

RN AIRCRAFT Part 1

Chance-Vought Corsair

This sleek and distinctive looking US aircraft remains one of the best carrier borne fighters of all time. A very powerful Pratt and Whitney Double Wasp radial engine was chosen for this aircraft, which gave it a speed in excess of 400 mph. The gull wing design had the benefit of providing less drag and permitted conventional landing gear for ground clearance for the 13 foot propeller. Despite early problems the aircraft excelled as an interceptor fighter and as a fighter-bomber, the standard gun armament was six 50 calibre colt-browning machine guns. The aircraft served with the USN and the US Marine Corps with numerous 'Aces' amongst the Marines over Japanese aircraft in the Pacific in WW2.

The RN received 1,977 Corsairs from the USA under Lend/lease arrangements, but most were returned or destroyed after VJ day. The Corsair entered combat for the RN in 1944 from the carrier HMS *Victorious* attacking the German battleship *Tirpitz* in Norwegian waters. The last Victoria Cross of the war was won by Lt Robert H. Gray who was killed when attacking a Japanese destroyer. Four squadrons were retained in light fleet Carriers in the Far East until 1946 when British aircraft became available. An example can be seen in the FAA museum in Yeovilton, Somerset.

Fairey Firefly

The Firefly was the last of a long line of two seater fighter reconnaissance, anti-submarine search or strike aircraft for the Fleet Air Arm and the last fighter built by Fairey Aviation. It was powered by a Rolls-Royce Griffon piston engine developing 2004 hp, which gave it a maximum speed of 270 knots. It was armed with 4X20mm cannon in the wings, also it could carry bombs, rockets, depth charges, flares and markers on underwing pylons. It was an excellent aircraft serving with distinction with Hawker Sea Furies in the Korean war 1950-1953 operating onboard the light fleet carriers. Throughout the Korean war it maintained an admirable record of serviceability and effectiveness. It was replaced in service by the Fairey Gannet in 1956.

An example can be seen in the FAA museum in Yeovilton, Somerset.

De Havilland Sea Mosquito

A derivative of the famous RAF Wartime fighter-bomber, many of which were used by the Fleet Requirements Unit in a variety of training roles. Powered by twin Rolls-Royce Merlin piston engines developing 1640 hp which gave it a speed of 380 knots, crew was a pilot and an observer. 50 new type TR33s aircraft were built for the RN, followed by 6 of the improved type TR37 intended for the strike role from carriers with torpedoes or bombs. It was the first twin engined aircraft to land on a carrier in March 1944 on HMS *Indefatigable*, piloted by Lt Cdr Eric 'Winkle' Brown. The TR37 did not see front line service and all Mosquitoes were scrapped in the early 1950s.

Supermarine Seafire

Descended from the famous RAF Spitfire, the early aircraft which served in WW2 had Rolls-Royce Merlin piston engines and a tail hook for catching the arrester gear on the carriers deck. The aircraft served with distinction during WW2 in the fighter and fighter reconnaissance roles. The later types were powered by the Rolls-royce Griffon engine which

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could attain a speed in excess of 400 knots. Armed with 4X20mm cannon in the wings and provision for a 500lb bomb on the centre line and smaller bombs and rockets under the wings, made for a potent aircraft.

It was a squadron of Seafires from HMS *Indefatigable* that fought the last dogfight in WW2 shooting down over 8 Japanese Zeke (Zero) fighters on 15th August 1945. The FR47 was the last model of Seafire, a far cry from the original Spitfire. Seafire 47s saw action onboard HMS Triumph in 1949 against communist guerillas in Malaya and in the Korean War throughout the early 1950s. They were replaced in service by Hawker Sea Furies and the jet propelled Supermarine Attackers. After 13 years of valuable service in November 1954 the last FAA squadron 764, gave up its last aircraft at RNAS Yeovilton.

A preserved example (SX137) can be seen in the FAA museum in Yeovilton, Somerset.

References:

1. US Navy Fighters of WW2 by Tillman & Lawson
2. Aircraft of the Royal Navy since 1945 by Lt-Cdr David Hobbs RN