

British military aircraft designations 1945 to date

The first list I have decided to display is of British military designation applied from 1945. The contents are developed from an appendix to my book *Aircraft in British Military Service - 1946 to date*.

Significant changes in type development - whether through new construction or conversion - usually merited a new mark number which through the war was written in Roman numerals to XIX and Arabic numerals from 20 upwards. From 1942 designatory prefix letters were used to indicate role. Then from 1947 Arabic figures became standard for all designations, although they had been in widespread but informal use as such for some time. Suffix letters were used to indicate minor changes, usually in equipment but sometimes in role. There have been cases where the military designations have coincided with civil series numbers (DH Comet and Heron for example), presumably to avoid confusion. Indeed, in the case of the Comet the military designations alternated between the civil ones.

Naval and Army variants often had designations starting at 10, 11, 20, 21 or 31 leaving earlier mark numbers available for RAF use. The Chipmunk started at Mark 10 to leave earlier designations free for Canadian use. In the unusual case of the Harrier odd numbers are for single-seat aircraft while even numbers are reserved for trainer variants. The Firefly appears to have been unique in having two sets of designations applied, one in Roman numerals and a later series in Arabic numerals. There have also been situations where a significantly new aircraft has been developed but designated within the existing name and sequence, such as the Harrier GR Mk 5 (in US service the Harrier II). In other instances significant model changes have been made but with no change to the mark number, only to the role prefix (Sea Prince C Mk 1, T Mk 1).

Note - those designatory letters in italics appear to have been in informal use

Prefixes

Designation	Role	Example
A	Airborne Forces	Halifax A.9
ABR	Amphibian Boat Reconnaissance	Sea Otter ABR.1
AEW	Airborne Early Warning	Sentry AEW.1
AH	Army Helicopter	Gazelle AH.1
AL	Army Liaison	Beaver AL.1
AOP	Air Observation Post	Auster AOP.9
AS	Anti-Submarine	Avenger AS.4
ASR	Air Sea Rescue	Seagull ASR.1
B	Bomber	Washington B.1
B(I)	Bomber (Interdictor)	Canberra B(I).8
B(K)	Bomber (Tanker)	Valiant B(K).1
B(PR)	Bomber (Photographic Reconnaissance)	Valiant B(PR).1
B PR(K)	Bomber Photographic Reconnaissance (Tanker)	Valiant B(PR)K.1
B(SR)	Bomber (Strategic Reconnaissance)	Victor B(SR).2

B(TT)	<i>Bomber (Target tower)</i>	<i>Canberra B(TT).2</i>
C	Transport	Beverley C.1
CC	Communications	Islander CC.2
COD	Carrier Onboard Delivery	Gannet COD.4
C(PR)	Transport (Photo Reconnaissance)	Pembroke C(PR).1
D	Drone	Sea Vixen D.3
E	Electronic	Andover E.3
ECM	Electronic Counter Measures	Gannet ECM.4
F	Fighter	Sabre F.2
FA, F/A	Fighter/Attack	Sea Harrier FA.2
FAW, (F(AW))	Fighter All-Weather	Javelin F(AW).7
FB	Fighter Bomber	Venom FB.4
FB(T)	<i>Fighter Bomber (Trainer)</i>	<i>Vampire FB(T).5</i>
FG	Fighter Ground (Attack)	Phantom FG.1
FGA	Fighter Ground Attack	Sea Hawk FGA.6
FGR	Fighter Ground-attack and Reconnaissance	Phantom FGR.2
FR	Fighter Reconnaissance	Swift FR.5
FRS	Fighter, Reconnaissance, Strike	Sea Harrier FRS.1
GA	Ground Attack	Hunter GA.11
GR	General Reconnaissance (to 1950)	Sunderland GR.5
GR	Ground attack, Reconnaissance	Jaguar GR.1
GT	Glider Tug	Master GT.II
HAR	Helicopter Air Rescue	Whirlwind HAR.10
HAS	Helicopter Anti-Submarine	Sea King HAS.5
HC	Helicopter Transport	Belvedere HC.1
HCC	Helicopter Communications	Whirlwind HCC.12
HM	Helicopter Maritime	Merlin HM.1
HMA	Helicopter Maritime Attack	Lynx HMA.8
HR	Helicopter Rescue	Sycamore HR.12
HT	Helicopter Trainer	Skeeter HT.11
HU	Helicopter Utility	Wessex HU.5
ITF	<i>Interim Torpedo Fighter</i>	<i>Beaufighter VI(ITF)</i>
K	Tanker	VC.10 K.2
KC	Tanker, Transport	Tristar KC.1
Met	Meteorology	Brigand Met.3
MR	Maritime Reconnaissance	Shackleton MR.3
MRA	Maritime Reconnaissance and Attack	Nimrod MR.4
NF	Night Fighter	Venom NF.3
NF(T)	<i>Night Fighter (Trainer)</i>	<i>Vampire NF(T).10</i>
PR	Photographic Reconnaissance	Meteor PR.10
R	Reconnaissance	Sentinel R.1
S	Strike	Wyvern S.4
SR	Strategic Reconnaissance	Vulcan SR.2

ST	Special Transport	Albemarle ST.VI
T	Trainer	Chipmunk T.10
TF	Torpedo Fighter	Firebarnd TF.5
TR	Torpedo Reconnaissance	Mosquito TR.33
TT	Target Tower	Tempest TT.5
TX	Trainer Glider	Prefect TX.1
U	Unmanned (to 1956)	Lincoln U.5
U	Utility	Not used
W	Weather	Hercules W.2

Suffixes

A, B, C, D Used to denote a minor modification not meriting a fresh designation. The Lynx seems to suffer from endless semi-formal suffix additions to denote systems additions or changes. Some designations are joined as in GMS.

Designation	Role	Example
B(FE)	Bomber (Far East)	Lancaster B.1(FE)
(BS)	Blue Shadow	Canberra B.6(BS)
CTS	Central Tactical System	Lynx HMA.8CTS
GM	Gulf Modification	Lynx HAS.3GM
ICE	Antarctic equipped	Lynx HAS.3ICE
K	Tanker	Hercules C.1K
K2P	<i>Tanker two point</i>	<i>VC-10</i>
LR	<i>Long range</i>	<i>Hercules C.1LR</i>
(Mod)	Modification	Neptune MR.1Mod
MRR	Maritime Radar Reconnaissance	Vulcan B.2MRR
N	Naval variant	Harrier T.4N
P	Probe	Hercules C.3P
PR	Photo Reconnaissance	Andover C.1(PR)
R	<i>Retrofit (Victor)</i>	<i>Victor B.2R</i>
R	Refuelling probe	Javelin F(AW).9R
RC	Radio Countermeasures	Canberra B.6RC
S	Secure speech radio	Lynx HAS.3S
SAR	Search and Rescue	Sea King HU.5SAR
T	Trainer (usually 'two-stick')	Tornado GR.1(T)
W	Re-winged	Hawk T.1W
X	Trials	Sea King X

List ends