

CRUSADER De-TAILS

A Review of Squadron Markings Applied to F8U Aircraft

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Breeding is the mark of a thoroughbred! The pedigree of the F8U goes back over 40 years to the Vought VE-7, first aircraft to take off from the Navy's first aircraft carrier, the USS LANGLEY. In the intervening years Chance Vought has produced many outstanding naval aircraft, the most famous example being the F4U "Corsair". The versatile "bent wing" was in production for eleven years, and more F4U's were delivered to the Navy than any other airplane type, total production amounting to 12,571 aircraft.

With this background of highly successful naval aircraft, the Bureau of Aeronautics announced in May, 1953 that Chance Vought had won a design competition for a new supersonic fighter, designated the F8U "Crusader".

Like a true champion, the F8U began its career in a blaze of glory. On its maiden flight, 25 March 1955, the prototype XF8U-1 exceeded Mach 1. In the following months the F8U added new laurels to its record. On 21 August 1956 a production F8U-1 captured the Thompson Trophy with a new national speed record of 1015.428 mph over a 15 kilometer course at the Naval Ordnance Test Station, China Lake, California. Piloted by Cdr. R.W. "Duke" Windsor, the "Crusader" became the first operationally equipped jet in history to fly faster than 1000 mph.

On 16 July 1957 an F8U-1P piloted by Maj. J. H. Glenn, USMC, under Project "Bullet", sped from NAS Los Alamitos to Floyd Bennett Field in 3 hr., 22 min., 50.05 sec., breaking the transcontinental speed record with an average speed of 723.517 mph. (1) As a fitting tribute to a new champion, the 46 year-old Collier Trophy was awarded by the National Aeronautical Assoc. to the BuAer and Chance Vought Aircraft, for the conception, design, and development of the F8U as the outstanding aviation achievement of 1956.

The "Crusader" was assigned in November 1956 to VX-3 for Fleet Introduction Program (FIP) at NATC Patuxent River. The mission of FIP is two-fold. It is an accelerated eight-week test program to see what the airplane can do, and it also tests the ability of Navy pilots and crews to step in and operate the aircraft as operational squadrons will have to do. VF-32 sent 11 pilots and ground officers, plus 80 enlisted technicians, and they were joined at Service Test Division by 6 pilots and 40 men from VF(AW)-3. Rarely has an airplane reached the Fleet with so few hitches; the first F8U-1 landed on a carrier deck on the first anniversary of the prototype's first flight. During that first year, the F8U carried out the most comprehensive flight envelope (altitude, speed, endurance) of any fighter plane tested. The final lap from the drawing board to fleet squadrons had been completed.

Since that time over 700 carrier and land-based have carried the markings of Navy and Marine squadrons. Four different models have seen squadron service; the F8U-1, F8U-1P, F8U-2, F8U-2N, and the fifth model, the F8U-2NE, is now in production. The markings carried by these squadrons add to the colorful history of the "Crusader". In March, 1957, VF-32 became the first operational squadron to receive the F8U-1, and was also the first squadron to take the "Crusader" to sea, aboard the USS FORRESTAL. VF-154 gave the "Crusader" its first operational workout at sea off the West Coast. It was the second to receive the "Crusader", and trained aboard the USS HANCOCK.

VMF-122, stationed at Beaufort, S.C., became the

first Marine unit to fly the F8U-1. Subsequently, the other squadrons of MAG-32; VMF-235, VMF-312 and VMF-333 were equipped with Crusaders.

As previously mentioned, some "Crusader" squadrons have carried several tail markings. VF-103 originally carried AK tail letters, which were changed to AJ, but retained the yellow arrowhead design. Besides changing tail letters from AF to GA, VFP-62 also changed squadron designation from VCP-62. VF-211 originally carried NP tail letters superimposed on a red & white checkerboard design. In mid-1960 the tail letters were changed to NE and the red & white checkerboard was confined to the rudder area, with 4 red bands running across the width of the fin area. Still later VF-211 changed back to NP tail letters with one red stripe above the letters and VF-24 has taken over the NE tail letters and the red & white checkerboard design.

When the new system of tail markings was put into effect, some squadrons tilted the letters for the jet-age effect, some letters were superimposed over each other, while others were connected together with a common center line. While this type of letter application produced some exciting marking designs, it also proved an impossible recognition problem when traveling at high speeds, since the connected letters and the swept back letters tended to blur into an unidentifiable mass. Marking regulations were changed and block type letters were to be used, separated in all cases, and the swept-back letters were limited to a slightly modified tilt. The accompanying drawings show examples of both the new and older type of letter applications.

Not since the mid-30's have Navy/Marine aircraft markings been so colorful. Navy squadrons are in a constant training cycle, with units returning from deployment and regrouping and acquiring new aircraft. All VF units have the two-letter tail markings and with few exceptions Air-Lant VF units use "A" as the initial letter, while Air-Pac VF units use "N" as the initial letter.

The 2-letter tail markings form the Carrier Group letters. Following are the tail letters for Carrier Groups during 1956/57:

CVG-1	- AB	CVG-10	- AK
CVG-2	- NE	CVG-11	- NH
CVG-3	- AC	CVG-12	- NJ
CVG-4	- AD	CVG-14	- NK
CVG-5	- NF	CVG-15	- NL
CVG-6	- AF	CVG-17	- AL
CVG-7	- AG	CVG-19	- NM
CVG-8	- AJ	CVG-21	- NP
CVG-9	- NG		

As another guide to markings, squadrons within Carrier Groups are identified by color of the aircraft. Following is the system employed for color trim.

	Color Trim
1st. Sqdn.	- Insignia Red
2nd. Sqdn.	- Orange-Yellow
3rd. Sqdn.	- Light Blue
4th. Sqdn.	- Intl. Orange
5th. Sqdn.	- Light Green
6th. Sqdn.	- Black
Photo Sqdn.	- Various

Marine aircraft have a slightly different system. As far as can be determined at this writing, there is no definite color system used by squadrons within a

(1) The same John H. Glenn, first American to orbit the earth in the space capsule, FRIENDSHIP VII.

Marine Air Group, except that they carry some of the most interesting and colorful designs used on F3U aircraft. It is also unknown what system is used to determine the tail letters used on Marine aircraft.

Photo squadrons use a different tail letter system than that described for VF & VA squadrons, and VFP & VCP squadrons are numbered from 901 - up.

As is usually the case when aircraft markings are recorded, there are many exceptions to the rule, and the writer would be pleased to hear from any Members who have additional information on "Crusader" tail markings.

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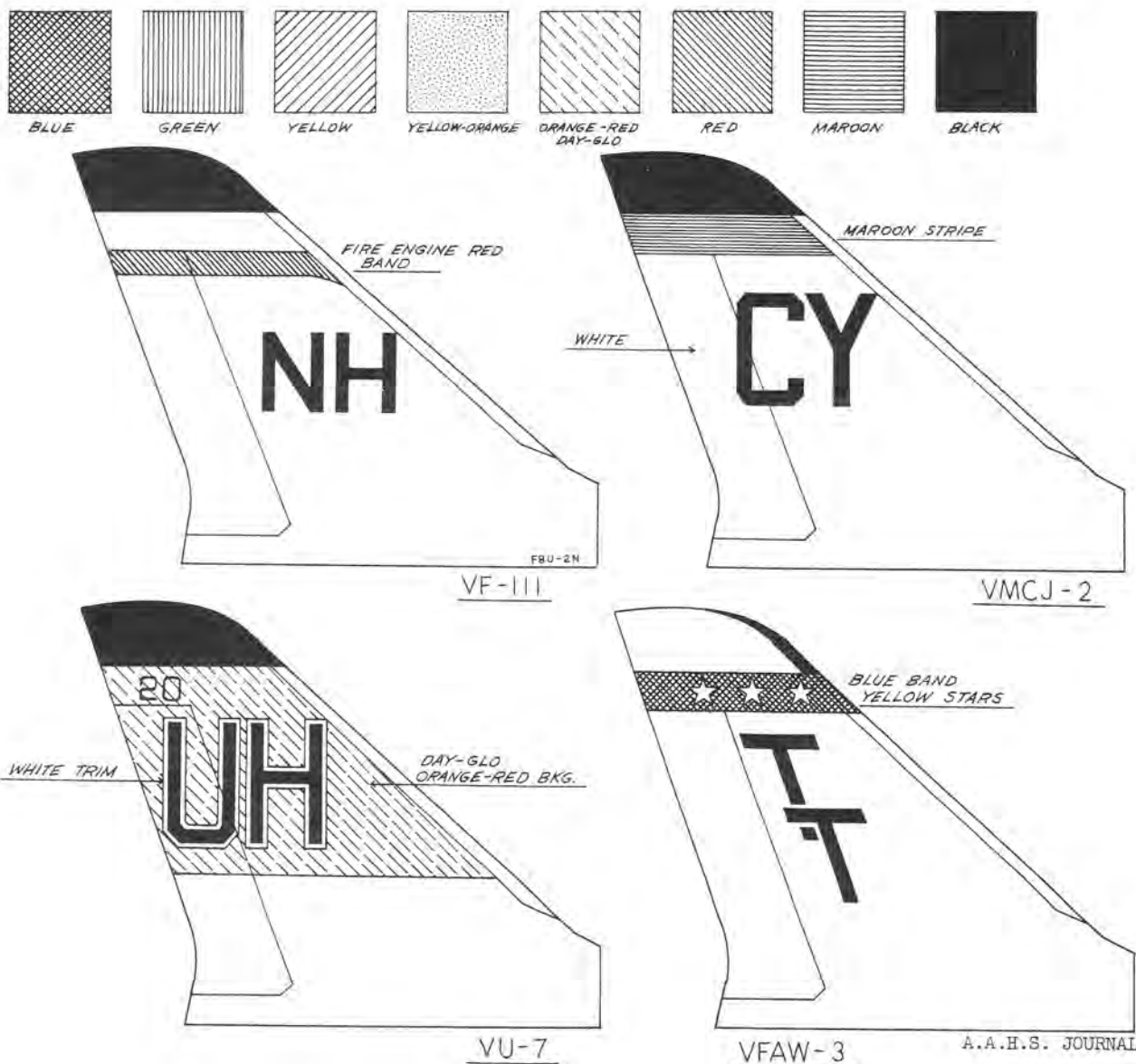
Lastly, my sincere appreciation to Member John Everds who prepared the drawings accompanying the article. John is a commercial artist by profession, and the quality of his drawings attest to his skill.

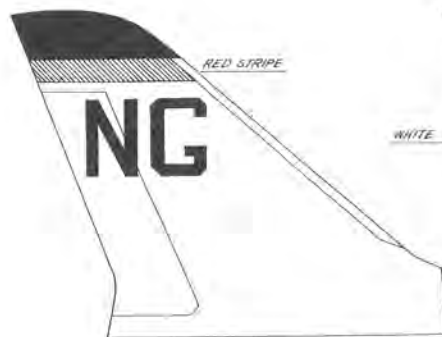
PHOTO CREDITS on Page 119

Photo #1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 - U.S. Navy via Art Schoeni, Chance Vought Aircraft.

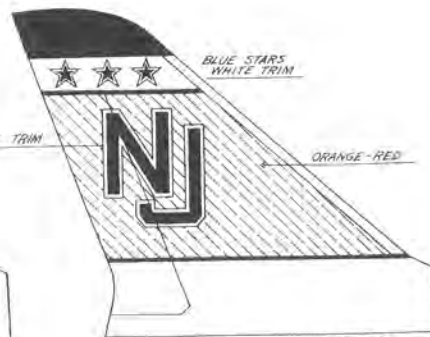
Photo #2 - U.S. Navy via Robert Knoernschild.

Photo #4 - Pat Stein.

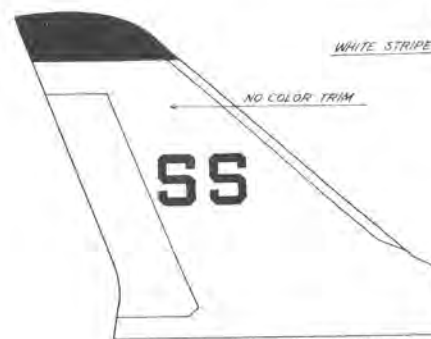




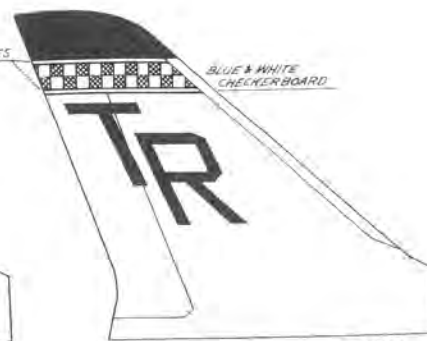
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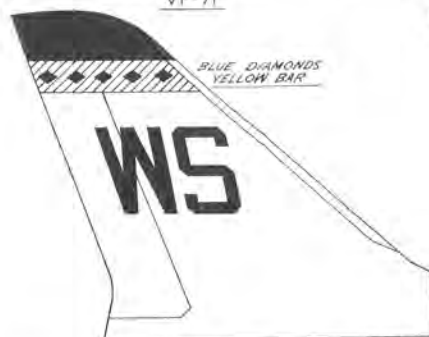
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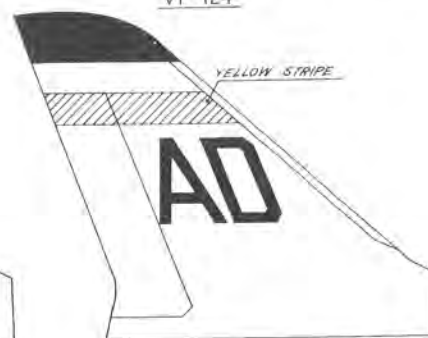
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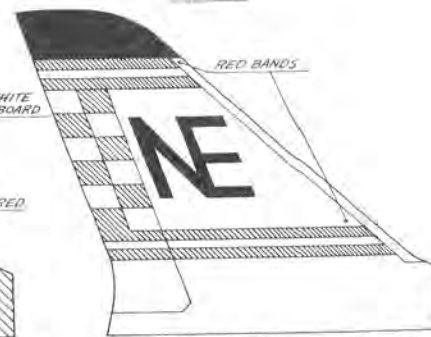
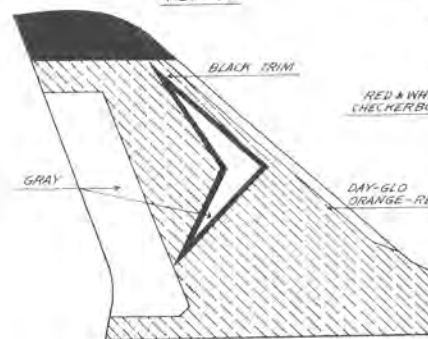
FAGU



VMF-323

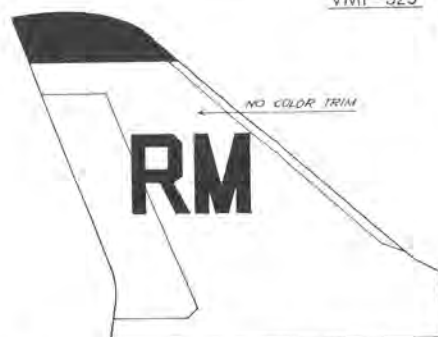


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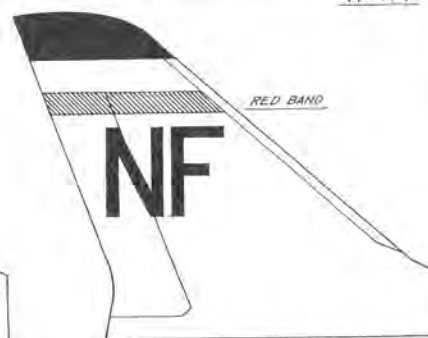


MARKINGS AS OF MID-1960

VF-211



VMJ-1



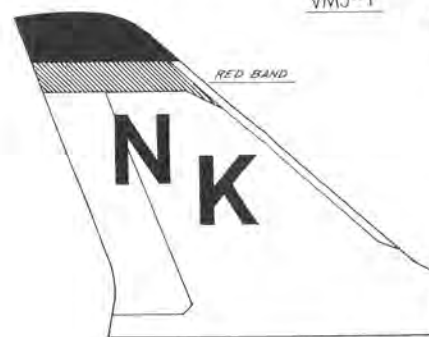
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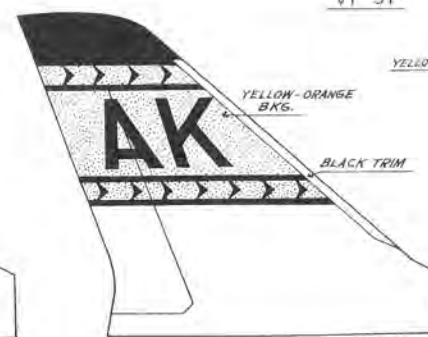
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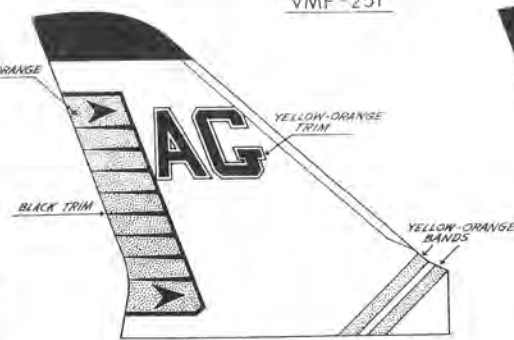
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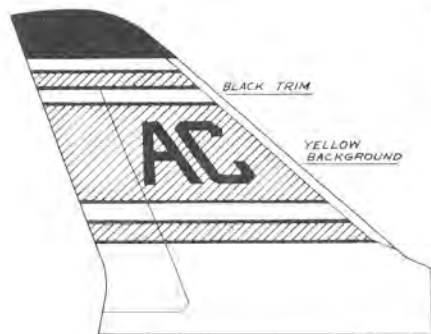
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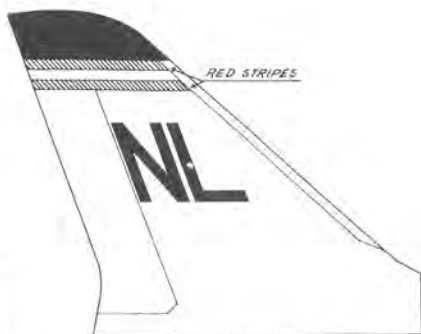
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VF-24



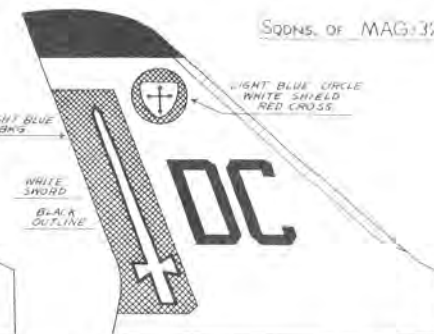
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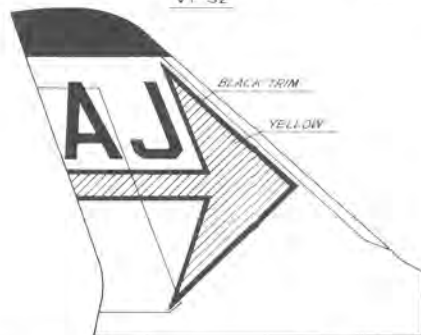
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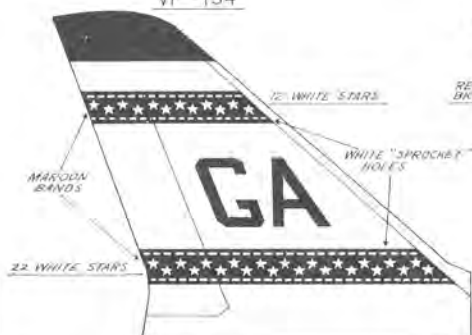
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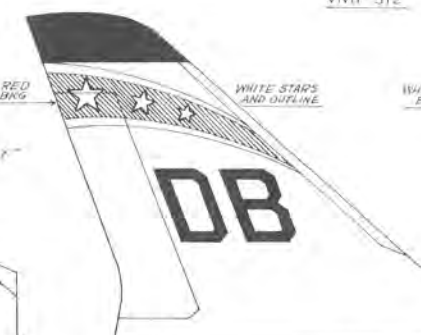
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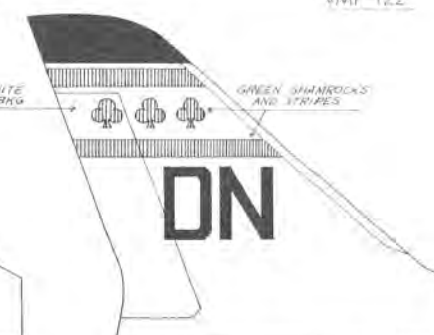
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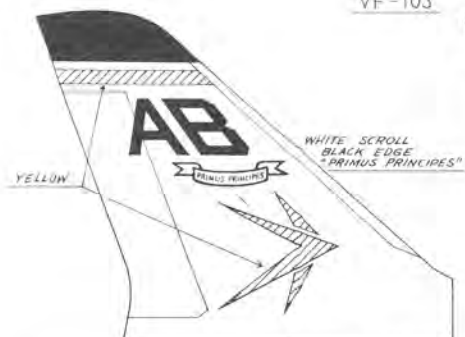
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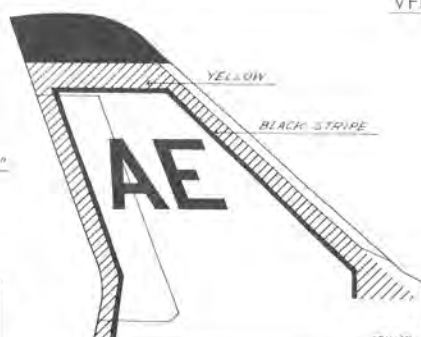
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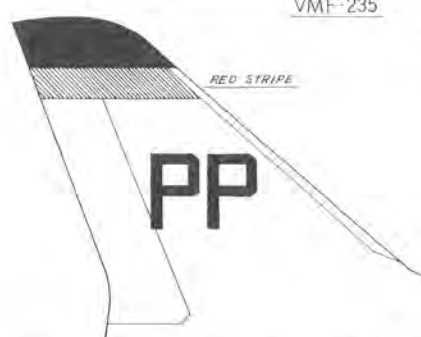
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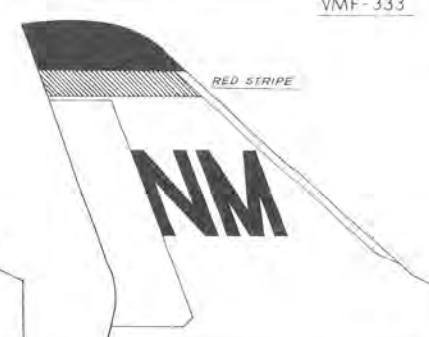
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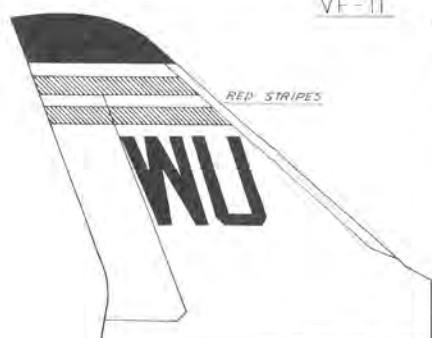
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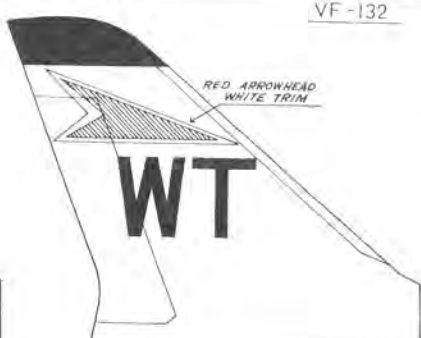
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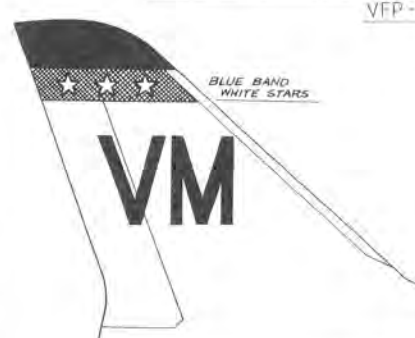
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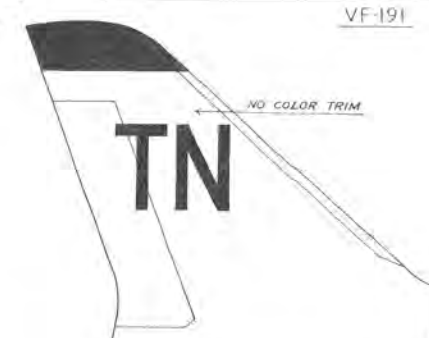
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VMF-232



VMF-451



VMJ-3



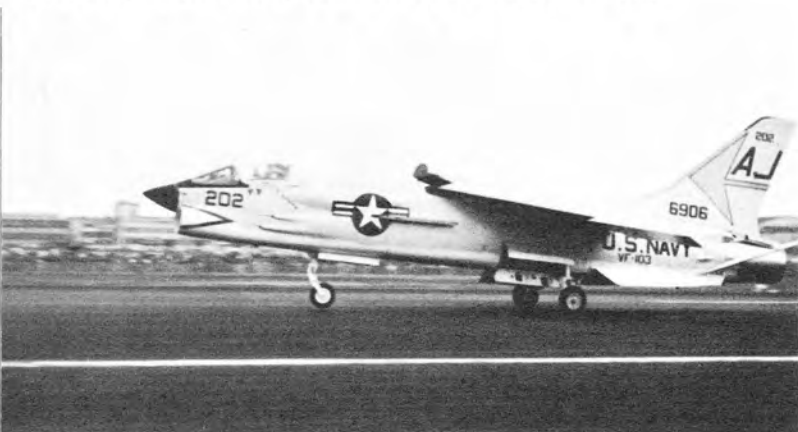
1. VF-32 was first to receive the F8U-1 "Crusader"



2. VF-154 was second, trained aboard U.S.S. HANGCOCK



3. VMF-333 of MAG-32 used F8U-2



4. F8U-2 of VF-103 at Paris Air Show, 1961



5. F8U-1P of VFP-62 (formerly VCP-62, letters AF)



6. F8U-1 of VF-11. #201 is 1st plane of 2nd Sq of Air Gp.



7. #201 of VF-132, also 1st plane of 2nd Sq, other AG.



8. F8U-1 of VMF-122, markings not in definite system