

The Curtiss Goshawk

By WILLIAM T. LARKINS

Of all the planes that the Navy flew in the early 1930s, probably the one type that has been consistently admired, by airplane enthusiasts, and yet most misunderstood, is the Curtiss F11C-2 "Goshawk". To this day, thirty years later, correct information and photographs of it are nearly impossible to find. Most of the following photos are being published for the first time and will be a remarkable addition to any collector's files.

Probably the major contributor to the confusion surrounding this plane has been the model industry. Due to the lack of any positive information, other than one or two published photos, the modeler could hardly have known any better when confronted with "F11C4" 1-F-7 with the Felix insignia (Model Airplane News, April 1939, page 4-9); F11C-2 6-F-48 with Felix (M.A.N., Feb., 1938, page 33); or the Lindberg plastic kit No. 535 showing 7-F-1 with the High Hat insignia. Adding to the confusion are the more frequently published photos of the BFC-2, appearing identical to many, with 2-B and 3-B on the side. With five squadron numbers thus involved, and two different insignias, it is little wonder that the poor enthusiast has been bewildered. Even such current plans for the F11C-2 as those in the October 1962 issue of American Modeler are in error both in regard to the plane and its markings.

The most important thing to remember in regard to the F11C-2, of which only 27 production "service" aircraft were built, is that except for one five month period in 1938, only one squadron operated them. This squadron was the famous "High Hat" unit which flew the planes from the time that they were delivered new in February 1933, until they were replaced by Vought SB2U-1s in February 1938.

Of secondary importance is the fact that these 27 planes flew as F11C-2s for one year only, and for the High Hat squadron (VF-1B) only. They were redesignated as BFC-2 in March 1934, modified with a higher turtle-back and the addition of a half-canopy, and served for four years as fighter-bombers. During this time the High Hat squadron was redesignated Bombing Two (VB-2B), and then Bombing Three (VB-3B), so that while it may appear at first that these planes flew for three units they were in fact flying for the same squadron while it was undergoing a normal chronological change.

We now list for the first time, the pilots that flew the F11C-2 with VF-1B aboard the USS Saratoga as of July 1933: Lt Morton T. Seligman (C.O.), Lt Thomas S. Combs, Lt Frank C. Sutton, Lt Selden B. Spangler, Lt Alfred C. Olney, Jr., Lt Edwin R. Peck, Lt (jg) Charles W. Oexle, Lt (jg) Rufus C. Young, Jr., Lt (jg) William L. Erdman, Lt (jg) Richard K. Gaines, Lt (jg) Michael P. Bagdanovich, Lt (jg) Earl A. Junghans, Lt (jg) John W. Davison, Lt (jg) Lloyd K. Greenamyre, Lt (jg) William S. Arthur, Lt (jg) Carl E. Giese, Ensign Thomas B. Haley, Ensign Edward C. Renfro and Ensign Lyle L. Koepke.

The XF11C-1 (9219) was ordered on Contract number 26572 of 16 April 1932 and powered by a Wright R-1510 engine of 600 hp. The XF11C-2 (9213) was ordered the same day on Contract number 264-80, with a Wright R-1820-E of 700 hp. Contract number 2884-7, of 18 October 1932, provided for 28 production aircraft, 9265-9282 and 9331-9340. Serial number 9269 was modified to use a retractable landing gear and thus became the XF11C-3, the prototype for the later production BF2C-1.

The F11C-2/BFC-2 operated aboard the USS Saratoga

during the entire time that the High Hats were going from VF-1B to VB-2B to VB-3B. When eleven BFC-2s left the squadron in January 1938, they went to the newly forming Bombing Six (VB-6) assigned to the USS Enterprise CV-6. It is doubtful that these BFC-2s ever landed on the carrier as they were replaced by Northrop BT-1s in May at the same time that the new ship was commissioned.

After leaving Anacostia in 1933, the XF11C-1 was assigned to Curtiss at Buffalo. In 1934 it was used by the Inspector of Naval Aircraft at Curtiss, by this time having been redesignated XBFC-1. After further storage, it was assigned to the INA at the Wright Corporation, Patterson, New Jersey, and remained there until 1936 when it was transferred to the N.A.C.A. lab, Langley Field. It stayed there through November 1938.

In addition to the squadron use mentioned, BFC-2s were assigned to a few other units. One was at the Naval Aircraft Factory for repairs, vibration tests and carburetor tests in 1935 and 1936. Two were assigned to the INA at Wright in 1934 and one in 1935.

By far the most interesting are their final assignments in 1938. On June 30th two were with the Utility Unit at NAS Seattle; four with the Utility Unit of Patrol Wing Two at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii; and three were assigned to Norfolk "awaiting action". Then, on November 30th, two were at Seattle; four in Hawaii, with one in storage; and three in storage at the Fleet Air Base, Coco Solo, Canal Zone. The final record of the BFC-2s was that a total of three were on hand at FAB Coco Solo on June 30, 1939. Perhaps some A.A.H.S. Member can turn up the remains of a BFC-2 in Panama.'

Colors. The standard colors as set forth in the February 1933 "Specifications for Naval Aircraft Insignia and Markings" apply to both the F11C-2 and BFC-2. When VF-1B first flew the F11C-2 they did not paint the cowls any color, but as will be seen in the following photos, this was changed during 1933 to bring the squadron in line with standard practice.

Section colors were assigned as follows: Section 1, Insignia Red; Section 2, White; Section 3, True Blue; Section 4, Black; Section 5, Willow Green; and Section 6, Lemon Yellow. Each section leader had a 20-inch wide colored band around the fuselage as well as a fully colored cowl, these being planes number 1, 4, 7, 10, 13 and 16. The number two plane of each section had only the upper half of its cowl painted and no fuselage band, these being 2, 5, 8, 11, 14 and 17. The number 3 plane of each section had the lower half of the cowl painted and no fuselage band; planes number 3, 6, 9, 12, 15 and 18.

Every plane in the squadron had a colored chevron on the upper surface of the top wing in the proper color for the section to which the plane was assigned. The normal position was for the apex to point towards the nose of the plane, and it did so until VB-2B changed their tail color to white in 1937. At this time the squadron, for reasons unknown, reversed the chevron as can be seen in the photo of 3-B-7. The number of the plane was centered inside the chevron. The tail surface was painted red as a squadron color until 1937. In June this was changed to white, tail colors then being assigned to carriers. For a short time VB-2B flew with white tails before becoming VB-3B. The VB-6 BFC-2s used blue - the color assigned to the new Enterprise.



The Curtiss XF11C-1 at the factory with a 500-lb bomb attached to the bomb release mechanism which swung it down and forward to clear the propeller. Engine is a Wright R-1510, twin row, 14- cylinder. (Photo - Curtiss W-7918)



A rare flight photo of the XF11C-1 taken on November 4, 1932. Note the twin row engine, cowling, wheel struts and pants. (Photo - Curtiss W-7803)



The XF11C-1 redesignated XBFC-1 and used to test various cowling configurations for better cooling at low speeds. At NACA Langley, 1936-38. (Photo - NACA LMAL 12063)



The XF11C-2 with distinctive small air wheels and pants, thin cowling, radio mast, etc. is seen at the factory on June 22, 1932. (Photo - Curtiss W-7457)



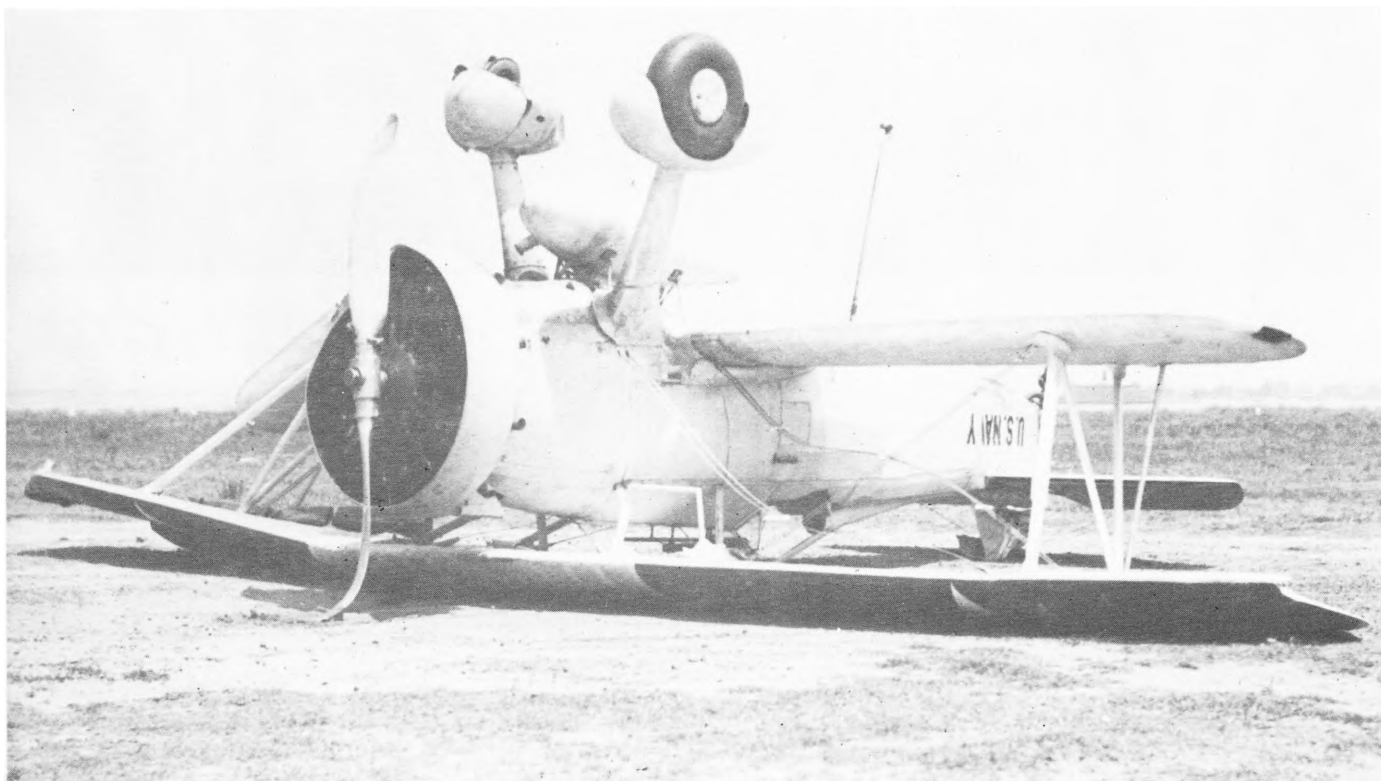
The civil demonstrator for export sales of the Goshawk, factory serial DH-46, was licensed 8-1-33. Note modified, flattened belly tank. (Photo - William T. Larkins)



The Curtiss XF11C-2 in clean condition, without bombs or belly tank, is seen on May 17, 1932 with Wright R-1820-E engine and 2-blade propeller. (Photo - Navy AN-31554)



The same plane, number 9213, with 116-lb bombs underwing but with Wright SR-1820F engine and 3-blade propeller on July 19, 1932. (Photo - Navy AN-31562)



During arrestor tests at Norfolk, Virginia on August 1, 1932, 9213's small, soft tires proved unsatisfactory (as witnessed by the results of the landing above) and were later replaced by hard, 36 x 6 tires. (Photo - Navy HR-1270)



The first production F11C-2, 9265. After vibration and carburetor tests at the Naval Aircraft Factory it became 2-B-15. (Photo - Navy AN-31806)



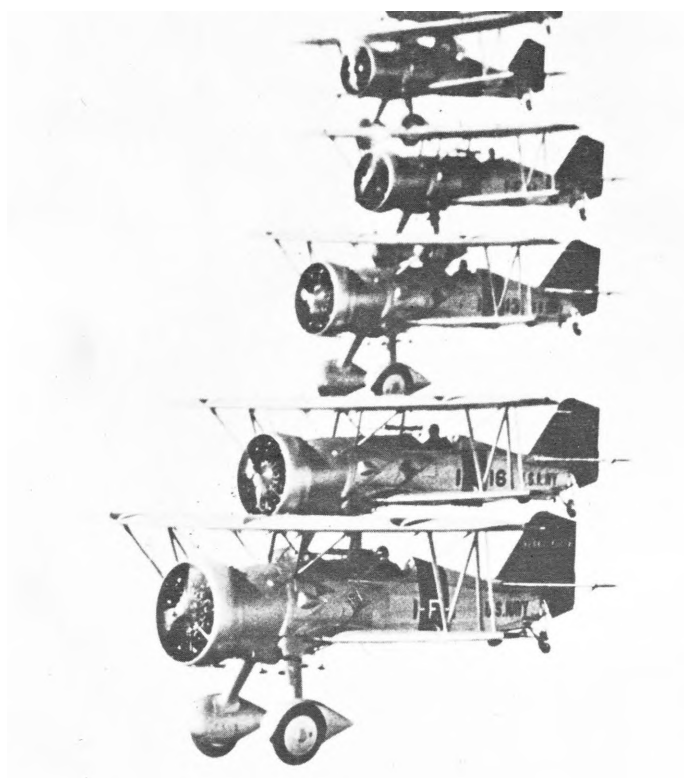
A Curtiss F11C-2 equipped with 50-gal. belly tank. During tests the XF11C-2 sustained 10.2 Gs on pullout, the highest ever recorded for a Naval aircraft. (W-7788)



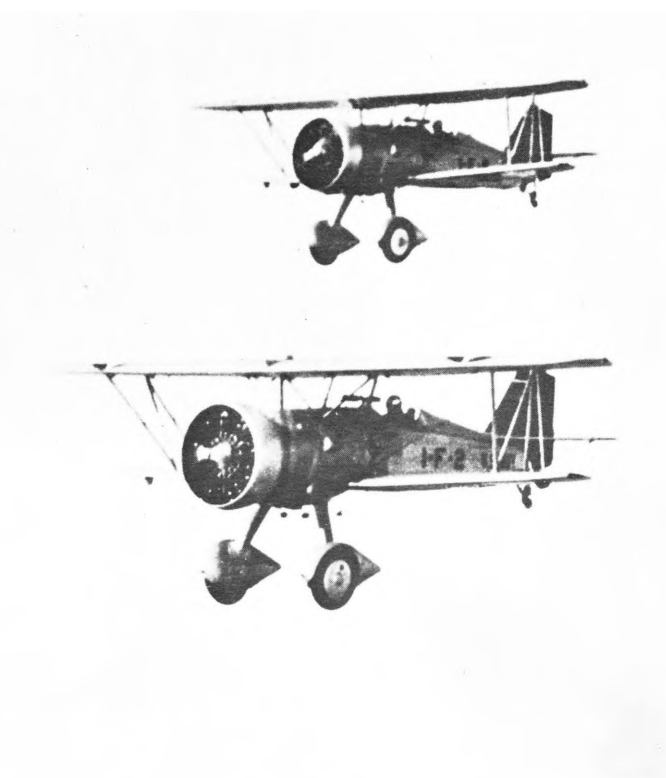
Third production F11C-2, 9267, at Grand Central Air Terminal, Glendale, California in 1933; Lt (jg) Lloyd K. Greenamyre, pilot. Cowl unpainted. (Photo - Mitchell)



Section two leader flown by Lt. Thomas S. Combs. Note red triangular gunnery pennant forward of High Hat squadron insignia. (Photo - John C. Mitchell)



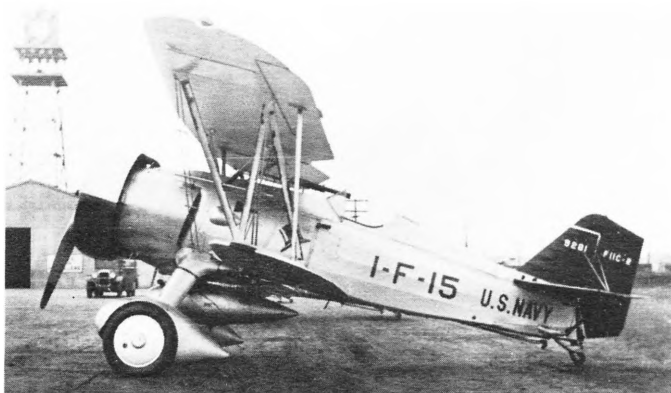
Lt. Morton T. Seligman, Commanding Officer of Fighting One, in 1-F-1 with section leaders 1-F-16 and 1-F-13 to his right. Note unpainted cowls but use of fuselage stripe and belly tank sway braces. (Photo - A.A.H.S. L-241)



Early photo of fourth production F11C-2 without belly tank. Compare with photo on right showing replacement aircraft at a later date. (Photo - Fred Dickey, Jr.)



A second 1-F-3, 9333, at Long Beach on 18 February 1933. Note lower half of cowl painted red and 16mm camera gun mounted on top of the wing. (Photo - Ed McCollon)



1-F-15, number 9281, at Long Beach, California on February 25, 1934. The dark red tail color of VF-1B appears black due to the film. (Photo - Ed McCollon)



Final proof that the F11C-2s did have their cowlings painted. Lt. Alfred C. Olney, Jr. was pilot of 9282. Speed was 205.1 mph. (Photo - John C. Mitchell)



LCDR Alan P. Flagg, Co.O. of VB-2B, warming up the engine of his plane. The F11C-2s were changed to BFC-2s in March 1934 prior to the July squadron change of VF-1B to VB-2B. Note the half canopy. (Photo - Ed McCollon)



Section two leader, 9336, with white fuselage stripe and cowl, flown by Lt. John E. Pixton. Note the forward facing wing chevron. (Photo - Ed McCollon)



A beautiful shot of 2-B-18 at Long Beach, flown at this time by Lt. (jg) Edward C. Renfro. This plane, 9332, became 3-B-12 in 1937. (Photo - John C. Mitchell)



A July 1937 photo of the number three section leader flown by Lt (jg) Joseph B. H. Young. Note reverse wing chevron. Rare "C" is believed to be for excellency in communications. White tail for USS Saratoga. (Photo - W. L. Swisher)



White tailed 3-B-8 at March Field in July 1937, flown by Ensign Garrett S. Coleman. As far as known BFC-2s never flew without belly tank. (Photo - W. Swisher)



Section five leader with Willow Green cowling and fuselage stripe at Oakland, California in 1937. Note thin black line outlining stripe. (Photo - W. T. Larkins)



Ex 2-B-4 now flown by Aviation Cadet J. W. Kerr. The top half of the cowl is painted Lemon Yellow. VB-3 changed to SB2U-1s in 1938. (Photo - W. T. Larkins)



A rare photo of 9333 from VB-6 which had a few for five months while organizing, prior to BT-1s. Insignia is a ram; tail color is blue. (Photo - F. C. Dickey, Jr.)