

Langdon Badger Family, Port Adelaide, S.A., Australia

Langdon Badger's beautifully restored F.Vc (T) as displayed in the South Australian Aviation Museum at Port Adelaide, S.A., before its recent repaint.

(Peter R. Arnold)



EE853 was built by Westland Aircraft Ltd at Yeovil, Somerset, with cockpit c/n WASP-20.484 as part of a batch of 200 Mk. V Spitfires ordered in September 1941 to Contract No. 124305/40. The restored aircraft carries the firewall c/n 6S-272319 but this may have been installed during the restoration. It was fitted with a Merlin 46 and delivered to No. 8 M.U. on 23 January 1943, moving on to No. 215 M.U. at Dumfries on 8 February, where it was packed for shipment by sea to North Africa. It embarked on board the SS *Sussex* on 9 March but the ship was diverted to Australia and arrived at Port Melbourne on 16 April 1943. The Spitfires were un-crated and assembled at No. 1 Aircraft Depot, Laverton, Victoria, where EE853 was officially taken on charge on 20 April and the Desert Sand colours were over-painted with Foliage Green, although the RAAF serial, A58-146, was not painted on the aircraft. No. 79 Sqn's aircraft, code-named "Capstans" after the popular cigarette brand, were then flown to a secret location on the Fairbairn's sheep station, *Wooloomanata*, North West of Geelong, Victoria.

EE853 being taxied whilst in service with No. 79 Sqn at Vivigani.

(via Langdon Badger)



EE853 remained at Laverton until 25 May when it was transferred to No. 13 ARD (Airframe Repair Depot). In all probability this was the Reserve Pool, which the unit operated at Breddan, Qld, and on 14 June it was issued to No. 79 Sqdn. The aircraft joined the squadron at Townsville on 16 June as one of a pair of replacements flown in after two of the original aircraft (EE954 and JG897) were involved in a fatal collision on landing on 13 June. It was immediately assigned to "C" Flight and on 17 June EE853 was one of the 13 aircraft of "C" Flight which flew from Townsville to Horn Island, with escort provided by a Lockheed Lodestar, Sgt Andy Byrne making the trip in 4hrs 30mins. After a short stop at Horn Island "C" Flight was back in the air – this time with a Beaufighter escort – en route to a strip at Seven Mile, Port Moresby, landing after 2hrs 15mins.

Andy Byrne and EE853 were part of a group of 12 Spitfires which left Seven Mile, Port Moresby on 18 June 1943 heading for Gurney Strip at Milne Bay, flying time for the trip varied between 1hr 15mins and 2hrs, the flight having been made in formation but not all aircraft could land together and some pilots had to hold for up to 45 minutes. The delay may, in part, have been a consequence of Andy Byrne over-running the landing strip on arrival in EE853 causing considerable damage to the aircraft when it tipped over onto its nose. EE853 was allotted to No. 10 R.S.U. at Milne Bay for repairs and was eventually taken on charge at Vivigani on 23 July.



EE853 came to grief on 28 August 1943 when it swung on landing and ran off the runway, colliding with a low embankment. The "August Girl" mascot is just visible above the port wing leading edge.

(via Langdon Badger)

Allocated the individual code "UP-O", it was air tested for 45 minutes on 25 July by P/O George Voges, who noted that it had problems with the armament and an oil leak. Voges made a further 55 minute test flight on 29 July after which it was passed fit for service and Sgt Alec Chomley took her up on an altitude test flight on 1 August, reaching a recorded 35,000 ft over Vivigani, taking off at 15:15 and landing at 16:28.

Following the US occupation of the Woodlark and Trobriand Islands in early July 1943, 79 Sqdn received an order on, 29 July, to transfer from Vivigani to a new base at Kiriwina, the principal island of the Trobriand group. Whereas Goodenough Island had been mountainous, the new island was very flat, the highest point on the island being a 100ft high coral cliff.

No. 79 Sqdn's ORB states that on 18 August 1943 the squadron finally departed Vivigani and flew to Kiriwina, Alec Chomley flew EE853 as part of Black Section, taking off from Vivigani at 15:30 and arriving at Kiriwina at 16:15, interestingly, Alec's own flying logbook states that the flight took place on 19 August. Both sources agree that he took EE853 up on the afternoon of 22 August for a squadron formation and practice attack exercise, George Voges taking off the following morning for a Recce scramble – nothing being intercepted.

The fuselage of EE853 as found on the edge of Vivigani airstrip in 1971.

(Charles Darby)

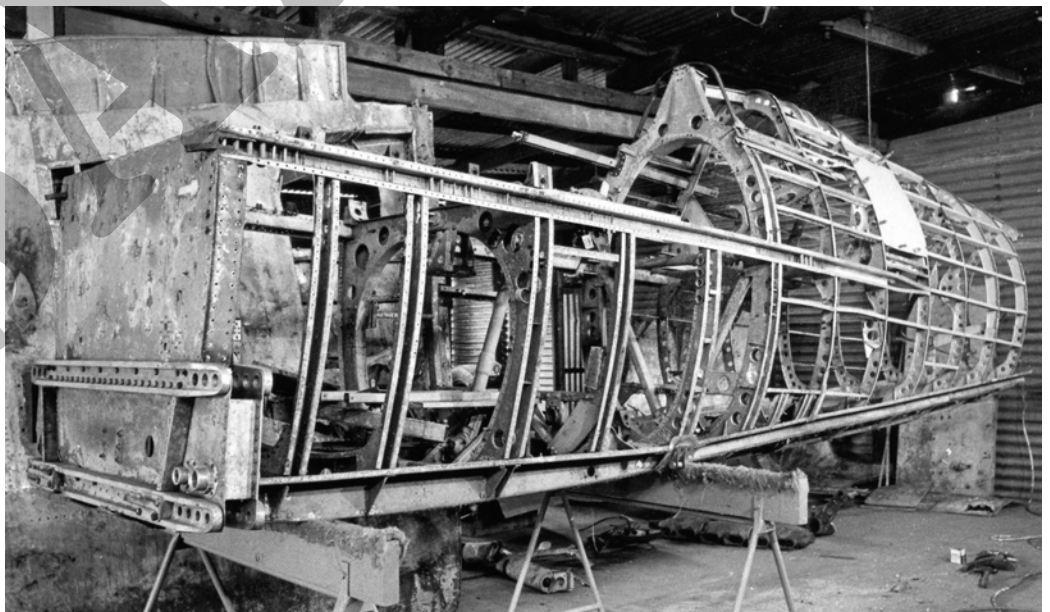


EE853's final flight was on 28 August 1943, Sgt Alec Chomley took off from Kiriwina at 16:32 for a squadron formation and AA strafing practice flight but on landing at 17:25 at the end of the exercise the aircraft swung off the runway, mounted an embankment at the side of the strip and was extensively damaged. Chomley was uninjured but EE853 was a write-off. Rather than leaving the wreck at Kiriwina it was transferred to No. 26 R.S.U. at Vivigani – with the location code “Ginger” painted on the components – who received it on 8 September. Following a survey it was decided, on 10 September, that it was beyond economic repair and was recommended that it was only suitable for “conversion to components”.

The stripped remains of EE853 lay in the jungle near the old airstrip – which is still in use today – until rediscovered in 1971 by Australian businessman Langdon Badger. Langdon and his family were in Papua New Guinea and he was interested in landing his light aircraft on

The fuselage of EE853 in the early stages of restoration in Adelaide in October 1974.

(Peter Sledge via Langdon Badger)





Nearly complete—EE853 is seen here at Parafield aerodrome, Adelaide, in the mid 1970s.

(Langdon Badger / PRA)

all the old wartime strips and asking the local people to show his family any wrecked aircraft in the jungle. The Spitfire was located and dismantled, along with parts from several other Spitfires, and shipped to Adelaide in 1973. Here work commenced on a rebuild to static display condition, Langdon Badger being assisted by his wife and three sons together with engineer John Delaney. A brand new Merlin 46, No. 94039, was located at Toowoomba, Queensland, and parts from at least five other Spitfires were incorporated into the project, which is, nevertheless, some 75 per cent original.



During 2009 EE853 underwent a thorough repaint which included an accurate recreation of the original Vargas "August Girl" artwork on the cowlings by artist Janice Eames.

(Langdon Badger Collection)

Once the restoration was completed EE853 was unveiled at a special ceremony in 1975 at which many surviving members of No 79 Sqdn – including Alan Rawlinson, David Hopton and Alec Chomley – were reunited. It was then displayed for many years in a specially built building at Langdon Badger's home in Adelaide but in August 2001 was placed on permanent loan to the South Australian Aviation Museum, Port Adelaide, South Australia.

The Museum had been formed in 1984 by a group of people interested in aviation history and aircraft restoration, and initially opened to the public in a garage behind the former Pier Hotel at Glenelg. In November 1986 the Museum relocated to the old "SA Lion" Flourmill in Mundy Street, Port Adelaide and in June 1990 the History Trust of South Australia awarded Provisional Accreditation to the Museum as the State's Aviation Museum. In 1991 the Museum assumed responsibility for the State Historical Aviation Collection, then held by the National Motor Museum at the Birdwood Mill. This collection is now under restoration. A turning point in the development of SAAM was the acquisition of the RAAF Douglas C-47B, A65-114, now the flagship of the Museum fleet.

In January 1996 the Museum relocated to an aircraft hangar on Ocean Steamers Road and was granted the privilege of displaying the Government DSTO Woomera Rocket Collection. In January 2000 the Museum was awarded full accreditation by the History Trust of South Australia, making it one of only six museums in the State awarded this recognition. In April 2005 the Museum closed to the public in preparation for relocation to Lipson Street and in June 2005 the aircraft were relocated to temporary storage in the new workshop at Lipson Street. The main hangar from Ocean Steamers Road was then dismantled and re-erected at the new site. January 2006 saw the aircraft reassembled and put on public display at the new aviation complex.

During 2009 EE853 underwent an extensive refurbishment which included repainting of the camouflage scheme and new stencils, together with an accurate recreation of the original "August Girl" artwork by local artist Janice Eames. Sgt Alec Chomley had copied the original in late 1942 from a newly-arrived 1943 *Esquire* calendar flown in by the Americans. The airbrush drawings were done by Alberto Vargas and she was "August Girl".

Following the completion of the artwork Emma Bitmead posed in her grandmother's 1940's swimsuit for comparison!

(Alf Knoll of Skorpion Photography)

