

INDIVIDUAL HISTORY

FIAT CR42 `FALCO' MM5701/8468M
MUSEUM ACCESSION NUMBER 78/AF/952

- c.1940 Built as part of a batch of 200 CR42 aircraft, serial numbers MM5510-MM5709. The last biplane fighter in production (until 1943).
- 10 Sep 40 In an effort to boost Italian home morale and as a political gesture to the Germans, units of the Regia Aeronautica were formed into the Corpo Aereo Italiano (CAI) – a force of some 203 aircraft including 50 CR.42s - to operate in support of the Luftwaffe from bases at Melsbroek, Chievres, Maldegheem and Ursel in Belgium, somewhat to the chagrin of the Luftwaffe itself.
- 6 Oct 40 MM5701 and the other 18 Gruppo CR 42s moved from their base in Novi Ligure, northern Italy to Maldeghein (modern Maldegem), Belgium, near the Dutch border, flying via Neubiberg and Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany, reaching Ursel on 19th October after being held up by bad weather. The fighters could only operate over England for about ten minutes due to limited fuel capacity/range.
- 24 Oct 40 CAI operations began with a night time bombing mission against Harwich and Felixstowe from Belgium, with the first daylight mission against Ramsgate, on 29 October (and continued until 3rd January 1941).
- 11 Nov 40 The CAI made one of its only three recorded daylight bombing raids on the UK, this being its largest operation. From a reduced force of 10 BR20 bombers and 40 CR42s aiming for Harwich, the Italians lost three bombers and three fighters, with three more bombers crashing back in France and Belgium with wounded on board. There were no RAF losses - two Hurricane squadrons (Nos.46 & 257 and Spitfires of 41 Squadron) engaged the Italians, who were intending to bomb Harwich; two Hurricanes were however damaged. Two CR42s were actually shot down within 15 minutes, both belonging to the 18° Gruppo, temporarily attached to 56° Stormo, and carried the squadriglia shield (the claw of an eagle) and the Gruppo shield (an axe with three arrows diagonally enclosed in a vertical rectangle and the motto `ocio che te copo!'. The unit was also given the Luftwaffe designation 18/JG56.
- Twenty-two CR42s took off at 1200 hours from Eechlou (modern Eeklo), Belgium and climbed to 18,000 feet. Before the actual combat MM5701, flown by 23-year-old Sergente Pilota Pietro Salvadori broke an oil pipe, fell behind the formation, and the engine overheated. He pressed on and force landed on the shingle beach at Orfordness, Suffolk. C.¼ mile north of the lighthouse, at c.13.45 hours.

His 18 Gruppo 95° Squadriglia Caccia Terrestre aircraft bore the fuselage marking 13 crest 95 and the serial MM5701 under the tail. (See crash report by Wg Cdr J A Easton, 14 Nov 40, DoRIS Ref.B2706) Salvadori was taken prisoner and was apparently very proud of his landing when he simply nosed gently over on the shingle. Details - C R Elliott, Air Pictorial Sep 69 p.332-335 and 'The Chianti Raiders' (Haining) pp.184 – 187.

When interrogated by the British, Salvadori commented that he was happy to be out of the war, was dissatisfied with the Italian officers, and didn't like Belgian weather, the Germans, or their food!

Photos of crashed aircraft. FlyPast Feb 89 p.32-3; and July 2009 p.114. Profile - CR42 (which also includes a colour side view of the aircraft). Further Photos: Aeroplane 22 Nov 40 p.560, and Blitz Then and Now (023203) p.233; Flight International 16 Sep 1965 p.496; The Chianti Raiders (Peter Haining) central picture spread.

(Salvadori (b.1917) remained in the Italian Air Force post-war only to be killed flying a F84G Thunderjet in April 1953 - see FlyPast Feb 89 p.33). See also colour profiles in Air Enthusiast Jul 73 p.44. Also Flypast Feb 97p.83.

- Nov 40 After the forced landing the aircraft was taken by road to RAF Martlesham Heath for repair.
- 27 Nov 40 Flown to RAE Farnborough with a Hurricane escort since the aircraft still carried Italian markings. After arrival at Farnborough given RAF serial BT474 and Italian markings painted over with RAF roundels, and given a thorough examination by RAE staff. Limited flights at Farnborough by Sqn Ldr Wilson.
- 15 Dec 40 Photographed at Farnborough still in Italian markings - Forever Farnborough (Cooper) p.73.
- 28 Apr 41 Flown from Farnborough to the Air Fighting Development Unit, Duxford by W/C J E Campbell-Orde to enable that unit to develop tactics against the type through mock combat with various type of RAF fighter. Photos in RAF markings: Air Pictorial Sep 69 p.334; Air Pictorial May 1995 p.225; War Prizes (027726) p.15; Fiat CR42 (028969) p.30; RAFM photo collection P4652 & P4653; Wingspan Nov 1995 p.19; War in the Air June 1990 cover; Aeroplane Monthly Dec 74; The Aeroplane 1 May 42; Aircraft Illustrated Jan 75 p.16; War Prizes-The Album p.82.

The aircraft was flown quite extensively at the AFDU; the logbook of Pilot Officer R J W Brown (DoRIS Ref: MF10116/18) records several flights in the aircraft, as detailed below:

- 29 Apr 41 Experience on type.

30 Apr 41	Local flying.
01 May 41	Endurance trials and test for rated altitude.
02 May 41	Test for rated altitude `sudden twists'.
03 May 41	Two flights - comparative speed tests and manoeuvrability VS Hurricane.
05 May 41	Comparative speeds as Hurricane.
12 May 41	Dog fight with Hurricane.
17 May 41	Test of camera gun.
18 May 41	Dog fight with Hurricane.
28 May 41	Comparative speeds v. Spitfire.
08 Jun 41	Attacks on Albacore.
11 Jun 41	Trials vs. Fulmer.
13 Jun 41	Test of diving speed.
24 Jun 41	Trials vs. Martlet.
27 Jun 41	Trials vs. Martlet.
28 Jul 41	`v. Fulmar 15000(ft)'
Oct 42	By this time trials with the aircraft were complete. PRO File AIR 2/10, 184 records that the aircraft, though still at Duxford, was 'finished with' by the Naval Air Fighter Development Unit but 'In view of the fact that this is one of the first Italian aircraft to be shot down over this country it is thought that it might be a good exhibit for the United Services Museum'. The Air Historical Branch wrote to No.41 Group requesting allocation of the aircraft for preservation 12 December 1942.
9 Jan 43	Telegram to 1426 Flight at Duxford requesting packing of the Fiat and fellow museum piece Bf109E DG200.
7 Aug 43	Fiat and BF109 in covered storage at a 'Purgatory Site' (No.16MU Stafford Dispersal Site) - Messrs. Judds, Haulage Contractors, Spencer's Wood, near Reading, Berks.
12 Dec 43	With evaluation of this obsolete type complete, the only (belated) entry on the aircraft's RAF movement card records - 'This aircraft for packing for permanent storage' and cases marked 'Museum Material'.
9 Nov 44	PRO file AIR 2/10, 185 records Fiat and Bf109 moved from Purgatory

site to No.52 MU Cardiff where several other AHB aircraft were collected from August 1944; however, due to the need for the Bellman hangar at Cardiff where the Museum aircraft were stored to be used for timber storage, moved in its single case to No. 76 MU Wroughton, Wilts c. December 1944.

- Aug 46 Packed and despatched from No.76 MU Wroughton - probably moved to storage alongside other AHB material at No.47MU Sealand but not specifically recorded there (see War Prizes).
- 1949 By this date at GAFEC Stanmore Park, Middlesex.
Late 1955 Moved from Stanmore Park to No.15 MU Wroughton for further storage alongside other AHB aircraft.
- c.Mid 1958 To AHB store at RAF Fulbeck, Lincs.
- c. Jun 60 To No. 49 MU, RAF Colerne, Wilts for refurbishing along with the Ju88 and Ki100 from the AHB collection.
- c.1960 To RAF Biggin Hill; certainly there by 1961. Restored c.1964. Photos: Air Pictorial Sep 65 p.299 and Wrecks and Relics – The Album p.58.
- Sep 65 Displayed at RAF Biggin Hill Battle of Britain open day. Initially retained its RAF Serial and yellow undersides. Colour photo: Air Pictorial May 95 p.222. Also Airfix Magazine Nov 65 p.71; Aero Modeller Jan 66 p.24.
- 1968 To RAF St Athan. Photos: still wearing BT474 serial - Control Column Dec 69. (At BoB open Day Sep 69).
- 23 Aug 69 Displayed at RAF Chivenor Open Day.
- 1970 Again displayed at Chivenor Open Day - Photo: Aviation News 2-15 Feb 1990 p.863.
- Jan 1973-
Mid 1974 Further restoration, including complete stripping, at RAF St Athan. Recovering and paintwork by trainee painters and finishers of 94 entry, D Flight No.2 TTS St Athan. Returned to its 95a Squadriglia 18 Gruppo colours as 95-13/MM5701, although there are errors in the camouflage scheme details and squadron insignia. File of notes on restoration - DoRIS Ref.B2579 (includes copy of Italian Technical Manual for CR42). Photo during restoration - Aircraft Illustrated Aug 73 p.340.
- Sep 74 Newly restored aircraft displayed at RAF St Athan's Battle of Britain Open Day. Photo of newly restored aircraft - DoRIS Ref.B2706.
- 13 Feb 76 Allotted Maintenance Serial 8468M at St. Athan.

Oct 78 Moved to RAFM Hendon for display in new Battle of Britain Museum, where it remains at the time of writing. Colour photos of a/c at RAFM - Aeroplane Monthly 1994 UK Aircraft Museum Guide p.19.

Survivors

A total of 1,709 CR42s were built 1938-1943. One of 72 delivered to Sweden survives at the Swedish Air Force Museum. Another ex Swedish aircraft (SE-AOP) has been restored for the Italian Air Force Museum at Vigna di Valle (Photos – Flypast December 2001 p.20; Aeroplane No 2004 p.9; Flypast July 2005 p.5) using parts from Italy and South Africa in a 2/3 original composite rebuild project, with a second composite aircraft, 'F9-10'/G-CBLS (Ex Swedish Fv 2542) being created for the Fighter Collection; this arrived at Duxford in February 2006. Photos Flypast May 2006 p.12 and April 2012 p.6.

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