

Spotlight

Fairey Firefly

FlyPast

Scrutinizes the history of...



The Fairey Firefly

Above
Fairey Firefly AS.5
VT362 in Fleet Air
Arm service. This
aircraft was struck
off charge on
September 26, 1950
at Yeovilton.

Introduced in 1943, the Fairey Firefly is among several types to have served the Fleet Air Arm well during World War Two and beyond. A two-seat naval fighter-bomber and reconnaissance aircraft, it was a development of the Fulmar. The latter first flew in January 1940 and was very quickly pressed into service aboard HMS *Illustrious*, such was the need to protect convoys sailing into Malta. The Firefly spent a longer period in development, but was much the better aircraft, being considerably more powerful and versatile.

Development began in 1940, following an earlier Air Ministry call for a 'turret fighter'. The specification was updated and the turret idea dropped, leading Fairey to tender a design that could be adapted for either single seat or tandem seat use, and powered by either a Rolls-Royce Griffon or Napier Sabre engine. Given the necessity for navigating over open sea, all aircraft were eventually built as two-seaters, and the Griffon was selected. A separate, single-seat aircraft intended to operate from naval bases was also built – the

contract going to Blackburn for its Firebrand.

The Firefly was designed by H E Chaplin, and on December 22, 1941, the first prototype took to the air. Due to its more powerful 1,730hp (1,290kW) engine, it was soon apparent that the new machine was much faster than the Fulmar, even though it was 4,000lb (1,810kg) heavier. Seeing its potential, the Admiralty immediately placed an order for 200. When production finally ended in 1955, over 1,700 had been built.

In Navy hands

Handling and performance trials were carried out at Boscombe Down, Wilts, in 1942, before the first Mk.Is were delivered. They did not enter operational service until July 1944 when they equipped 1770 Naval Air Squadron aboard HMS *Indefatigable*. The unit's aircraft flew anti-shipping patrols along the Norwegian coast, along with various armed reconnaissance sorties. Fireflies from the unit provided air cover while Avro Lancasters were attacking the German warship *Tirpitz*.

While the first aircraft were in action,

tests were continuing at Boscombe Down and the Firefly was cleared to use underwing rocket projectiles in 1944. In April of that year the aircraft proved itself capable of carrying a total of 16 rockets and two 45-gallon drop tanks without an unacceptable loss of performance (in service, eight rockets were normally carried). Tests with a variety of other ordnance were also largely successful, proving the Fairey machine's versatility.

As a result, crews were tasked with increasingly more demanding roles. Aircraft flew as fighter-bombers or were used in the Pacific to target German submarines. Attacks on enemy airfields, military bases and oil refineries were also undertaken. It was against Japan in both the Indian and Pacific Oceans that the Firefly operated for most of the war. The type gained some renown when it became the first British-designed and built aircraft to fly over Tokyo during attacks on Japan's home islands.

Most Fireflies were of the Mk.I family, comprising the 'standard' F.I fighter-bomber and FR.I fighter-reconnaissance model. The NF.I night-fighter had the same radar used in the latter, with most fitted with the more powerful Griffon XII engine. Another night-fighting variant – the NF.II – was built in limited numbers with a lengthened nose and wing-mounted airborne interception radar.

Post-war

A second generation of Fireflies, the Mk.IV series, was brought into production after the war. Powered by 2,190hp Griffon 74s, these aircraft remained in frontline service with the Fleet Air Arm until the mid-1950s. The UK also supplied aircraft to Canada, Australia, Denmark, Ethiopia, India, Thailand and the Netherlands. During the Korean War, British and Australian Fireflies flew ground strikes and anti-shipping patrols, and the type was also used in the Malayan Emergency.

The Firefly was gradually replaced by the Fairey Gannet, but several versions of the type were developed for use as trainers, target tugs and drones. The Royal Thai Air Force



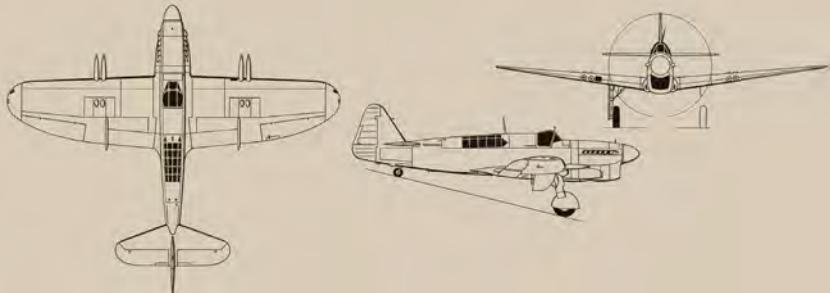
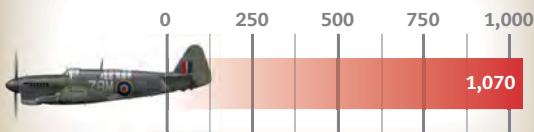
may have been the last to operate Fireflies, its 'fleet' soldiering on until 1966. The last time the aircraft was used in anger by a European nation was 1962, when the Netherlands

flew its AS.4s on a small number of operations against Indonesian forces in Dutch New Guinea. Around 24 Fireflies are believed to survive today. ●

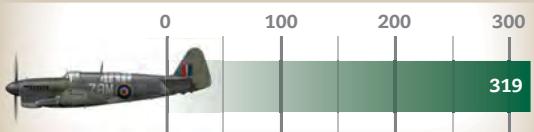
Above
Fairey Fireflies and a Douglas Skyraider aboard HMS 'Eagle' south of Greenland, probably in the early 1950s. BOTH KEY

Fairey Firefly F.1

AT A GLANCE: RANGE (miles)



AT A GLANCE: SPEED (mph)



Construction: A total of 1,702 of all models were built, including four prototypes, and 429 F.Is.

First Flight: Developed from the Fulmar, the first Firefly got airborne on December 22, 1941.

Powerplant: One 1,730lb (1,290kW) Rolls-Royce Griffon IIB V-12 or 1,900hp Griffon XII driving a three-bladed propeller.

Dimension: Span 44ft 6in (13.6m). Length 37ft 7in. Height 13ft 7in. Wing area 328sq ft (30.5sq m).

Weight: Empty 9,750lb (4,423kg). Loaded 14,020lb.

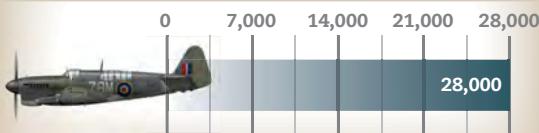
Performance: Max speed 319mph (513km/h) at 17,000ft (5,182m). Service ceiling 28,000ft. Initial rate of climb 1,700ft per min. Max range 1,070 miles (1,722km).

Armament: Four 20mm cannon in wings, plus provision for two 1,000lb bombs or eight 60lb rockets under wings.

Crew: Two – pilot and observer.

Note: performance and weights varied according to role and configuration.

AT A GLANCE: CEILING (feet)





Spotlight

Fairey
Firefly

Clearing the decks



Above
Major 'Cheese'
Cheesman, CO of
1770 Squadron. VIA
AUTHOR

Andy Thomas profiles some of the aircrew who helped to make the Firefly a potent naval fighter

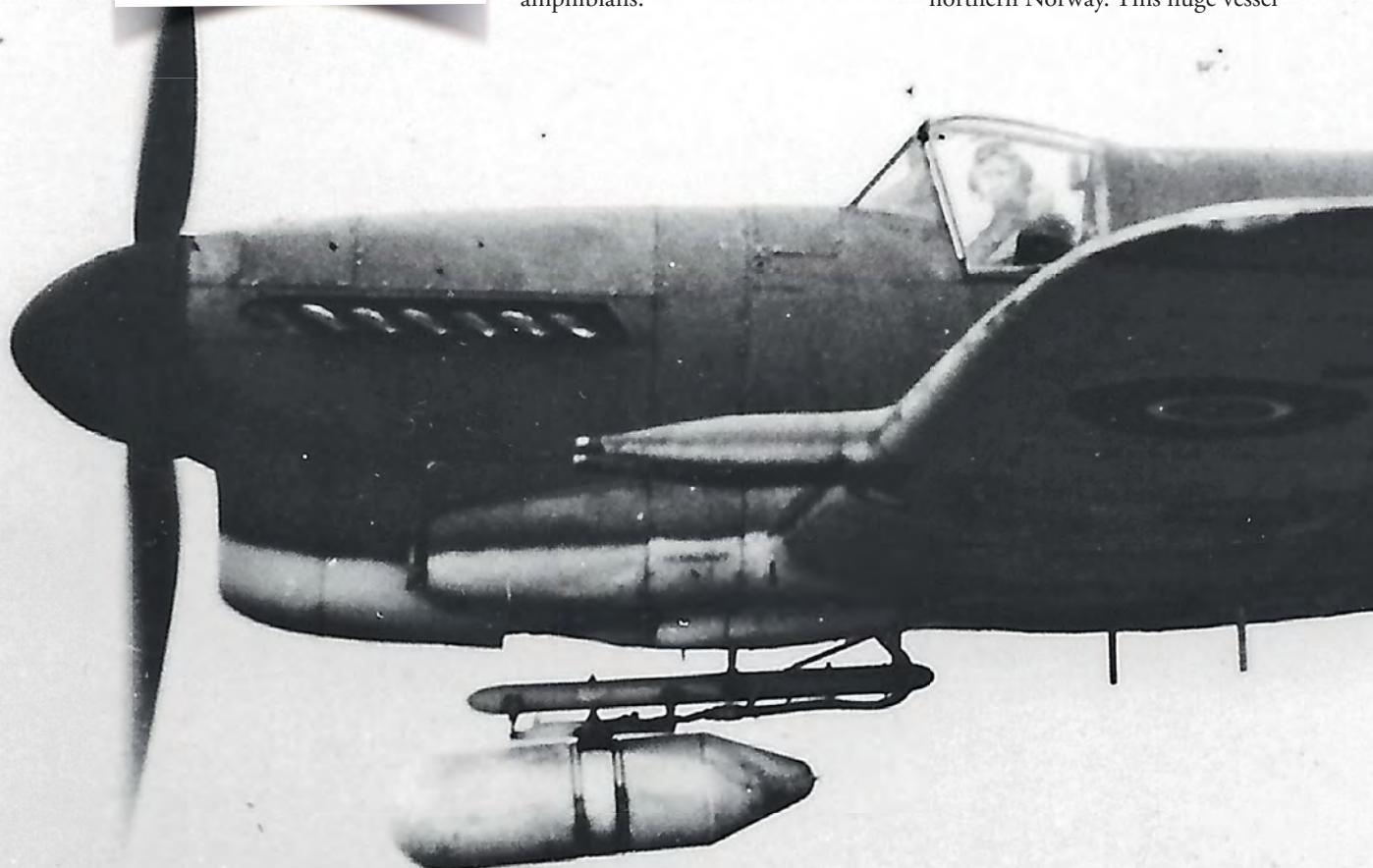
Formed at Yeovilton in Somerset in September 1943, 1770 Squadron was the first unit to put the Fairey Firefly into operational service. Initially commanded by Lt Cdr I P Godfrey, in early February 1944 he handed over to a Royal Marine pilot, Major Vernon Cheesman.

Universally known as 'Cheese', he had joined the marines in 1936 but three years later began training as a pilot. At first he flew the Supermarine Walrus and was awarded an MBE for a mid-ocean rescue in one of these ungainly amphibians.

On April 5, 1942 he survived the sinking of the cruiser HMS *Cornwall* off Ceylon. Retrained on fighters, he served on an escort carrier in the Atlantic before joining 1770.

Target Tirpitz

Having worked up, 1770 Squadron took the Firefly to sea for the first time on May 18, 1944 when it embarked on the carrier HMS *Indefatigable*. The ship's air group trained for Operation Mascot – strikes against the elusive battleship *Tirpitz* moored in Altenfjord in northern Norway. This huge vessel



SPOT FACT *The Firefly entered operational service in July 1944*

Men Behind the Firefly



posed a continuing threat to the Arctic convoy route to North Russia.

Working closely with the strike leader, Lt Cdr Roy Baker-Falkner, Cheesman's unit was to escort Fairey Barracuda dive-bombers to the target and then fly ahead to suppress flak batteries. The strike launched from *Indefatigable*, *Formidable* and *Furious* in the early hours of July 17 with Cheesman leading 1770 at sea level before having to climb up to 9,000ft (2,743m) to cross the mountains.

He wrote afterwards: "What cruel-looking terrain that was; all white,

cold, barren and desolate. An engine failure here meant, out harp and halo and hello St Peter!"

German radar detected the strike force, so by the time it arrived *Tirpitz* was wreathed in a protective smoke screen and very few of the airmen even caught a glimpse of the ship. The Fireflies and Grumman Hellcats tasked with flak suppression were the first to attack before turning their attention to a destroyer, which suffered superficial damage, and a small vessel which was forced aground, heavily damaged.

In early August Cheesman

led 1770 Squadron back onto *Indefatigable* for further attacks, known as Operation Goodwood, staged on the 22nd, 24th and 29th. The fleet carriers were bolstered by two escort carriers, HMS *Nabob* and *Trumpeter*.

Once again a combination of low cloud and German preparedness foiled the strikes, which caused only slight damage. Cheesman led his Fireflies on each of the attacks, successfully strafing flak batteries around *Tirpitz*. He was awarded the DSO for the determined way he led his unit. ☺

Above left
A Firefly I of 1770 Squadron landing on 'Implacable' after one of the 'Tirpitz' strikes in the summer of 1944.
N FRANKLIN

Below
A Firefly I fitted with a podded ASH. AUTHOR'S COLLECTION



200 examples were initially ordered by the Admiralty



Above
Lt Douglas Price (right) with his observer. Both played an important part in the development of naval night-fighting capability. AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

Above right
A Ki-51 'Sonia' under attack by a Firefly of 1770 Squadron off Formosa, April 12, 1945. VIA CFSHORES

First 'kill'

In November 1944, *Indefatigable* sailed for the Far East, taking 1770 Squadron along. Assembling in Ceylon, it was decided that *Indomitable*, *Indefatigable* and *Victorious* should strike Japanese targets in northern Sumatra.

Cheesman with his observer, Lt D J C Wilkey, in Firefly I DT943 led 1770 against the refinery at Pangkalan Brandan on January 4, 1945. The aircraft carried 60lb rocket projectiles – a weapon 'Cheese' had been agitating for – which were used to great effect.

On return, DT943 ran out of fuel and ditched astern of *Indefatigable*, but Cheesman and Wilkey were soon picked up. 'Cheese' was awarded the DSC, making him probably the most decorated pilot in the Fleet Air Arm at the time.

The carriers left Ceylon on January 16, heading for Australia, conducting strikes en route. A complex of refineries around Palembang on the Moezi River on the northeast coast of Sumatra held significant risk as the aircraft would have to fly over enemy territory for 150 miles (241km) to get to their objective.

During the attack, Cheesman's Firefly developed a problem and he had to pass leadership to his senior pilot, Lt Dennis Levitt, who shot down a Nakajima Ki-43 Oscar fighter, the first aerial victory by a Firefly pilot.

Kamikaze attacks

The strike force returned on January 24 and 29, inflicting more damage on the refineries. Afterwards the fleet continued to the Pacific to take part in the invasion of Okinawa as part of Task Force 57.

During Operation Iceberg, which was also known as the Battle of Okinawa, the ships were exposed to the horrors of Japanese 'kamikaze'



"Over Pladjoe, Stott and Ward fired on a Ki-43 which disintegrated under the weight of fire from the Firefly's cannon"

attacks, although the armoured decks of the British carriers reduced their vulnerability. With Cheesman's 1770 Squadron well to the fore, operations continued throughout April and May, the Fireflies unleashing almost 1,000 rockets during that time.

The last strikes took place on May 25, after which, having spent 62 days at sea during the campaign, the fleet headed for Australia. Following a highly eventful and successful tour Cheesman handed over command of 1770 on June 22. He continued flying until 1950 when he retired. He died in June 1999.

Firefly 'ace'

One of Cheesman's pilots, Sub Lt John Phillip Stott, was aboard *Indefatigable* when it participated in Operation Lentil, the successful attack on Pangkalan Brandan on January 4, 1945. The strike, involving more than 90 aircraft, saw 1770's Fireflies suppressing enemy defences.

Stott, who usually flew with the unit's senior observer, Lt D J Ward, attacked a Ki-43 in concert with Sub Lt Redding; they shared in shooting it down. Stott then attacked the harbour at Pangkalan Soe Soe with 60lb rockets before returning to the carrier.

He also took part in Operation Meridian against Palembang on January 24 and 29. On the first of these attacks, 1770's Fireflies provided close escort to Grumman Avengers.

The strike was opposed by a

swarm of Japanese Ki-43 Oscars and Nakajima Ki-44 Tojos and the escorts became heavily engaged. Over Pladjoe, Stott and Ward fired on a Ki-43 which disintegrated under the weight of lead from the Firefly's cannon.

The pair returned for the second Meridian attack five days later when the Japanese again put up vigorous opposition. Stott tackled a Ki-43 and, along with Sub Lt Martin, shared another 'kill'.

Piloting DT935, Lt D Levitt downed another and shared a second with a fellow Firefly. Sadly, Levitt and his New Zealander observer, Lt J F Webb, failed to return. Sub Lt Pugh meanwhile got another Oscar and destroyed one more, shared with Sub Lt Redding.

Stott was on *Indefatigable* during the action against Okinawa. On April 12, 1945, with Lt Ward as observer, he launched in Firefly DV119 as No.2 to Lt Walter Thomson, providing escort to a US Navy Martin PBM Mariner flying-boat on a rescue task off the northeast coast of Formosa.

Flying at 1,000ft, the pair spotted five obsolete Mitsubishi Ki 51 Sonias off Kumi Island, probably on a Kamikaze mission. Breaking off, the Fireflies attacked the desperately evading Japanese and each shot down two – and between them probably destroyed the fifth.

In shooting down the Sonias, Stott became the first and only Firefly pilot to down five enemy aircraft and so became an 'ace'. He continued in action off Okinawa



until the carrier returned to Australia, by which time he had been promoted to lieutenant. Late in the summer, Phillip Stott was Mentioned in Despatches, while Lt Ward received the DSC.

V-1 stalking

Formed at Lee-on-Solent, Hampshire, in November 1942 under Major L A 'Skeets' Harris, 746 Squadron served as the Naval Fighter Interception Unit (NFIU). The following month it moved to Ford in Sussex to be alongside the RAF's FIU, which had pioneered nocturnal interception techniques with radar-equipped fighters.

The first Firefly Is joined the NFIU in May 1943, the unit receiving its first NF.II versions in February 1945. After trials with

a pod-mounted ASH radar in the autumn of 1944, the NFIU sent crews to Coltishall, Norfolk, to gain experience of night operations against V-1 flying-bombs.

Radio failure frustrated the first sortie – on the night of October 25/26 – by Lts J H Neale and J C Harrison in MB419. Lts Howell and Lester, again in MB419, gained a radar contact on a V-1 on November 21/22 but the missile is thought to have crashed into the sea. The detachments ended in December.

Nocturnal Fireflies

To provide a cadre of experienced night-fighters the Fleet Air Arm seconded a number of pilots to fly with the RAF. Among them was Sub Lt Douglas Price, who had originally been posted to join the Fairey

Swordfish-equipped 816 Squadron aboard HMS *Dasher* for convoy escort duties.

Price joined a blind flying training unit in mid-1943 before attending a night-fighter course on Fairey Fulmars, where he teamed up with his observer, Sub Lt Robert Armitage. In October both were posted to fly DH Mosquito XIIIs with the RAF's 29 Squadron in the night fighting role. Remaining with the unit through most of 1944 they had considerable success, being credited with three enemy aircraft destroyed and two damaged.

The victories made Price and Armitage the most successful Fleet Air Arm night-fighter crew and both were awarded the DFC, an unusual decoration for naval officers. With their wealth of experience the pair joined NFIU in 1945, firstly at Ford and later at West Raynham, Norfolk.

Price went on to conduct many trials on Firefly NF.IIIs. Early in 1946 he was seconded, along with a Firefly, to the US Navy Test Centre at Patuxent River, Maryland.

He spent much of the rest of his career on test and development work interspersed with periods on frontline units, including leading a Hawker Sea Hawk squadron. Douglas Price eventually retired with the rank of commander. ●

Left
A Firefly of 1770's sister unit, 1771 Squadron, carrying a load of 60lb rockets. R MACWHIRTER

Below
Firefly I DV126 of 1770 Squadron unfolding its wings aboard 'Indefatigable', January 1945. N FRANKLIN



1,702 were built in total



Colonial Fighters

From 1946 the Netherlands took the Firefly into combat in the East Indies. **Andy Thomas** details how the design found a new lease of life

Above
Fireflies of 860
Squadron over Java
in 1947.

By late 1945 the air arm of the Royal Netherlands Navy was re-equipping and had become the first export customer for the Fairey Firefly. As peace descended on Europe, the Netherlands found itself at war on the other side of the world. Having helped to rid Java of the Japanese, Indonesian nationalists were determined not to allow their former colonial masters to return.

Under Lt Cdr Jan van der Tooren, 860 Squadron received its first Firefly Is in January 1946 at Ayr in Scotland. Initially the Fireflies wore British roundels, but with the inverted Dutch orange triangle on the nose and rudder, to proclaim their nationality. By 1947 Dutch roundels and its national flag were applied.

On February 14, 1946 Lt Cdr B

Sjerp took over command and on July 27 the unit was transferred to Dutch control. After a brief workup, on August 26 the Fireflies embarked on the *Karel Doorman*, the former HMS *Nairana*, and the carrier steamed to Java, in the Dutch East Indies.

Counter-insurgency

Karel Doorman arrived off Java on October 12 and 860's 15 Fireflies disembarked to Kemajoran, near Batavia (the present-day Jakarta). This move was not without incident; Firefly 13 (the former Fleet Air Arm PP528) crashed on arrival and was written off.

Soon afterwards, 860 flew on to Morokrembangan, near Soerabaja in the east of the island. From there the unit began policing and counter-insurgency duties.

The arrival of the capable Fireflies

was a welcome reinforcement as the Dutch had assumed responsibility for air support in the East Indies from the RAF on September 19, 1946. The unit quickly established, flying tactical reconnaissance sorties and providing on-call air support to marines and army forces.

The last British forces left in November, by which time the nationalists and the Dutch had reached a form of agreement. There were many breaches to the ceasefire and 860 remained active.

On May 14, 1947 Firefly 11-24 crash-landed in Indonesian-held territory. The pilot made a good belly landing and his wingman orbited overhead for protection until dusk as Dutch troops made a brave, but ultimately unsuccessful, attempt to reach the aircraft.

Uneasy peace

Peace talks broke down in July 1947. At dawn on July 21 the Fireflies went into action, attacking an airfield near the nationalist capital at Djokjakarta in central Java, destroying eight former Japanese aircraft of the embryonic Indonesian Air Force on the ground. During the day Firefly 11-22 was shot down by nationalists with squadron stablemate 11-27 brought down on August 4.

Another uneasy ceasefire came into effect the next day, although Dutch troops continued mopping



up operations. In December 1948, the Fireflies supported 'police' actions that captured most republican towns until yet another ceasefire on January 1, 1949.

Indonesian guerrilla activity continued until the final ceasefire in August. An accord was signed on December 22, 1949 in which the

Netherlands ceded independence to the nationalists.

With sovereignty transferred to Indonesia, 860 Squadron was disbanded on March 18, 1950 and its 11 surviving Fireflies were shipped home. During its time in the East Indies, the unit had flown more than 2,000 operational sorties.

Post- script

The demise of 860 Squadron did not mean the end of the Firefly in Dutch service. A presence was maintained on the island of Biak (see *FlyPast* August 2016) off the north coast of New Guinea. On July 4, 1955 the naval air service reformed 7 Squadron on the island, equipped with Firefly FR.4s and FR.5s for air defence and reconnaissance.

Indonesia agitated to recover Biak and 7 Squadron was needed to maintain an operational posture. The unit disbanded on January 15, 1962, by which time Royal Netherlands Air Force Hawker Hunters of 322 Squadron had been deployed. The Fireflies were withdrawn and scrapped on site. ●

Above
The training variant of the Firefly was also used by the Dutch Naval Air Service. This is T Mk.1 12-H pictured in January 1948. It was scrapped in September 1959.

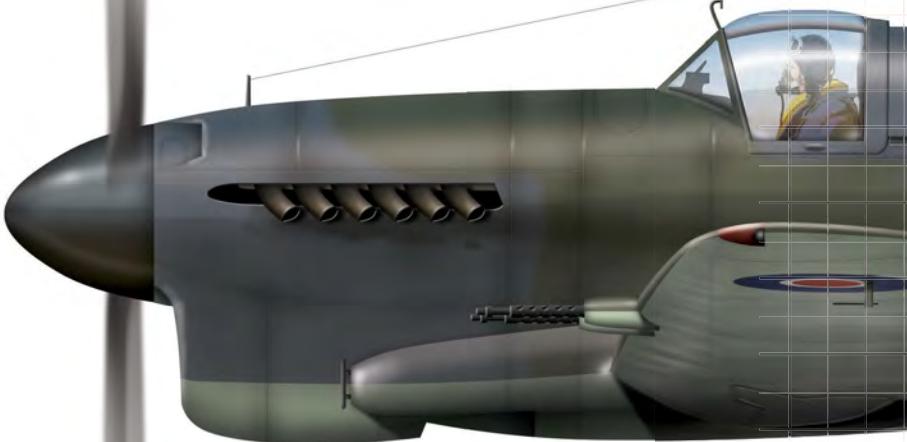
Left
Dispersed at Biak in the late 1950s, Firefly FR.4s of 7 Squadron.

Below
Dutch Naval Air Service Firefly FR.4s of 7 Squadron over New Guinea in the late 1950s.



Spotlight

Fairey Firefly



Faithful servant

Andy Hay artwork of a Firefly that flew with the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm

Artwork
Fairey Firefly F.I
Z2030 'Z8M' during
its time with 790
Naval Air Squadron.
ANDY HAY-2016

The Firefly was a longstanding staple of the Fleet Air Arm (FAA) during World War Two and beyond. Produced from 1941 until 1955, the type was declared operational with the Royal Navy in 1944 and flew on until 1956 when it was replaced by the Fairey Gannet. Although the Firefly took a long time to start its duties, the fact it racked up 12 years of active service at a time when technology was rapidly advancing is impressive.

Our subject is F.1 Z2030, which flew with 790 Naval Air Squadron. It was delivered to 15 MU on April 30, 1944, and was received by its FAA unit on June 20. Coded 'Z8M', it served with 790, then based at RNAS Dale near Milford Haven in Pembrokeshire, until October 1945. Its operational life came to an end that month when it was damaged in a landing accident.

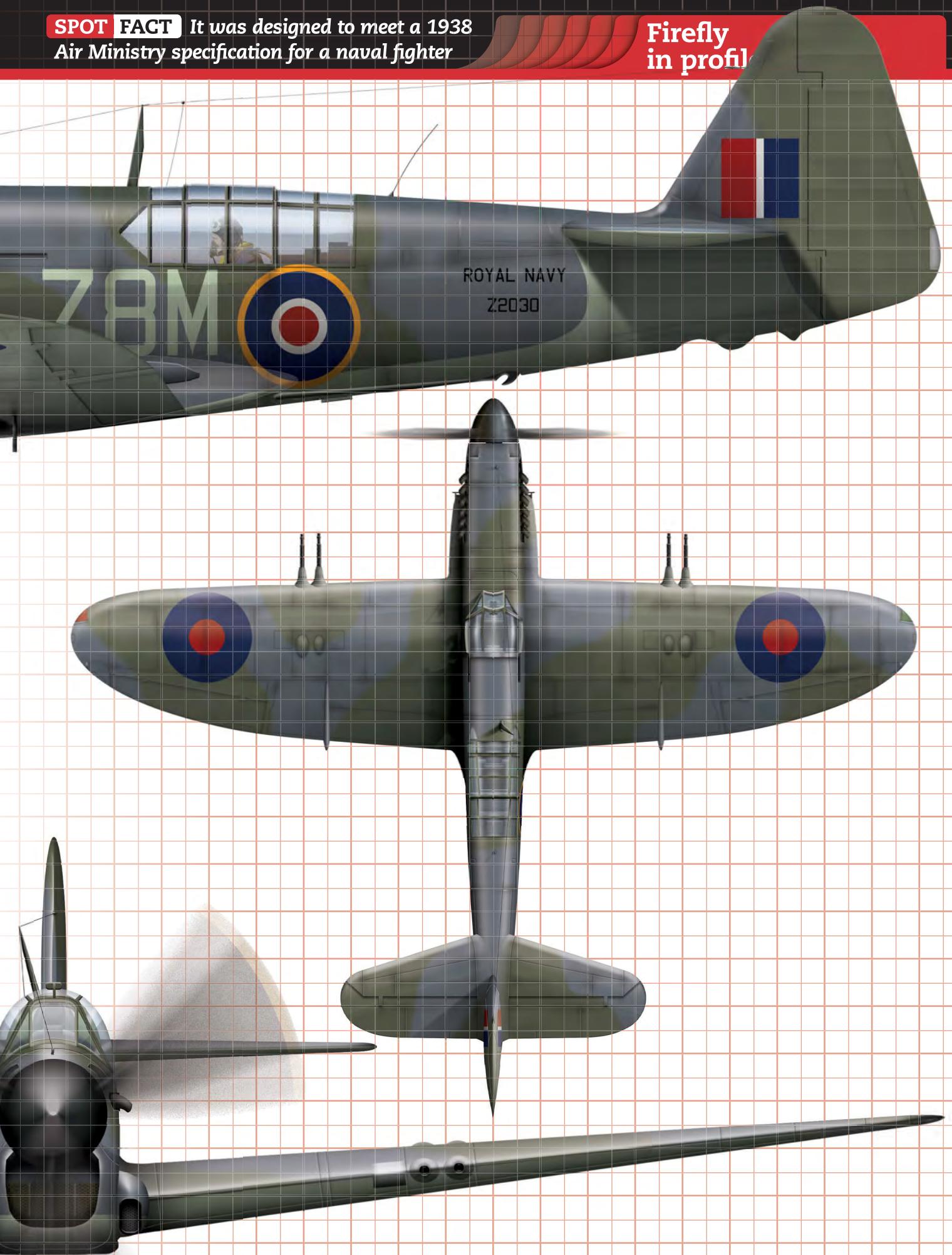
Powered by a 1,730hp (1,290kW) Rolls-Royce Griffon II, Firefly Z2030 was among the last of an original batch

of 200 ordered from Fairey in June 1940. Some of these were built to NF.II standard and 12 were cancelled.

In total, 429 F.1s were built (total Firefly production came to just over 1,700). After 1956, several versions of the type flew on as trainers, target tugs and drone aircraft, while others were acquired by overseas operators, including the Indian Navy.

SPOT FACT It was designed to meet a 1938 Air Ministry specification for a naval fighter

Firefly
in profile



6 units belonging to the Royal Netherlands Navy flew Fireflies



Spotlight

Fairey Firefly

Another War

Graham Pitchfork examines the incredible contribution Fireflies made during the Korean conflict

Below
A Firefly FR.5 of 825 Squadron about to take the wire on 'Ocean' in Korean waters. VIA AUTHOR

When thousands of North Korean troops swarmed across the border and into South Korea on June 25, 1950, the light fleet carrier HMS *Triumph* of the British Eastern Fleet was in the area. It arrived off the west coast of Korea on July 2 where it joined Task Force 77 under Rear Admiral Hoskins of the US Navy.

Embarked on *Triumph* were two squadrons: 800 with Supermarine Seafire FR.47s and the Firefly-equipped 827. Led by Lt Cdr B C Lyons, 827 Squadron was the last operational Fleet Air Arm unit to be equipped with Firefly FR.1s.

Five years earlier, in waters not far from where *Triumph* was cruising, Fireflies had fought the Japanese. Now 827's complement of a dozen ageing FR.1s were preparing for the type's second major war.

Intensive sorties

At dawn on July 3, 1950, all 12 Fireflies of 827 Squadron, led by the CO, flew the Fleet Air Arm's first Korean theatre operation when they attacked hangars and installations on Haeju airfield in North Korea with rocket projectiles (RPs). This heralded the beginning of continuous action by Firefly units on a rotational basis throughout the three-year war.

The Firefly's primary task was to support the land forces with a mix of bombs and RPs up to a maximum of 2,000lb (907kg) plus four 20mm cannon in the wings. Sorties were flown at intensive rates, sometimes reaching 120 a day, often in harsh weather conditions.

Targets were classed as interdiction sorties when railways, rolling stock, river traffic and shipping were attacked.

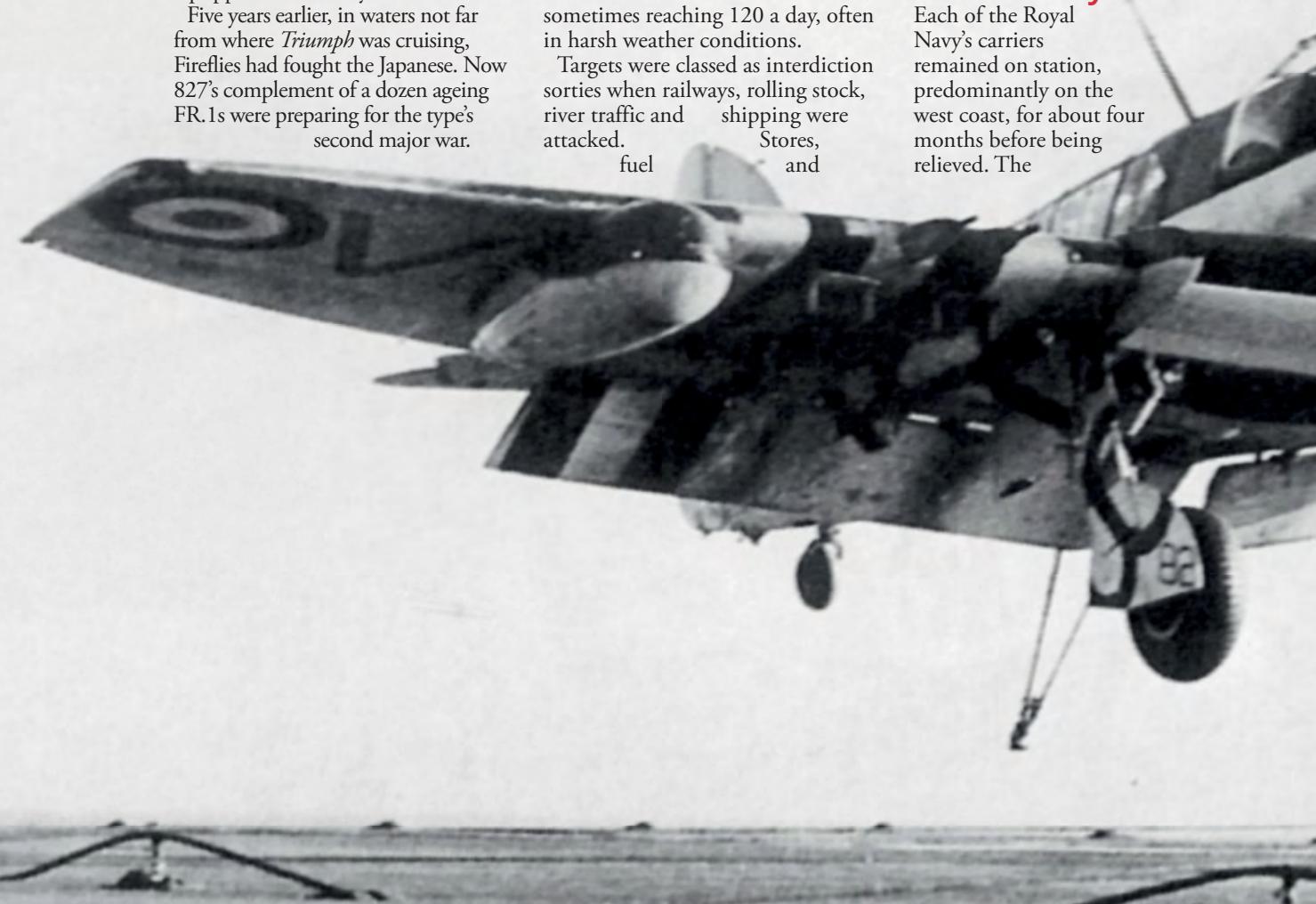
Stores, fuel

ammunition dumps also received attention from the Fireflies.

The versatility of the type was frequently demonstrated when they were also tasked for close support operations hitting troop positions and armour. Additionally, Fireflies provided gun direction for naval forces engaged in shore bombardment. For such sorties they were fitted with non-jettisonable 45 gal (204 lit) wing tanks giving two hours over the target area, greatly reducing the number of aircraft required to maintain continuous cover.

Carrier relay

Each of the Royal Navy's carriers remained on station, predominantly on the west coast, for about four months before being relieved. The





embarked squadrons of Fireflies and Hawker Sea Fury FB.11s (which had replaced Seafires) worked in close co-operation with the larger carriers of the US Navy.

On October 5, 1950 HMS *Theseus* relieved *Triumph*. It carried the Sea Furies of 807 Squadron and 12 newly built Firefly FR.5s of 810 Squadron. As the changeover took place, 827 Squadron paid off its Mk.1s.

The unit disbanded the following month, in preparation for adopting the large Blackburn Firebrand TF.5s in December. The CO of 827,

Lt Cdr Lyons,

complimented the personnel of the repair and maintenance carrier, HMS *Unicorn*, which provided crucial support to keep the FR.1s, the majority of which were of World War Two vintage, serviceable.

The winter of 1950-1951 was harsh and the carrier's air group was able to fly on only 17 days during December. Despite this, more than 630 sorties were flown without an accident. In February that figure rose to 1,500, a remarkable achievement.

Close support and armed reconnaissance were the main activities during the early months of 1951 with strafing and RP attacks against enemy troop



positions and gun emplacements. Bigger targets, such as rail yards and tunnels, required 1,000lb bombs.

By the time *Theseus* was relieved by *Glory* in April, the crews of 810 Squadron had amassed very impressive statistics. Almost 7,000 rockets had been fired while the 500lb and 1,000lb bombs dropped totalled, respectively, 1,390 and 84. Junks, railway wagons, gun positions and buildings had been destroyed, all for the loss of four aircraft, two due to accidents.

Spring offensive

Aboard *Glory* were the Fireflies of 812 Squadron. The carrier's tour coincided with the Chinese spring offensive, which included the fierce battles on the Imjin River. For 812's crews, the established pattern continued with bombing, strafing and rocket attacks.

Intense and accurate low-level anti-aircraft fire took its toll. One

Above left
With Fireflies on deck,
HMS 'Ocean' during
replenishment at Sasebo,
Japan. VIA AUTHOR

Above
Firefly FR.5 WB421 at
the point of taking the
wire on HMS 'Theseus',
1951. KEC

SPOT FACT UK and Australian Fireflies flew attack 'ops' from carriers in the Korean War

Below
HMS 'Glory' relieved HMS 'Theseus' in Korean waters to the tune of 'Anything You Can Do I Can Do Better' played by the ship's band. A few days later, the 2000th deck landing of 'Glory's' 14th Carrier Air group since leaving home waters was made by 812 Squadron's commanding officer, Lt Com FA Swanton, seen about to touch down in his Fairey Firefly. KEY

Firefly fell victim to this barrage and had to be ditched but the crew was rescued. Another crew was killed when they were shot down behind enemy lines while bombing a bridge; both had survived an earlier ditching.

During six months of operations, 812 had flown just over 1,000 sorties but had lost eight aircraft, three pilots and three observers, most due to ground fire.

After the departure of *Glory* it was the turn of the Royal Australian Navy's HMAS *Sydney* and 817 Squadron to take over the patrols. *Sydney* arrived in Korean waters on October 4; this was the first time that a Dominion aircraft carrier had been in action.

Commanding *Sydney*'s 21st Carrier Air Group was the Royal Navy's Lt Cdr Michael Fell DSO DSC who flew many of the most difficult sorties. For his service in Korean waters Fell was awarded a Bar to his DSC and eventually retired as a vice-admiral.

Apart from a special operation on the east coast, *Sydney*'s aircrew flew off the west of Korea, the majority of sorties in support of the Commonwealth Division. Enemy

lines of supply and communications were regular targets.

An attempt by five aircraft to block a tunnel was unsuccessful, although the rail lines were damaged. A similar strike a few weeks later was successful when both entrances to a tunnel near Chaeryong were closed.

During its four months in Korean waters, *Sydney* had to contend with severe weather, including a particularly bad typhoon, and a bitter winter. Despite these problems, the carrier's two squadrons flew 2,336 sorties. At the end of January 1952, *Glory* took over for a second spell.

Anything that moves

Operations changed little during the following months: interdictions and close support provided the majority of sorties.

The communist forces had removed much of the population from the coastal areas; therefore any movement was almost certainly that of the enemy. Ox-carts were one of the main targets and, as one pilot remarked, "it is amazing on how many occasions they blow up".

During the summer of 1952, *Glory*

alternated with another light fleet carrier, *Ocean*, the fifth to see service during the conflict. The Fireflies of 825 Squadron flew patrols over the mainland and attacked anything that moved in addition to pre-planned static targets.

The arrival of Russian-built Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-15 'Fagots' changed the dynamic of the air war. The MiGs had a clear advantage over the piston-engined Fleet Air Arm types although Sea Fury pilot Lt Peter Carmichael managed to shoot one down.

Four Fireflies were attacked by the communist jets on July 24, 1952 while returning from a strike. All four were damaged and one was forced to ditch near Chodo Island. The crew were rescued and the others recovered to the carrier safely.

The Royal Navy's carriers and the embarked squadrons continued to mount operations until July 27, 1953 when an armistice was signed. During the conflict 14 aircrews had been killed.

Firefly squadrons were in constant action in the ground attack, fighter escort and artillery spotter roles. A few flew briefly as night-fighters.



"The Fireflies of 825 Squadron flew patrols over the mainland and attacked anything that moved in addition to pre-planned static targets"

Firefly in Combat



British and Australian Carriers on Korean duties

Vessel	On Station	Fireflies embarked
HMS Triumph	Jul to Oct 1950	827 Sqn, FR.1s
HMS Theseus	Oct 1950 to Apr 1951	810 Sqn, FR.5s
HMS Glory	Apr to Oct 1951	812 Sqn, FR.5s
HMAS Sydney	Nov 1952 to Jul 1953	821 Sqn, FR.5s
HMS Ocean	Oct 1951 to Jan 1952	817 Sqn, FR.5s
	May to Oct 1952	825 Sqn, FR.5s
	Jul 1953	810 Sqn, FR.5s



It was a robust and reliable aircraft but by the end of the conflict it was obsolete.

With the Fleet Air Arm the type was destined to see little further active service, although some squadrons took part in strikes during the Malayan campaign. It also remained briefly in Korean waters where one Commonwealth carrier on rotation continued to serve with the United Nation's peacekeeping force. ●

Left
HMS 'Ocean' at Hong Kong, 1949. KEC

Below
Fireflies of HMS 'Ocean' fly over Valetta and Grand Harbour, Malta on a last operational flight on April 7, 1952 before leaving for Korea. 'Ocean' relieved HMS 'Glory' which had been in Korean waters since April 1951. KEY



Left
The Firefly frequently used rocket-assisted take off packs when based on carriers. AS.5 variant, WB330 '238' of 810 Squadron has its rockets lit as it begins its roll down the deck of HMS 'Theseus' during the conflict. KEY



2,140 feet per minute was its maximum rate of climb

Spotlight

Fairey Firefly

Fireflies helped Canada to adopt carrier-borne anti-submarine warfare.

Bill Cumming describes the type's service

Right
A Firefly FR.1 of 825 Squadron on the deck of HMCS 'Warrior', 1947. COURTESY CANADIAN WARPLANE HERITAGE

Below and top right
The Canadian Warplane Heritage Firefly AS.6 C-GBDG flies in the colours of RCN Mk.5 VH142 of 1949. COURTESY CANADIAN WARPLANE HERITAGE

During World War Two Canadians served in the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm, but the country did not have an independent naval air arm. At the Quebec Conference in August 1943 expansion of the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) was discussed and in February 1945 an agreement was reached to transfer two light fleet carriers from the UK: HMCS *Warrior* and *Magnificent*. Firefly FR.1s were chosen for the RCN in January 1946 and 29 were taken on strength up to April 1947. The first nine arrived in Canada aboard the newly-commissioned HMCS *Warrior* on March 31, 1946. Operated by 825 Squadron, they were shore-based at Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.

In August of the following year, 825 transferred its aircraft to 826 Squadron. The aircrew of 825 sailed to Britain on *Warrior*, where the unit re-equipped with nine Firefly FR.IVs (designated FR.4s from 1948). The Mk.IVs were being loaned by the Fleet Air Arm as interim equipment until anti-submarine Fairey Firefly AS.5s became available.

Canadian Legacy



Sub-hunters

The first FR.4 joined 825 Squadron in February 1948 and the unit embarked on HMCS *Magnificent* in May. Along with the Mk.4s, four T.1 trainers were also taken on charge. Later a pair of FR.1s were converted by Fairey Aviation of Canada, to T.2 weapons trainers.

As part of its commitment to NATO in 1949 Canada adopted the anti-submarine warfare (ASW) role. Equipped with upgraded

electronics and the capability to drop sonobuoys to detect submerged submarines, the initial AS.5s were accepted by 825 Squadron on February 16, 1949.

Canada's navy participated annually in joint operations with NATO fleets. In March 1950 Fireflies were pitted against the more modern equipment of the US Navy and one Firefly crew was commended by the Americans for its "cunning and skill".





Canadian Warplane Heritage tribute

Based at Hamilton, Ontario, Canadian Warplane Heritage (CWH) has a Firefly wearing the colours of a Mk.5 of 825 Squadron, RCN. It carries the serial number VH142, which was delivered to the RCN in February 1949, serving briefly with the unit as 'BD-G'. Nine months later it ditched off the coast of Nova Scotia following an engine failure.

The CWH example was built as an AS.6, serial number WH632 for the British Fleet Air Arm. It went to the Volunteer Reserve unit 1840 Squadron at Ford, Sussex, in July 1951. It was transferred to the Royal Australian Navy and despatched on the carrier HMS *Sydney* in June 1953.

Downgraded to an instructional airframe in April 1948, WH632 joined the Australian Air League in June 1960 and was stored near Sydney. It was acquired by CWH from the Museum of Aviation at Camden, New South Wales and shipped to Hamilton in mid-1978.

Civil registered in October 1991 as C-GBDG, to coincide with the code letters of the chosen RCN colour scheme, restoration to flying condition was completed at Victoria, British Columbia. Delta-Golf's post-restoration test flight took place on October 31, 1995. www.warplane.com

The CWH Firefly while serving as WH632 with the Fleet Air Arm's 1840 Squadron, from Ford in 1951.
COURTESY CANADIAN WARPLANE HERITAGE



Shortcomings

The Firefly AS.5 proved to be ill-suited to all-weather ASW. With only a 2½ hour endurance it could not be used for long-range patrols and its cramped fuselage offered little room to move in.

No sooner had the variant been taken on strength than the RCN was searching for a replacement. The best machine available in sufficient quantities was the Grumman Avenger.

The first Avengers arrived in May 1950 to replace Fireflies. The AS.5s continued to be operated by 825 Squadron (re-numbered 880 Squadron in May 1951) until the end of November 1951. The other Firefly unit, 826 Squadron, re-equipped with Avengers in October 1950. Despite the type's limitations in its given role, Fireflies gave the RCN the vital ASW coverage it needed, paving the way for later aircraft such as the Canadair Argus. ●

Above
Firefly AS.5s on board HMCS 'Magnificent' while berthed in 1949. Ground running in the foreground is VH142 - the aircraft commemorated by the CWH example. KEY COLLECTION



Spotlight

Fairey Firefly

Firefly Photo File

Below

Three Fleet Air Arm Fireflies flying in formation with a trio of Hawker Sea Furies in 1948. ALL KEY



From the Archive

Spotlight Next Month

Junkers Ju 52

Next month, our **Spotlight** will focus on a legend of German engineering, the tri-motor Junkers Ju 52. Manufactured from 1931 until 1952, the Junkers served in both military and civilian roles, and despite its seemingly crude design, proved reliable and efficient. Examples continued to fly for decades after the war, and several are still airworthy today. We examine the history of the 'Tante Ju' in our *October* issue, on sale in the UK on *September 1* – see page 52 for our latest money-saving subscription offers.



A collection of rarely seen images of the Firefly in British, Canadian and Dutch service

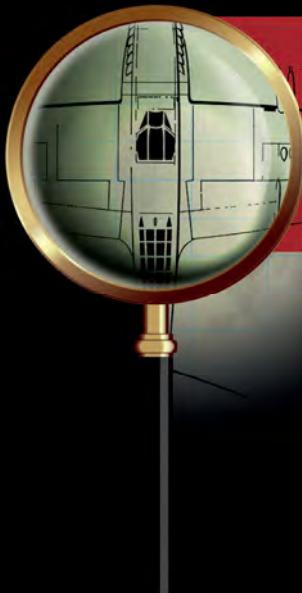


A pair of two-seat Firefly trainers flying in January 1948. Nearest the camera is 12-H of the Koninklijke Marine (Royal Netherlands Navy) with T.1 Z2027 of the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm.



Five Royal Canadian Navy Fireflies on the forward deck of HMCS 'Magnificent', probably in the late 1940s. The Fireflies of 825 and 826 Squadrons were replaced by Grumman Avengers from 1950.

FlyPast Spotlight



Fairey Firefly

17 Pages in detail

- 70** Origin and history
- 72** In combat - Firefly in action
- 78** Firefly in profile
- 80** Men Behind the Machine
- 86** From the archive



Main picture
Fairey Firefly TT.1 INS112 of the Indian Navy. Parts of this aircraft are preserved at the Naval Aviation Museum near Goa, India. KEY

This month our *Spotlight* focuses on the Fairey Firefly, a development of the relatively primitive Fulmar, and a machine that served the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm well during the latter years of World War Two. Although the Firefly spent a long time in development, it was used to great

effect. A second generation of the type was brought into service after the war, and continued to operate with some overseas air arms deep into the 1960s.