

## Gloster Sea Gladiator N5518...?

The Fleet Air Arm Museum's Engineering Team are currently rebuilding an example of a Gloster Sea Gladiator in the Museum's Restoration Workshop.

When complete, the Sea Gladiator will help to tell a vital part of Fleet Air Arm fighter pilot training and operational history from the late 1930s and into the early stages of WW2.

Fewer than 6 (reasonably) complete Gladiators are known to exist in the world today, with an additional small number of incomplete aircraft in museums and collections worldwide.

The Fleet Air Arm Museum only has a few badly corroded and damaged parts with which to start it's project, however, it will aim to use as much of this original material as possible in the rebuild. Where components are not available, original factory drawings will be used along with references from the existing aircraft, to duplicate any missing parts as accurately as possible.



### **N5518 - ? How sure are we that the aircraft we are building is N5518...?**

In 1940, N5518 was operating as a loaned aircraft (from the Fleet Air Arm) attached to 263 RAF Squadron operating from the frozen lake runway at Lake Lesjaskogsvatnet, Norway. As German forces advanced quickly the RAF had to withdraw, abandoning the parked aircraft to their fate.



During the spring as the ice melted, the aircraft slithered to the bottom of the lake. Here they remained until the late 1960s and early 1970s, when diving teams located and recovered much of the now jumbled and largely unidentified wreckage. Some pieces of salvaged Gladiator went to the RAF Museum, others to the Gloster Aviation Society and some to the Fleet Air Arm Museum. Since the recovery exercise, all three establishments have been co-operating to provide as much shared information as possible to enable each group to achieve their own aims. More recently the Gloucester based company, Reto Track & Air, have embarked on their own Gladiator rebuild project and are currently working closely with the Fleet Air Arm Museum.

Whether any components from N5518 were extracted during the lake recovery 40 years ago still remains unknown.

Positive identification has long been a problem. However, knowing that N5518 was operating on that frozen lake and did go to the bottom in the Spring thaw of 1940, the Museum has chosen to use it as a serial

number reference for the project until better evidence becomes available (or a more identifiable N5518 steps forward).

Careful examination of the original components has revealed two bullet holes from the guns of a German aircraft making an attack on the Gladiators whilst parked on the frozen lake. These components have been incorporated into the re-build of the aircraft and give an interesting insight into the position and angle of attack from the German aircraft.

Although this project will consist of (mostly) new fabricated components and construction, the Museum Engineering Team are always vigilant and trained to spot vital historical details that may exist on any original parts as important witness marks of the objects past.