

1) What is the History behind flying in ex-military aircraft in the UK and why haven't we been allowed to do it before?

Historically the Civil Aviation Authority, or CAA, have erred on the side of caution, believing that the average non-pilot is not in possession of enough knowledge to understand the level of risk they are taking when flying a vintage warbird. With the success in other industries of adventure sports such as bungee jumping, car racing etc. there has been a change of heart, providing the operator of the aircraft takes the time to explain the risks to the participants, and mitigates against these risks as far as possible. This makes it important for us to explain to you, as clearly as possible, the risks involved in flying in a vintage warbird.

2) What are the differences between a vintage warbird and the aircraft in which you might go on holiday such as a Boeing or Airbus?

The Spitfire is not an aircraft built for passenger carriage. It was built as a war machine, whereas Boeing and Airbus make their aircraft almost solely with people's safety in mind, so there is a clear difference in design philosophy that affects safety. This is compounded by the fact that the technology is many years apart. That said, flying in all types of aircraft remains very safe, whether it's used for travel or as a pastime.

3) So what risks are you taking when you fly a vintage warbird, and what can we do and what have we done already to mitigate these risks, or reduce them as far as practicable?

The greatest risk that vintage warbird Pilots in the 1940's had to face was, of course, in the form of an attack from the enemy. Fortunately no one is shooting at us these days! However there are some unlikely eventualities that we still need to discuss with you.

Before worrying too much about all the things that could go wrong you should first consider our **PILOTS** and their history. They are all professionals, from commercial or military backgrounds. They are all highly experienced in flying vintage aircraft, and they undergo regular competency checks and recurrent training by ourselves in addition to the other professional training they receive. Amongst them are some of the finest pilots in the country.

However being a good, or even great pilot is not about buzzing the tower as the films would have you believe. It is about making constant well-informed, safe decisions throughout a flight that will avoid any of the potential scenarios which we will discuss in a moment. In the event of an incident of some sort, it is about acting calmly and applying professional training to guarantee the best outcome possible from the situation in which they find themselves.

There is a well-known saying in aviation that states: "A superior pilot is one who uses his superior judgment so as not to have to use his superior skill".

So what can go wrong?

First of all there's the possibility of an **ENGINE FAILURE** -In most non-pilot's minds this means the end! It does not. Just like any other aircraft, the vintage warbirds will glide. And if there isn't an airport near then that doesn't matter either. The aircraft will stop in about 100 metres in any field we choose. The only reason we don't do this all the time is because it will mean some damage to the aircraft, which would be costly! As an example, pilots during the war, most with very little experience, were landing badly damaged aircraft in fields day after day, heading off to the pub then flying again the next day. Not a problem.

WARBIRD FLIGHTS FOR NON- PILOTS – RISK INFORMATION

This provides an opportune moment to talk about our **AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE**. We are supported by ARCO, The Aircraft Restoration Company based at Duxford. This company is, without doubt, the one of the best organisations of its kind, looking after over a large percentage of all the vintage warbirds flying in the world today.

Each year these aircraft go in for 3 months of Annual Checks during which time all panels are removed, revealing the control systems, engine and aircraft structure, all of which are thoroughly tested.

Then, throughout the season, the aircraft has interim servicing after every 25 hours of flight to once again check the engine, undercarriage and control systems.

Finally we have our own on-site professional engineer, trained by ARCO, who gives the aircraft a thorough check prior to each day of flying, and then checks it again between each flight.

The next biggest risk is of a **MID-AIR COLLISION**. This flight will be performed in uncontrolled airspace, which means once we leave the airfield we will not be directed what to do by Air Traffic Control. Whilst they will give the pilots information about the location of other aircraft, they will not give avoiding action advice. It is therefore up to us to see and avoid other aircraft, a task in which you will be asked to help by your pilot prior to the flight.

A key part of your pilot's job is to maintain a good lookout at all times to ensure that you are never put at risk of a mid-air collision but, should the worst happen, you still have options. One of those is bailing out and using the parachute.

To that end we will give you a comprehensive brief on the **SAFETY EQUIPMENT** you will have with you on this flight, such as flight suit, boots and gloves, helmet, lifejacket and parachute. All this equipment is fire retardant.

There is also the extremely remote possibility that the **PILOT** could become **INCAPACITATED**. If this were to happen then you'd still be able to use the parachute. However, to reassure you, all our pilots have regular thorough medical examinations to check that they are fit to fly passengers so there is really nothing to worry about on this account.

And finally, there's **YOUR OWN HEALTH** to consider. Vintage warbirds are very dynamic aircraft and it is possible to get very excited in them. We therefore have to ask you lots of questions about your own health and weight prior to your flying, whilst we also reserve the right to make our own decision about your suitability for flight. Should we need to have such a discussion with you regarding this, please don't get upset. We are doing it for your own benefit and safety. In some rare cases it might be necessary for you to go to an aviation doctor to assess your suitability to fly.

There is also an **AGE LIMIT** that needs to be considered. There are no upper limits. Suitability just depends on your health. However, we cannot fly anyone younger than 18.

WARBIRD FLIGHTS FOR NON- PILOTS – RISK INFORMATION

4) Are there any statistics that contextualise the risks, and is it any more dangerous than a track day, parachute jumping, bungee jumping, kite surfing, Paragliding, hill walking, or even riding a motorbike.

We have looked closely at the risks involved and whilst there is some data available, it is very difficult to provide any reliable figures that would provide a basis for comparison. What we can say is that the risk of serious injury or death in other General Aviation activity for the duration of the flight you are about to undertake would indicate a less than 1 in 300,000 chance of death.

This is a generalised statistic - with the CAA's guidance and support, we go to a great deal of effort to minimise risk on your behalf, utilising highly experienced pilots, top class maintenance, and robust operational procedures, as well as providing you with comprehensive safety equipment. With this in mind, we consider our operation is probably safer than many other General Aviation activities.

So in summary, if you choose to fly in a vintage warbird, there is an increase in risk, but the overall chance of injury, or indeed death, is likely to be less than many other potentially hazardous activities such as bungee jumping, hang-gliding or motorcycle racing.

5) If something does go wrong what is your Insurance status when you fly?

We carry Personal Accident Insurance for all passengers who fly in Vintage warbirds. This is in addition to standard aircraft policies, and hangar and facility policies that cover you completely from the moment you enter the facility. You are each personally insured by us for up to £250,000.