

LEND-LEASE SPITFIRE

RECOVERED FROM THE RUSSIAN TUNDRA WHERE IT HAD CRASHED IN 1945, THIS SPITFIRE HAS BEEN PAINSTAKINGLY RESTORED TO ITS ORIGINAL WWII CONFIGURATION

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY
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During 1941, the United States created a policy to help the European war effort obtain war equipment and supplies, which included the Allies sending aircraft to other nations. The British government supplied Spitfires to Russia under the Lend-Lease agreement and one of those now-rare fighters has returned to the air in the United Kingdom.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt wanted to provide Britain with as much aid as his administration could,

without committing the United States to actual war. He sold the idea to a skeptical nation and equally skeptical Congress by suggesting it was like lending items to a neighbor, who would return the items once finished with them. Signed into law on 11 March 1941, and titled the "Act to Promote the Defense of the United States," the program supplied countries deemed to be vital to

American defense. This included the United Kingdom (and British Commonwealth), France (prior to German occupation), the Republic of China, and latterly Russia with supplies like food and oil, aircraft, and other military hardware. The aid was in most cases supplied free of charge, with the intention of the hardware being returned once the war was over (or purchased outright or scrapped). In return, the United States was offered leases to bases in Allied territory. Despite the United States entering the war in late 1941, the Lend-Lease agreement was continued and proved

vital to the fight against Germany in Europe.

A Reverse Lend-Lease scheme also existed, that resulted in the British supplying Spitfires to the United States when they first entered the war. The first United Kingdom-based American units formed in 1942 (334th, 335th and 336th Fighter Squadrons), were equipped with Spitfires supplied by the RAF. These squadrons were partially formed from the personnel who had fought during the Battle of Britain in the volunteer Eagle Squadrons. Supplying Supermarine Spitfires to other nations was something that continued as the arrangement of the Lend-Lease agreement became blurred with both Britain and America

supplying aid to Russia. For their part, the United Kingdom supplied the Soviets with 2252 Hawker Hurricanes and 1338 Spitfires. With the US Army Air Force now having significant numbers of fighters based in Britain, it relieved the pressure on the RAF and the Hurricanes and Spitfires could be released to Russia, along with other fighters from America that included Bell P-39 Airacobras and P-63 Kingcobras, Curtiss P-40s, and Republic P-47s. The Roosevelt administration specifically did not want the Russians to get P-51 Mustangs.

Over the decades, a number of war-time Lend-Lease aircraft have been discovered at crash sites around Russia — from lakes, forests, and open countryside. A few have been restored but, to date, just one Lend-Lease

Spitfire has returned to the air. Supermarine

Spitfire PT879 is a unique survivor, and is the only one of the 1338 delivered to Russia that is now again flying. The fighter was discovered by a farmer at a woodland crash site on the Kola Peninsula in extreme northwest Russia, and the wreck was in a remarkably complete state having been untouched since May 1945. The remains were recovered during 1997 in conjunction with the Moscow Preservation Society and United Kingdom-based Spitfire restoration expert/pilot Peter Monk, who returned the fighter to England.

The Mk. IXe Spitfire was originally built at the Castle Bromwich factory, and rolled off the production line in 1944. The fighter then passed through No. 39 Maintenance Unit at Colerne in August 1944, before heading to No. 52 Maintenance Unit at Cardiff in September that same year, for dismantling and shipping to

Peter Teichman display the classic lines of Spitfire PT879, but with a twist — this is the first flying Spitfire with Soviet markings. The paint scheme was completed before the Russian invasion of the Ukraine and after that just about everything Russian became unpopular in the Free World. However, history is history and we must remember the Soviets suffered catastrophic losses fighting with the Allies against the Nazis.