



McDonnell F-4B of Flight Test at Naval Air Test Center, Patuxent River, Maryland. (All Photos - Joseph G. Handelman)

N.A.T.C. PATUXENT RIVER

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On 9 June 1943 the United States Naval Air Station at Patuxent River, Maryland began to function as an aviation test facility. Patuxent River was commissioned to consolidate Naval Aviation test functions that were then being carried on at such places as Norfolk, Dahlgren, Philadelphia and Anacostia. Establishment of the Naval Air Test Center, Patuxent River took place on 16 June 1945 under a commander responsible for aviation test functions formerly assigned to Naval Air Station, Patuxent River.

At present, N.A.T.C. is organized into the Board of Inspection and Survey (B.I.S.), the U. S. Naval Test Pilot School (T.P.S.), Service Test (S.T.), Flight Test (F.T.) and Weapons System Test (W.S.T.).

Aboard the station is at least one example of almost every aircraft in the Navy's inventory. Many one-of-a-kind types are there including: A Lockheed EC-121K without radomes but with two non-jettisonable belly

tanks, the only Vought TF-8A extant and the Operation Skyhook Grumman S-2 Tracker. Others include a Martin SP-5B modified to carry a jet engine in its rear fuselage, a Douglas C-54P with a belly searchlight housing, and the aerodynamic prototype of the Grumman E-1A--a twin-tailed C-1A and likely the only one in existence.

The accompanying photos demonstrate the many non-standard markings found on N.A.T.C. aircraft. Wide use is made of dayglo on aircraft that are usually seen in the standard Navy dove gray and white. F-8 Crusaders and A-4 Skyhawks in flashy orange are common sights.

Being a test facility, unusual modifications are not uncommon. The belly tank. Constellation and jet-augmented Marlin are only two examples. The Cornell Aeronautical Laboratory's Douglas 8-26 is a variable Stability aircraft; its black boxes allow the pilot to feel as though he is flying anything from a slow prop aircraft to a supersonic type.

Test Pilot School aircraft are marked with T.P.S. on the vertical tail surfaces. These letters are in dark blue when against a light background and white when against a dark setting. Service Test aircraft carry an "S" on their vertical tail surfaces, the "S" being outlined in white. Aircraft belonging to Flight Test are marked with a Boomerang on their tails. This insignia is usually white, outlined in black. The photo of the Flight Test McDonnell F-4B above illustrates the lettering found on the sides of all F.T. aircraft. Only Flight Test marks its aircraft as such. Weapons System Test uses a "W" in a lightning bolt motif on its aircraft. Against a dayglo background this insignia is black, when against other colors it is in dayglo. This marking, as the others, is usually placed on the vertical tail surfaces. Almost all aircraft, regardless of the division to which they belong, carry "N.A.T.C." on their vertical tail surfaces.



North American T-28B, BuNo 138362 of Test Pilot School.



Douglas NA-4B, BuNo 142089 of Weapons System Test with orange "W" on the tail and orange rudder.



Grumman A-6A of Weapons System Test with wings folded. Only the "W" is orange.



Douglas A-3B, BuNo 142246, of Weapons System Test with gray and white finish, "W" in orange.



North American T-39D, BuNo 150542, of Weapons System Test in orange and white with black "W".



Douglas A-4E, BuNo 149652, of Service Test with red and white rudder stripes from previous squadron assignment.



Grumman TF-9J, BuNo 142442, of Service Test in orange dayglo (on nose, tail and outer wings) and white.



Vought F-8D, BuNo 147042, of Service Test with orange fin and rudder, black fin tip and "S" white outlined.



Grumman S-2A, BuNo 133061, of Service Test with Operation Skyhook modifications. Standard Navy finish.



Lockheed T-1A, BuNo 144159, of the Test Pilot School with orange (nose and tail) and white finish.



Douglas F-6A, BuNo 134764, of the Test Pilot School with orange dayglo bands aft of nose, fin and outer wings.



Vought TF-8A, BuNo 143710, the only one in existence, with dayglo outer wings, nose, fin and rudder.



Grumman OV-1A, serial 313134, of Test Pilot School in olive drab with Army markings and numbers in yellow.



Martin SP-5B, BuNo 141258, of Flight Test with jet in aft fuselage. Boomerang white, outlined in black.



Douglas B-26, N9417H, belonging to Cornell Aeronautical Laboratories with red and white paint finish.



Lockheed NC-121K, BuNo 145925, orange and white Project Magnet aircraft of Oceanographic Air Survey Unit.



Douglas C-54P, BuNo 50851, with underbelly searchlight, orange under fuselage, fin, elevator and outer wings.