

US MARINE CORPS AIRCRAFT

Bell AH-1J Sea Cobra

Based on the successful Bell UH-1 “Huey,” the Cobra attack helicopter took only six months to develop and made its combat debut during the Vietnam War (1964–75). The Cobra uses the same engine, transmission and rotor system as the Huey, but in a streamlined and redesigned fuselage. It has a top speed of 219 mph (352 kph). Tandem seating places the pilot behind and above the gunner. Located in a chin-nose turret under the gunner, the three-barreled mini-gun was devastating when used against ground targets. Marine Corps variants carried larger guns and were twin-engined.



This AH-1 is a veteran of both the Vietnam War and Operation Desert Storm (1991). It was the last flying “J” model to be retired, making its final landing on board the Intrepid on October 29, 1993, flown by Major Warren Fox, USMC, of squadron MAG-42. This was the first time that an aircraft to be given to the museum had flown aboard under its own power. The Sea Cobra was officially turned over to the museum’s chairman, Zachary Fisher, by Colonel Beaver, USMC, Commanding Officer of VMA-775. It is on loan from the National Museum of the Marine Corps.

British Aerospace AV-8A Harrier

Most combat aircraft require long runways or an aircraft carrier’s powerful catapults to get airborne. Not this Harrier “Jump Jet.” It uses vectored-thrust technology to take off and land vertically. Smaller jet nozzles on the airframe control the aircraft while hovering. Developed from the experimental Hawker P.1126 and 1127 of 1960, the first Harrier GR Mark 1 flew on December 28, 1967. Commissioned by Britain’s Royal Air Force and Royal Navy, the Harrier has a top speed of 661 mph (1065 kph) and first saw combat during the Falklands War (1982).



The U.S. Marine Corps realized the Harrier’s potential and made an initial purchase of 110 AV-8A Harrier I planes from Britain in 1970–71. Later McDonnell-Douglas AV-8B Harriers were the first Marine Corps tactical strike aircraft to be utilized during Operation Desert Storm (1991), flying 3,342 sorties in over 4,300 flight hours.

This aircraft displayed on the flight deck is part of the original Marine Corps order of Harrier Is and is on loan from the National Museum of the Marine Corps.

Douglas F3D-2 Skyknight

The Skyknight was the US Navy's first jet-propelled all-weather fighter. First flown on February 13, 1950, it was one of a series of naval jets designed by Edward Henry "Ed" Heinemann for Douglas. The most famous was the A4 Skyhawk of 1954, one of which is on display in the hangar deck exhibition. The large two-seat Skyknight, nicknamed "Willie the Whale" because of its bulbous appearance, carried a pilot and radar operator. It could fly 600 mph (966 kph) at heights up to 44,000 feet (13,411 meters).



Skyknights destroyed more enemy aircraft than any other type flown by the U.S. Navy or Marines in the Korean War (1950–53). The first Skyknight success was recorded, while flown by a Marine Corps squadron, on November 2, 1952—the first time one jet aircraft had destroyed another during a night interception. Skyknights also played an important operational role in the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) and later in the Vietnam War (1964–75).

This Skyknight displayed on the flight deck was operated by Raytheon in Massachusetts as an electronics test plane until it was donated to the museum in 1987. It is painted in the colors of Marine squadron VMFN-513 as flown during the Korean War.

McDonnell F-4N Phantom



The Phantom was one of the first fighters adopted by multiple armed services. Developed for the U.S. Navy, the F-4B was compared with Air Force fighters in 1961 and found to out-perform all by a wide margin. The two-seat Phantom flew at 1,500 mph (2,415 kph) at heights up to 50,000 feet (15,239 meters). More than 5,000 were produced and flown by American and foreign armed forces.

Originally, Phantoms carried missiles but no guns: designers felt confident that its longer-range Sparrow III missiles made cannons unnecessary. Despite successful missile duels with North Vietnamese MiGs during the Vietnam War (1964–75), close encounters sometimes proved them wrong. These experiences laid the groundwork for the next generation of dogfighters, such as the F-14 Tomcat and F-16 Fighting Falcon.

This Phantom is an F-4B that was modified to an F-4N in 1971. It served with Marine squadron VMF-323 on combat standby during the failed Iranian hostage rescue mission of April 24, 1980 in the same markings as seen in the photograph supplied by Bill Bowers, a pilot with that squadron then. Our Phantom is painted as it appeared then. The aircraft is displayed on the flight deck, and is on loan from the National Museum of Naval Aviation in Pensacola, Florida.