



Unwanted



# High-flyer

We couldn't resist a brief look at

Westland's other wartime twin, the big-winged Welkin

**T**HERE was genuine concern in 1940 that the Luftwaffe would send very high-flying bombers or reconnaissance aircraft over the UK without fear of interception. Designing a fighter capable of 'greeting' such intruders would be a major technical challenge.

Within the Air Ministry, there were worries that this sub-stratosphere rider was a requirement too far. Also, that such a craft would divert precious resources from far more pressing needs – Britain had more than enough on its plate with a comparatively low-flying invasion to contend with that summer!

Despite these misgivings, Specification F4/40 was issued in July 1940 for a two-seat, high-speed, heavily-armed, radar-equipped Rolls-Royce Merlin-powered fighter. The cabin would be pressurised and the winner was

expected to operate happily at 45,000ft (13,700m).

Westland was declared the winner on January 9, 1941, with its P.14 design. This leant heavily on the company's experience with the Whirlwind; although it was an altogether bigger and more complex beast.

But views were already shifting and the new aircraft had to achieve all that that was asked of it with a single pilot. Changes kept coming, so much so that by April a new Specification, F7/41, was written around the alterations. This was a big fighter; it boasted a wing span of 70ft 4in (21.43m).

It was agreed that the name Welkin would be adopted, keeping to the alliterative style of the time. The name came from Ancient English for the upper air, or even the heavens.

Harald Penrose flew the first Welkin F.1, DG558, at Yeovil,

Somerset, on November 1, 1942. From the start, the type proved problematical. Five forced landings in just over a year was not a confidence-builder! The second machine, DG562, flew in March 1943.

Meanwhile, Westland had been given a contract for 100 Mk.Is, with the first production example, DX278, appearing in March 1943. Evaluations at Boscombe Down, Wiltshire, and Farnborough, Hampshire, all found reliability and technical problems.

By this time, condensation trails from high-flying Germans were noticeable by their absence from British skies. The Welkin was out of a job before it had entered squadron service. A follow-on order for 200 examples was cancelled.

Undaunted, Westland kept building Mk.Is to contract, even though the majority were being

ferried straight to storage, never to see the light of day again.

At the same time it proposed a two-seat radar-equipped night-fighter variant, the NF.II, and Specification F9/43 was devised to cover the conversion of Mk.I DX836 to the revised status. With the new serial number PF370, this first flew on October 23, 1944. Nothing came of the nocturnal version, the prototype ending its days on radar trials with yet another identity, WE997, in the late 1940s.

Only two examples, DX278 and DX289, entered RAF service proper, joining the Fighter Interception Unit at Ford, Sussex, in late 1944 for service introduction. In all, Westland built 77 Welkins and met its contractual obligations by completing another 26 engineless airframes up to 1945. All were destined for the smelter. ●

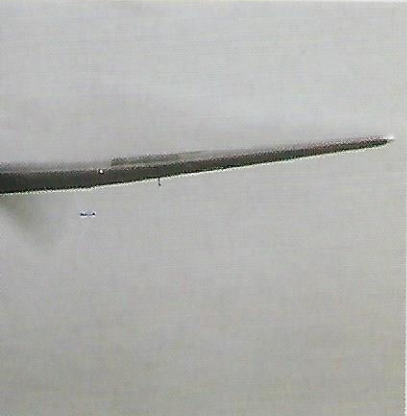


Mk.I DX281 served all of its life at Yeovil on development work.



By late 1943 Welkins were appearing in an all-over pale blue colour scheme to aid their high-flying role - DX318 illustrated. WESTLAND

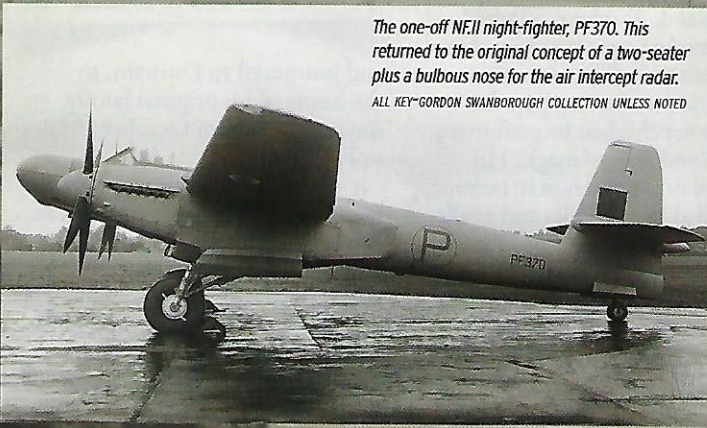




**Far left**  
*The prototype fitted with 200-gallon long-range tanks. WESTLAND*

**Left**  
*The Welkin was a large aircraft for a single-pilot machine; wing span was 70ft 4in and all-up weight 19,775lb.*

**Main image**  
*The Welkin prototype, DG558, showing off its Whirlwind-like layout and design attributes. Note the non-retractable access ladder.*



*The one-off NEII night-fighter, PF370. This returned to the original concept of a two-seater plus a bulbous nose for the air intercept radar.*  
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