

Hawker Sea Fury FB11

Introduction

The last propeller fighter-bomber to serve with the Royal Navy, it was also one of the fastest production piston-engined aircraft ever built.

Development history

Designed in 1942 by Sir Sydney Camm, the Hawker Fury was the evolutionary successor to the Hawker Typhoon and Tempest fighter-bombers of the Second World War. It met the Royal Air Force's requirement for a lightweight Tempest Mk.II replacement by using modified Tempest semi-elliptical outer wing panels, bolted and riveted together on the fuselage centreline. The fuselage itself was similar to the Tempest, but fully monocoque with a higher cockpit for better visibility.

In 1943, the design was modified to meet a Royal Navy request for a carrier-based fighter. Both prototypes were undergoing carrier landing trials when the Japanese surrendered in 1945, ending development of the land-based Fury; but work on the navalized Sea Fury continued. The first production model, the **Sea Fury F10**, flew in September 1946.

Sea Fury develops from Hawker Fury

In 1943, the design was modified to meet a Royal Navy request (N.7/43) for a carrier-based fighter. Boulton-Paul Aircraft were to make the conversion while Hawker continued work on the Air Force design. The first Sea Fury prototype, SR661, flew on 21 February 1945, powered by a Centaurus XII engine. This prototype had a "stinger"-type tailhook for arrested carrier landings, but lacked folding wings for storage. SR666, the second prototype, which flew on 12 October was powered by a Centaurus XV turning a new, five-bladed Rotol propeller and was built with folding wings. Specification N.7/43 was modified to N.22/43, now representing an order for 200 aircraft. Of these, 100 were to be built at Boulton-Paul.

Both prototypes were undergoing carrier landing trials when the Japanese surrendered in 1945, ending development of the land-based Fury. However work on the navalized Sea Fury continued. LA610 was fitted with a Napier Sabre VII which was capable of developing 3,400 to 4,000 hp (2,535 to 2,983 kW). As a result it became the fastest piston engined Hawker aircraft, reaching a speed of around 485 mph (780 km/h).

Production

The original order to specification N.22/43 was reduced to 100 aircraft, and the Boulton-Paul agreement was cancelled. At the same time construction of what was intended to be a Boulton-Paul built Sea Fury prototype, VB857 was transferred to the Hawker factory at Kingston. This aircraft, built to the same standard as SR666, first flew on 32 January 1946. The first production model, the **Sea Fury F Mk. X** (Fighter, Mark 10), flew in September 1946. Problems arose with damaged tailhooks during carrier landings; after modifications, the aircraft were approved for carrier landings in spring 1947.

The first production version was the F Mk 10, of which 50 were built. The next version was the FB Mk 11, a genuine fighter-bomber version with provisions for two 1000 lb. bombs or twelve rockets on under-wing stores. The British Royal Navy took delivery of 615 FB Mk 11s.

Operational History

The F.10 was followed by the **Sea Fury FB.11** fighter-bomber variant, which eventually reached a production total of 650 aircraft. The Sea Fury remained the Fleet Air Arm's primary fighter-bomber until the introduction of the Supermarine Attacker in 1951 and Hawker Sea Hawk in 1953 and continued to serve with the RNVR until early 1955.

A total of 74 *Sea Furies* served in the Royal Canadian Navy between 1948 and 1956 and a further 50 with the Royal Australian Navy.

Roll of Honour: Korean War

The FB.11 served throughout the Korean War as a ground-attack aircraft, flying from the Royal Navy light fleet carriers HMS Glory, HMS Ocean, HMS Theseus, HMS Unicorn, HMS Triumph and the Australian carrier HMAS Sydney.

Sea Furies had to dog-fight Russian MiG-15 on several occasions and more than once the piston engined fighter-bombers out turned and destroyed their opponents! FAA pilot Lieutenant Peter "Hoagy" Carmichael Royal Navy, downed a MiG-15 jet fighter in air-to air combat, making the Sea Fury one of the few prop-driven fighter-bomber aircraft to shoot down a jet-powered fighter. The engagement occurred when his mixed flight of Sea Furies and Fireflies was engaged by eight MiG-15s, during which one Firefly was badly damaged while the Sea Furies were able to escape unharmed.

Later Service

Sea Fury FB.11s entered service with the fighter squadrons of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve in August 1951. Units equipped were No. 1831, 1832, 1833, 1834, 1835 and 1836 squadrons, No. 1832 being last to relinquish the type in August 1955.

The **Sea Fury F.50** export variant proved popular being purchased by Iraq, Egypt, Burma, Pakistan and Cuba. The Netherlands bought 24 aircraft and acquired a licence for production of 24 more F.50s at Fokker. Cuban Sea Furies saw action during the Bay of Pigs Invasion. The final production figures for all marks reached around 860 aircraft.

Cuba bought 15 ex-FAA *Sea Fury FB.11s* and two *Sea Fury T.20s* in 1958. After the Cuban Revolution they were then used to fight against the CIA-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961.

Today

Fortunately the Sea Fury was considered by some people to be the ultimate racing plane, and as a result a good number survived. They can be seen at the Reno air races competing with Mustangs and Bearcats.

Myths

Researching this piece I became aware of a number of myths which have grown up around the Sea Fury over the years:

- 1/ It was a copy of an FW190 that landed in England.
- 2/ All UK Sea Fury's had grey spinners and black and white stripes. All RAN and Canadian Sea Furies were much more colourful generally.
- 3/ It was the last piston engined allied fighter-bomber in the Korean conflict.
- 4/ Royal Australian Navy Sea Furies were used in big numbers.

Facts

- 1/ In actual fact the Sea Fury design is essentially a Hawker Tempest Mk2 with modified Tempest VI wing. The laminar flow wings for the Tempests were designed after carefully studying the Mustang. What the Hawker engineers did gain by studying the FW190 was the way the engine was mounted. So much for it being a copy!!!
- 2/ Unfortunately B&W photos obscure the real spinner colours and the fixation with Lieutenant Carmichael's famous plane have resulted in most UK coloured planes painted with grey spinners. Research has shown that, for example 1831 Sqd RNVR had red spinners with a yellow band.
- 3/ America operated the Mustang in Korea in a similar fighter-bomber role.
- 4/ Less than 1 in 13 manufactured Sea Furies flew in RAN colours. To watch the races at Reno or a typical large air display you'd be forgiven for thinking they were representative of

typical Sea Furies. In actual fact Canada operated more Sea Furies: 74 versus 50. Therefore if there were 28 Sea Furies in flying condition, to be representative 2 would be in RAN colours, 3 in Canadian and 22 in RN markings.

Specifications (Sea Fury FB.Mk 11):

Engine: One 2,480-hp Bristol Centaurus 18, 18-cylinder radial piston engine.

Weight: Empty 9,240 lbs., Max Takeoff 12,500 lbs.

Wing Span: 38ft. 4.75in.

Length: 34ft. 8in.

Height: 15ft. 10.5in.

Performance:

Maximum Speed: 435 mph

Ceiling: 34,300 ft.

Range: 680 miles

Armament:

Four 20-mm cannon in wings

Underwing racks for eight 60-pound rockets or two bombs

Number Built: 860