



A Blue Angel  
F9F Cougar over  
NAS Pensacola in 1959.

The A-3 Skywarrior recovers aboard USS America (CVA-66) in 1970.  
The Skywarrior first appeared in the 1950s and remains in the  
Navy's aircraft inventory today.



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surgeon jumped up to the cockpit immediately and managed to stop the flow of blood. Then, for the first time, Jackson saw the flight deck.

Seven days later, Jackson was launched on a test flight in his repaired plane and was back in action.

The Navy's flight demonstration team, the *Blue Angels*, had been flying the exhibition circuit since 1946 but it was now time for the more serious business of aerial warfare. The team flew its last exhibition at NAS Dallas on July 30, 1950, in *Panthers*, after which the pilots were sent to ComAirPac for further assignment. The tradition would be resurrected after the war but, even in the four-year span since its inception, it was estimated that 14,000,000 spectators had marveled at the skills of the *Blue Angels*.

In November, the carrier forces were tasked with cutting off Chinese Communist reinforcements from Manchuria by destroying the international bridges across the Yalu River. On November 9, during initial strikes against the bridges at Sinuiju, Soviet-built MiG-15s rose to oppose Navy planes. This assured the first encounter of Navy jets against MiGs. VF-111's C.O., Lieutenant Commander E. T. Amen, flying a *Panther*, scored one kill and became the first Navy pilot in history to shoot down a jet aircraft.

Back home in January 1951, in a milestone development, the Douglas XF4D-1 delta-wing fighter flew for the first time.

On April 2, 1951, two *Panthers* from VF-191, each loaded with four 250 and two 100-pound bombs, were catapulted from USS *Princeton* for an attack on a railroad bridge near Songjin. This marked the first Navy use of a jet fighter as a bomber.

Meanwhile, on the home front, a new dimension in jet aircraft was manifested in the innovative design of a twin-engine bomber, the A3D *Skywarrior*, by the Douglas Company. It had a gross weight of 60,000 pounds, making the *Skywarrior* the largest and heaviest ever projected for carrier use. In August 1951 another shipboard fighter, McDonnell's XF3H-1

*Demon*, completed its maiden hop. Test pilot Bill Bridgeman set a speed record over Muroc, Calif., when he flew the D-558-2 *Skyrocket* at 1,238 mph. That was on August 7. On the 15th, Bridgeman climbed to 79,494 feet, the highest altitude achieved by man that date.

The jets had long since proven themselves and, along with the venerable piston-powered planes, would flourish in the years ahead.

Still, Grampaw Pettibone was not reluctant to zero in on jet mishaps. Like their trusted predecessors, the jets provided fertile ground for Grampaw Pettibone's *Naval Aviation News* column. A sample of a jet accident follows:

"The pilot of an F9F made a normal start, completed his ground check and proceeded to the end of the duty runway. When his pretakeoff check of the emergency fuel system produced flameout symptoms, the pilot's wingman informed him that the *Panther* was on fire and that he ought to get out. As he stood there in wonderment, he suddenly heard the *Panther's* engine wind up. The plane weathercocked in the wind, heading down the runway.

The pilot ran to the aircraft and attempted to board it, but the access ladder was stowed and he was unable to

get back into the cockpit. He made several attempts to man the steed, but the plane was moving too fast and he had to let go.

The fighter accelerated to 150 knots. After traveling 6,000 feet, the nose wheel struck a slight rise in the runway surface and took off, climbing rapidly to 700 feet, thus becoming the first pilotless *Panther*. Sure enough, the F9F stalled and crashed into the bay off the end of the runway. Scratch one \$543,000 aircraft."

Marine ingenuity paid dividends at MCAS Cherry Point, N.C., in 1952 when cold weather formed sheaths of ice on VMF-122's F2H *Banshee*. First Lieutenant C. B. Lafayette, flight line officer, came up with a common sense idea. He had a jet taxi into a position so that its exhaust was aimed at a point between the tail and wing section of a second ice-bound plane. The heat of the exhaust whisked the ice from the aircraft without doing any damage. The process was repeated on the other side of the *Banshee*. The squadron was thus able to put an eight-plane formation flight of F2Hs in the air within a half hour of a possible scramble call.

VF-61's Lieutenant Junior Grade John



An F11F Tiger is towed off the deck elevator of USS *Forrestal* (CVA-59) in 1956.

P. Eells made history of sorts when he successfully landed his F9F-2 on USS *Franklin D. Roosevelt* with only the nose wheel and right main landing gear. When the port main gear failed to extend, Eells burned off his *Panther's* excess fuel, made the approach and got his cut. The *Panther* caught a wire and rolled forward on the nose and right main gear until forward motion was lost. The aircraft then settled onto its left wing tip tank, causing only minor damage.

In April 1952, following tests of the British-developed steam catapult conducted during the first three months of the year at Philadelphia, Norfolk, and at sea, the Navy announced that the catapult would be adopted for use on American carriers. First installation was slated for USS *Hancock*.

In late May 1952, the feasibility of the angled-deck concept was demonstrated in tests conducted on a simulated angled deck, aboard USS *Midway*, by test pilots flying both jet and prop aircraft.

In June, combined elements of the Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps virtually destroyed the electric power potential of North Korea with attacks on prime military targets which had been bypassed for nearly two years of the war. The two-day attack, which involved more than 1,200 sorties, was the largest single air effort since the close of WW II. It was also the first to employ planes from all of the U.S. services fighting in Korea.

Then, on July 11 and 12, in one of the major coordinated air efforts of the war, Navy, Marine, Air Force, Australian and British air elements launched a round-the-clock attack on the railroad yards and industrial facilities at Pyongyang.

Two days later, on the other side of the globe in Newport News, Va., the keel of the 59,000-ton supercarrier, USS *Forrestal*, was laid. It was the first of its class.

Struck by canopy fragments when his *Panther* took a hit near Wonsan, Ensign Floryan Soberski demonstrated a blind carrier landing with the help of his wingman, Lieutenant Francis J. Murphy, and a pair of LSOs, Lieutenant Lawrence A. Dewing and Lieutenant Junior Grade

George A. Parker. Soberski could see slightly from his right eye but needed the radio guidance of Murphy and the LSOs to trap aboard the carrier, USS *Princeton*.

In February 1952, CNO approved a modification of the Project 27A carrier conversion program which provided an increase in the capacity of deck operating equipment. Changes included use of more powerful arresting gear, higher performance catapults and a replacement of the number three centerline elevator with a deck-edge type of greater capacity. Conversion of three *Essex*-class carriers incorporating these changes was completed in 1954 under Project 27C.

On August 29, the new UN philosophy of mass air attack was demonstrated once more by a record-breaking, around-the-clock raid on Pyongyang. The entire carrier air force of Task Force 77 teamed with the Fifth Air Force and the British to spread destruction on supply concentrations in and around the city.

In January of the new year, during tests aboard USS *Antietam*, the Navy's first angled-deck carrier, Captain S. G. Mitchell, the ship's C.O., landed in an SNJ. During the next four days, six aircraft models made landings, touch and goes, night landings and takeoffs in winds of varying force and direction.

Major John F. Bolt, USMC, downed his fifth and sixth MiGs while operating with the Fifth Air Force in Korea on July 11. He became the first Naval Aviator to attain five victories in jet aerial combat. The war was to end two days later.

On that final day, Task Force 77 went after transportation facilities with airfields as a secondary target. The attacks destroyed or damaged 23 railroad cars, 11 railroad bridges, one railroad tunnel, nine highway bridges and numerous buildings.

United Nations and communist representatives signed an armistice at Panmunjom, bringing hostilities to a halt, on July 27, 1952.

Lt.Col. Marion Carl, USMC, piloted the *Skyrocket* experimental aircraft to 83,235 feet, a new altitude mark, on August 21, 1-952. On September 2, a conversion plan for *Midway-class* carriers, titled Project 11, was promulgated. Changes were similar to those for the angled-deck version of Project 27C but with the addition of a modified C-11 steam catapult in the angled-deck area.

Lieutenant Commander James F. Verdin set a world speed record of 752.943 mph over a three-kilometer course in an F4D *Skyray*. This was a first for a carrier aircraft in its normal combat configuration. On September 16, Douglas test pilot Bob Rahn broke the 100-kilometer closed-course record in the *Skyray* with a 728.114-mph mark. On December 3, the first successful test of super circulation (boundary layer control) on a high-speed airplane, an F9F-4 *Panther*, took place at Grumman's Bethpage, Long Island, facility. John Attinello, BuAer engineer, was credited with developing this practical application of a long-known aerodynamic principle.

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## II. Tactical Jet Missions

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In spite of the Korean truce, peace in the world remained on unsteady footing in the last half of the 1950s. There were crises in the Far East, the Middle East, and a general deterioration in international relations. At the same time, a new importance was rendered to the traditional practice of deploying naval forces to trouble spots of the world.

There were also significant technological advances. In fact, Naval Aviation experienced changes that were as great as any in its history during this time. These improvements enhanced the speed, firepower, versatility and mobility of sea and air forces. Guided missiles began replacing guns, the capability to deliver nuclear weapons was increased, aircraft speeds jumped from sub to supersonic, the adaptation of nuclear power to aircraft was under investigation, and an increased knowledge of space gave evidence of its future effect on surface operations.

A new class of flattops was built and the carrier modernization program was completed. Carrier forces were thus strengthened and a new family of high-performance aircraft operated with them.