

Andy Bystra's DG.Eng BUGLE.



ANDY BYSTRA

Man on a Fergi, Spitfires, White Cliffs of Dover, could this really be BREXIT at last? Nearly but not quite but, a super BUGLE issue for the start of 2020. Andy Bystra shares with us a lifelong dream of flying a Spitfire in the spirit of the boys of that era - 1940/1941. Sit back and enjoy the trip. Andy writes:-

The highlight of last year began some time in February when I spotted an Advertisement in a magazine to fly a Spitfire. It was pretty expensive, but the more I thought about it, the more it became a 'Why Not' decision.

I phoned Biggin Hill airport who told me: The basic flight was about 30 minutes but other options were available. I really wanted to fly past the RAF memorial on the cliffs above Dover but was told this was out of bounds due to security at the port. However, I would be able to fly the length of the cliffs at Beachy Head. A date was set for Saturday 31st August and a flight plan agreed, including at my request, a barrel roll!!

I was restricted to the number of guests I could take so settled on my wife Rita, my Sister Trixi who has a PPL and Chris Stovold (ex-Lucas Aerospace) and his wife Olwen. A hotel was booked for us all close to Biggin and we met for a meal on the Friday evening. My flight was scheduled for 1400hrs the following day, being there half an hour earlier for the 'Briefing'.

This was mainly outlining the risks associated in flying a 75 year old plane as well as instructions on parachuting out should the need arise, as well as how to leave the plane should it crash land and be on fire. The only part of this I remembered was that whatever happened it was imperative to exit 'Bloody Quick'!!!! While I was being briefed, Chris spotted a 'Skyvan' outside the hanger and established that we could hire it so that our party could take aerial pictures of me and the 'Spit' in the air. I was introduced to my pilot, Anna Woods, who was well aware of the flight plan I'd requested and, after chatting about my current experience flying in the right hand seat, suggested I might like to take a turn at the controls. Didn't need asking twice!!!!

Duly strapped in and checks done, Anna fired up that beautiful Merlin. I'd been quite controlled until then, but as soon as the prop (which from the rear seat looked almost as big as the wing span) started to turn and the engine fired, I was in 'some sort of seventh heaven'!! The 'Skyvan' taxied out first and we followed at a respectful distance, having to pause for a while halfway round the peri-track while a fuel bowser crossed our path. We caught up with the 'Van' at the beginning of the runway, now slightly askew so our party could photograph

the 'Spit's' approach. No sooner had we stopped however, it turned and took off. Leaving us to follow a few minutes later.

Our take off was silky smooth and we climbed gently to around 2,000 feet, joining the 'Van' and flying quite tightly port and starboard to allow those on board to take photos and video. After some five minutes or so, Anna rolled the aircraft down and away, which looks spectacular on the video taken from the Skyvan! Levelling at about a 1,000 feet, Anna announced I had control and would I climb back to 2,000 feet and head for the coast. We crossed the coast a mile or two west of Newhaven and she suggested I turn eastwards and just follow the coastline, keeping above 1,000 feet and at least 400 yards away from the cliffs to avoid birds using the up-currents. This was pure joy, the aircraft seemingly responding to thoughts rather than physical input. Passing over Beachy Head lighthouse, the beauty of sea, cliffs and fields was stunning and in a fit of patriotism I couldn't help feeling perhaps we should cut out ties with Europe and signalled this to the French coast in 'time-honoured' fashion!!! A few miles east of Eastbourne, Anna took control, climbing through quite dense cloud as we progressed inland. At about 3,500 feet she indulged me by 'playing' in the clouds, at one stage pointing out our shadow with a 'rainbow' halo around it in the cloud below.

Finding a 'hole' in the fairly continuous cloud, Anna announced we would now do the 'barrel roll' and to my total surprise, immediately put us in a steep dive; only pulling out when things started to look quite large, then, climbing back up into the cloud, she rolled the aircraft rapidly through 360 degrees. It was certainly exciting, but I felt rather as though I'd left my stomach

behind in the fields below and more than a little 'second-hand'! Settling back down to about 1500 feet and just below the cloud, Anna once more handed control to me with instructions to maintain our heading until joining the circuit at Biggin, at which point she would take control. The landing was uneventful and as silky smooth as take-off. I really enjoyed the following debrief with Anna and the inevitable lengthy 'photo call' since it enabled my stomach to regain its composure and my legs to stop feeling they were made of jelly. Makes you realise just a little of how those lads in 1940 must have felt doing it for real!!!

Anyway, what a fabulous experience, wouldn't have missed for anything. Back at the hotel, there was just time to shower before the taxi was due to take us all for a celebration meal at The Grumpy Mole. A leisurely breakfast on Sunday and we went on our separate ways; Chris & Olwen to Brighton for the day, my sister back to the airfield to meet an old 'Aviation' chum and us back home to 'swap cases' and drive to North Wales for a week to play with several narrow gauge/heritage railways.

P.S. I keep in touch with Peter Kendrick who let me know he'd visited Biggin for a 'Spitfire' experience also, in August last year. This had involved a visit around the workshops and being able to sit in the aircraft and being given a very informative briefing. Small world!.

***Many thanks Andy for this write-up. I'm sure there are many of us would give anything to have experienced that adventure.
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PROOF THAT HE REALLY DID IT:-



The BRIEFING



Andy looking really chuffed in the back seat.