



Spitfire F. Mk24

Spitfire F.Mk.24 VN317/P of 80 Sqn, RAF

This is actually the 1/72nd Airfix Spitfire Mk.22 kit first released in 2012(?); it is due for re-release in 2020.

It was good to see Airfix move away from the more traditional wartime Merlin-engined Spitfire Ia, Vb/c, and IX variants, and dipping their corporate toes into the final post-war Griffon-powered Marks with redesigned wings and enlarged tail units. These tail units were designed for the ill-fated Supermarine Spiteful and Seafang, neither of which entered service: the RAF was determined to have an all-jet fighter force; the Royal Navy chose the Hawker Sea Fury as its principal carrier-based fighter.

The Spitfire F.22 prototype, SX549, and the earliest airframes, PK312-15, initially had the same tail units as the Spitfire F.21, with a cut-down rear fuselage, and bubble canopy; a 24 volt electrical system replaced the 12 volt system of the F.21. The early F.22 airframes suffered from serious directional instability which was not readily solved. An additional rear fuel tank affected the aircraft's centre of gravity, making the stability problems considerably worse - using this fuel tank was quickly officially forbidden. The solution to the lack of directional stability lay in deleting the rear fuel tank from all bar the first few airframes, and in fitting what became known as the "Spiteful tail" to all F.22 airframes. This gave a 27% increase to the area of the tailplanes and elevators, and added 28% to the area of the fin and

rudder; this big increase in surface area only added an extra 3 inches to the length of the airframe.

627 Spitfire F.Mk.22 aircraft were ordered. It was envisaged that most would serve in the Pacific, but the end of the war resulted in the order being cut to 278 airframes. Apart from those that served with No.73 Squadron in Malta and Cyprus (from November 1947 until October 1948), the RAF's Spitfire F.Mk.22s served exclusively with Royal Auxiliary Air Force Squadrons until 1951. The F.22 was also sold to the Syrian Air Force (10), the Royal Egyptian Air Force (20), and the Southern Rhodesian Air Force (22); most were ex-RAF: there was an unconfirmed order for 100 for Argentina.

The Spitfire F.Mk.22 could carry 3 x 500lb bombs, as could the F.Mk.24, which can be considered a refined F.22; in fact, the first airframes were unfinished F.22s brought up to F.24 standards by Supermarine, and some were F.22s converted by the RAF. The F.21, F.22, and F.24 all shared the same Works Type Number – Type 356. The first true F.24 was delivered to No.33 MU in April 1946, and the last, VN496 - the very last Spitfire of all 20,351 built - was delivered in April 1949.

The only *visual* difference between the F.22 and F.24 lies in the fitting of the short-barrelled Hispano Mark V 20 mm cannon in *later production* F.24 airframes; earlier F.24 airframes retained the long-barrelled Hispano Mark II weapons. An electrical gun-firing system replaced the F.22's pneumatic system. The Spitfire F.Mk.22's ability to carry 3 x 500lb bombs was improved in the F.24 by having the additional option of carrying six air-to-ground rockets on zero-length launchers. The F.24 had two 33-gallon fuel tanks in the rear fuselage, the stability problems having been overcome. 81 Spitfire F.Mk.24 airframes were delivered to the RAF; the first 27 (PK*** serials) were converted from unfinished F.22s, the remaining 54 (VN*** serials)

were new builds. *Checking the airframe's serial number is by far the best way to differentiate which airframe was which Mark!*



I will not dwell on the minutiae of the build, except to say that it is a very nice little kit; a straightforward build, presenting no difficulties, even to a novice modeller. (Remember - add the pitot head, and the IFF aerial below the starboard wing, *after the decals are applied!*) A nice touch is the provision of two canopies, one for a closed cockpit, and the other for an open one. Airfix offers two decal choices: one, a camouflaged F.22 of No.607 (County of Durham) Squadron, Royal Auxiliary Air Force, in special racing finish for the 1948 Cooper Trophy Air Race; the other an F.22 of No.603 (City of Edinburgh) Squadron, Royal Auxiliary Air Force, in High Speed Silver (aluminium) in 1951, just prior to the Squadron re-equipping with de Havilland Vampires.

The model represents Spitfire F.Mk.24 VN317 from No.80 Squadron, in Germany in January 1948 - the only RAF squadron to operate this Mark. In late July 1949, No.80 was transferred to RAF Kai Tak, Hong Kong, becoming part of the Colony's air defence against possible Chinese aggression during the Korean War.



No.80 Sqn retained its Spitfire F.24s until December 1951 when it began re-equipping with the de Havilland Hornet F.Mk.3; the final Spitfire left the Squadron in January 1952.

The ex-No.80 Sqn F.24s went to the Hong Kong Auxiliary Air Force, serving until January 15th 1955. However, three survivors participated in a fly-past celebrating the Queen's birthday on April 15th 1955, the last Spitfire to land being VN485; this aircraft returned to the UK in 1989 and is preserved at Duxford.

VN317 was the mount of Squadron Leader R. A. Newberry, the C.O. of No.80 Squadron. This aircraft had non-standard code letters – light blue, shadow-shaded with white – and a white spinner. It carried the squadron badge on the tail fin, and a Squadron Leader's pennant on either side forward of the cockpit. Although it had the standard wartime temperate camouflage of Ocean Grey/Dark Green/Medium Sea Grey, the roundels and fin flash were of the post-1947 style, in bright colours.

VN317 was built in 1946 at Supermarine's Keevil factory near Devizes; on 18th July 1946 it was at the Empire Central Flying School,

before transferring to No.80 Squadron. A wheels-up landing at Renfrew on 7th July 1949 saw VN317 being written off and scrapped.



Paints and satin varnish are by Xtracrylix.

Decals come from Xtradecal sheet X72-128. VN317's markings are dated for July 1948, when based at RAF Lübeck, Germany. The blue/white codes are provided as separate components for accurate alignment. This decal sheet also offers an RAF Kai Tak, No.80 Sqn Spitfire F.24, with the black and white identity stripes of the United Nations air forces during the Korean War. The remaining options on the Xtradecal sheet are for six Royal Auxiliary Air Force Spitfire F.MK.22 airframes, in both camouflaged and High Speed Silver finishes.

Whenever I finish a kit, I ask myself whether I would build another one... I wholeheartedly recommend this kit; this is my fourth build from this little kit – *there are more to come..!*