

SURPLUS AIRCRAFT AT LITCHFIELD PARK

by

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The Naval Air Facility, Litchfield Park, was established during the Second World War to accept newly modified aircraft from the adjacent Goodyear Aircraft Corporation plant. It is located near Avondale and Litchfield Park, about ten miles West of Phoenix, Arizona,

In late 1945 the Navy's need for operational aircraft had materially decreased, and it was decided to utilize the ideal conditions of the Phoenix area, for the storage of excess aircraft. By 1947, 1000 aircraft of twelve basic types were stored at the installation, and it was designated as a service stop for Naval aircraft flying the trans-continental ferry route.

In June, 1950 the station had 2,000 aircraft on hand, of eighteen different types. The foresight of the preservation program proved its value during the Korean War, when many aircraft were quickly re-commissioned into the service, and made available for the fighting in Korea.

Currently, the facility has two missions. The primary objective is to store reserve aircraft that have been withdrawn from active service, and to keep these aircraft maintained in order to be able to re-issue them to the fleet should any emergency arise. The second objective is the modification of operational type aircraft.

Litchfield Park currently (March 1958) stores approximately 135 active Naval Aircraft, along with about 2,500 inactive aircraft, which are being prepared for transfer to our allies, for sale to civilian contractors, or for salvage. Salvage aircraft are stripped of all essential aircraft components, which are channeled back into the Navy's supply system for support of aircraft now in service with the fleet. Litchfield Park is the only Naval Air Facility that is devoted exclusively to the storage and disposal of reserve aircraft.

When an aircraft is declared surplus, bids are opened, and those not purchased by dealers, or other individuals are usually salvaged.

There is a considerable number of types of aircraft now in storage at Litchfield Park. There is no established number of types, however, as types are continually entering storage or being salvaged. Some of the types of aircraft now in storage, according to my observations, are: Grumman F6F-5, F7F-3, F8F-2, F9F-2, F9F-4, F9F-5, F9F-6, F9F-7, AF-2, UF-1; Goodyear FG-1D; Convair PBV-6A, P4Y-2; North American SNJ-5, SNJ-6, AJ-2, FJ-2; Lockheed WV-2, R6V-1 (both remaining examples), R7V-2, FV-2, P2V-2, TV-1, TV-2; Chance Vought F4U-4, F4U-5, F7U-3, F7U-3M; Douglas AD-1, AD-2, AD-4, R4D-6, JD-1X, F3D; Curtiss R5C-1; General Motors TBM-3; Martin PBM-5A (one left); McDonnell F2H; Fairchild R4Q; and Beech JRB-4.

I have observed some types during the past year that are not there presently, and I suspect that they have been salvaged or flown out with civilian registrations.

These types include the PB4Y-1, AM-1, PB-1 and P4M-1. I photographed a PB4Y-1P at Phoenix in January 1958, and the last PB-1VJ is at Phoenix now, registered N-5228V.

The Phoenix area has a considerable number of surplus aircraft from the Naval Air Facility. Sky Harbor Airport, which is the airline terminal and the most active Phoenix airport, has the following types of Naval aircraft: Convair PB4Y-6A, General Motors TBM-3E (some are stored, while two are operated as crop dusters), North American SNJ-4 (four are stored, unlicensed), Lockheed PV-2, PV-2T and PV-2T2 (which are all licensed, but still retain their Navy markings).

Some of the types I have seen which have passed through the Phoenix area are: Consolidated PB4Y-1P, P4Y-2 and P4Y-2G (a Coast Guard model, still retaining all markings). Several Chance Vought F4U-4's, with civil registrations, some Grumman F7F-3's, and two Curtiss R5C-1's, former Marine Corps aircraft, are currently at Litchfield Park. They are on contractor's areas, and will be flying out soon. Another interesting aircraft I saw was a Lockheed WV-2, complete with radar installations, with a civil registration.

Litchfield Park houses one of the most interesting collections of Naval aircraft in existence today. In addition to examples of nearly every type of aircraft the Navy has operated during the past ten years, there are aircraft carrying markings and insignia of most of the Naval Air Stations, Aircraft Carriers, and Special projects. Also, at least four different color schemes are present on the aircraft in storage. From the dull gray of WW2 to the light gray and white camouflage of the present, is shown, in part, the development of Navy camouflage.

I would like to express my appreciation of the cooperation of Commander G. D. Gilmore, Executive Officer of the installation, without which, this report would have been impossible. The information concerning types of aircraft is from my own observations only, and not from any official source,.

Members interested in photos of these aircraft are invited to contact me at 3307 East Hubbell Street, Phoenix, Arizona.
