

Eric 'Winkle' Brown

Aviation in Britain suffered a sad loss when Captain Eric Brown, CBE, DSC, AFC, HonFRAeS, RN passed away on 21st February 2016 aged 97. A legend in his own lifetime he flew 487 different types of aircraft. He was the first person to land a jet aircraft - a de Havilland Sea Vampire - onto an aircraft carrier on 3 December 1945. I met him when he was an after dinner speaker at the Royal Motor Yacht Club and he told me that this was before ejection seats were fitted to the aircraft.

His father had been an RFC pilot so Eric experienced flying at the early age of around 10 and later visited the 1936 Olympics in Berlin where he met Goering and Udet, both WW1 fighter pilots. Udet took him for a flight and said he should learn to fly and learn German which he did when he went to University. On the outbreak of war he was in Germany on a student exchange and arrested but released a few days later along with his MG Mignette to the Swiss border. His knowledge of German and aviation made him a natural to evaluate captured aircraft at the RAE and his experience with carrier landings led him to amass a total of 2,271 landings.

Steve Robson



SPITFIRE GIRL



This month I had the pleasure and privilege of meeting 92 year old Joy Lofthouse, one of only 3 surviving UK 'Attagirls', the plucky band of 164 women who were allowed into the Air Transport Auxiliary during World War Two. The small group of female pilots dubbed the 'Attagirls' were based at White Waltham in Berkshire and were trained to fly numerous types of aircraft, from Tiger moths up to Stirling bombers. The ATA made an enormous contribution to the war effort by taking over from service pilots the task of ferrying Royal Air Force and Royal Navy warplanes between factories, maintenance units and front-line squadrons. The ATA delivered aircraft from factories to airfields, also returning damaged aircraft for repair. Sometimes the 'Attagirls' would be given only 30 minutes with a handbook before taking off in an unfamiliar plane. At one stage losses were so great that the casualty ratio was one in six.

Joy was working in an ammunitions factory at the time and joined the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) in 1943 alongside her sister Yvonne after spotting an advert in a flying magazine. After training she became qualified to ferry single and twin engine types but regretted that the war ended

before she had a chance to ferry a DH Mosquito! During the war, she flew 20 types of aircraft and flew numerous marks of the Spitfire. "The Spitfire is such a wonderful plane. It's the nearest thing to having wings of your own and flying. The culmination was being able to fly in a Spitfire - the first time I did it was faster than anything I'd ever known in my life. There's nothing quite like it! In many ways we were trailblazers for female pilots in the RAF." "The weather was our biggest enemy. There were a couple of times when I thought I'd lost one of my nine lives."



Last year she had the opportunity to fly twice in a 2-seater Spitfire, 70 years almost to the day since she last flew a Spitfire. One flight was from Goodwood and one from Kemble, in Gloucestershire near to where Joy lives. During the flight, which is available to watch on You Tube Joy said: "It's incredible to be in a Spitfire again after so long. I am so lucky to be given this chance to fly it again. It's hard to describe the feeling". She particularly relished coming in to land telling her co-pilot that was "always the exciting bit." She added that the only difference from when she had flown the plane 70 years ago was the use of radio. When she used to fly there was complete silence after take-off with no radio contact with people on the ground. After the war Joy, now a widow, married and became a teacher

The pilot on the flight from Kemble was Rolls Royce Chief Test pilot Phil O'Dell, a previous speaker at our group. He is one of the lucky pilots who gets to display the Spitfire owned by Rolls Royce, and flew the Vulcan last year at the Bournemouth airshow.

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