

### GREEK A-7, LAST OF THE MOHICANS

The Greek LTV A-7 Corsair II of the 336 Mira, 116 Combat Wing at Araxos soldiered on for a long time and now finally it retired but not without a farewell happening after 39 years of service. Yes indeed, considered as active and one painted in fresh farewell colours, the actual situation was different. Most of the Hellenic Air Force examples were already stored with only a few left in active service and they have really come to the end of their service life.

### ONLY A FEW AIR FORCES

This farewell was marking an episode coming to an end because Greece was the very last user of the A-7 Corsair II. The type was very well known being in service with USAF and U.S. Navy in considerable numbers and performed many missions in the Viet Nam war. Other users were the Portuguese air force and the Royal Thai Navy. Both U.S. forces and Portugal seized flying the type a long time ago and outphasing was some decades in the past during the eighties and nineties. The Royal Thai Navy stored their Corsairs also a long time ago and it is not expected they will ever see active life again. You may say that Greece had really 'the last of the Mohicans' in their inventory. Why was there such difference with other users? Probably Greece recognized the capabilities were still acceptable, not bad, even in modern time.

### WELL KNOWN FROM VIET NAM

Because of the presence in the Viet Nam war the Corsair II was well evaluated in comparison with other types and considered to be of the same level as late variants of the MIG-21 which is still in use in some countries. Looking from this point of view it becomes less odd that the A-7 could still hold up presence. Considering the fact that the aircraft were not used in the dog fight role such as the F-16's, but in the attack role, the inferior agility and limited maximum speed compared to later generation aircraft were not an obstruction to deploy the A-7 in that role even nowadays. Although to perform the attack role as sustain safe, the aircraft needed better avionics to survive. That was exactly what the Hellenic Air Force had in mind all the time and they put effort in it to keep up with the available developments. The type entered service in the 1970's being one of the first combat aircraft to feature a head-up display (HUD), an inertial navigation system (INS) and a turbofan engine. The variants in use with the Hellenic Air Force were the A-7E and TA-7C, designed for the traditional tactical strike and ground attack roles. Amongst the many improvements were engine upgrades of the Allison TF-41 engines, avionics upgrades, a better radar and fully day/night capabilities.

### GREEK UPGRADES

The shoulder wing of the Corsair II was designed to carry a lot of weapons including AGM-88 High Speed Anti Radiation Missiles (HARM), GBU-series bombs, Paveway series bombs and the latest sidewinder rockets for self defence. Also mission computers, however probably not state-of-the-art were modern enough to ensure a powerful presence in warfare. They include an AN/ASN-91(V) navigation/weapon delivery computer and CP-953A/AJQ solid state Air Data computer (ADC). The Hellenic Air Force (HAF) ordered 60 new A-7H aircraft in 1974 and three TA-7H's in 1980 and received 62 surplus A-7C/TA-7C from the USN after the Gulf War. The United States was phasing the type out and left a large surplus quantity on stock. Greece as an experienced user of the type thankfully adopted an offer to update their A-7 Fleet. The surviving A-7's up till now were of those last batch and the A-7C were due to the improvements transformed to A-7E standard. Officially the withdrawal concerned 28 A-7E and 15 TA-7C but in fact a far less amount were in service on the last day. The task of the Corsair II will be given to the F-16.

## CEREMONY

On 17 October 2014 the farewell ceremony for the retirement of the Corsair in the great hangar at Araxos air base was in the presence of the Minister of National Defence Dimitris Avramopoulos and his Deputy Minister of National defence and chiefs of staff. A farewell speech was spoken by retired Lieutenant General Antonios Lordanou. He thanked all dedicated people who were related to the Corsair whether they were Generals, Pilots or ground crew. The Corsair was in their heart, but not only that they were also the heart of the corsair for so many years. As he spoke the machines would not be worth if they did not carry these capable Greek officers. This noble and symbolic ceremony was a reference of honour and acknowledgement of their sacrifice, of their serving in supreme duty. There was an emotional moment when the killed pilots during flying activities were memorised, 13 in Total. A special flying program was planned to make it a real farewell impression for everybody and of course the A-7 was part of it. Everybody saluted. A special painted A-7 was uncovered and this turned out to be an example without engine and so it stayed only static. Two A-7 flew in formation over the air field, followed by another formation of an A7 with a Phantom, Mirage 2000 and a F-16. Team Zeus with F-16's presented a display as did the Beech T-6 from Kalamata. Mixed feelings with the people on the ground but inevitable for those committed to the A-7. Their presence has come to an end and next month only F-16 Block 52+ will use the runway from Araxos with the message business as usual. It is sad that a nice aircraft like the A-7 won't be flying anymore.

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