



Back row (left to right) : Mike Muller, Denis Earp and Tony Smit

Front row (left to right) : Alan Bridgens, Butch Bester, Trevor Wallace, Basil Hersov, John Martin, Harry Freeman and Dick Turner

Spitfire pilots honoured at gathering hosted by Friends of the SAAF Museum

On Saturday, 1st April 2017, the Spitfire Restoration Project hosted ten Spitfire pilots at the South African Air Force Museum at AFB Swartkop, Centurion. The project is being managed by the Friends of the South African Air Force Museum (FSAAFM). It is restoring the Museum's Supermarine Spitfire Mk IXe, 'Spirit of Reutech', which was badly damaged during an emergency landing in April 2000.

The gathering reunited South African Spitfire pilots who flew these remarkable warbirds operationally, in the Second World War, or elsewhere, such as in the SAAF after the end of World War 2.

According to Ian Grace, chairman of the Spitfire Restoration Project steering committee, there are around 20 Spitfire pilots in South Africa, and the Friends managed to get 10 of them together for the reunion, where the fuselage section of the Museum's Spitfire was on display. A letter of greeting from James Feuiheralde, who now lives in Australia, was read out. He was the youngest of the pilots who flew Spitfires.

"The enthusiasm for the Spitfire shown by these pilots, most of whom are in their nineties, was remarkable. It was an emotional and inspiring day for all of us. They were profuse in their thanks, for letting them join in what was, for them, such a special event," says Grace.

“Our thanks to the SAAF Museum and to the staff at AFB Swartkop, who went out of their way to help us in setting up the event and to everyone else who made it such a fantastic event,” notes Grace.

The Museum Spitfire restoration is a tribute to all who have served within the SAAF, both as support and aircrew. The Project will create awareness of aviation history, the history of the SAAF and the rich legacy of the Spitfire to the younger generation.

The Friends of the SAAF Museum lobbied to have the Spitfire Mk IXe returned to at least static display condition, and the SAAF Museum Council has approved this, giving the Friends the management responsibility for the project. Since then, most of the work has gone into setting up the correct project organisation, structure and plans to provide a framework to do that.

“We are keen to get Spitfire 5518 back to flying condition, to promote the Air Force and aviation amongst the youth. It would also be in honour and tribute to the many Spitfire pilots who lost their lives and those who still survive today,” concludes Grace.

For more information on the Spitfire Restoration Project and how you can help go to www.spitfire-restoration.co.za

Editorial contacts:

Ian Grace | Chairman | Spitfire Restoration Project Steering Committee | iang@xsinet.co.za
| 082 452 5291

Karen Heydenrych | Public Relations | Spitfire Restoration Project Steering Committee |
karen@communikay.co.za | 083 302 9494