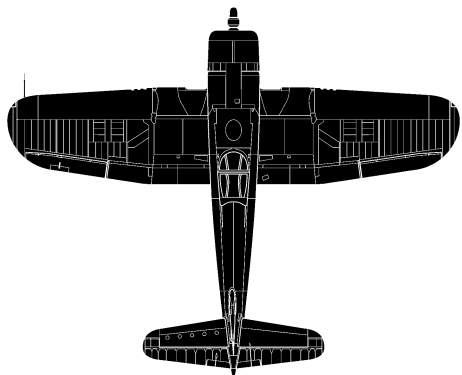


Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

F4U Corsair



The F4U was the naval fighter Japanese airmen feared most. The powerful Corsair dominated the Pacific air war, racking up an 11-to-1 exchange ratio (2,140 kills v. 189 losses). It reprised that success as a ground support airplane in the Korean War. This fleet, rugged fighter-bomber was the finest naval aircraft of its era, but it took some time to build up a head of steam.

From the beginning (1938), the goal was to build a small, sleek airframe with a monster engine. The flush-riveted Corsair—easily recognizable for its inverted gull wings—used a Pratt & Whitney R-2800 engine driving a huge 13-foot-4-inch propeller. Yet it had poor lateral stability, bad landing visibility, and it bounced on carrier decks. The Navy at first found

it unsuitable, but the Marine Corps used it—as a land-based fighter. The Royal Navy figured out how to use it on carriers; the US Navy followed suit. The Corsair had blazing speed (the first 400 mph production airplane) and a high roll rate. The first Navy squadron was deck-qualified in April 1943. Soon, land- and sea-based F4Us were making life miserable for enemy pilots and troops.

In World War II, the Corsair flew 64,051 sorties—44 percent of the Navy-Marine Corps fighter total. It delivered 15,621 tons of ordnance—70 percent of the naval fighter total. In Korea, the Navy-Marine Corps team deployed 33 F4U squadrons, which devastated ground targets. Truly, it was one of the all-time greats.

—Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: Navy F4U-1A Corsair BuNo 18086—*Lulubelle*—as it looked in late 1943 in the Pacific. It bears the name and victory markings of USMC Maj. Gregory “Pappy” Boyington, of VMF-214 “Black Sheep” fame.



F4U-5N “night fighter” Corsair during the Korean War.

In Brief

Designed by Chance Vought ★ built by Vought, Goodyear, Brewster ★ first flight May 29, 1940 ★ crew of one ★ P&W R-2800 engine ★ number built 12,571 ★ **Specific to F4U-1A:** max speed 417 mph ★ cruise speed 185 mph ★ max range 1,070 mi ★ armament six .50 cal machine guns ★ weight (max) 14,000 lb ★ span 41 ft ★ length 33 ft 4 in ★ height 16 ft 1 in.

Famous Fliers

Medal of Honor: USMC Maj. Gregory Boyington, USMC 1st Lt. Robert M. Hanson, USMC 1st Lt. Kenneth A. Walsh (all WWII); USN Lt. (j.g.) Thomas J. Hudner Jr. (Korea) **Notables:** Lt. Cmdr. John T. Blackburn, Navy Cross (WWII), USMC Capt. Jesse G. Folmar, MiG-15 killer (Korea), Charles Lindbergh (WWII).

Interesting Facts

Built longer (12 years) than any piston-engine fighter ★ called “Whistling Death,” “Hose Nose,” “Bent Wing Bird,” “U-Bird,” “Sweetheart of Okinawa,” “Ensign Eliminator” ★ flown by Lindbergh, as civilian, in Pacific War ★ used by Honduras, El Salvador, in 1969 “Soccer War” ★ seen in 1970s TV series “Baa Baa Black Sheep,” 2006 Clint Eastwood film “Flags of Our Fathers,” and 1951 John Wayne film “Flying Leathernecks” ★ first Navy craft with flush-retracting landing gear ★ “state airplane” of Connecticut ★ used by France in Vietnam, Algerian, and Suez wars.