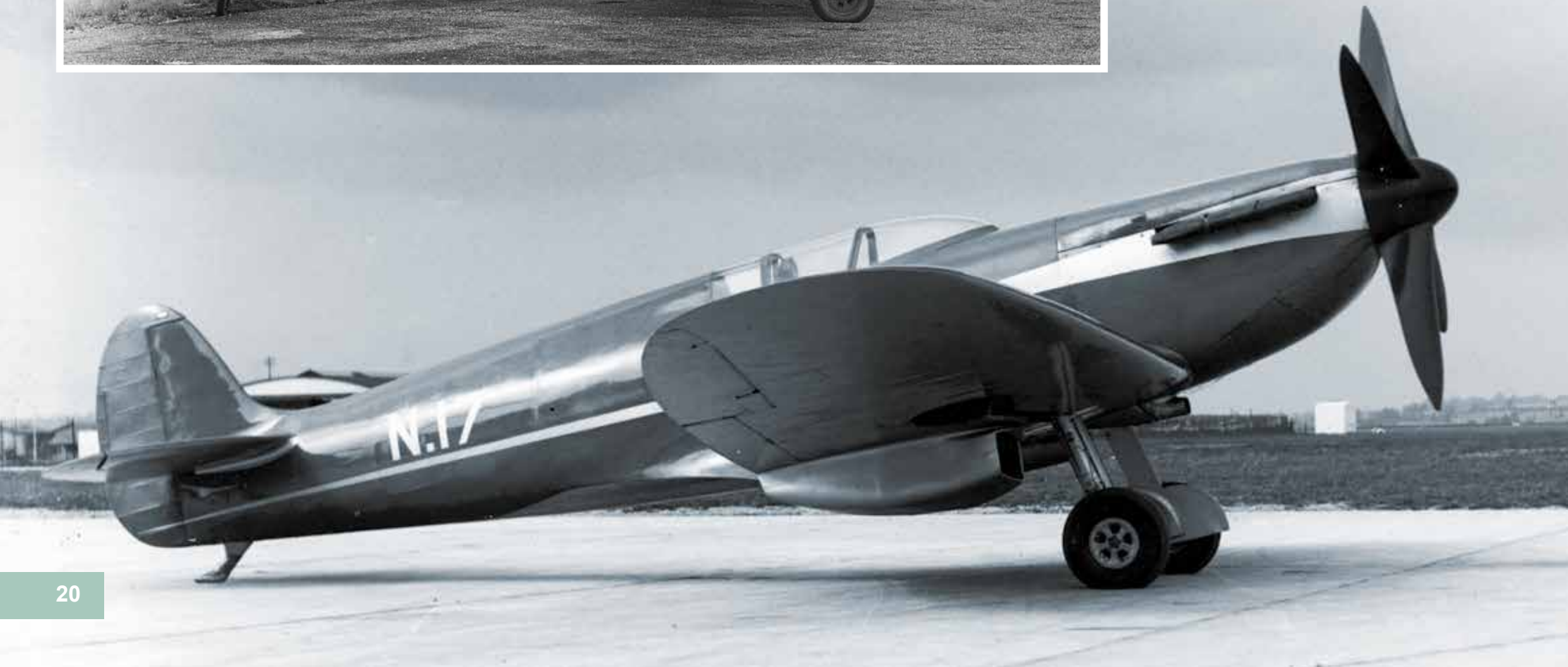


THE SPEED SPITFIRE



In late 1937, a Spitfire was taken off the production line to be modified in an attempt to break the landplane speed record. K9834 was extensively modified with a four bladed wooden prop, enlarged radiator and oil cooler, streamlined canopy as well as an uprated engine and fuel systems. The highly polished blue and silver N.17 achieved 408mph in February 1939 but was constantly behind the Germans as they pushed the record to over 450mph just a month later. With war clouds looming, the project was shelved and K9834 was modified back to a PR MkII but kept its distinctive lightning flash on the fuselage.



WAR!



609 Squadron received its Spitfires in August 1939, so hardly had time to apply its peacetime codes of BL before going onto a war footing with PR codes.

The inset photo shows a very rare combination of wartime codes with the blue/red fuselage roundel which only lasted for a couple of months before the blue/white/red roundel was introduced on the fuselage sides. At around the same time, armoured windscreens were being installed externally to all Spitfires, as can be seen in the larger photo.





When war was declared, squadrons were required to change their codes from the peacetime list to the wartime list. For 65 Squadron this meant replacing its FZ codes with YT. This Spitfire K9906, seen above being flown by Robert Stanford-Tuck, had its YT codes applied in rather a hurry by the looks of it! The brown paint used to cover the FZ codes has obliterated some of the fuselage roundel and the new 'T' is not exactly on the same angle as the 'Y'. As 65 Squadron's codes were usually pretty smart, it's possible that this photograph was taken just after war was declared and the 'temporary' markings were subsequently improved. Note the serial number is still just visible on the fuselage and is also painted on the fin.

THE EVOLUTION OF MARKINGS



When N3035 was delivered to 66 Squadron in October 1939 the official markings were black and white undersides with toned down national markings of just red and blue roundels. The serial number was also removed from its usual position on the fuselage and may have been applied in small numerals on the tail fin.

The 66 Squadron groundcrew applied the unit's LZ codes and individual letter K on either side of the roundel and were one of the few squadrons to re-apply the serial on the fuselage, although uniquely in grey paint.

Just a month or so later, an order was received to add a white ring to the fuselage roundel to aid identification after a series of 'friendly fire' incidents. The groundcrew clearly didn't want to repaint the codes so just enlarged the roundel to slightly overlap the letters.

In May 1940 with the invasion of France, the Spitfire squadrons were sent to patrol the skies over Dunkirk and quickly needed far more visible markings in the hectic combats that were taking place. Roundels were added under the wings, a fin flash applied to the tail and a yellow outer ring applied to the fuselage roundel. With the urgency of the situation, the groundcrew must have assumed that the markings were more important than the code letters and so further obliterated them.

With the action over Dunkirk dying down, the pilots were not happy with their very visible black and white undersides, and so orders were sent out to repaint all undersides of RAF fighters in 'Sky', which was interpreted in many different shades by squadrons due to the lack of official supplies of the colour.

OCTOBER 1939



DECEMBER 1939



MAY 1940



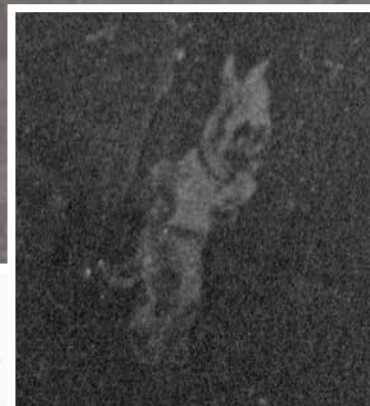
JUNE 1940



Right: A nice air to air of a 609 Squadron Spitfire PR-B in early 1940. Note the '100' stencilled on the fuel tank reminding ground crews to use the new 100 octane fuel which gave the Spitfire better performance.

Below: Another view of PR-O seen on the opening page in this section with a cartoon dog(?) nose art (inset). The thick armoured windscreens is very clear in this view.

Bottom right: Another example of 609 Squadron Spitfire nose-art, this one being a hare saying 'pah'.



Background photo: With the outbreak of war, 611 Squadron changed its codes to FY and later moved to Digby in Lincolnshire where this photo was taken. K9999 was later transferred to 152 Squadron and was shot down into the sea off the Isle of Wight on 12th August, its pilot Pilot Officer Douglas Shepley was killed but his body never found.

Inset top left: 72 Squadron also changed its codes, from SD to RN, as seen on this early K series Spitfire, note the early 'ring pull' door locking mechanism.

Inset left: 19 Squadron at Duxford changed its codes from WZ to QV as the winter of 1939 set in.

Inset top right: 66 Squadron, also at Duxford, changed its codes from RB to LZ but still couldn't make up its mind what colour to paint the serials! Here is N3040 with a grey serial and N3121 with the standard black lettering at Duxford in early 1940.

