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A
fighting machine
par excellence

‘SPITFIRE’

Author John Nichol
Reviewed by John Cox

John Nichol (navigator) and John Peters (pilot) were shot down over Iraq during the Gulf War in 1991 while flying an RAF Tornado bomber. John Nichol has since proved a prolific author, having produced some excellent fiction and non-fiction books.

Considerable research has been undertaken by the author, including interviews with many who flew and maintained the Spitfire, of which several died before the book was published in 2018.

The prototype of the Spitfire first flew in July 1934, going on to fight alongside the sturdy Hurricane to keep the Luftwaffe at bay during the Battle of Britain in 1940. The early Mark 1 and Mark 11 versions of the Spitfire established themselves as national icons and, from that point, its development through the war was astonishing. 20 versions of the Spitfire were produced between 1936 and 1945 (plus numerous prototypes); and 8 versions of the Seafire (naval version). A total of nearly 23,000 were built.

The United States Air Force operated several Spitfire squadrons during the Second World War, as they did not have an equivalent combat aircraft, until the US-built Mustang (powered by a Rolls Royce Merlin engine) entered service.

There is no doubt, the Spitfire was an amazing piece of British engineering and much more than just that portrayed during the Battle of Britain. It had been used in combat in every theatre of war with more than 30 countries operating the aircraft. The Spitfire went on to fight in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, with both the Israeli and Egyptian air forces using the fighter against each other. Seafires were in combat during the Korea War in 1950, flying from a Royal Navy aircraft carrier. The RAF continued to operate the Spitfire as a meteorological aircraft until 1957.

The book is as much about the people who flew and maintained the Spitfire as the aircraft itself. There are many fascinating stories of the dedicated individuals and of the courageous actions of the pilots. The pilots loved the aircraft, one stating it was an aircraft with a personality all of its own – docile at times, swift and deadly at others – a fighting machine *par excellence*.

I must admit to learning much from reading this book and have no hesitation in recommending it.

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