

SPITFIRE RW388

Spitfire RW388 was officially presented to the City of Stoke-on-Trent by the RAF in 1972. It commemorates Reginald Mitchell, the designer of the Spitfire, who was born in Kidsgrove and educated in the Stoke-on-Trent.

RW388 was built in 1945 at Castle Bromwich in Birmingham. The aircraft entered service too late to see combat during World War Two, being first a training aircraft and later towing targets for Navy ships so they could accurately aim their guns.

In 1952 the Spitfire was damaged in a flying accident and flew again. It was used as a gate guardian at RAF Benson, and then at RAF Andover.

In 1968, marking the 50th anniversary of the RAF, RW388 was converted to appear at the Royal Tournament at Earls Court and at the Edinburgh Military Tattoo. The aircraft was disguised to appear as Spitfire AB917, known as "The Inspirer".

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES

RW388 is a Mk.XVI (16) Spitfire. This variant was essentially the same as the Mk.IX (9) Spitfire, but was adapted to accommodate a new engine, the Merlin 266. The 266 was a version of the Merlin 66, built under licence from Rolls Royce by the Packard Motor Car Company in the United States.

The aircraft is also designated 'LF' – which identifies it as a low-altitude fighter. Aircraft of this type were commonly fitted with the 'clipped' wingtips which improved performance at lower altitudes. Officially the designation refers to the choice of engine, which was optimised for low altitude operation.

Another distinguishing feature of the aircraft is the low-back and 'bubble' canopy. Earlier versions had a higher back.

RW388 TIMELINE

18/7/1945

Taken on charge No. 6 M.U. [RAF Brize Norton]

2/8/1945

Service with 667 Squadron

30/11/1945

Category Ac Damage (Flying Accident)

[Category Ac: Repair is beyond the unit capacity, i.e. may be repaired on site by another unit or contractor]

13/12/1945

To No. 411 Repair & Salvage Unit

9/5/1946

To No. 29 M.U. [High Ercall, Salop (Aircraft Storage Unit)]

12/1/1949

Returned to No. 6 M.U. [RAF Brize Norton]

23/3/49

Handling Squadron

29/4/1949

Return to No. 6 M.U. [RAF Brize Norton]

2/7/1949

To No. 5 Squadron (F.C.)

1/4/1951

Allocated to 612 Squadron

[Squadron Motto: *Vigilando Custodimus* | "We stand guard by vigilance" (Latin)]

4/6/1951

Fighter Command Control and Reporting School

3/1/1952

Category 3R damage (Flying Accident)

[Category 3: Repair is beyond the capabilities of the parent or nearest unit]

14/1/1952

Converted to instructional No. 6946M, then issued to No. 49 M.U.

Alloted to 41G

Then to RAF Colerne. Coded 3L.R.

Then Gate Display RAF Benson

Then Gate Display RAF Andover

Return to No. 5 M.U. [RAF Kemble]

10/4/1968

No. 19 M.U. [RAF St. Athan]. Converted to Mk.VB AB917 'The Inspirer for Royal Tournament'

10/5/1968

RAF Cardington for Royal Tournament practice

26/06/1968

Royal Tournament, Earls Court

1968

Edinburgh Military Tattoo

09/1968

Battle of Britain Display, RAF St. Athan

Returned to 19 M.U. [RAF St. Athan] for storage.

Prepared for presentation to City of Stoke-on-Trent and restored to a Mk.XVI

23/10/1969

71 M.U. RAF Bicester, sorted prior to presentation

28/6/1972

Air Chief Marshall Sir Neil Wheeler on behalf of the Airforce Board presented the Spitfire to the City of Stoke on Trent

RW388 FACT FILE

Type: Single-seat fighter-bomber

Serial Number: RW388

Mark: XVI (16)

Designation: LF (Low altitude fighter)

Wing Type: 'E' type with clipped wingtips

Armaments: 2x 20mm Mk.II Hispano cannon, 2x 0.50 calibre Browning machine guns.
Capacity for 1 x 500lb bomb on central rack and 2 x 250lb bombs under each wing.

Engine: Merlin 266 (1,720-hp liquid-cooled V-12, two-stage, two-speed supercharger)

Airscrew: 4 blade constant speed Rotol airscrew with wooden blades

Top Speed: 406 mph

Range: 430 miles (without extra tanks)

Climb Rate: 20,000 ft in 6 minutes 42 seconds

Service Ceiling: 41,500 ft.

Camouflage: grey and green

Other information: Mk. XVI Spitfires are essentially the same as the Mk. IX, but adapted for the the American built Packard Merlin. This one features a cut-down rear fuselage with bubble canopy. A total of 1,054 Mk. XVI Spitfire were built at Castle Bromwich. Fitted with a larger, pointed 'Mk. VIII-type rudder' often fitted to late-production Spitfires. Elevator has straight-angled mass balance horns – tips point forwards rather than 45° angle, as featured on all but the earliest Mk. XVI Spitfires.