

BoB Aircrew – Flying Goggles



Pilots who had joined up before the war, either in full-time service or as volunteers, would on average undergo six months **training** before going into battle. By August 1940 this had dropped to just two weeks. As the Battle progressed, the age and experience of the aircrew reduced; by the end the average age of a Battle of Britain pilot was just 20.

Aircrew

Even with thorough training, pilots often had to quickly adjust from outdated biplanes to active combat in the recently developed Spitfires and Hurricanes. A fifth of Battle of Britain aircrew were international pilots. After British nationals, the largest number of pilots were Polish, having fled occupied Poland in 1939. Polish pilots found themselves flying aircraft that were opposite to those they had been flying at home – to accelerate in a Polish aircraft they pulled the throttle back, but in a British Spitfire or Hurricane they pushed it forward. Many had also never flown aircraft with a retractable undercarriage so had to remember to release the wheels before landing!



Aircrew posing for a photograph with other members of their squadron.



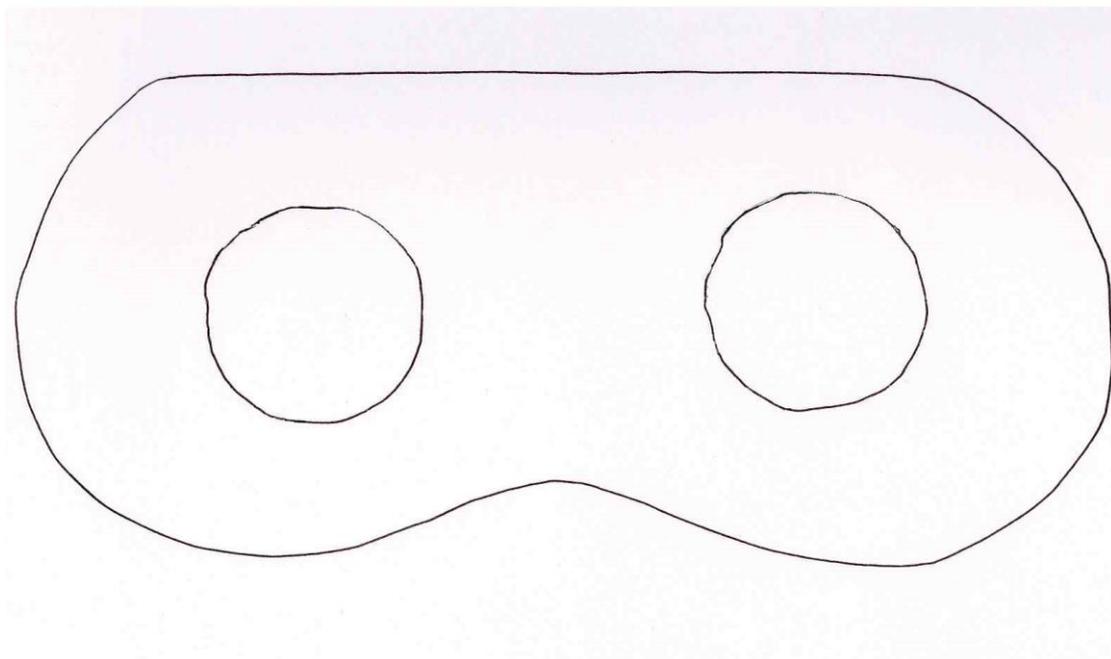
Pilots from the Polish 303 Squadron.

Clothing

Due to the positioning of the fuel tanks in both Spitfires and Hurricanes, pilots often suffered from burns if their aircraft caught fire. Aircrew therefore wore protective clothing – special flying goggles, boots and gloves were particularly important. If their hands got burnt, it would make it particularly difficult to pull the rip cord on their parachute when they baled out. Many aircrew who did suffer from burns were treated by the pioneering plastic surgeon Sir Archibald McIndoe at the Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead.



Airman in flying helmet, goggles and oxygen mask.



Flying Goggles Instructions

1. Cut out the template and draw around it onto card (use white card if you want to decorate).
2. Cut out your shape.
3. Punch holes on either side (you can make the holes stronger by adding circular paper reinforcers).
4. Cut a piece of elastic or string that will fit tightly around your head. Tie each end through the two holes.
5. Decorate your goggles with different coloured pens, paper or felt (stick the white card to the felt and then cut out the felt shape).

Why not wear your goggles along for a visit to the Museum and have a go at sitting in our Spitfire cockpit?

