

# Anytime...

by **Ralph J. Ferrusi**

I've thought about "My Favorite Airplanes", or, actually sat down and listed My Favorite Airplanes, the Chance-Vought F4U Corsair has been "on the list". OK, let's get something right up front, right away. Right now I simply cannot remember ever seeing a Corsair "in person": in the air, or, on the ground!!!

I've had B-17's and a B-24 trundle by me, and then watched them take off. I've been aboard a B-17, and a B-25, as they took off. I can't stop bragging about the three Mustangs I've sat in. I'm pretty sure I've watched a Hellcat, a Bearcat, and a Tigercat, and maybe even a Grumman Avenger taxi by. But, dammit, and, weirdly, NO Corsairs...

OK: maybe there just aren't that many airworthy Corsairs in existence. Let's find out. I just counted 35 airworthy Corsair variants, most of them in the USA. So, I'd say it's just bad luck that our paths—or flight plans—have never crossed. And, since Maryland's Eastern Shore is by no means a hotbed of Warbird air shows, there isn't much I can do about making this happen; unless, the Collings Foundation decides it's about time they acquired a Corsair...

OK, just for the helluva it, let's start off with some Corsair Fun Facts:

Just about any World War II aviation nut knows that the Japanese called the Corsair the "Whistling Death". But...apparently the Japanese called it, simply, and substantially more boringly, "the Sikorsky".

The name "Corsair" was inherited from Vought's late-1920's O2U naval scout biplane.

The Corsair is Connecticut's official state aircraft, certainly influenced by the fact that Vought-Sikorsky Aircraft, Pratt & Whitney, and Hamilton Standard all had plants in Connecticut.

Major Greg "Pappy" Boyington of "Baa Baa Black Sheep" fame was credited with 28 World War II kills, 22 famously in Corsairs, but...six of the kills were in AVG P-40's!

Charles Lindbergh flew Marine Corsairs as a "civilian technical advisor".

12,571 Corsairs were produced in sixteen separate models from 1942 to 1953, the longest production run of any U.S. piston-engined fighter.

But, here is a non-fun sobering statistic: 1,624 of those 12,571 were "lost" during World War II: a mere 189 in aerial combat, and a whopping 692 in non-combat operational flights...

Back to the Basic Nitty Gritty F4U Facts and Figures: February 1938 the U.S. Navy Bureau of Aeronautics published very specific requests/parameters for a single-engined fighter. June 1938, the U.S. Navy signed a contract with Vought for the prototype XF4U-

1. The Corsair design team was led by Rex Beisel: this might be something that could come in real handy in Final Jeopardy.

The XF4U-1 had the biggest, most powerful engine available at the time—the 2,000 hp 18-cylinder Pratt & Whitney R-2800 Double Wasp radial—the largest propeller—a 13 feet 4 inches three-blade Hamilton Standard, that necessitated the Corsair's signature inverted gull wing, to keep it from chewing up runways and carrier decks—and [probably...] the largest wing on any naval fighter at that time.

The Corsair made it's somewhat dicey—more "dicey" is to come—first flight on May 29, 1940. On October 1, 1940, the XF4U-1 attained 405 mph, becoming the first single-engine U.S. fighter to fly faster than 400 mph. The bad news was there were problems in full-power dives, and, "impossible" spin recovery problems, a "potentially lethal characteristic"—EEEKS!!!—due to the nifty inverted gull wings. Several additional problems were encountered during carrier trails, not the least of which was "bad rebound characteristics"/"bouncing" while landing.

Apparently—and, hopefully—these were solved, and the U.S. Navy awarded Vought a contract for 584 F4U-1 fighters. The first one flew—and, I would assume landed safely, not spinning out—on June 24, 1942. The Navy received its first production F4U-1 on July 31, 1942. But...early Navy pilots dubbed it, quite-unflatteringly "hog", "hosenose", or "bent-wing widow maker".

But...though the Corsair was considerably faster, due to the aforementioned "problems" with carrier landings, the erstwhile, easier to fly, more "docile" Hellcat became the dominant carrier-based Navy World War II fighter, and the Corsair was released to the Marines—which sorely needed a better fighter than the F4F Wildcat—where it was deployed from land bases "with devastating effects".

Large numbers of Corsairs entered combat in late 1944 and early 1945, soon becoming acknowledged by Japanese pilots—ahem, from personal experience, I would assume—as the most formidable American fighter of World War II.

On February 12, 1943 a dozen VMF-124 USMC F4U-1s landed on Henderson Field, Guadalcanal. Their first combat mission, a raid escorting B-24's was a "fiasco", referred to as the "Saint Valentine's Day Massacre": 10 American planes were lost, including two (of VMF-124's 12) Corsairs.

The Good News is by May VMF-124 recorded its first Corsair ace, Second Lieutenant Kenneth A. Walsh, who eventually was credited with 21 kills. On January 1, 1943 the first of 24 Corsairs of



photo: Wayne Mason

VMF-113 were activated, and on March 26, 1944 they recorded their first enemy kills. Eventually, Corsairs were famously flown by VMF-214 in the Solomons by "Pappy" Boyington's "Black Sheep". In 1945 Corsairs dropped napalm on Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

Marine and Navy F4U and FG Corsairs flew 64,051 operational sorties, 44% of total fighter sorties. 9,581 sorties were flown from carriers. They claimed 2,140 air combat victories against 189 losses to enemy aircraft, for an overall kill ratio of over 11:1, the lowest loss rate of any fighter of the Pacific War.

As a fighter-bomber the Corsair delivered 14,171 metric tons of bombs during the war, 70% of total bombs dropped by U.S. fighters.

Post World War II the Corsair served, very admirably, as a fighter-bomber in Korea, and in multiple air forces into the 1960's.

Specifications: F4U-4

- Length: 33 ft 8 in
- Wingspan: 41 ft 0 in
- Height: 14 ft 9 in
- Empty weight: 9,205 lb
- Gross weight: 14,670 lb

- Powerplant: Pratt & Whitney R-2800-18W radial engine, 2,380 hp
- Maximum speed: 446 mph
- Cruise speed: 215 mph
- Range: 1,005 mi
- Service ceiling: 41,500 ft
- Armament: 6 × 0.50 in M2 Browning machine guns, 400 rounds per gun or 4 × 20 mm AN/M3 cannon, 231 rounds per gun
- Rockets: 8 × 5 in high velocity aircraft rockets and/or
- Bombs: 4,000 pounds

A final interesting fact, from my 2012 AIRCRAFT OF WORLD WAR II: "...during the Korean War...One Corsair even shot down a MiG-15 jet fighter." No who/when/how/where... Here's the story: "...as told by Warren Thompson in his book F4U Corsair Units of the Korean War, on September 10, 1952 Captain Jesse Folmar flying a Corsair from VMA-312 was able to destroy one of two MiG-15s that had bounced both him and his wingman."

Way To Go, "hosenose"!!!

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