (1960-1989). On 23 January 1967 it was dispatched from Henlow to Pinewood where it was used as the master for the moulds that were made to cast the fibre glass replicas used in the film 'Battle of Britain'. It remained at Pinewood until August 1968 when it was returned to Henlow and finally in 1969 to Church Fenton. Tim Routsis, the founder of Historic Flying, recovered the aircraft in 1989 as part of a deal with the RAF and sold it to HAC in 1993 with Historic Flying undertaking the complete restoration to original specification and flies now in the colours of 317 Squadron, though in an earlier camouflage paint scheme.

The HAC team have been in contact with a number of Polish veterans who flew BM597 whilst in service with the Polish 315 (PK-C) and 317 (JH-C) Squadrons RAF. Squadron Leader Ludwik Martel and Squadron Leader Tadeuz Anderz were reunited with the aircraft at the Old Hay Charity Fly-in in July 2000. S/Ldr Franciszek Kornicki, was reunited with BM597 and sat in his former cockpit at Chailey in 2004. Their signatures can be found on the inside of the cockpit door. From squadron records, other pilots who flew the aircraft were Sgt Slonski, P/O Widziszewski, P/O B. Semmerling, F/O H. Wyrozemski, F/S J. Adamiak, P/O S. Blok, P/O J Zbrozek, Sgt Aleksander Chudek, F/LT Waleriaw Jasiowowski and F/LT W.J. Zajac. F/LT Zajac flew BM597 on several occasions including acceptance checks and tests when BM597 was assigned to 315 Squadron in May 1942.

We are constantly looking for more wartime photographs and historical information on this aircraft, and if anyone has any of these or pilot log-book entries showing BM597, we would welcome hearing from you.

In September 2005 Spitfire BM597 became the first Spitfire to return to the Mediterranean island of Malta since the filming of Malta Story in 1952. It flew there together with Hurricane "Z5140" as part of the Merlins Over Malta project.

Spitfire BM597 can be found in Hangar 3 at the Imperial War Museum, Duxford.

Spitfire Vb

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| Wing Span: | 36ft 10in (11.23 m) |
| Length: | 29ft 11in (9.11 m) |
| Height: | 11ft 5in (3.48 m) |
| Power: | RR Merlin 45 1,440hp |
| Weight: | 6,785 lbs. (3,078kg) loaded |
| Maximum Speed: | 374 mph. (602km/h) at 13,000 ft (3960m) |
| Service Ceiling: | 37,000 ft. (11,280m) |
| Range: | 470 miles (756km) |
| Armament: | 2x20mm Hispano cannons and 4x .303 Vickers machine guns |

Spitfire BM597 is available for air displays, memorial flights, TV and film work and other promotional activities. Please Janice Black at:

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