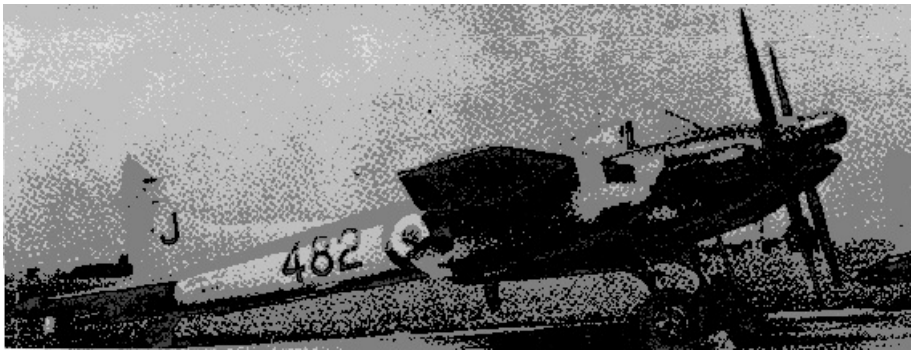
DeHavilland Sea Hornet NF.21

History: During 1942 DeHavilland began development of a single seat fighter based on the Mosquito and retaining its wooden construction. The resulting Hornet looked similar to the Mosquito but was smaller with a composite metal and wood wing. It was aerodynamically refined and powered by Merlin engines with reduced frontal area. The first Hornet flew on 28 July 1944, production began in late 1944 and the first Hornet was delivered to the RAF in February 1945. They were too late to see service in Europe and plans to use them in the Pacific War did not eventuate when that war ended unexpectedly early in August 1945. A total of 60 Hornet F.1s were produced and a further 132 Hornet F.3s. They saw active service in Malay from 1950 to 1955 against the Communist insurgents and were phased out of service due to lack of spares.

During development of the Hornet DeHavilland began work on a navalised version and in late 1944 three early Hornet F.1s were modified to naval standard with high-drag flaps, arrester hook, catapult hookup, stronger undercarriage and other equipment. The first prototype flew on 19 April 1945 and the third prototype commenced carrier trials in August 1945. The Sea Hornet F.20 was similar to the RAF's Hornet F.3 and, despite its modifications, was around the same weight as the land based fighter. A total of 78 Sea Hornet F.20s were built and they commenced service with the Royal Navy in June 1947. They embarked on their first cruise in 1949 and served operationally until 1951 when they were replaced by Sea Furies, although some F.20s served in second-line roles until 1955. A reconnaissance version, the PR.22, was also developed and 43 were produced.



In late 1945 the Royal Navy issued an urgent requirement for a carrier based, two seat night fighter. Two Hornet F.3s were converted to the new standard, equipped with a radar thimble in the nose, flame dampers on the exhausts, a small bubble canopy on the rear fuselage for the navigator/radar operator and a larger tailplane assembly to compensate for the second cabin and canopy. The resulting Sea Hornet NF.21 was slightly longer than the Hornet F.3 because of its thimble radar nose and its empty weight was about a tonne heavier, but it was still capable of carrying the full F.3 armament. The NF.21 served as the standard night fighter on four Royal Navy Carriers where it was also used as a formation leader for strike fighters. They remained in service until 1954 when they were replaced by Sea Venoms, although some remained in service as radar trainers for a further year.

Data: *Engine* two Rolls Royce Merlin 130/131 piston engines of 1544kW (2,070hp) each. *Wing span* 13.72m (45ft). *Length* 11.17m (36ft 8in). *Maximum speed* 752km/h (467mph). *Range* 4025km (2050miles). *Armament* four 20mm Hispano cannon and two 454kg(1000lb) bombs or eight 27.2kg (60lb) rocket projectiles.

The kit: Special Hobby 1:72

Unlike the Hornet, which is an extremely elegant aeroplane, the Sea Hornet NF.21 kept much of its elegance but got a new nose and bubble canopy that somehow make it look more

business-like. When the Special Hobby Hornet F.1 and F.3 kits came out it seemed it would only be a matter of time until the Sea Hornet versions also appeared, and finally they did. The box, with its excellent art, contains plastic parts for a standard Hornet/Sea Hornet and decals and resin bits to suit the various versions. The NF.21 kit contains lots of beautiful resin part including the new nose and a fully detailed rear cabin for the radar operator, which is hidden inside the fuselage halves when it comes time to put the fuselage halves together. The decal sheet is excellent and offers three versions; although the colour schemes are identical and so, with a little innovation or help from the spare decals box, it should be possible to make any of the NF.21s. (A slightly querulous aside; I don't know how reliable the decals are. I found a photo of one with the large numbers 488 but the decals don't have the same serial numbers as the photo. Does this mean that the large numbers might have changed over time, that the photo is wrong or the decals are wrong? Who knows?)

The kit parts look very nice in their cellophane bag but the trouble starts then you take them out and start trying to assemble them. Almost nothing fits. Both the cockpit and radar operator's cabins are beautifully detailed with resin and etched metal parts all put together with super glue, but when it comes time to fit them into a fuselage side there are two problems. One is that there is no indication of precisely where they should go. This is a bit of a problem with the cockpit which can slip back or forward four or five millimetres, which effects the look of the final model. It is the same for the rear cabin, but you can't see that anyhow. Having solved that problem, there is then the problem of having to get them to fit inside the fuselage snugly because they are far too wide in their original state. There went another evening in trimming and fitting and trimming and fitting until things were tolerable. Other parts that don't fit without a struggle are the nose, the tail planes, the canopies and the exhaust dampers. The dihedral built into the kit is alarming so another hour or so went into making up a spar on which to mount the wings and then there was all that additional time filling in the large gaps between the fuselage and the wings. In fact, it would be fair to say that the pieces that didn't fit outnumbered those that did, by a wide margin.

The non-fitting bits that annoyed me the most were the undercarriage and the propellers. The kit offers you two fairly rudimentary undercarriage legs and then a number of tiny parts to mount them on the fuselage. This would give you a realistic looking undercarriage mounting and a blinding headache, but since there is no wheel well detailing it all seemed rather futile so I just glued the legs to the fuselage and left it at that. On the other hand, whoever it was that told kit makers that modellers wanted kits with individual propeller blades should be consigned to a special place in Hell where they have to spend eternity making up endless Special Hobby propellers for Hornet and Sea Hornet kits. Since none of the parts fitted but propellers are fairly prominent, I spent a night or so struggling with the infernal little pieces of plastic trying to get everything to fit properly and lined up tolerably squarely. Come to think of it, eternity would not be long enough.

The painting is simple, more or less. Dark grey on top and 'Sky' on the sides and underside. One of the great debates in modelling used to be, and it still may be for all I know, what colour is 'Sky'. I had a nice bottle of Aeromaster 'Sky' that I had been treasuring for many years since they went out of business. This, I decided, was the kit to use it on. I'm not sure that the result isn't a little bit too green, but that's how it came out of the bottle. On with the decals, despite misgivings about their accuracy, and the trial was over. Didn't deHavilland make lovely looking machines?