

First of the many nears completion

FIRST MAJOR Spitfire reconstruction in Australia was the Mk V EE853 of Langdon Badger, an Adelaide businessman. This derelict and dismantled airframe was located on Goodenough Island, which lies in the New Guinea chain, arriving in crates in Sydney in May 1973.

Taken on charge in January 1943 and passing through 8 MU, Little Rissington, and 215 MU, Dumfries, the aircraft was shipped immediately to Australia aboard SS Sussex departing March 9, arriving in Melbourne on April 16. Repainted in the appropriate 'foliage' green camouflage and with the red centres deleted from the roundels, the aircraft was issued to the newly formed 79 Squadron RAAF and coded 'UP-O'. The Australian serial A58-146 was not applied.

Following initial training the Squadron was moved north to the Pacific Theatre beginning an island hopping campaign which began at Goodenough and ended in Borneo. For EE853 it was to be just one hop. Returning to Kiriwina on August 28, 1943 in the hands of Alec Chomley, after strafing practice, the aircraft ground-looped with binding brakes. The resulting damage was too substantial for local repair and the aircraft was shipped back to Vivigani Strip on Goodenough. Here it was stripped of all spares and dumped, providing an occasional aluminium trinket for the locals as the war moved elsewhere, until it was swallowed up by the lush vegetation and rediscovered in 1971.

Once located in the workshop the major task of re-skinning and location of parts was begun. Although never conceived as a flying project, a very high standard of sheet metal and detail fit-out was pursued. Langdon's family and John Delaney consumed many hundreds of hours before the first roll-out. Several of the wrecks of Spitfires in the Northern Territory yielded vital components and a new Merlin 46 located in Toowoomba, Queensland, was fitted. Alec Chomley has taken a very keen interest in his old machine and was regularly consulted during the restoration.

For some years the aircraft has been displayed in the private museum in the grounds of Langdon Badger's house in Adelaide. A magnificent display of artifacts, photographs and related documents adorn the walls. It is a regular watering hole for old Spitfire pilots. Not locked away out of sight, but regularly opened to groups and to the public on selected days and shown with pride.

Additional work was recently

completed on the aircraft with the exchange of its high quality wooden Dowty propeller for a complete set of new manufactured cowlings, with an English collector. The propeller was not quite right for this mark and probably came from a Hurricane. A more appropriate metal de Havilland propeller recovered from a Darwin crash and straightened, will now grace the machine.

Complete repainting is now under way and it is planned to paint the port side with the all-white empennage and leading edge required by the 5th Air Force from September 1943. Alec Chomley will again paint the two naked small females that curved over the wing leading edge onto the new cowls - Ah! the sweet nostalgia of it all!

FLYPAST APRIL 88

A 85-146



Mk V EE853 (see top of page) as found on Goodenough island, in the New Guinea chain. The airframe was shipped to Sydney, arriving there in crates in May 1973. (Langdon Badger via PRA)

Found in poor state on Goodenough Island (see bottom) Mk V EE853 has made great progress in the hands of Langdon Badger, family and friends. The Langdon 'museum' is regularly opened up. (Peter R Arnold)

