

Last of the 'Spits' rolled



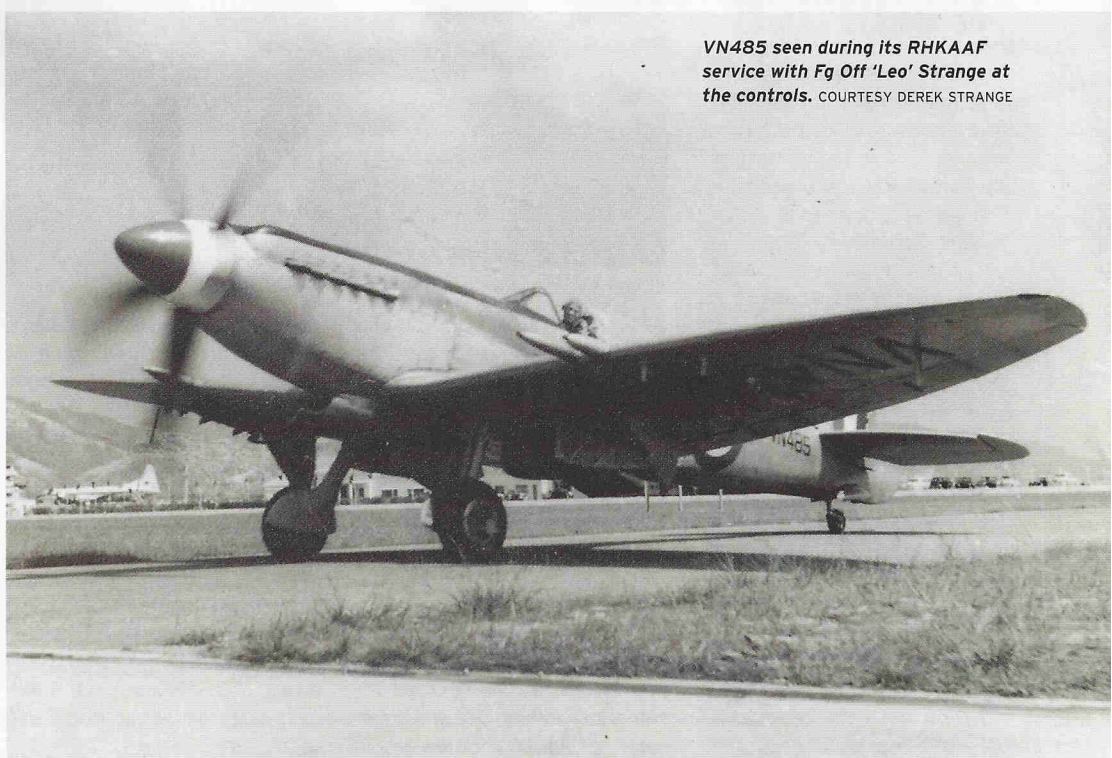
Spitfire F.24 VN485 at Duxford after being rolled out for the media on November 10.

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SUPERMARINE Spitfire F.24 VN485 is the latest post-refurbishment aircraft to be rolled out at the Imperial War Museum Duxford, Cambs, in readiness for display in the museum's forthcoming 'AirSpace' complex. The ceremony took place on November 10 and included a speech by Duxford's new Director, Richard Ashton.

The F.24 was the final RAF version of the legendary fighter, and the first examples were accepted in April 1946. Although the mark could outperform jet fighters of the time, F.24s only saw limited service with the RAF.

VN485 came out of production in 1947, and was the 12th from last Spitfire to be completed for the RAF. This makes it the last surviving example of its type to be allocated an RAF serial number. It was delivered to 9 Maintenance Unit, Cosford, Shropshire, on September 27 and taken on charge the same day.



VN485 seen during its RHKAAF service with Fg Off 'Leo' Strange at the controls. COURTESY DEREK STRANGE

led out for 'AirSpace'

Although World War Two was over, tension was escalating in the Far East and, in June 1949, VN485 was one of a number of aircraft despatched to RNAS Renfrew, Scotland, for shipment to Seletar, Singapore, and stored. In September 1950, it was shipped to



The pilot who flew VN485 for its last sortie was Flt Lt Adrian Rowe-Evans, seen reunited with the Spitfire almost 50 years later at Duxford on November 10.

Hong Kong, arriving the following month and readied for service.

In September 1951, the 'Spit' was issued to 80 Squadron at Kai Tak, before being transferred to the Royal Hong Kong Auxiliary Air Force

(RHKAAF) in May 1952. In April 1955, VN485 flew its last official sortie - as part of a four-ship Spitfire formation for the Queen's Birthday Flypast. For this it was piloted by Flt Lt Adrian Rowe-Evans.

At the end of July 1955, the aircraft was placed into storage at Kai Tak with a total flying time of just 242 hours. In September, VN485 was officially struck off charge and, a year later, was issued to RAF Kai Tak as a 'museum piece' and placed on display. The aircraft was generously gifted to the Imperial War Museum by the RHKAAF in 1989 and will eventually be displayed in Duxford's £23.7 million 'AirSpace' project, which is scheduled to open in 2006.

The Spitfire's 12-month restoration was carried out by a

'AirSpace'

VN485 will form a central exhibit of 'AirSpace', which aims to showcase British and Commonwealth aviation heritage and is due to open in 2006. It marks a very significant redevelopment of Duxford's 'Superhangar', and will house over 30 relevant aircraft, some suspended from the roof. With a project estimate of £23.7 million, 'AirSpace' will make use of a 107,000ft² (10,000m²) exhibition area and will include a dedicated education centre that aims to attract at least 50,000 school children per year.

The project has been granted £9 million by the Heritage Lottery Fund and £995,000 by the East of England Development Agency. BAE Systems has also generously agreed to partner the IWM in establishing 'AirSpace'. Fundraising is an ongoing priority to raise the outstanding £4.2 million required to complete the project.

Richard Ashton, Director of IWM Duxford, commented: "AirSpace is the most ambitious development undertaken by the Imperial War Museum at Duxford to date. The remarkable project will guarantee the long-term preservation of aircraft that helped shape the world in which we live, either by defending liberty and freedom or by enabling people to travel around the world in a matter of hours. In short, AirSpace will ensure that our heritage and our past have a future."



Members of the F.24's restoration team present for the roll-out.

dummy barrels will then need to be fabricated), wingtip and tail lights and a correct pilot's headrest. The cockpit also still requires some attention, but the aim is to have the Spitfire totally completed before the opening of 'AirSpace'.

Attending the roll-out ceremony was Flt Lt Adrian Rowe-Evans, the last pilot to have flown VN485. Also attending was Derek Strange, whose father Fg Off 'Leo' Strange served with the RHKAAF from 1949 to 1971, and was another former pilot of this Spitfire.

If anyone can help with locating parts or paperwork for VN485, the team would be pleased to hear from them. The next aircraft to be rolled out for 'AirSpace' will be DH Mosquito TT.35 TA719, which is being restored to target-tug configuration. The conservation team on this project is also in need of some parts: an ML Type G winch and the rear bomb bay banner buffer unit. If you could help to locate any of the items mentioned, please make contact with the teams via Geoff Ochs or Chris Knapp by telephoning 01223 835000. JC



Message from the new Director

"Although I have only been in post at Duxford for a short time, it is already clear to me that Duxford is a unique museum that offers unique challenges and opportunities. Duxford is a success story built on partnerships, and I am very much looking forward to working with the many staff, volunteers and partners that have made Duxford the success it is today.

"Duxford is part of the Imperial War Museum, Britain's national museum of modern conflict and is already a thriving heritage attraction. Within the next few years the completion of our 'AirSpace' project will reaffirm Duxford's position as Europe's premier aviation heritage complex.

"The museum will, however, face a number of challenges over the coming years. Funding will always be a prime concern for Directors of Duxford and it is certainly mine. I am committed to exploring all types of appropriate revenue generation for Duxford so that our reliance on Government funding is reduced and all necessary investment and development can continue.

"The ageing UK population, greater competition for people's leisure time and the increasing distance in time from the major conflicts of the Twentieth Century will all require Duxford to evolve and develop to continue to satisfy the needs of the people who visit it. Whatever happens, however, the preservation of the collections and the historic site at Duxford will always be central to the museum's function.

"I am very much looking forward to leading Duxford through the challenging times ahead."

RICHARD ASHTON

DIRECTOR, IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM DUXFORD