



Presentation Spitfires in Australian Service Vers 2

It was early in World War II when Lord Beaverbrook, the Minister for Wartime Production, originated the idea of the "presentation aircraft". The idea was a morale boosting exercise for a population that was facing, almost alone, the onslaught of the German war machine in 1940.

A "price list" was set out with £5,000 for a single-engine aircraft, £20,000 for a twin-engine aircraft and £40,000 for a four-engine aircraft. These did not represent the actual cost of the type of aircraft, but was considered a fair value to have one's assigned name in four inch high yellow characters on the fuselage forward of the cockpit, as in the Spitfire's case.

A presentation Spitfire at £5,000 came to represent the ultimate choice, with many towns and organisations starting "Spitfire Funds" to help do their bit for the war effort. Many went to great lengths to raise the money required, resulting in around 11% of the total production of Spitfire Mk I, II, or V versions built during 1940-1942. How many is that? Nearly 1000 named Spitfire aircraft in fact.

In Australia, I have found only one example where permission was requested for the establishment of such a Spitfire Fund, the "**Western Australian Spitfire Fund**" during 1941 to purchase a Spitfire for UK operations. There are no further details as to whether the required £5,000 was raised or from the records available, whether a Spitfire was so named.

I suspect that the answer, following research on some War Cabinet Minutes documents dated 4th June 1941, lies in the following quote:

"The Treasurer referred to a request that has been received for authority to permit the raising of funds for the purchase of Spitfire aircraft along the lines of the appeals which have proven so popular in Britain. It was observed that any funds would really amount to contributions to the British Treasury, and that they could not be authorised. The only class of appeal for funds for overseas purposes which are to be permitted are those for special purposes, such as the relief of citizens in bombed areas".

Thus died the one and only attempt by Australia to have its own presentation Spitfire.

Though having been denied a named Spitfire through public subscription, our association with presentation Spitfires didn't end there as 452 and 457 Squadrons had at various times several on strength during 1941-1942, as the following selection shows:

X4936 " In Memory of RJ Mitchell" ff17/01/41, 6MU 01/02/41, **457Sqn RAAF** 23/06/41, 58OTU 22/10/41, Flying accident Cat B 26/11/42, repaired by Scottish Aviation Ltd, 5FTS Cranwell 12/07/43, Royal Navy Deposit Account 15/01/44.

P8380 "Black Velvet" 9MU 30/04/41, 74Sqn RAF 09/05/41, 403Sqn RCAF 24/07/41, 54Sqn RAF 04/08/41, 403Sqn RCAF 25/08/41, **457Sqn RAAF** 27/09/41, hit lorry at base Cat E 01/12/41 53 OTU 15/06/42, flew into ground bad weather, Cymmer, Wales 15/08/42, Soc 21/08/42.

P8085 "Garfield Weston VII" 38MU 26/02/41, 303Sqn RAF 13/03/41, **452Sqn RAAF** 27/05/41, Cat D crashed Conisholme, Yorks Cat E, 05/07/41. Soc 11/07/41.

P8361 "Krakatoa (NEI)" 6MU 10/04/41, 303Sqn RAF 18/04/41, **452Sqn RAAF** 04/06/41, FTR Ops 09/08/41, Soc 10/09/41.

X4908 "Southern Railway Invicta" ff27/12/40, 8MU 04/01/41, **457Sqn RAAF** 22/06/41, 130Sqn RAF 02/11/41, 81Sqn RAF 16/02/42, 165Sqn RAF 12/04/42, 5UAS(University Air Sqn) 22/08/42, P&PSM 06/01/43 to cvt to MkVa, 61OTU 15/06/43, Flying accident Cat B 18/07/43, Soc 06/06/45.

On a final note, one that didn't make Australian service but was accepted by the renowned red haired 452 Sqn Spitfire Fighter Ace, Squadron Leader Keith "Bluey" Truscott on the 27/08/41 was **AB935, "Gingerbread"**. **Redheads of Britain** funded this particular aircraft which later went on to serve with 92 Sqn RAF and was finally shipped to the Middle East in 1943.

Thanks to Bob Livingstone for his help