



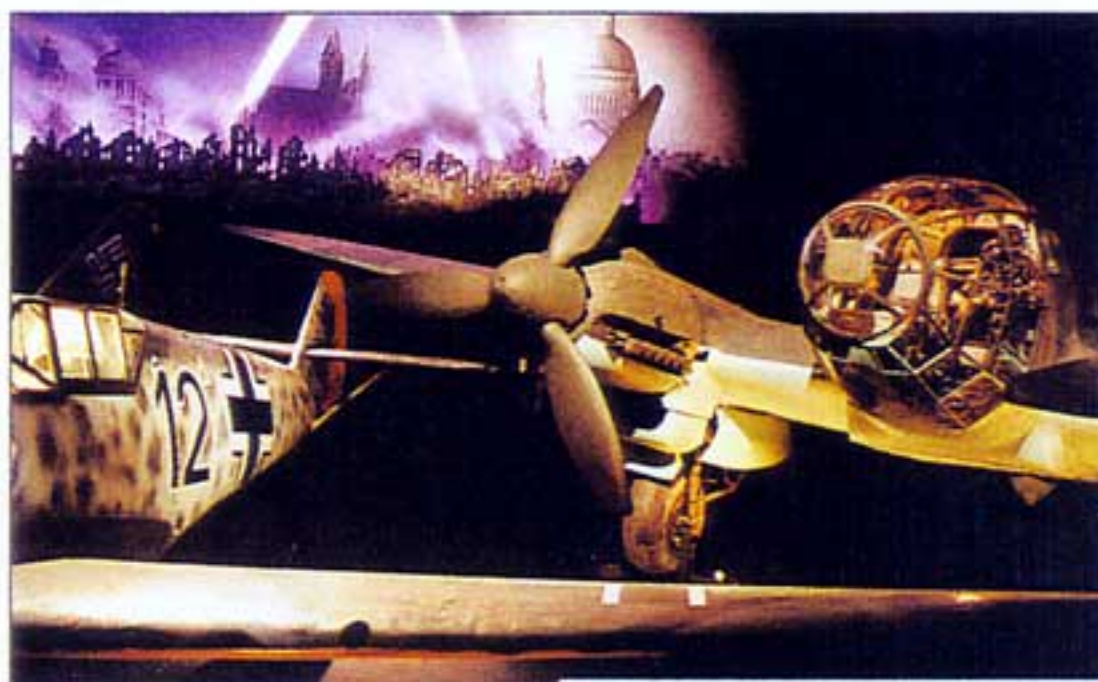
Our Finest Hour

The RAF Museum in Hendon recently unveiled its latest attraction - a multi-media show which retells the story of the Battle of Britain. Entitled 'Our Finest Hour', the show is the biggest development the Museum has witnessed in recent years and with a six-figure price tag, the hope is that it will significantly increase visitor numbers at the venue, which currently attracts 140,000 a year.

To mark the launch, which coincides with the sixtieth anniversary of the Battle of Britain, the Museum invited over a hundred VIPs and guests, including 36 Battle of Britain veterans to the official opening of the new show. The company behind the design of the show was Sarner International, who emerged with the most creative ideas when the contract was put out to tender.

Faced with two irreversible items - the size of the Hall (36 x 45m) and a number of static exhibits in place (a Spitfire and Hurricane, plus a Heinkel 111, Junkers 88, Messerschmitt 109 and 110), Sarner's storyboards envisaged a show which the audience would watch from a raised bank of seating erected to one side of the Hall. The planes would be in the lower foreground, a painted backdrop behind, and projection screens would be lowered into place on which archive footage would relate the story of the Battle of Britain.

The Sarner team, led by John Griffin, Ross Magri and Mike Bennett, worked with LD Bob Bryan and sound designer Charles Bennett on implementing



John Griffin, Ross Magri and Mike Bennett - the production team behind the RAF's new visitor attraction



their ideas. First, Sarner had to find a way to carry out the work without damaging the aircraft, and in particular the installation of the show infrastructure - overhead lighting bars and cabling. Using cherry pickers to avoid damaging the aircraft, Sarner then attached a range of Pars and ETC Source Fours to the bars. The Hall had originally been lit with Mercury lighting, which Sarner requested that this be changed to tungsten lighting, which they then interfaced to, adding dimmer circuits so they could control light levels. Since the planes were to be an integral part of the show, Sarner lit each cockpit by installing a mix of lamps.

With no budget available for acoustic treatment of the space, to give them the levels of intelligibility required, Sarner spec'd a pair of Tannoy 115s and a pair of 112s with TX2 controllers run through Crest and C Audio amplification. For the projection elements, two screens were rigged above the planes - the main scenically painted gauze screen (15m by 4.5m) and a mock barrage balloon (10m by 5m). The stills and footage for

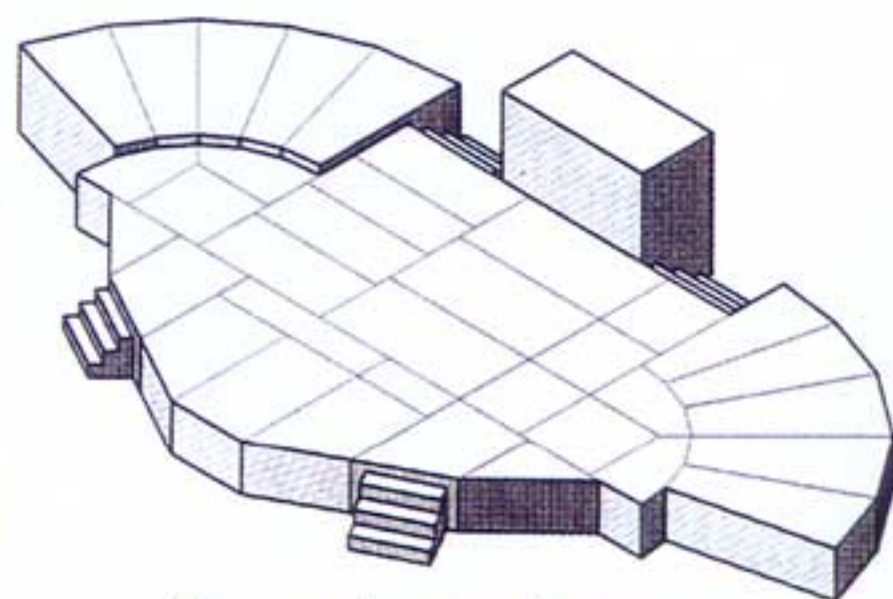
these are fed from NEC and Kodak projectors. To the rear of the planes stands a large dramatically painted backdrop (25m wide by 5m high). Commissioned from scenic artist John Campbell, it shows a war-torn London skyline which is cleverly brought to life by the use of dimmable fluorescents and Coda floods. Adding the haze effect is a Jem ZR20 smoke machine, whilst motorised lights mimic WWII searchlights.

Both the footage and audio clips for the main presentation were obtained from a number of sources and recorded and tracklaid in Sarner's own studio using Pro

Tools 4 and a JL Cooper CS10 control station. They were then layed back and MPEG2 encoded from Sony BVW 75 Betacam SP machines. The video segments were edited using a Windows NT1000 Avid Suite followed by a digi beta online edit. An Alcorn McBride V4+ show controller is used to trigger all the effects and to maintain video and audio synchronisation. Next to it, an Alcorn McBride DMX machine controls both the theatrical and exhibition lighting, with an Alcorn McBride DVM-2 handling playback of MPEG-2 video. A Fostex DI08 - an eight-track hard disk based digital playback machine - manages the surround and spot effects.

The official opening was conducted by the Secretary of State for Defence, Geoffrey Hoon MP and when the invited veterans saw the show, they were extremely moved by it, believing it to have captured the spirit of the Battle perfectly.

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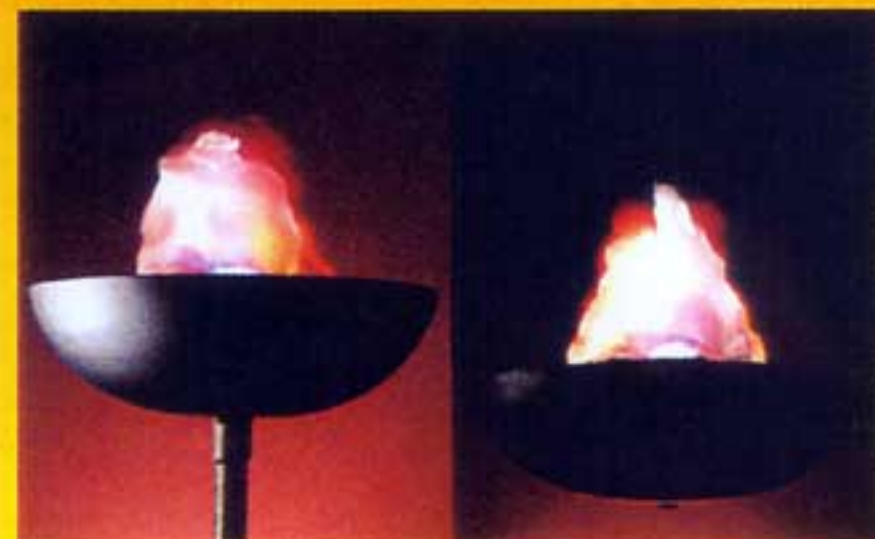
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