





Shooting Stars were a training mainstay during the late 1940s and early 1950s. These are the TV-1 version.

Also in 1948, the Navy revealed 13 different types of aircraft, totaling 1,165, were to be purchased out of the \$653.5 million authorized by the Secretary of Defense from congressional appropriations. The Air Force was allowed to buy 2,100 planes. Included in the Navy's procurement package were 576 fighters — the F2H, F9F, F3D (a new night fighter), F6U and the F7U *Cutlass*, also new. Attack machines included the AD, Grumman's AF and Martin's AM *Mauler*. Eighty-two P2V *Neptunes* were ordered for patrol missions. Sixteen transports, Fairchild R4Os, Grumman JR2Fs, and some miscellaneous types were bought. Thirty-seven Sikorsky helos, HJSs and HO3Ss. were also ordered.

John Nicholas Brown, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Air, chalked one up for the record books by becoming the first man in the secretarial level of the armed forces to fly a jet plane. Brown was

a passenger in a TF-80C *Shooting Star* during a demonstration flight out of NAS Patuxent River on July 30, 1948. Tony Levier, test pilot for Lockheed, builder of the TF-80C, was the pilot. Said Brown afterwards, "It was a wonderful experience. After we became airborne and had accelerated to cruising speed, all the regular sense of mechanical power, of which you are conscious in conventional aircraft, seemed to dissolve. You got a feeling of 'disembodied power.' The lack of vibration and lack of noise gave a sensation of pure speed."

During the International Air Exposition at New York's Idlewild airport in the summer of 1948, a trio of flag officers demonstrated that veteran pilots could handle jets as easily as propeller planes. Admirals D. V. Gallery, Apollo Soucek and E. A. Cruize together buzzed the field in FH-1 *Phantoms*, to the delight of 750,000 onlookers.

In one of the first of such tragic mishaps, a civilian mechanic at Muroc Air Base in California was killed when he walked in front of the air intake of an F-86 jet aircraft and was sucked in by the vacuuming air. The fighter's J35 engine was operating at military power at the time. That happened in 1946. Extensive tests established by BuAer began in 1948

at Patuxent River utilizing an FJ-1 to determine safe distances from the dangerous intakes of jet planes. This hazardous characteristic thus became one of the most critical concerns in jet aircraft operations, especially aboard crowded aircraft carrier flight decks.

The press got a good first look at Chance Vought's F7U-1 *Cutlass* at NATC Patuxent River in the fall of 1948. The swept-wing, tailless fighter flew for the first time on September 29. It had a maximum speed of about 680 mph.

The D-558-II *Skyrocket* experimental aircraft made numerous flights using only its primary jet engine before its rocket engine was installed and both power plants were called into operation on a single sortie. The needle-nosed speedster launched from the Muroc test base with both engines burning and became airborne after 2,400 feet of travel down the sandy runway. The rocket engine fuel was soon depleted but the jet engine kept the plane aloft for another 19 minutes. Douglas test pilot Gene May, who flew both the *Skyrocket* and its predecessor, the *Skystreak*, said, "The *Skyrocket* is a flight machine refined to the nth degree. It's extremely stable, yet as sensitive and light as an arrow. I thought the *Skystreak* was a dream plane but the rocket's flying qualities are without parallel."

◀ The F7U Cutlass had a wing span of 39 feet, 8 inches and could fly more than 650 mph.

A little competition is good for the soul. The question arose: Which is the best performing airplane, the jet-driven FJ-1 or the time-tested *Bearcat*. Cdr. Aurand, of VF-51 (formerly VF-5A), was not about to concede the capabilities of his squadron's *Furies* to anyone. As a result, *Bearcats* from VFs 113 and 53 squared off with Aurand's FJs and conducted five tests, the results of which follow.

First test: Two FJs and two F8Fs participated in a climb test from a standing start. The F8Fs were to use water injection but, due to malfunctioning, could only do so for a few minutes after takeoff. The best of the two *Bearcats* beat the two best FJs to 15,000 feet by more than a minute.

Second test: A zoom climb test was conducted with the two plane types. Both stabilized speed at full power at 1,000 feet. On signal, they commenced a climb. The FJ beat the *Bearcat* to 10,000 feet by 13 seconds. The F8F stalled trying to catch up with the jet going on to 15,000 feet.

Third test: Two weeks later, VF-51 pitted a *Fury* against a *Bearcat* at NAS San Diego to race to 25,000 feet above El Toro, 63 miles away. The FJ-1 arrived a minute and 40 seconds before the propeller plane.

Fourth test: This one simulated catapult launching climb performance. At 500 feet in flight with gear and flaps down, a climb was started on signal. The timing was stopped accidentally when the stop clock in the F8F became inoperative. The test was inconclusive but VF-51 said it felt the jet would have won this one, too.

Fifth test: A simultaneous takeoff was made. The *Bearcat* gained about 5,000 feet while the *Fury* was still on the ground and therefore could make a gunnery run on the jet immediately, if desired. In the test, the F8F got airborne and immediately pulled up to make the first pass. On the second pass, it fell behind the FJ and in the final race to 10,000 feet the FJ won by seven seconds and further increased its lead 15 seconds in climbing to 15,000 feet.

VF-51 pointed out that the *Fury* was being tested against the best characteristics of the F8F, i.e., rate of climb at low altitude. It contended the FJ-1 was far superior in other respects.

A pair of VMF-122 FH-1s took on fuel at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and were en route to NAS Roosevelt Roads, P.R., when their engines acted up and quit

almost simultaneously at 20,000 feet. The wingman, Master Sergeant Lytton Blass, managed to glide 60 miles before he discovered a soft beach and made a wheels-up landing on the sand.

First Lieutenant Shirley W. Reese, in the lead *Phantom*, descended along a 20-mile course and made a wheels-down, dead-stick landing on a dirt strip at La Romana, Dominican Republic. Power plant failures in both cases were caused by excessive water in the gasoline, the guilty party being the refueling truck at Guantanamo. Lt. Reese's bird flew again after his FH-1's fuel system was overhauled. Blass' *Phantom* got back into the air thanks to jet assisted takeoff (JATO) and some innovative maintenance work.

The Marines and Dominican Republic personnel lacked equipment to jack up Blass' *Phantom* so they dug holes in the sand under it, permitting the wheels to be lowered to a taxiing position. Then they cleared a short area from the holes to level ground, making it possible to pull the plane off its belly.

The *Phantom's* fuel system had to be overhauled and the inboard flaps replaced. The terrain was too soft for a normal takeoff. Two JATO units, weighing 200 pounds each and modified slightly to fit onto the fuselage, were shipped in. The center of gravity was necessarily moved to the rear, a special concern since the nose compartment was mostly empty.

Blass started up and began the takeoff

