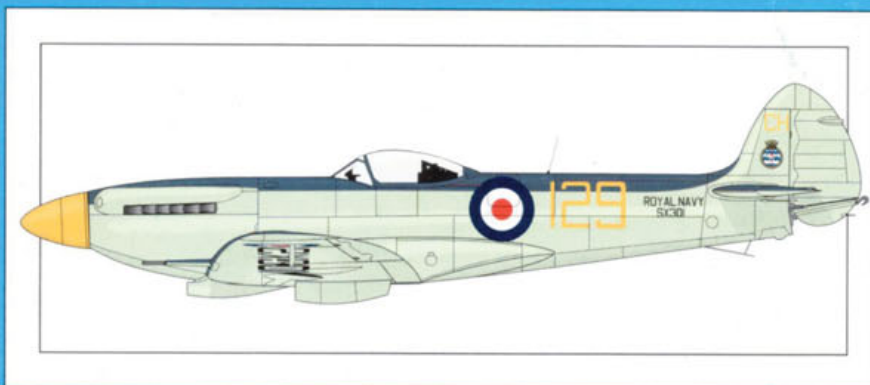




WARPAINT SERIES No. 20

Supermarine SEAFIRE

Griffon-engined variants - Mk.F.XV, F.XVII, F.45, F.46 and FR.47

By GEOFFREY BUSSY

The penultimate operational unit with the Royal Navy to use the Seafire FR.47 was 804 Squadron embarked for much of its time on *HMS Ocean*. This aircraft, VP440:131-O is shown taking off from the carrier's deck during exercises with the Mediterranean fleet in the mid-1950s. (P.Cook)



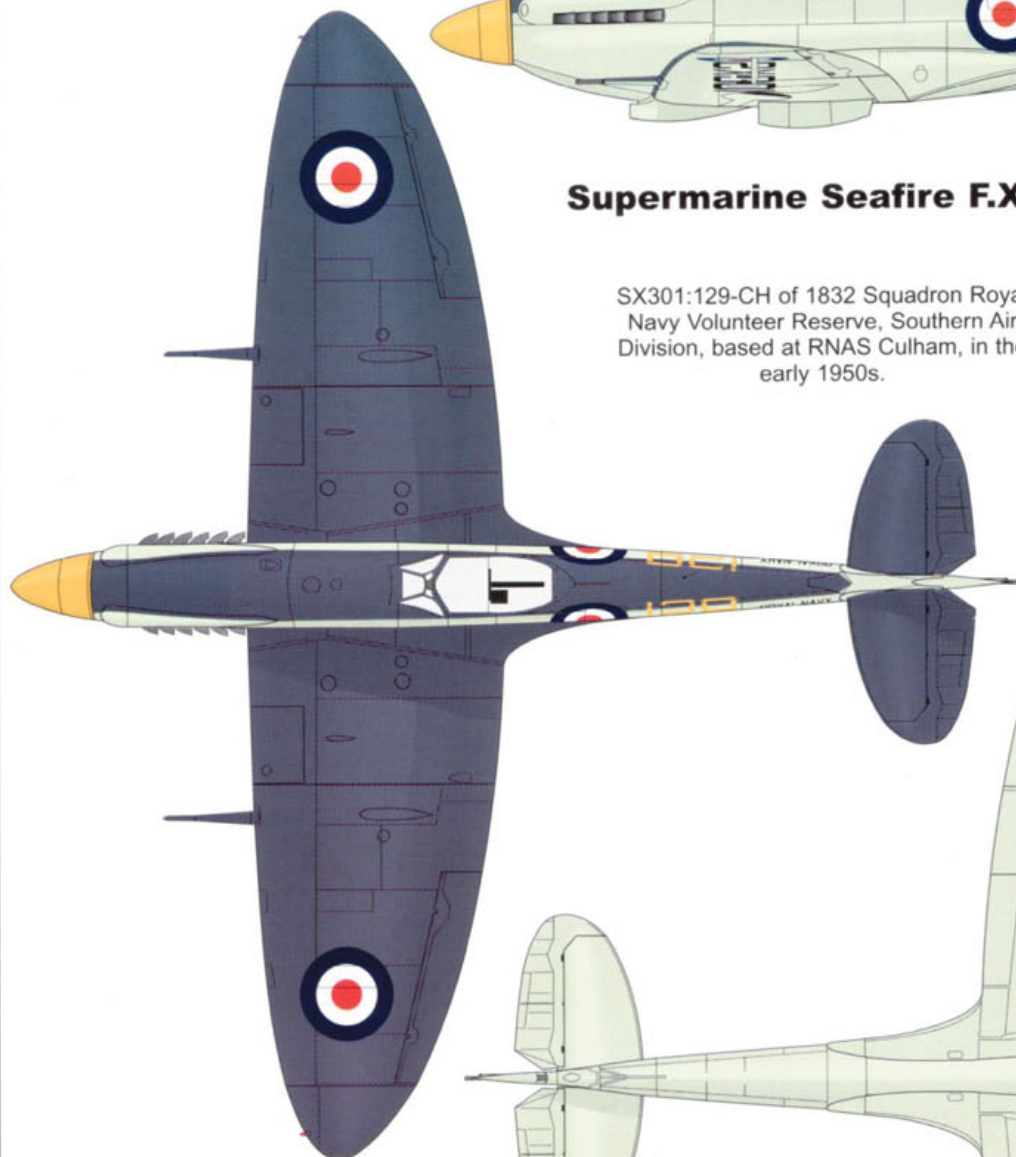


Supermarine Seafire F.XVII

SX301:129-CH of 1832 Squadron Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve, Southern Air Division, based at RNAS Culham, in the early 1950s.



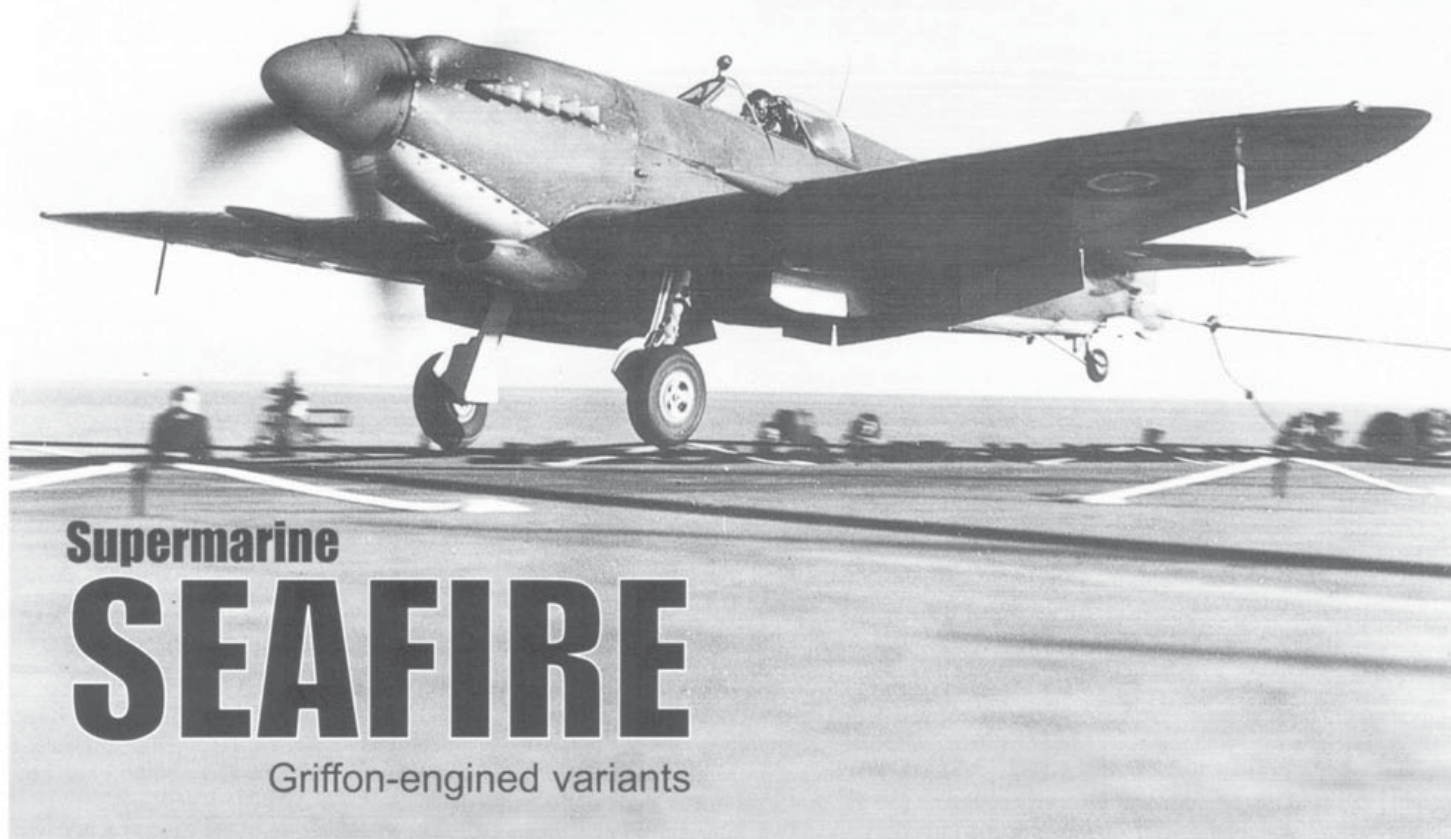
Squadron badge of 1832 Squadron



Drawings by
David Howley



By Geoffrey Bussy



Supermarine

SEAFIRE

Griffon-engined variants

THE Griffon-engined Seafires were the final developments of the Spitfire family started in March 1936 with the first flight of the Supermarine Type 300. The ultimate Seafire FR.47 was then a hundred mph faster, was powered by an engine delivering twice as much horsepower, and weighed in at about double its ancestor. Although too late to see service in World War 2, the later marks of Seafires proved invaluable to fill the gap from the disposal of the Lend-Lease American fighters to the arrival of the Hawker Sea Fury in August 1947. The Seafires were the only naval fighters available when the Royal Navy supported the British evacuation from Palestine, intervened in the Malayan insurrection and was involved in its first Korean deployment.

Considerations of the Eastern and Pacific theatres, where Japanese aircraft had out flown their British opponents, led the Royal Navy to look for an improved Seafire intended to supersede the Mk.III variant - an enhanced and navalised Spitfire Mk.V due to enter service in the autumn of 1943. The Admiralty showed interest in the Griffon-engined variant of the Spitfire. The Navy significantly lagged behind the RAF as the Spitfire Mk.XII reached operational service in February 1943. At this time, two

machines were loaned to the Fleet Air Arm and were navalised by Supermarine during February and March. These aircraft then joined 778 Squadron, the Service Trials Unit, and carried out carrier suitability experiments. Test pilots were impressed by the speed at low altitude but handling characteristics on take-off and landing needed aerodynamic corrections for a naval utilisation.

Meanwhile Supermarine worked on a more suitable variant and presented the Type 377 which was covered by Specification N4/43 and followed by the award of a contract in March 1943 for six prototypes. This model was designated Seafire F.Mk.XV as the Air Ministry then allotted mark numbers consecutively in the Spitfire/Seafire family. The new Seafire

With the wheels inches above the deck and the arrestor hook firmly attached to the wire, this Seafire XV of an unknown squadron is seen coming in for a perfect landing on a carrier (FAA Museum)

would emerge as a successor to the Seafire L.IICs and LF.IIIIs and as a perfect complement to the tough American fighters used by the FAA - the Corsair and the Hellcat. The Seafire F.XV was a real interceptor dedicated to air superiority in defence of the Fleet, featuring an impressive low-level top speed and a phenomenal rate of climb.

The Seafire F.XV was based on the Seafire Mk.III airframe with an engine installation similar to that of the Spitfire Mk.XII and an empennage extrapolated from the Spitfire Mk.VIII characterised by a broad chord



After the fitting of its distinctive arrestor hook, prototype Seafire F.XV NS487 is seen at RAE Farnborough during the intensive trials that took place beginning in March 1944 to test the catapult and arrestor gear. Earlier it had been to A&AEE Boscombe Down for flight trials. (RAE)



rudder and an enlarged trimming tab. The Mark F.XV introduced a retractable tailwheel as standard in Seafires.

Previously fitted on the Seafire Mk.III, the wings were the folding versions of the universal wings first adopted on the Spitfire Mk.V. Each wing folded upwards, just inboard of the cannon bay. As the overall height still had to be reduced for carrier clearance, the wingtips folded downwards. Folding and spreading operations were

manual and required five ratings in less than one minute per wing. Armament was identical with the Seafire Mk.III, including two 20 mm Hispano Mk.Vs and four 0.303 Browning guns. The main plane could carry offensive armament, like one 500 lb bomb attached to the centreline rack, or two pairs of Mk.VIII rocket projectiles and an external tank (30 gal or 45 gal blister tank, or 50 gal torpedo tank). Two 22½ gal combat tanks could be fitted under the wings but their

Second prototype Seafire F.XV NS490 during flight trials which were conducted throughout 1944 by the manufacturers, A&AEE and RAE, Farnborough. (IWM)

installation prevented the use of rockets. There were also restrictions for deck operations. Catapult launchings prevented carrying an under fuselage bomb or a drop tank.

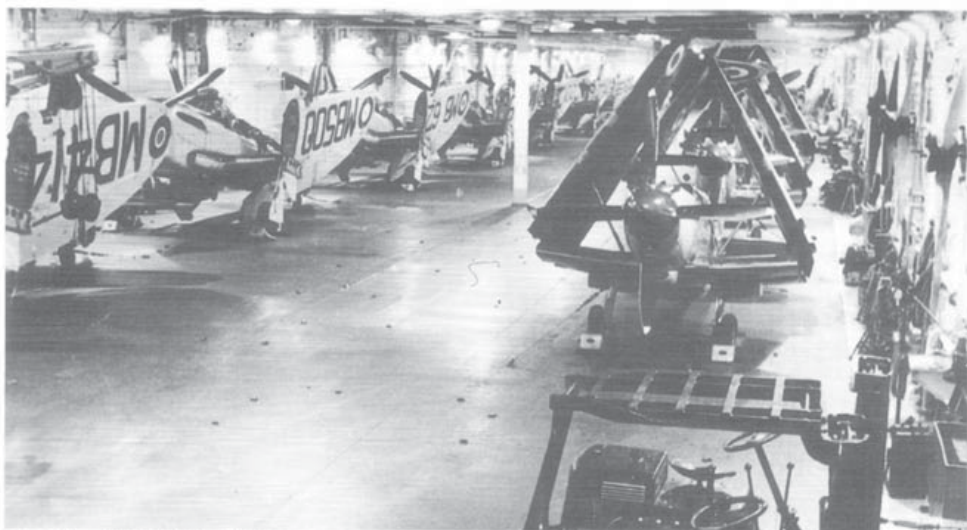
The main feature of the Seafire F.XV was its engine. The Griffon VI was a two-speed, single-stage supercharged engine giving 1,950 hp for take-off and 1,850 hp at maximum power at 2,000 ft. It was bulkier than the Merlin, with an increased capacity of 37 litres, but its frontal area only increased slightly. The Griffon drove a four-bladed Rotol propeller of 10 ft 5 in diameter, rotating in the opposite direction to the Merlin. A newly designed spinner was fitted. Although the Seafire F.XV retained the Mk.III wings, the cooling system was replaced by two Spitfire Mk.IX type large radiators under the wings; the usual coolant radiator under the starboard and the oil cooler plus an additional coolant radiator under the port wing in order to meet tropical requirements and extra oil capacity.

One of the main drawbacks of the Seafire as a naval aircraft was its deficiency in internal fuel capacity. The problem of sufficient fuel remained unsolved with the Mark F.XV although two extra leading edge fuel tanks were introduced, providing 9½ gal each. Internal fuel capacity rose to 101 gal but range was only 430 miles without having recourse to an external tank.

TESTING AND IMPROVEMENTS

The first prototype to emerge from

Top left: Seafire F.XV SW523 seen landing at Nutts Corner. This is possibly one of the aircraft that went to the Royal Canadian Navy. (National Aviation Museum) Left: Tightly packed in their respective sides of the hangar deck Seafire F.XVs and Fireflies seen on board HMS Implacable. (FAA Museum)



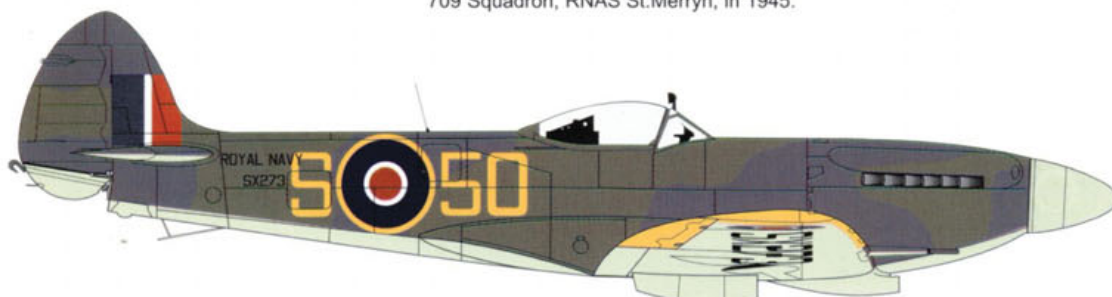
Supermarine Seafire camouflage and markings

SEAFIRE COLOUR KEY

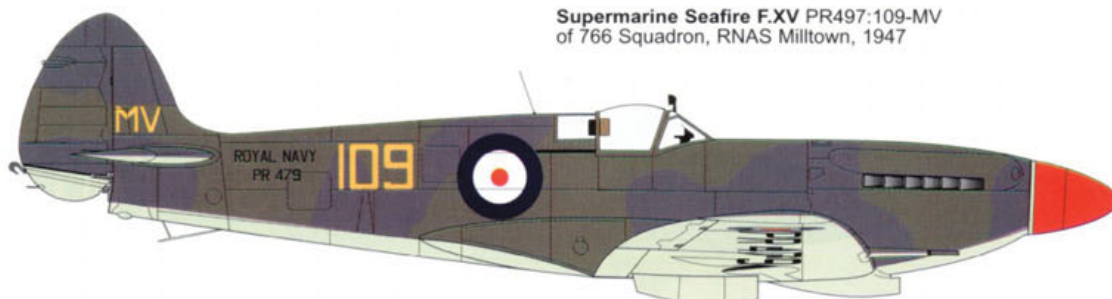
								
Black	White	Yellow	R. Red	R. Blue	Ex. Dk Sea Grey	Dk. Slate Grey	Sky	Aluminium

Artwork by David Howley

Supermarine Seafire F.XVII SX273:S-50 of
709 Squadron, RNAS St.Merryn, in 1945.



Supermarine Seafire F.XV PR497:109-MV
of 766 Squadron, RNAS Milltown, 1947

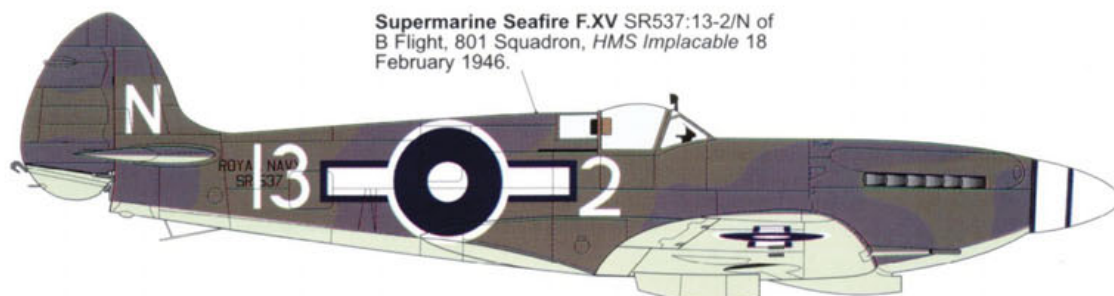


Supermarine Seafire F.XV PR479:L of 803
Squadron, Royal Canadian Navy 1945-46.
HMCS Warrior

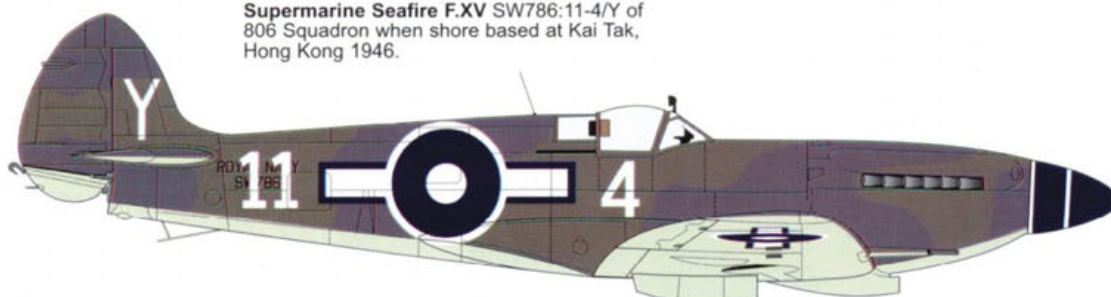


Squadron badge
of 803 Squadron

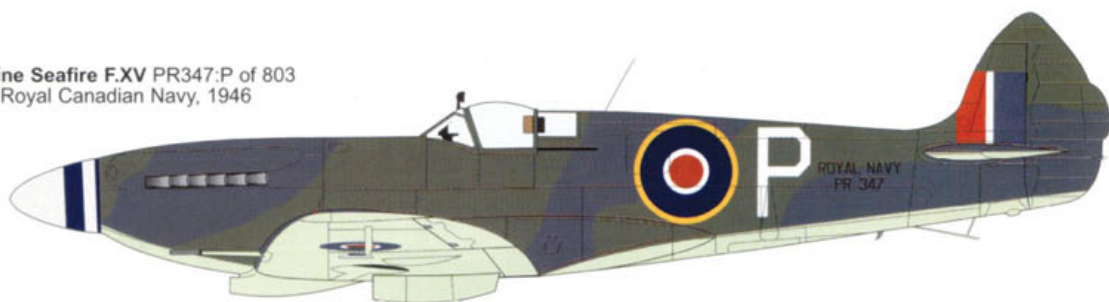
Supermarine Seafire F.XV SR537:13-2/N of
B Flight, 801 Squadron, *HMS Implacable* 18
February 1946.



Supermarine Seafire F.XV SW786:11-4/Y of
806 Squadron when shore based at Kai Tak,
Hong Kong 1946.



Supermarine Seafire F.XV PR347:P of 803 Squadron, Royal Canadian Navy, 1946



Supermarine Seafire F.XVII SX280:C of 807 Squadron, 1946.



Supermarine Seafire FR.46 LA550:045-FD of 778 Squadron, RNAS Ford, 1946-47.



Supermarine's Hursley Park workshop in November 1943, NS487 undertook intensive trials and investigated some improvements. It was first assessed at the Aeroplane & Armament Experimental Establishment from February 1944. Catapult and arrestor gear trials were carried out by the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough as soon as Supermarine had fitted an arrestor gear in March 1944. During the course of the year, the next five prototypes - serialled NS490, NS493, PK240, PK243 and PK245 - joined the first one in the flight testing programme.

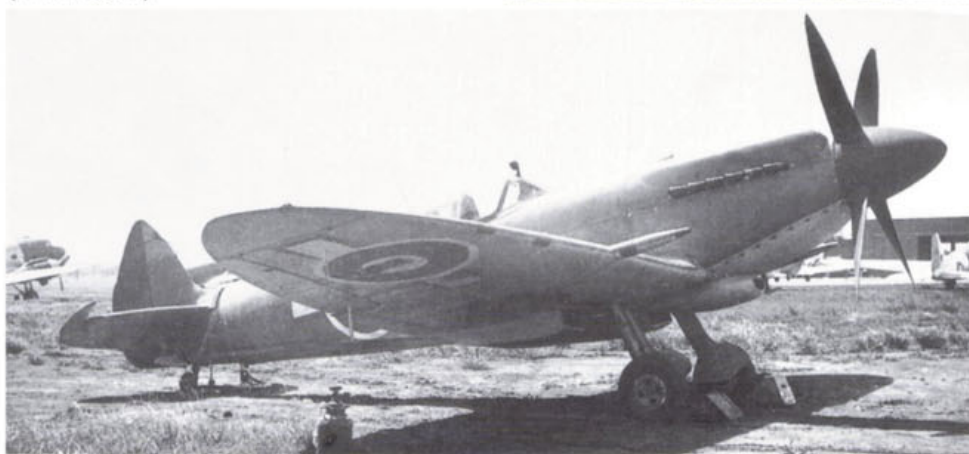
Orders for Seafire F.XVs were soon placed with the two established manufacturers of naval Spitfires: Westland and Cunliffe-Right: Seafire F.XV SW847 fitted with an under-fuselage drop tank seen at RNAS Culham immediately after the war. The first of the Navy's helicopters, an R-4 Hoverfly, is parked to the right. (FAA Museum)

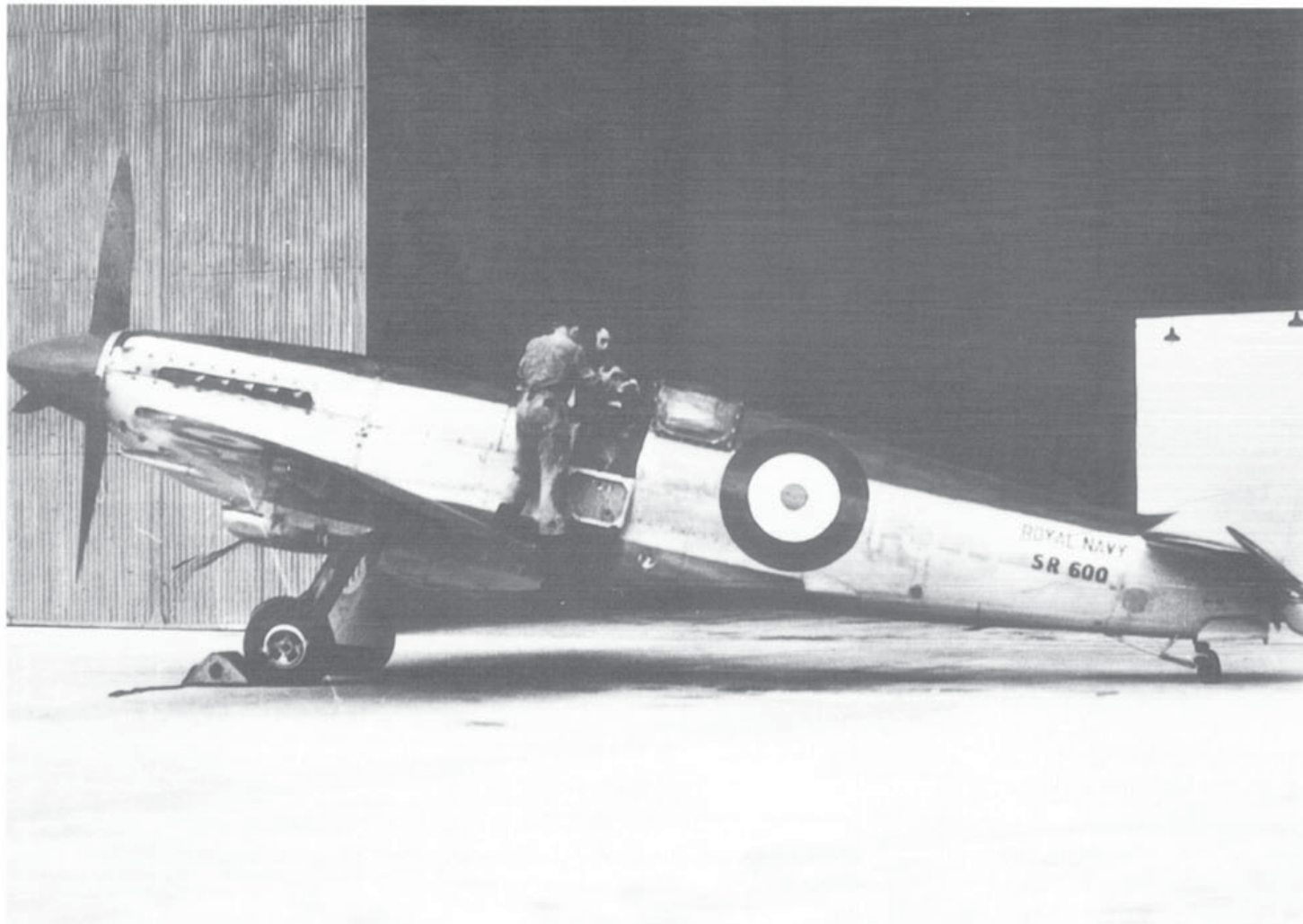


Left: Seafire F.XV SR452 seen at Archerfield, Brisbane, Australia at No. 1 Transportable Aircraft Maintenance Unit where aircraft were assembled and tested before delivery to operational squadrons. (C.G.Hyde)

Owen. A previous order dated July 1943 for 150 Seafire Mk.III's to be built by Cunliffe-Owen was transferred to the F.XV production line. A further batch of 250 machines, of which 50 were built as Mk.III's, were ordered from Cunliffe-Owen in February 1944.

At the same time, Westland gained a contract for 140 aircraft followed in April 1944 by a further order for 500 F.XVs. Nevertheless, the end of the war and the





One of the many duties given to the Seafire XV after completing its front line operational service was that of training both ground and air crews in fighter direction. Seafire SR600: 153-CW, repainted in post-war colours, was based at RNAS Culdrose, as part of 790 Squadron, the Navy's Fighter Direction Unit in 1948 (K. Lambert).

introduction of new Seafire variants caused important cancellations. Actually only 384 production Seafire F.XVs were built; 134 of them being assembled by Cunliffe-Owen.

Westland delivered the first production aircraft on 31 August 1944. Deliveries of Cunliffe-Owen built machines started later, in March 1945. First production Seafire F.XVs joined the prototypes to speed up the long service clearance tests. On several occasions, prototypes were allocated to 778 Squadron, of which B Flight was in charge of deck trials on *HMS Pretoria Castle*. Each prototype was slightly different and all modifications were tested in order to obtain the best combination. Notably, various configurations were compared during evaluations aboard *HMS Pretoria Castle*.

From 13 to 16 October 1944, Lt. J.F. Underwood, Lt.Cdr. E. Brown and Lt.Cdr. J.K. Quill, with Lt J. Clarke as spare pilot, undertook the first trials on board *HMS Pretoria Castle*. One of the three Seafire F.XVs - NS490 - was fitted with a sting-type hook. Only ten landings were completed the first day. Next day saw a Seafire burst a tire and, in the afternoon, Lt. Underwood in

NS487 hit the barrier. Another incident occurred when a Swordfish crashed into the remaining Seafire F.XV on 16 October.

A second session took place from 20 November 1944. Three prototypes, including PK240 equipped with an experimental five-bladed propeller, took part in these trials as well as the third Westland built production machine and the huge navalised Spitfire Mk.21 (later the prototype Seafire Mk.45) flown by Quill. One of the main objects was the comparison between the A-frame hook and the sting-type hook. Before disembarking on 25 November, a total of 103 landings was performed in three days (weather prevented flying on 22 November) and only one incident was recorded; a collapsed tailwheel leg.

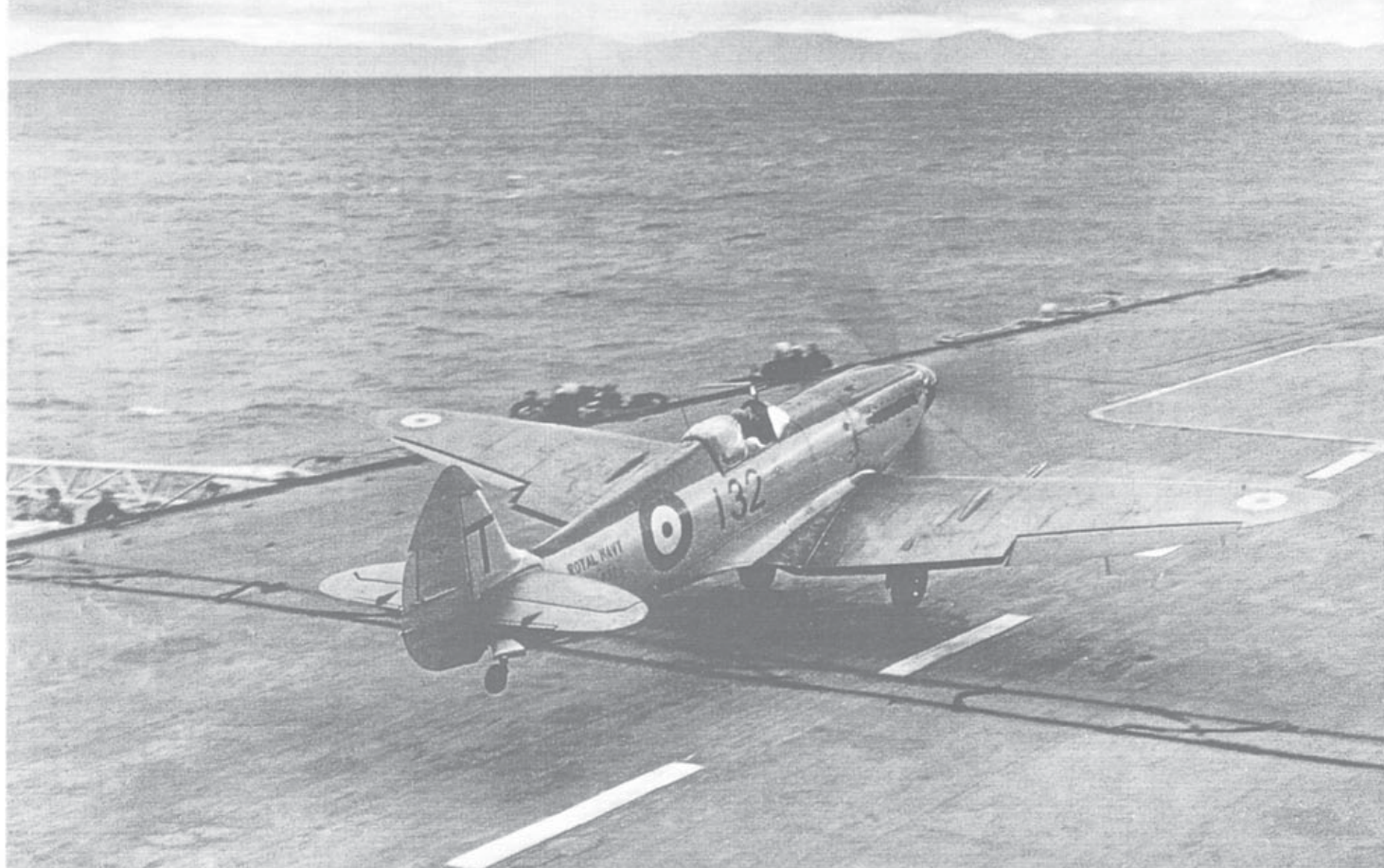
Initially retained, the A-frame hook was identical to that of the Seafire Mk.III except

it was stressed to 10,500 lb instead of 7,000 lb. A sting-type hook was tested on some prototypes and introduced on production aircraft after a few dozen had been built with the original arrester gear. The new hook was fitted to the fuselage stern at the rudder base and was spring-loaded in its housing. On release, it extended aft about 18 inches while the arm and hook housing dropped in the lowered position - where it was maintained by an oleo-pneumatic damper - and could pivot laterally within an angle of 30 degrees. After landing, the hook required assistance from ground crews to be restowed in the lock-up position.

As the sting hook cut a part of the rudder, it was necessary to enlarge the rudder once again in order to compensate for the ineffective area. Later in the production programme, Westland introduced on its last

Two Seafire F.XVs of 767 Squadron at RNAS Milltown in 1949. By this time all Seafire F.XVs had been relegated to second line duties and this picture illustrates part of a stream take-off by trainee pilots at this Scottish airfield. Note the two different colour schemes, roundel sizes and types. (B.A.Forward/MAP)





30 aircraft a teardrop hood, which became standard on the following Seafire Mk.XVII and allowed the installation of an additional fuel tank behind the cockpit. Nevertheless this rear-view canopy and the cut down of the aft fuselage were less aerodynamic and had an adverse effect on handling, particularly with a full tank.

The end fuselage position of the sting hook was allowed by the heavier engine and it maintained the centre of gravity. However it proved less adequate than the A-frame position as experienced with NS490 on 1 June 1944 while on trials with 778 Squadron. Lt. J.F. Underwood in the second F.XV prototype, in company with Quill flying BS390, a Spitfire Mk.IX fitted with a hook, left for Arbroath to practise ADDLs (Aerodrome Dummy Deck Landing) and wire-pulling. As predicted by the Squadron's pilots, the tail-wheel caught a wire and was damaged. To prevent such accidents, a tail-

wheel tubular guard was fitted just in front of the tail oleo.

DISAPPOINTING DEBUTS

RAF units were flying Griffon-engined Spitfires for 26 months before the naval derivatives were issued to the Fleet Air Arm. On 1 May 1945 802 Squadron reformed at RNAS Arbroath, commanded by Lt.Cdr. R.E. Hargreaves. By 7 May, the squadron's strength consisted of 12 Seafire L.IIIIs and 11 F.XVs. A very intense work-up started immediately, including familiarisation flights, formation - four plane finger - flying, aerobatic trips, navigation exercises, dog fighting, close radar control attacks and fighter affiliation with Barracudas.

Seafires F.XVs had an extremely sensitive rudder trim and control in comparison with the Mark III, a characteristic which required having a light touch. Otherwise the pilots

Naval air pilots had to keep in constant training. Here one of 804 Squadron's personnel takes off from *HMS Theseus* in a Seafire F.XV, whilst cruising off the Scottish coast. (FAA Museum)

experienced less trouble in landing the F.XV as it did it tail first. On the ground, the Griffon Seafire had a tendency to tip up on its nose due to a line of thrust lower than that of the Mk.III. 802 Squadron's CO ordered that a groundcrew member had to sit on the tail while starting up, following an incident when an F.XV had nosed forward. The first Westland-built F.XVs were fitted with an interconnected throttle and propeller control, which had to be removed. This operation was completed by mid-June.

Flying the new F.XVs brought its share of troubles. An air collision happened on 12 May during a 180 degree turn between the aircraft of the CO and Sub-Lt. Pyrah. Both pilots managed to keep control and landed with damage to their wings.

By the middle of May, three Seafire F.XVs had been grounded for faulty elevators. Moreover several engine cuttings had occurred when the aircraft was executing a steep turn or was inverted. Despite some teething troubles, the pilots were generally pleased with the Seafire F.XV and its powerful Griffon.

The first operations took place on 7 June with Exercise 'Finger'. The aim was to provide fighter cover for a fleet. 802 Squadron sent three formations of four Seafires. Unfortunately the weather was poor and visibility was limited to only 400 to 600 yards. While climbing up through the clouds, Sub-Lt. Thompson broke formation



The Mediterranean base for all FAA squadrons disembarked from aircraft carriers was Hal Far, Malta. This Spitfire F.XV is seen landing there and belongs to 805 Squadron. (Mrs P.J.Hutton via R.C. Sturtivant)

Supermarine Seafire Mk. VX, XVIII, 45, 46 and 47 Production list

Marks	Quantity	Serials
Mk.XV prototype	6	NS487, NS490, NS493, PK240, PK243, PK245
Mk.XV	434	PR338 to PR379, PR391 to PR436, PR449 to PR479, PR492 to PR506, SP136 to SP168, SP181 to SP197, SR446 to SR493, SR516 to SR547, SR568 to SR611, SR630 to SR645, SW781 to SW828, SW844 to SW879, SW896 to SW921.
Mk.XVII prototype	1	NS493
Mk.XVII	233	SP323 to SP327, SP341 to SP355, SW986 to SW993, SX111 to SX139, SX152 to SX201, SX220 to SX256, SX271 to SX316, SX332 to SX370, SX386 to SX389
Mk.45 prototype	1	TM379
Mk.45	50	LA428 to LA457, LA480 to LA499
Mk.46 prototype	1	TM383
Mk.46	24	LA541 to LA564
Mk.47	89	PS944 to PS957, VP427 to VP465, VP471 to VP495, VR961 to VR971

and disappeared. Although Seafires and Barracudas were sent out to do square searches, no trace of the aircraft or pilot could be found. During the search, a Seafire ran out of fuel and Sub-Lt. Holtham had to make a forced-landing.

June saw 802 Squadron reduced to 18 aircraft; 12 F.XVs and six L.IIIIs. It moved north to RNAS Twatt on 21 June. ADDLs were then performed; the CO did the first with an F.XV on 1 July. Lt.Cdr. Hargreaves decided once again to ground all F.XVs on 9 July after suspicious cracks had been discovered around the rivets in the wing panels, but flying resumed some days later. The stay in the Orkneys ended on 18 July when the squadron reached RNAS Ayr. It moved four days later to RNAS Abbotsinch, in the Firth of Clyde, in readiness for carrier embarkation as it was due to join the British Pacific Fleet for operations against Japan.

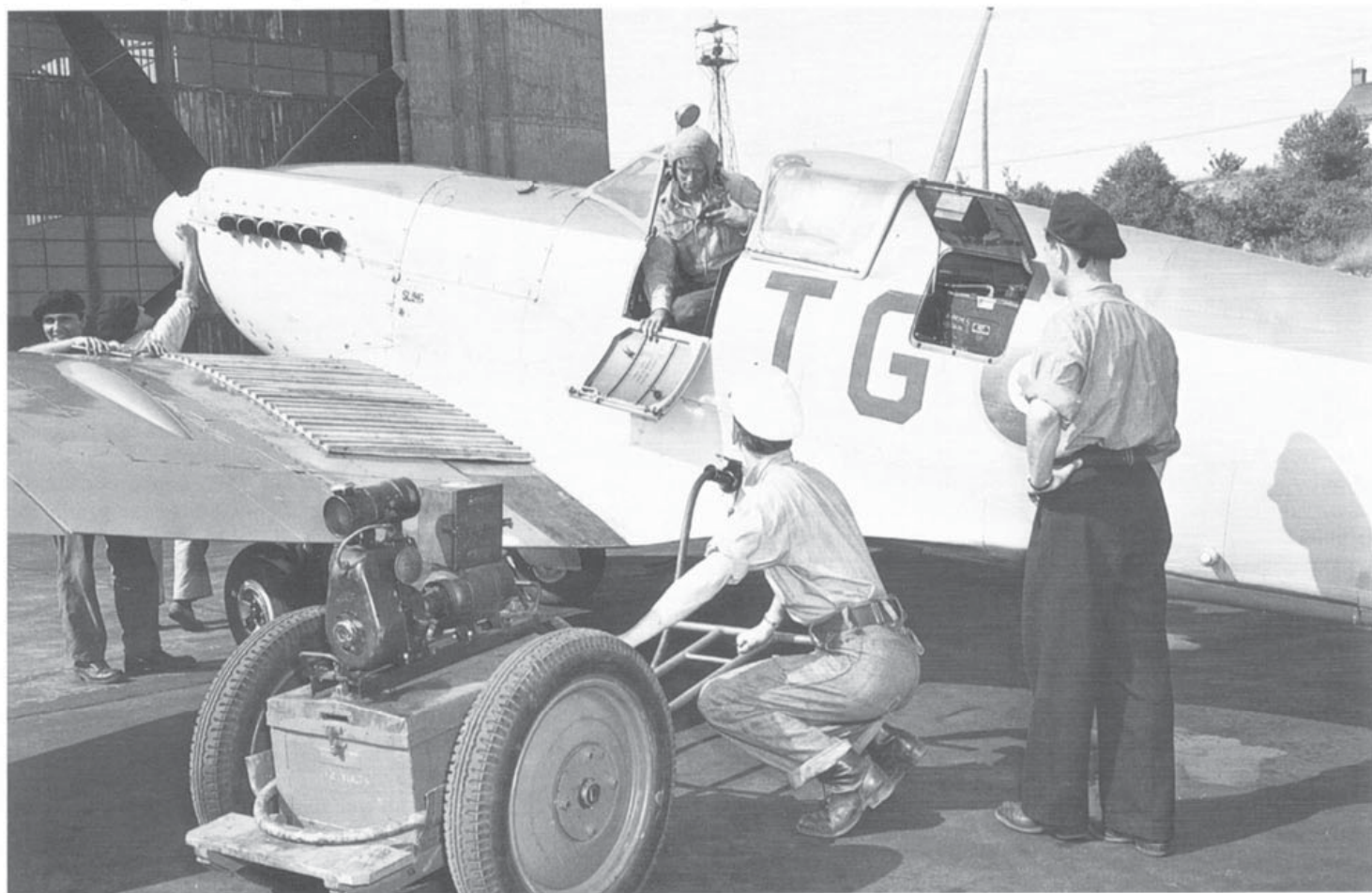
From 22 July to 3 August 1945, the remaining Seafire L.IIIIs were ferried to Machrihanish for use by 806 Squadron. The 12 Seafire F.XVs were prepared for embarkation and, on 11 August, were lifted aboard *HMS Queen* at the King George V dock, Glasgow. Before sailing, new carburettors were supplied and they had to be changed on the way out. Nevertheless, *HMS Queen* was still in the Clyde when Japan surrendered. The journey was cancelled and the Seafires were unloaded on 24 August. Passing via Abbotsinch, they arrived at RNAS Ayr on the next day.

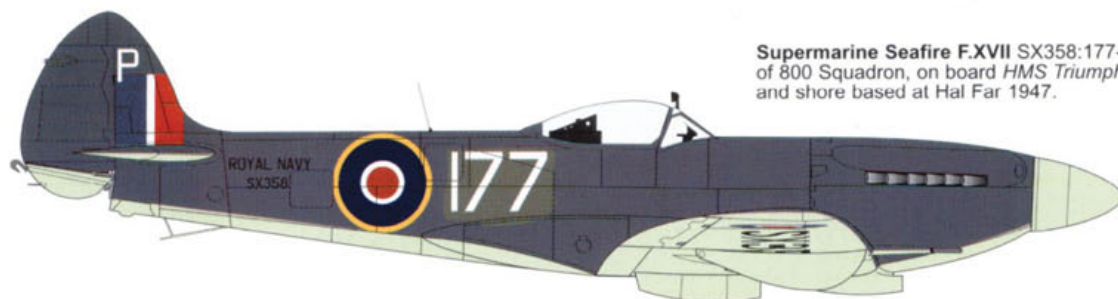
Flying resumed ashore. On 1 September four new Seafire F.XVs fitted with a sting type hook were supplied to the unit. Deliveries of 12 such Seafires continued at a slow rate until October while the old F.XVs with a V-frame hook were ferried to Nutts Corner.

At Ayr, 802 Squadron experienced other accidents. On 13 September, Sub-Lt. R.P. Hypher made a forced-landing with an engine fire. He had a bird strike over the Atlantic about 150 miles from the airfield and experienced the complete seizing-up of his engine. A more tragic accident happened on 5 October. Chief Petty Officer Bradshaw lost control of his machine while carrying out a high altitude oxygen climb. From about 35,000 ft, he went into a spiral dive and disappeared into the sea. In the meantime, on 24 September, all the squadron's F.XVs had been grounded owing to the discovery of corrosion on the valve springs and cam shafts. New sets of valve springs were supplied two days later.

By this time the pilots had gained enough experience for deck landing practice. Eight Seafires joined *HMS Premier* at 1205 on 23 October and, after lunch, three more landed on. Gale force winds prevented flying for four days and only a small amount of DLT was then carried out prior to disembarking at Ayr on 29 October. A second DLT period took place aboard *HMS Premier* from 19 November. All aircraft landed on successfully, except Sub-Lt. Davies who floated over all nine wires and crashed into the barriers. Four days later, the same pilot repeated this unorthodox way of stopping. After having received six wave-offs, Sub-Lt. Davies touched down before the first wire but bounced until the eighth wire with its tail in the air before the hook caught; the Seafire being finally stopped by the barrier. Later Lt.

One of the Royal Canadian Navy's Seafire F.XVs in the later colours and markings adopted. The ubiquitous trolley-ac for engine starting, radio compartment behind the canopy and the protection to prevent footmarks on the upper wing surface show how well these aircraft were kept. (National Archives of Canada)





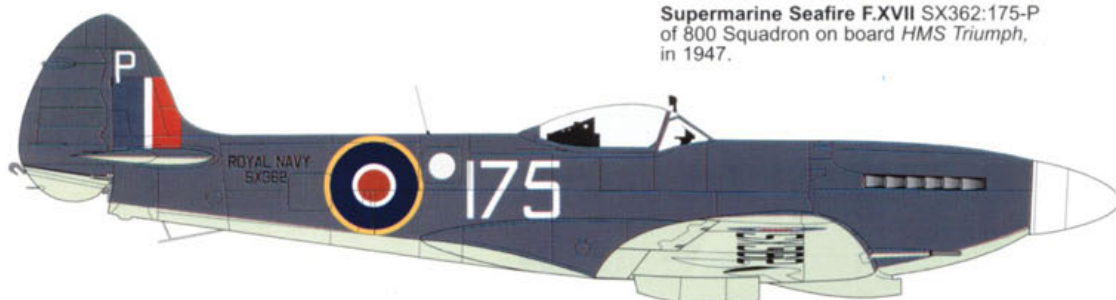
Supermarine Seafire F.XVII SX358:177-P
of 800 Squadron, on board *HMS Triumph*
and shore based at Hal Far 1947.



Supermarine Seafire F.XV PR348:111-Q
of 802 Squadron, *HMS Vengeance*, 1947.



Supermarine Seafire F.XV PR362:5H
of 806 Squadron, *HMS Glory*, April 1947



Supermarine Seafire F.XVII SX362:175-P
of 800 Squadron on board *HMS Triumph*,
in 1947.



Supermarine Seafire F.XV PR479:AA-B,
of 883 Squadron, Royal Canadian Navy
Dartmouth, 1947.



Supermarine Seafire F.46 LA546:900-LM,
Lossiemouth Station Flight, FAA, 1947-48.



Above and right: Re-arming and refuelling Royal Canadian Navy Seafire F.XVs. These pictures were taken after August 1945 when the first were delivered to 803 Squadron for service on the Canadian carrier *HMCS Warrior*. Both colour schemes used by the four RCN squadrons are in evidence. (National Archives of Canada)

Brooks ended up in the same way after his tail and hook had hit the round-down.

After leave, 802 Squadron resumed operations from RNAS Nutts Corner on 10 January 1946. As new pilots - as well as a new CO; Lt.Cdr. B.H. Harris - joined up, a period of working-up was undertaken. Then the squadron prepared to sail for the Far East. The Seafire F.XVs were flown to RNAS Yeovilton on 27 February and later ferried to Inskip by RN ferry pilots for disposal. Only ground activities were thus possible until 23 April when the personnel boarded *HMS Berwick* in Portsmouth. They reached Colombo, Ceylon on 13 May.

802 Squadron set up quarters at Trincomalee. Six Seafire F.XVs coming from storage in Ceylon were allotted on 23 May. Four more F.XVs, previously disembarked from *HMS Implacable*, had to join the squadron after modifications and the rest of its strength had to be made up with Seafires from storage, depending upon availability. All pilots passed without difficulty a short flying test on 24 May. Unfortunately flying was cancelled on 30 May as the aircraft were grounded pending a tanks inspection. The problem was resolved by 5 June and flying resumed.

A more consequent signal prohibiting all deck landings with Seafire F.XVs was received on 22 July. The fault lay in the Griffon VI's M ratio supercharger clutch. Boost troubles had been experienced as the



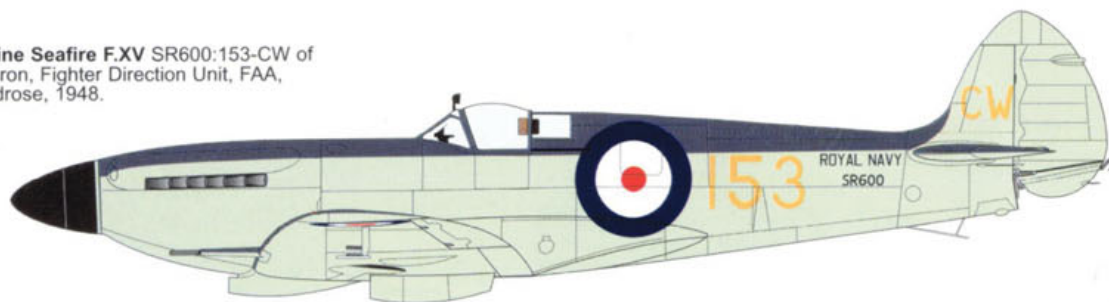
supercharger clutch slipped at high rpm. The Admiralty declared the Seafire F.XV unreliable for deck operations. Rolls-Royce worked on a modified clutch which was supplied to the FAA units from early in 1947.

Despite these limitations, 802 Sqdn had to leave Ceylon and its Seafires were hoisted aboard *HMS Venerable* and *Glory* on 20 September. Both carriers proceeded to Singapore. Permission was granted to fly off the 13 Seafires just before arrival on 26 September in order to land them at RNAS Sembawang from where they could fly. Some exercises were carried out with *HMS Venerable's* Carrier Air Group and with the

RAF but the serviceability was very poor during the stay at Singapore. Moreover, on 14 October, the majority of the Seafires were grounded as the propellers were falling to pieces. Contacts with a Rotol representative revealed that there were specially made tropical propellers and the ones fitted on 802 Squadron's Seafires were inadequate for Far East operations.

The squadron re-embarked on *HMS Venerable* on 14 November. The ship sailed in the area for four days before heading for Hong Kong. There was no flying for the Seafires until the aircraft were sent to Kai Tak airfield on 27 November. The squadron spent Christmas there and subsequently

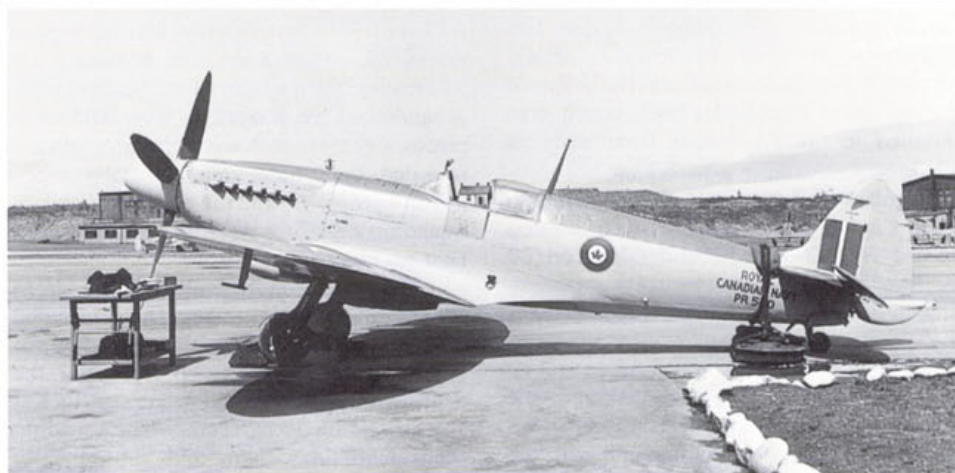
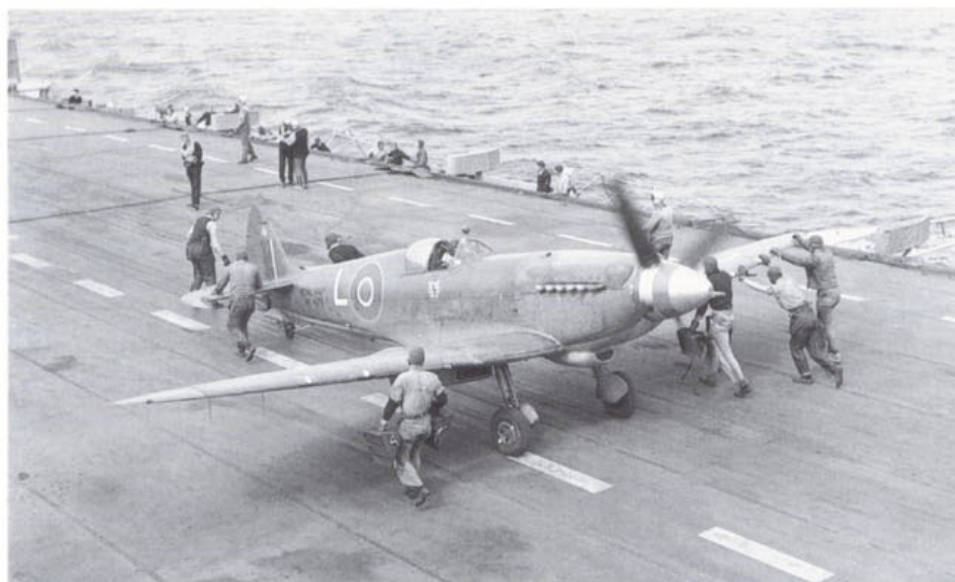
Supermarine Seafire F.XV SR600:153-CW of 790 Squadron, Fighter Direction Unit, FAA, RNAS Culdrose, 1948.



Supermarine Seafire F.XV SW910:123-CH of 1832 Squadron, Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve, Southern Air Division, Culham. Seen at Gardermoen, Norway in 1949.



Supermarine Seafire F.XVII SX282:151-BR, of 1833 Squadron, RNVF, Bramcote, 1949.

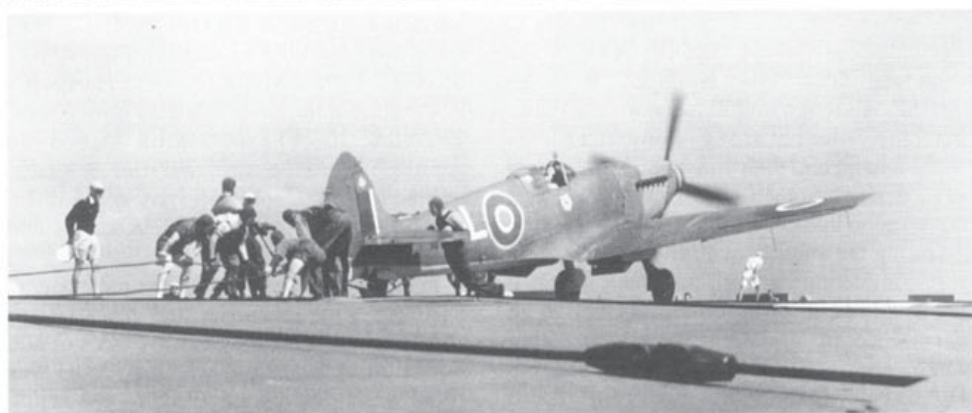
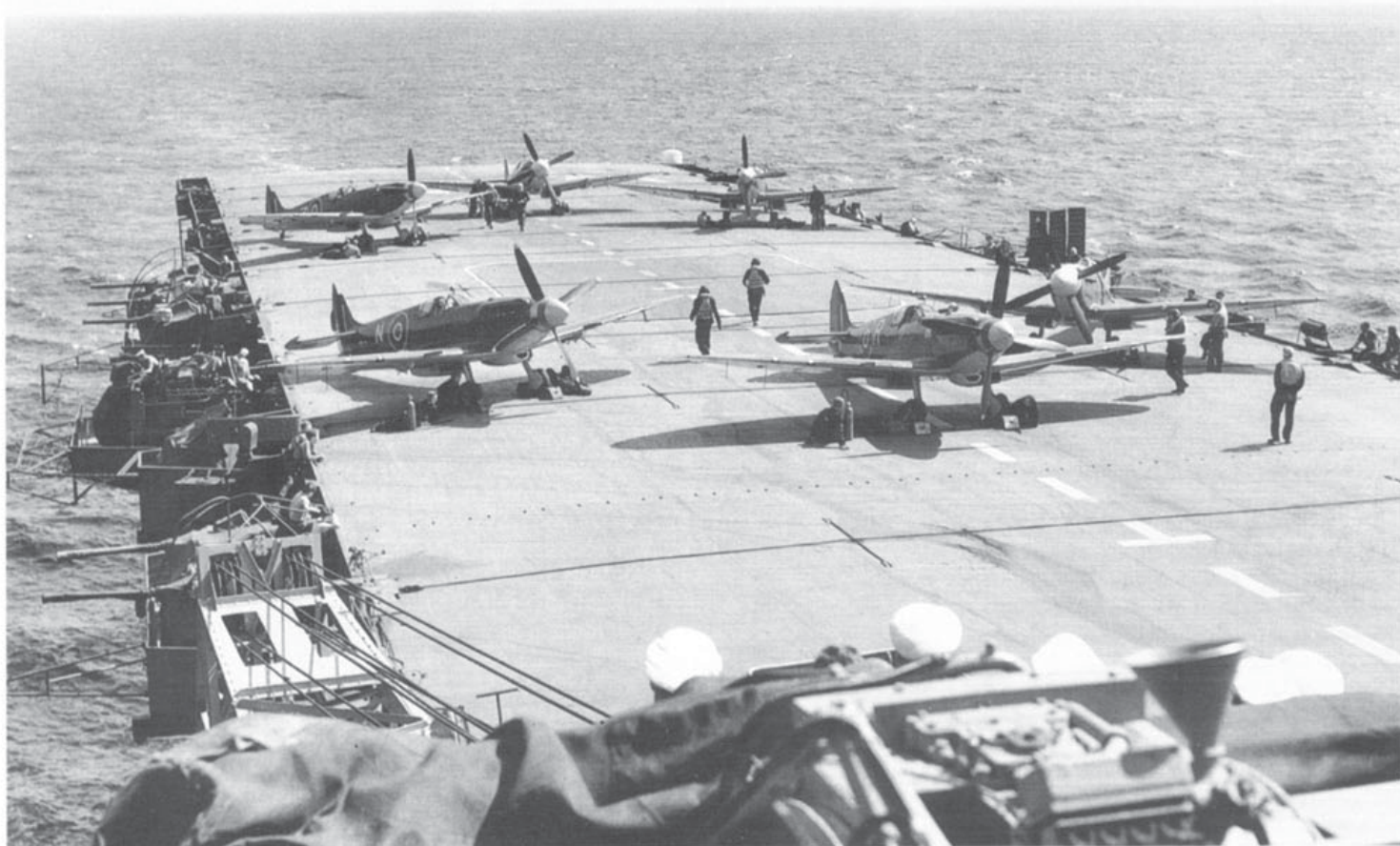


prepared to leave for home. Personnel embarked on *HMS Venerable* on 12 February 1947, leaving the five serviceable Seafire F.XVs for 806 Squadron - which had arrived at Hong Kong with *HMS Glory* - and 721 Squadron, a Fleet Requirements Unit. 802 Squadron's personnel were back in the United Kingdom on 28 March.

A new 802 Squadron was commissioned at RNAS Eglinton on 1 May 1947. Under the command of Lt.Cdr. M. Hordern, the unit was henceforth part of the 15th Carrier Air Group with 814 Squadron. Pilots took up flying again with the usual familiarisation flights, section formation drills, aerobatics, and ADDLs. Seafire F.XVs were delivered at a slow rate; only six having been supplied from Abbotsinch by 20 June.

With work-up completed, 802 Squadron embarked on *HMS Vengeance* on 24 September. The arrival on board was marked by Sub-Lt. Davidson crashing into the barrier after his hook had bounced on the round-down. The carrier sailed for the Mediterranean where the Seafires and Fireflies of the CAG worked up together. 802 Squadron deployed to RNAS Hal Far on 11 November and, from 24 November, to RAF Ta Kali; all bases in Malta. By mid-March 1948, the personnel left Malta. They embarked in troop ships in Valetta and sailed for home on 16 March. On arriving in the

Top left: An 803 Squadron Seafire XV, PR479:L being pushed back on the deck of *HMCS Warrior* during flight operations. (National Archives). **Left:** Shorebased Seafire F.XV PR 500 of the Royal Canadian Navy probably at Shearwater. (Shearwater Aviation Museum)



Operations on board *HMCS Warrior*. Above: Pilots of the 18th CAG joining their aircraft for a sortie. Left: Unhooking a Seafire F.XV after a successful landing. This aircraft appears to have a different colour on the nose and wing tips, which might be yellow, and was presumably for exercise purposes. (National Archives)

UK, permission was granted and 802 Squadron next reformed on Hawker Sea Furies with many new pilots.

THE ONLY FLEET FIGHTER

Back in 1945, a second unit had received Seafire F.XVs in September. Commanded by Lt.Cdr. P.J. Hutton, 805 Squadron had been flying Seafire L.IIIIs for two months from RNAS Machrihanish when they began to give way to Griffon-engined Seafires. By the last month of 1945, the strength of this unit had reached 12 F.XVs. Work-up continued until the spring of 1946 with the usual ADDL exercises before embarkation; the squadron having moved to Lee-on-Solent on 25 March 1946.

As part of the 20th CAG, 805 Squadron embarked in company with the Fireflies of 816 Squadron aboard *HMS Ocean* on 19 July 1946 for a spell in the Mediterranean. This was actually curtailed on 4 August when the Seafire F.XVs were suspended from carrier-borne operations due to their defective supercharger clutch. Pilots were thus restricted to shore operations from Hal Far until 12 Fireflies were provided in September. This allowed 805 Squadron to Three Seafire F.XVs of 803 Squadron, Royal Canadian Navy, in formation. The squadron badge appears under the cockpit of the lead aircraft. (Shearwater Aviation Museum)

French Seafire F.XVs belonging to the Groupe de Chasse Embarque on board the carrier *Arromanches* had no changes to their markings from those used before they were handed over by the Royal Navy in late June 1949. This picture, and those on the next page, were taken a month later and in this case adequately illustrate the man power required to fold the wings and attach the bracing strut. (J.Lebourg via C.A.Pierquet)

re-embark on *HMS Ocean* but abruptly ended its association with the Seafire F.XV.

Among the five Royal Navy units to equip with Seafire F.XVs was 801 Squadron. Involved in the war against Japan aboard *HMS Implacable*, 801 Squadron was intended to re-equip with the F.XV in place of the L.III before the invasion of the Japanese mainland. The British Pacific Fleet sailed for Australia on 12 August 1945 and arrived at Sydney. On 9 September *HMS Implacable's* Seafires flew ashore to Schofields and, two days later, 801 Squadron absorbed 880 Squadron, becoming the largest RN squadron with 48 aircraft.

Re-equipping with Seafire F.XVs was then progressively undertaken from November 1945. Eighteen F.XVs were taken on charge while the strength of Mk.IIIIs was reduced to 18. During a public display at Schofields on 29 November, Sub-Lt. J.L. Norton was killed when his Seafire literally disintegrated in mid-air. As further problems arose from aileron reversal, the Seafire Mk.XVs in Australia were grounded until technicians arrived from the UK to replace the faulty skins on the wing roots. When *HMS Implacable* had ended her involvement in the repatriation of POWs, 801 Squadron embarked on 16 January 1946 for a cruise in Australian and New Zealand waters. Nevertheless, only the Seafire L.IIIIs joined the carrier as the Griffon-engined models were not cleared for deck operations. When 801 Squadron returned to the UK in March 1946, the Seafire F.XVs were left behind in Australia.

Seafire F.XVs were also taken on charge by 806 Squadron. Commissioned on 1 August 1945 under the command of Lt. A.C. Lindsay, 806 Squadron began to withdraw its Seafire L.IIIIs in September and was allocated F.XVs. Work-up was punctuated by several accidents. One was fatal to Sub-Lt. Winch on 14 December. During a formation flight, his Seafire suddenly spiralled down and crashed into the ground.

After the pilots qualified and gained experience on the new fighter, they sailed



for the Far East on 24 April 1946. Having reached Trincomalee on 13 May, the squadron received 12 new Seafire F.XVs and was included in the 16th CAG. On 20 September 1946, 806 Squadron joined *HMS Glory* for uneventful tours in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean with the usual stays in Singapore and Hong Kong. The carrier finally returned home after one year of eastern cruises and on arrival, on 6 October 1947, 806 Squadron disbanded.

Last FAA unit to fly the Seafire F.XV, 804 Squadron, reformed at RNAS Maydown on 1 October 1946 with Lt.Cdr. R.F. Bryant as Commanding Officer. By 18 October, the squadron was fully equipped with 13 aircraft. Although all pilots appreciated their machine, the Seafires delivered were second-hand and their finish left a great deal to be desired. Some of them were fitted with an A-frame hook.

During the autumn of 1946, 804 Squadron was completing its work-up which included the usual carrier drill, ADDLs, as well as an experience of gliding. By mid-December 1946, the Seafire F.XVs were sent to Donibristle for modifications and for a maintenance overhaul which lasted until early February 1947. Whilst ferrying six aircraft back to Maydown on 3 February, the pilots encountered bad weather. Four of them turned back to Donibristle and Sub-Lt. Higgs managed to get through the clouds. But Sub-Lt. Knight was reported missing

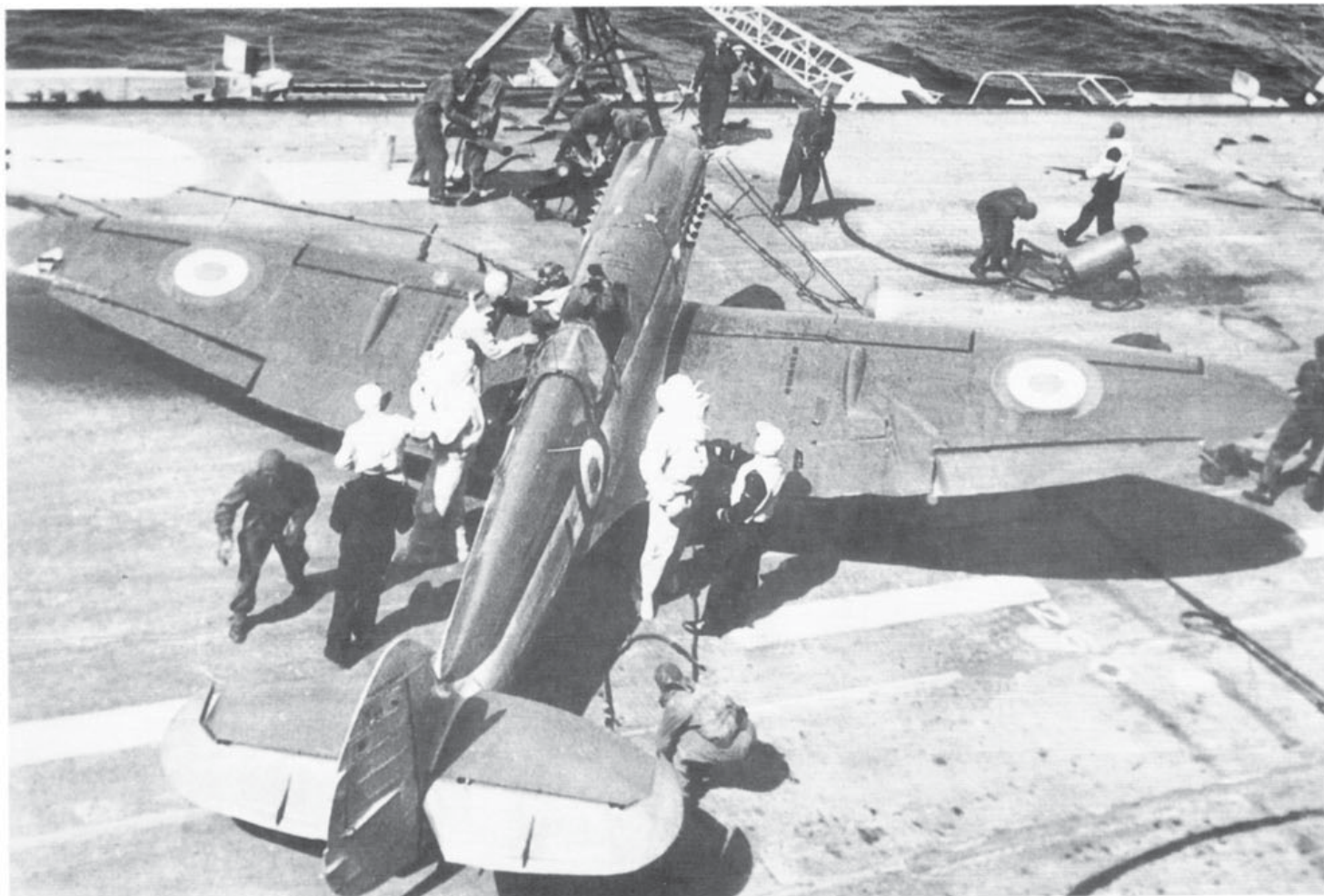
and believed lost as no traces were found despite many searches.

With the Seafires fully serviceable and cleared for carrier operations, 804 Squadron then prepared to join *HMS Theseus* as part of the 14th CAG. Pilots boarded the ship on 19 February. She proceeded to sea and sailed for the Far East, via the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal. At Aden, *HMS Theseus* passed the carrier she was relieving, *HMS Venerable*. Ceylon was reached on 15 March, and all aircraft flew ashore to Trincomalee. When flying resumed, 804 Squadron experienced a high attrition rate as three Seafires were damaged during ADDL sessions. On 27 March, Sub-Lt. Hartland's F.XV burst a tire and ended up on its back. The next day, Lt. Ashworth stalled on approach, burst a tire and did a gentle ground loop. The following day saw Sub-Lt. Brewer stalling just before touchdown and writing off a mainplane.

In April 1947, 804 Squadron took part in exercises with its carrier and *HMS Glory*; aboard which were the Seafire F.XVs of 806 Squadron. A Seafire to which RATOG was fitted was flown by Lt. Wright - the acting CO - on 19 April in order to test the handling of the aircraft. The stalling speed increased by two knots and there was slightly more

Preserved Seafire F.XV of the Royal Canadian Navy. Kept in immaculate condition this picture illustrates part of the underwing markings of RCN Seafire aircraft. (Leo Pettipas)





buffeting. A real RATOG demonstration was achieved by the AGC, Lt.Cdr. Callingham, on 13 May as there was no wind.

Before reaching Singapore, *HMS Theseus* visited Penang, Malaya. Just before the carrier anchored on 22 May, three Seafires were flown off to RAF Butterworth to allow flying to continue. On 31 May, Lt. Ashworth and Lt. Hartland led an unsuccessful search for piracy victims following a request for assistance from the local police. Later Sub-Lt. Brewer located the pirate junk, but no trace of any survivors or bodies were found. From 2 June, three Seafires were operating from Sembawang as *HMS Theseus* had to enter dry dock in Singapore. They re-embarked on 21 June for a cruise which lasted until 11 October and included various exercises and visits to Australia, New Zealand and Guadalcanal.

After a short stay in Singapore, *HMS*

Theseus reached Hong Kong where all the 14th CAG was disembarked at Kai Tak on 20 October for a period of shore flying. The 13 Seafires and 12 Fireflies rejoined the carrier on 4 November, ending all flying for the 14th CAG as *HMS Theseus* took passage for the UK ten days later. The ship stopped at Singapore and Trincomalee and a number of stored Seafires were embarked for returning home. *HMS Theseus* arrived at Plymouth on 14 December and then sailed to Greenock where the spare Seafires were off-loaded. 804 Squadron took off for RNAS Ford on 20 December 1947. After their Christmas leave, the unit had to convert to the new Seafire FR.47.

CANADIAN SEAFIRES

On 19 December 1945, Canada decided to form an air branch for the Royal Canadian

Navy. A carrier - *HMCS Warrior* - was obtained from the UK and she was commissioned on 24 January 1946. The same day, two Canadian-manned squadrons were officially transferred from the British Fleet Air Arm to the Royal Canadian Navy. These units were 803 Squadron equipped with 12 Seafire F.XVs and commanded by Lt.Cdr. A. J. Tanner, and 825 Squadron flying Firefly FR.1s.

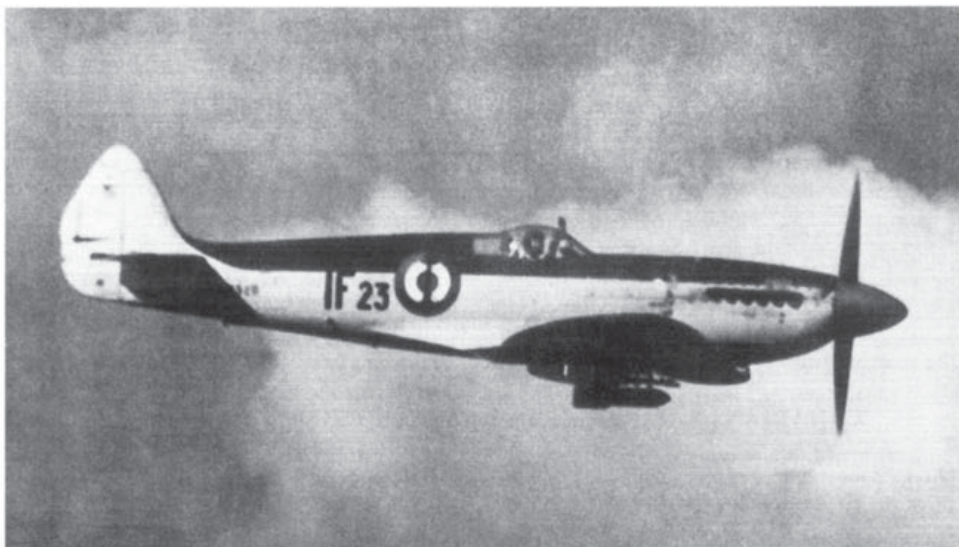
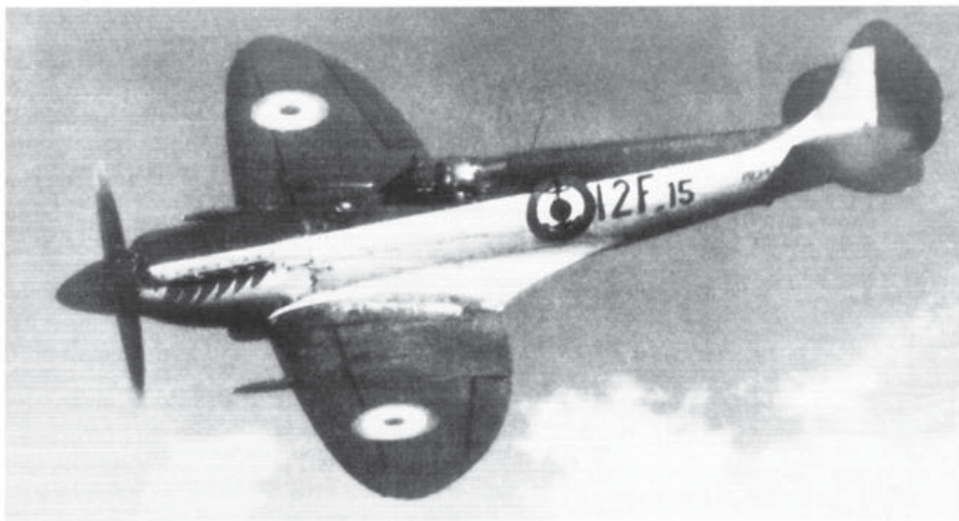
During 1945, four squadrons had actually been formed to be put at the Canadian forces disposal, two of them were fighter units. 803 Squadron initially equipped with Seafire L.IIIIs, received new Seafire F.XVs from August 1945. While working up at RNAS Nutts Corner, Northern Ireland, 803 Squadron saw the arrival of 883 Squadron on 7 November. This unit had been activated on 18 September 1945 with Seafire L.IIIIs and undertook its transformation onto the Griffon-engined variant once the personnel were installed at Nutts Corner.

Unfortunately, due to a shortage of Canadian personnel, the RCN was compelled to disband 883 as well as the second Firefly unit on 23 February 1946, its 18 aircraft being delivered to Inskip. Shortly afterwards, 803 Squadron moved to RNAS Lee-on-Solent in preparation for embarkation in *HMCS Warrior*. After

Manhandling a French Seafire F.XV on the deck of the *Arromanches* with what looks like the whole deck party getting on with the job. The upper wing roundels are near the tips unlike on those shown at the top of this page. (J.Frelaut)

Manhandling a French Seafire F.XV on the deck of the *Arromanches* with what looks like the whole deck party getting on with the job. The upper wing roundels are near the tips unlike on those shown at the top of this page. (J.Frelaut)





Although the quality of the pictures on this page leave something to be desired they do show the various units with which the Aeronavale was equipped when ex-FAA Seafire F.XVs were supplied and after their change of colour and markings. Left: Seafire F.XV SR520 of Escadrille 54S, Lower left: This F.XV PR347 belongs to Flottille 12F when based at Hyeres. (Jean Frelaut)

completing her acceptance trials and embarking spare aircraft at Glasgow and the personnel from the two disbanded squadrons at Portsmouth, the ship welcomed 803 and 825 Squadrons aboard and sailed for Canada on 23 March reaching Halifax on the 31st. The aircraft were stationed at the RCN Air Section which had been established at RCAF Dartmouth, later commissioned as *HMCS Shearwater* in December 1948.

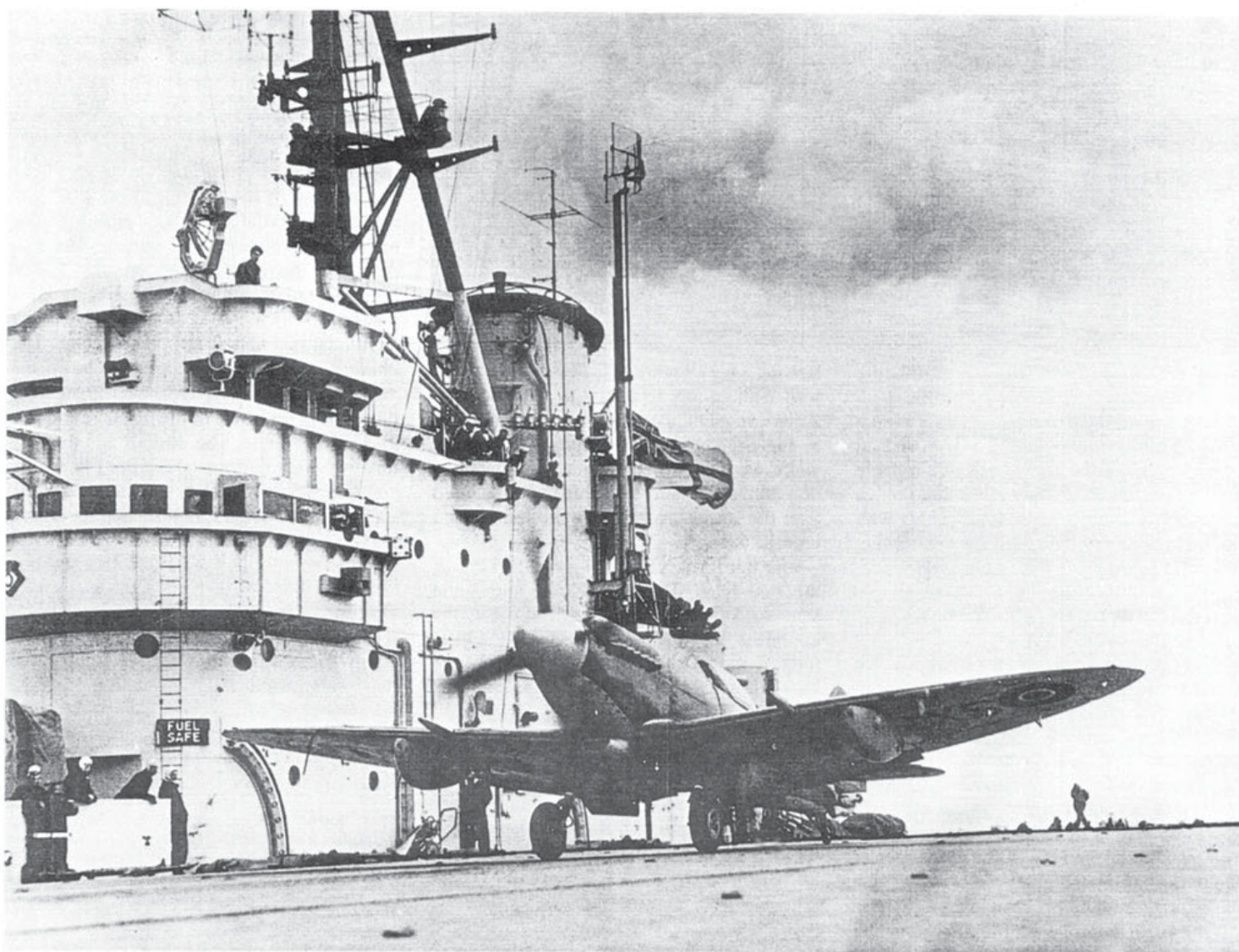
Although the pilots practiced ADDLs and qualified for carrier operations throughout the spring and summer of 1946 under the command of their new CO Lt.Cdr. C.G.Watson, the warning received from the British Admiralty about the defects of the supercharger clutches deprived 803 Squadron of the first cruise aboard *HMCS Warrior* which took place in November. While the Firefly squadron was enjoying a trip around the North American continent, the Seafires were sent to Montreal for modifications. Then with all Seafires cleared for carrier operations 803 finally embarked in April 1947 for a visit to Bermuda. Intensive flying was carried out. Only one accident was recorded when Lt J.W.Logan's Seafire hit the ship's crane on landing.

When the squadrons were back at Dartmouth on 15 May 1947, the Carrier Air Group system was adopted. 803 and 825 Squadrons formed the 19th CAG while the two newly formed - 883 and 826 Squadrons - constituted the 18th CAG. Pending the re-equipment of 803 Squadron with Hawker Sea Furies, the two fighter units shared the same Seafires. The aircraft were handed over to Lt.Cdr.R.A.Monks who commanded 883 in August as the personnel of 803 Squadron sailed for the UK to get the new fighter.

In November 1947, the aircraft of the 18th CAG were engaged in sea training aboard *HMCS Warrior*; her last cruise as *HMCS Magnificent* was soon to be commissioned. The Group spent two months on combined operations and training with the RCAF and the Army when 883, with seven Seafires, and those of 826 Squadron flew from Dartmouth to the Joint Air School at Rivers on 16 August 1948.

As a new batch of Sea Furies had arrived, 883 Squadron began to convert to these new fighters on its return from Rivers. At the same time, the two fighter units were re-organised into the 19th CAG. This was not the end of flying for the Canadian Seafire F.XVs as the Sea Furies experienced engine troubles and were grounded in June 1949. Whilst awaiting modifications of the Hawker aircraft, the 19th CAG was assigned some Seafires in September and October 1949. Other Seafire F.XVs released from

Top left: Seafire F.XV SR520 shortly after being repainted and in service with Flottille 1F. This is the same aircraft that appears in the picture at the top of the page. (Le Bomin/J.Frelaut) Left: Seen at Hyeres Seafire F.XV PR397 bears the markings of Escadrille 54S. (EAE/J.Frelaut)



The Seafire F.XVII differed from previous Marks by having a tear-drop canopy as its main distinguishing feature. This one, seen landing on *HMS Triumph*, also has the small underwing combat tanks fitted. (FAA Museum)

front-line service had found their way to the OFTS (Operational Flying Training School) in February 1948 but proved unsuitable in this role. Only two courses were completed before operational training of the Canadian pilots was transferred to the Royal Navy.

SEAFIRE, COCKADE AND HOOK

Before the end of hostilities in Europe, the French Navy researched the possibility of re-building its carrier aviation which could be invaluable for deployments in their colonies all over the world. France succeeded in negotiating an agreement with the British Admiralty about the loan of the escort carrier *HMS Biter*, which was renamed *Dixmude*, in March 1945. Within one year, the *Aéronautique Navale* acquired 48 Seafire Mk.IIIs from Royal Navy surplus stocks. A further batch of 65 Seafire Mk.IIIs was supplied to the *Aéronautique Navale* during the first half of 1948.

Being second-hand machines, the Merlin-engined Seafires suffered from reliability problems and experienced a substantial attrition rate. Especially after operations in Indochina, their serviceability deteriorated

due to the lack of spare parts. As a result, all French Seafires were grounded in January 1949 for a large scale inspection. Two months later flying resumed but the aircraft were suspended from carrier-borne operations from June 1949.

To allow the two fighter units to embark again, 16 Seafire Mk.F.XVs were lent by the Admiralty to the *Aéronautique Navale*. These aircraft were hurriedly ferried to Hyères (near Toulon) in three batches on 17, 24 and 28 June 1949. Each squadron, Flottille 1.F commanded by Lt. de Vaisseau J-M. Lenglet and Flottille 12.F lead by Lt. de Vaisseau A. Sanguinetti, took on charge six Seafire F.XVs and retained some Seafire Mk.IIIs for shore-based training.

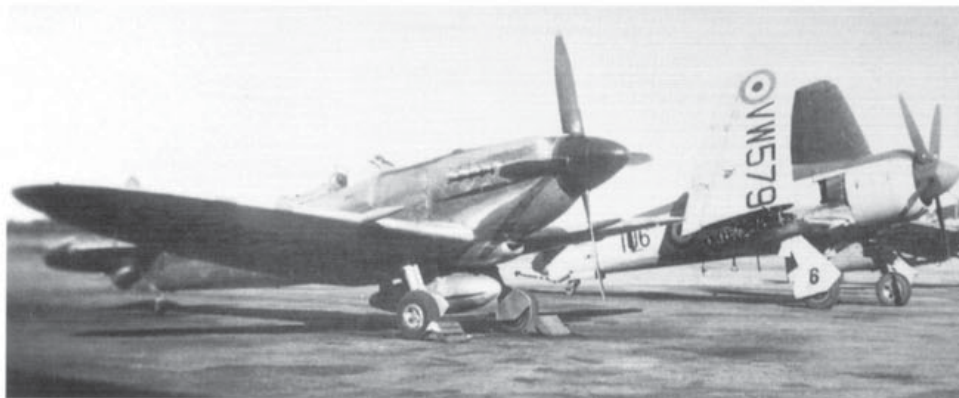
When Seafire F.XVs arrived at Hyères,

pilots undertook their qualification on the Griffon-engined fighters and then carried out an intensive ADDL programme at Lann-Bihoué (Brittany). Fourteen pilots completed their work-up in time to embark aboard the *Arromanches*, ex-*HMS Colossus*, to take part in the combined exercise 'Verity' along with British, Belgian and Dutch ships. Unfortunately, Capitaine de Corvette J-P. Craignic, who commanded the Groupe de Chasse Embarqué (a group formed of the two fighter Flottilles), wrote off a Seafire F.XV when entering the barrier on 4 July.

The Seafire F.XVs delivered to France had already flown operationally with Fleet Air Arm units and had high fatigue lives. They deteriorated with the passing of time and



One of the early production Seafire F.XVIIIs seen at Yeovil where they were built. Bomb shackles appear under the wings as well as distinctive trestle markings. (MoAP)



were also forbidden from deck-landing following the accident of a Flottille 12.F Seafire aboard the *Arromanches* on 8 March 1950. Flottilles 1.F and 12.F stayed at Hyères pending the arrival of more reliable Grumman Hellcats in May 1950. Ten French Seafire F.XVs still flew until 1951 with Escadrille de Servitude 54.S for the training of carrier pilots.

THE USEFUL INTERIM Mk.XVII

A direct development from the Mark XV, the Seafire Mk.XVII was externally similar to the late production F.XVs which had the rear view bubble canopy and the 33 gallon additional fuel tank in the aft fuselage. Modifications included a curved windscreen in front of the bullet-proof portion, a 24 volt electrical system to replace the previous 12 volt installation, and the fitting at the root of the wing of attachments and wiring for rocket assisted take-off gear.

The main improvement consisted in the strengthening of the main wing spar. This allowed the carrying of two 250 lb underwing bombs or eight 60 lb rocket projectiles. But above all, it permitted the incorporation of a new strengthened long stroke undercarriage. The oleo leg stroke extended from 4.9 inches on the former models to 8 inches. The ground clearance for the propeller was thus significantly improved in comparison with the Seafire F.XV permitting higher landing and take-off weights as well as greater loads. On deck

Seafire F.XVII SP325 belonging to 807 Squadron seen taking the wire on board *HMS Vengeance*. (FAA Museum)

landing, the Seafire Mk.XVII performed well without any tendency to rebound. The American method of dropping the aircraft on to the deck was then adopted. The wheel wells were modified to accommodate the new undercarriage and blisters appeared over the wings, as well as three indentation wheels.

The third Mk.XV prototype, NS493, was diverted from the testing programme and sent to Westland in June 1944 for the adoption of a teardrop hood. Other modifications of the Mk.XVII standard were incorporated into the production aircraft; the first one, SW986, being rolled out in April 1945. Westland manufactured 213 Mk.XVIIIs and Cunliffe-Owen completed 20 aircraft from a previous Mk.XV order as Seafire Mk.XVIIIs.

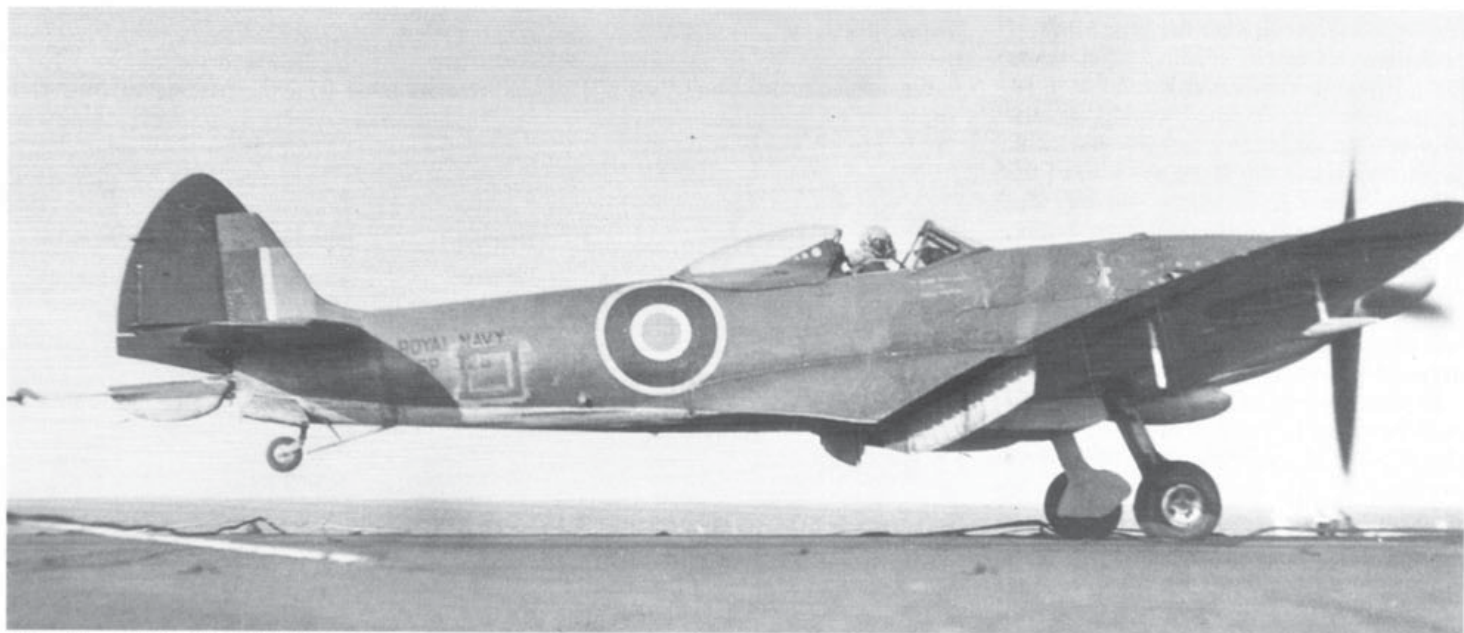
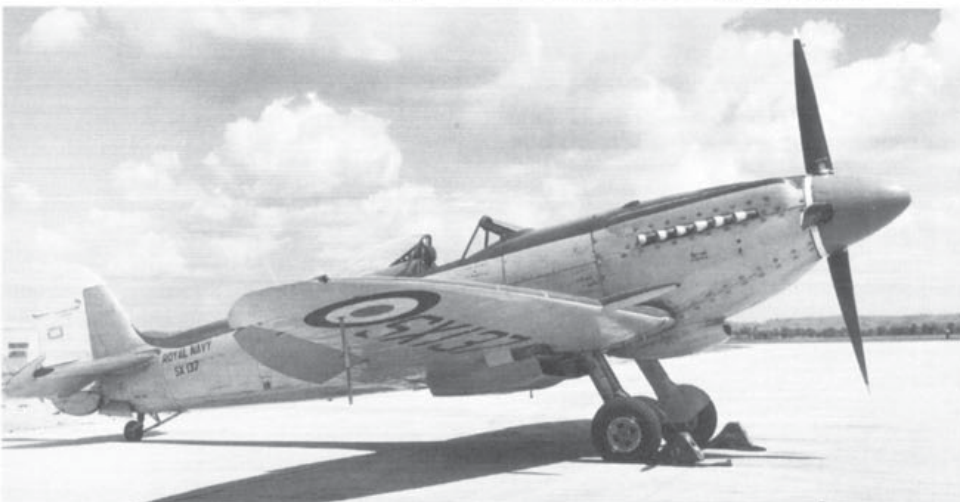
One feature of the Merlin-engined Seafires was the availability of photographic

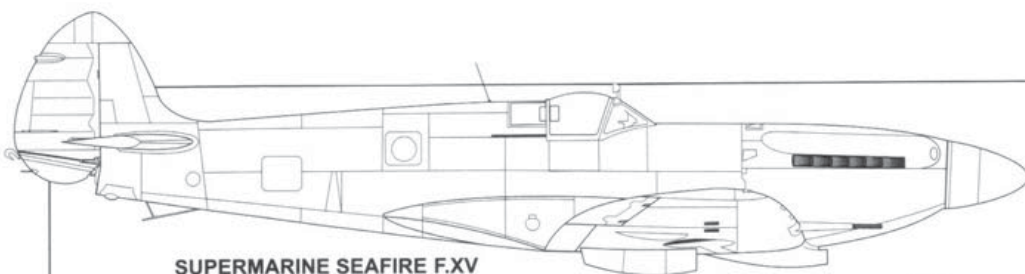
This interesting picture shows Seafire F.XVII SX161 when in service as the AGC's aircraft of the 14th CAG. It was stripped of camouflage and left in natural metal unlike any others of its kind. The date was 1950 and the place Hal Far, Malta. One of 804 Squadron's newly acquired Sea Furies appears in the background. (Peter Cook)

reconnaissance variants. With the introduction of the Griffon in the F.XV, no camera installation was possible for maintaining the centre of gravity. The cut-down of the aft fuselage on the Seafire Mk.XVII again allowed the carrying of a pair of F.24 cameras, as an alternative to the additional fuel tank in the rear fuselage. The oblique camera was mounted above the vertical camera and two apertures were provided in each side of the fuselage and one more in the belly. The aircraft equipped in this way were designated Seafire FR.XVIIIs.

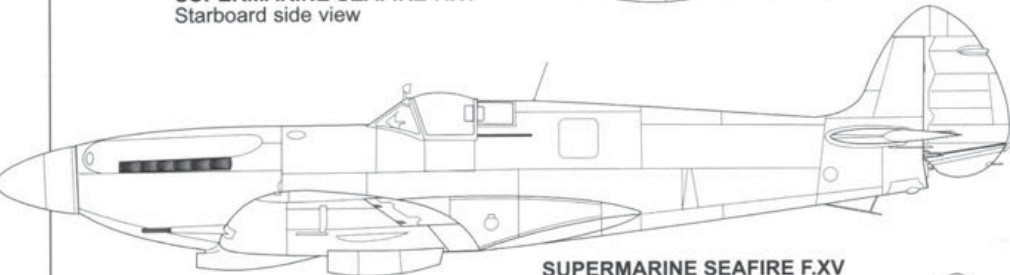
The Seafire F.XVII entered front-line service with 809 and 879 Squadrons. These two units had come back from Far East war operations with their Seafire L.IIIIs and had been based at RNAS Nutts Corner since 21 October and 10 November 1945, respectively. 809 Squadron began to re-equip with Seafire F.XVs; receiving three machines from 805 Squadron on 19 November. Two weeks later, the unit engaged in the dispersal of its Seafire L.IIIIs and F.XVs as it was now to convert to the Seafire F.XVII. By 4 December, the strength

This Seafire F.XVII, SX137, is seen on the Yeovilton hard standing in 1961. It is now part of the FAA Museum collection (B.J.Lowe)

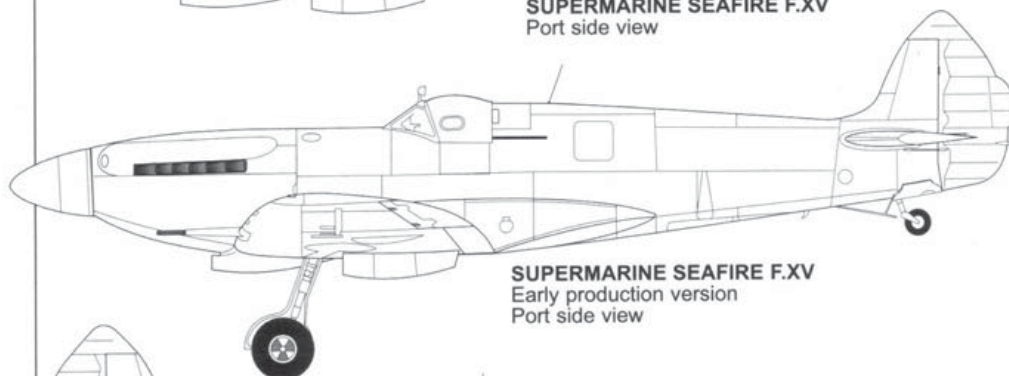




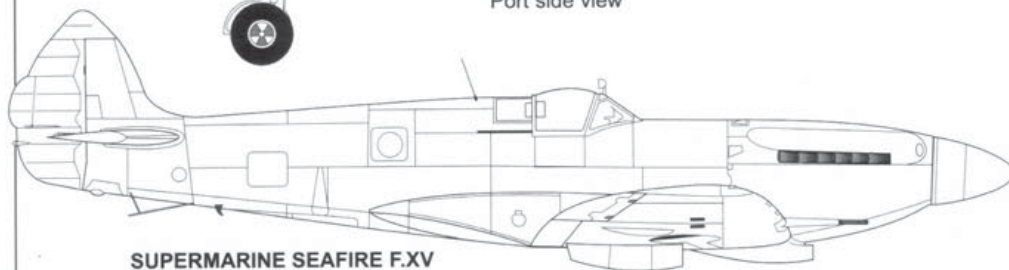
SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE F.XV
Starboard side view



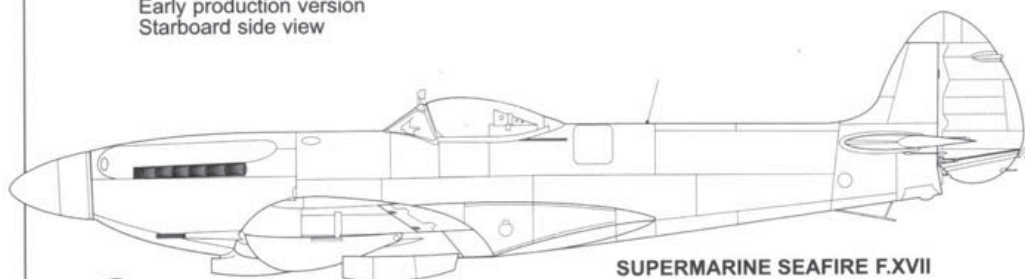
SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE F.XV
Port side view



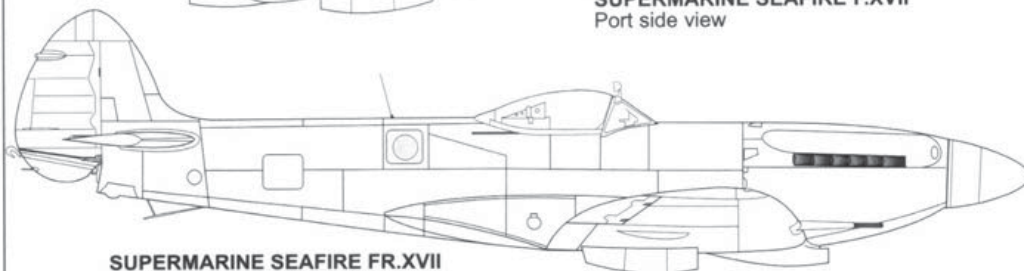
SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE F.XV
Early production version
Port side view



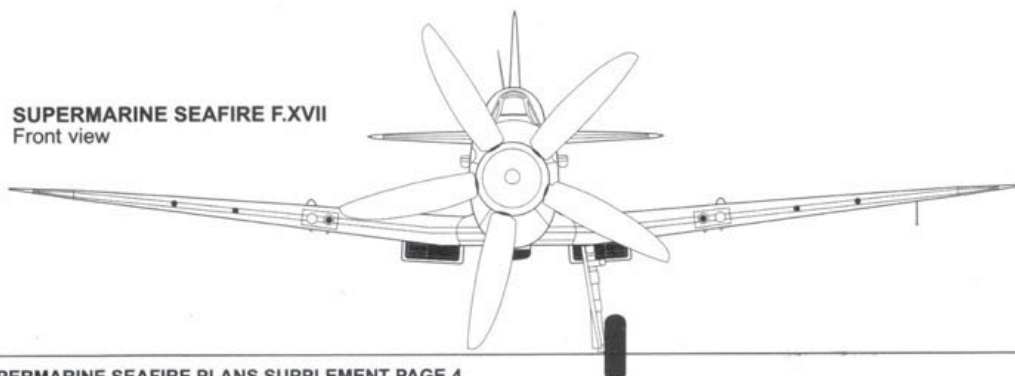
SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE F.XV
Early production version
Starboard side view



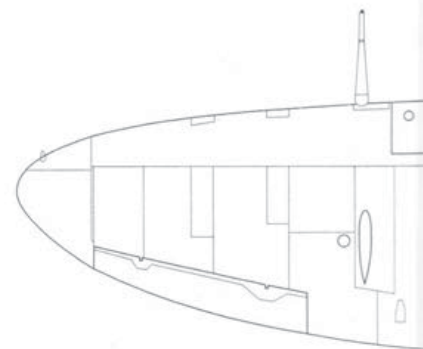
SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE F.XVII
Port side view



SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE FR.XVII
Starboard side view



SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE F.XVII
Front view



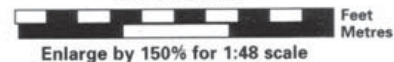
SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE
Upper surface plan view

Supermarine **SEAFIRE**

Griffon-engined variants

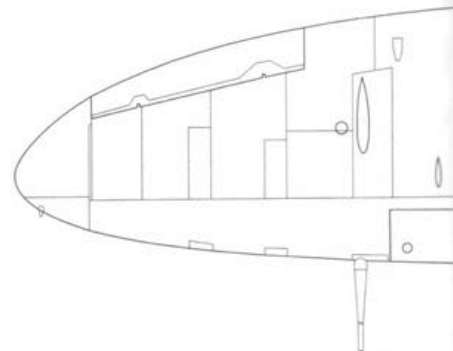
Drawings by
David Howley

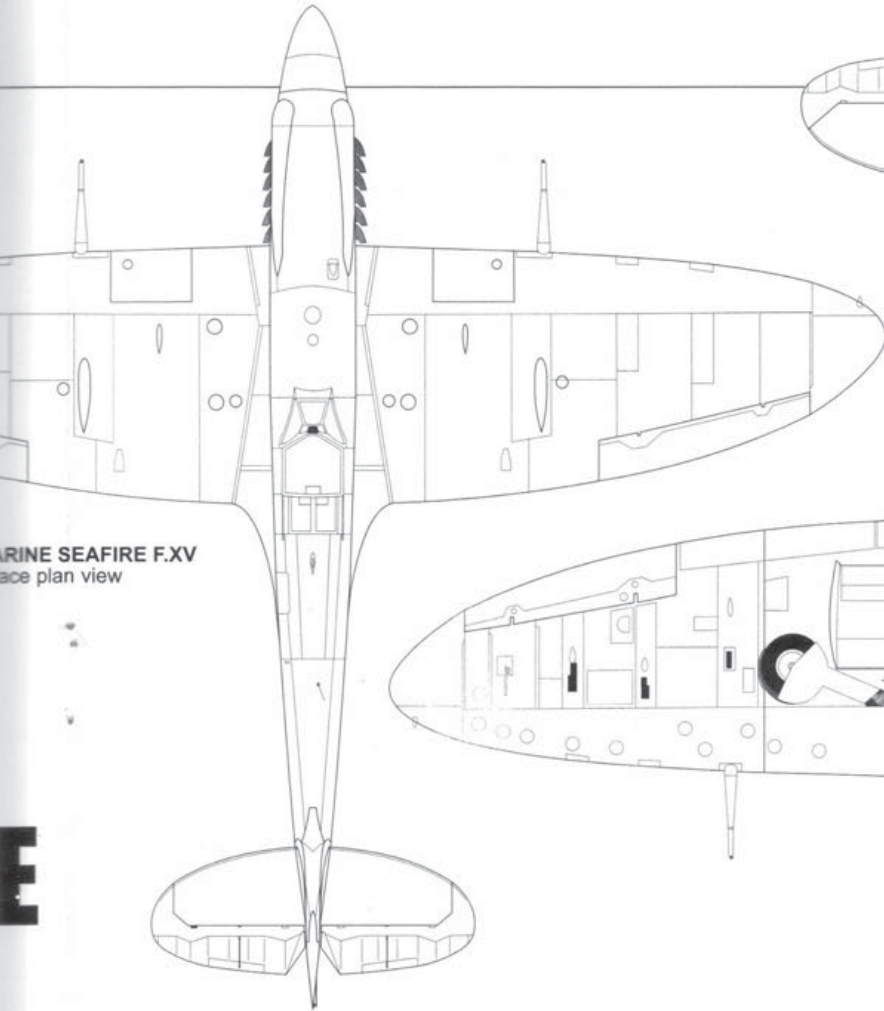
1:72nd SCALE



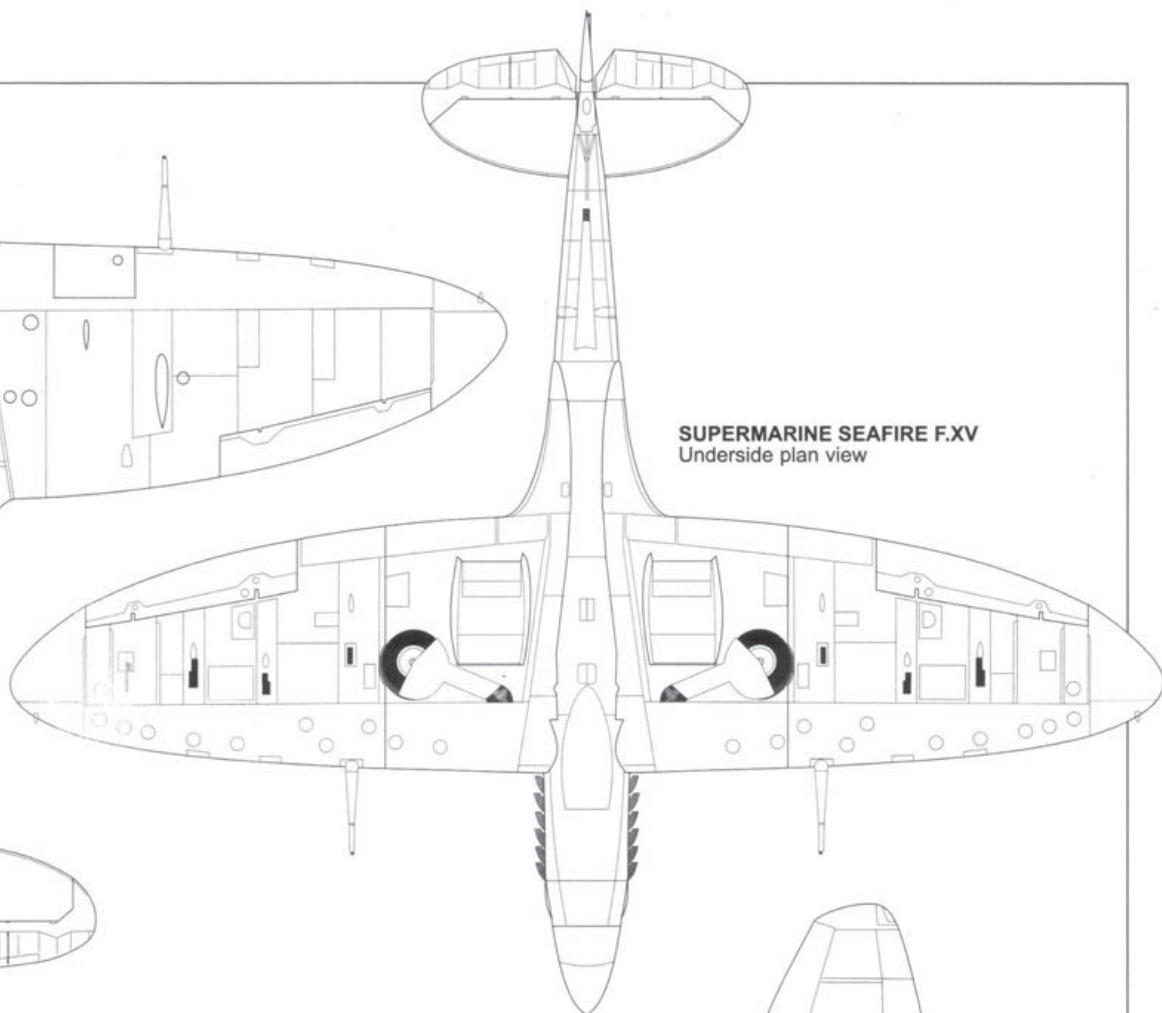
Enlarge by 150% for 1:48 scale

SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE F.XVII
Upper surface plan view

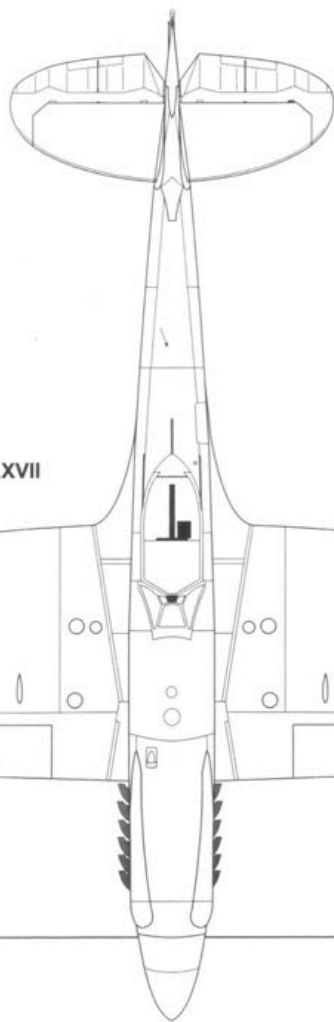




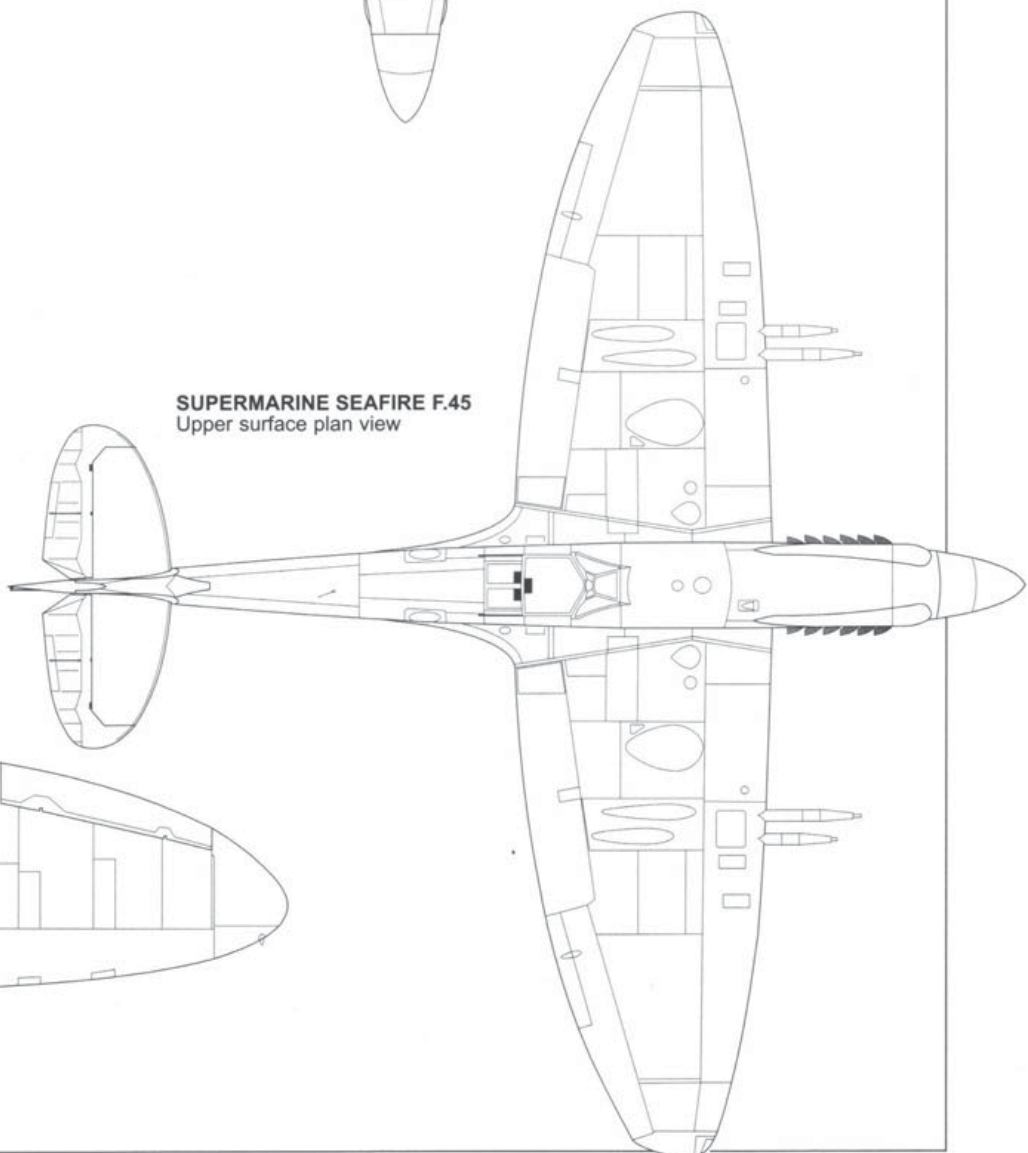
SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE F.XV
Underside plan view



SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE F.XV
Underside plan view



SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE F.XVII
Underside plan view



SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE F.45
Upper surface plan view

Feet
Metres

SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE F.XV
Starboard side view

SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE F.XV
Port side view

SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE F.XV
Early production version
Port side view

SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE F.XV
Early production version
Starboard side view

SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE F.XVII
Port side view

SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE FR.XVII
Starboard side view

SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE F.XVII
Front view

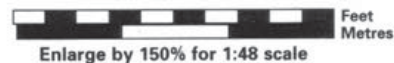
SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE
Upper surface plan view

Supermarine SEAFIRE

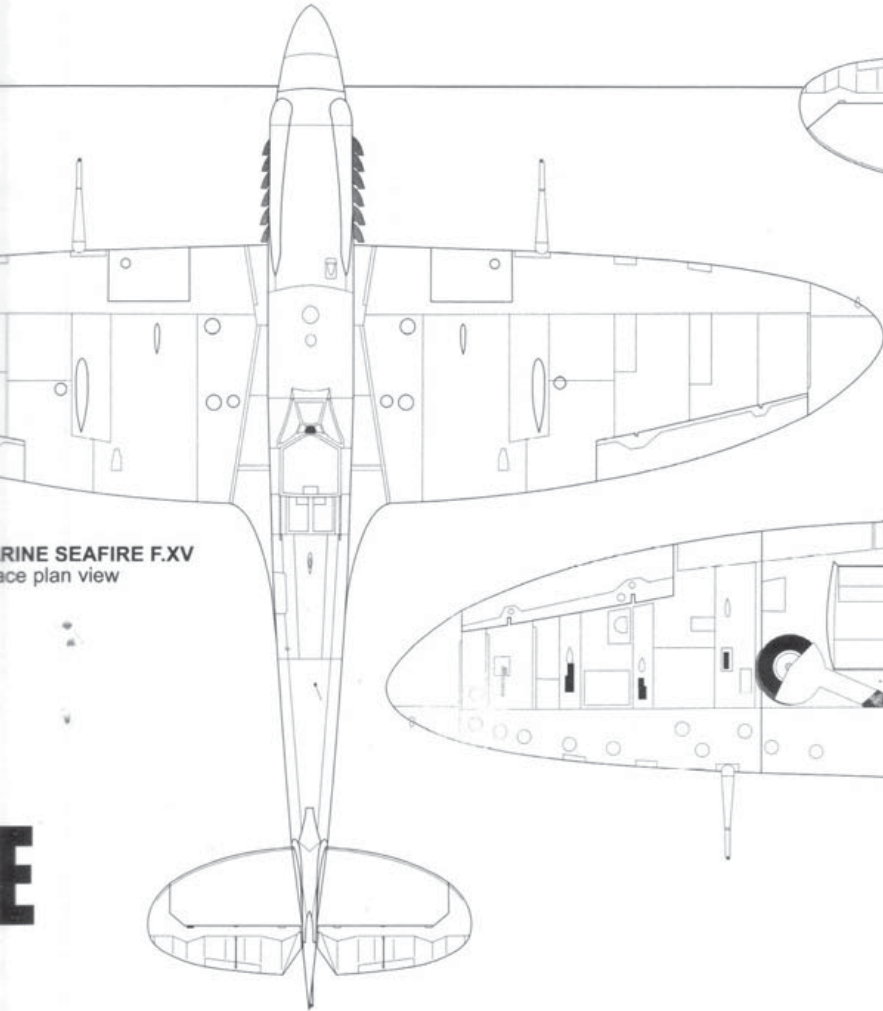
Griffon-engined variants

Drawings by
David Howley

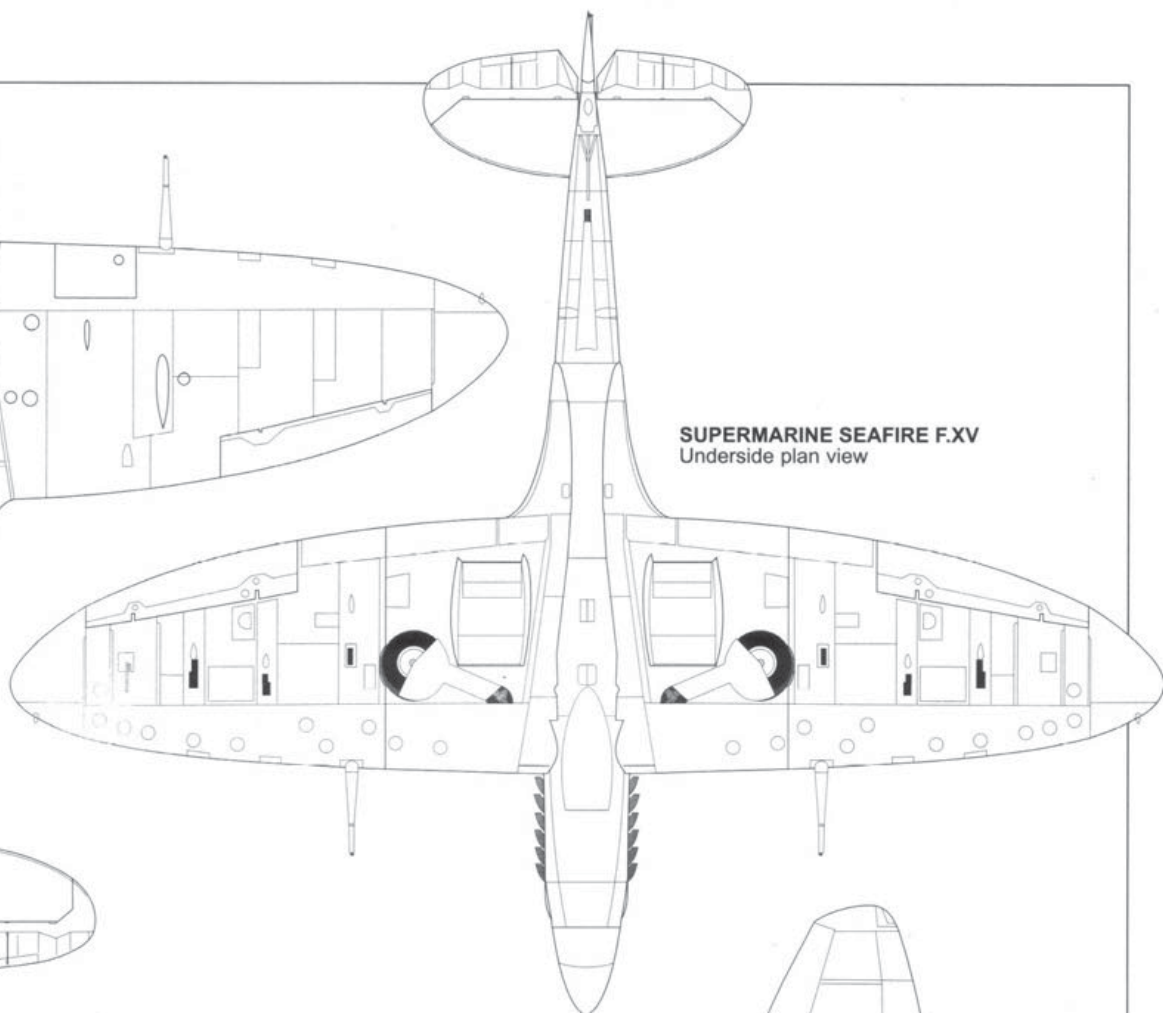
1:72nd SCALE



SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE F.XVII
Upper surface plan view



SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE F.XV
Underside plan view

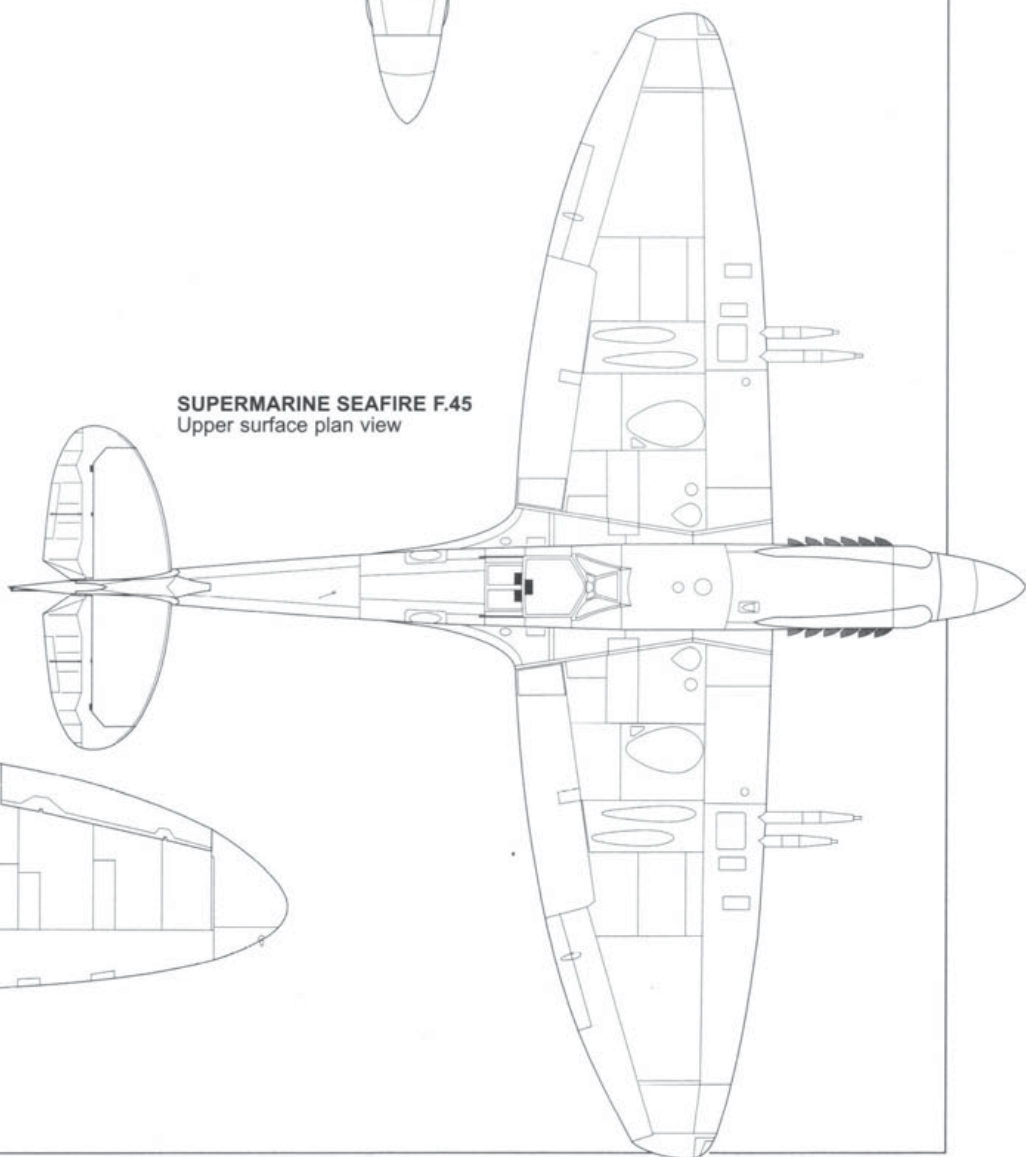
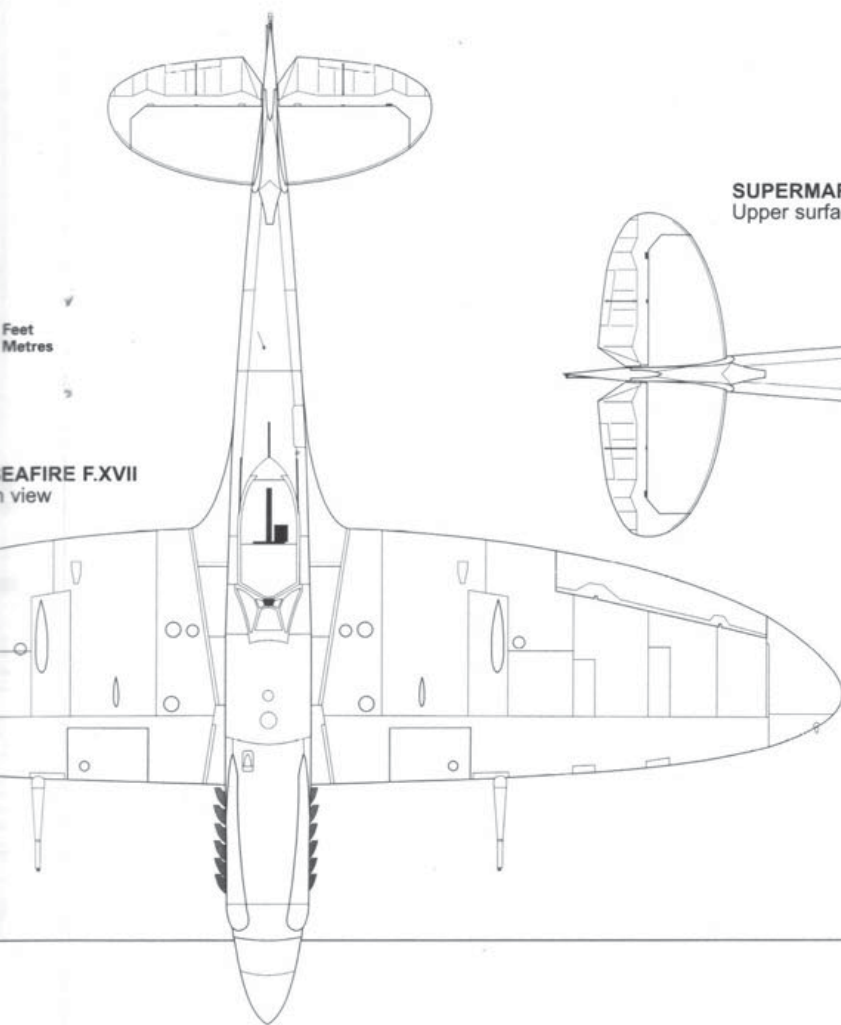


SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE F.XV
Underside plan view

E

Feet
Metres

SEAFIRE F.XVII
Underside plan view



SUPERMARINE SEAFIRE F.45
Upper surface plan view



Due to the change in centre of gravity in the Seafire F.XVII it became possible to mount one horizontal on either side, and one vertical F.24 cameras aft of the cockpit. In this form, as shown here on SX334, the aircraft was re-designated FR.XVII. (IWM)

ACTION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

The next unit to receive Seafire Mk.XVIIIs was 800 Squadron. It had just been reformed at RNAS Eglinton, Northern Ireland, under the command of Lt.Cdr. D.G. Parker on 15 September 1946 and was assigned a fortnight later to the newly created 13th CAG. By 19 September, the squadron reached its full strength of 12 aircraft; of those, three were FR.XVII models, but all lacked the long stroke undercarriage.

was 11 F.XVIIIs, three L.IIIs and a single F.XV. Unfortunately, the squadron suffered two fatal casualties on 19 December. Sub-Lt. Lees-Jones and Sub-Lt. Siddall collided over the sea off Northern Ireland, probably due to a glazing sun. Immediately after the Christmas leave, 809 Squadron prepared to disband, ending its activities on 11 January 1946.

879 Squadron had an even shorter life after its return home. By mid-December 1945, the pilots were still awaiting their Seafire F.XVIIIs and contented themselves with looking at 809 Squadron's F.XVIIIs or at the Canadian's F.XVs still based at Nutts Corner. Although some machines were subsequently allocated to 879 Squadron, it had to disband on 30 December and this was completed by 9 January 1946, their aircraft being flown to Donibristle for reallocation.

The third operational unit to be equipped with F.XVIIIs was 807 Squadron, also based at Nutts Corner and commanded by Lt.Cdr. E.J. Clark. Seafire F.XVIIIs arrived from December 1945 and the squadron worked-up slowly throughout 1946; including a four-week deck-landing training period aboard *HMS Implacable* from 28 September 1946, and several moves to various stations. When the Carrier Air Group organisation was changed in September 1946, 807 Squadron had been the only fighter unit not attached to a CAG and linked with a carrier. On 6 November 1946, 807 Squadron joined the Second TAF in Germany and remained at Lübeck until 30 January 1947 with the occupation forces. 807 Squadron then embarked aboard *HMS Vengeance* on 12 May 1947 to take part in exercises in the North Sea and along the Norwegian coast. On return to RNAS Stretton on 27 June, the squadron again embarked aboard *HMS Vengeance* from 17 to 31 July and subsequently rejoined RNAS Gosport. It moved to RNAS Culdrose on 19 August where the Seafire F.XVIIIs were gradually superseded by Sea Furies; all Seafires having disappeared by September 1947.

Top right: One of the RNVR squadrons to use the Seafire F.XVII was 1832, then part of Southern Air Division based at Culham. SX194 is seen landing there in 1951. Centre right: Seafire F.XVII SX156 of 767 Squadron was used for training purposes in 1949. It appears that the rear fuselage and tail unit are painted white, presumably for exercise purposes. (MAP) Right: A bad prang on *HMS Vengeance*. Seafire F.XVII SX123 of 804 Squadron ended up on its back after a difficult landing. (FAA Museum)





Left and lower left: Two views of the Seafire F.Mk.45 which was basically a navalised Spitfire F.21 with a hook, slinging points and a naval radio. Strengthened wings allowed the installation of four 20-mm Hispano cannon. It had a top speed of 443 mph powered by a Griffon 61 engine. The aircraft lower left is LA443 seen at Boscombe Down. (IWM and DERA)



The Air Group Commander, Lt.Cdr. W.C. Simpson, as well as the CO made the first flights of 800 Squadron on 25 September as the first aircraft had been pronounced serviceable the previous day. Then the unit put itself into the usual work-up period with the inevitable familiarisation flights, section drills, navigation exercises, and dummy strikes in conjunction with 827 Squadron's Fireflies.

In December, the Seafires were ferried to Stretton where the engines were modified and the non-bounce oleos were fitted, releasing them for carrier operations. Nevertheless the return trip across the Irish Sea proved eventful. A first batch of five Seafire Mk.XVIIIs were collected on 9 January 1947, but Sub-Lt. O'Doherty was involved in a taxiing accident and had to stay at Stretton while Lt. Powell landed in the Isle of Man due to bad weather and collapsed the tailwheel. Four days later, three further aircraft also attempted to return to their home base. This time the pilots stopped on the Isle of Man to refuel. With flaps unserviceable, Sub-Lt. Barnard's Seafire approached too fast and overshot the runway; jumping a ditch, crossing a road, tearing through a barbed wire fence and ending up in an adjoining field with fortunately the pilot unhurt.

With its Seafires equipped with adequate undercarriages and the efficient supercharger clutches, 800 Squadron undertook ADDLs from mid-January 1947. The pilots were delighted with their aircraft,

Seafire F.45 LA489:568-LP was serving with 771 Squadron at Lee-on-Solent when this picture was taken in late 1949. (K.F.Thurkettle)

the engines responding perfectly to sudden accelerations and the long stroke undercarriages eliminating any bounces after landing.

All the 13th CAG personnel and aircraft assembled at Glasgow on 3 February to join *HMS Triumph*. The material was loaded and safely stowed in the hangars from 6 to 9 February while spare Seafire Mk.XVIIIs intended for 805 Squadron were secured on the deck. The aircraft carrier proceeded to sea on 10 February, passing Gibraltar four days later and reaching Malta on 16 February. Before *HMS Triumph* entered Grand Harbour, five Seafires were boosted off and landed at RNAS Hal Far to allow 800 Squadron's pilots to carry out an ADDL

programme.

On 24 February, *HMS Triumph* sailed to an area off Malta where 800 Squadron performed DLT, carrier drill, vectoring and co-ordinated attacks. On 26 February, Lt. Powell and Sub-Lt. Barnard missed the wire on landing and ended up in the barrier. Lt. Powell finished in the same way on the next day and was some days later transferred to the Fleet Requirements Unit at Hal Far. A more serious accident occurred on 7 March when Sub-Lt. Hughes was waved-off during his approach and struck the sea as he was turning to starboard, disappearing with his aircraft.

HMS Triumph joined the Mediterranean Fleet, which included *HMS Ocean*, on 23 March and Fireflies carried out a strike with four Seafires acting as CAP. Then *HMS Ocean*'s Fireflies dive-bombed *HMS Triumph* but were successfully intercepted by the 800 Squadron CAP. Similar exercises were repeated the next day before the ships entered Valetta. There, at last, 805 Squadron, which had been flying Fireflies since the Seafire F.XVs had been suspended from carrier operations, was supplied with the reliable Seafire Mk.XVIIIs brought to Malta by *HMS Triumph*.

While 805 Squadron worked-up on their new single-seat fighters, 800 Squadron re-embarked on 14 April and, after some DLT and flying exercises, the ship set course for Freetown and Tangier. *HMS Triumph* was back at Malta on 15 May and the aircraft landed at Hal Far. With the ship anchored, Sub-Lt. Osler was boosted off in harbour to take ashore a spare Seafire. Unfortunately the catapult failed and the Seafire crashed into the sea, killing the pilot.

Throughout 1947 and the first months of 1948, 800 and 805 Squadrons were operating with their respective carriers, *HMS Triumph* and *Ocean*, joining on several occasions for combined exercises in the Mediterranean. Several periods ashore were spent at Hal Far. This was not only for rest

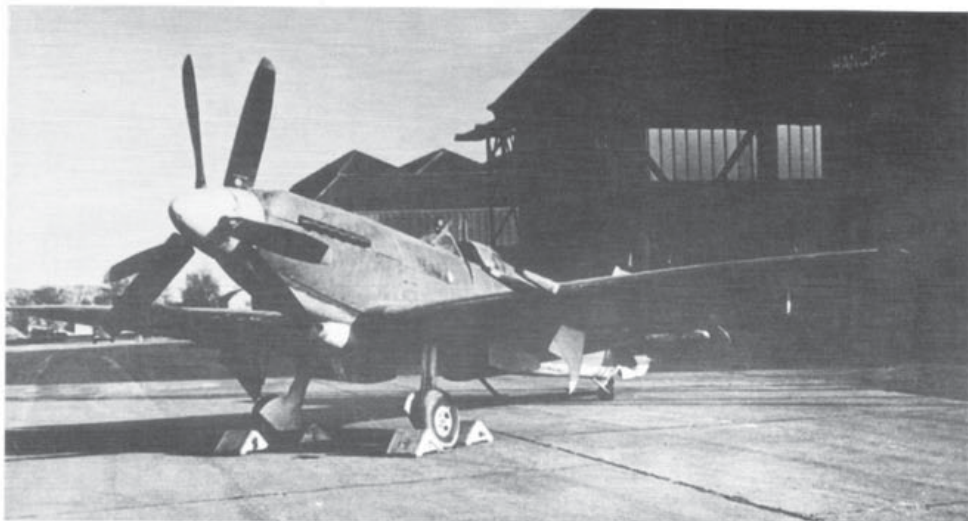


One of 11 Seafire 45s to be modified with a six-bladed contra-rotating propeller. This one was in service with 771 Squadron at Lee-on-Solent. (K. Thurkettle)

but to make the most of the shore installations and of the Filfla or Delimara ranges for live bombing and rocketing. On several occasions, the carriers visited Libya and their aircraft were based at Castel Benito for operations with the Army or Royal Marine Commandos. Seafire FR.XVIIIs also performed armed reconnaissances to Tripolitania, flying direct from Malta.

The main involvement of British forces in the Mediterranean during 1948 lay in the evacuation of Palestine. This was a gradual withdrawal, which began in October 1947 and which would end with the final departure from the Haifa enclave on 30 June 1948. As the last Army and RAF units were brought in to the Haifa enclave, *HMS Ocean* provided support to the two RAF fighter squadrons still based at Ramat David. The carrier arrived off Haifa early in the morning of 10 May 1948. From 09.00 until 14.00, 805 Squadron continually flew a pair of Seafire F.XVIIIs, while four Fireflies were also on patrol, but none of these aircraft were actually armed. *HMS Ocean* retired to the open sea during the night for security reasons.

The following day, the 20th CAG took part in exercises. The real action began on 12 May when the aircraft were used for spotting or in support missions on behalf of the convoys leaving Jerusalem or Tel Aviv. Pilots were kept on readiness at 15 minutes notice but as no more operational sorties were required by the Army ashore till 16 May and, as all the convoys had reached the Haifa enclave or Egyptian territory, *HMS Ocean* withdrew to Malta. 805 Squadron disembarked to Hal Far on 18 May. After a month ashore, the 20th CAG rejoined *HMS*



Ocean to return home. 805 Squadron was put ashore at RNAS Eglinton on 28 June and disbanded three days later.

For the final evacuation of the British forces still in the Haifa enclave, *HMS Triumph* was deployed in the Eastern Mediterranean on 29 June 1948. Upon arrival, a formation of eight Seafires and six Fireflies were launched over the Haifa area. Crews were then kept on readiness for the rest of the day. On 30 June, two pairs of Seafires and as many of Fireflies were flown on an armed reconnaissance, armed with rockets. The day before three Army tanks had been stolen by Jews from Haifa airport and an RAF reconnaissance had proved unsuccessful. On the morning of 30 June, the FAA aircraft were also unable to locate the tanks due to bad visibility and the tanks became part of the Jewish armoured forces. The crews remained on stand-by until 11.40 when the 13th CAG did a fly-past together with four RAF Spitfires over *HMS Phoebe*. On board was the Headquarters for the last stages of the evacuation. As the last

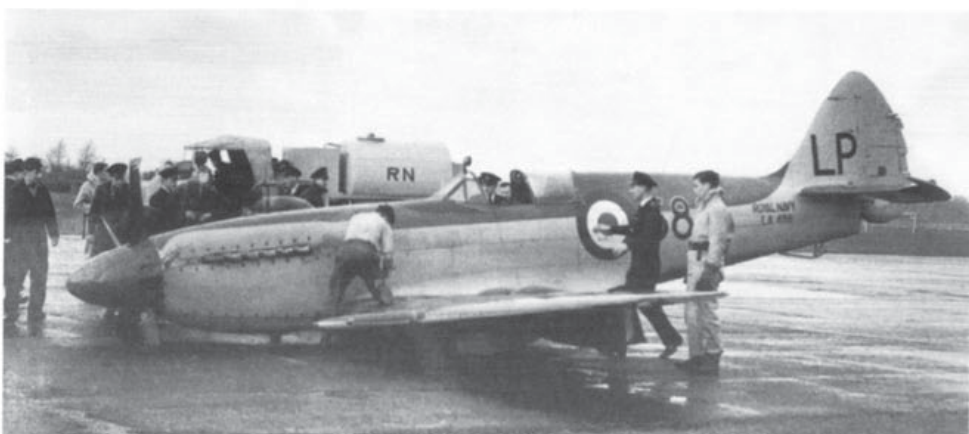
troopships had then left Haifa, *HMS Triumph* sailed to Limasol. Later, the carrier visited Ankara before returning to Malta on 29 July from where the usual training routine was resumed for 800 Squadron.

TOWARDS THE DEFINITIVE SEAFIRE

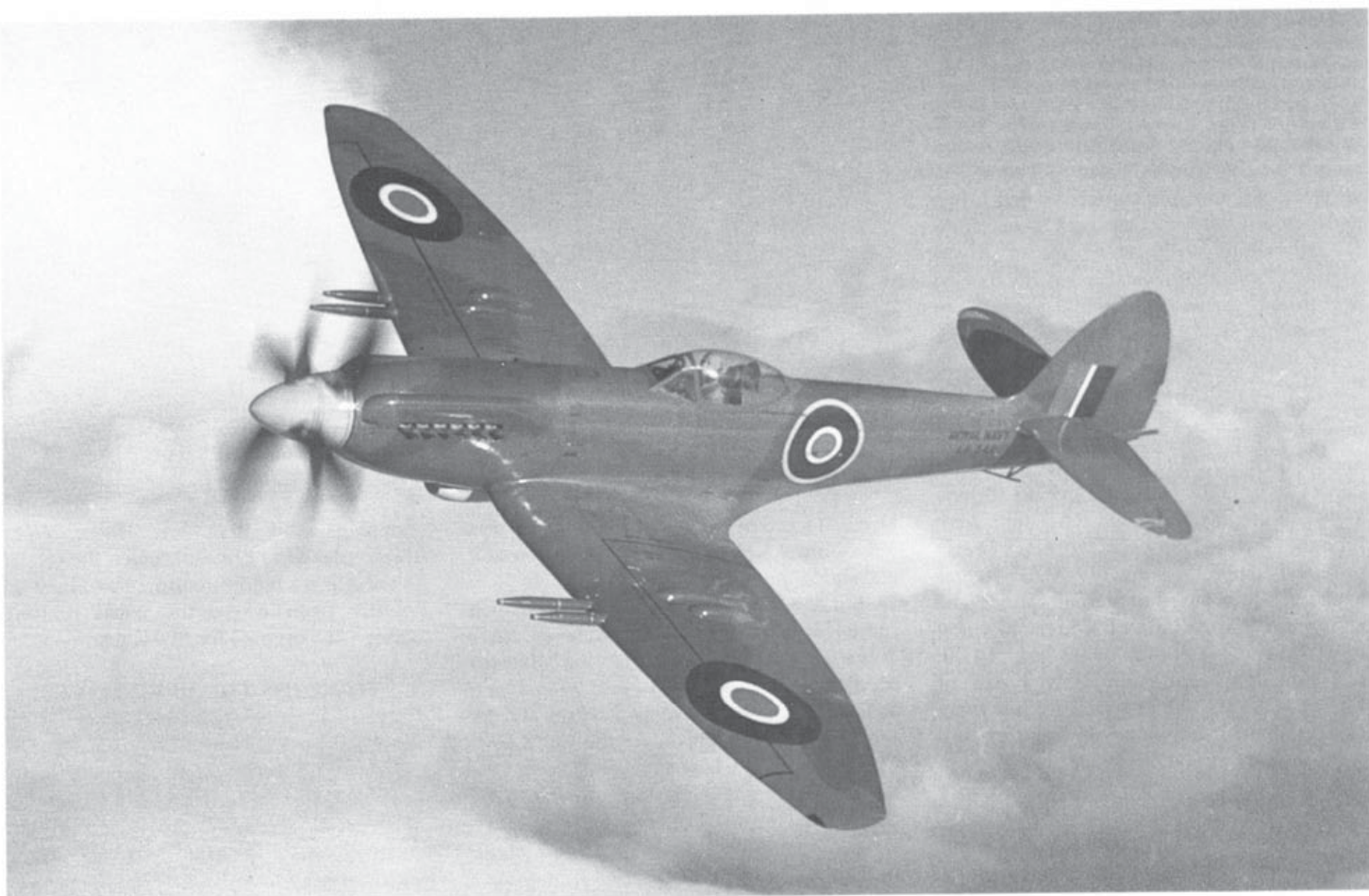
The Seafire Mk.45 was developed directly from the RAF Spitfire Mk.21 under Specification N.7/44. Conversion of the Spitfire Mk.21 for naval use was given to Cunliffe-Owen. The Seafire Mk.45s were intended as interim models pending the development of a fully navalised variant. A Spitfire Mk.21 airframe was diverted in August 1944 for conversion as the Mk.45 prototype at Eastleigh. The Admiralty hoped that the production of this partially navalised Mk.45 could begin early in 1945.

Basically, the Seafire Mk.45 was a Spitfire Mk.21 fitted with the basic naval equipment; a sting arrester hook, slinging points, and a naval radio. It was powered by a Griffon 61 engine with two-speed, two-stage supercharger, driving a five-bladed propeller and giving 1,900 hp on take-off and 2,005 hp at maximum power at 6,000 ft. The essential difference between the Mk.45 and the previous Griffon-engined Seafires lay in the entirely redesigned wings which then slightly departed from the true elliptical shape, introducing quite different tips and ailerons. These strengthened wings had provision for four 20-mm Hispano Mk.II cannon. Four - instead of two - small tanks were fitted in the leading edges, increasing internal fuel capacity to 119 gallons. Complete fairing of the wheel wells was obtained by the addition of two doors for the lower portion of the undercarriage. Combination of the Griffon 61 and enhanced wings provided the Seafire Mk.45 with a top speed of 443 mph, a rate of climb of 4,800 ft/min and a service ceiling of 41,000 ft which was a great improvement over the Seafire Mk.XV and Mk.XVII.

The Seafire Mk.45 retained the same enlarged rudder of the Mk.XVII but a small angle plate was added above the rudder trim



Two pictures of Seafire F.45 LA486:583-LP showing the moment of contact with Lee-on-Solent's runway and the start of the subsequent accident investigation. It was established that the cause was hydraulic failure which caused the undercarriage to lock in the up position. (Dennis Treweek/K.Thurkettle)



Only 24 production Seafire 46s were built. This is the prototype LA542 which had a wire guard on the fin for spinning trials to prevent the tail parachute becoming entangled. The variant did not have folding wings and was relegated to training and trial roles. (RAF Museum)

and the tab was split in an attempt to improve directional stability. A final modification consisted of reducing the undercarriage mainwheel fairings to increase clearance over arrestor wires during deck landings, and in enlarging the outboard wheel doors to compensate.

Lack of folding wings, as well as a consequent torque effect and a directional stability far from being satisfactory, prevented any operational use of the Seafire Mk.45 with front-line units. Nevertheless, 50 Mk.45s, in addition to the prototype serialled TM379, were built by Vickers at the Castle Bromwich factory and assembled at South Marston. The operational life of the Seafire Mk.45 was thus limited to trial and training purposes.

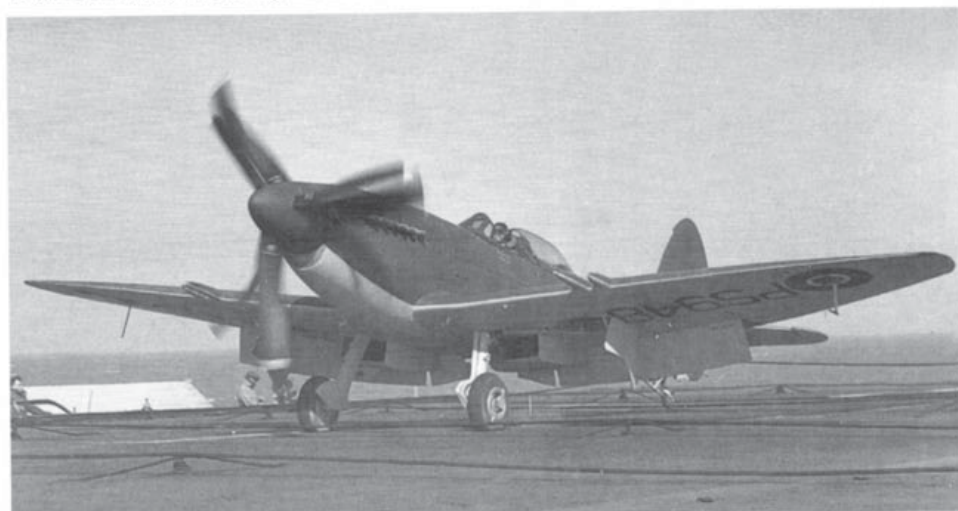
Supermarine worked actively on solutions to remedy the poor directional stability and the effects of engine torque. After spending time at Boscombe Down, prototype TM379 returned to Supermarine in November 1944 for the installation of a Griffon 87 engine driving two three-bladed Rotol contra-rotating propellers. At the same time, the fin area was increased by extending the leading edge forward. After these modifications, TM379 was flown by Quill and rejoined 778 Squadron aboard *HMS Pretoria Castle* on 21 November 1944. It soon became evident that the 33 ft 4 in long Seafire was too long for the lift and the spinner had to be removed before it could be brought down to the

hangar. A total of 14 deck landings were made before Sub-Lt. Clark damaged the prototype while landing ashore, scrapping one wing tip and taking five inches off one of the propeller blades. Test flying resumed shortly afterwards, TM379 being joined by the production Mk.45s from the beginning of 1945. Eleven of the production Mk.45s were later modified with a Griffon 85, an engine with the same power as the Griffon 61 but fitted with a specific gear drive for contra-rotating propellers. As the introduction of two airscrews rotating in opposite directions overcame the torque and the inclination of the fuselage to rotate round the propeller, this lay-out was adopted on the next Seafire variant, the Mark 46.

Similar to the Spitfire Mk.22 in the family lineage, the Seafire Mk.46 featured a cut down rear fuselage and a bubble canopy, but lacked the curved windscreen installed on the Seafire Mk.XVII. A 33 gallon rear fuselage tank was permanently fitted on all Seafire Mk.46s, including the FR versions.

This combination was not allowed on the FR.XVII. Internal fuel tank capacity consequently rose to 152 gallons. The even larger empennage developed for the Spiteful was introduced on the Mk.46 in order to improve the directional stability and to counterbalance the two airscrews and the long spinner. Standard engine on the Seafire Mk.46 was the Griffon 87 connected to a six-bladed Rotol contra-rotating propeller. It only differed from the Griffon 85 by allowing a greater maximum boost.

A prototype, serialled TM383, was modified from a Spitfire Mk.21 airframe by Cunliffe-Owen and flew in September 1944. It appeared to be an enjoyable aircraft to fly and a good gun platform, fortunately cleared from the Mk.45's rather unpleasant characteristics. Although a huge (considering the Mk.46 still had fixed wings) order for 200 aircraft was signed, but the end of the war curtailed this order and only 24 production Seafire Mk.46s were built at the South Marston factory using

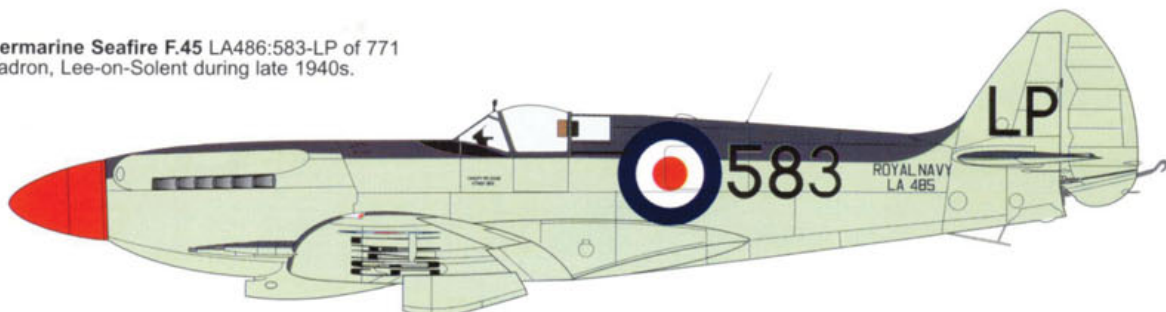


Seafire FR.47 PS948 seen during the initial deck landing trials on board *HMS Illustrious*, 13-15 May 1947. (RAF Museum)

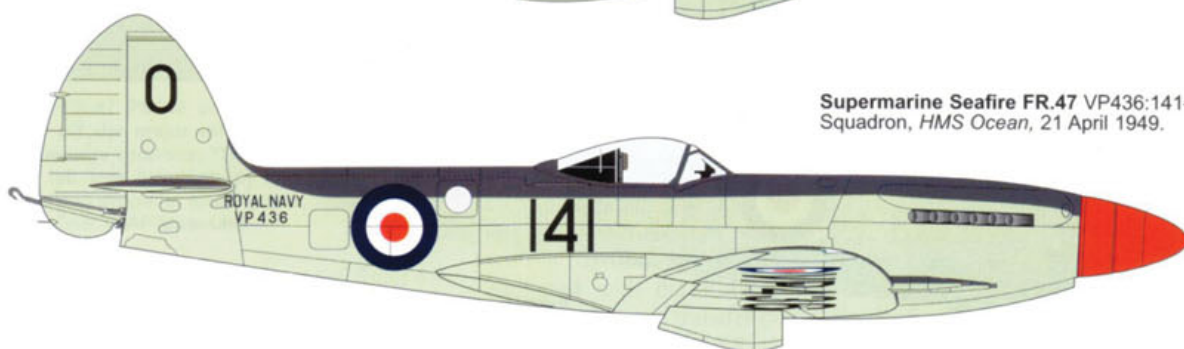


Supermarine Seafire F.XVII SX365:173-JB of 736 Squadron, seen on board *HMAS Sydney* in 1949.

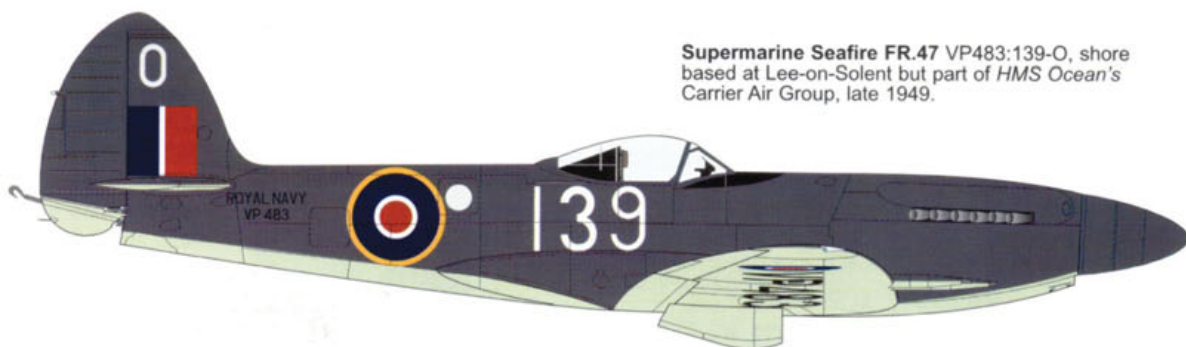
Supermarine Seafire F.45 LA486:583-LP of 771 Squadron, Lee-on-Solent during late 1940s.



Supermarine Seafire FR.47 VP436:141-O of 804 Squadron, *HMS Ocean*, 21 April 1949.



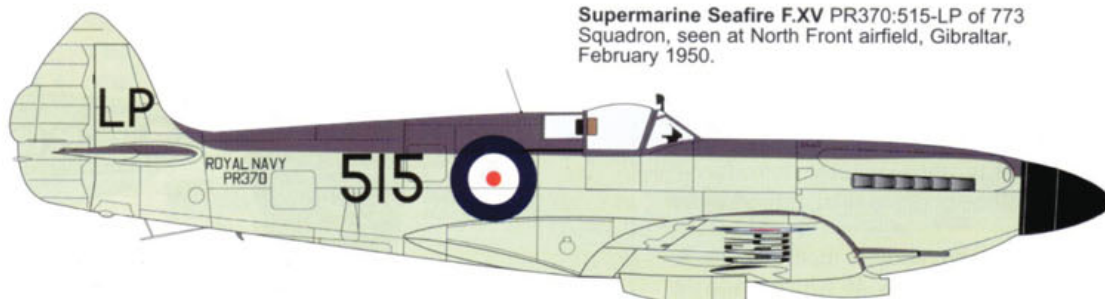
Supermarine Seafire FR.47 VP483:139-O, shore based at Lee-on-Solent but part of *HMS Ocean's* Carrier Air Group, late 1949.



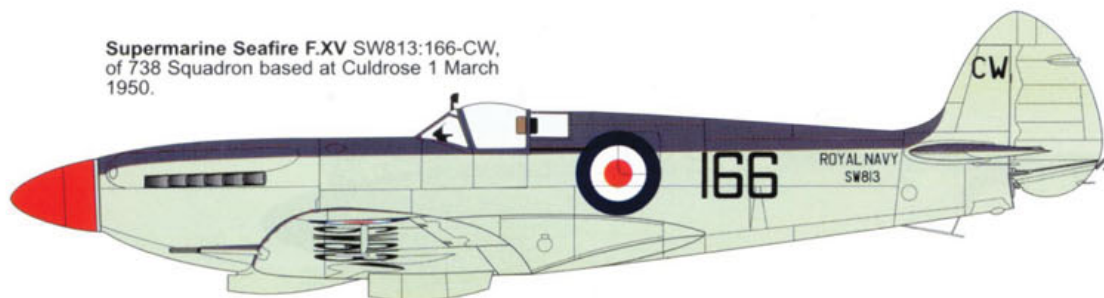
Supermarine Seafire FR.47 VR965:177-P of 800 Squadron, *HMS Triumph*, 5 July 1949.



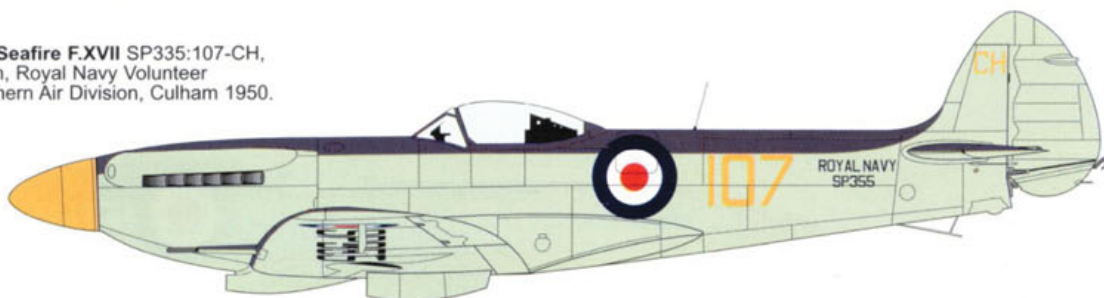
Supermarine Seafire F.XV PR370:515-LP of 773 Squadron, seen at North Front airfield, Gibraltar, February 1950.



Supermarine Seafire F.XV SW813:166-CW,
of 738 Squadron based at Culdrose 1 March
1950.



Supermarine Seafire F.XVII SP335:107-CH,
1832 Squadron, Royal Navy Volunteer
Reserve, Southern Air Division, Culham 1950.



Supermarine Seafire F.XVII SX288:111-CH.
1832 Squadron, RNVF, Southern Air Division,
Culham early 1950s.



Supermarine Seafire F.XV PR397:54S.22 of
54S Escadrille, Aeronavale, early 1950s. Note
the smudged paint around the codes.

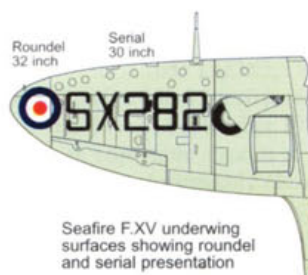


components manufactured at Castle Bromwich. A proportion of these were completed as FR.46s in the same way as the FR.XVIIIs. All Seafire Mk.46s were relegated to training and trial roles.

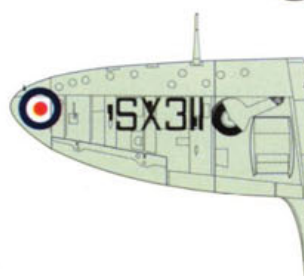
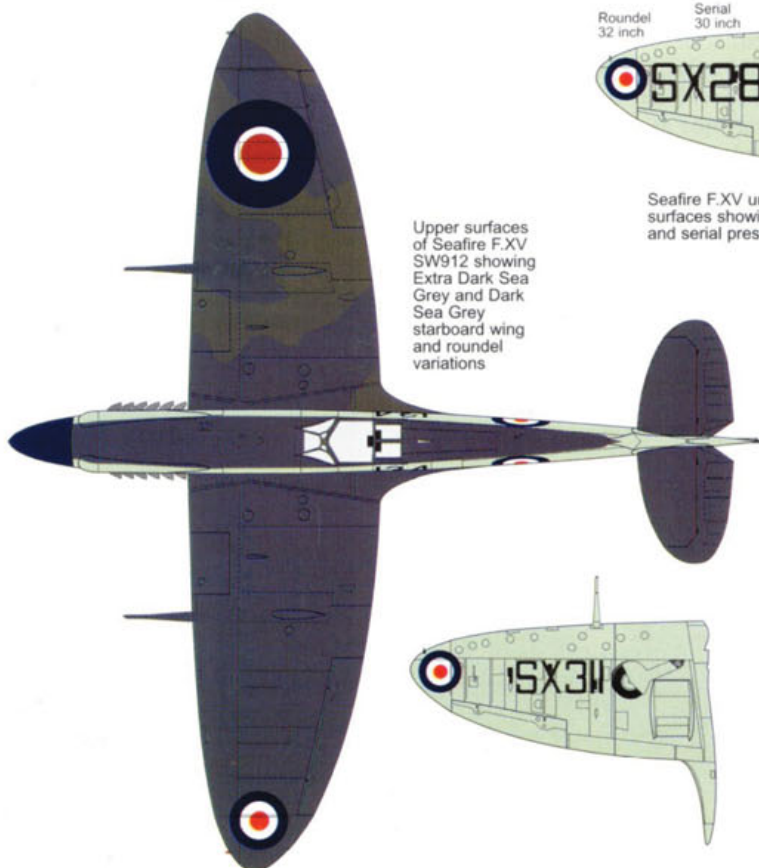
SEAFIRE'S ACHIEVEMENT

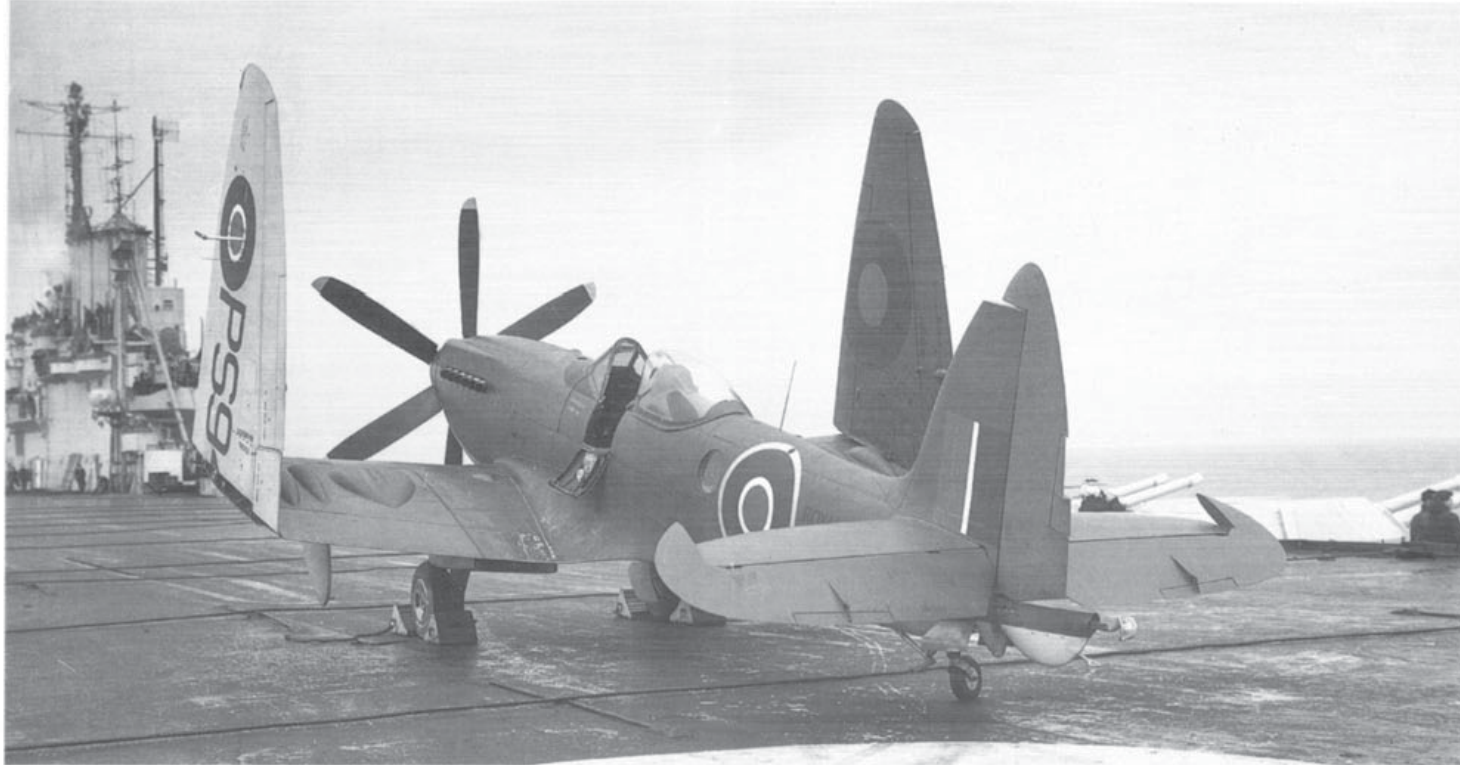
The ultimate Seafire Mk.47 was a fully navalised development of the Seafire Mk.46. At last, Supermarine had succeeded in designing a folding version of the new wings introduced on the Spitfire Mk.21 and its derivatives. Each wing folded upwards vertically, with the hinge line being just outboard of the cannon bay. Unlike the Seafire Mk.III, Mk.XV and Mk.XVII, the wing tips remained unfolded as height with wings folded kept within hangar space requirements. Wing folding operation was manual with the first four production Seafire Mk.47s. Hydraulic power folding and spreading was subsequently introduced, completing the operation then only took ten seconds.

There were several other modifications in comparison with the Mk.46 which made the Seafire Mk.47 a useful naval fighter. The mainplane was strengthened and adequate



Upper surfaces
of Seafire F.XV
SW912 showing
Extra Dark Sea
Grey and Dark
Sea Grey
starboard wing
and roundel
variations





Seafire FR.47 PS948 on board *HMS Illustrious* shows off the major differences between this and previous versions. The folding wings, broad chord tail, tear drop canopy and six-blade contra-rotating propeller identify this, the last of the Seafire line. (RAF Museum)

wiring and attachment points were fitted for up to two 500 lb underwing bombs and eight 60 lb rocket projectiles as well as a centreline 90 gal drop tank. Loaded with this and two underwing 22½ gal combat tanks, the Seafire Mk.47 had a fuel capacity of 287 gal and still could carry two 500 lb bombs. Armament was as usual based on the 20-mm Hispano cannon, but the new short-barrelled Mk.V model was adopted.

To cope with the weight increase and the greater permissible loads, the undercarriage was revised. The oleo leg stroke was again increased by one inch while the undercarriage track was widened by one foot. New wheels, characterised by three hub indentations instead of four, were fitted. These required more spacious wells and, therefore, blisters appeared over the wings while the wheel doors were slightly protruding and their division into two parts added more length to the outboard fairings.

Amongst the external differences distinguishing the Mark 46 from the Mk.47 were a curved windscreen, larger area flaps but with a deflection reduced to 75 degrees instead of 85 degrees, a hold-back gear at the hook fairing for tail-down catapult accelerations, and an extended ram-air intake. Although introduced in order to improve aerodynamic qualities, this long fairing of the air intake duct proved less efficient than the original type. The maximum speed of the Seafire Mk.47 was 433 mph at 24,000 ft, some 10 mph slower than the Mk.46.

No prototype was built, Supermarine

directly manufacturing 89 production Seafire Mk.47s at South Marston between April 1946 and January 1949. The first 14 airframes were powered by a Griffon 87 engine. The following aircraft were fitted with a Griffon 88 of similar power but equipped with the Rolls-Royce combined fuel injection and transfer pump. Production aircraft were mainly FR.47 variants. They had provision for two electrically heated F.24 cameras, one oblique which could face port or starboard depending on the lens used, and one vertical. Three lenses of 5, 8 and 14

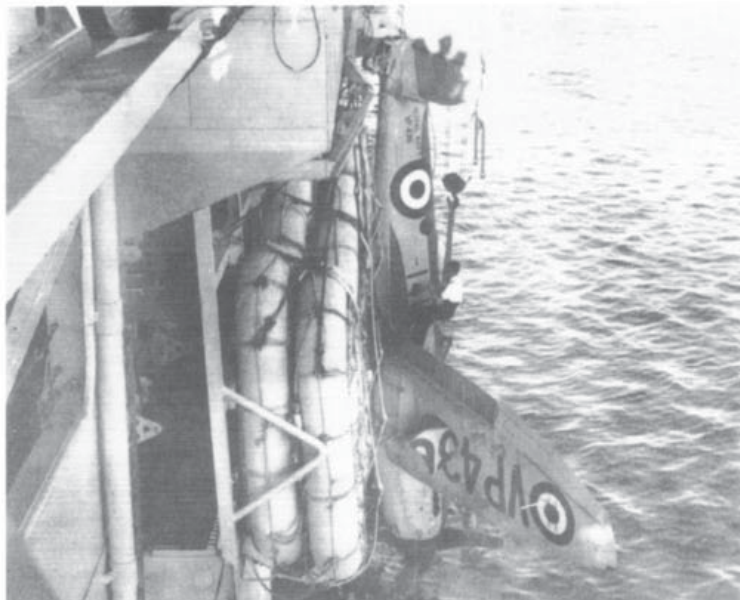
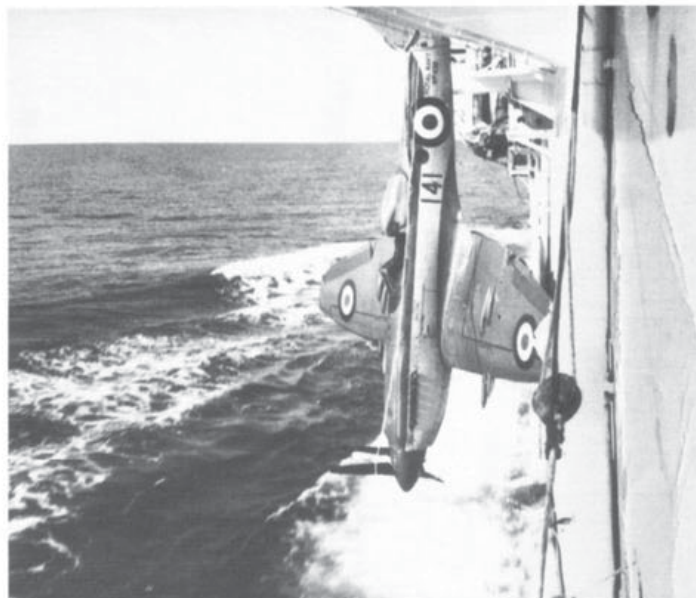
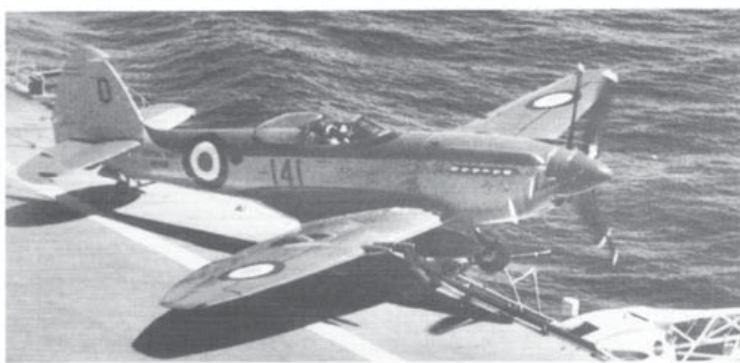
inch were available.

MEDITERRANEAN CRUISES

Service trials were carried out with a number of Seafire Mk.47s by 778 Squadron from December 1946 and by 787 Squadron between May 1947 and September 1949. Nevertheless, it was not until January 1948 that the first Mk.47s were supplied to a front-line unit. Back from a Far East cruise, Ford-based 804 Squadron was chosen to equip with the last Seafire variant. After



HMS Triumph left Malta on 4 August 1949. The ship is seen leaving Grand Harbour from where it went to the Far East taking part in operations against Malayan bandits in October. Right: The Seafires FR.47s of 800 Squadron went ashore to Sembawang for these attacks. (FAA Museum)



An unusual rescue in the Mediterranean on 21 April 1949. These four pictures show the sequence of 804 Squadron Seafire FR.47 VP436 missing the wire and going overboard only to be caught on one of *HMS Ocean's* cranes by the tail hook. Lt. Barron, descended on a rope to secure the aircraft and it was lashed to the ship's side for its return to Malta where the final stage of turning it the right way up and lowering the remains onto a barge took place. Normally in an accident of this sort the aircraft is ditched but LA436 lived to fly again. (Peter Cook)

Christmas leave, a new CO, Lt.Cdr. S.F.F. Shotton, joined the unit the day before the first FR.47 arrived from Lee-on-Solent on 12 January 1948. Deliveries were slow and it was only on 14 April that the 13th and last FR.47 reached RNAS Ford. The first three machines taken on charge by 804 Squadron lacked wing power folding mechanism. All pilots seemed enthusiastic about the Mk.47 which appeared as a completely different aircraft to the Seafire F.XV previously used. The last of the F.XVs had been sent to Lossiemouth during January.

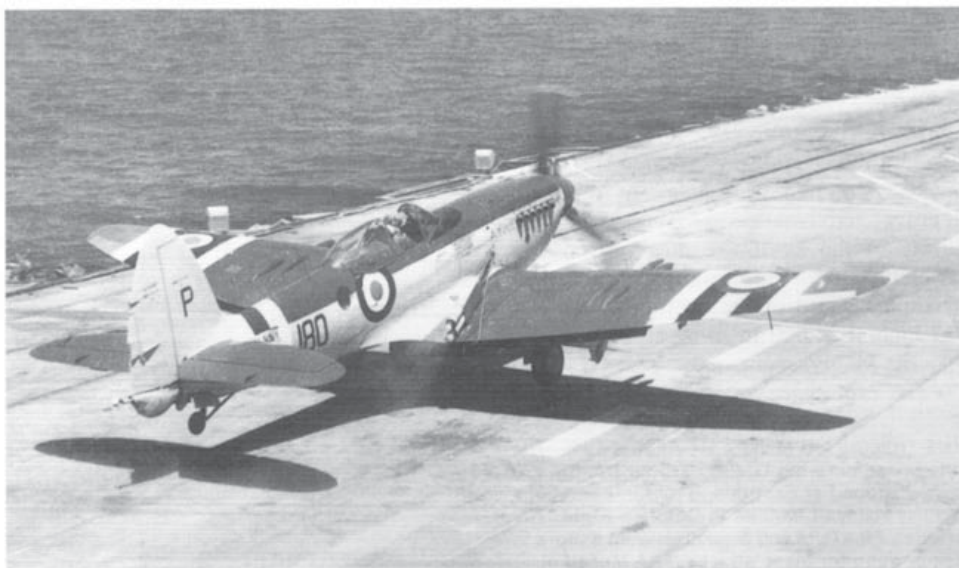
During April 1948, 804 Squadron took part in six of the annual training exercises. The Seafire FR.47s either provided close escort to FAA strike forces, or acted as defence fighters. When attacked by RAF Meteors or Vampires, they were unable to engage them due to their inferior speed; only 801 Squadron's Sea Hornets managed to cope with the jets. Then, on 25 May, the squadron moved to RNAS Eglinton. During the journey, Lt. Saban force-landed in a potato field owing to the failure of one airscrew. Although the propellers were inspected and no fault was found, the Admiralty ordered all the propellers to be changed.

After the usual ADDL sessions in July and August, the pilots practiced deck landing on

HMS Ocean on 19 August. Owing to engine trouble, the ship had to return to Portsmouth dockyard for repairs. The Commission really began on 3 September when *HMS Ocean* could set sail for the Mediterranean. At Malta, the ship rejoined *HMS Triumph* and 800 Squadron which were back from their operations in Palestine.

Combined exercises between the two carriers and their Air Groups were carried out. On 26 October, they took part in a defence of Malta exercise. Seafire Mk.XVIIIs of 800 Squadron and FR.47s of 804 Squadron, as well as RAF Vampires,

confronted a strike of some 40 aircraft from the *USS F.D. Roosevelt*. The next day, eight Seafire F.XVIIIs escorted Fireflies from *HMS Ocean* on a strike on the American carrier. Interceptions by Corsairs resulted in dog fights and 800 Squadron pilots claimed several hits on the Corsairs. A further strike was carried out on the American carrier on 4 November. The two British carriers launched all they had available - a mere 19 aircraft. US fighters offered little opposition but, after the attack, one of the four Seafire FR.47s had trouble with its fuel system and Lt. Taylor decided to land on the *USS*



Seafire FR.47 of 800 Squadron on board *HMS Triumph* in Korean waters about to take off using RATOG (Rocket Assisted Takeoff Gear) during the ship's attachment to 7th Fleet in July 1950. (IWM)



Supermarine Seafire F.XV SR520:1F.23 of Flottille 1F, Aeronavale, early 1950s.



Supermarine Seafire F.XVII SX311:179-JB of 736 Squadron, RNAS St.Merryn, early 1950s.



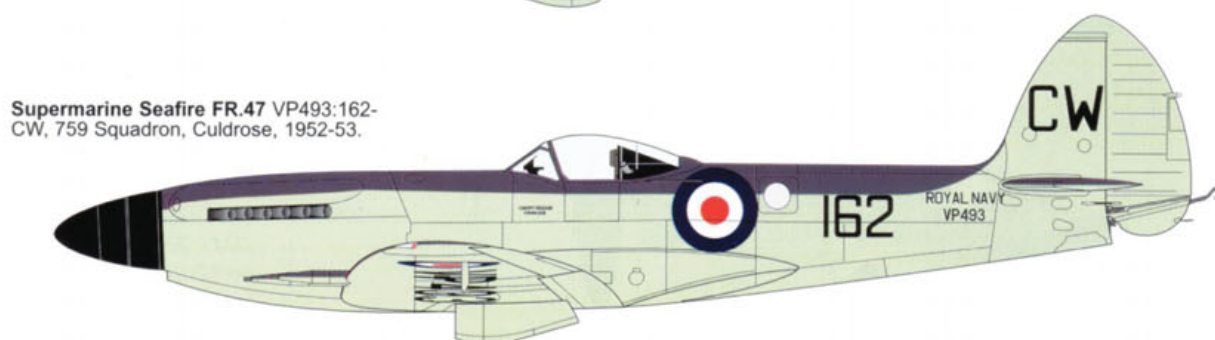
Supermarine Seafire F.XVII SX232:105-VL of 766 Squadron, Yeovilton in the early 1950s.



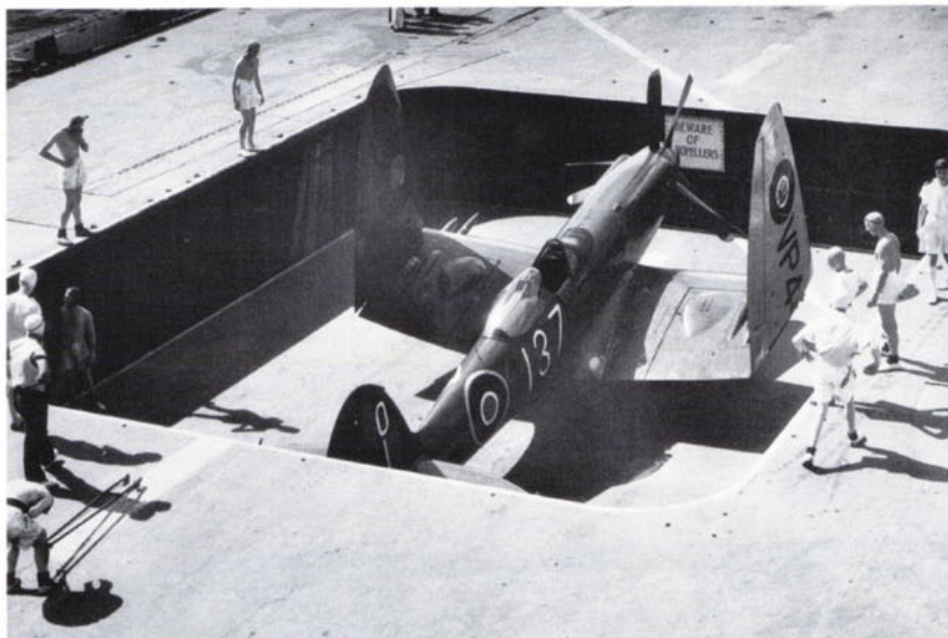
Supermarine Seafire FR.47 VP464:155-BR of 1833 Squadron Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve, Southern Air Division, Bramcote, early to mid 1950s.



Supermarine Seafire FR.47 VP492:180-P of 800 Squadron HMS Triumph, Korean war, July 1951. Recognition stripes on wings and rear fuselage.



Supermarine Seafire FR.47 VP493:162-CW, 759 Squadron, Culdrose, 1952-53.



A Seafire FR.47 of 804 Squadron on *HMS Ocean*'s forward lift being brought out of the hangar deck for flight operations during November 1948. (D. Treweek)

Roosevelt which was done after four wave-offs. At the same time, while Lt. H.J. Abraham was flying at 1,500 ft, his engine suddenly cut, forcing the pilot to ditch his Seafire F.XVII. Lt. Abraham was fortunately rescued by an American destroyer. A last

strike on the *USS Roosevelt* was carried out on 1 December by six Seafire F.XVIIIs of 800 Squadron which escorted RAF Lincoln bombers.

HMS Ocean again suffered from engine trouble and the 14th CAG had to embark

aboard *HMS Triumph* to practise deck landings on 29 and 30 December while nine Seafires of 800 Squadron and five Fireflies of 827 Squadron went ashore in order to relieve the congestion on the small deck of the light fleet carrier. On the second day, whilst Lt. Ward in his Seafire FR.47 was being brought down to the hangar on the forward lift, Seafire F.XVII of Lt. Abraham was directed too soon to the forward deck after landing. 800 Squadron's old Seafire fell in the lift shaft and ended upside down on top of 804 Squadron's aircraft.

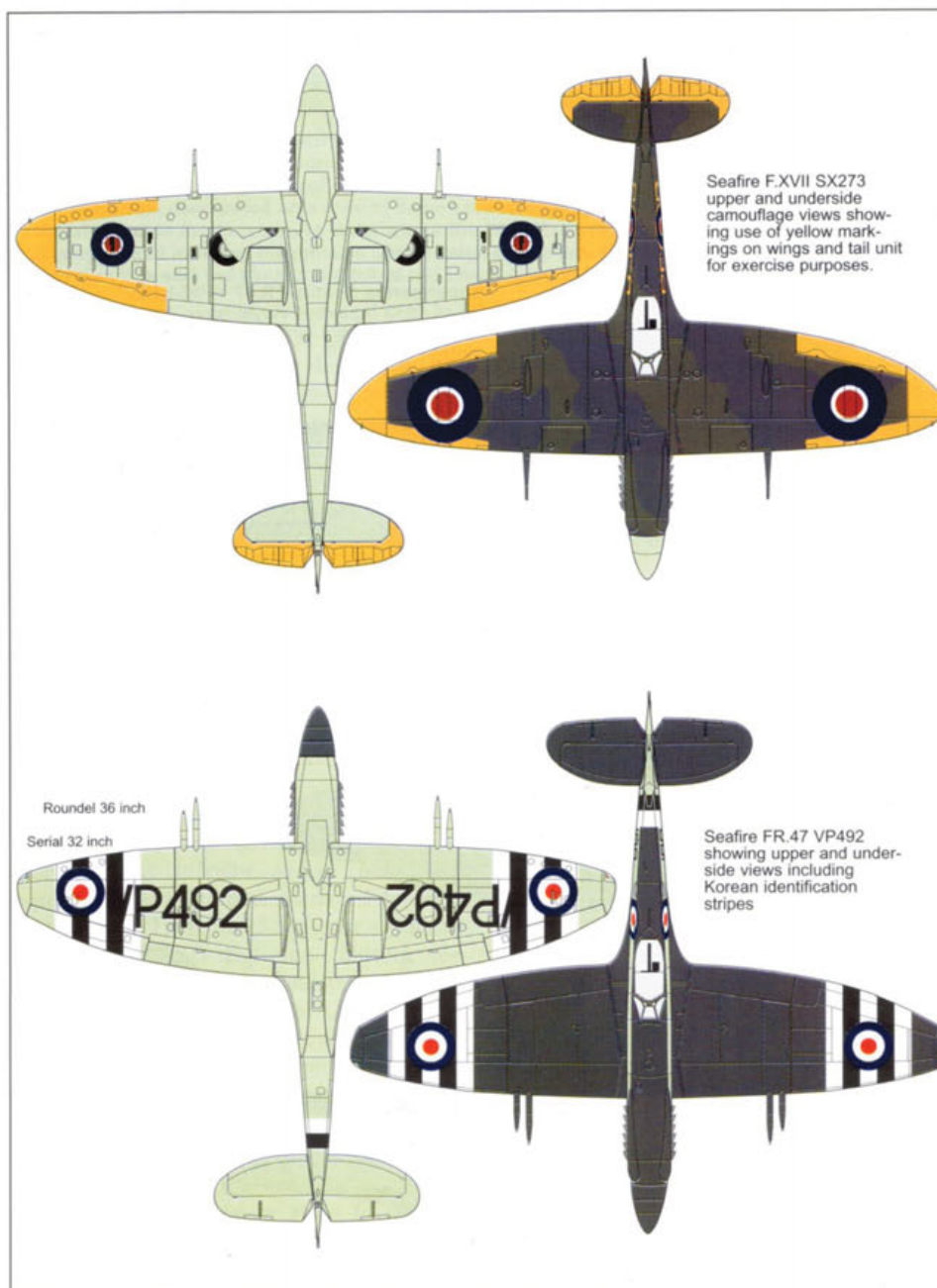
On 3 January 1949, *HMS Triumph* sailed for Tripoli with the 13th CAG on board, along with eight Seafire FR.47s of 804 Squadron and four Firefly FR.5s of 812 Squadron as *HMS Ocean* was in Malta's dry dock with propeller shaft problems. After having carried out tactical reconnaissances and cab-ranks for an Army exercise in Libya, they all returned to Malta on 6 January.

From 20 January and throughout February, the two Seafire squadrons were involved in various exercises with the US Sixth Fleet and the *USS Philippine Sea*. On several occasions, the *USS Midway* and *HMS Theseus* took part. The British were very impressed when the two American carriers could muster some 90 aircraft for a strike; not to be compared with a FAA's CAG!

Then *HMS Triumph*, with only the 13th CAG on board, took part in a large scale exercise which consisted in escorting cruisers through the Mediterranean narrows at Gibraltar. On 7 March 1949, *HMS Triumph* was in the Atlantic and sailed towards Malta. Although three Seafire FR.XVIIIs as well as 11 Fireflies carried out a reconnaissance, they found no trace of the opposing fleet which included *HMS Implacable* and *Theseus*. As they came back on board, the carrier was attacked by 11 Sea Hornets and six Sea Furies which evaded 800 Squadron's CAP. The next day further strikes were launched and all ships entered Gibraltar on 9 March, ending the exercise. *HMS Triumph* returned to Malta on 16 March only to prepare for her return home. She entered the Clyde on 30 March 1949.

Meanwhile 804 Squadron had flown to Castel Benito in Libya on 28 February. The pilots were engaged in desert flying, tactical reconnaissance sorties, cab-ranks for the Army, artillery spotting, and live firing. During a firing demonstration on 7 March, all ten Seafire FR.47s that fired 60 lb rocket projectiles and cannon miserably missed the three-ton trucks soaked in petrol and positioned as targets. The Army was not impressed by the FAA's performance! On 16 March, four Seafires made dummy attacks on Auster AOPs in order to give the Army pilots some experience in evasive actions.

After three months of either shore operations, or short deployments aboard *HMS Triumph*, 804 Squadron re-embarked on *HMS Ocean* on 12 April 1949 for a deck landing session. On 21 April, Lt. Barron's Seafire FR.47 went over the side on landing. Held by the hook still hanging from a wire,





Squadron badge
of 1833 Squadron

Supermarine Seafire F.XVII SP352:163-BR of
1833 Squadron, RNVR, Bramcote in 1957.



Supermarine Seafire F.XV UB409, ex-PR376,
Union of Burma Air Force, Defence Services
Museum, Yangon, Myanmar, Burma, last seen
1996.



the Seafire was suspended with its nose in the sea. After rescuing the pilot, the carrier carefully sailed back to Malta as the recovery was too delicate to be undertaken at sea. Next day, *HMS Ocean* put to sea for a cruise in the Adriatic up to Venice and Trieste, and was back at Malta on 14 May.

THE FINAL SEA-GOING UNIT

Since its arrival in the UK, 800 Squadron's personnel had settled down at RNAS Donibristle to convert to Seafire FR.47s. The Seafire Mk.XVIIIs were transported on 1 April 1949 from Glasgow docks to Abbotsinch for servicing. These aircraft were ferried four days later to Sydenham for

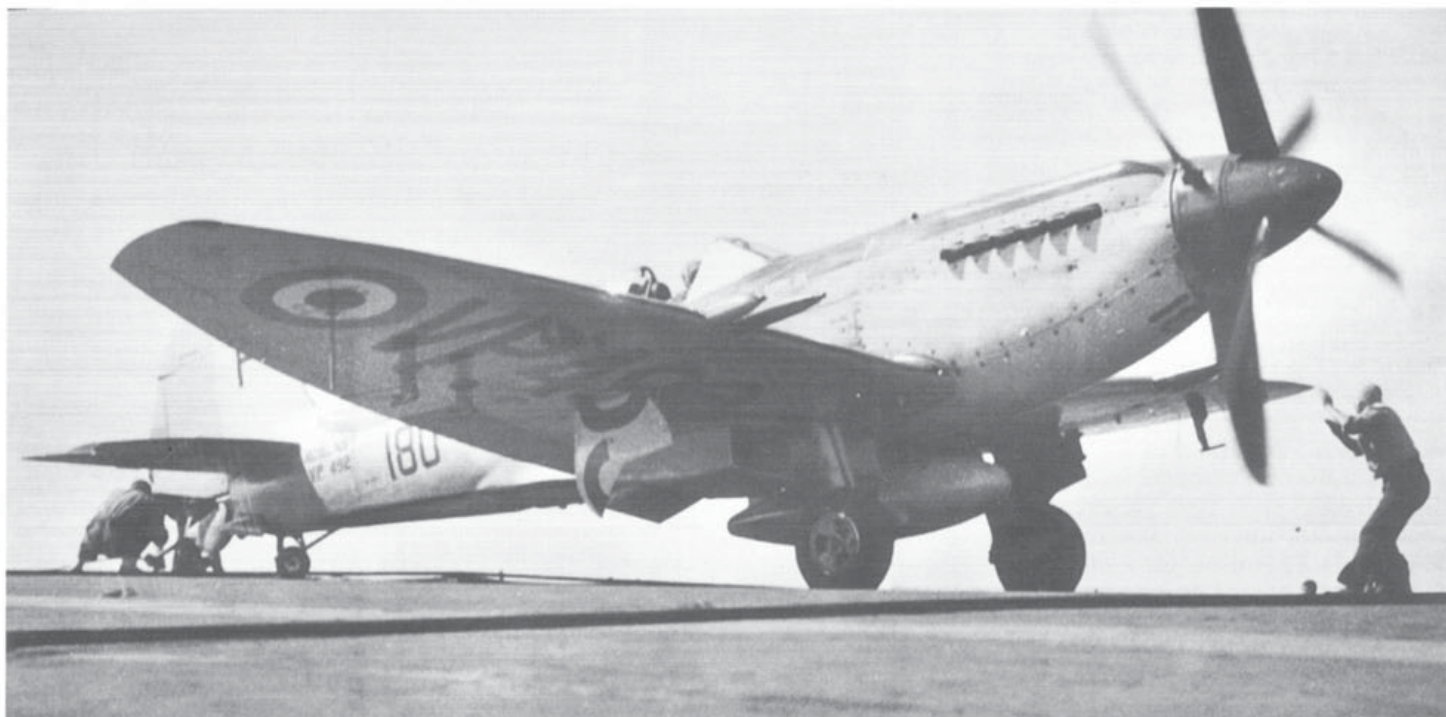
a complete overhaul before being supplied to second-line units or stored. By 11 April, almost all the Seafire FR.47s had been delivered to 800 Squadron at Donibristle and subsequently ferried to Abbotsinch after a quick test flight as the unit was due to embark. The 13th CAG was back aboard *HMS Triumph* on 25 April, its aircraft being hoisted on to the deck. The 12 Seafires and 13 Fireflies disembarked on 6 May at Hal Far where the work-up was completed in six weeks.

During this time, 804 Squadron had been operating from *HMS Ocean* in the Mediterranean. The squadron stayed at Hal Far on 21 June while the ship sailed for the UK. 804 Squadron converted to Sea Furies

whilst in Malta. From 27 June to 18 July, the Seafire FR.47s were handed over either to the Royal Navy Aircraft Maintenance Yard at Kalafrana for storage, or to 800 Squadron for replacing older machines on strength. On 18 July 1949, 804 Squadron became officially a Sea Fury squadron, leaving 800 Squadron as the sole front-line unit to fly the Seafire.

The spare aircraft from 804 Squadron proved useful when, on 30 June, 800 Squadron began its deck landing training period. On the very first day, Lt. Lamb Seafire FR.47 landing on board *HMS Triumph* in Korean waters. The black and white identification stripes on the wings were to assist friendly fighters and prevent attacks on FAA aircraft during operations. (FAA Museum)





floated over all wires and ended up in the barrier. On 4 July, Lt. Kettle had a similar accident. The following day, Lt. Davies flew through No. 1 barrier and into the second. On 8 July, Lt. Heard hit the ship's round-down and, although he managed to catch a wire to stop the Seafire, the aircraft was a complete write-off. Finally on 12 July, Lt. Sugden also hit the round-down, breaking his aircraft in two. Unfortunately, the aft fuselage with the pilot still strapped in fell into the sea and disappeared. These were very hard times.

The operational commission began on 4 August 1949 when *HMS Triumph* left Malta and took passage for the Far East. In September, the carrier exercised off Hong Kong and then sailed for Singapore. The 13th CAG was put ashore at Sembawang on 3 October. It was involved in the air offensive against Communist terrorists in Malaya, in co-operation with Singapore-based RAF aircraft.

A first strike against Malayan bandits was carried out on 21 October. A wave of ten Seafires and 12 Fireflies was launched twice over. The targets were identified and attacked with rockets under the control of an Army Air Control Officer. Only Lt. Treacher's Seafire suffered from a splintered windscreen, probably due to rocket fragmentation. Following a request from the Army for air support, four 800 Squadron's aircraft successfully attacked a designated target two days later.

On 24 October, Lt.Cdr. R. Pridham-Wippell left the squadron and Lt. Steen became the acting CO pending the arrival - on 8 December - of Lt.Cdr. I.M. MacLachlen. The two squadrons of the 13th CAG re-embarked on 1 November as the ship set course for Hong Kong. As soon as 8 December, the 13th CAG was back at Singapore, flying ashore to Changi. 800 Squadron took part with four Seafire FR.47s in a strike on a bandit camp near Kluang on

19 December. One of the heaviest attacks was made on 1 January 1950 in the Negri Sembilan area. Six Seafires and as many Fireflies supported a large scale strike made by RAF Spitfires, Tempests, Beaufighters, Sunderlands and Harvards, in strafing and rocketing the suspected area. The Seafires refuelled at Kuala Lumpur after the attack.

The air offensive resumed on 20 January but, despite continuous air attacks, the terrorists' activities increased. Five Seafire FR.47s were involved in a raid. Four days later, a similar strike ended with the squadron's first fatal casualty in the Malayan operations. Lt. J. Heard experienced a coolant leak and, while attempting a wheels-up landing at Changi, his aircraft hit a tree and crashed in flames.

On 4 February, re-embarkation proved tragic as Lt. Stone missed all wires and engaged the barrier. Unfortunately, his Seafire immediately burst into flames, severely burning the pilot before he was released by the fire-fighters. *HMS Triumph* took passage for Hong Kong and later visited the Philippines for a joint exercise with the American carrier, *USS Boxer*. After a two-week refit period in Singapore, *HMS Triumph* was joined on 25 March by the

The last operational aircraft carrier to have Seafire 47s on board was *HMS Triumph*. One of 800 Squadron's aircraft, VP492 is seen in 1949 ready for launch. (S.Bellis via R.C.Sturtivant).

Repair and Ferry Carrier *HMS Unicorn*, with a complement of reserve aircraft on board. While several wrecked Seafires were hoisted onto *Unicorn*, two new fighters were hoisted inboard for 800 Squadron. On 10 April, the ships began a cruise to Australia and Japan.

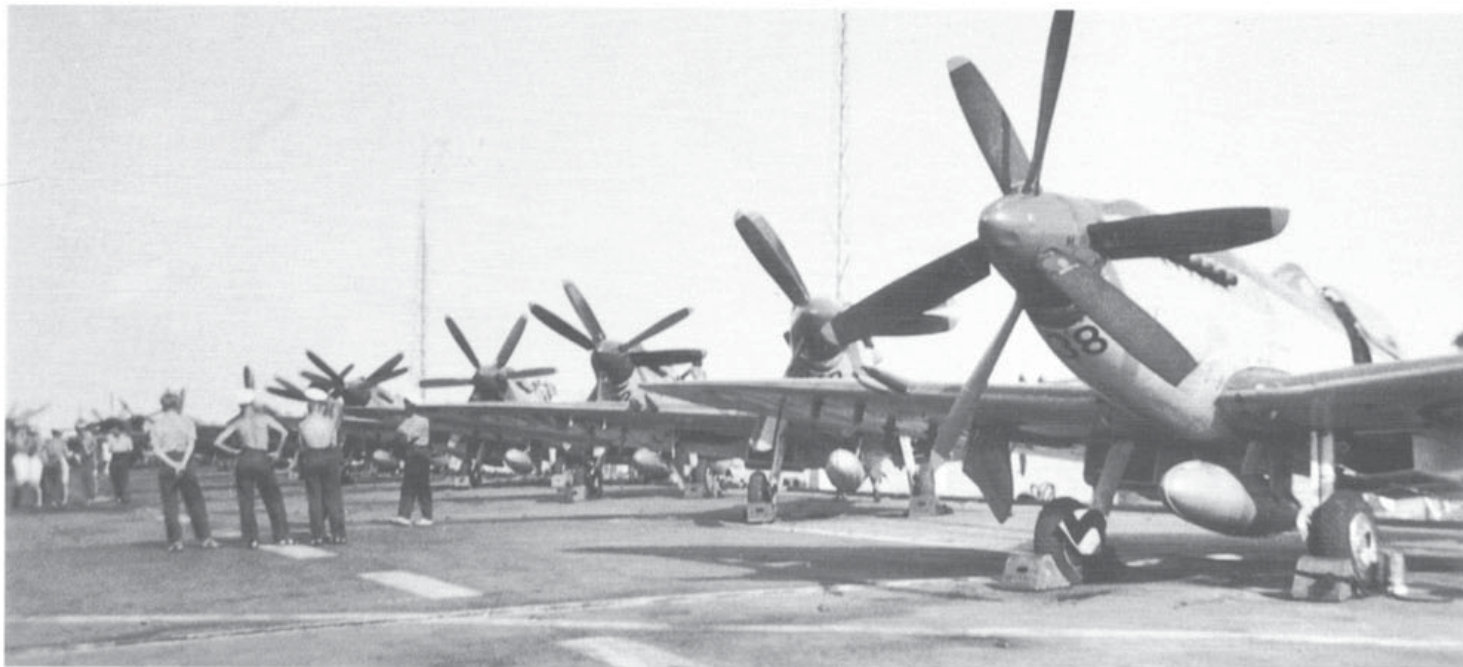
KOREA

At the end of the Japanese cruise, on 24 June 1950, *HMS Triumph* sailed for Hong Kong. The next day, Communist troops from North Korea crossed the 38th parallel and invaded the Democratic Republic of Korea and the British Far East Fleet was put at the disposal of United Nations forces. *HMS Triumph* was ordered back to Kure in Japan on 27 June for replenishment and to join up with US ships. She then joined the American 7th Fleet in Okinawa and sailed on 1 July to start the air offensive over North Korea.

Before dawn on 3 July, *HMS Triumph* launched the first strike, consisting of 12 Seafire FR.47s and nine Firefly FR.1s, all



One of 804 Squadron's Seafire FR.47s on shore leave. Disembarked from the carrier *HMS Ocean* the squadron spent this period at RNAS Ford in April 1948. (D.Treweek)



Seafire FR.47s of the 14th CAG, 804 Squadron, lined up on the deck of *HMS Ocean*, probably in the Mediterranean, judging by the semi-nude deck handling party (Peter Cook).

loaded with rocket projectiles. They attacked Haeju airfield but no aircraft were observed and the deserted-looking hangars and installations were rocketed. Several British aircraft were hit by debris thrown into the air by the explosions. Lt. Lamb's Seafire sustained radiator damage and just reached the carrier before his engine failed. On 4 July, seven Seafires accompanied 12 Fireflies in an armed recce over the Haeju area. The formation split into two groups; one going east and the other west along the road and the railway. While the Fireflies rocketed railway bridges, the Seafires strafed armed trucks, Army buses, and gun positions. The next day, *HMS Triumph* sailed back to Okinawa for replenishment as well as maintenance and stayed at anchor for a week. As the Seafire bore a resemblance with the Yak-9, the Americans asked for the British aircraft to be painted with black and white recognition stripes.

Ships of Task Force 77 proceeded to sea on 16 July in order to provide air support to an

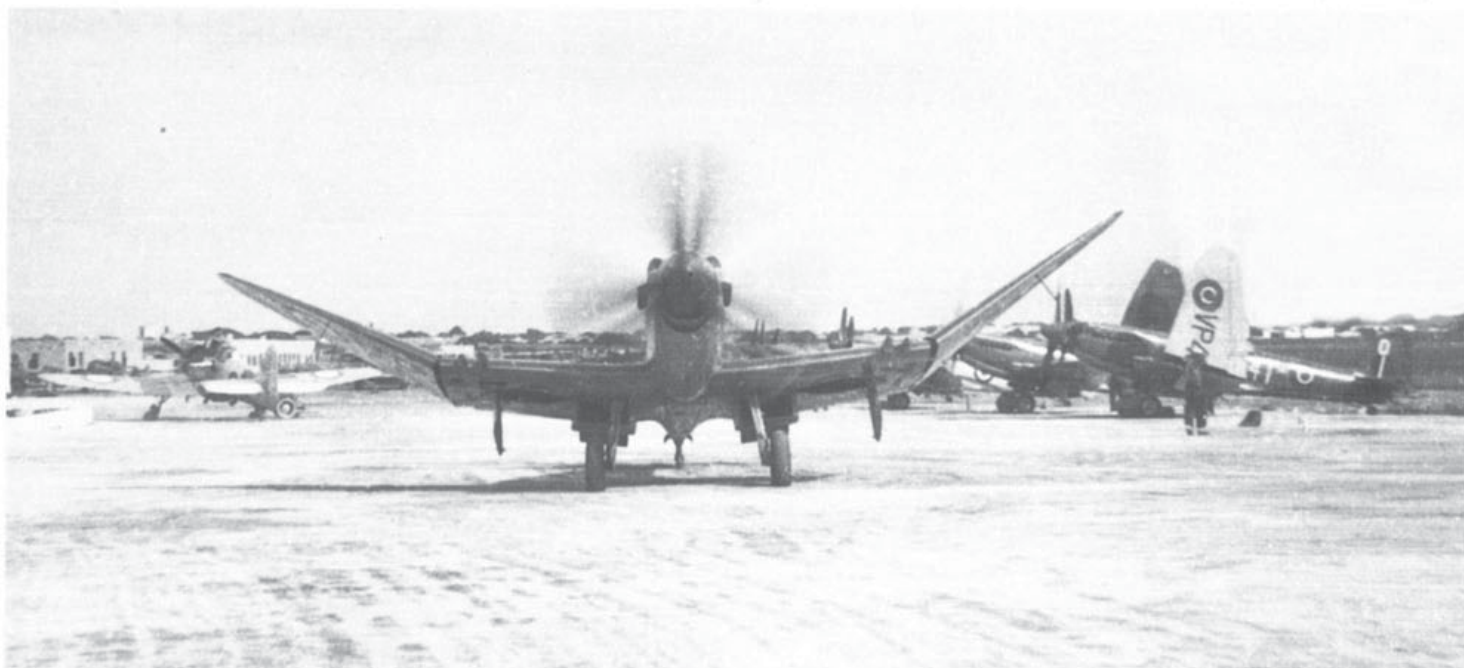
amphibious landing at Pohang. The role of 800 Squadron was to provide a continuous CAP over the fleet while the *US Valley Forge's* aircraft covered the landing, which was totally unopposed on 18 July. The following day, after some CAPs, operations were curtailed due to the arrival of a typhoon. *HMS Triumph* detached from the Task Force on 21 July and set course for Sasebo, Japan. There, seven new Seafire FR.47s were transhipped from *HMS Unicorn* while the two aircraft written-off during the previous operations were disembarked. 800 Squadron had a strength of 17 aircraft by that time.

The US ships arrived on 24 July and the complete Task Force 77 sailed in the night to reach the operational area the following day. The Seafires were again restricted to CAPs over the fleet for two days. The squadron complement was reduced to 15 aircraft as two Seafire FR.47s suffered deck landing damage. On 28 July, a section of three Seafires were sent to investigate radar bogeys, which turned out to be a formation of B-29s. Commissioned Pilot White approached to within 300 yards and his aircraft was fired on by a B-29. He baled out

and was rescued about an hour later by an American destroyer, although suffering from burns. More CAPs were carried out on 29 July. The following day, *HMS Triumph* withdrew to Kure for a self refit. Within Task Force 77, the *USS Philippine Sea* took her place beside the *USS Valley Forge*.

Released from maintenance works on 9 August, *HMS Triumph* took passage for Sasebo and some flying resumed but one more Seafire was written-off as a consequence of a failed deck landing. On 12 August, *HMS Triumph* returned to the Yellow Sea where a small fleet had the task of acting independently for blockading the Korean west coast in order to prevent the North Koreans supplying their troops in the south by sea. On 13 August, Lt.Cdr. MacLachlan led a section on a photo reconnaissance mission over the ports of Gunzan and Mokpo. Only two small coastal ferries were found and strafed. Four more

The Seafire FR.47 was the first of the Griffon-engined variants to have power-operated folding wings. This one belonging to 804 Squadron and shore-based at Hal Far, Malta, is seen taxiing out for take-off, unfolding the wings in the process. A Royal Navy Martinet target tug can be seen in the left background. (Peter Cook)



sections were flown off during the day, only accounting for a further small coaster as the Korean ports were deserted and had also been heavily bombed by US forces.

The presence of three ships in the Chinnampo estuary was revealed by a photo mission on the morning of 14 August. A strike consisting of six Seafires and six Fireflies was sent to deal with them. The attack was easily performed as the ships appeared abandoned and aground. Next day was uneventful and the carrier returned to Sasebo for the oiling and ammunitioning. A heavy landing had caused damage to a further Seafire which had to be repaired aboard *HMS Unicorn*, leaving 800 Squadron with 12 aircraft.

The carrier returned to the operational area on 19 August for three days of armed reconnaissances. Naval targets were sparse although the Seafires managed to destroy a large motor junk at Kunsan and various small vessels at Inchon and Mokpo. They also strafed a goods train and anti-aircraft gun positions, and bombed a factory. Three more Seafires became unserviceable due to wrinkled fuselages; the aircraft structure suffering from the hard and continuous operational conditions. Seven Seafires were still available aboard *HMS Unicorn* but were not embarked at the time.

Replenishment at Sasebo lasted until 26 August. Some deck landing training was performed as new pilots had joined 800 Squadron. The session was curtailed when Commissioned Pilot Hefford wrote off one aircraft, leaving the unit with only eight Seafires. Following an attack by two IL-10s on a British destroyer, the Seafires were then devoted to CAPs while the Fireflies carried out armed reconnaissances. Owing to the lack of serviceable aircraft, 800 Squadron was unable to keep up a continuous patrol of two aircraft on 27 August.

Except for two offensive sorties and attacks on two 50-ton coasters, uneventful CAPs continued until the end of the patrol on 29 August. This day, 800 Squadron lost its CO. A landing Firefly entered the barrier and its propeller disintegrated. In the operations room, Lt.Cdr. MacLachlan was fatally injured by a part of one of the blades and he died a few hours later. Lt. T.D. Handley assumed command, becoming the last CO of a front-line Seafire unit.

HMS Triumph reached Sasebo on 30 August. *HMS Unicorn* also arrived and transferred six Seafires aboard the light fleet carrier and hoisted the unserviceable machines. A spare Seafire was also supplied; 13 were now on strength and no more were available in the Far East. *HMS Triumph* took station on 4 September. 800 Squadron immediately lost a Seafire when its drop tank came off on being boosted off the deck. On the first two days, only CAPs were flown, except for a reconnaissance over Kunsan which allowed a section to sink two motor junks. On 6 September, three more motor junks were attacked and two Seafires controlled the naval bombardment of a railway station and terminal at Kunsan.

The next day, *HMS Triumph* sailed around the South Korean coast to patrol along the Wonsan area on the eastern side of the



Griffon Seafire in detail

These photographs by the author are, except where stated, of the Seafire F.XVII SX137now preserved in the Fleet Air Arm Museum, Yeovilton

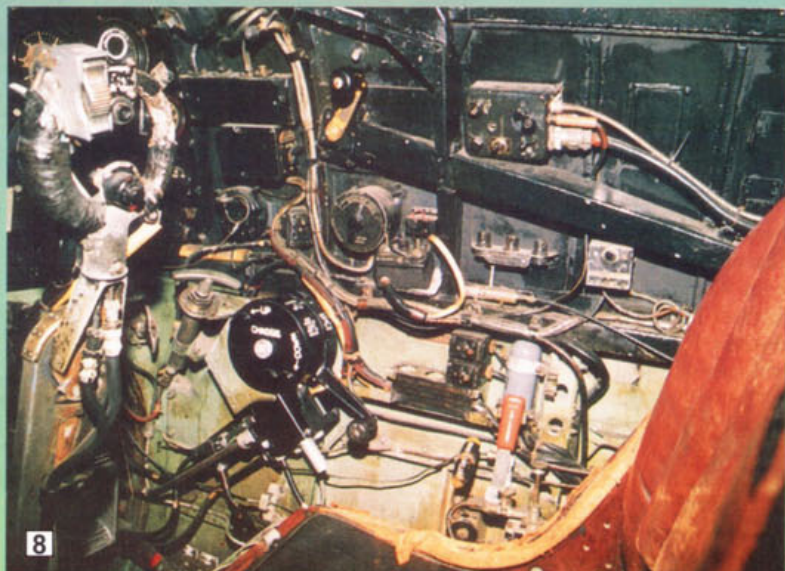
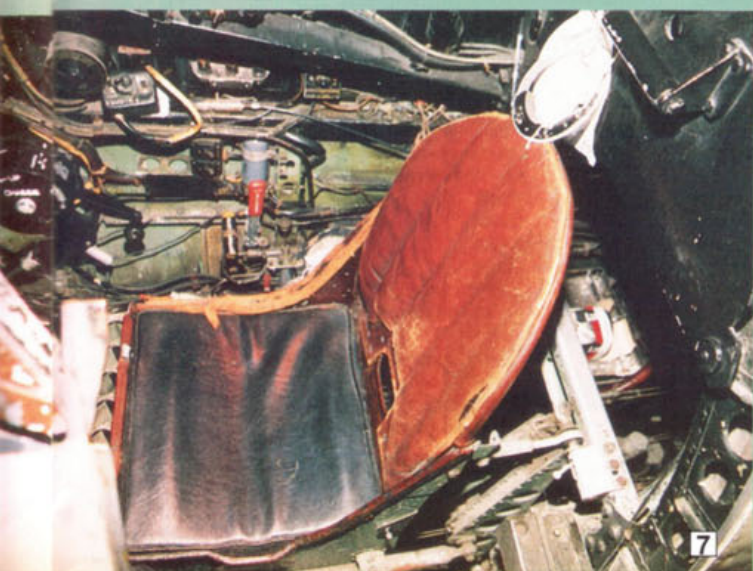




1. The Seafire's starboard undercarriage leg and front of the underwing radiator. Treaded tires were only fitted to later versions of the aircraft. 2. The F.XVII had a manually folding wing with down turned tips and a fuselage to wing brace. The illustration shows the interior of the wing at the fold. 3. The unique tail arrester hook on most Griffon-engined Seafires with its bulged lower section to the rudder area. 4. Front view of the Seafire FR.47 showing the six bladed contra-rotating propeller and nose mounted ram air cooler radiator. This was said not to be so effective as earlier versions. (D.Treweek). 5. The Griffon engine with the cowlings removed. Note the massive bearer arms to which it is attached and the close fitting cylinders to the outer skin. The aircraft has the wing tips folded down giving it a clipped wing appearance.



6. The Seafire F.XVII featured a rounded windscreen unlike some other variants of this aircraft. The gunsight has been removed in the FAA Museum exhibit, though the connecting cables remain. 7 and 8. The cockpit interior could be described as being rather cramped. Like the Spitfire the Seafire suffered from having the undercarriage operating lever on the right hand side thus making it necessary to change hands from the throttle when getting airborne. Note that the control column has no less than three operating switches for trim, guns and radio.





peninsula. An armed reconnaissance was carried out by six Seafires and six Fireflies over the communication lines on 8 September. The section led by Lt. Abraham strafed a train while the CO's section attacked a small patrol boat. In the afternoon, another reconnaissance mission comprised six Seafires and four Fireflies. They found about 80 goods wagons at Kowon and 40 more at Yonghung. Only the Fireflies were loaded with rockets; the Seafires strafing with their 20-mm guns. On return, Lt. Berry was unable to lower the hook and had to bale out, being picked up by an Australian destroyer.

When the carrier withdrew to Sasebo on 10 September, 800 Squadron had only six Seafire FR.47s on strength as four more machines were declared unserviceable by the engineers due to exceeding the safety limits. *HMS Triumph* proceeded to sea on 12 September to support an amphibious assault on the west coast, at Inchon. While the Marines landed on the island of Wolmi-Do in the morning and on the mainland in the afternoon of 15 September, the Seafires carried out three armed reconnaissance missions attacking a flak position and some barges. The day ended with Commissioned Pilot Reid performing a heavy landing and writing off his Seafire. On the following days the troops progressed towards Seoul and the flying activity of 800 Squadron was limited to one or two sorties per day. On 19 September, a section damaged a 500-ton ship and attacked an anti-aircraft gun position. On return to the carrier, Commissioned Pilot Warren caught number 10 wire and entered the barrier. On 20 September, only one armed reconnaissance was made by two Seafires and, as the troops were out of range of naval guns, *HMS Triumph* left the area.

At Sasebo, the carrier entered dry dock for repairs and then sailed for Hong Kong on 25 September, putting an end to her operations over Korea. Although several replacement aircraft had been provided 800 Squadron remained with only four Seafire FR.47s serviceable - and only one of these cleared for combat operations - after eight operational patrols covering a period of 35 days.

The carrier entered Hong Kong harbour on 29 September *HMS Theseus* also being there to take over operations in Korea. After passage to Singapore, where aircraft and

stores from Sembawang were embarked, *HMS Triumph* with 53 aircraft on board set sail for home on 15 October, via Aden and Gibraltar. 800 Squadron officially disbanded on 10 November 1950 and the Seafire was phased out of front-line service.

WEEKEND PILOTS

Early in 1947 the Admiralty announced that the Air Branch of the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve would be formed. Initially four units were created around a core of regular officers and ratings as the reservists were unable wholly to maintain and fly their aircraft. Each year reservist pilots had to complete at least 75 hours during week-end training and the highlight was either the annual fortnight camp, or the embarked training during the summer.

On 1 June 1947, 1831 Squadron formed at RNAS Stretton as the first fighter unit of the RNVR. Six Seafire F.XVs and F.XVIs were delivered. Exactly one month later, 1832 Squadron was commissioned at RNAS Culham with four obsolete Seafire Mk.IIIs. They were rapidly superseded by six Seafire FR.46s and a number of F.XVIs. From April 1949, Seafire F.XVs began to be replaced by the partially navalised FR.46s, and by January 1950 a mixed batch of 14 fully-navalised Seafire F.XVs and F.XVIs was on strength at 1832 Squadron.

The last fighter unit of the RNVR to be

The only RNVR unit to be equipped with the Seafire FR.47 was 1833 Squadron based at Bramcote who received theirs in July 1947. The squadron was the only Seafire unit in the RNVR Midland Air Division in the fighter role. Seafires were withdrawn in March 1954. (FAA Museum)

created with Seafire Mk.XVIs was 1833 Squadron stationed at RNAS Bramcote on 15 August 1947 with seven Seafires and three Harvards. The initial strength rose to 11 Seafires with the arrival of some F.XVs. In July 1952, the early types of Griffon-engined Seafires were withdrawn and replaced by Seafire FR.47s, 1833 Squadron becoming the sole RNVR squadron to use this ultimate variant. The RNVR pilots were not impressed by the performance of the Mark 47 although the increased internal fuel capacity was greatly appreciated.

The fourth RNVR unit established was 1830 Squadron on 15 August 1947. This was a dual role fighter and anti-submarine squadron equipped with three Seafire Mk.XVIs and three Firefly Mk.IIs. In May 1948, the Seafires were withdrawn and 1830 Squadron concentrated its activities on anti-submarine warfare.

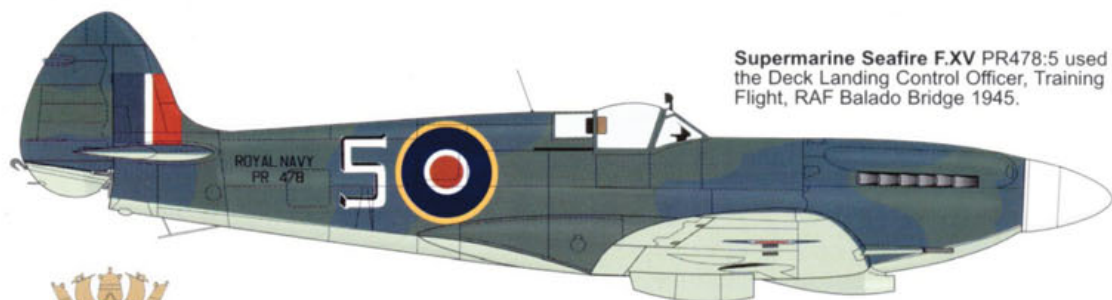
In 1949, the Admiralty decided to test the reserve units with full scale exercises aboard aircraft carriers. After the necessary ADDLs, carrier drill and deck landing qualification, 1832 Squadron's pilots first went to sea for a fortnight aboard *HMS Implacable* from 9 July 1949. Successively 1833 and 1831 Squadrons embarked for the same period aboard *HMS Illustrious* in September 1949. Other exercises at sea were carried out by the three units in 1950. During the years when no shipborne operations were planned, RNVR units spent a fortnight on gunnery practise, air-to-air, air-to-ground, rocket firing and bombing; either at RNAS Culdrose or St Merryn. The Seafire Mk.XVIs of 1833 Squadron were the last to embark when they exercised aboard *HMS Triumph* from 9 to 20 June 1952.

Sea Furies began to supersede the Reserve Seafires from August 1951 in 1831 and 1832 Squadrons. The Midlands-based 1833 Squadron flew its Seafire FR.47s until March 1954 when it re-equipped with Sea Furies.

Griffon Seafire kits, models and accessories

Correct to May 1999

Scale	Type	Manufacturer	Reference	Remarks
1:72	Seafire XV	Ventura	V0513	Injection moulded kit
1:72	Seafire XVII	Ventura	V0516	Injection moulded kit
1:72	Seafire Mk. 47	Ventura	V0507	Injection moulded kit
1:72	Seafire Mk.47	Final Touch	FTK001	Resin
1:72	Seafire XV	Airparts	AP042	Resin
1:72	Seafire XVII	Airparts	AP043	Resin
1:72	Seafire Mk.47	Airparts	AP049	Resin
1:72	Seafire Mk.46	CMK	066	Injection moulded kit
1:72	Seafire Mk.47	DB Productions	010	Nose and spinner conversion parts
1:72	Seafire XV	Almark	S7208	Decals
1:48	Seafire XV	Hobbycraft	1521	Injection moulded kit
1:48	Seafire	Airwaves	4007	Detail set
1:48	Seafire	Engines & Things	48104	Griffon engine for XV, XVIII and FR.47
1:48	Seafire	Falcon Industries	0904	Accessories set
1:48	Seafire XV	Almark	A4813	Decals
1:48	Seafire FR.47	Aeromaster	48296	Decals
1:48	Seafire 46/47	Eduard Model	48202	Detail set
1:48	Seafire FR.47	Squadron Mail	9574	Canopy
1:48	Seafire Mk.46/47	Airfix	07106	Injection moulded kit



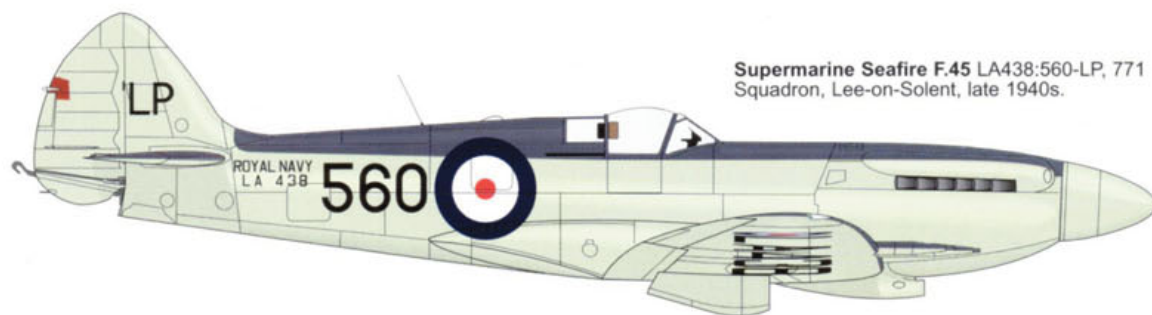
Supermarine Seafire F.XV PR478:5 used by the Deck Landing Control Officer, Training Flight, RAF Balado Bridge 1945.



Badge of 804 Squadron



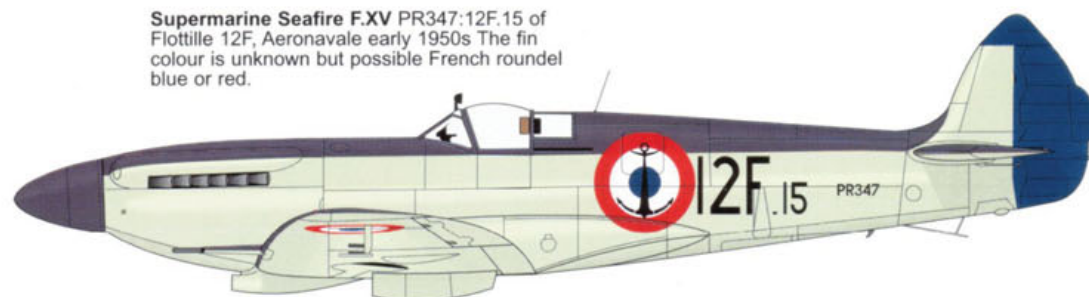
Supermarine Seafire F.XV SW912:134-T of 804 Squadron, HMS Theseus, 1946.



Supermarine Seafire F.45 LA438:560-LP, 771 Squadron, Lee-on-Solent, late 1940s.



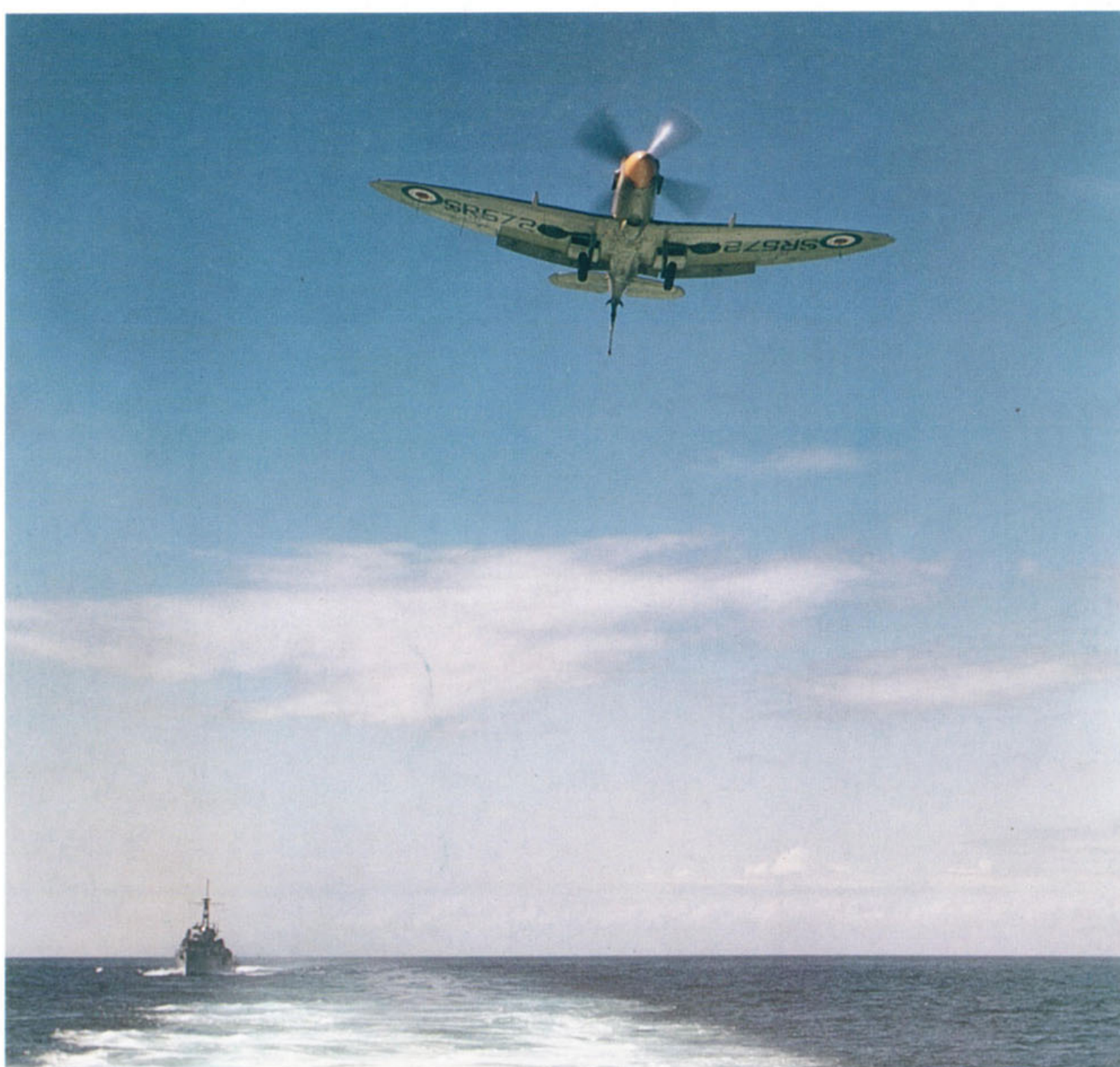
Supermarine Seafire F.46 LA561:104-CH, 1832 Squadron, Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve, Southern Air Division, Culham 1947.



Supermarine Seafire F.XV PR347:12F.15 of Flottille 12F, Aeronavale early 1950s The fin colour is unknown but possible French roundel blue or red.



Supermarine Seafire FR.47 VP458:132-O of 804 Squadron, HMS Ocean when shore based at Hal Far, Malta in 1950. Note the replacement rudder which is probably in Dark Slate Grey.



Above: Seen from the stern of a post-war aircraft carrier, this Charles Brown picture was one of the few taken of the Seafire in colour. It shows F.XV SR572 with hook, flaps and undercarriage down on a perfect approach to the deck whilst the attendant destroyer hovers in the background in case of accidents. (RAF Museum) Below: One of the few preserved Seafire F.XVs held in the Shearwater Aviation Museum, Canada.



Seafire Mk. XV, XVII, and FR.47 Specification

	Mk.XV	XVII	FR.47
Span:	36ft.10ins	36ft.10ins	36ft.11ins
Length:	31ft.10ins	32ft.3ins	34ft.4ins
Height:	10ft.8ins	10ft.8ins	12ft.6ins
Wing area:	242 sq ft	242 sqft	243.6 sq ft
Empty weight:	6,300 lbs	6,385 lbs	7,625 lbs
Loaded weight:	7,960 lbs	8,148 lbs	10,300 lbs
Max speed:	383 mph	387 mph	433 mph
at height 13,000ft	13,000ft	13,000ft	24,000 ft
Rate of climb:	4,750 ft/min	4,600 ft/min	4,790 ft/min
Service ceiling:	35,500 ft	35,200 ft	43,100ft
Range:	430 miles	435 miles	405 miles
Armament:	F.XV Two 20-mm Hispano cannon, 4 x.303 machine guns F. XVII Two 20-mm Hispano cannon		
	F.45, F.46 FR.47 Four 20-mm Hispano Mk.V cannon.		

Other titles in the Warpaint series:

Bristol Beaufighter (£6.95), Blackburn Buccaneer (£7.50), Junkers Ju 87 (£7.50), F-100 Super Sabre (£7.50), Hawker Typhoon (£7.50), Avro Shackleton (£7.50), Junkers Ju 88 (£7.50), Hawker Hunter (£11.50), Grumman F4F Wildcat/Martlet (£7.50), Vickers Wellington (£7.50), de Havilland Sea Vixen (£7.50), Fairey Swordfish (£8.50), BAC Lightning (£11.50), Focke Wulf Fw 200 Condor (£7.50), Short Stirling (£7.50), Hawker Sea Fury (£7.50), Gloster Javelin (£9.50), Douglas Skyraider (£8.50), de Havilland Hornet and Sea Hornet (£9.50). Note: Several titles may be out of stock.