

FlyPast Classics

MERLIN-ENGINED SEAFIRES

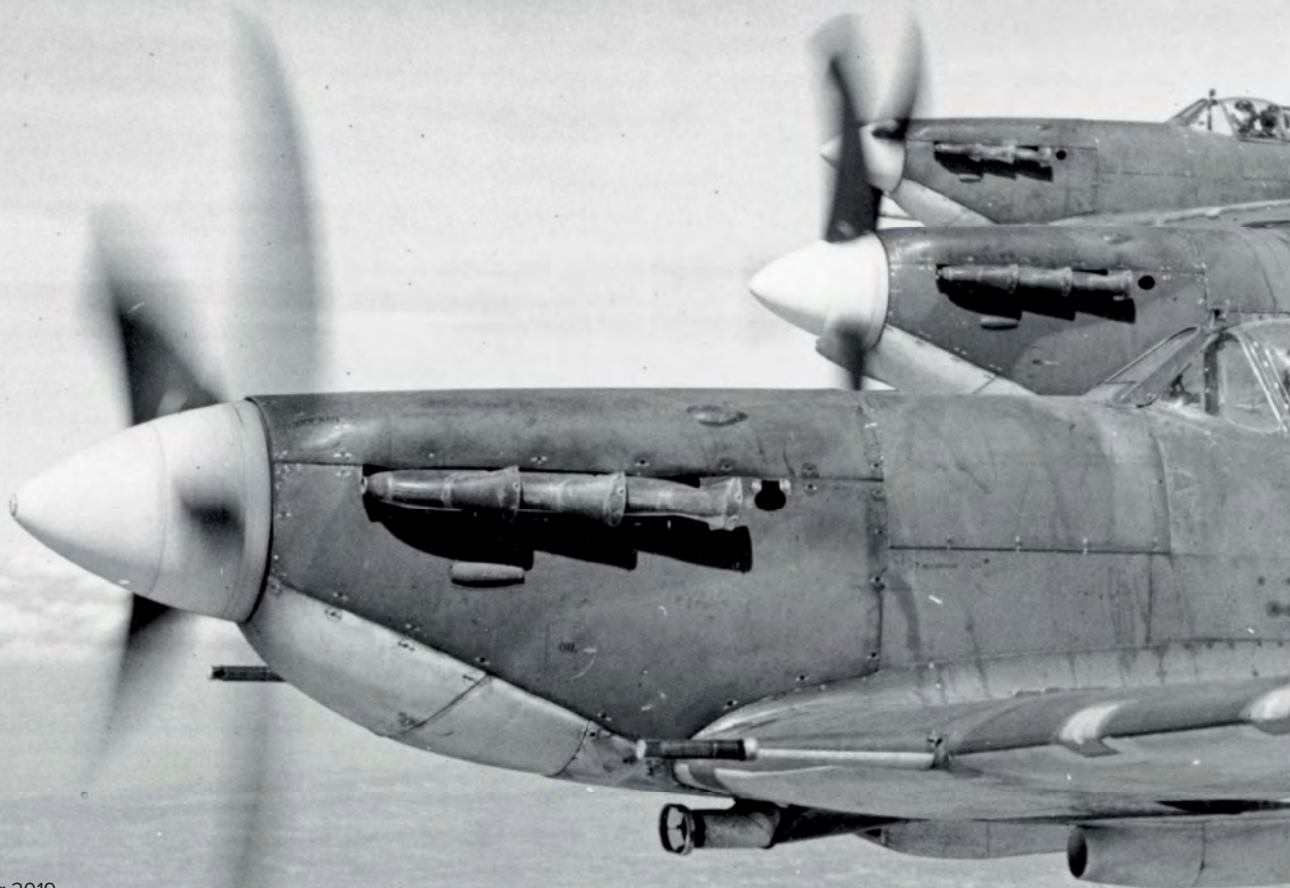
No 01

Superlative Seafarer

The iconic Spitfire found its sea legs in the form of the Seafire line of 'hooked' fighters. In our first 'Classics' instalment, **Malcolm V Lowe** describes the Merlin-engined versions

During the early years of World War Two, Britain's Royal Navy (RN) found itself chronically short of effective fighters able to operate from its aircraft carriers. The service entered the war with various 1930s designs, which were outclassed by the German Luftwaffe's more modern fighters, leading to a major crisis not easily solved. The Blackburn Roc and Gloster Sea Gladiator were among the main fighter types of the Fleet Air Arm (FAA) at that time, plus the multi-role Blackburn Skua. They were accompanied in the early war period by the Fairey Fulmar, which entered service during the summer of 1940. Of these,

BELOW An iconic image of three Seafire Mk.Ib fighters in formation, displaying the characteristics of the type including the arrester hook protruding beneath the lower rear fuselage. Belonging to 736 NAS, Fleet Air Arm, the nearest aircraft to the camera was NX890/AC-C, with NX924/AC-D behind.



by far the best was the Fulmar with its eight wing-mounted .303in Browning machine guns, but as a two-seat fighter it suffered from an obsolete design philosophy; effectively its second crew member was little more than an unnecessary passenger.

The short-term answer to meet the RN's immediate operational requirements lay close to home. During the inter-war period the FAA was under RAF control and it was not until 1939 that the service again came under Admiralty jurisdiction. Ironically, it was two land-based RAF aircraft which, when navalised, gave the service a credible counter to Germany's aerial supremacy. These were the RAF's superlative fighter designs: the Hawker Hurricane and Supermarine Spitfire.

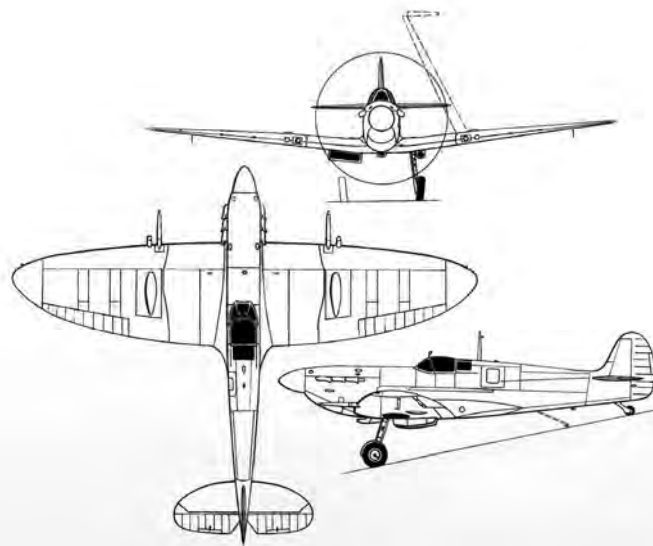
Navalised versions of the Sea Hurricane entered FAA service during 1940 initially as a land-based trainer. The rugged and dependable Hurricane adapted comparatively easily into a naval fighter. Its wide-track main undercarriage was ideally suited for carrier operations,

although some examples were successfully converted as expendable fighters for one-shot operations, launched from converted merchant vessels (Catapult Aircraft Merchantman or CAM Ships). The first aerial victory by a Sea Hurricane was achieved during the summer of 1941 by a CAM ship-operated example. The main failing with the Sea Hurricane was its lack of wing-folding, which was vital for stowage aboard aircraft carriers, but it proved to be a dependable and sometimes highly successful stopgap.

Early intransigence

With the Hurricane being a worthy asset for carrier-based operations, there was growing interest in navalising the Spitfire. However, despite increasing requests from the Admiralty, there was at first little official backing for the concept to go ahead.

The inadequacy of the FAA's fighter force was subsequently demonstrated in Norway, which was invaded by the Germans on April 9, 1940; Britain and France duly went



Supermarine Seafire L.III

Specifications

Powerplant	1 x Rolls-Royce Merlin 55M V12 liquid-cooled inline piston engine, 1,585hp (1,182kW) take-off power
Crew	1
Length	30ft 2½in (9.21m)
Wingspan	36ft 10in (11.23m)
Wingspan (clipped)	32ft 7in (9.93m)
Height	13ft (3.96m) over propeller
Empty weight	6,204lb (2,814kg)
Max take-off weight	7,640lb (3,465kg) with external ordnance
Maximum speed	358mph (576km/h) at 6,000ft
Cruise speed	272mph (438km/h) at 6,000ft
Range	460 miles (740km) at cruising speed
Service ceiling	30,000ft
Armament	2 x 20mm Hispano cannon, 4 x .303in Browning machine guns, up to 500lb (227kg) of external ordnance





'Hooked' Spitfire Mk.Vb, BL676 'Bondowoso' was intrinsic to Seafire development. It made the first carrier deck landing aboard HMS 'Illustrious' on January 10, 1942 and was later converted to Seafire Mk.Ib standard by Air Service Training at Hamble.

to Norway's aid. Although the British naval fighters committed to Norwegian sorties acquitted themselves well and punched above their weight during the ultimately failed operation, it was clear FAA fighter strength needed bolstering and expanding.

Persistent requests from the Admiralty office managing FAA procurement led eventually to Air Ministry agreement during 1941 for a batch of Spitfire Mk.Vs to be allotted to the FAA. At one stage 150 examples were envisaged, although due to changing priorities (and heated arguments between the Air Ministry and Admiralty) the total number transferred was altered several times.

It was during October 1941 that Supermarine received the green light to

properly navalise the Spitfire, including most noticeably the installation of an arrester hook in the lower rear fuselage and catapult attachments.

There is evidence the firm studied drawings of the hook arrangement planned by US firm Vought for its Chesapeake carrier-borne dive-bomber, as well as details of an assembly designed by the Royal Aircraft Establishment.

Several Spitfire Mk.Vb airframes were used in the development programme and among these, BL676 was highly important. This aircraft was seconded to the parent company during October 1941 and converted with an arrester hook assembly. After various trials on land, it made the first Spitfire deck landing on January 10, 1942 aboard HMS *Illustrious*,

while the carrier was anchored in the River Clyde.

The success of BL676 and other trials Spitfires led to the adoption of the type for RN use. Although it is a point of controversy, the name 'Seafire' for the new fighter was apparently suggested by a Mrs Freda Clifton, and adopted on Supermarine's company documentation from January 1942 onwards.

sources as 'hooked' Spitfires. These aircraft were originally Spitfire Mk.Vs. Although they were not intended for frontline action, they nevertheless played an important part in the early Seafire story.

Initial variant

The first full Seafire model, as opposed to the initial 'hooked' Spitfires, was the Mk.Ib. It was created by converting existing



A deck batsman guides in a Seafire for a successful arrested landing. The photo's caption states the aircraft carrier was HMS 'Indomitable'. Due to the poor forward view, landings aboard carriers would normally be made using a banking approach, to keep the flight deck in view for as long as possible.

As an interim before the genuine carrier-capable Seafire came online, the Spitfires originally allocated to the FAA were used for training naval pilots. Some were converted with the addition of the tail hook assembly then being developed for the Seafire, and became known in some

Spitfire Mk.Vb airframes, the necessary work being carried out by Air Service Training of Hamble, and Cunliffe-Owen Aircraft at Eastleigh, Hampshire. Included was the installation of a large, A-frame tail hook assembly in the lower rear fuselage, aft of the wing centre section, and



Seafire Mk.Ib PA103/AC-B while serving with 736 NAS. Like other Spitfire Mk.Vb to Seafire Mk.Ib conversions, it was re-serialised on its transformation, formerly being EN770. Officially the Mk.Ib was the Supermarine Type 340.



Four Seafire Mk.IIc airframes of 880 NAS are serviced, with a Fairey Albacore parked in the background. This unit operated from HMS 'Argus' during the Operation Torch landings in November 1942, before flying in action from HMS 'Indomitable' during the latter half of 1943. This scene is almost certainly on the latter vessel.

the associated strengthening of the fuselage to absorb the loads associated with the considerable inertia of an arrested landing.

The initial Seafire Mk.Ib conversion was taken on charge by the FAA on June 15, 1942. Details of these early Seafires remain somewhat vague. They featured the 'B' wing, with two 20mm cannon (one in each wing with 60 rounds per gun) and four .303in Browning machine guns (two per wing).

The type was superseded almost at once by the Seafire Mk.IIc. Powered by the Merlin 45, this version was based on the Spitfire Mk.Vc with the so-called 'universal' or 'C' wing. Fitted with full naval equipment including

attachments for catapult launch, the A-frame arrestor hook and additional fuselage strengthening, the Mk.IIc was armed with two 20mm cannon (one in each wing with 120rpg) and four .303in machine guns (two in each wing) – a similar arrangement to the Mk.Ib but with a different and larger feed for the two wing cannon. Because it had the 'C' wing, the Mk.IIc in theory could be fitted with four 20mm cannon, there being provision for two in each wing, although in practice this was not adopted.

The Seafire Mk.IIc was the first of the family built on a production line. Its prototype/development airframe was AD371, a converted Spitfire Mk.V, which first flew during

February 1942. The type was built by Supermarine and by Westland Aircraft at Yeovil, Somerset; the latter company duly played an increasingly large part in the Merlin-engined Seafire story. Westland completed its first Mk.IIc during December 1942, having created tooling for a completely new production line.

There were three main Mk.IIc sub-types. The basic F.IIc was fitted with the Merlin 45 as standard, but the L.IIc was powered by the Merlin 32, which provided its maximum output at lower altitudes and offered a maximum speed of 316mph (509km/h) at 6,000ft. There was also a camera-equipped tactical recce model, the LR.IIc for which the Heston Aircraft Company arranged the installation during the summer of 1943, and converted several more Mk.IIc airframes to that standard. A total of 372 is now generally accepted for overall Seafire Mk.IIc manufacture, Supermarine completing some of its build quota alongside its Mk.Ib conversions.

But these initial Seafires were austere compared to the examples that came later, as they lacked folding wings.

Further development led to the main Merlin-engined Seafire, the Mk.III, again based on the Spitfire Mk.V series. At this time, Westland was completely poised for production and manufactured the majority of this increasingly capable and maturing naval fighter.

Happy hangar decks

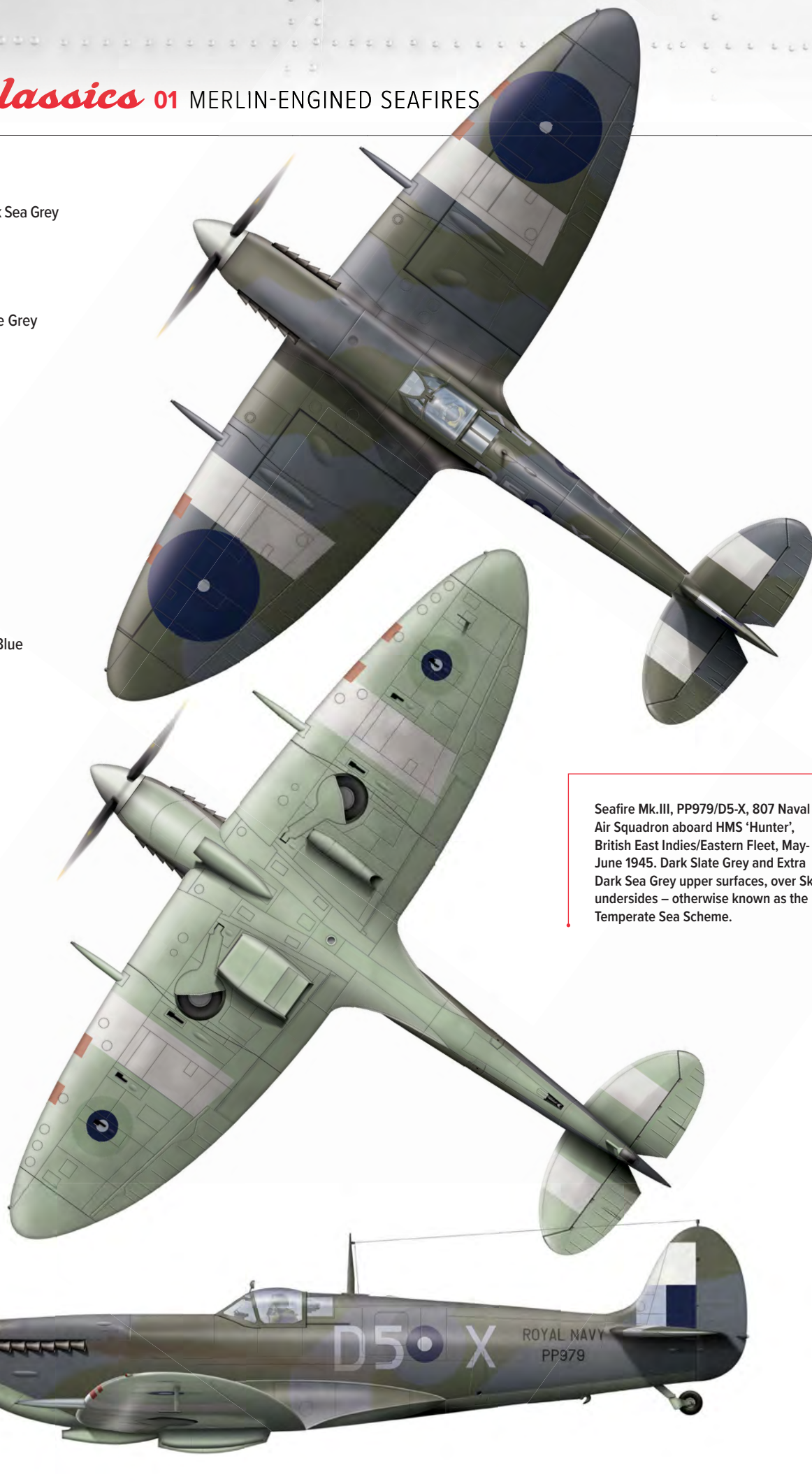
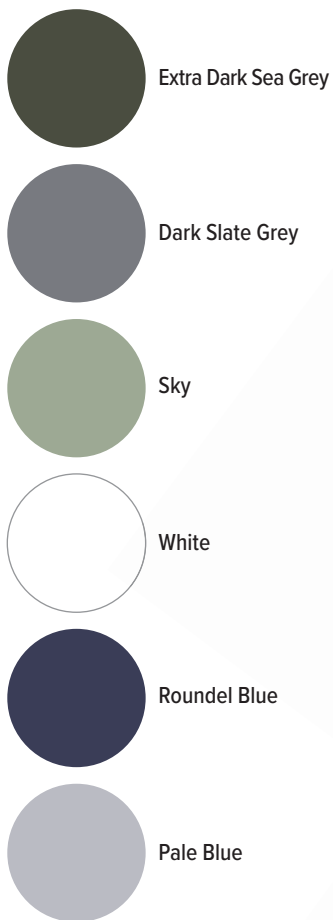
The Seafire Mk.III crucially incorporated folding wings, pioneered for the series by General Aircraft during 1942. Later, Seafire Mk.IIc MA970 tested the necessary installation. Each wing folded twice, firstly outboard of the main undercarriage, with the second one being close to the wingtip. However, the task on the Mk.III was always accomplished manually and conducted by naval ratings, as the equipment for powered folding was deemed too heavy to install. The wing fold was highly appreciated aboard the aircraft carriers, however, and allowed Seafires to be placed below deck on smaller vessels, compared with the Mk.Ib and Mk.IIc, which did not have folding wings.

Production of the Mk.III was the primary responsibility of



LEFT Exhibiting a pose all too regularly seen on aircraft carriers of the period, Seafire Mk.III PP979/D5-X stands on its nose after a landing accident. This 1945 incident took place while alighting aboard HMS 'Hunter' of the British East Indies/Eastern Fleet, the Seafire belonging to 807 NAS.

FlyPast Classics 01 MERLIN-ENGINEED SEAFIRES



Seafire Mk.III, PP979/D5-X, 807 Naval Air Squadron aboard HMS 'Hunter', British East Indies/Eastern Fleet, May-June 1945. Dark Slate Grey and Extra Dark Sea Grey upper surfaces, over Sky undersides – otherwise known as the Temperate Sea Scheme.



Seafire Mk.Ib, MB340 (ex-Spitfire Mk.Vb BL689). This was a station 'hack' at HMS Kipanga II (Port Reitz) near Mombasa, Kenya, in late 1944, flown by Lt Cdr Duncan Hamilton. Overall dark blue (variously described as Royal Blue or occasionally Bosun Blue) with white spinner, lightning flash and letters/numbers.



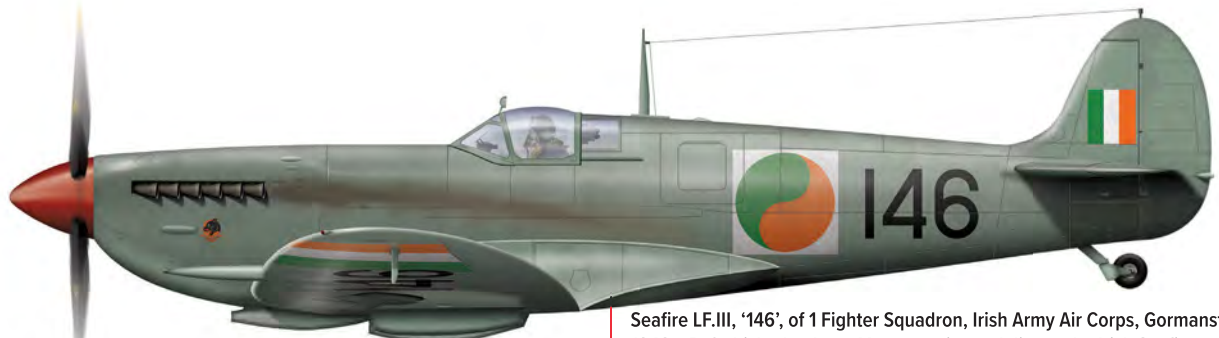
Seafire Mk.IIc, MB218/S-A, 809 NAS aboard HMS 'Unicorn' for Operation Avalanche (the Salerno landings), September 1943. Temperate Sea Scheme with black letters/numbers, code 'S-A' in red and outlined in black. Red spinner. 'Unicorn' was a repair carrier not normally used for frontline operations.



Seafire Mk.III, NN300/D5-O, 807 NAS aboard HMS 'Hunter', British East Indies/Eastern Fleet, September 1945, flown by Lt Cdr George Baldwin. Natural metal overall (presumably with silver-doped fabric areas), black anti-glare panel ahead of cockpit. Letters/numbers, bands on tail surfaces and wings all black. Blue spinner.



Seafire LF.III, '1.F.12' of Aéronavale's Flottille 1F, late 1948, aboard the French aircraft carrier 'Arromanches' for operations against anti-French insurgents in French Indochina. Temperate Sea Scheme, fuselage code in white. Sky rudder.



Seafire LF.III, '146', of 1 Fighter Squadron, Irish Army Air Corps, Gormanston, late 1940s. Refurbished at Long Marston prior to delivery, the Irish Seafires were de-navalised and painted in a unique grey-green, similar to that used on RAF aircraft cockpit interiors. Black '146'. Red (or possibly grey-green) spinner.

Westland as main contractor, accompanied by Cunliffe-Owen. The first Westland-built Mk.III was LR765 in the spring of 1943, while Cunliffe-Owen's initial example later in the year was NN333. Delays with the production of wing-folding components resulted in the first 32 Mk.III airframes (30 from Westland and two from Cunliffe-Owen) being delivered without wing folding, some if not all later being redesignated as Mk.IIc instead of or as hybrid models.

The Mk.III was powered by the Merlin 55-series engine and was built in three distinct but closely related versions. The F.III

Mk.V. Up to 500lb (227kg) of external ordnance could be carried, one 500lb (227kg) bomb beneath the fuselage or two 250lb (113kg) stores under the 'C' wings. The fitting of up to four unguided rockets was also possible.

Although many pilots preferred the old Seafire Mk.Ib for its handling, the L.III was the best of the Merlin Seafires considering overall performance. Powered by a Rolls-Royce Merlin 55M of 1,585hp (1,182kW) take-off power, it had a maximum speed of 358mph (576km/h) at 6,000ft. Most historians now agree that 1,250 Mk.III Seafires were built.



S Lt H H Salisbury, RNVR, photographed at RNAS Yeovilton beside Seafire Mk.Ib NX942, during September 1943. The aircraft was Spitfire Mk.Vb EN763 before conversion.

was to be the 'standard' fighter variant, but in the event only around 100 were completed as such. By far the most prevalent was the L.III (sometimes referred to as the LF.III), configured for low- to medium-level aerial combat with its Merlin 55M engine. Related to these main Mk.III versions was a reconnaissance-configured sub-type carrying two F.24 aerial cameras (one vertical, one oblique), as the FR.III or LR.III (the final 129 or so airframes from Cunliffe-Owen).

Armament for the Mk.III was similar to Mk.IIc and comprised two 20mm Hispano cannon, with four .303in Brownings. Initially the cannon were Hispano Mk.II, later replaced by the improved

Although the Seafire proved to be as good a fighter in air-to-air combat as its land-based cousin and was certainly useful for ground attack, it was not without its vices.

Operational issues

Hard-and-fast carrier recoveries often resulted in nose-overs, and sometimes the propellers could be found 'pecking' the deck even on good landings. The arrestor hook also had an unfortunate tendency to rebound up into the rear fuselage if it struck the deck hard, writing off various perfectly good airframes until local strengthening, introduced by the manufacturers, partially cured the problem on later examples.

Royal Navy Seafire Squadrons

By the later years of World War Two, the Merlin-engined Supermarine Seafire had become one of the FAA's principal combat aircraft. A significant number of squadrons flew the type, especially in its most developed Mk.III form. This table details the various units, with the squadron's code included where known or verified. In some cases, the unit mentioned only flew the particular type for a short time, while in comparison other squadrons operated the same model for many months in combat.

Mk.Ib

700, 708, 715, 719, 731 (E3), 736 (AC), 748, 759, 761 (G1), 768, 778, 779, 781, 787, 787Y, 790, 798, 801, 807, 809, 816, 842, 879, 885, 887, 894, 897

Mk.IIc

700, 708, 718, 719, 728 (M8), 731, 748, 757, 759, 761, 768 (M2), 770 (D8), 775, 776, 778, 787, 787Y, 790, 794, 798, 799, 801, 807 (H), 808, 809 (S), 816, 833, 834, 842, 879, 880, 884, 885 (D6 and O6), 886, 887, 889, 894, 895, 897 (D4 and A), 899

Mk.III

700, 706, 708, 709 (S5), 715 (S4), 718 (G3), 721, 728 (M8), 733, 736, 736B (YO), 740, 744, 748 (S7), 757 (P4 and P), 759 (Y2, Y3, Y4, Y5, Y6, Y7), 760 (L2), 761 (G1, G4 and G5), 766 (I6), 767 (IT3), 768, 771 (GP9), 772 (O9), 778 (FD9), 781, 782, 787, 787Y, 790, 794 (A5 and J2), 799, 801 (P6, P7 and P8), 802, 803, 805, 806, 807 (D5, and H), 808, 809 (D6, and S), 879 (D4, and A), 880, 883, 885 (D6), 886, 887 (H5 and P5), 889, 894 (H6 and P6), 899 (C and K), 1832

787 NAS was a Fleet Fighter Development Unit; its 'Y' Flight was a Fighter Affiliation Flight teaching the latest fighter tactics to frontline squadrons; it later became 'B' Flight of 736 Squadron.

1832 Squadron was a post-war RN Volunteer Reserve (RNVR) unit when flying the Seafire Mk.III.

An enduring issue for all squadrons flying Seafires operationally was the type's comparative lack of range/endurance. The use of 'slipper' under-fuselage fuel tanks partly alleviated the problem, especially the largest 90 gal (409 lit) type. However, personnel aboard the carrier HMS *Implacable* in the British Pacific Fleet (BPF) created an ingenious and apparently successful solution of rigging the streamlined drop tanks usually fitted beneath the fuselage of Curtiss P-40 Warhawks. These carried some 89 gal (405 lit) and were in comparatively plentiful supply in the Far East. They dropped away from the Seafire when jettisoned much more

smoothly than the more ungainly 'slipper' tanks.

Overall, some considered the Seafire to be a little too flimsy and 'dainty' for the harsh world of carrier operations. But that did not diminish in any way the type's undoubted pedigree and fighting capabilities.

Into the fray

The first Seafires to join a frontline FAA unit were Mk.Ib airframes assigned to 807 Naval Air Squadron (NAS) in mid-1942, while it was also starting to re-equip with the Seafire Mk.IIc. However, the initial fully furnished FAA unit on the type was 801 NAS, which at first flew examples of the 'hooked' Spitfire Mk.Vb in September 1942 and in September/October



The presence of the unusual bare metal Seafire Mk.III NN452/S 141, with its engine running at the front of the group, marks its host vessel as HMS 'Indefatigable' in 1945. The aircraft was flown by Lt Cdr N G 'Buster' Hallett, CO of the 24th Naval Fighter Wing – an air component of the British Pacific Fleet.

was allocated the first Seafire Mk.Ib examples for operational use. During the latter month this unit embarked aboard HMS *Furious* and duly took full part in Operation Torch, the allied landings in North Africa during November 1942. Subsequently the ship operated in the North Sea, at one stage the Seafires flying in support of strikes against the German battleship *Tirpitz*. During May and June 1944, the squadron transitioned to the Seafire Mk.III, which it flew until the end of the war, latterly in the Far East with the BPF. It was the only operational squadron fully equipped with the Seafire Mk.Ib, although several other units had at least some Mk.Ib machines on strength at different times.

Operation Torch was the first time Seafires entered major combat. In addition to 801 NAS with its Mk.Ib fighters, several further squadrons were by that time operational with the Mk.IIc variety. The first squadron to receive the Mk.IIc was 807 NAS during June 1942. Joining them in Torch were the Mk.IIc examples of 880, 884 and 885 NASs.

The Seafire duly became a stalwart of RN operations in the Mediterranean and southern Europe, for example during the landings on Sicily and then covering the allied invasion at Salerno (Operation *Avalanche*) in September 1943.

Operational debut

The first frontline unit to field the Seafire Mk.III was 894 NAS in November 1943. Henceforth this mark, with its folding wings, gradually replaced earlier versions, although the process remained incomplete and some served well into 1945.

The type was employed during



A Seafire Mk.III with wings folded has its engine run up while apparently undergoing maintenance on the hangar deck. Note the two groundcrew bracing the wheel chocks to prevent the aircraft from moving forward. The Mk.III introduced a four-bladed propeller unit (Roto/Jablo) as standard.

D-Day, especially via spotting targets for naval gunfire, and later participated in Operation *Dragoon* (the allied landings on the southern French coast during August 1944).

Seafires distinguished themselves in service with the BPF in the Far East, and several units participated in a wide range of operations right up to the Japanese surrender in August 1945. Among them was 880 NAS, which joined HMS *Implacable* in March 1945 with its Seafire L.IIIIs and flew strikes against Japanese forces on Truk (now known as Chuuk State) in the western Pacific during June 1945 (Operation *Inmate*). The squadron ended the war by attacking targets on the Japanese home islands.

The highest-scoring Seafire pilot during the war was S Lt Richard H Reynolds (Royal Naval Volunteer

Reserve) of 894 NAS who claimed 4 1/2 aerial victories during 1944-45. He flew the now well-known L.III PR256/S 146 *Merry Widow*.

Post-war, Merlin-engined Seafires continued in FAA service and the final frontline units with the type were 887 and 894 NASs, which disbanded in March 1946. However, the Seafire persisted in the training role within the FAA. For example, 767 NAS accepted the type for the first time, during March 1946. This unit was a deck landing training school and flew a large variety of different aircraft for this purpose. Its Seafire Mk.IIIIs continued to serve until mid-1947, when the unit was based at Milltown in Morayshire.

Overseas operators

A small number of countries flew Merlin-engined Seafires besides Britain.

LEFT Photographed aboard the French aircraft carrier 'Arromanches' with its wings folded, Seafire Mk.III '1.F.10' belonged to the Aéronavale's Flottille 1F, which took the Seafire to war over Indochina in late 1948.



Following World War Two, Merlin-powered sub-types served briefly with the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN). Two units, 803 and 883 Squadrons, were delegated for RCN use from former FAA employment and both flew Merlin Seafires for a short time before transitioning to Rolls-Royce Griffon-powered versions.

The French naval air arm, the *Aéronautique Navale* (usually abbreviated to *Aéronavale*) was reconstituted following the liberation of France's North African possessions, with gradual restructuring and re-equipment taking place from 1943 onwards. The pace of this re-equipment accelerated following the end of the war in Europe, with both aircraft and carriers taking centre stage. Loaned to the French was the British RN 'flat top' HMS *Colossus*, which the French re-named *Arromanches*.

As a part of the re-equipment of operational aircraft for the French naval forces, during 1946 the *Aéronavale* became a major Seafire operator with the delivery of Seafire Mk.III airframes. They were ferried from Britain to Les Mureaux near Paris, where they were altered to French requirements. The total number is open to some debate, even among French

historians, but what is certain is the poor condition of some of the airframes. More than 100 appear to have been eventually supplied. Several accidents followed with these very much second-hand aircraft, due to the high number of hours that some had flown and their attendant large total of carrier landings. This eventually led to a board of enquiry to investigate the problem, and the resulting necessity for the best of the airframes to be stripped and virtually rebuilt. The situation was only really resolved with the supply to France of Griffon-engined Seafire Mk.XVs, which gradually replaced the worn Merlin-powered examples.

The main French frontline unit that flew Seafire Mk.III's was Flottille 1F, originally home-based at Cuers in the south of France. The second-line Escadrille de Servitude 54S was the major training and familiarisation unit for the type, although several other escadrilles had a small number of Seafires on hand for diverse duties.

Into action

The air group aboard *Arromanches* for its operational cruise to the war zone of Indochina comprised Flottille 1F with its Seafire Mk.III's and

Flottille 4F equipped with US-supplied Douglas SBD Dauntless dive-bombers. The ship and its support vessels arrived in Indochinese waters during late November 1948 and combat missions were commenced soon after. The Seafires' primary role was to defend both the carrier and the Dauntlesses from enemy air activity, but ultimately there was little danger of that from France's opponents, so the Seafires in effect from the outset were used for supporting French ground forces.

Unfortunately, the attrition rate of the Seafires caused by accidents prevented their long-term use in theatre and the *Arromanches* was withdrawn from the war zone within weeks. During the replacement of the Mk.III's by Griffon-engined Seafires, several Merlin-powered survivors were operated for a time alongside the Seafire Mk.XV's of Flottille 12F, mainly for familiarisation.

Irish air power

The only country that flew Seafires without an aircraft carrier on which to base them was Ireland. This operator never intended to take its Seafires to sea and they were land-based throughout their Irish service.

During August 1946 Ireland ordered 12 Seafire Mk.III's for the then Irish Army Air Corps. The chosen aircraft were all ex-RN examples and prior to delivery they were de-navalised with the removal of maritime equipment including the lower rear fuselage arrester hook assembly; wing folds were permanently locked.

The first four examples were handed over to an Irish representative by Supermarine during January 1947, subsequent deliveries taking place from February until September that year. The 12 aircraft were allocated the Irish serials 146 to 157. In service they operated with 1 Fighter Squadron, stationed at Gormanston, Co Meath. Besides the Seafires, a small number of two-seat Spitfire TR.9 airframes were bought, these serving as conversion trainers for pilots transitioning to operational Seafires.

The final Irish Seafire (number 150) was withdrawn from service in March 1955. **FP**

Author's Acknowledgement: Grateful thanks to Robin Powell for Seafire background information; similarly, to Patrick J Cummins and Joe Maxwell for their extensive research on Ireland's Seafires.

Next month: Ilyushin Il-28

RIGHT Home-based at RNAS Henstridge in Somerset, 761 NAS was an important FAA training unit, constituted as 2 Naval Air Fighter School. It flew a large number of Seafires of different marks, including this formation led by Seafire Mk.Ib NX957, wearing the barely discernible fuselage codes 'G1-A'.

