



THE DOUGLAS SKYRAY IN FLEET COLORS

PART I

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The Douglas F4D-1 Skyray was a remarkably adaptable airplane. In eight short years, from the first "Factory-to-Fleet" delivery in April 1956, to the retirement of the last "Ford" in an operational Fleet squadron in February 1964, the Skyray served in the colors of no fewer than 35 separate Navy and Marine Corps squadrons, shore facilities, and civilian agencies.¹

During this period, consistent squadron markings displayed by these Skyrays very often were short lived, as many schemes changed in detail from year-to-year. Within each squadron, a markings evolution usually progressed from elaborate schemes to more simplified ones over the two to eight year span of each unit's operation of the F4D-1.

Several related factors account for this difficulty in maintaining consistent squadron markings. Each airplane's rotation through its progressive maintenance cycle occasionally resulted in its re-assignment to a different squadron. The high cost of repainting these aircraft caused a hesitancy on the part

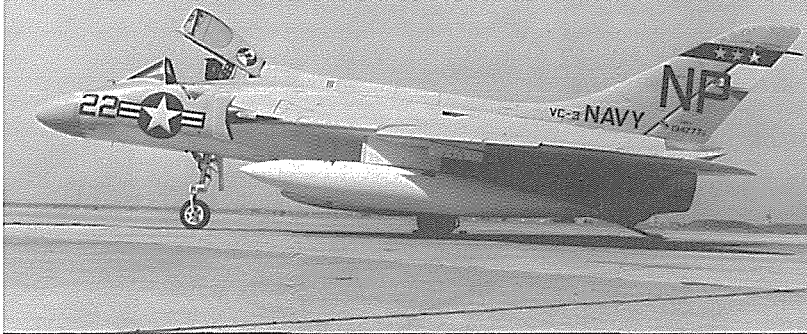
of many squadrons to retain elaborate schemes. The Marine Corps' policy of rotating squadron personnel on foreign deployment, leaving the aircraft for the replacement unit, also caused the eventual reduction of Marine squadron markings to simple tail Modex letters and little else.

These and other considerations resulted in what has been described as a "running battle" between the squadrons and their parent commands. This battle was more like a family feud between the squadron fighter pilots, who enjoyed flying colorfully painted aircraft and appreciated the special spirit they evoked, and their Navy or Marine Corps command organizations, who had difficulty in justifying the time and expense involved in maintaining these flamboyant schemes.

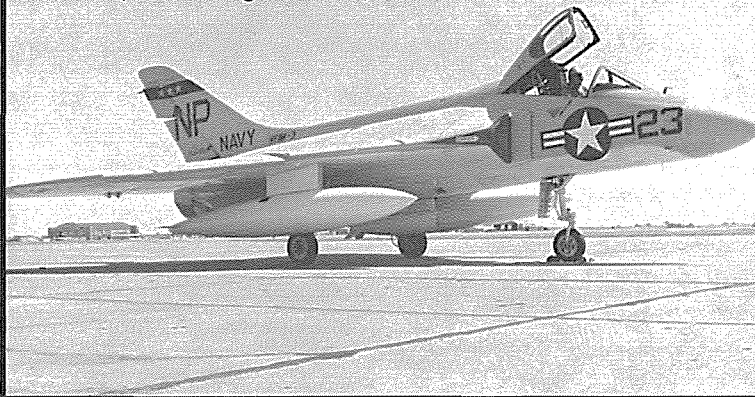
What follows is not a "markings article" per se, for complete information on unit colors has often been nonexistent or contradictory. Neither is this article intended to supply comprehensive squadron histories. Rather, each unit's activities has been described primarily during its operation of the F4D-1 to provide background information for the markings variations within each squadron. Unfortunately, this task has been hindered by a temporary change in Navy policy, in which squadrons were not required to submit their official histories from 1953 through June 1957, at which time the Aviation Historical Summaries began.

Anyone having corrections or additional information on any F4D-1 squadron and its markings is requested to contact the author so that these may be included in further installments to this series.

VC-3's first F4D-1 at NAS Moffett Field in 1956. Tail band was black with white stars. Insignia: brown dog; yellow lightning bolts, eyes and spikes on collar; light blue - cloud highlights and base of cloud; gray - lance and circle in shield; dark blue - background and rain; black - bat on shield and collar. (Larkins courtesy of Jim Sullivan).



BuNo. 134780 is shown in 1957, after VC-3 had been redesignated VF(AW)-3. Markings are as those of VC-3, although insignia behind cockpit is smaller. (Kraus via Roger Besecker).



VC-3/VF(AW)-3

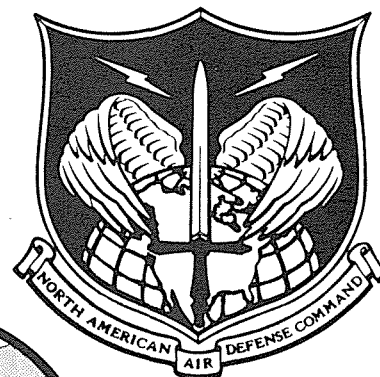
Fleet Composite Squadron Three, based at Moffett Field, Calif., had the distinction of being the first operational unit to receive the F4D-1. In the first Skyray "factory-to-fleet" delivery, BuNo 134777 was formally accepted by the squadron at El Segundo on April 16, 1956.

The Douglas-applied markings on this airplane were spartan: a black tail band with three white stars, a large "NP" tail Modex, "VC-3" on the fin, and the squadron's emblem on each side of the canopy. Although Douglas gave 777 nose number "21," this was later changed by the squadron to "22."

Within a month, VC-3 accepted at least three additional Skyrays, using them to provide fleet pilot instrument training and indoctrination training for fleet replacement pilots and maintenance personnel.²

On July 1, 1956, VC-3 was redesignated VF(AW)-3, presumably due to its acquisition of the all weather Skyrays. However, its mission remained unchanged, and VF(AW)-3 Skyrays retained their "NP" tail code and the original VC-3 insignia for some time. At a later date these Moffett-based Skyrays acquired a new tail code: a smaller, stylized "TT." As far as is known, Skyrays with this code did not display VF(AW)-3's squadron insignia.

In any event, VF(AW)-3 continued to fly their Skyrays until May 2, 1958, when the squadron was decommissioned and its duties taken over by VF-124.



FAWTUPAC/VF(AW)-3

The history of Fleet All Weather Training Unit, Pacific begins in 1944, when NACTUPAC was commissioned at Barber's Point, Hawaii to provide training in night operations for combat pilots in the Pacific area. Through several redesignations (NightDevRon, Pac; VCN-1) FAWTUPAC emerged in 1948 with the mission of providing all weather training for fleet pilots.

The unit moved to NAS North Island in Feb. 1955, and in December of that year assumed the supplementary mission of air defense, being assigned to the Continental Air Defense Command, 27th North American Air Defense Division (NORAD).

When the squadron assumed their air defense role they functioned as a "split unit," one element continuing in all weather training, and the other element under Air Force control, flying for NORAD. As FAWTUPAC had been maintaining "Detachment Bravo" at Moffett Field since Oct. 1953, it is assumed that this unit supplied the all weather part

of the squadron's mission, while the North Island unit was used exclusively for air defense.

At the time of this unique assignment, FAWTUPAC had been flying Douglas F3D Skyknights, but the squadron began supplementing these with F4D-1 Skyrays by the summer of 1956.

For some time, FAWTUPAC Skyrays carried only their unit name, a nose number, and their tail code "PA" in large letters. Early in 1958, however, at least one FAWTUPAC Skyray was painted in one of the most spectacular schemes to be applied to any aircraft of the era. This consisted of a dark blue spine and tail with various sizes of yellow stars scattered randomly about. The unit's "PA" Modex was changed to white letters superimposed over a large yellow lightning bolt on the tail. Similar treatment (yellow stars on a blue field) was given each wing tip and 300 gal. drop tank.

An additional FAWTUPAC Skyray carried what appears to be a "one off" special paint scheme applied for the Third Annual Naval Air Weapons Meet, held as NAAS El Centro in April 1958. The aircraft, BuNo unknown, featured a red spine, wing tips, and drop tanks. Little is known about this variation as it appeared only during this occasion.

On May 2, 1958, the same day that Moffett Field-based VF(AW)-3 was decommissioned, San Diego-based FAWTUPAC was redesignated VF(AW)-3! The squadron was relieved of its all weather training duties, Detachment Bravo was disbanded, and the unit assumed the full time role of air defense.

As the only Navy unit in NORAD, All Weather Fighter Squadron Three became one of the most unique of Navy outfits, in more ways than one. They not only continued to fly their F3D's well into the 1960s, but were equipped with anywhere from 25 to 31 Skyrays, most probably making them the largest non-training squadron in the Navy.

In nearly five years of VF(AW)-3 operations with the F4D-1, usually only Skyrays with nose numbers up to 18 carried their full paint scheme. The remainder displayed only the unit's "PA" modex, with nose numbers reaching into the 50s. The original FAWTUPAC scheme was modified somewhat over the years as the Air Force Air Defense Command shield was often carried on the canopy, although this was sometimes partially obscured by the blue spine paint. At least one Skyray was decorated with white stars on the blue field, although the lightning bolt remained yellow.

The pilots of VF(AW)-3 were as colorful as the aircraft they flew. The squadron, nicknamed the "Blue Nemesis," was split into four flights, with each flight trying to outdo the other by adopting nicknames, non-standard headgear (berets, derby hats, etc.) to promote a special esprit de corps.³

VF(AW)-3 racked up an impressive list of achievements, among these two consecutive Air Force "A" awards for 1959 and 1960, winning the "Top Gun" competition at the Fourth Annual Naval Air Weapons Meet at Yuma in 1959, a flight safety award in 1960, and a final Navy Unit Commendation in March 1963.

The squadron deployed a detachment of F4D-1's to NAS Key West during the 1961 Cuban alert. By 1963, however, the Skyrays had long been obsolete and the squadron was decommissioned on March 4 of that year, bringing an end to one of the most colorful of Navy Skyray squadrons.

One of two known VF(AW)-3 Skyrays with a "TT" tail code, shown at Moffett Field in Dec. 1957. (William T. Larkins).

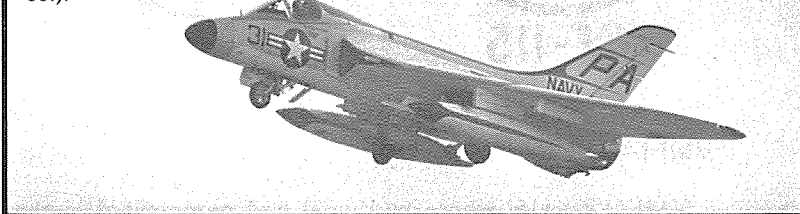


The Skyrays of Fleet All Weather Training Unit, Pacific (FAWTUPAC) featured only their unit designation and the tail code "PA" for nearly two years. (US Navy via National Archives).



One of two new marking schemes seen on FAWTUPAC Skyrays at the Third Annual Air Weapons Meet at NAAS El Centro in April 1958. Dark insignia blue - spine, tail, and drop tanks; yellow - stars and lightning bolt; white - lettering on tail. (US Navy).

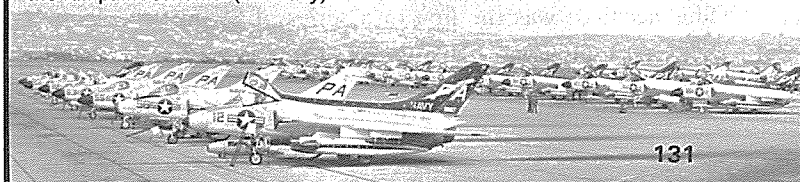
The only FAWTUPAC Skyray known to be painted in these markings appeared at the Third Annual Air Weapons Meet in El Centro, in April 1958. Markings on spine, tail, wing tips, and drop tanks are red. (Douglas Aircraft Co.).



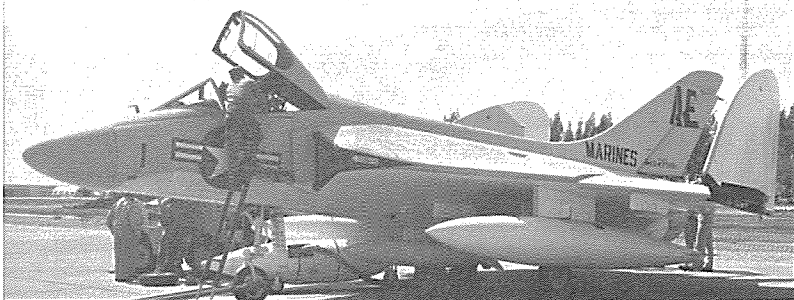
These spectacular markings carried by San Diego's VF(AW)-3 were applied only to the first 18 Skyrays in the squadron. Markings and colors are as those on FAWTUPAC aircraft, with the addition of the partially obscured Air Defense Command shield behind cockpit. (Photo, courtesy of Jim Sullivan).



Twenty-six Skyrays of VF(AW)-3 are shown here in March 1959, 16 carrying the full paint scheme. (US Navy).



This May 1956 photo shows the early markings applied to VMF-115 F4D-1s. All lettering is black. (Photo, courtesy of R.W. Petersen).



VMF-115s colorful paint scheme as it appeared in the summer of 1956 at El Toro. Bands on tail and drop tanks are (top to bottom): red, white, and blue, with wing tips given similar markings. (Clay Jansson).



VMF-115



VMF(AW)-115

VMF(AW)-115, whose personnel had participated in the Fleet Introduction Program with VC-3, began receiving its Fords shortly after the first delivery to this unit. Not only did VMF-115 have the dubious distinction of being the first Marine unit to receive the supersonic Fords, they also became the longest lived Skyray outfit, flying their F4Ds until early 1964.

Based at MCAS El Toro, California, VMF-115 received its first F4D-1 in mid-April 1956. This aircraft, BuNo 134758, carried only the squadron's tail Modex "AE" and "1" on the nose to indicate that it belonged to the CO, Lt. Col. J.S. Flickinger.

In short order 758 became the first Marine Corps Skyray to crash, when, on May 8, Lt. Col. Flickinger was killed while trying to dead stick the airplane on final approach to El Toro. This accident was the first in a series of Skyray accidents in VMF-115 that occurred over the next year-and-a-half. Major problems centered around a balky fuel transfer system, compressor stalls, and structural weaknesses in the wing

stores.⁴ Several hundred modifications and service changes made during this period slowed the unit's training schedule considerably, as the Fords were grounded for several weeks.

On December 31, 1956, VMF-115 became VMF(AW)-115 to reflect their acquisition of the all weather Skyrays, and their Fords were repainted accordingly.⁵ During 1956 and into mid-1957 the squadron applied distinctive markings to their Skyrays. These consisted of red, white, and blue bands on the wing tips, drop tanks, and near the top of the fin and rudder. During this time period, the squadron insignia featured a diving eagle superimposed over a large capital "A." This insignia was supposed to depict the squadron modex letters "AE" through the use of the "A" and the eagle.

By April 1957, the squadron was ordered to change its tail code to "VE." This repainting job occurred gradually, the squadron flying its Skyrays with both codes for some time afterward. With this modex change came a second trio of red, white, and blue bands carried below the tail code, the colors of these being reversed from the top tail bands. A revised squadron insignia was approved on April 30, 1958. This emblem, still in effect with the squadron, featured a diving eagle superimposed on a diagonal red, white, and blue stripe.

By late summer of 1957, modifications to the Skyray had been completed and training had progressed to the point where the squadron deployed to MCAAS Mojave on August 16 to undergo their Phase I combat readiness and instrument training. In over 450 sorties flown during their three weeks at Mojave, VMF(AW)-115 pilots accumulated a total of 1028 flight hours, including several hundred simulated ground approach, flame out approach, and instrument approach landings.⁶

During this Mojave deployment and after their return to El Toro, VMF(AW)-115 continued to suffer additional crashes. As a result of these, and others that were occurring in early F4D-1 squadrons, the Skyrays were once again grounded in December 1957 for further modifications to the pylons, fuel cells, and afterburner.⁷

Once the unit's Skyrays had been cleared for flight operations, VMF(AW)-115 pilots continued their Phase II training. From October 1957 to January 1958, a portion of the squadron was sent to NAAS El Centro for air-to-air rocketry, gunnery, and missile practice.

On February 11, 1958 the squadron capped a year of training at El Toro and left for San Diego where personnel and aircraft were loaded aboard the USS Windham Bay, bound for Japan. The unit arrived there in March and VMF(AW)-115 was assigned to Marine Air Group 11, 1st Marine Air Wing, and stationed at NAS Atsugi.

The Quemoy Crisis over the Formosa Straits resulted in the squadron's deployment to North Pingtung, Taiwan, on Sept. 8, 1958. From September until March 1959, VMF(AW)-115 Skyrays flew round-the-clock Combat Air Patrol missions in support of Nationalist transport aircraft supplying the island of Quemoy. During this period several VMF(AW)-115 pilots managed to get Sidewinder "lock-ons" to ChiCom MiG-17s, but the Communist aircraft never challenged the Skyrays, much preferring to dodge into the mainland when detected.⁸

The Chinese Communists declared a cease fire approximately six weeks after the squadron had arrived, and VMF(AW)-115 pilots devoted their remaining time on For-

mosa to training missions. VMF(AW)-115 returned to Atsugi in March 1959, where they remained for the next two months.

The Eagles of VMF(AW)-115 ended their 14-month tour in the Far East in May 1959, when the squadron was "cadred." Nearly all of their personnel were reassigned to other units, and a small nucleus of officers and men took the squadron records to MCAS Cherry Point, North Carolina to form a new squadron. Their Skyrays remained at Atsugi and were taken over by the replacement group, VMF(AW)-531.

Once at Cherry Point, this small cadre of VMF(AW)-115 personnel "reactivated" the squadron, forming it around a sub-unit of VMF(AW)-114. The new squadron became a part of MAG 24, 2nd MAW. In a move apparently not uncommon for this sort of transfer, a few of VMF(AW)-114s brightly colored Skyrays were taken over by VMF(AW)-115 with no change in markings.

VMF(AW)-115s Skyrays now sported an orange da-glo spine that continued rearward, tapering up the tail and downward on the fuselage. The drop tanks also featured da-glo designs along with the unit designation, tail code, and nose number painted in black on each side.

It is doubtful whether VMF(AW)-115 carried these da-glo markings on their Skyrays for much more than a year. The squadron was reassigned to MAG 11, 1st MAW at Atsugi in June 1960, where they remained until July 1961, evidence showing that they had reverted back to their former markings. In July 1961 the unit was reassigned once again to MCAS Cherry Point.

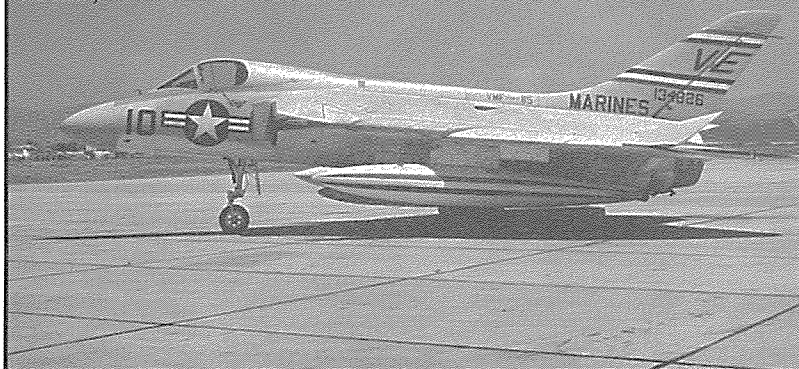
From April 19 until August 27, 1962, VMF(AW)-115 replaced a Navy fighter unit aboard the USS Independence (CVA-62) as part of a Carrier Air Group 7 Mediterranean cruise.⁹ For this tour the squadron's Skyrays were painted in their most flamboyant markings: their traditional red, white, and blue bands on the tail and drop tanks were supplemented by the first appearance of the squadron insignia, which was carried on the rear canopy with a red wing trailing behind it. A red "arrow" outlined in black adorned the white rudder, while the Air Group's "AG" tail code was carried along with "USS Independence" on the rear fuselage.

As far as can be determined, these colorful markings were carried only for this cruise. Photos of VMF(AW)-115 Skyrays taken subsequent to this deployment show a mixed bag of aircraft markings: some with the red, white, and blue stripes of the earlier periods, and other Fords with virtually no special markings other than a very large "VE" tail code.

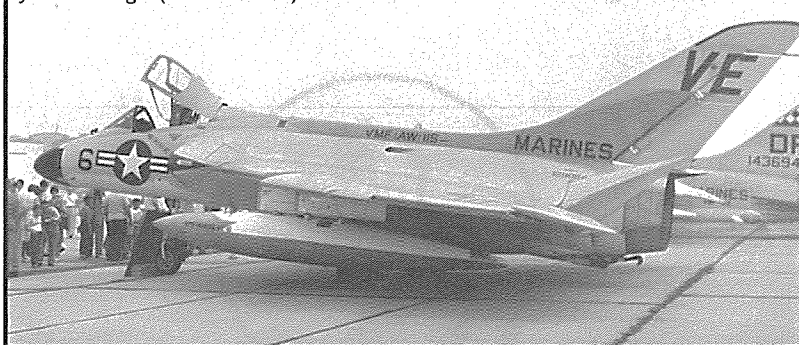
VMF(AW)-115 had returned to Cherry Point by late summer 1962, but was again off to a new crisis area within a few months. From approximately October 1962 to January 1963 VMF(AW)-115s Skyrays were deployed to NAS Guantanamo Bay, Cuba in support of President Kennedy's naval blockade of the island.

After their return, VMF(AW)-115 continued to operate the Skyray at Cherry Point throughout 1963, while other Navy and Marine F4D-1 units were exchanging their weary mounts for F-4B Phantom IIs as fast as they could get them. By the end of 1963, VMF(AW)-115 began receiving its Phantoms, and the squadron was re-designated VMFA-115 on January 1, 1964 to reflect this. The last F4D-1 Skyray (now F-6A) in an operational fleet squadron was retired on February 29, 1964, marking nearly eight continuous years that the airplane had been flown by the Silver Eagles of VMF(AW)-115.

VMF-115 was designated an all weather squadron on Dec. 31, 1956, and added another tail band to their Skyrays as well as a Modex change. (Clay Jansson).

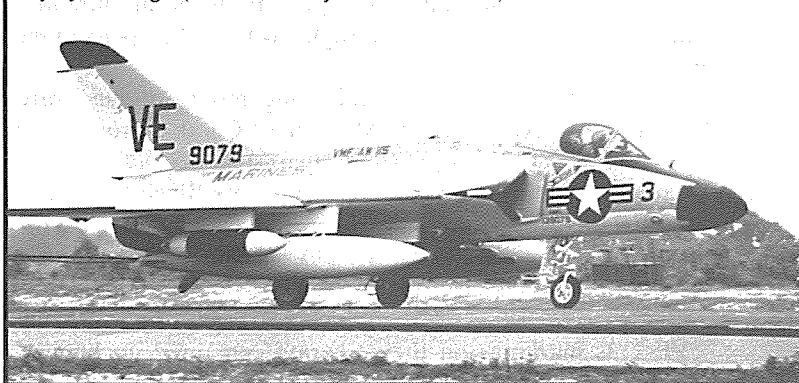


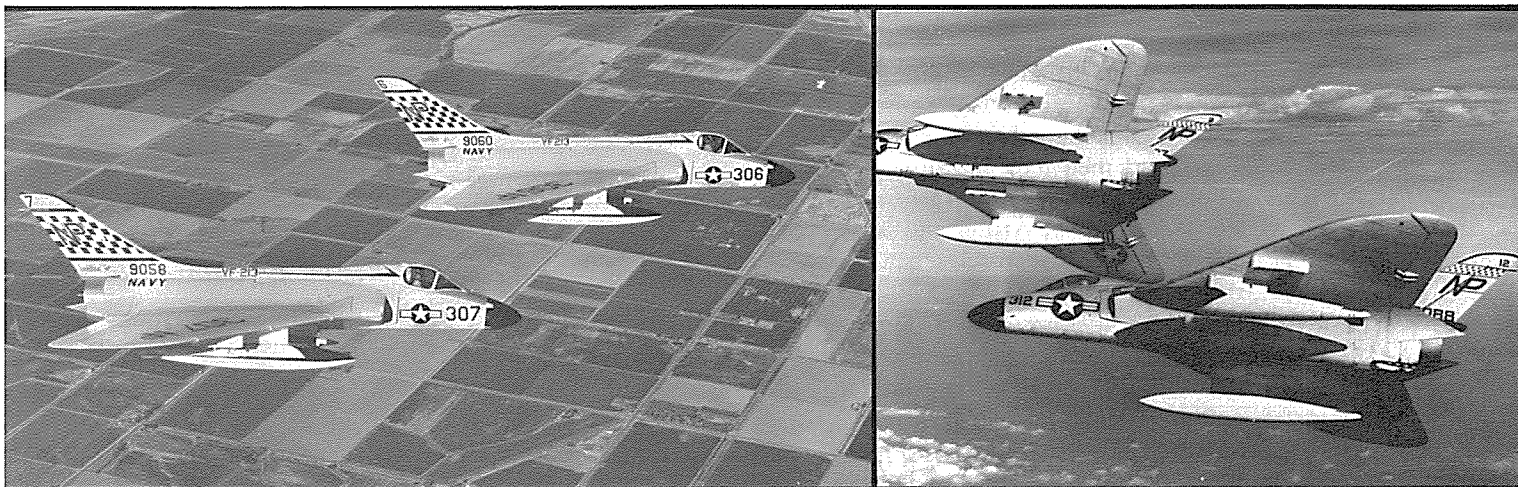
After reforming around a sub-unit of VMF(AW)-114 in the spring of 1959, VMF(AW)-115 apparently "borrowed" 114's aircraft and markings for a number of months. Colors of tail and drop tank markings is fluorescent yellow-orange. (Robert O'Dell).



Skyrays of VMF(AW)-115 sported these colorful markings while attached to Carrier Air Wing Seven during a Mediterranean cruise aboard the USS Independence (CVA-62). (US Navy courtesy of Bob Lawson)

"VE-3" during field carrier landing practice at MCAS Cherry Point in August 1962 shows that VMF(AW)-115 had come around full circle in their Skyray markings. (USMC courtesy of R.W. Peterson).





VF-213 carried these markings during the Third Annual Air Weapons Meet in April 1958. Light blue and white checks on tail with light blue markings on fuselage and tanks. All lettering is black. (US Navy).

At some later date VF-213 reduced their markings to a small band of light blue and white checks on tail. (US Navy).



VF-213

The "Black Lions" of VF-213, based at NAS Moffett Field, Cal., began transitioning from F2H-3 Banshees to Skyrays in Feb. 1957. With only ten F4D-1s on hand, the squadron entered into Phase I training in instrument and tactics flying throughout the summer and fall.

The squadron deployed to NAAS Fallon, Nevada twice in the fall of 1957: from October 11 to 26 and December 6 to 20, achieving the best scores to that date in aerial gunnery with the F4D-1.

From March 2 to 22, 1958, VF-213 deployed to NAAS El Centro for three weeks of rocket firing practice. Squadron pilots concentrated on perfecting their lead collision intercept skills, which enables an interceptor to meet an inbound bomber or missile at head-on angles with a high percentage of kills.

This practice paid off the following month at the Third Annual Naval Air Weapons Meet at El Centro. From April 14-18, 1958 VF-213 competed against other all weather squadrons winning the air-to-air event. The Black Lions also were awarded the James V. Forrestall Memorial Trophy, Navy League Champions Trophy, Team Championship Trophy, Individual Champions Trophy, and 52 other winners trophies.

VF-213s markings on their Skyrays remained unchanged for nearly the entire time they flew the F4D-1: light blue and

white checkers on the tail bordered by light blue stripes top and bottom; a light blue arrow running from the cockpit to the tail; and light blue designs on the drop tanks. Their Carrier Air Group 21 tail code "NP" was blended in over the checkered design on the tail. At some later date, VF-213 Skyraiders markings were reduced to a small band of blue and white checks carried above their tail code, with standardized markings on the drop tanks absent.

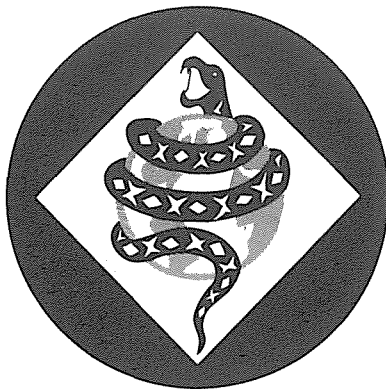
Shortly after returning to Moffett Field, VF-213 boarded the USS Lexington (CVA-16) for three periods of carrier qualifications: May 19 to June 3, June 24 to 30, and July 1 to 11. On July 15 the squadron embarked aboard the Lexington for a West Pacific cruise with CVG-21. During this cruise, VF-213 participated in "Operation Blue Skies," 7th Fleet exercises in the Taiwan Straits. VF-213 Skyraiders conducted fighter sweeps of the area and provided Combat Air Patrol for these Fleet maneuvers.

VF-213 returned to Moffett Field on Dec. 17, 1958, travelling to NAAS Fallon once again from Jan. 31 to Feb. 20, 1959 for weapons training. VF-213 spent the spring of 1959 in another series of carrier qualifications aboard the USS Lexington. In two short cruises from March 8-20 and April 6-17, 15 pilots accumulated over 1000 hours during day and night carrier qualifications flights.

On April 25, 1959, a week after returning to Moffett Field, the Black Lions of VF-213 boarded the Lexington for their last WestPac cruise. Once in Hawaii, the squadron received a score of 94.48 for their Operational Readiness Inspection.

At sea once again, VF-213 spent the summer of 1959 in three exercises, conducting simulated strikes on Taiwan and the southern coast of Japan, and providing CAP for the Lexington during these operations. From July to December, the 14 pilots of VF-213 amassed over 1000 hours during these training flights. Upon their return to NAS Moffett Field on Dec. 4, 1959, VF-213 had set a deployment record for F4D-1 squadrons by flying 1934 hours and 1123 carrier arrestments aboard the Lexington. Ten VF-213 pilots were designated Centurions during this cruise for making their 100th arrested landing aboard the Lexington.

The Black Lions of VF-213 received their first replacement F3H-2s on December 14, 1959, and by January had ended their association with the F4D-1 Skyraider.¹⁰



VF-102

The history of VF-102 begins with an event understandable perhaps only to the Navy. On July 1, 1955, VF-102, located at NAS Cecil Field, Florida, was redesignated VA-36 and assigned F9F-5 aircraft.¹¹

On the same day at the same field, however, another VA-36 was commissioned and immediately redesignated VF-102!¹² The nucleus of this new squadron, comprising four officers and fifty enlisted men, chose the rattlesnake for their new unit emblem, and called themselves the "Diamondbacks." They were assigned the F2H-4 Banshee, which they flew for nearly two years.

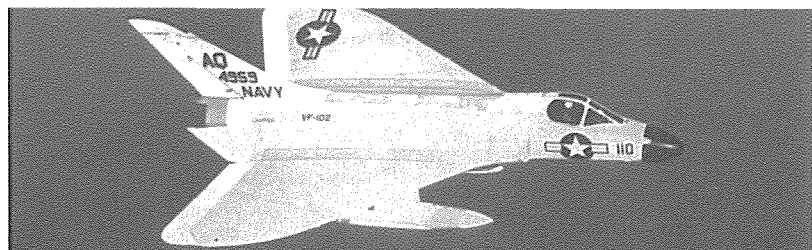
The squadron began the transition to F4D-1s in the early spring of 1957, and spent the next nine months in training with the Skyrays. VF-102 was assigned to Air Task Group 202 in Nov. 1957. Little is known about the group's operations, although it appears they were aboard a carrier for part of their existence.

At this time VF-102 Skyrays were painted in a distinctive diamondback scheme, which they carried nearly unchanged for the following four years. Each Skyray featured a red spine with white diamonds spotted along its length, with similar markings on the fin and drop tanks. Air Task Group 202's tail code, "AQ," was carried on the tail in block letters, although, as with all later tail codes on VF-102 Skyrays, these apparently were not carried on the upper right wing.

Early in 1958 VF-102 went aboard the USS Ranger (CVA-61) for carrier qualifications. When these had been completed in March, the squadron travelled to NAS Key West for advanced ground controlled intercept training and high altitude rocket firing.

In April 1958, the Diamondbacks' Skyrays were chosen to represent the Atlantic Fleet in the All Navy Weapons Meet at NAAS El Centro, Cal. Two VF-102 pilots took a second and third place in the first air-to-air all weather event, VF-102 being one of two teams selected to blind fire their missiles in the contest. Displaying Carrier Air Group 8's "AJ" tail code in large, upright block letters, VF-102 Skyrays placed second overall in the meet.

VF-102 next joined Carrier Air Group 10 for a Mediterranean cruise aboard the USS Forrestal (CVA-59) in the fall of 1958. Departing Norfolk on Sept. 2, their F4D-1s carried the group's "AK" modex during the six month cruise. After their return in March 1959, the squadron spent the



VF-102 Skyray featuring Air Task Group 202's "AQ" tail code in 1957. Note that no markings are carried on upper right wing. (US Navy).



F4D-1 of VF-102 aboard the USS Forrestal in November 1958. Skyray's "AK" tail code signifies CVG-10. (Photo, LCdr. C.E. Shinholser).



Carrier Air Group Eight's "AJ" tail code is carried on this VF-102 F4D-1 aboard the USS Forrestal in April 1960. (US Navy)

following three months in electronic countermeasure training with VAW-33 and VCMJ-1.

To prepare for upcoming carrier exercises, VF-102 moved to NAS Oceana, Virginia on June 1, 1959, and began four months of intensive training in field carrier landing practices, carrier controlled approaches, and high altitude rocket firing runs. These weapons evaluation exercises, dubbed "Operation Wexval-9," were held aboard the USS Forrestal during October and November 1959.

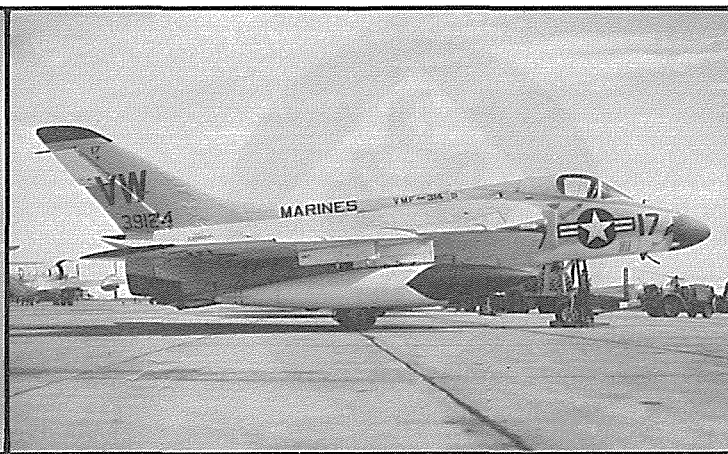
VF-102 again boarded the Forrestal in January 1960 for a Med cruise as part of CVG-8. A squadron operations record was set on this cruise when their F4Ds were flown for a total of 538 hours during the month of June. The Diamondbacks returned to Norfolk in August 1960, but boarded the carrier again briefly in November for further carrier qualifications.

On February 9, 1961, VF-102 began its final Mediterranean cruise with the F4D-1 aboard the Forrestal, again carrying CVG-8's "AJ" tail code. Although the squadron pilots broke their own operations record by flying 540 hours in 15 days, several accidents marred the tour. Weaknesses in the Skyray's tail hook assembly were becoming common during carrier operations, and caused at least one VF-102 Skyray to have its lower fuselage ripped out upon engaging a wire.

VF-102 returned from this last cruise in August 1961, and almost immediately began transition training in VF-101's Det. A. By December 1961, the Diamondbacks of VF-102 had relinquished their F4D-1 Skyrays for McDonnell Phantom IIs.



Two "Black Knights" of VMF(AW)-314 high above Southern California. Scarf design on tail was red-orange outlined in black, while lance on tanks was black. (USMC courtesy of R.P. Gill).



The many deployments VMF(AW)-314 underwent from 1960 to 1962 necessitated simple markings as aircraft were left for the replacement squadrons. Tip of tail, wings, and nose of drop tank are black. (Paul Stevens).



VMF(AW)-314

In December 1957, eleven months after having been redesignated an all weather squadron, El Toro's VMF(AW)-314 began converting from F9F Panthers to F4D-1 Skyraiders.

In the first months of 1958, the "Black Knights" began applying distinctive markings to the Skyraiders to conform to their nickname. A red-orange scarf-like design, outlined in black, was painted on each tail, with the unit's Modex "VW" slanted rearward inside. The drop tanks carried a black lance along their length, while each wing tip was painted red-orange bordered in black.

On July 1, 1958, after six months of intensive training, VMF(AW)-314 departed San Diego aboard the Utility Carrier USS Cape Esperance (T-CVU-88) and arrived at NAS Atsugi, Japan on July 22, where the squadron became part of MAG 11, 1st MAW.

On September 30, 1958, the squadron, still carrying their colorful paint scheme, was ordered to North Pingtung, Taiwan during the Quemoy Crisis. From September until March 18, 1959, VMF(AW)-314 pilots flew 152 scrambles in support of the Nationalist Chinese Forces. In gratitude, the Nationalist Government presented the squadron with a Chinese ceremonial sword, which was used by the Marine unit to dub each pilot qualifying in the F4D-1, making him a "Black Knight."

VMF(AW)-314 returned to Atsugi on March 23, 1959 and remained there until September 8, when the squadron apparently was "cadred" and reformed on the same day at

MCAS El Toro as part of Marine Air Group 15, 3rd Marine Air Wing, AirFMFPac. The squadron's Skyraiders remained at Atsugi and were taken over by the replacement unit, VMF(AW)-542.

The "new" squadron received another complement of F4D-1s and within a week of reforming left El Toro for a two-week training deployment to MCAAS Yuma, Arizona. During this period only the squadron's tail code "VW" was painted on their Skyraiders, while the wing and tail tips and noses of the drop tanks were painted black. The squadron's earlier colorful paint scheme was never again used on their Skyraiders.

Throughout the next year, VMF(AW)-314 made many training deployments to Yuma and Fallon, Nevada for ordinance, radar, navigation, instrument, and field carrier practice.¹³ From March 6-18, 1960 the squadron trained jointly with a detachment from Marine Air Control Squadron 3 at Yuma. The Black Knights passed their Phase II training at this time by conducting night air-to-air intercepts under the direction of MACS-3 personnel.

From July 11-14, 1960, the Black Knights flew 68 sorties during the Operational Readiness Inspection at Yuma. At this time, the Wing Inspector stated, "VMF(AW)-314 is the most qualified F4D squadron to depart the west coast since unit rotation began."¹⁴

On Oct. 14, 1960, VMF(AW)-314 personnel left their Skyraiders at El Toro and boarded R5Ds of VMR-352 for a flight to San Francisco. From there the squadron was flown to NAS Atsugi, Japan aboard MATS transports. Once at Atsugi, VMF(AW)-314 replaced VMF(AW)-542 and again acquired the unit's fleet of F4D-1s as part of MAG-11, 1st MAW. With the same black wing and tail tips and drop tank markings applied previously, VMF(AW)-314 pilots spent the next year in intensive training: carrier qualifications and re-qualifications, air defense exercises, and numerous deployments.

It should be mentioned here that although the unit's Skyraiders often carried an individual pilot's name below the cockpit, this does not necessarily mean the aircraft was flown exclusively by one man. During a tour it was quite possible for a pilot of VMF(AW)-314 to have flown nearly every Skyraider in the squadron.

VMF(AW)-314 rounded out its last tour in Japan by undergoing carrier qualifications aboard the USS Hancock (CVA-19) on Dec. 19-20, 1960, Jan. 9-10, 1961, and again on Feb. 22, 1961. On June 14, 1961 the USS Ticonderoga (CVA-14) also hosted the unit's Skyrays for qualifications, as did the USS Midway (CVA-41) on August 11, 1961. At least nine deployments were made during the year to Itazuke AFB, NAF Naha, and MCAF Iwakuni.

The squadron departed Japan in November 1961 and returned to El Toro. They remained there with a new set of Skyrays until the fall of 1962, when these were traded in for McDonnell Phantom IIs.



VF-13

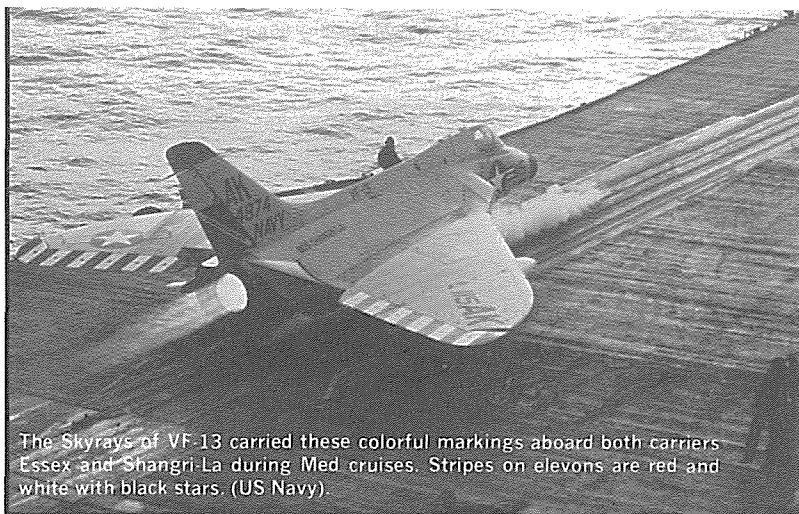
The "Night Cappers" of VF-13, based at NAS Cecil Field, Florida, began transitioning from the F9F-8 to the F4D-1 in January and February 1959. Less than four years later VF-13 was the last Navy squadron to make an operational carrier deployment with the Skyray.

The squadron went aboard the USS Randolph (CVA-15) in April 1959 for carrier qualifications as part of Carrier Air Group 10. The following month VF-13 boarded the USS Essex (CVA-9) for training operations before a planned Mediterranean deployment. From August 1959 until February 1960 the Essex joined the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean. This cruise marked the first successful deployment of the F4D-1 aboard a carrier equipped with the outdated hydraulic catapults.¹⁵

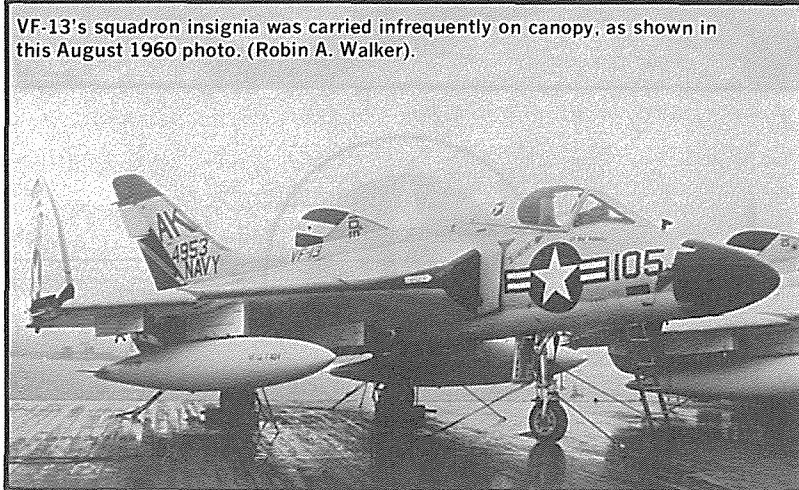
The markings VF-13 Skyrays carried at this time were rather elaborate. The entire upper elevon surface of each wing was painted with seven red and six white stripes, with a small black star centered in each stripe. The lower half of the rudder was painted to represent the squadron's emblem: black and red fields separated by a diagonal "bar sinister" in black. This was used to indicate the squadron's "outcast" origin when it was formed in September 1948 by taking personnel and aircraft from VF-11 and VF-12 to provide another fighter squadron for Carrier Air Group One. The squadron motto, "Potentia et Potestias" means the "will and the might."

Essex-based VF-13 Skyrays carried the tail code "AK," indicating Carrier Air Group Ten, and their squadron insignia was placed behind the cockpit window. Although VF-13 Skyrays used the CVG-10 "AK" modex throughout their career, the emblem was infrequently displayed on their aircraft subsequent to this deployment aboard the Essex.

VF-13 carried this colorful paint scheme at least until early 1961, but it was subsequently altered (by eliminating the elevon stripes and stars) due to the maintenance involved.



The Skyrays of VF-13 carried these colorful markings aboard both carriers Essex and Shangri-La during Med cruises. Stripes on elevons are red and white with black stars. (US Navy).



VF-13's squadron insignia was carried infrequently on canopy, as shown in this August 1960 photo. (Robin A. Walker).

After this date VF-13 Skyrays carried only the rudder insignia and a small red band on the fin.¹⁶

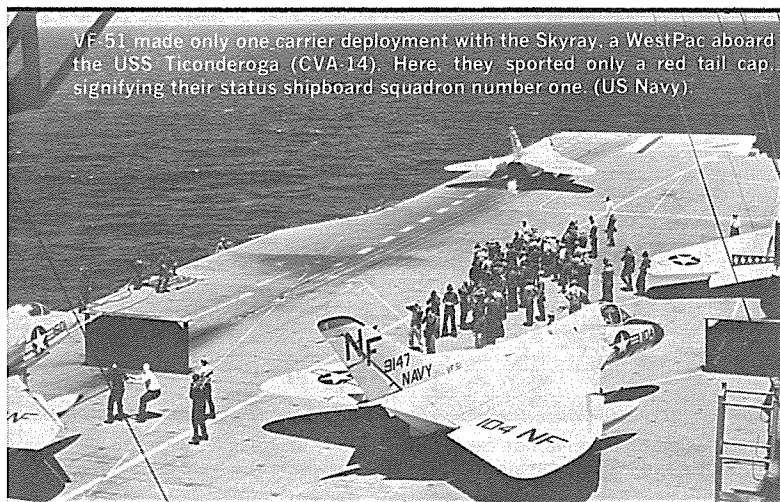
The squadron returned from their Med cruise aboard the Essex in February 1960, but three months later left Cecil Field for operations off Guantanamo Bay, Cuba aboard the USS Shangri-La (CVA-38). VF-13 continued to fly aboard the Shangri-La in August and September 1960 during NATO exercises in the North Atlantic. In November 1960, VF-13, aboard the Shangri-La again as part of CVG-10, was sent to the Caribbean as part of a deterrent force there to "preserve peace."

In February 1961, VF-13's Skyrays were equipped with drop tanks fitted for in-flight refueling, and the squadron again deployed to the Mediterranean aboard the Shangri-La as part of the Sixth Fleet.

The Dominican Crisis forced the Shangri-La into an early return to Mayport in May 1961. Three weeks later VF-13 and the Shangri-La were on station in the Caribbean as part of the emergency force during the crisis. VF-13 returned in mid-June and spent the remainder of 1961 alternating between operations aboard ship and ashore for carrier qualifications, VIP cruises, and an Operational Readiness Inspection.

VF-13 deployed aboard the Shangri-La in February 1962 for its third Mediterranean cruise with the F4D-1s. The last operational carrier flight by a Navy Skyray took place aboard the Shangri-La in August 1962 with Cdr. Hjalmer E. Swanson, VF-13 Executive Officer, at the controls.

The squadron returned to Cecil Field in early September 1962, and on the 14th of that month began transitioning to the F3H-2 Demon.



VF-51 made only one carrier deployment with the Skyraider, a WestPac aboard the USS Ticonderoga (CVA-14). Here, they sported only a red tail cap signifying their status shipboard squadron number one. (US Navy)



A rare photo. VF-51 flew their Skyraiders with these stylized red talons for only a few months. (Swisher courtesy of Harry Gann)



VF-51

Located some 60 miles south of El Toro, home of the longest-lived F4D-1 squadron, NAS Miramar provided the home base for one of the shortest-lived Skyraider units: VF-51.

The Screaming Eagles of VF-51 returned in October 1958 from carrier qualifications with their newly acquired F11F-1s, but wasted little time in exchanging their Tigers for Skyraiders.¹⁷ As the F4D-1s began to arrive in January 1959, the squadron applied few markings to the aircraft: "NF" on the tail, "VF-51" on the fuselage, a nose number, and red tail caps containing the last digit of the nose number in white.

These markings were carried at least into mid-1959. However, the pilots of VF-51 felt that these colors were a little drab for an outfit nicknamed the Screaming Eagles, and a new set of markings were designed and quickly applied to their Skyraiders. Three stylized red talons were now carried on each side of the fuselage and drop tanks. Satisfied with their new-found identity, VF-51 operated their Fords with this scheme for several months.

However, a "running battle" between the squadron and COMNAVAIRPAC developed over the markings. Roy Johnston, Commanding Officer of VF-51 at the time, comments, "Our markings were not spectacular, but in those days COMNAVAIRPAC considered even that little bit of color too flamboyant and we were requested to revert to standard gray with normal markings."¹⁸

The squadron reluctantly complied and, in October 1959, boarded the USS Ticonderoga (CVA-14) for carrier qualifications, sans talons.

On March 5, 1960 VF-51 embarked aboard the Tico again for their only WestPac with the Skyraiders, attached to CVG-5. The squadron returned to San Diego on October 11, and by November 1960 had begun to convert to F-8 Crusaders.



VF-162

The "Hunters" of VF-162 have the distinction of being the shortest lived carrier based Skyraider unit in the Navy. In a grand commissioning ceremony held on September 1, 1960 at NAS Cecil Field, Florida, VF-162 was established along with VF-161, VA-163, VA-164, and VA-165, as well as the parent organization Carrier Air Group Sixteen.

Congress had granted the Navy permission to organize the Air Group for one year only, and its existence beyond this time was in doubt. The other units of CVG-16 were formed to fly the AD Skyraider, A4D Skyhawk, and the F3H Demon, all of these aircraft still in wide use throughout the fleet. However, as there had been no specific procurement measures to equip these units, the building up process was a slow job.

VF-162, on the other hand, had no problems in finding surplus Skyraiders with which to equip itself. The F4D-1 had already been phased out of the Pacific Fleet, and reduced in favor of the F3H in the Atlantic Fleet. The advent of the F4H Phantom II was at hand, and ComNavAirLant knew that in the process of introducing the Phantom II into the fleet, an additional all weather fighter squadron would be needed to fill in the gaps left by squadrons temporarily taken out of service for retraining. Consequently, VF-162 was built up rather quickly and began a period of intense training.¹⁹

The first F4D-1 arrived at Cecil Field on October 10, 1960. By the end of the year the unit had a full complement of aircraft and nearly a full complement of pilots, the rest of the Air Group having few of either.

During the winter of 1960 and into the spring of 1961, several detachments from VF-162 were dispatched to NAS Key West, Florida to stand alert watches during the Cuban Crisis. In these deployments, VF-162 Skyraiders replaced F4D-

Is flown by VF-101, the all weather Replacement Air Group (RAG) for AirLant, as these air defense duties interfered with the RAG training program.

At this time VF-162 Skyrays carried CVG-16's modex "AH," a "200" series nose number, and an elaborate marking scheme consisting of black upper elevon and rudder surfaces with gold stars of various sizes scattered randomly about. Their unit insignia also was carried on each side of the cockpit behind the window: Orion, "The Mighty Hunter" poised on a black field with a club and shield in hand superimposed over the constellation Orion. A small gold stripe on the fin also displayed each aircraft nose number in black. The nose of each drop tank carried similar gold stars on a black field, with the left tank's refueling probe painted in a gold and black spiral pattern.

In the spring of 1961, VF-162 transferred to Carrier Air Group Six, changed its modex to "AF," and replaced VF-74 aboard the USS Intrepid (CVA-11). Between April 15 and August 1, 1961 the squadron made four deployments. During the first two of these VF-162 qualified for day and night carrier operations while cruising off of Norfolk. The third came when the squadron received a phone call at Cecil Field at 3 p.m., giving notice that the assassination of the dictator Trujillo had caused a crisis situation in the Dominican Republic. By midnight, the entire squadron was aboard the Intrepid and was underway by six the next morning. The fourth deployment was made during an Atlantic Fleet exercise off the coast of New York. For each of these deployments it was necessary to airlift the squadron to Norfolk, as VF-162 was based at NAS Cecil Field while the Air Group was headquartered at NAS Oceana, Virginia.

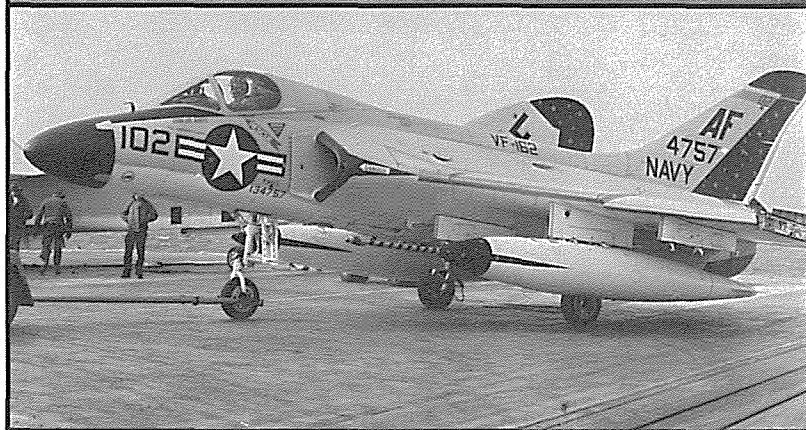
On August 3, 1961, VF-162 departed for an extended Mediterranean cruise aboard the Intrepid. The squadron returned to Cecil Field on February 28, 1962, and almost immediately prepared to move to NAS Miramar, as CVG-16 had been shifted to the Pacific Fleet.

On April 2, 1962, VF-162 began painting out their squadron markings on the Skyrays, and by the 4th most of their personnel had left for VF-124's "Crusader College" at Miramar. On that date, fifty-nine squadron personnel were left at Cecil Field to launch the last of VF-162's Skyrays for the short flight to NAS Jacksonville's Overhaul and Repair depot.

REFERENCES

1. Actually, the Naval Air Test Center at Patuxent River, Maryland received its first F4D-1 in April 1955. Also, Navy and Marine reserve squadrons at NAS Olathe, Kansas (VF-881/882; VMF-113/215) continued to fly the Skyray until August 1964, while the Test Pilot School at Patuxent River operated a pair of F4Ds until December 1969. Douglas F4D-1 operators known to date include:

VC-3	VMF-113	FAWTUPAC
VF(AW)-3	VMF(AW)-114	Fleet Air Gunnery Unit Pacific
VF-13	VMF(AW)-115	Naval Air Development Unit (So. Weymouth, Mass.)
VF-23	VMF-215	Naval Air Test Center
VF-51	VMF(AW)-314	Naval Air Test Facility (Lakehurst, N.J.)
VF-74	VMF(AW)-513	Naval Air Facility, China Lake
VF-101	VMF(AW)-531	Naval Missile Center, Pt. Mugu
VF-102	VMF(AW)-542	Test Pilot School
VF-141	H & MS-15	NACA/NASA Ames Research Lab (Moffett Field, Calif.)
VF-162	H & MS-24	
VF-213	VU-3	
VF-881	VX-3	
VF-882	VX-4	
2. "Historical Data on Squadrons Designated VF(AW)-3," Naval History Unit, Washington D.C. Undated.



The Hunters of VF-162 flew the Skyray aboard the USS Intrepid in the summer of 1961. Rudder, elevons, and drop tank noses are black with gold stars. Note pilot's helmet is painted in similar colors. Stripe on fin is gold. (US Navy).

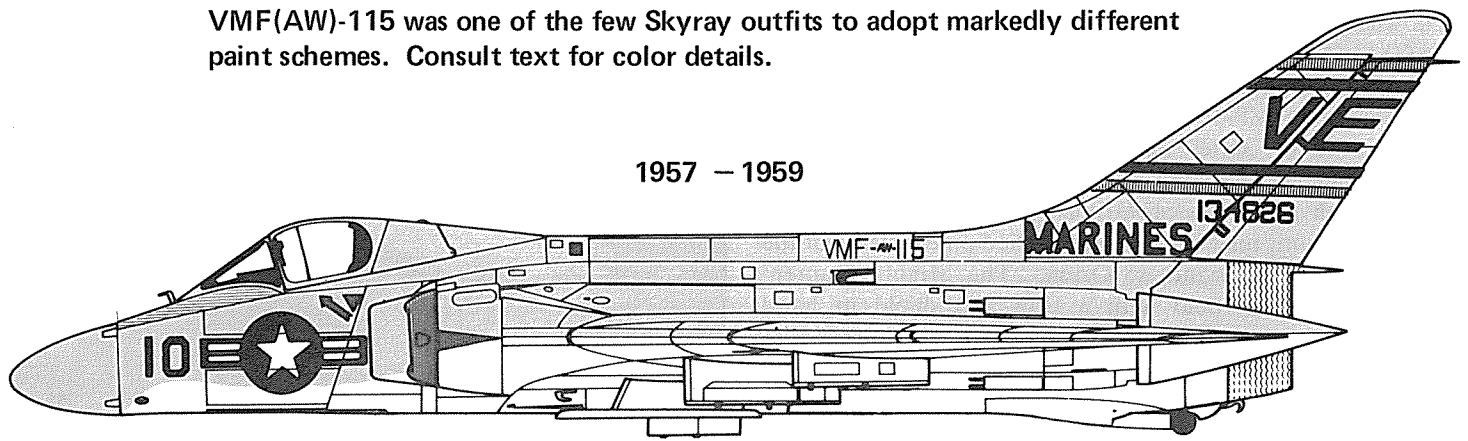
3. "Unique Navy Squadron Flies for The Air Force," Navy Times, Sept. 2, 1959.
4. Letter to Author from C.A. Jorgenson, former VMF(AW)-115 pilot, Jan. 30, 1970.
5. "Marine Fighter (All Weather) Squadron 115 Outline of History, 1943-1967," undated.
6. VMF(AW)-115 Tour Book (Aug. 1957-Mar. 1959), undated.
7. "Skyray Meets The Marines," Naval Aviation News, Jan. 1958, p. 30.
8. Op. Cit. Jorgenson letter.
9. Letter to Author from Rowland P. Gill, June 30, 1972.
10. Aviation Historical Summaries, VF-213, July 1957 to 31 Dec., 1959.
11. "Notes on The History of VA-36," dated 5 April, 1960. Naval History Unit.
12. "Fighter Squadron One Hundred Two History," undated. Naval History Unit.
13. Untitled outline history of VMF(AW)-314.
14. "The Knights Tale," 8 Sept., 1959 to 16 Oct., 1961. VMF(AW)-314 Tour Book.
15. "The History of Fighter Squadron Thirteen," Change of Command brochure, May 4, 1963.
16. Letter to Author from H.E. Swanson, Capt. USN, ex-Commanding Officer of VF-13, dated Jan. 13, 1971.
17. "History of Fighter Squadron Fifty-One," undated.
18. Letter to Author from Roy S. Johnston, ex-Commanding Officer of VF-51, dated Sept. 13, 1972.
19. VF-162 Squadron Scrapbook, undated.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

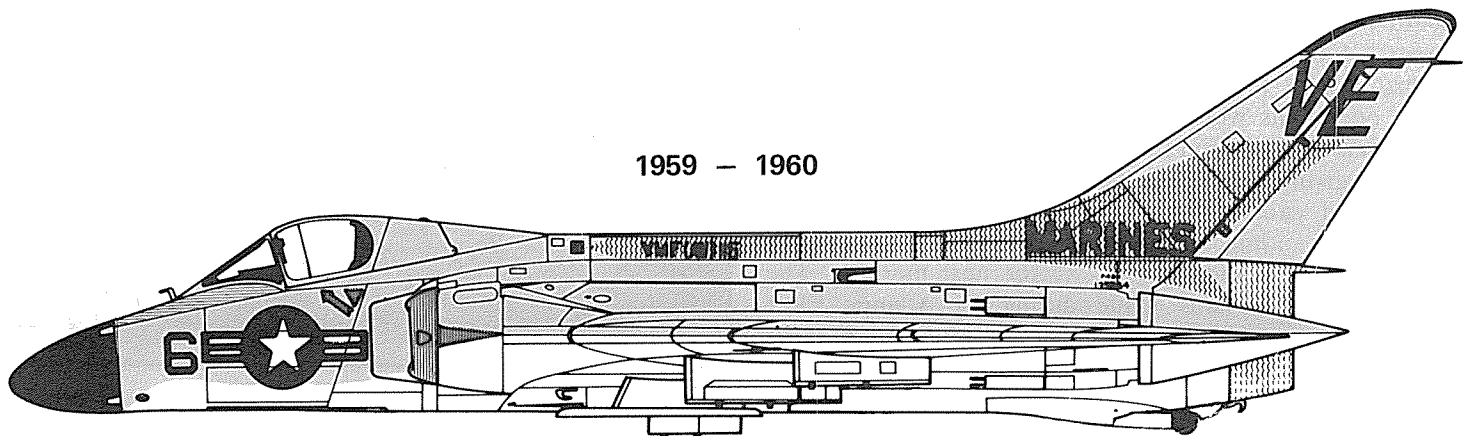
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VMF(AW)-115 was one of the few Skyray outfits to adopt markedly different paint schemes. Consult text for color details.

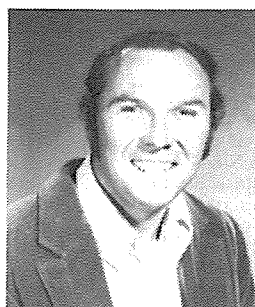
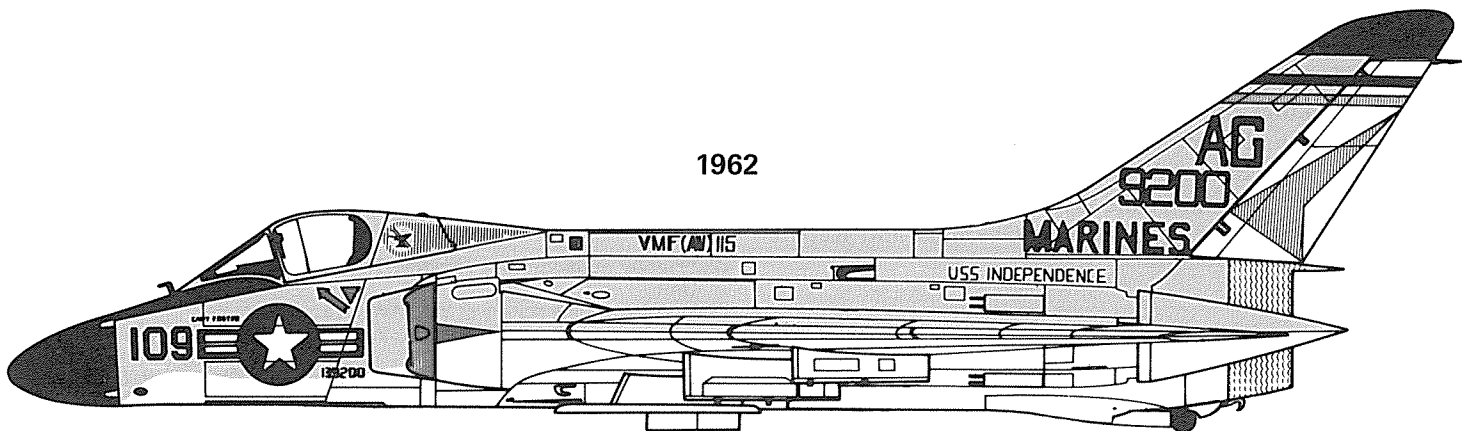
1957 – 1959



1959 – 1960



1962



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Nick Williams is presently teaching sixth grade in Anaheim, California. In addition to being on the Society's Board of Directors, Nick is Newsletter Advertising Manager, and recently traded his hat as Chairman of the Editorial Committee for that of Research Project Coordinator.

In his leisure time Nick enjoys jogging, tennis, camping, and collecting information for his various Society Research Projects: Douglas' F4D-1, C-74, C-118, and the Aero Commander 500 series of airplanes. Anyone wishing to help Nick can contact him at: P.O. Box 751, Cypress, CA 90630.