

BATTLE OF BRITAIN

The Battle of Britain Hall commemorates the most important action of the RAF. Aircraft had been used in World War I but not in the same way as they were used in World War II. The Royal Air Force was now crucial to the outcome.

Explore
Further

On this sheet you will find details of 5 important World War II aircraft housed in the Battle of Britain Hall to help you with your self guided tour. There are, however, 11 other World War II aircraft in this Hall. Basic information about these aircraft can be found on our website www.rafmuseum.org/london

THE DE HAVILLAND TIGER MOTH

Location: Opposite the unexploded bomb as you come out of the Home Front displays.

The Tiger Moth was intended as a successor to, the well known civilian aircraft, the Gypsy Moth. Instead a majority of World War II RAF pilots completed their elementary level training in them.

After the Dunkirk evacuation in 1940, 350 Tiger Moths were filled with light bomb racks, in order to bomb enemy troops in the event of invasion. This never happened.

Two other ideas that were dismissed were:

The use of the “paraslasher”- a scythe like blade fitted to the Tiger Moth in order to cut the canopies of Parachutists as they attempted to land.

The Tiger Moth “human crop sprayer” with a tank fitted to the front dispensing “D-D green” an extremely poisonous insecticide.

Fortunately these ideas were never used as the Tiger Moth was underpowered and too slow to be a fighting aeroplane. Instead, the Tiger Moth continued its vital role as a trainer vehicle.



THE SUPERMARINE SPITFIRE I

Location: Left of the Our Finest Hour seating area, as you face it.

The Spitfire is arguably the most famous British fighter aircraft in history. To fly, it was very responsive and took little more than a touch of the fingertips on the joystick, or the feet on the pedals, to manoeuvre it. Fighter pilot Bob Stanford-Tuck was heard to say about the Spitfire:

“Some men fall in love with Yachts, or some with Women... or Motor cars, but I think every Spitfire pilot fell in love with it as soon as he sat in that nice tight cosy office [RAF slang for cockpit] with everything to hand”

The First Spitfire, the Mark I, is perhaps the most famous Spitfire because of the important role it played in the Battle of Britain, helping to defeat the German air attacks. It proved to be the best performing Allied Aircraft in 1940.



HAWKER HURRICANE I

Location: Right of the 'Our Finest Hour seating area, as you face it.

The Hurricane, alongside the Spitfire, played a vital role in the Battle of Britain during the summer of 1940. The Hurricane destroyed more enemy aircraft during the Battle of Britain than all the other air and ground defences combined.

The Hurricane's success was that it was boosted by a very powerful engine but retained a lightweight frame, providing the RAF with a fighter 160kph (100mph) faster than any aircraft then in service (1937).

Ft Lt JB Nicholson was awarded Fighter Command's only Victoria Cross for Bravery carried out in a Hurricane.

A famous Hurricane Pilot was the children's author Roald Dahl.



THE JUNKERS JU87 G-2

Location: At the far end of the German planes, opposite the training planes.

The Ju87, more widely known as the "Stuka" after the German word for Dive bomber (Sturzkampfflugzeug) first saw action in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). In appearance it was terrifying, with its fixed undercarriage and cranked wing giving it a menacing image. It also had special sirens fitted so that when it dived it made a noise that would terrify the enemy.

The Ju87 played a particularly important role in the success of the German Blitzkrieg campaign (Lightning war) in Poland, France and initially Russia. It was regarded as a "wonder weapon" because, if it had little aerial opposition, it was able to attack targets precisely in close support of tanks and troops on ground level. Dive bombers could deliver a bomb load with much greater accuracy than a normal bomber. The disadvantage was that the strength needed to withstand the strains of diving made them heavier and slower than similar sized fighter planes, leaving them vulnerable to attack.



THE SHORT SUNDERLAND MR5

Location: In the area at the front of the hall as you exit.

The Sunderland Flying boat saw front line service for over twenty years, from June 1938 to 1959, and it was the last flying boat operated by the Royal Air Force.

During World War II, its main role was to patrol the Atlantic Ocean for anything up to up to 13 hours at a time, using radar to seek out German U-Boats. If submarines were caught on the surface they were often sunk before they had time to dive.

Initially their main purpose was to stop the U-Boat from surfacing. As the war progressed and improvements were made in radar and depth charges they became much more aggressive.

The Sunderland was notably the first British flying boat to have power operated gun turrets as part of its defensive armaments. This earned it the nickname of the "flying porcupine".

