

## FLIGHTLINE

Newsletter of the American Aviation Historical Society

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## **News and Views**

## From the Editorial Hangar

**B**ack in October, ye editor hit a major milestone—80 years on planet Earth. At some point, that milestone is gonna hit back, and maybe sooner than later. We could go for another 10 or 15 years or another 10 or 15 minutes. For now, this part of the AAHS world will mostly turn as it has for the past seven months, but that will inevitably have to change. For one thing, expect more random delivery times than the current 1st and 15th of the month schedule. How, or if, FlightLine continues in the long term will depend on the Society's general well being over the next two or three years.

AAHS desperately needs active members—folks who are passionate about aviation history and eager to share their expertise and experiences with kindred spirits. If that's you, step up! HQ is always in need of volunteers to help with the behind-the-scenes work that must be done to keep AAHS functioning. Too far away to get to Flabob? The AAHS Journal is chronically short of material, 100% of which comes from our members or other outside sources.

If you can contribute in any way, shoot us an email at FlightLine@aahs-online.org We'll see that it gets into the proper hands. Meanwhile, have a safe and enjoyable Thanksgiving!

AAHS FlighLine Editor

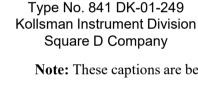
Joe Martn

**D**avid Wallenburn (AAHS #7231) contacted *FlightLine* regarding identification of the instruments shown below. The nomenclature on the data plates is obvious, but closing speed or lead/trail for what?

If you know, please contact David at: wallenburn@usamontana.com







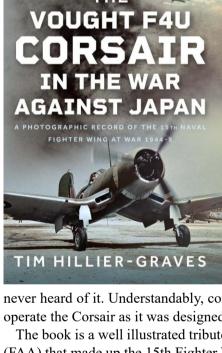


Type No. 841 DK-4-01-???? Kollsman Instrument Division Square D Company **Note:** These captions are best guesses only. The images are too indistinct to say for sure.

Trail and Lead Control Ind.

## The Vought F4U Corsair in the War Against Japan

Book Reviews



By Tim Hillier-Graves (2025)

A Photographic Record of the 15th Naval Fighter Wing at War 1944-5

ISBN: 978 1 03612 810 4 130 pages of text, with bibliography and index, numerous b&w photos, and a 16-

page spread of color images.

Available at <a href="https://www.casematepublishers.com/">https://www.casematepublishers.com/</a> or through Amazon.

On this side of the Atlantic, or at least in that part of it south of Canada, the title of this book may cause a little head scratching. Even the most casual student of the

heck was the 15th Naval Fighter Wing? It's a safe bet that most U.S. readers have never heard of it. Understandably, considering that it was not an American unit. What it was, was one of the first outfits to operate the Corsair as it was designed—from a British aircraft carrier, HMS *Illustrious*. The book is a well illustrated tribute to the Corsair and the men of the three squadrons of the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm (FAA) that made up the 15th Fighter Wing, from its training in the U.S. to combat in the Indian Ocean and on to the Pacific in support of the Okinawa landings. The story is told primarily through the reminiscences of FAA veterans that the author

Pacific air war is aware of the part played by the F4U in that conflict, but what the

previous work, Widowmaker: Living and Dying with the Corsair, from which many passages and a few photos have been reproduced.\* This current effort is divided into six "parts" (chapters), beginning with a brief overview of the development of the Corsair and its importance to both Vought and the Fleet Air Arm; Vought from the business/financial standpoint and the FAA from the need of a carrier-based fighter capable of matching up with contemporary enemy aircraft. The less demanding Grumman F6F would've been the FAA's weapon of choice, but with the Corsair confined to dry land and the new Essex class carriers fast coming on line, ever increasing USN demands precluding diverting many Hellcats to the British. Corsairs, on the other

interviewed or corresponded with in the 1990s or before. In many respects this book is an adjunct or supplement to his

department began to consider the possibility that unless it could be carrier qualified the Navy might stop further production. An answer, perhaps not the most desirable one, came with the word from London that "for political reasons it was essential that the British Fleet should take part in the main operations against Japan." In practical terms that meant steaming side by side with the U.S. Navy in the advance across the Pacific, all the way to Tokyo—a task that neither the Royal Navy nor Britain itself were equipped to handle. But the directive was clear; thus was conceived the Corsair-equipped 15th Fighter Wing, although some time would elapse before that designation became official. It was well known in aviation circles that the unforgiving Corsair could be deadlier to the operator than the Japanese Zero.

hand, were being parked on the Vought ramp while engineers scrambled to correct its often lethal habits and the accounting

Shortcomings exhibited during carrier operations were particularly troubling; so much so that American operations were initially limited to South Pacific bases. The remainder of the narrative describes the trials and tribulations of the Corsair squadrons as seen through the eyes of their pilots, some barely past their teen years, and the handful of veteran leaders who strove to keep their inexperienced young charges—and themselves—alive long enough to master the "Bent Wing Bastard" before facing the rigors of seaborne combat operations, first against the oil refineries of Japanese-held Sumatra then in the waters off Okinawa. The potentially deadly attributes of the Corsair are prominently featured, as are the measures devised to overcome them.

Even so, the airplane required unwavering attention. The author notes that between 1943 and April 1945, when the worn out *Illustrious* and its air wing were withdrawn from combat, 57 pilots had been assigned to the wing. Of these, 23 were killed, only seven the result of enemy action, and that number included two prisoners of war summarily executed only days before the Japanese surrender. Among the episodes unfamiliar to many U.S. readers was the March-May 1944 deployment in to Ceylon of the USS Saratoga (CV-3) with Air Group 12 to operate with the British Eastern Fleet so that *Illustrious* and her ship and air crews

could learn and practice American methods and procedures before the real test came in the Central Pacific. Credit is duly given to the U.S. Navy and the Vought engineers and tech reps who worked alongside the men who flew it to shape the Corsair into the legend it became. Gerry Salmon, a pilot in No. 1830 squadron, FAA, left this eloquent description of his time in the Corsair:

I wouldn't have wanted to go to war in anything else. They had a swagger and class all of their own, with such rugged good looks. And they seemed to sum up everything good about America and its people, where "can do, will do" was a way of life.

In the early days we were privileged to meet the Corsair's design team and they all seemed to exude this confidence and great competence besides, particularly Rex Beisel. And Tom Stanton, their technical representative on *Illustrious*, who was with us for so long, advising and directing maintenance programs, became something of a father figure to us all. We were very lucky to have these aircraft and the support of these good men. In summary, The Vought F4U Corsair in the War Against Japan is short, well written, and informative. The reader will come away with a fresh appreciation of the Corsair and of a little remembered segment of its career in British service. Review by Joe Martin



\* Also published by Casemate and recently available in Kindle version for \$2.99—quite a bargain.



A pair of WWII color shots of FAA Corsairs. At left is a "birdcage" canopy Corsair Mk I of No. 1833 squadron In "home waters" markings, photographed while training in the U.S.. (World War II Aircraft) The other is of a Mk II in initial Pacific markings. (War Thunder Wiki) To avoid mistaking for the Japanese rising sun, allied air forces removed all traces of red from national insignias.