



## Second World War: Meet the Pilot, Frequently asked questions

These are the questions that are asked most often by pupils either at the National Museum of Flight or as part of the digital school session. We hope that they will be interesting to your pupils and help you to answer some of their questions.

### People

#### **Were people forced by law (conscripted) to be pilots?**

People were forced by law to join the armed forces, including the RAF, but they then volunteered to fly.

#### **How were pilots picked?**

They had special tests called aptitude tests to work out how good they would be at being a pilot.

#### **How old were people in the RAF?**

People were conscripted aged between 18–41.

#### **How many pilots were killed in WW2?**

There were about 85,000 members of the RAF killed during the war.

### Clothes

#### **Did you get the uniform for free?**

The “other ranks”, ordinary people who were not officers, did not have to pay for their uniforms. If you damaged it by being careless you might have to pay for a replacement.

#### **Are there other versions of the bomber jacket you showed us?**

Yes but the biggest difference is that most do not have a yellow hood.

### Aeroplanes

#### **How many people did it take to drive the plane?**

Some aeroplanes, such as Supermarine Spitfire had a pilot, others had crews of up to 8, but the key people were the pilot and the navigator.

#### **Why was a Supermarine Spitfire called a Spitfire?**

The man who designed it wanted to call it the Shrew after the small animal like a mouse. The managers of the company who built it thought it should sound more fierce as a fighter aeroplane and called it the Spitfire.

#### **What was the fastest aeroplane of the Second World War?**

The fastest aircraft to see any combat in WWII was the Messerschmitt Me 163 Komet, which set an airspeed record of 702 mph in 1944. It used a rocket engine and there is one next to the Spitfire in the Military Aviation Hangar at the museum.

#### **How did they go to the toilet in the aeroplanes?**

Some of the big aeroplanes, like the Avro Lancaster Bomber, had a chemical toilet, basically a bucket with a lid on it. Aeroplanes like the Supermarine Spitfire had a funnel attached to a pipe, sometimes called a pee tube.

### Weapons

#### **How did they track enemy aeroplanes?**

They had radar, which is the same technology as we have now, but it was not as advanced. They also had people looking out, and listening out for enemy aeroplanes. The people looking and listening tried to work out which aeroplanes they were, which way they were going and how fast.

### **What weapons did the Spitfire have?**

The Spitfire started with 8 x .303 machine guns because the scientists thought it would take 1,000 bullets to destroy an enemy aeroplane. Later they had 2 x 20mm Hispano-Suiza Canons and 4 x .303 machine guns as this worked better.

### **What was the biggest bomb used in the war?**

The biggest bomb used by the RAF was the Grand Slam which weighed 22,000 pounds or 10,000 kilogrammes. It could only be carried by a specially adapted Lancaster bomber.

### **Did the pilots have weapons?**

Pilots were issued with a .38 revolver or a .38 semi-automatic pistol in case they needed to defend themselves

## **RAF East Fortune**

### **What is RAF East Fortune?**

RAF East Fortune is the name of the Royal Air Force Station that the National Museum of Flight is now based on. The RAF mainly used it as a place to train people.

### **How big was it?**

It covered about 150 hectares or 371 acres. A football pitch is about an acre.

### **How many people lived and worked there?**

About 2,000.

### **How many aeroplanes were there?**

The total number of aircraft varied every month. There were 39 in December 1941, 60 in July 1942 (one Magister, seven Oxfords, one Battle, 11 Beaufighters and 40 Blenheims), 51 in August 1942, 73 in January 1943, 85 in April 1944, 92 in November 1944, and 64 in May 1945. So for most of the war it varied between 50 and 100.

### **What sort of aeroplanes were there?**

Boulton Paul Defiants were the main type from June 1941 until March 1942, then it was predominantly Bristol Blenheims and Beaufighters, with the addition of Beauforts from August 1943. Mosquitoes started to arrive in April 1944 but it was only from June 1945 that they became the main type.

## **Gadgets**

### **Did the pilots carry any other gadgets?**

They tried various gadgets, such as a wire saw in the shoe laces, but the main ones were the maps and compasses.

### **Did the pilots carry gas masks?**

Only when they were on the ground. The gases used in the First World War were heavier than air and so stayed on the ground.