AVSIM Commercial Aircraft Review

F-4U Corsair

Product Information		
Publishers: Aircraft Factory (through A2A Simulations		
Description: WW2 Military Aircraft Add-On.		
Download Size: 86.3 MB	**Format:** Download	**Simulation Type:** FSX
Reviewed by: Alexis Esguerra **AVSIM Senior Contributing Reviewer - September 12, 2009**		

Introduction

If one was to judge the F4U Corsair based on the nicknames it earned from its US pilots, one would be hard pressed to make a quick assessment. The monikers covered the whole good-to-bad spectrum with such dubs as a positive

Sweetheart of Okinawa, a neutral Bent Wing Bird, or the downright dreadful Ensign Eliminator. Japanese pilots that engaged it, however, had a very specific name for the Chance Vought machine that came to symbolize Marine Corp aviation in WW2 - Whistling Death, based on the distinctive sound it made while in flight at high speed, and its fearsome reputation in aerial combat.

While it did not match the F6F Hellcat's kill ratio of 19:1, the Corsair was no slouch. Figures estimate an 11:1 overall kill ratio during its service with the US Navy alone (it also served with the British, French, and New Zealand armed forces, amongst others countries) during its service in WW2 and the Korean War.
The Corsair, one of the more advanced aircraft designs to be borne out of the hostilities in the Pacific, was an excellent combat machine in both the air-to-air and air-to-ground roles. To date - and likely forever - it holds the record for the longest production run of any single piston-engine fighter in US history, 10 years to be precise.

Not bad for something once called the Ensign Eliminator.

It is this aircraft that newcomer Aircraft Factory decided to jump into the FSX add-on aircraft line with. Grab a pair of goggles and a Mae West as we look into what they have here in their F4U Corsair.

Installation and Documentation

Corsair came to me in the form of an 86.3MB installer (downloaded from A2A's website for $24.99), from which no hiccups were noted during the process of throwing the package into FSX. Besides the planes themselves, it also has a 26-page manual that gives the simmer some needed insights into the plane.

'Insights' is a pretty good term; it's a brief overview of the Corsair, along with 5 pages of checklists that will help one fly it. Personally, I might've appreciated something more in-depth regarding the history of the applicable aircraft, but my personal wants and desires do not warrant a fault in what is provided. It gets the job of introductions and how-to-fly done, and that's what counts.

A total of three variants of the legendary 'Hog' are provided, the -1A in the scheme of VMF-214 (specifically the famed Black Sheep squadron, and the chosen -1A is none other than Maj Gregory 'Pappy' Boyington's own "Lulubelle"), the -1C hailing from VF-85, and the -1D from VF-84. Aside from some minor differences in the external details and the cockpit interior, they are all essentially the 3-bladed variety of this venerable fighter (the fourth propeller blade started showing up in (ironically enough) the -4 variant).

In And Out Details

I don't care if you love or hate the F4U; she is a plane that cuts a rather unique profile. With its longish snout and gull wings, it's just about impossible to mistake it for anything else. For the sake of this review, I'll concentrate mostly on the 1A model.

Given my long love for the Corsair, I had fairly high expectations from AF as I waited for FSX to finish loading up the plane, and I was not disappointed. From every angle, their offering of the F4U was amazing to behold. The textures of the exterior model, from the 18-cylinder R2800 Wasp engine up front to the tip of the arrestor gear hook all the way aft, is extremely well done, crisp to where individual parts are easily identifiable from a distance.

The detailing is excellent, right down to the rivets and panel lines that provide the right amount of depth without going into overkill (poke your head in one of the wheel wells and you'll see what I mean). Same can be said about the weathering, even if AF's -1A's paint (and the others for that matter) looks relatively untouched by the rigors of aerial combat, there is just enough of it to indicate use. The exhaust stains streaming back from the engine, the most apparent sign of this, is utterly convincing.

The cockpit, unmistakably circa-40 in its appearance, also deserves praise. While there were so many Corsair variants and/or post-era modifications on surviving examples, the basics of the pilot's office was done justice. The layout of the panel is very much correct, and the controls and switches present are excellent in their rendering. And since we're sitting in the cockpit, let me say right here and now that the view, or lack thereof, is just as convincing; the nose seems to go forever, making one serious blind spot when on the ground, and especially during a landing. At a minimum, some altering of the viewpoint is needed in these scenarios to avoid some unhappy incidents, or you can employ some techniques that actual Corsair pilots used to keep their planes in one piece (a curving flight path to the runway/deck on landing was one such practice).

No niceties such as an autopilot; its stick and rudder boys and girls, as it was back in those days. Compensating for that is the vast amount of clickables in the cockpit. Most of the switches, buttons, and levers are interactive, even if a good percentage of them don't do anything (you can just imagine how much I wanted the armament switches to work). However, it's too early in the review to make that determination as a final statement. I'll explain that last one a little later.

As for animations, we've got accurate gear movement (a ninety degree pivot of the mains before they fold up into the wings), engine smoke on startup, wing-fold, a tail hook that works (more than you realize; more on that later), and a pilot that seems to pay attention to his surroundings.

While all of these are fairly standard on payware aircraft these days, it's nice to know AF didn't miss that boat. Other features worth mentioning are droppable fuel tanks (with the flight model reacting to the sudden loss of weight as can be expected), wing rockets that can be removed or installed with a simple click of the appropriate switch in the cockpit, and compatibility with Shockwave's 3D Lights.

Flight Model

As with almost everything else that I've reviewed, it was not practical nor realistic to go into the review of AF's F4U trying to prove that the flight model IS or IS NOT like the real deal; try as I might, I don't think any self-respecting Corsair owner would allow me to take their priceless bird into the air in the first place (I could TRY, but I would not

succeed), let alone wring it out to its aeronautical limits. All I have is historical references and basic physics to go with.

That disclaimer now in print, in my general testing of F4U's flight model, I was satisfied with what I saw.

Let's take the Corsair's giant of a prop driven by the R2800. It was a massive combination, even by today's standards (3 blades, measuring 13 ft in diameter, driven by 2,000 HP). That power plant/prop combo, however, becomes an issue when the speed is low and the angle of attack is high (read – takeoff). The p-factor and torque that it generates is enormous, and requires a significant amount of right rudder and left aileron to counteract.

No surprise there; it's the trade-off I'd expect for having 2,000 HP at my control. Still, it makes for a potential of a very nasty power-on stall scenario; lack of proper control technique and abrupt power changes will send the nose careening to the left. More than once when I didn't follow the rules of common sense, I found myself cart wheeling in the air as I explored that aspect of the flight envelope.

Now for how things went once at altitude. Corsair flies as one would expect in terms of pure speed. At 20,000 ft with War Emergency Power engaged (you have to map it to a control in FSX), I had 360-ish kts on the GPS groundspeed, which is very much in the ballpark of what is listed in the more reliable references for this plane. In a dive, 400 kts is easily attained with the over speed alarm finally kicking at approximately 450 kts. This is a plane that will leave many of its contemporaries struggling to keep up.

So far so good… now for how she turns-n-burns (so to say) in a historical mock combat against a known opponent. Such 1 v 1 contests have always been a good test of a flight model for a military fighter like this one.

The Corsair, like so many US-built fighters in WW2, was a boom-n-zoom machine – it was made to go fast, slash at the enemy, then run and reposition for the next slash. While maneuverable in its own right, the F4U was not meant to take on planes like the Zero in a classic slow-turning dogfight. Pilots that tried more often than not found themselves on the receiving end of a 20mm-ladened beating. This fact figured heavily in the subsequent phase of flight model testing.

Using FSRecorder, I set up Shockwave's Zero for a game of high performance tag. Under 200 kts, it was no contest. The instant that Zero whipped right, he had won the fight, pulling far more lead than I could hope to match (it was a struggle to just not stall as I tried to match the initial move). By the time I had reacted to its first turn reversal, it was screaming back at me, nose pointed right at my cockpit. Had I put this test into reality some 55 years ago, and I would've been dead.

Now to take the fight into the vertical - this is where the Corsair gets considerably better. If the Zero was in the wise, it'd refuse to go this route, but as it was preprogrammed not to do so, it was completely at my mercy. Diving in and screaming by at 450 kts, the vaunted Japanese fighter became nothing more than a 200 kt target for six Browning 50 cals. Following historical practice, once past, the throttle was slammed to the stops, the stick pulled back in my lap, and up… up…. UP I went. 5,000 ft of altitude in seconds with plenty of speed in reserve! Switching to the Zero and trying to give chase in this zoom climb, the Corsair just ran away to the clouds as I inevitably and frustratingly stalled.

If the A6M did try to dive away to escape, it was going nowhere. I could catch it 'all-the-live-long-day', sticking on its tail like glue. Maybe it was me, or maybe it was because of the fact that the Zero's control effectiveness decreases at higher speeds, but the F4U seemed to be more agile with more air flowing over the control surfaces. This matched historical references. As long as Corsair pilots managed their speed properly (and this could be said of all 2nd Gen WW2 fighter planes from the US), their success rate (if not just chances for survival) went up dramatically. F4U mimics this edict extremely well; leaving me convinced that the flight model was very well done here.

Landings are pretty typical for this conventional gear plane. Fly the approach at about 95 kts, smoothly reduce throttle while pulling back on the stick once you're over the threshold, and she'll kiss the pavement in three-point posture; anything faster, and expect a float, a bounce, or both. Oh yes… of course, it would not do if I reviewed a carrier borne fighter without testing its landing characteristics on an FSX carrier.

After finally finding USS Default (my lil name for the program's carrier) off San Francisco Bay, I wheeled around in the Corsair for a series of flattop tests. I was delighted to find that AF's offering snagged the 'Ok-3 Wire' with minimal fuss (the nose does take a dramatic dive as the plane is dragged to a screeching halt, but the program does not register damage). Obviously, the Acceleration expansion pack is required for this practice.

I never could get Corsair to take advantage of a cat-assisted launch, but it was really not an issue. At 50% fuel and positioned just aft of the wires, she has plenty of power to get herself into the air, even with the carrier at a standstill.

Sounds

In almost all respects, Corsair's sound set is very good. It is truly all-radial once you get it going (sweet music to my ears). The Wasp catches very quickly on startup, so it's difficult to say anything about the fidelity of that part of the engine operation. The tone of everything else seems pretty convincing stuff, including a shutdown with an accompanying whirling grind as the propeller comes to a halt.

My one gripe here is volume – it just seems a little muted to my senses. When I pulled some video footage from a F4U flight demo in Chino, I confirmed that the Wasp was much louder than what AF put in. As compared to the well known MAAM B-25 engine sound set… well, I would've boosted the volume sliders a bit to the right.

Test System

CPU: 2.67GHz Intel Core i7 920
RAM: 3.0 GB DDR3
Video: ATI Radeon HD 4850 - 512MB
Sound – Onboard
Joystick – MS Sidewinder FF2

Flying Time:
30 hours

Outside of pure decibels, the engine noise really showcases itself on a fly-by; that particular view mode quickly outshined spot-view as the method of choice for looking at the Corsair from the outside - this plane is all radial as it zips by. I did not hear the signature 'whistle' during those passes at speed for which the Corsair is famous (Japanese WW2 pilots didn't call it 'Whistling Death' for nothing.) I'm less inclined to call this a fault though; as unique as that noise is, perhaps including it into the soundest was just not possible.

No complaints to voice in the sound department. Everything from switch clicks to the rumbling of the tires rolling over the ground is present, and seems to come out at a level that isn't overdone or underdone.

Accumsim

Many of you will recognize A2A, through which AF's F4U can be purchased, for their extremely well received Accusim. This realism package, implemented on their B337 and P-47 aircraft, keeps a pilot honest to the trade by emulating many aspects of engine operation that we simmers take for granted. For example, I personally have yet to worry about how much oil I've burned during a multi-hour sim hop, and the serious damage the lack of such will reek unto said engine while it's spinning the prop.

During my review, I was delighted to read on the A2A forums that Corsair is slated to receive the Accusim upgrade sometime in the future, although a definitive date has not been set. I for one am looking forward to that upgrade to this aircraft, which should make it even better than it already is.

Performance

Reviewer's Settings

Graphics	Aircraft	Scenery	Weather	Traffic
ULTRA HIGH (1280x1024x32, locked @ 20FPS)	ULTRA HIGH	CUSTOM (Terrain And Detail – Med/65/10m/60cm/2x, Scenery Objects – Ext Dense/ Normal/ Medium, Land Details & Shadows – ENABLED)	MED LOW	CUSTOM

Corsair had a minimal impact on FSX. The drop in frames that I could associate with the bird worked out to maybe 2FPS. This is an excellent rating for any quality add-on. Additionally, no conflicts or complications were noted. Users with a fairly recent rig should have no problems running this product on their PC.

In Closing

For their first-time release, AF really has a great thing here in the Corsair. Its rendering does its namesake proud, and the flight model lives up to historical reference. Yes, I did voice a complaint about the soundest, but one could argue, "That's what the volume control is for." These two aforementioned items alone garner it high marks for consideration; throw in the fact that it goes so easy on the PC resources and it's hard to even think about complaining.

Overall, this is perhaps the best Corsair out there for FSX; it's certainly the best I've ever flown in that program, or any of the series' preceding titles. It gives me a little relief knowing that, while I may never be so blessed as to get to fly the Bent Wing Bird for real, a quality product like AF's F4U is out there to give me a fair taste of what that might be like.

Besides, who wants the hassle of seeing if the real deal really does live up to that moniker of 'Ensign Eliminator' anyways?

What I Like About The F4U Corsair

- Outstanding visual rendering of the aircraft.
- Flight model mimics 'boom-n-zoom' mentality the plane was known for.
- Great performance and stability.

What I Don't Like About The F4U Corsair

- Engine sound set could use a tweak or two.

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F4U Corsair

(adobe acrobat required)

Comments?

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