

# Spitfire flown by The Great Escape's Sandy Gunn to return to skies with help from GKN

A Second World War Spitfire flown by a pilot whose story was immortalised in the film *The Great Escape* is set to return to the skies as part of a major project.

The AA810 plane flown by Alistair 'Sandy' Gunn was shot down over Norway in 1942 while on a secret mission to photograph the German battleship Tirpitz. The pilot escaped – but was later captured and imprisoned by the Gestapo. He was executed in 1944 following his involvement in 'the Great Escape' from the Stalag Luft III prisoner of war camp.

The historic aircraft flown by Mr Gunn is now being restored following a £500,000 donation from aerospace giant GKN, which supplied fuselage frames and system components for the Spitfire more than 80 years ago.

GKN apprentices in Bristol and the Isle of Wight will be involved in the restoration project, with the plane expected to take flight in 2024.



Alastair 'Sandy' Gunn leaning on the tail of Spitfire R7056 in November 1941

(Image: Gunn Family)

During the 1930s and 1940s, a thousand Spitfires rolled off GKN's Hadley Castle production line near Telford. It also made components for the aircraft at its East Cowes facility, where the Spitfire AA810 will be restored.

The project will involve the restoration of the plane's fuselage structure, as well as the wing spars, leading edges and the wing ribs, GKN said.

GKN established Spitfire AA810 Restoration as a limited company in 2018, with the aim of returning Mr Gunn's historic aircraft to flight. The associated charitable education arm – the Sandy Gunn Aerospace Careers Programme – was launched in 2019.

John Pritchard, president civil airframe at GKN Aerospace,

said the company is hoping to “inspire the next generation of aerospace engineers” with the project.



Workers at Hadley Castle pose with the last Spitfires to be produced on the site, June 1945

(Image: GKN)

“By doing so, this restoration project can help us shape the future of flight,” he said.

The so-called ‘Sandy Spitfire’ was a super long-range photographic aircraft during the war. It also has the highest operational hours of any surviving Mk1 Spitfire and is the earliest surviving unarmed military reconnaissance aircraft in existence, according to GKN.

Once completely restored, the aircraft will make a return

flight to Norway, and will attend air shows in Wanaka, New Zealand, and Oshkosh, in the US. The aircraft is expected to be based with the Shuttleworth Collection at Old Warden airfield, near Bedford, where it will be available to the public.

Tony Hoskins and Dr Michael Smith, co-directors of Spitfire Restoration and co-trustees of the Sandy Gunn Aerospace Careers Programme Charity, added: "Given their shared history, GKN Aerospace is the ideal partner in this iconic project and educational programme which, together, revives the past and inspires the future."

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