

AIRCAM AVIATION SERIES

No 19

GRUMMAN F6F-3/5 HELLCAT

IN USN · USMC · FAA · AERONAVALE & URUGUAYAN SERVICE





Above: F6F-5Ps of VF-85 off 'Shangri La'; 17 August, 1945. On 28 July, 1945, a VF-85 photo pilot, making photo runs over Japan, noticed four locomotives which he then destroyed by strafing, and then took photos of the results. (US Navy)

Below: An F6F-5N of VMF-511 following barrier crash on 'Block Island' (CVE-106); 19 May, 1945. VMF-511, part of Marine Carrier Air Group 1, operated six F4U-1Ds and six F6F-5Ns. (US Navy)





F6F-5 Hellcat, VF-27, USS Princeton. Overall sea blue gloss scheme red mouth with black outline, white teeth, black and white eye.

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Text by Richard M. Hill

Illustrated by Michael P. Roffe

**Compiled by Richard M. Hill
and Richard Ward**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is to be hoped that this the first AIRCAM devoted to a naval fighter aircraft, the Grumman Hellcat, instrumental in turning the tide of war over the Pacific, will settle once and for all the somewhat complex matter of USN Hellcat squadron identification markings from the introduction of the type into service to the end of the war. Thanks to all those who assisted with photographs whose names are listed below.

United States Navy, United States Marine Corps, MoD Admiralty, Grumman Aircraft Corporation, Fred C. Dickey Jr., N. Mendiburu, Garry Kuhn, J. C. Cuny.

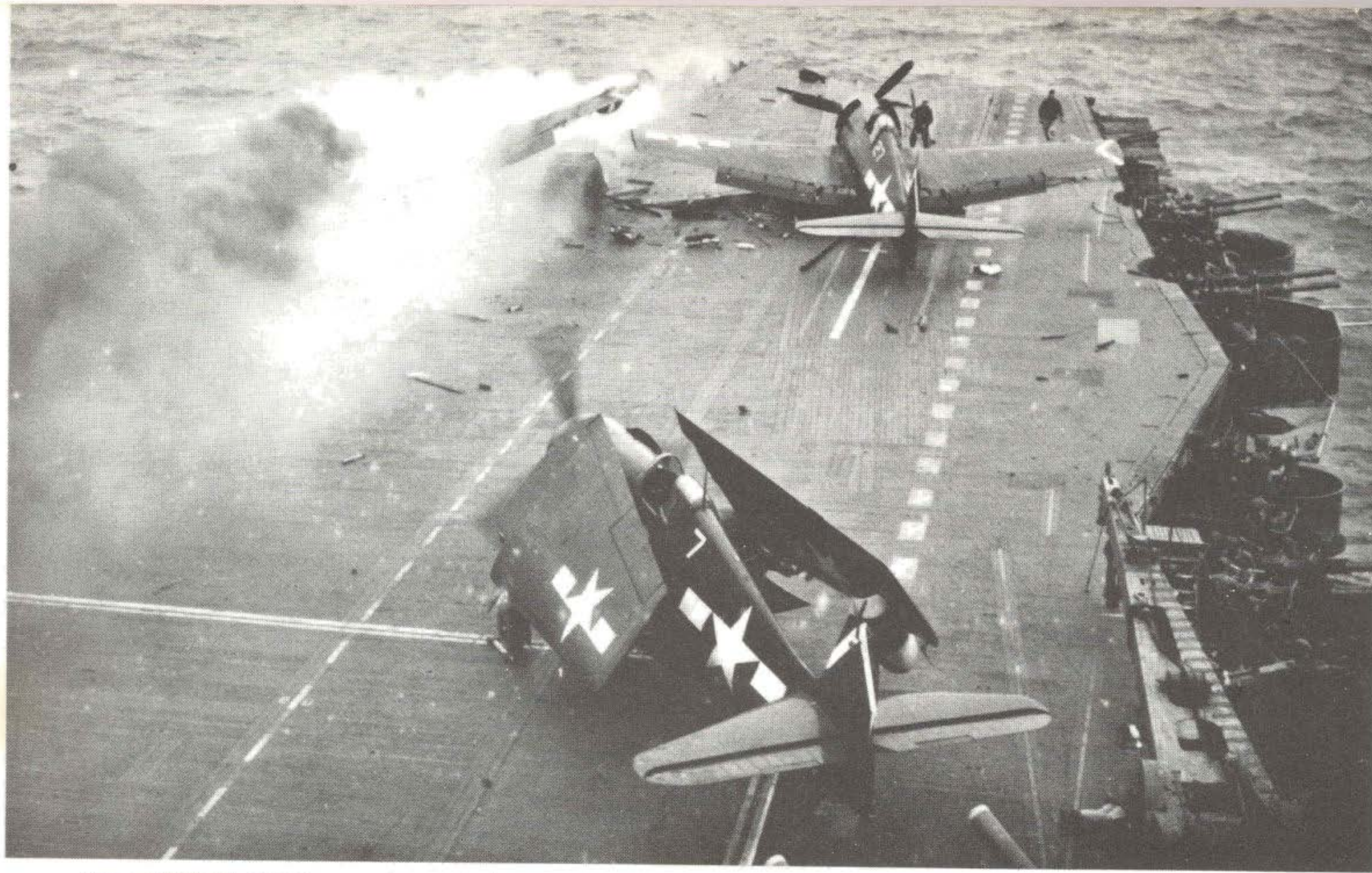


Hellcat Mk. II, No. 800 Squadron, FAA, HMS Emperor. Overall USN sea blue gloss with white trim. Note: the long-range tank was standard equipment and has not been included in the colour side-view illustrations due to lack of space.

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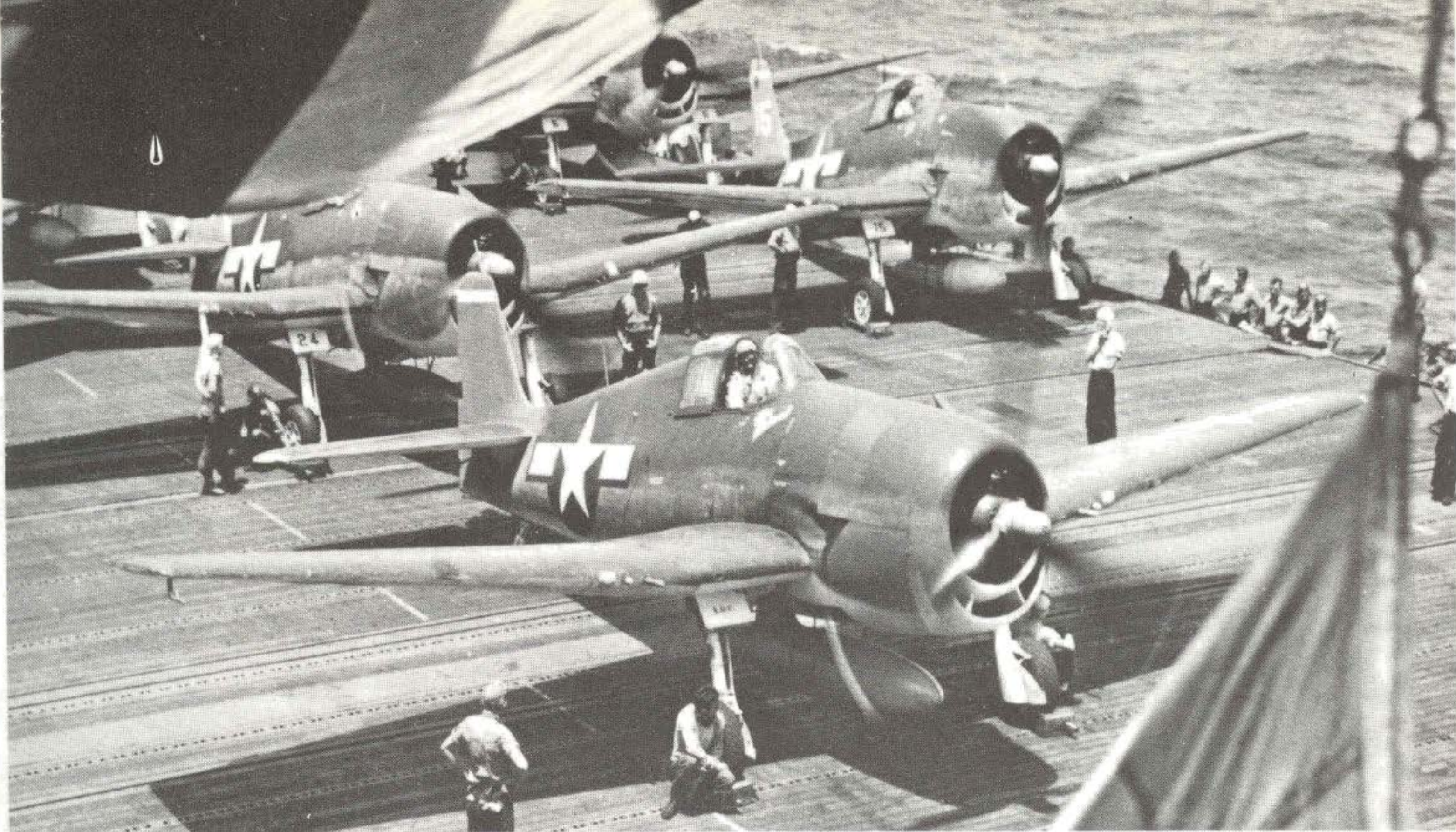
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Above: VF(N)-53 F6F-5Ns were about ready for launch when 'Saratoga' was hit by four Kamikazes and one bomb on 21 February, 1945. A fifth Kamikaze and a second bomb hit moments later. The third Night Carrier in action, 'Saratoga' was put out of operation only five days after commencing operations off Iwo Jima. (US Navy)

Below: A single bomb from a lone Judy resulted in this damage, and the sinking several hours later, on 'Princeton' in the "Battle of Leyte Gulf" on 24 October, 1944. The F6F-5, No. 1, on which the snarling face is just barely discernable, was that of CAG-27, Lt. Cdr. F. A. Bardshar. (US Navy)





VF-15 F6F-3s warm up prior to take off from 'Essex'; June, 1944. In the foreground, "The Minsi", the un-numbered F6F-3 of Cdr. David McCampbell, Air Group Commander. (US Navy)

GRUMMAN F6F-3/5 HELLCAT

On 30th June 1941, the Navy had contracted with Grumman for two experimental models of a carrier-based fighter to be designated the XF6F-1. However, design changes, including several as a direct result of conferences with combat-experienced Navy pilots, resulted in the XF6F-1 becoming little more than a "paper aircraft" which was all but discarded before it got off the ground. The first prototype, flown on 26th June 1942 with the R-2600-8 engine, was later modified to the one-of-a-kind F6F-4 configuration. The second prototype, with the more powerful R-2800-10 engine, was completed as the XF6F-3. The first production model F6F-3 was completed on 4th October 1942, and made its first flight in November. On 16th January 1943, VF-9 became the first operational squadron to receive the new Hellcat. The Navy pilots now had a carrier-based fighter "tailor made" to their own requirements, and designed to combat a specific enemy on its own terms. The efficacy of the Hellcat's design is evident from its extremely successful combat record and the fact that only two major versions (the F6F-3 and F6F-5) were produced.

In external details, late model F6F-3s differed very little from the early F6F-5s; the only visible changes were the redesigned windshield, a moveable trim tab on the right aileron, and the camouflage.

With the speed and rate of climb which had obviously been lacking in the F4F, and with a full range of flight characteristics completely void of any unusual tendencies, the Hellcat was superbly suited to its rôle as a carrier-based fighter. Data compiled by the Office of Naval Intelligence and released in May 1948 credit the Hellcat with 5,155 Japanese aircraft shot down—well over half of the 9,258 shot down by all types of U.S. Navy aircraft. The Hellcat's closest competitor, the F4U Corsair, is credited with 2,140 kills during World War II.

Service in the Pacific

On 31st August 1943 the Hellcat engaged in its first combat action, as Air Groups 9 and 5 from the U.S.S. *Essex* and the new U.S.S. *Yorktown* delivered four suc-

cessive attacks on Marcus Island. On a technicality, the slim margin by which they preceded VF-9 over the target, VF-5 Hellcats were the first to engage in combat. Several Bettys were strafed, but no airborne Japanese aircraft were seen. VF-6 from the U.S.S. *Independence* provided CAP for the Task Force during the attacks.

On the following day, VF-6 and VF-23 from U.S.S. *Princeton*, and VF22 from the U.S.S. *Belleau Wood* commenced a 12-day period of providing CAP over Baker and Howland Islands where Seabees were constructing a fighter strip. The Hellcat claimed the first of its many victims on 1st September when VF-6 pilots Lt.(jg) Richard L. Loesch and Ens. A. W. Nyquist intercepted and shot down an Emily. A second Emily was downed by VF-23 pilots on 3rd September, and a third was shot down on the 8th. The new U.S.S. *Lexington* with VF-16 Hellcats aboard joined the fleet, and on 18th September, in concert with *Princeton* and *Belleau Wood*, launched strikes against Tarawa. Two F6Fs of VF-24 and one from VF-22 shot down a Betty. It was to be more than a full month after its combat debut before the Hellcat would meet Japanese fighters in the air.

On 5th and 6th October 1943, in strikes against Wake Island, VF-9, VF-5, VF-6, VF-22 and VF-16 put the defending enemy fighters out of action on the first strike. Hamilton McWhorter of VF-9 claimed his first kill, one of four by VF-9. "Butch" O'Hare, C.O. of VF-6 on *Independence*, knocked down a Zeke and a Betty.

Carrier strikes were launched against the Japanese air and naval concentrations at Rabaul on 5th November 1943, and again on 11th November. On the 5th, U.S.S. *Saratoga's* VF-12 and *Princeton's* VF-23 escorted their respective air groups over Simpson Harbour into the swarm of waiting Japanese fighters. The F6F pilots had orders to stick close to the TBFs and SBDs, but nevertheless claimed 22 destroyed and 17 probables against the loss of three Hellcats shot down over the target.

On the 11th Rabaul received a double dose when Air Groups 12 and 23 returned and were followed closely by Air Groups 9, 17 and 22 from the *Essex*, *Bunker Hill*



An early production F6F-3 being positioned on a mooring sponson on 'Yorktown', June, 1944. Several of the features in evidence on this aircraft were changed on later F6F-3s; the radio mast, with a noticeable forward cant here, was straightened; the gun fairings, the lower cowl flaps, and the bulge over the central exhaust outlet were eliminated. Another feature, found only on some early F6F-3s, is the antenna wire, on both sides, leading from the tip of the horizontal stabilizer to the fuselage just below the upper point of the star. (US Navy)

and *Independence*. Striking from the east through heavy weather, VF-12 and VF-23 met little airborne opposition. Engaged briefly by no more than half a dozen Japanese fighters, one of which was shot down by VF-12, the two air groups escaped unscathed. Within moments, Hellcats of VF-9, VF-18 (Air Group 17), VF-22 and VF-6 (Air Group 22 on *Independence*), led their groups over Rabaul from the south. Stirred up by Air Groups 12 and 23, the Japanese fighters met this strike in force. Again, with orders not to be drawn away from their escort duty, the Hellcats claimed 31 destroyed and five probables. William Blair of VF-9 claimed one of the more unusual kills of the war when he inadvertently dropped his belly tank on a Zeke below him. Three F6Fs were shot down in the target area. The carriers *Essex*, *Bunker Hill* and *Independence* were in the process of launching a second strike when Vals and Kates swarmed all over them in retaliation. *Essex* and *Bunker Hill* had all but completed launching their Hellcats when the first wave of Vals came plummeting down. On his first combat mission, "Billy" Watts of VF-18, in the last F6F off the *Bunker Hill*, barely had time to retract his wheels before he shot a Val into the water. When the smoke cleared an hour later, the ships of the Task Force remained undamaged; VF-9 claimed 41 kills, VF-18 claimed 20½ and VF-22 claimed one.

Operation GALVANIC, the occupation of the Gilbert Islands in November and December, employed six CVs, five CVLs and eight CVEs. All, except three of the CVEs, had F6Fs aboard. Except for a few scattered instances, enemy air action was limited to dusk and night torpedo attacks by long-range Bettys. At dusk on 20th November, about 30 miles west of Tarawa, 16 Bettys attacked Task Group 50.3.1 with torpedoes. Five Bettys were shot down by the VF-18 CAP, and ship's A.A. accounted for several more, but *Independence* was put out of action with torpedo damage. The ease and regularity with which the Japanese conducted torpedo attacks in the dark of night clearly demonstrated the need for carrier-based night fighters.

On the night of 26th November "Butch" O'Hare, ace and Medal of Honor winner, led the first attempt at carrier-based night interception. C.O. of Air Group 6 on the *Enterprise*, O'Hare and his wingman, Warren Skon of VF-2, flew standard F6F-3s and were to be guided to the targets by a radar-equipped TBF piloted by John Phillips, C.O. of VT-6. Phillips shot down two Bettys before the Hellcats could join up with the TBF, and shortly thereafter, amidst the darkness and some

confusion, O'Hare was apparently shot down.

VF-16 pilots seemed to have an uncanny knack of finding action. On 23rd November 12 VF-16 F6Fs, led by Paul Buie, were on CAP when they shot down 17 of 23 Zekes and Hamps attempting to reinforce Tarawa. The other four were claimed as probables. The next day, 12 VF-16 F6Fs shot down 12 more enemy fighters following the same route. Over Kwajalein on 4th December, 12 VF-16 Hellcats mixed it up with some 30 Zekes and came away with claims of 19 Zekes and one Betty shot down. The string was broken that evening when *Lexington* and VF-16 were temporarily put out of action by a torpedo hit.

As the U.S. Fleet moved into the Marshall Islands early in 1944, it was reinforced by more new carriers with some new, and some old Hellcat squadrons; in January, *Intrepid* with VF-6, and *Cabot* with VF-31; in February, the new *Hornet* with VF-2, *Langley* with VF-32, and *Santee* with VF-26. *Enterprise* renewed an old association with the "Grim Reapers" of VF-10. Air Groups on some of the CVs were augmented by four-plane detachments of night fighters; VF(N)-76 with F6F-3Ns on *Essex*, *Yorktown* and *Bunker Hill*, and VF(N)-101 with F4U-2s on *Enterprise* and *Intrepid*.

In the pre-invasion strikes on Kwajalein on 29th January, the few Japanese fighters in the air over Roi-Namur were promptly shot down by VF-9 and VF-31; VF-9 claiming eight and VF-31 claiming five. VF-6, on Target CAP in the afternoon, shot down one Topsy and six Bettys apparently out for their now familiar night torpedo missions. Three of the six Bettys were shot down by Alex Vraciu, the third after eight or nine runs in a 25-mile chase with only one gun functioning. After the first day's operations, not one Japanese aircraft rose to challenge the invasion force, and within two days the carrier planes had destroyed the balance of the Japanese aircraft, in excess of 100, on the ground.

On 16th February 1944, Task Force 58 Hellcats were instrumental in shattering the myth of invincibility which surrounded the Japanese bastion of Truk. In the pre-dawn darkness, 90 miles ENE of Truk, Task Force 58 commenced the two-day operation by launching a fighter sweep. F6Fs of VF-5, VF-6, VF-9, VF-10 and VF-18, 72 in all, arrived over the atoll just before dawn. An estimated 45 to 50 Japanese fighters were already in the air, and more took off during the ensuing battle. With no bombers to protect, as there had been at Rabaul some three months earlier, the Hellcats were free to engage the enemy at will. The mass dogfight which developed



Cdr. James Flatley, Commander Air Group 5 and Strike Co-ordinator, leading Air Groups 5 and 9 against Marcus Island in the Hellcat's first combat action, 31 August, 1943. This aircraft exhibits the first of the visible changes in the F6F-3, the upright radio mast. Antenna wires from the horizontal stabilizer tip to the fuselage are fitted. (US Navy)

was probably the wildest in the annals of Pacific aerial combat, and was entirely one-sided. The fighter sweep shot more than 50 Japanese from the air and lost only four F6Fs. At least another 50 enemy fighters were claimed by the Hellcats escorting the various strikes during the day. As the aerial opposition thinned out the Hellcats turned to strafing the remaining aircraft on the ground, destroying an estimated 150. On the following morning, not one Japanese aircraft rose to meet the fighter sweep.

During the night of the 16th, several Kates attempted to press home torpedo attacks on the Task Force, but were kept at a respectable distance by A.A. fire. The first use of a carrier-borne night fighter for night interception took place when Russ Reiserer of VF(N)-76 was launched from *Yorktown*. Vectored out without benefit of radar bearings, the F6F-3N failed to make contact with the Kate, which finally made a successful torpedo run on *Intrepid*.

Five days later Task Groups 58.2 and 58.3 moved westward into the Marianas where VF-9, VF-5, VF-24, VF-18, VF-30 and VF-25 had another field day. Sixty-seven of the 74 Japanese aircraft which rose to challenge the Hellcats never made it back, and 100 more were destroyed on the ground. Four F6Fs were lost to enemy action.

As the Fast Carriers moved on, they left behind them the CVEs and their air groups to provide support for the ground forces and cover for the supporting ships. At best it was a dreary job, with little opportunity for excitement or glory. VF-60, one of several CVE-based Hellcat squadrons, served aboard *Suwanee* (CVE-27) from November 1943 to October 1944 and amassed a grand total of 21 Japanese aircraft shot down; one of the higher scores among CVE squadrons.

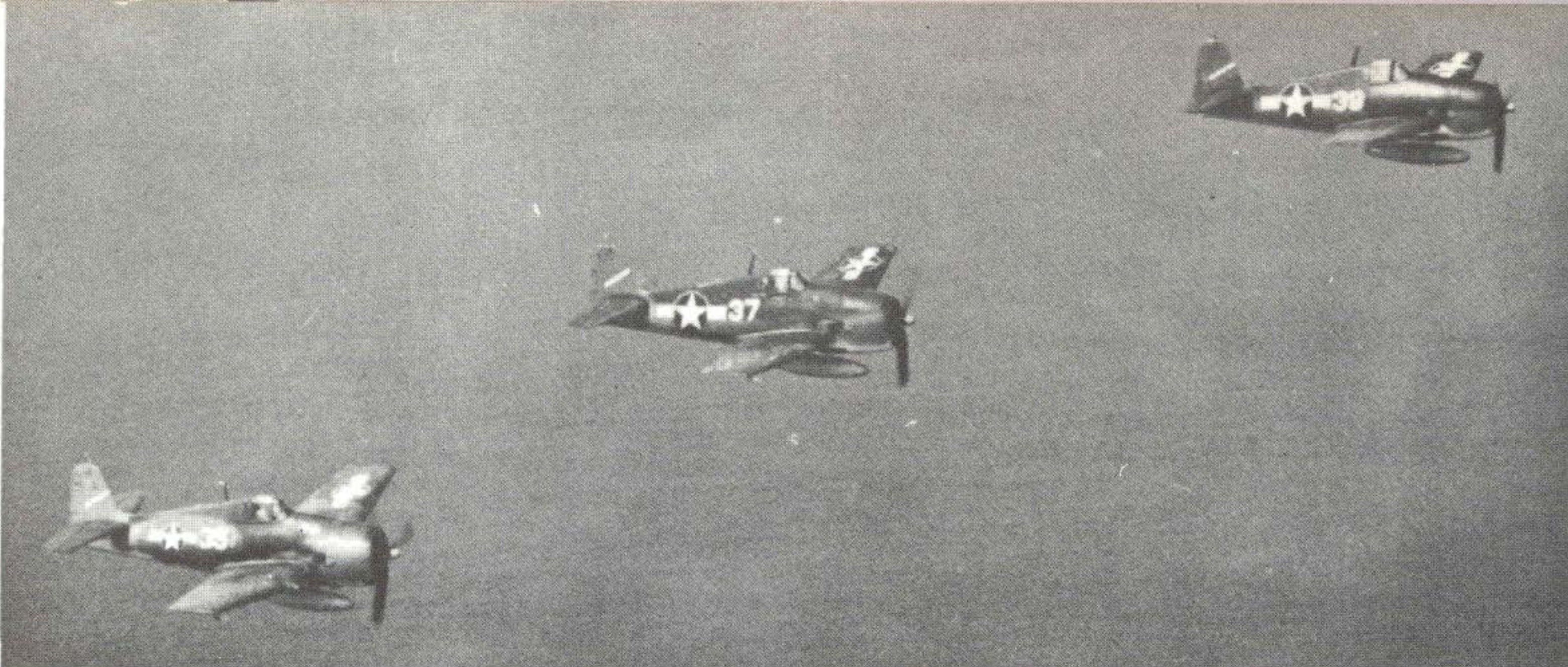
Penetrating deep within Japanese territory, the air groups of eleven carriers worked over Palau, Ulithi and Woleai in the Western Carolines for three days, beginning on 30th March 1944. On *Bunker Hill*, VF-8 had replaced VF-18; *Hornet* with VF-2 was participating in its first combat action; VF-16 on battle-scarred *Lexington* was back in action. These, plus the veterans of VF-5, VF-10, VF-24, VF-25, VF-31, VF-30, VF-23 and VF-32 repeated what had become a familiar cycle. The few Japanese fighters in the air were quickly eliminated. Some 40 to 50 reinforcements flown into Palau on the night of the 30th fared no better on the 31st. The same eleven carriers, plus *Bataan* with VF-50 F6Fs aboard, provided cover and support for the Allied invasion forces at Aitape and Hollandia. Upon withdrawing from the New Guinea area, Task Force 58 flyers administered another pounding to Truk which had been reinforced since February and now had approximately 100 aircraft. The fighter sweep on the morning of 29th April was led by two divisions of VF-32 Hellcats. Arriving over the target well in advance of the other F6Fs, the eight chewed up a recep-

tion committee of 35 to 40 Zekes, downing 21 confirmed kills and claiming two probables without incurring any damage to their own aircraft. Lt.-Cdr. E. C. Outlaw, VF-32 C.O. and flight leader, accounted for five of the confirmed kills. In all, the F6F pilots shot down more than 50 Japanese fighters, and joined in the destruction of several more on the ground. Upon the departure of Task Force 58 on 30th April, approximately 12 serviceable aircraft remained on Truk's airstrips. Although some 26 Navy carrier aircraft had been shot down, mostly by A.A. fire, 28 of the 46 crewmen had been rescued.

When Task Force 58 moved into the Marianas Islands area in early June 1944, it constituted the largest and most powerful assemblage of carriers and carrier-based aircraft ever seen; seven CVs and eight CVLs with a combined complement of approximately 918 aircraft, half of which were Hellcats. Two of the carriers, *Wasp* and *San Jacinto*, and six of the air groups were new and untried. *Yorktown*'s veteran Air Group 5 had been replaced by Air Group 1; Air Group 28 replaced Air Group 30 on *Monterey*; Air Group 27 with VF-27's uniquely-marked F6Fs had replaced Air Group 23 on *Princeton*; *Essex* had returned with Cdr. David McCampbell's Air Group 15; Air Groups 14 and 51 were aboard the two new carriers.

The initial fighter sweep was advanced from the morning of 12th June to the afternoon of the 11th, partly to achieve surprise by varying the routine of the pre-dawn strike, and partly to reduce the number of anticipated night-time snoopers. Some 200 Hellcats ranged over Saipan, Guam, Tinian and Rota, shooting at anything in their way. More than 70 Japanese aircraft were shot from the air, and an additional number were destroyed on the ground. A dozen or more were shot down on the following day, and by 13th June Japanese air power in the Marianas Islands had been wiped out. On 15th and 16th June approximately 60 more Japanese aircraft were shot down over Iwo Jima, Haha Jima and Chichi Jima as Task Groups 58.1 and 58.3 ranged north in an attempt to discourage the Japanese from staging more aircraft into the Marianas.

The "Battle of the Philippine Sea" on 19th and 20th June was the largest carrier-v.-carrier battle of the war, although neither surface fleet ever came within sight of the other. Precise statistics of aircraft losses in the "Marianas Turkey Shoot" on 19th June are virtually impossible to ascertain; no two sources agree. However, it was undeniably the Hellcats' day, as they thwarted the Japanese raids in a daylong defensive action and claimed at least 354 airborne kills. VF-15, in their first major combat action, turned in the highest claim, 68½ destroyed and 12 probables, against the loss of three pilots. Significantly, David McCampbell, the Navy's top scoring ace of World War II, was individual high scorer of the day with seven kills and one probable. Alex Vraciu, with VF-16 since *Intrepid* had been torpedoed at Truk, shot



F6F-3s of VF-5 headed for Marcus Island, 31 August, 1943. The two leading F6F-3s have the canted radio mast and large, red bordered fuselage insignia. Number 35 has the upright mast and small, red bordered, fuselage insignia. The diagonal line on the vertical fin was the standard 'Yorktown' aircraft marking until 12 February, 1945. A pea green prop hub was standard for virtually all 'Yorktown' (CV-10) aircraft throughout the war. (US Navy)

down six Judys to run his total victories to 18. Wilbur "Spider" Webb of VF-2 and Russell Reiserer of VF(N)-76 off *Hornet* were among 27 Hellcat pilots who wreaked havoc on 49 Japanese carrier planes attempting to land at Orote Field on Guam. In the landing circle with a string of Vals, Webb shot down six and Reiserer got five. Thirty of the 49 Japanese were shot down, and the other 19 were so badly damaged that they crashed on landing.

Squadron claims of Japanese aircraft destroyed in the air

"Marianas Turkey Shoot" - 19 June 1944

VF-1 (<i>Yorktown</i>)	37	VF-25 (<i>Cowpens</i>)	Unknown
VF-2 (<i>Hornet</i>)	45*	VF-27 (<i>Princeton</i>)	30
VF-8 (<i>Bunker Hill</i>)	21	VF-28 (<i>Monterey</i>)	18
VF-10 (<i>Enterprise</i>)	29	VF-31 (<i>Cabot</i>)	28
VF-14 (<i>Wasp</i>)	12½	VF-32 (<i>Langley</i>)	2
VF-15 (<i>Essex</i>)	68½	VF-50 (<i>Bataan</i>)	Unknown
VF-16 (<i>Lexington</i>)	45	VF-51 (<i>San Jacinto</i>)	8
VF-24 (<i>Belleau Wood</i>)	10	Total	354

*Includes 8 by *Hornet's* VF(N)-76 detachment.

Based on figures contained in Japanese records, the claims of the Hellcat pilots appear to be exaggerated. Undoubtedly, the claims must include some duplications. However, if it is reasonable to consider the American claims as being exaggerated, it also seems reasonable to expect that the Japanese would make an effort to minimize their losses. Of 473 aircraft available to the Mobile Fleet at dawn on 19th June, only 127 are reported to have remained serviceable 24 hours later. An estimated 50 Guam-based aircraft destroyed brings the total to 396 admitted losses for the day. Of that total, approximately 86 can be attributed to causes other than aerial combat with the Hellcats. Of the other 310 losses, at least 192 Mobile Fleet aircraft and 18 Guam-based aircraft were definite on-the-spot kills by the F6F pilots; 19 carrier aircraft, seriously damaged by the F6Fs, were destroyed when they crashed in landing on Guam airfields; 81 managed to make it back to the carriers, but were so shot up by the Hellcats or by A.A. fire, or both, that they were considered non-repairable. Eighteen Hellcats were lost during the day's action; 16 shot down or crashed due to combat-sustained damage, one shot down by Task Force 58 A.A. fire, and one operational loss.

On 20th June, day-long searches culminated in a twilight strike on the Japanese Fleet by some 216 Task Force 58 aircraft, including 85 F6Fs. Twenty to 40 more Japanese aircraft were shot down. These, plus several operational losses, left the Mobile Fleet with 35 serviceable carrier planes and 12 float planes on 21st June. Six F6Fs were shot down over the Japanese Fleet.

Deck crashes, or fuel depletion during the long return trip in darkness accounted for 17 more F6F losses. Japanese carrier-based aviation had been virtually annihilated and would not again be a factor in the war.

Crowded with aircraft intended as reinforcements for Guam and Tinian, Iwo Jima and Chichi Jima were struck twice more by Task Group 58.1. Hellcats of VF-2 and VF-1 quickly discouraged the Japanese by shooting down approximately 70 of their reinforcements on 24th June, and another 59 on 4th July. On 7th July, the surviving flyable aircraft were withdrawn to Japan.

In the July 4th strike on Iwo Jima, VF-13, off the new carrier, *Franklin*, introduced the F6F-5 into combat and claimed four kills. VF-13 also claimed the destruction of a destroyer and four small merchant vessels in the first combat use of rocket projectiles by U.S. Navy fighter aircraft in the Pacific. More F6F-5s appeared shortly as VF-19 replaced VF-16 on *Lexington*, VF-21 replaced VF-24 on *Belleau Wood*, and VF-22 replaced VF-25 on *Cowpens*. Additional F6F-5s were introduced piecemeal as other squadrons replaced F6F-3s lost in the June battles. In August, *Monterey* put into Pearl Harbour where VF-28 exchanged its F6F-3s for a full complement of new F6F-5s. On *Enterprise*, VF-10 was relieved by VF-20. Two veteran carriers rejoined the fleet following repair of torpedo inflicted damage; *Intrepid* with a new Air Group 18 aboard, and *Independence* in a new rôle as a night carrier with Night Air Group 41. Although all CV fighter squadrons now included from two to four F6F-3Ns or F6F-5Ns, along

F6F-3s probably of VF-1 on Tarawa in November 1943. (USMC)





This VF-9 F6F-3 off 'Essex', in late 1943, carries the standard and rather uninteresting markings of the period, the aircraft number on the fuselage and vertical fin. This F6F-3 is believed to have been that of Lt. jg. George M. Blair who was later rescued from Truk Lagoon by Lt. jg. Baxter and his OS2U on 16 February, 1944. (US Navy)

with specially trained night fighter pilots, their employment in their intended rôle was limited. From lack of experience, carrier commanders were still sceptical of the effectiveness of night operations, and were reluctant to upset the routine of the ship by conducting regular night operations. *Independence* with her radar-equipped F6F-5Ns and TBM-1Ds was intended to overcome these objections and provide the sorely needed night-time protection to the fleet.

The majority of CV fighter squadrons were also equipped with two to four F6F-5P photo aircraft. Retaining the full complement of armament and flown by regular squadron pilots who had taken a course in aerial photography, these F6F-5Ps provided fast photographic assessment of strike damage and were capable of protecting themselves when the need arose. Several such photo/fighter pilots became aces, and on occasion had to be admonished to "quit shooting down planes and get on with the photo job". Reflecting both the need for more fighters, and the ability of the F6F to perform most of the missions required in the Navy's air war, the VF squadrons on CVs now operated with a complement of 50 to 54 Hellcats as opposed to the previous standard complement of 36.

When Task Force 38 sortied from Eniwetok on 29th August 1944, the decks of its 16 carriers were packed with more than 1,000 aircraft, including 520 F6Fs. Moving into the Western Carolines and the Philippine area to cover the invasion of Anguar and Palau, the force met no determined opposition. Following strikes on the Visayas on 12th and 13th September, the Hellcat pilots claimed 140 Japanese aircraft shot down. Another 130 were shot down in the first strikes on the Manila area on 21st and 22nd September. An even greater number, estimated in excess of 800 during the month of September, was destroyed on the ground. On the 21st, VF-31 pilots C. N. Nooy and E. W. Toaspern tangled with several intercepting Japanese fighters. Following the dog-fight in which Nooy shot down two Zekes, two Tojos and one Tony, and Toaspern downed two Tonys, the pair went on to hit Clark Field with the 500-pound bomb each had carried throughout the fight.

The arrival of *Hancock* with Air Group 7 increased

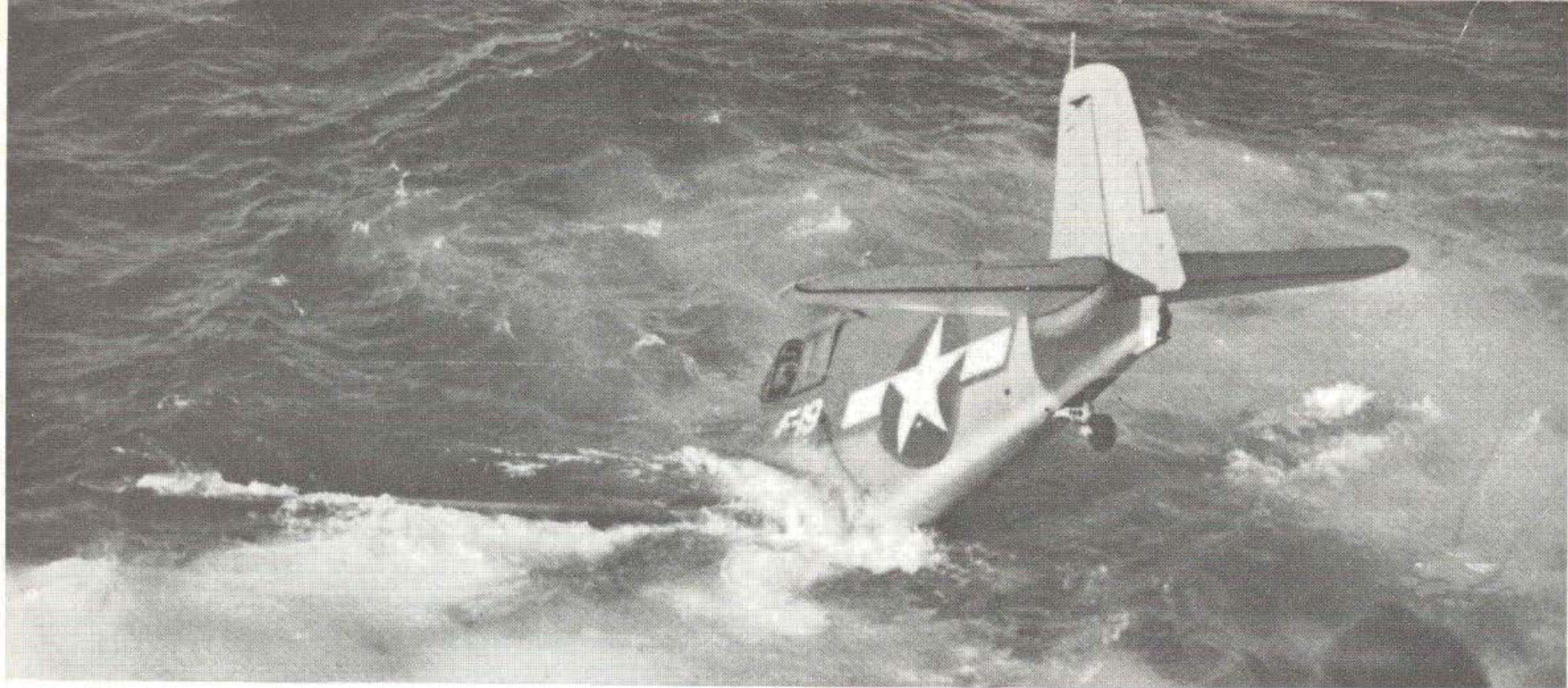
the Task Force 38 carrier complement to 17. Several new air groups were rotated into combat; VF-2's spot on *Hornet* was now taken by VF-11, VF-44 relieved VF-32 on *Langley*, and *Cabot* had VF-29 in place of VF-31. The Hellcats of the replaced squadrons were retained on board and taken over by the new squadrons. Most Task Force 38 VF units were now operating with a mixed complement of F6F-3s and F6F-5s. Squadrons which had gone to sea in May or June with F6F-3s had received some F6F-5s as replacements. Those which had gone to sea in August or September with F6F-5s sometimes found themselves with a few -3s as replacements when -5s were not immediately available. Those squadrons consisting mainly of F6F-5s considered their F6F-3s as liabilities due to the increased performance and manoeuvrability of the -5.

The air battle over Formosa on 12th—14th October was another "Turkey Shoot"; during the three days, the Hellcat pilots claimed more than 300 airborne kills against the loss of 27 F6Fs. The heaviest action occurred on the 12th when 188 Japanese aircraft were shot down. On the early morning fighter sweep, a relative handful of Hellcats, outnumbered at times by as much as five to one, fought a determined battle and emerged with claims of 122½ enemy fighters shot down. A hornet's nest of Zekes, Oscars and Nicks over Taien Airfield lost 57 of its number to VF-18 and VF-8. Although four VF-18 F6Fs were shot down, the 15 pilots of VF-8 destroyed 32 Japanese fighters without loss to themselves. Over central Formosa, VF-19 and VF-15 engaged a similar force of Zekes and Tojos and claimed 47½ shot down. Over the relatively quiet area of southern Formosa, VF-20 pilots met 30 Oscars and shot down 18.

Over Luzon, between 15th and 19th October, VF-11, VF-14, and VF-20 claimed 80 more kills. During the same period, the Hellcat pilots successfully resisted the attempts of Japanese aircraft to finish off the cruisers *Houston* and *Canberra* which had been crippled by torpedoes off Formosa. On the 15th, VF-14 and VF-22 F6Fs on CAP shot down 46 of these, and on the 16th, VF-22, VF-11 and VF-29 accounted for another 56. Fourteen F6Fs and 11 pilots were lost to enemy action during these five days.

A smoking VF-16 F6F-3 returns to the 'Lexington' from Wake Island, 5 October, 1943. (US Navy)





F6F-3 of VF-30 following crash on take-off from 'Monterey', 19 November, 1943. The pilot was rescued by 'Radford' (DD-446). Fuselage marking is F-19. (US Navy)

During the "Battle of Leyte Gulf" on 24th October, the Japanese lost more than 150 aircraft to the Hellcat pilots. The fighter pilots of Task Group 38.3 had the major rôle when the Japanese chose that group as the target for several strong air raids. VF-19 had an exceptionally busy day and claimed 61 kills. William J. Masoner Jr., out on a long-range search, brought back gun camera film showing the destruction of six twin-engine bombers. VF-15 claimed 43 kills, including nine fighters by David McCampbell and six by his wingman, Roy Rushing. VF-27 intercepted a strong formation of Japanese fighters and shot down 36, but the loss of *Princeton* in the same action temporarily put VF-27 out of the war.

On 29th October, fighter sweeps over the Clark Field and Manila area resulted in claims in excess of 60 kills by VF-7, VF-13, VF-18 and VF-20. On 5th November, in the same area, VF-11, VF-14, VF-15, VF-19 and VF-80 claimed 72 more kills. Subsequently, the Japanese showed great reluctance to send their remaining aircraft into combat. Dispersing them on the ground, sometimes several miles from the airstrips, was of little use. Turning to low-level bombing and strafing, the Hellcat pilots sought out the hidden aircraft and destroyed them in droves.

The first concerted *Kamikaze* attacks resulted in an increased number of fighters on the carriers. The authorized VF complement on CVs was increased from 54 to 73, and the VB and VT squadrons cut to 15 aircraft apiece. Several Marine Corps Corsair squadrons were given hurried training in carrier operations and put aboard several CVs until the Navy could provide more fighter aircraft and pilots. During the month of January 1945, Air Groups 4 and 81 dispensed with their SB2Cs and operated with a complement of 91 fighters and 15 TBMs. The 73 plane/110 pilot squadron proved unwieldy, and was split into two separate units in January 1945, with the second unit being designated a VBF (Fighter Bomber) squadron. Except where the two squadrons operated different types, the VF and VBF squadrons usually shared the same aircraft and the same flight schedule.

In November 1944, the Oscars being used as night bombers proved to be too fast for the Army's P-61s on Leyte. At the request of General MacArthur, the Marine Corps' VMF(N)-541 F6F-5Ns were moved up to Tacloban Field on 3rd December. The P-61s took VMF(N)-541's spot at Peleliu. Before returning to Peleliu on 11th January 1945, VMF(N)-541 claimed 22 kills, including three during the hours of darkness.

Although the realization was slow, mainly due to improper utilization in the initial stages, *Independence's* Night Air Group 41 proved itself to be remarkably

successful. With its all night CAPS and heckler missions over Luzon airfields, the familiar snoopers and night torpedo attacks were most conspicuous by their absence. In night operations between 12th October and 16th December, VF(N)-41 destroyed 23 enemy aircraft in the air and four more on the ground. A second night carrier, *Enterprise*, with Night Air Group 90, joined the fleet in January 1945.

January operations in support of the Lingayen Gulf landings were carried out under severe weather conditions. Instrument conditions were all too common, and 200 foot ceilings forced the Hellcats into extremely low-level strafing attacks. One VF-3 Hellcat returned with mud splattered on the wings and windshield after strafing vehicles on a road north of Manila.

For several air groups, the first carrier strikes on Japan and the Tokyo area on 16th and 17th February 1945 were also their first taste of combat. The reception was hot, and in spite of guns frozen by the cold weather, the F6F pilots claimed 200 of the 245 Japanese aircraft shot down on the 16th. On the 17th, the reception was some-

A wounded Hellcat back from Kwajalein. Ens. Eddie Wendorf of VF-16 hit the barriers on the 'Lexington's' deck, but had the satisfaction of shooting down two enemy aircraft on this mission; 4 December, 1943. Red bordered insignia were quite common on carrier aircraft until early 1944 even though the official change to blue borders was ordered in September, 1943. (US Navy)



what diminished and the 74 kills included 55 by the F6F pilots. Sixty carrier planes were lost to enemy action in the two days.

A unique experiment was prematurely halted when *Saratoga* was hit by five *Kamikazes* and two bombs on 21st February off Iwo Jima. In action for only five days, *Saratoga's* Air Group 53 was intended to provide 24-hour protection to the supporting ships off Iwo. Air Group 53 consisted of two night squadrons, VF(N)-53 with F6F-5Ns and VT(N)-53 with TBM-3Ds, and one day squadron, VF-53 with F6F-5s. *Enterprise* with Night Air Group 90 was left as the sole night carrier in action. From 23rd February to 2nd March, for 174 consecutive hours, VF(N)-90 maintained a continuous succession of night Caps, day Caps, Target CAPS, fighter sweeps and intruder missions over Iwo and Chichi Jima.

In the Okinawa campaign extensive employment of the *Kamikaze*, the only major weapon left in the Japanese arsenal, kept the carrier pilots busy. On 21st March, 18 Bettys—16 of them carrying the *Oka* piloted glide bombs—and 30 Zekes were intercepted by 16 Hellcats; eight from VF-30 and four each from VF-17 and VBF-17. Within 20 minutes, all 18 Bettys and at least a dozen Zekes had been shot down, along with one VBF-17 F6F. From 21st March to 28th May, when Task Force 58 was released from its close support rôle at Okinawa, T.F. 58 Hellcats claimed approximately 800 enemy aircraft shot down. During the same period some 80 F6Fs were lost in combat, mostly to A.A. fire. The majority of the Japanese losses occurred during several of their *Kikusui*, massed *Kamikaze* assaults. In the first, and largest, *Kikusui* attack on 6th April, more than 200 of the 300 Japanese aircraft shot down by U.S. Navy and Marine Corps airmen were claimed by T.F. 58 Hellcat pilots. Fifty-eight kills were scored by the F6Fs in the second such attack on 12th April, and another 100 in the third attack on 15th and 16th April.

On 26th March the British Pacific Fleet, with its armoured-deck carriers, and including several Hellcat squadrons, had joined the U.S. Fleet off Okinawa. Initially assigned the mission of suppressing enemy air action in the Sakishima Gunto, the south-west extension of the Ryukyu chain, the BPF also participated in the strikes on Japan during July and August.

Resuming the rôle to which they were more suited, the Fast Carriers operated up and down the coast of Japan in July and August. The Japanese had dispersed and hidden their remaining aircraft in anticipation of an invasion in October, and except for a few isolated instances, most of the Hellcats were employed in the rôle of the fighter-bomber. Several of the 80-odd kills scored by the F6F pilots during this period were high altitude

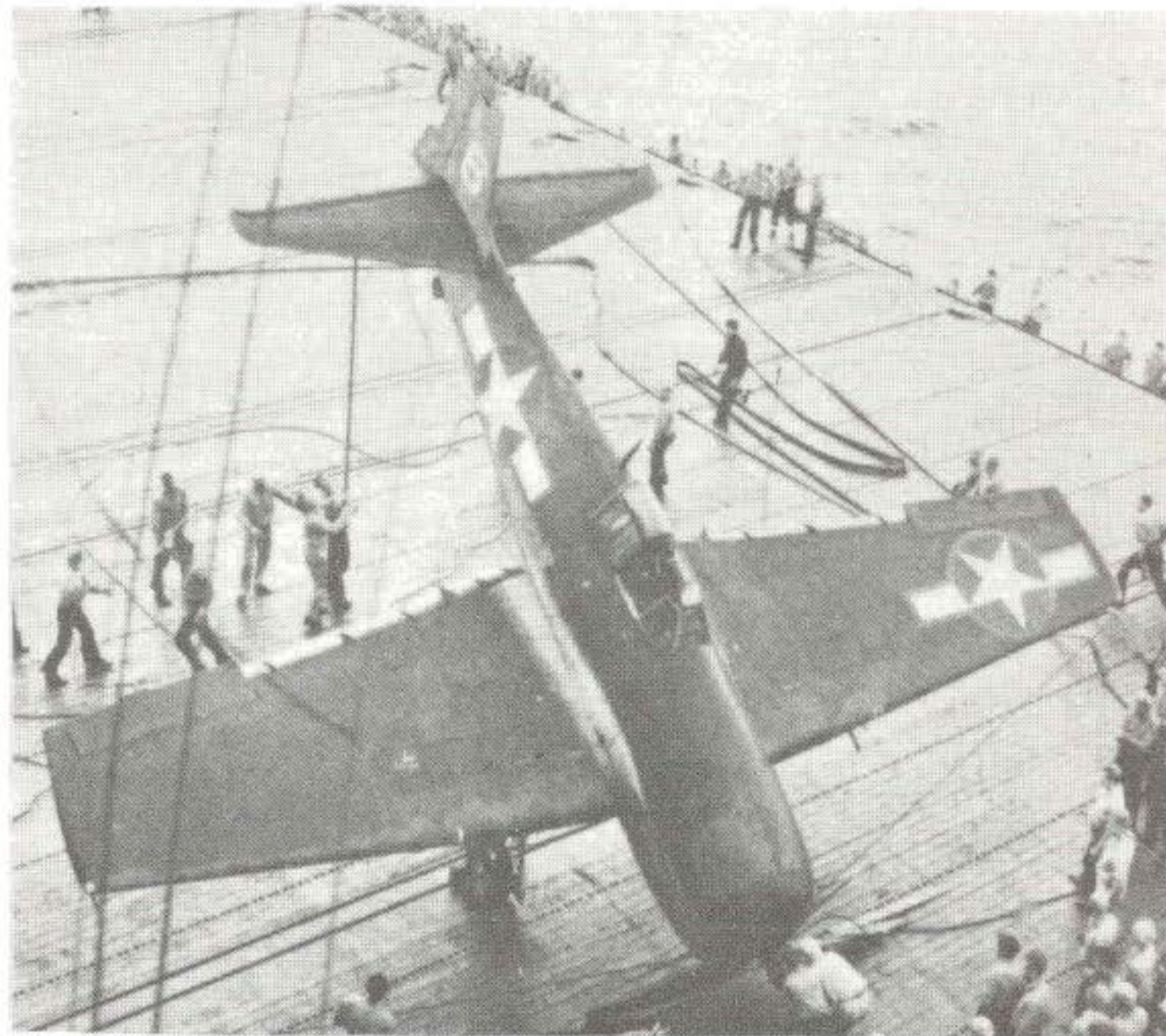
Right: With damage sustained in combat over Kwajalein, this VF-24 F6F-3 from 'Belleau Wood' crashed the barriers on 'Yorktown', 1 February, 1944. Note red bordered insignia still in use. (US Navy)

Below: F6F-3s of VF-10, 'The Grim Reapers' on 'Enterprise', 20 January, 1944. (US Navy)

reconnaissance flights over the carriers. On 9th August, a VF-88 F6F won a race with an F4U and shot down an Irving at 30,000 feet. Four days later, a VF-86 F6F, with only two guns operating, shot down another at 32,000 feet. On 15th August, Hellcat pilots shot down 25 Japanese aircraft, including several which displayed belligerent tendencies after the cease fire order had been passed to the Allied forces.

Having accomplished the job for which it was intended, and outclassed by a new generation of fighters, the F6F quickly faded into obscurity. Although a few special purpose versions, such as the F6F-5N, remained in first-line service as late as mid-1950, the majority of Hellcats were relegated to training rôles. In the Flight Training Command, the F6F served as an advance trainer until June 1950, when it was replaced by the F8F Bearcat. In the Naval Reserve, the F6F equipped many "Weekend Warrior" squadrons, and was still in use by a few squadrons as late as 1953.

Converted into Drone configurations, many F6F-3Ks and F6F-5Ks served as targets, guided missiles, or research aircraft. In the latter rôle, several F6F-3Ks were flown through the radio-active cloud which mushroomed up from the atomic bomb tests at Bikini Atoll in early 1946. It was as a pilotless guided missile that the F6F was last employed in combat by the U.S. Navy. On 28th August 1952 the first of six such attacks against North Korean targets was launched from *Boxer* (CV-21). An F6F-5K of Guided Missile Unit 90, under control by AD Skyraiders of VC-35, was directed against a railroad bridge at Hungnam.



F6F HELLCAT SQUADRONS—COMBAT OPERATIONAL—PACIFIC—WORLD WAR II⁽¹⁾

Abbreviations:

NA —Not available
LB-G —Land-based, Guam
LB-T —Land-based, Tarawa
LB-S —Land-based, Segi Point, New Georgia, Solomon Islands
LB-M —Land-based, Marshall Islands

LB-P —Land-based, Peleliu Island
LB-L —Land-based, Leyte, Tacloban Airstrip
LB-OKY —Land-based, Okinawa, Yontan Airstrip
LB-OKK —Land-based, Okinawa, Kadena Airstrip

Dates are given in the order, Month-Day-Year, or Month-Year

Sqd.	Base	Main	F6F model Secondary	Dates ⁽²⁾		Enemy Air- craft Des- troyed ⁽³⁾	
				From	To	Air	Ground
U.S. NAVY							
VF-1	CVE-16(4)	-3		11-43		0	0
	CVE-20(4)	-3		11-43		0	0
	LB-T	-3		12-43	1-44	1	0
	CV-10	-3		6-44	7-44	101	61
VF-2	CV-6(5)	-3		11-18-43	12-8-43	4	NA
	CV-12	-3	-3N	3-30-44	9-24-44	220	NA
VF-3(6)	CV-10	-5	-3, -5N, -5P	11-11-44	3-6-45	45½	161
VBF-3	CV-10	-5		2-1-45	3-6-45	45½	20
VF-4	CV-17	-5	NA	11-4-44	11-18-44	7	NA
	CV-9	-5	NA	11-18-44	3-9-45	50	17
VF-5	CV-10	-3	-3P	8-31-43	4-30-44	93	NA
VF-6(6)	CVL-22	-3		8-31-43	11-26-43	9	5
	CVL-23(7)	-3		8-31-43	11-11-43	2	6
	CVL-24(7)	-3		11-12-43	12-9-43	1	0
	CVL-25	-3		9-24-43	12-9-43	4	2
	CV-11	-3		1-29-44	2-24-44	22	47
	CV-19	-5	-5E, -5N, -5P	3-18-45	8-15-45	20	3
VF-7	CV-19	-5	-5N, -5P	10-10-44	1-26-45	74	160
VF-8	CV-17	-3	-5, -3N, -5N	3-30-44	10-21-44	153	277
VF-9	CV-9	-3		8-31-43	2-22-44	120	124
	CV-16	-5	-5E, -5N, -5P	2-3-45	3-6-45	128	75
	CV-10	-5	-5E, -5N, -5P	3-6-45	6-10-45	Incl. above	47
VBF-9	CV-16	-5		2-3-45	3-6-45	NA	NA
	CV-10	-5		3-6-45	6-10-45	NA	NA
VF-10	CV-6	-3		1-29-44	6-20-44	93	56
VF-11	CV-12	-5	-3, -3N, -5N -3P, -5P	10-10-44	1-22-45	102	288
VF-12	CV-3	-3		11-5-43	4-19-44	20	49
	CV-15	-5	-5E, -5N, -5P	2-16-45	5-14-45	51	134
VBF-12	CV-15	-5		2-16-45	5-14-45	74	35
VF-13	CV-13	-5	-3, -3N, -5N, -5P	7-29-44	11-2-44	87½	76
VF-14	CV-18	-3, -5	-3N, -5N, -3P	5-19-44	11-10-44	140	242
VF-15	CV-9	-3, -5	-3N, -5N, -3P	5-19-44	11-14-44	313	313
VF-16	CV-16	-3		9-18-43	6-20-44	111	NA
	CV-15	-5	-5N, -5P	7-10-45	8-15-45	18	NA
VBF-16	CV-15	-5		7-10-45	8-15-45	1	18
VF-17	CV-12	-5	-3, -5N, -5P	2-16-45	6-10-45	160½	118
VBF-17	CV-12	-5	-3	2-16-45	6-10-45	124	36
VF-18(8)	CV-17	-3		11-11-43	2-22-44	68	NA
	CV-11	-5	-3, -3N, -5P	9-6-44	11-30-44	187	177
VF-19	CV-16	-3, -5	-3N, -3P	7-24-44	11-7-44	155	190
VF-20	CV-6	-5	-3, -3N, -5P	8-31-44	11-22-44	157	246
	CV-16	-5	-3, -5N, -5P	11-22-44	1-22-45	Incl. above	
VF-21	CVL-24	-3, -5	-5P	8-2-44	11-2-44	43	NA
VF-22	CVL-24	-3		9-44		4	33
	CVL-22	-3		10-5-43	11-27-43	Incl. above	NA
	CVL-25	-5	-5P	9-6-44	1-22-45	50	95
VF-23	CVL-23	-3		9-1-43	4-30-44	37	11
	CVL-27	-5	-3, -5P	2-16-45	4-17-45	20	12
VF-24	CVL-24	-3		1-29-44	6-20-44	36	NA

Sqd.	Base	Main	F6F model Secondary	Dates ⁽²⁾		Enemy Air- craft des- troyed ⁽³⁾	
				From	To	Air	Ground
U.S. NAVY							
VF-25	CVL-25	-3		10-5-43	6-20-44	37	NA
	CVE-28	-5		4-45	7-10-45	NA	NA
VF-26	CVE-29	-3, -5		3-44	10-44	NA	NA
	CVE-29	-5		7-20-45	8-10-45	NA	NA
	CVE-70	-5		8-10-45	8-15-45	NA	NA
VF-27	CVL-23	-3	-5	6-11-44	10-24-44	136	64
	CVL-22	-5	-5P	7-10-45	8-15-45	1	NA
VF-28	CVL-26	-3, -5	-5P	6-11-44	12-19-44	56	132
VF-29	CVL-28	-3, -5		10-10-44	4-7-45	112	48
VF-30	CVL-26	-3		11-18-43	4-30-44	50	NA
	CVL-24	-5	-5P	2-16-45	6-10-45	110	59
VF-31	CVL-28	-3, -5		1-29-44	9-24-44	146	56
	CVL-24	-5	-5P	7-10-45	8-15-45	14	NA
VF-32	CVL-27	-3	-5	1-29-44	9-24-44	44	57
	CVL-28	-5		8-1-45	8-15-45	0	0
VF-33	LB-S	-3		10-43	NA	NA	NA
VF-34	CVL-26	-5	-5P	5-13-45	8-15-45	2½	41
VF-35	CVE-28	-3	-5	11-43	10-44	NA	NA
VF-37	CVE-26	-3	-5	11-43	10-44	NA	NA
VF-38	LB-S	-3		10-43	NA	NA	NA
VF-39	LB-M	-3		NA	NA	NA	NA
VF-40	LB-S	-3		10-43	NA	NA	NA
	CVE-27	-5		3-45	8-15-45	NA	NA
VF-44	CVL-27	-3, -5		10-10-44	1-22-45	NA	NA
VF-45	CVL-30	-3, -5	-5P	11-7-44	4-7-45	81½	NA
VF-46	CVL-25	-5	-5P	2-16-45	3-1-45	26	80
VF-46	CVL-25	-5	-5P	2-16-45	3-1-45	26	80
	CVL-22	-5	-5P	3-18-45	6-10-45	Incl. above	
VF-47	CVL-29	-5	-5P	3-18-45	8-15-45	68	28
VF-49	CVL-30	-5	-5P	5-13-45	8-15-45	NA	NA
VF-50	CVL-29	-3		4-21-44	7-4-44	62	NA
	CVL-25	-5	-5P	6-20-45	8-15-45	2	NA
VF-51	CVL-30	-3	-5	5-19-44	11-3-44	29	5
VF-53	CV-3	-5		2-17-45	2-21-45	5	0
VF-60	CVE-27	-3	-5	11-43	10-44	21	NA
VF-80	CV-14	-5	-5N, -5P	11-3-44	1-21-45	179	NA
	CV-19	-5	-5N, -5P	2-16-45	3-1-45	Incl. above	
VBF-80	CV-19	-5		2-16-45	3-1-45	NA	NA
VF-81	CV-18	-3, -5	-3N, -3P, -5N, -5P	11-14-44	3-1-45	NA	NA
VF-82	CV-20	-5	-5E, -5N, -5P	2-16-45	6-8-45	85	89
VF-83	CV-9	-5	-5E, -5P	3-18-45	8-15-45	137	60
VF-86	CV-18	-5	-5E, -5N, -5P	3-18-45	8-15-45	7	43
VF-87	CV-14	-5	-5N, -5P	5-17-45	8-15-45	0	14

Sqd.	Base	F6F model		Dates ⁽²⁾		Enemy aircraft destroyed ⁽³⁾		Sqd.	Base	F6F model		Dates ⁽²⁾		Enemy Aircraft destroyed ⁽³⁾	
		Main	Secondary	From	To	Air	Ground			Main	Secondary	From	To	Air	Ground
U.S. NAVY															
VBF-87	CV-14	-5		5-17-45	8-15-45	NA	NA	VMF(N)-534	LB-G	-3N	-5N	7-44	8-45	1	0
VF-88	CV-10	-5	-5N, -5P	7-10-45	8-15-45	14	NA	VMF(N)-541	LB-P	-5N		9-44	11-2-44	1	0
VF-94	CV-16	-5	-5N, -5P	6-20-45	8-15-45	NA	NA		LB-L	-5N		11-3-44	1-11-45	22	0
VF(N)-33	CVE-26 CVE-28	-5E, -5N -5E, -5N		3-45 7-10-45	7-10-45 8-15-45	NA NA	NA NA		LB-P	-5N		1-12-45	8-15-45	0	0
VF(N)-41	CVL-22	-5N	-3, -5	9-6-44	1-22-45	36 ⁽¹⁰⁾	10	VMF(N)-533	LB-OKY	-5N		5-10-45	8-15-45	35	0
VF(N)-53	CV-3	-5N		2-17-45	2-21-45	0	0	VMF(N)-542	LB-OKY	-5N		4-7-45	8-15-45	18	0
VF(N)-63	CVE-108	-5N		8-45	8-15-45	NA	NA	VMF(N)-543	LB-OKK	-5N		4-9-45	8-15-45	15	0
VF(N)-76	CV-9 CV-10 CV-12 ⁽⁹⁾ CV-17 CV-16	-3N -3N -3N -3N -3N		1-44 1-44 4-44 1-44 3-44	2-44 4-44 9-44 9-44 9-44	NA NA 16 5 NA	NA NA 0 0 NA	VMF-511	CVE-106	-5N		5-45	8-15-45	NA	NA
VF(N)-77	CV-9 CV-18 CV-13 ⁽⁹⁾ CV-10	-3N -3N -3N -3N		5-44 5-44 7-44 6-44	9-44 9-44 9-44 7-44	NA NA NA NA	NA NA NA NA	BRITISH PACIFIC FLEET							
VF(N)-78	CV-11 CV-6 ⁽⁹⁾	-3N -3N		8-44 8-44	9-44 10-2-44	NA Included in VF-20 data	NA NA	885	RULER			6-14-45	8-45		
VF(N)-90	CV-6	-5N, -5P, -5P		1-3-45	5-14-45	37	19	1839	INDOMITABLE			3-26-45	4-15-45		
VF(N)-91	CV-31	-5N, -5E		6-8-45	8-15-45	9	0	1840	SPEAKER			3-26-45	4-15-45		
VF(N)-105	CV-14	-5N		9-29-44	1-21-45	NA	NA	1844	INDOMITABLE FORMIDABLE			3-26-45 7-17-45	4-15-45 8-11-45		
This list is not complete.															
U.S. NAVY F4U CORSAIR SQUADRONS WHICH OPERATED WITH A SMALL COMPLEMENT OF F6F NIGHT FIGHTERS AND/OR PHOTO PLANES															
VF-1	CV-20		-5N, -5P	7-10-45	8-15-45	NA	NA	VF-5	CV-13		-5N, -5P	3-18-45	3-19-45	0	0
VF-5	CV-13		-5N, -5P	3-18-45	3-19-45	0	0	VF-10	CV-11		-5N, -5P	3-18-45	8-15-45	8	0
VF-10	CV-11		-5N, -5P	3-18-45	8-15-45	8	0	VF-84	CV-17		-5N, -5P	2-16-45	4-7-45	8	0
VF-84	CV-17		-5N, -5P	2-16-45	4-7-45	8	0	VF-85	CV-38		-5N, -5P	5-13-45	8-15-45	1	0
VF-85	CV-38		-5N, -5P	5-13-45	8-15-45	1	0								

Key to Carrier names:

CV-3 — SARATOGA	CV-14 — TICONDEROGA	CV-21 — BON HOMME RICHARD	CVL-26 — MONTEREY	CVE-26 — SANGAMON
CV-6 — ENTERPRISE	CV-15 — RANDOLPH	CV-38 — SHANGRI LA	CVL-27 — LANGLEY	CVE-27 — SUWANEE
CV-9 — ESSEX	CV-16 — LEXINGTON	CVL-22 — INDEPENDENCE	CVL-28 — CABOT	CVE-28 — CHENANGO
CV-10 — YORKTOWN	CV-17 — BUNKER HILL	CVL-23 — PRINCETON	CVL-29 — BATAAN	CVE-29 — SANTEE
CV-11 — INTREPID	CV-18 — WASP	CVL-24 — BELLEAU WOOD	CVL-30 — SAN JACINTO	CVE-70 — FANSHAW BAY
CV-12 — HORNET	CV-19 — HANCOCK	CVL-25 — COWPENS	CVE-16 — NASSAU	CVE-106 — BLOCK ISLAND
CV-13 — FRANKLIN	CV-20 — BENNINGTON		CVE-20 — BARNES	CVE-108 — KULA GULF

NOTES

- (1) Includes only those F6F squadrons known to have engaged in combat operations. The list of squadrons is not necessarily complete.
- (2) Dates shown are those of the first and last combat action, and do not necessarily cover the squadron's entire period of embarkation.
- (3) Data on enemy aircraft destroyed is derived from figures stated in the various squadron histories submitted by the squadrons.
- (4) 44 F6F-3s and 44 pilots embarked on CVE-16 and CVE-20 (22 on each) 11-8-43. Following four days of troop support missions, flown from the carriers, at Tarawa, VF-1 landed on Betio Island on 11-25-43, and remained land based for two months.
- (5) VF-2 was part of Air Group 6 on *Enterprise* since VF-6 was engaged elsewhere (see Note 7).
- (6) For reasons unknown, VF-3 and VF-6 exchanged designations in July, 1943. The "old" VF-3, known for its "Felix the Cat" insignie, was redesignated VF-6 and retained the "Felix" insignie. At the same time, the "old" VF-6 was redesignated VF-3.
- (7) During the last three months of 1943, VF-6 was broken up into several detachments to serve aboard the various CVLs listed.
- (8) The VF-18 which served aboard *Bunker Hill* as part of Air Group 17 had no connection with the VF-18 which later served aboard *Intrepid* in Air Group 18. The first VF-18 was decommissioned on completion of its combat tour on *Bunker Hill*, and was not reformed. The VF-18 on *Intrepid* was originally formed as VGS-18 on 10-15-42; was redesignated VC-18 on 3-1-43, and VF-36 on 8-15-43. In February, 1944, VF-36 was assigned as part of Air Group 18 and redesignated VF-18.
- (9) Four plane detachments were assigned to the carriers as listed. Those detachments still in combat in September, 1944, were then decommissioned and the aircraft and pilots absorbed into the fighter squadron then aboard the carrier. Except where noted, records of enemy aircraft destroyed are not available and may well be included in the figures for other squadrons.
- (10) Data on enemy aircraft destroyed by VF(N)-41 are incomplete and cover only the period through 31 December, 1944.

A faded and weathered F6F-3 of VF-12 on 'Saratoga', late 1943. (US Navy)





Above: F6Fs and F4Us lined up on the coral strip at Espiritu Santo in February, 1944; units unknown. F6F-3 -2, which features the name "Battling Bobbie" has had its radio mast replaced by a whip antenna. (US Navy)



Above: 22 February, 1944, off Saipan, Bettys attacking with torpedoes delay take off for this VF-24 F6F-3 on 'Belleau Wood'. (US Navy)

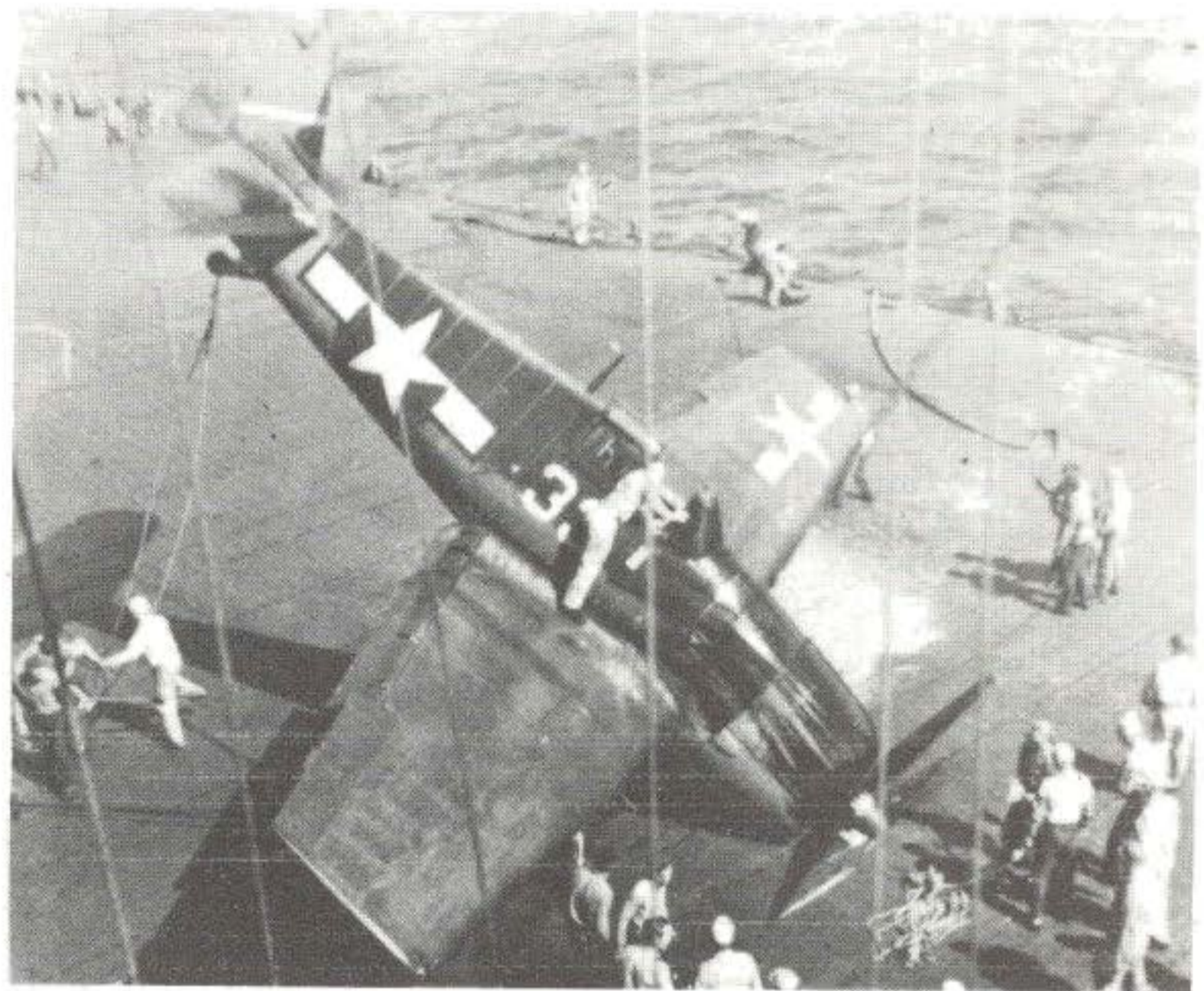
Below: One of 'Enterprise's' "Grim Reapers" off Palau, 30 March, 1944. (US Navy)





Above: Pre-war type markings were standard for squadrons in training on the east coast of the US throughout the war. The fuselage marking was repeated on the underside of the left wing on these VF-8 F6F-3s. (US Navy)

Below: An F6F-3N of VF(N)-76 prepares to take off from 'Essex' May, 1944. Note application of camouflage to upper portion of radar dome. Colours on spinner are not known. (US Navy)



Right: An oil smeared F6F-3 of VF-5 made it back from Palau; 'Yorktown', 31 March, 1944. (US Navy)

Below: Following 'Yorktown's' lead, 'Hornet' was the second carrier to use a geometric marking. The small, solid, white circle, as shown on this VF-2 F6F-3, was the standard 'Hornet' marking throughout 1944 and into early 1945. Note application of camouflage to upper portion of belly tank. 28 April, 1944. (US Navy)





Above: F6F-3s of VF-1 flying out of Kaneohe, Oahu; May, 1944. Assigned to 'Yorktown', markings were added, but not completed when this shot was taken, prior to embarking on 29th May. Significance of the "K" on the rudder is not known. (US Navy)

Below: F6F-3s of VF-2 warming up prior to take-off on the flight deck of 'Hornet' (US Navy)





Above: VF-27 at Maui, Hawaii prior to embarking on 'Princeton'; May, 1944. The snarling faces were hand painted on all VF-27 Hellcats by the squadron pilots. This F6F-3 is one of the later model -3s without the lower cowl flaps and bulge over the central exhaust channel. (US Navy)



Above: Lt. jg. Carl A. Brown of VF-27 lands his damaged F6F-5 on 'Essex' during the Battle of Leyte Gulf; 24 October, 1944. Brown scored 5 kills on this mission, bringing his total score to 10. The name just below the windshield is "Paper Doll". (US Navy)

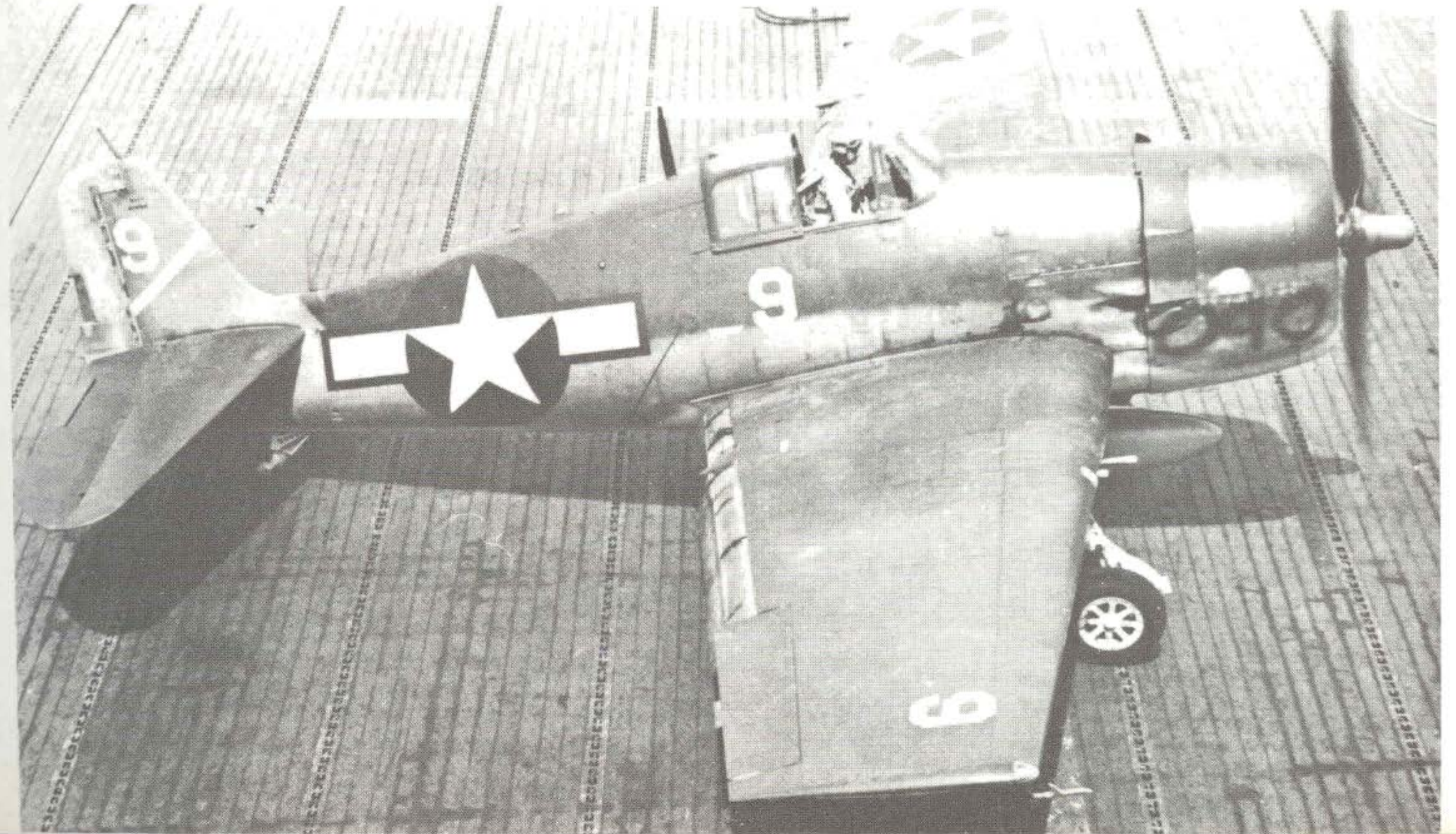


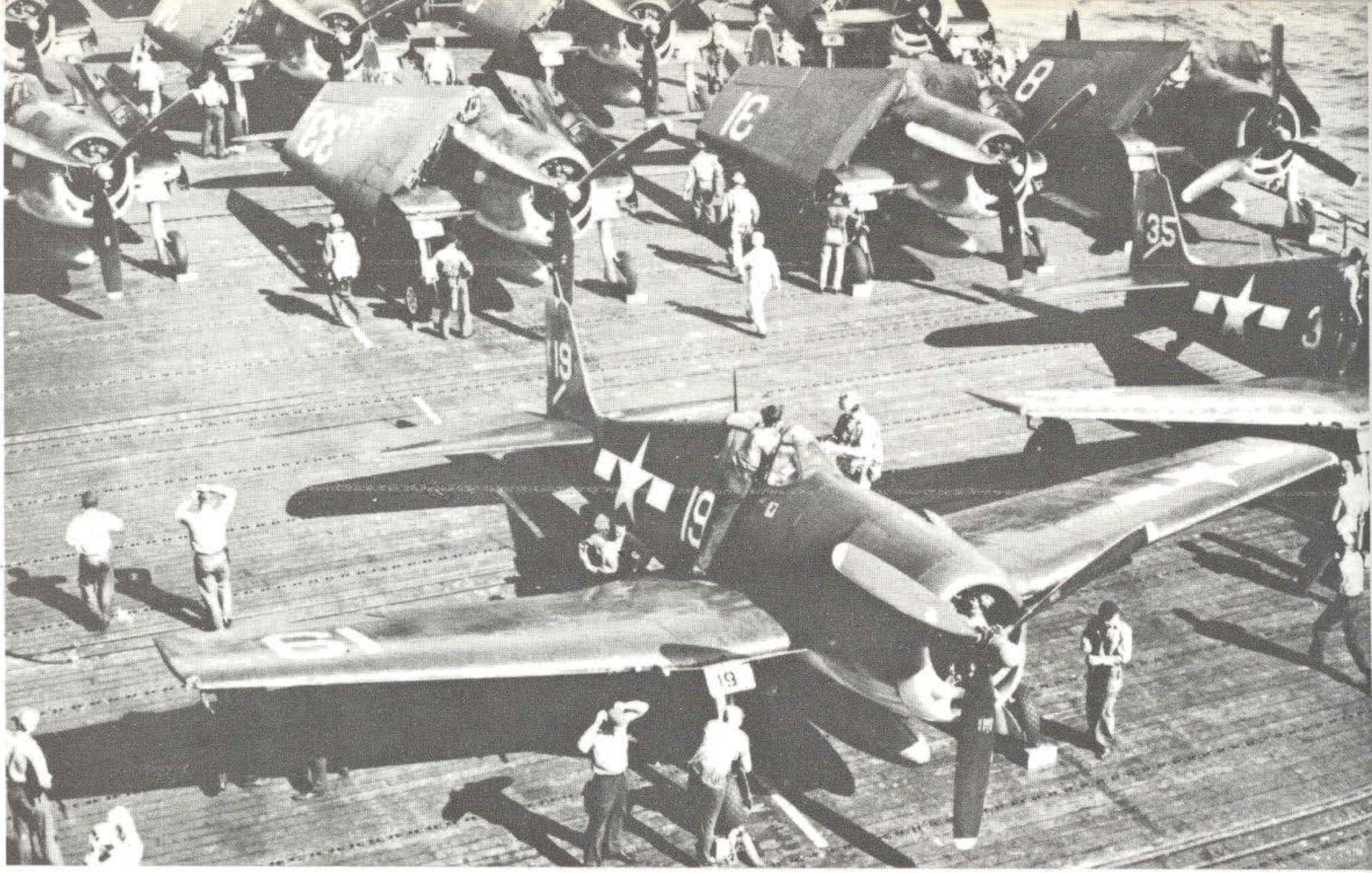
Above: A VF-31 F6F-3 hits the barrier aboard 'Cabot'; 8 June, 1944. VF-31 Hellcats carried the VF-31 "Flying Meataxe" emblem on both sides of the cowl. Note white prop dome. When the red border was eliminated from the national insignie, F6F marking instructions called for the blue border to be omitted from the upper wing insignie. (US Navy)



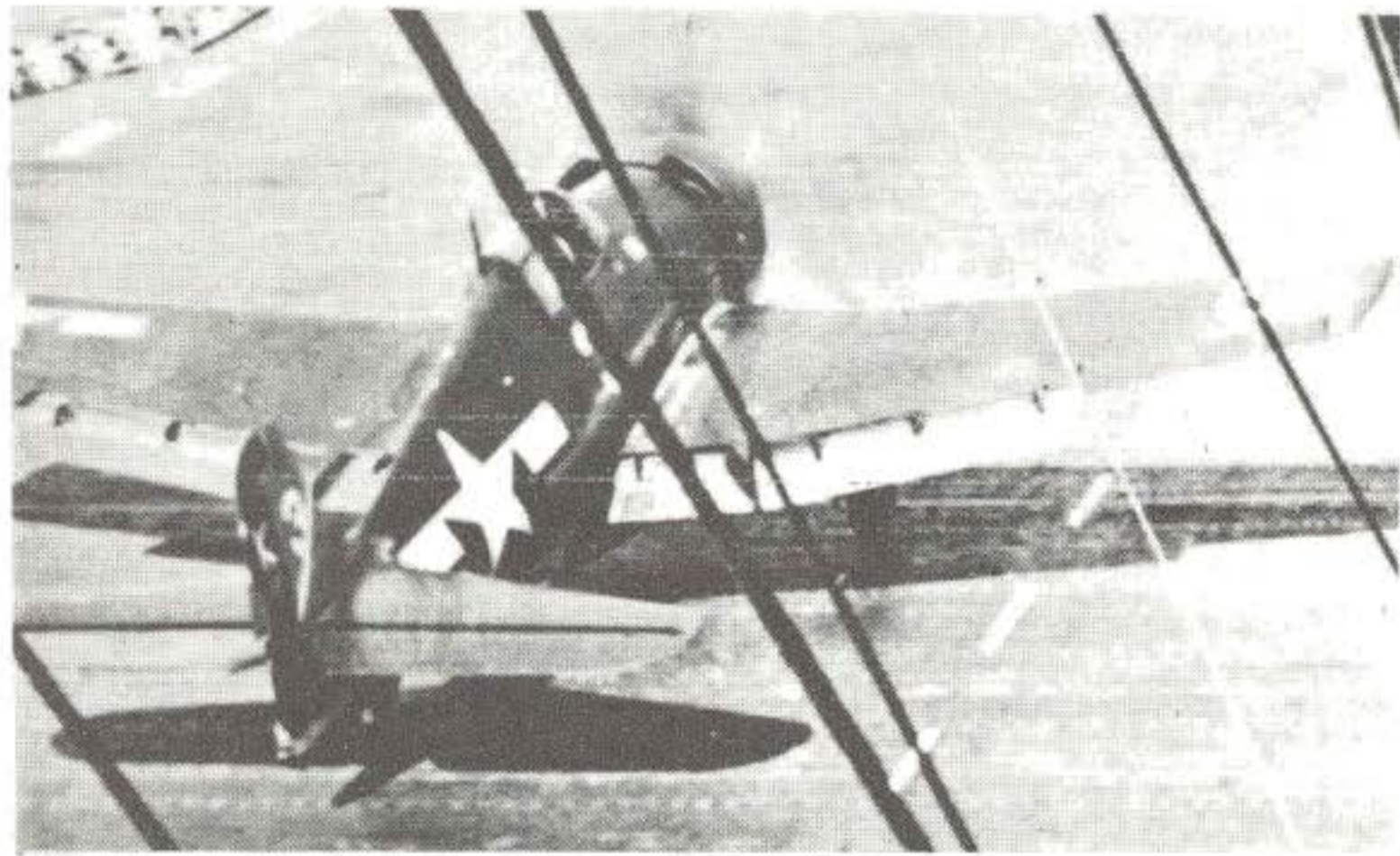
Above: A casualty in the "Marianas Turkey Shoot", 19 June, 1944. With its after fuselage and empennage riddled, this VF-1 F6F-3 off 'Yorktown' made it back to land aboard 'Hornet'. After catching the arresting wire, the weakened tailhook broke off resulting in this barrier crash. The plane was pushed over the side shortly after this shot was taken. The VF-1 "High Hat" emblem was marked on both sides, just below the windshield, on most VF-1 Hellcats. (US Navy)

Below: Lt. William C. Moseley, one of VF-1's aces (6 vics), taxis forward after landing aboard 'Yorktown'; June, 1944. Moseley was subsequently shot down and listed as missing in action over the Bonin Islands on 4 July. The VF-1 "High Hat" emblem had not yet been added to this replacement F6F-3. On most VF-1 Hellcats, the aircraft number was marked on the upper right wing tip, and in black on the lower left wing tip. (US Navy)





Above: VF-1 pilots man their planes; June, 1944. The 'Yorktown' marking on the vertical fin was abbreviated on the majority of aircraft with two digit numbers. (US Navy)



Above: Although the majority of VF-1s F6Fs carried their wing numbers oriented to be read from the rear, -3 had its marking applied in the opposite direction. June, 1944. (US Navy)



Above: An F6F-3 of VF-28 is catapulted from 'Monterey'; June, 1944. The catapult crew races to retrieve the catapult bridle. (US Navy)

Below: A replacement F6F-3 of VF-28 makes a standard deck run take off from 'Monterey'; June, 1944. (US Navy)





Above: The majority of VF-8's F6F-3s aboard the 'Bunker Hill' had black cowl numbers. Note that although the lower cowl flaps are omitted the bulge over the central exhaust channel is present. June, 1944. (US Navy)



Above: F6F-3s of VF-8; June, 1944. The aircraft number with over and underlining on the vertical fin, was the standard 'Bunker Hill' marking in 1944. (US Navy)



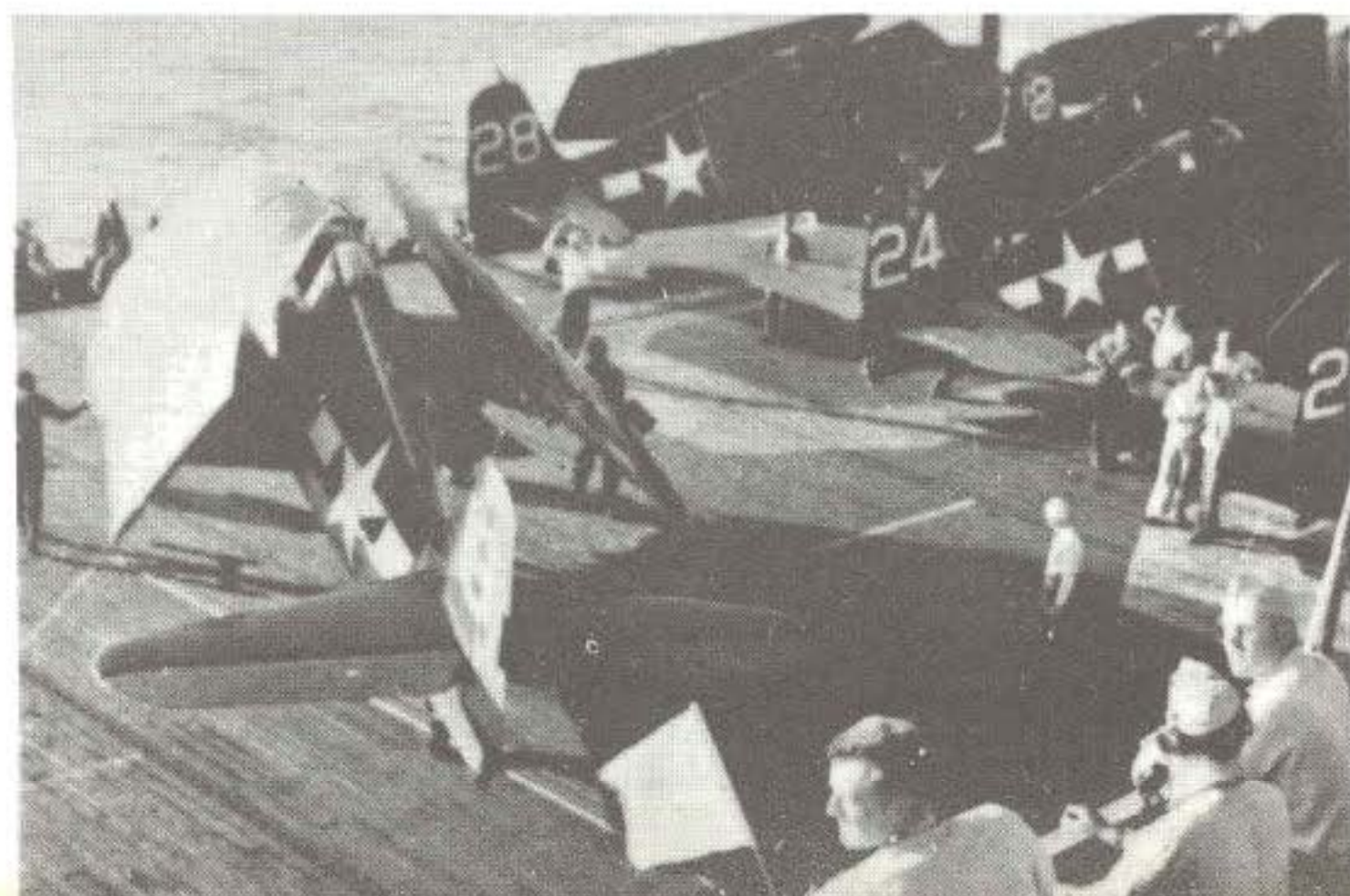
Above: Equipped for rockets, a VF-7 F6F-3 gets a cut from the 'Hancock's' LST during a training cruise in the Atlantic. (US Navy via Fred C. Dickey)

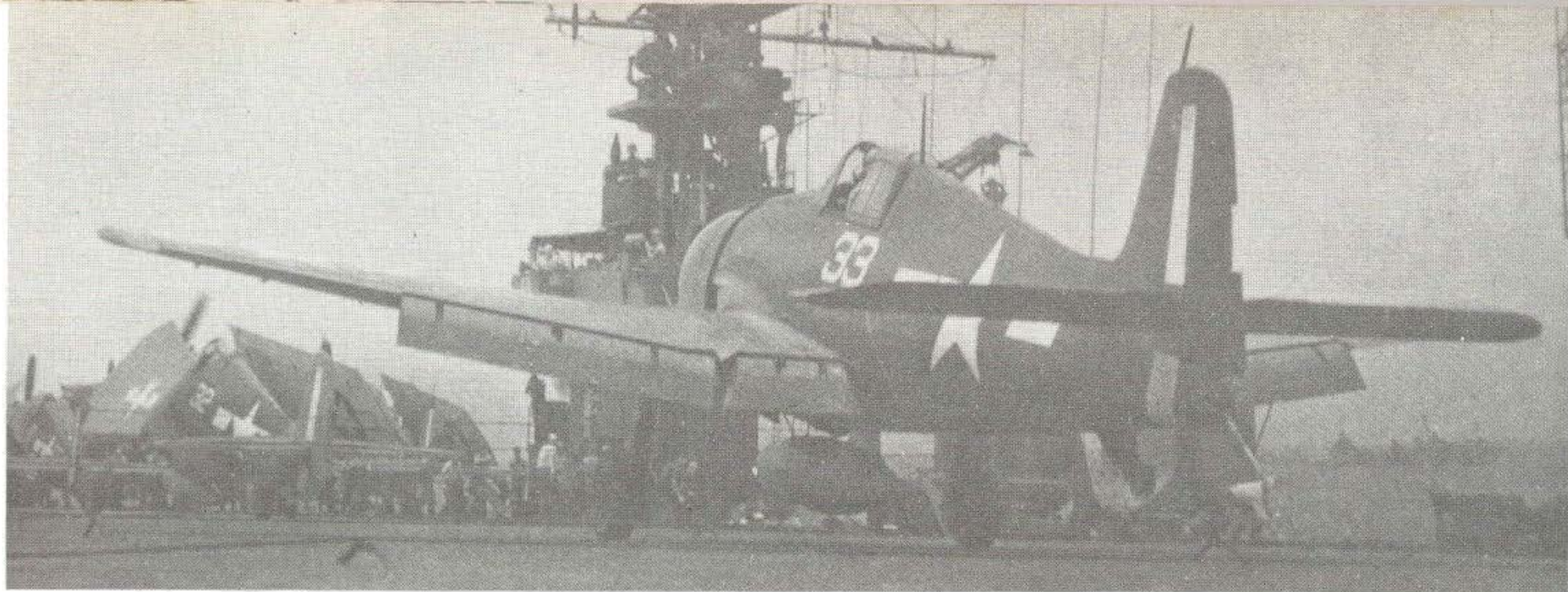


Above: One of the rare instances of personal markings on the Hellcat; this VF-51 F6F-3 from 'San Jacinto' is marked with dice and the name "Little Joe"; 20 July, 1944. (US Navy)

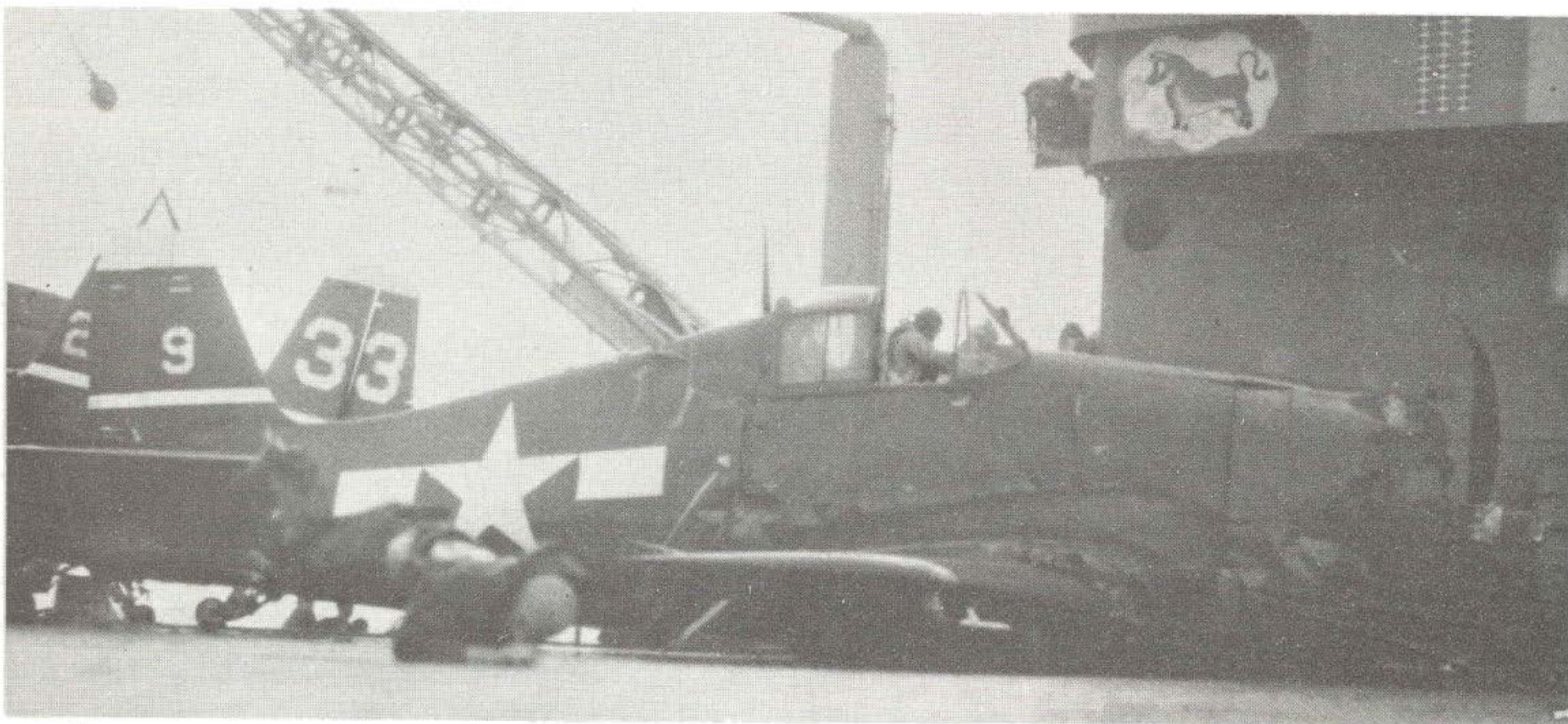
Below, left: A bomb laden F6F-5 of VF-74 about to be catapulted from 'Kasaan Bay' during the invasion of Southern France; 15 August, 1944. This was one of the early model -5s which retained the rear vision window behind the cockpit. (US Navy)

Below, right: F6F-5s of VF-74 being spotted on the forward deck of 'Kasaan Bay' after returning from a mission over Southern France; 15 August, 1944. (US Navy)





Above: One of VF-31's replacement F6F-5s landing aboard 'Cabot'; 11 September, 1944. The vertical tail stripe was added to Air Group 31 aircraft for operations in the Philippines in September. Several F6F-3s are seen forward of the barriers. (US Navy)



Above: Returning from a mission over Luzon, this VF-21 F6F-5 went through the barriers and crashed into personnel and other aircraft on the forward deck of 'Cowpens'; 21 September, 1944. (US Navy)

Below: David McCampbell taxis forward on 'Essex' after returning from a mission over the Visayas; 13 September, 1944. The 2½ victories scored on this mission brought his total score to 21. McCampbell's 34th and final kill, an Oscar, was shot down over Manila Bay on 14 November, 1944. The name "Minsi III" on this early model F6F-5 was in yellow. (US Navy)





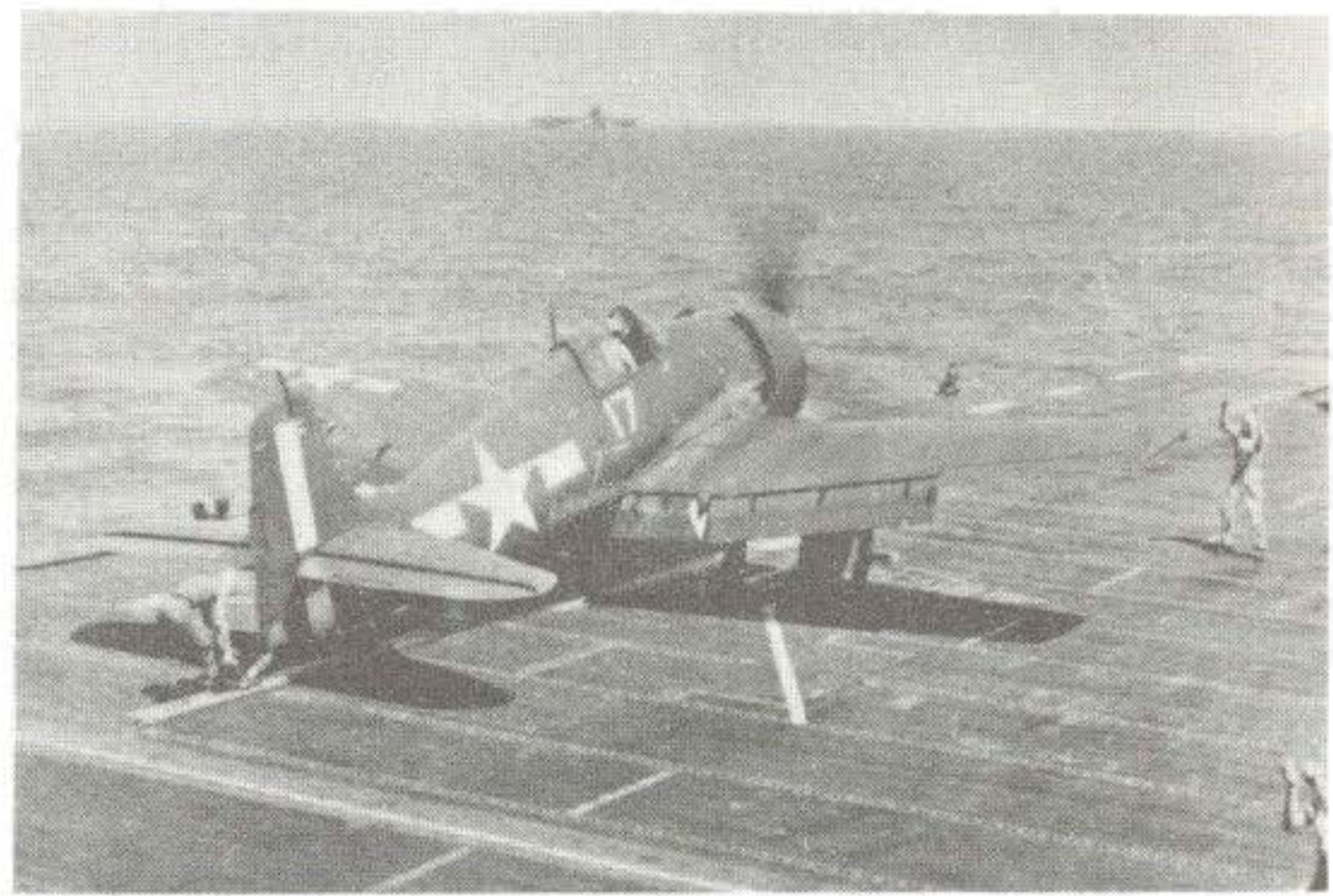
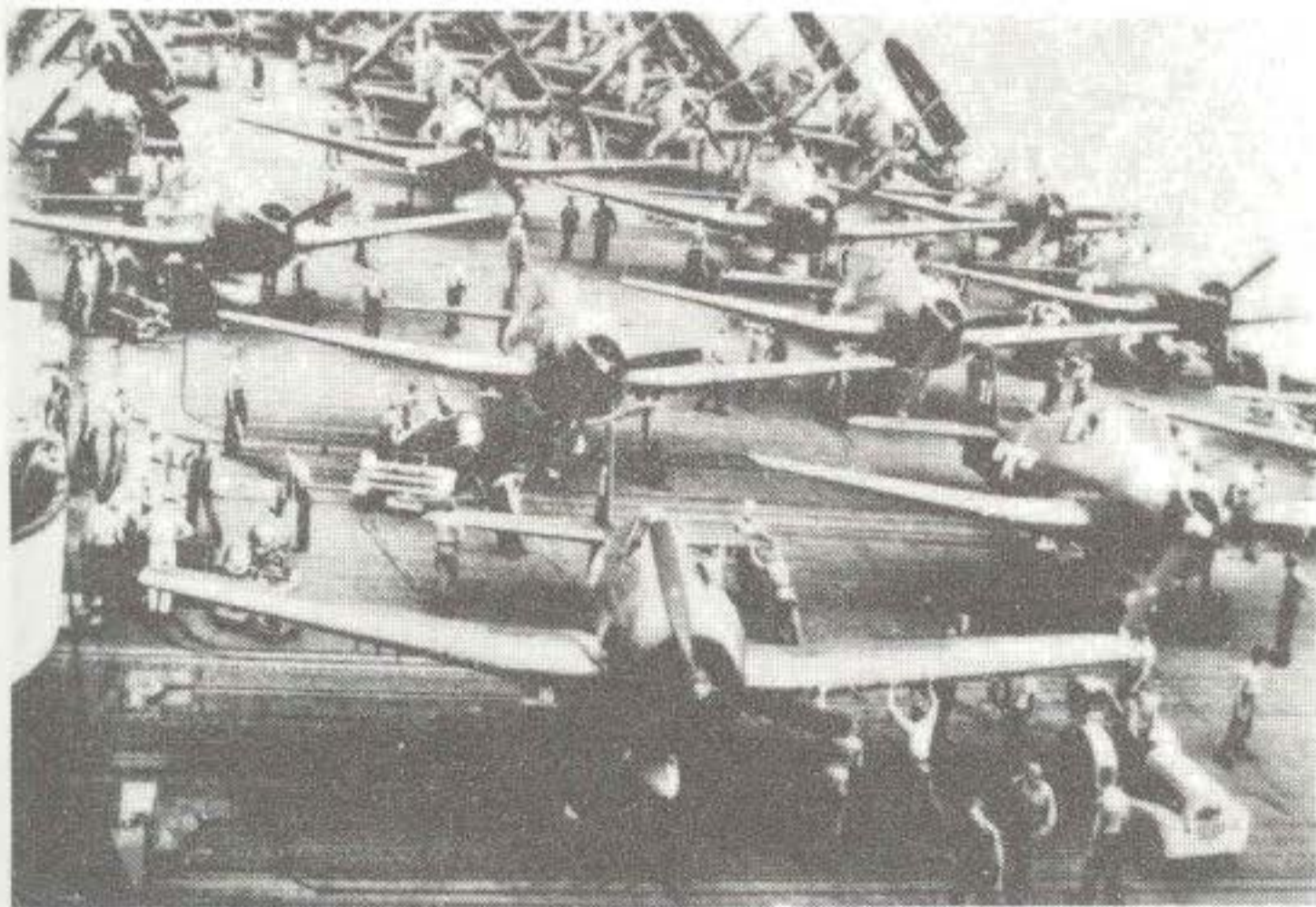
Above: F6F-5s of VF-14 escorting Admiral Nimitz' R4D from Ulithi to Guam; November, 1944. The small triangle atop the vertical fin was the standard 1944 marking for 'Wasp' aircraft. (US Navy)

Right: An F6F-3 of VF-44 catapulted from 'Langley' for combat air patrol off Okinawa; 10 October, 1944. (US Navy)



Below, left: VF-13 F6F-5s being rearmed on 'Franklin'; October, 1944. VF-13 introduced the F6F-5 to combat on 4 July, 1944 with strikes on the Volcano and Bonin Islands. 'Franklin' was the only fast carrier which did not use some form of geometric marking in late 1944. (US Navy)

Below, right: An early model F6F-5 of VF-29 being positioned on 'Cabot's' catapult; 10 October, 1944. This same F6F with the same markings had been operated by VF-31 on the 'Cabot' only a few days earlier. (US Navy)



Below: This combat damaged F6F-3 of VF-29 made an emergency landing aboard 'Intrepid'; October, 1944. (US Navy)





Above: An F6F-5 of VF-28, with wheels retracting, leaves 'Monterey' for a strike on Iwo Jima; 10 October, 1944. The wing stripes, completely encircling the wing tip, were added to 'Monterey' aircraft for operations in the Philippines in September, and are the only known instance of geometric wing markings in 1944. (US Navy)

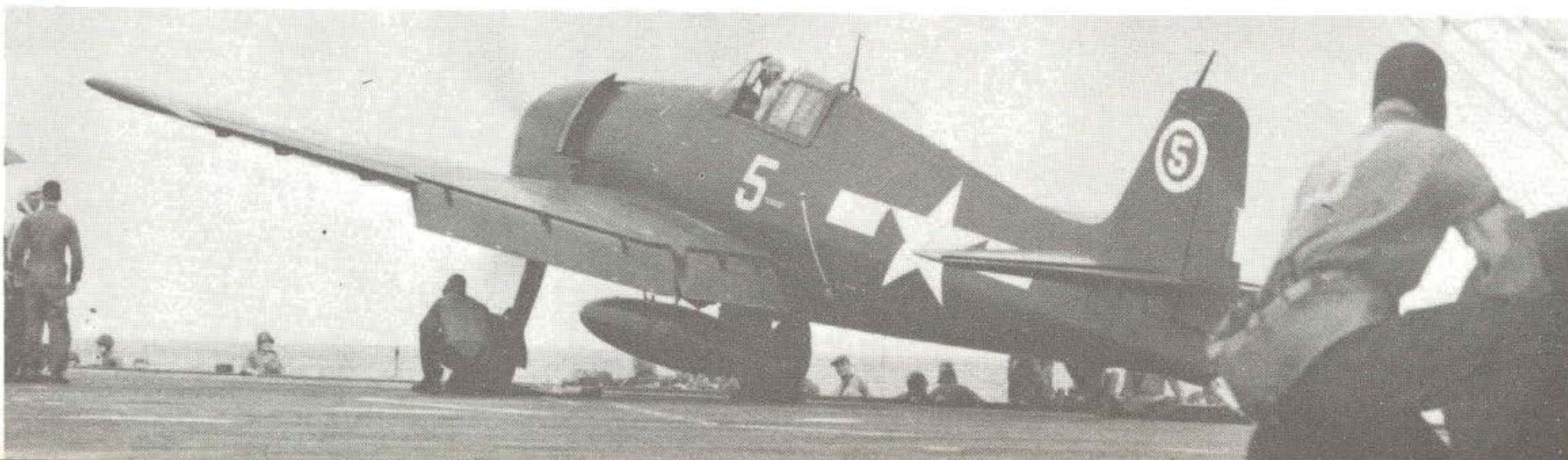


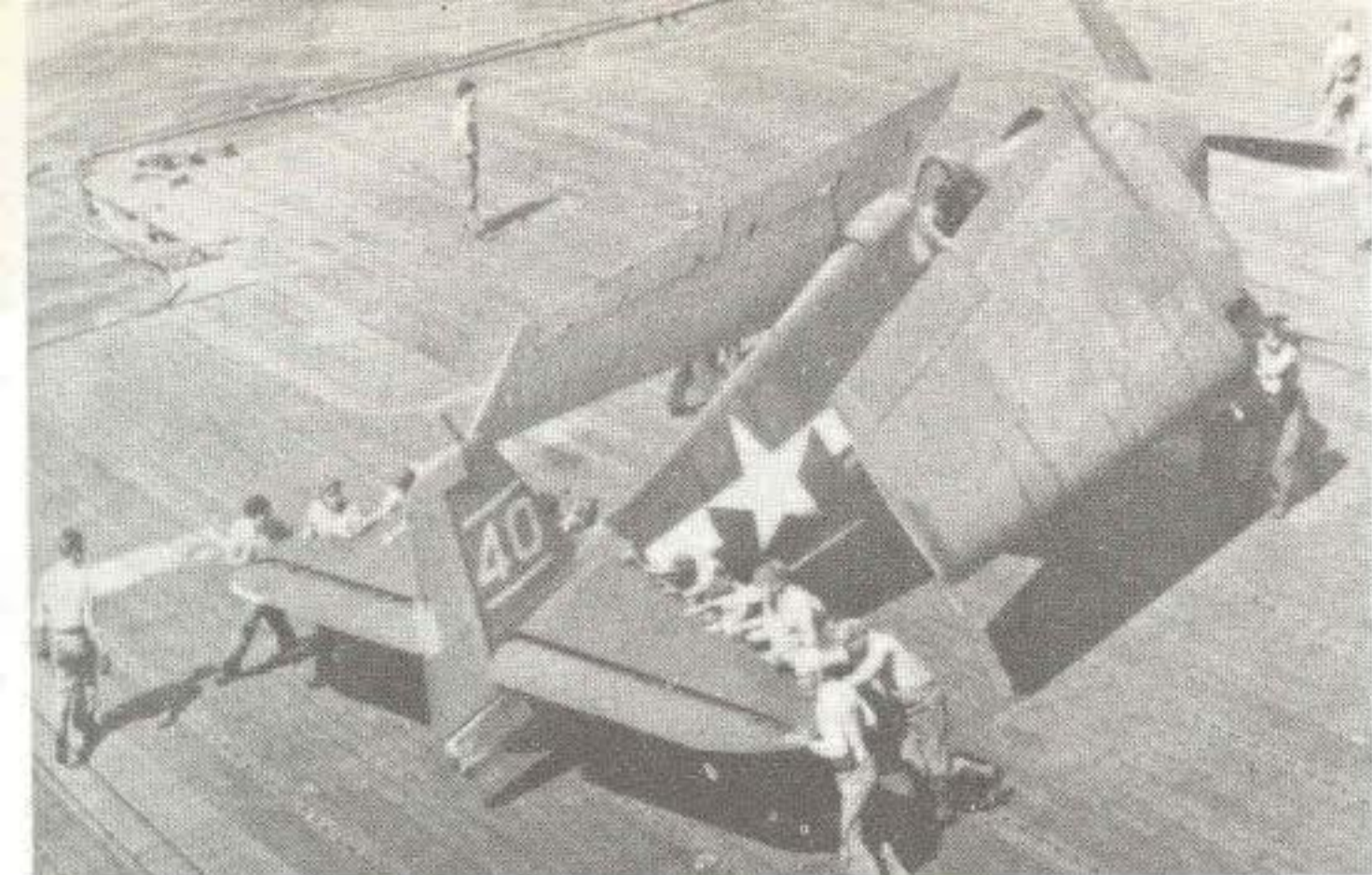
Above: Although other aircraft of Air Group 19 used a geometric tail marking (a hollow triangle), VF-19 felt that the distinctive placement of the number behind the cockpit was sufficient identification for their Hellcats. This F6F-3 is waiting to take off on a mission over Okinawa on 10 October, 1944. (US Navy)

Below: Off Okinawa, F6F-5Ns of VF(N)-41 line up for take off on 'Independence'; 10 October, 1944. (US Navy)

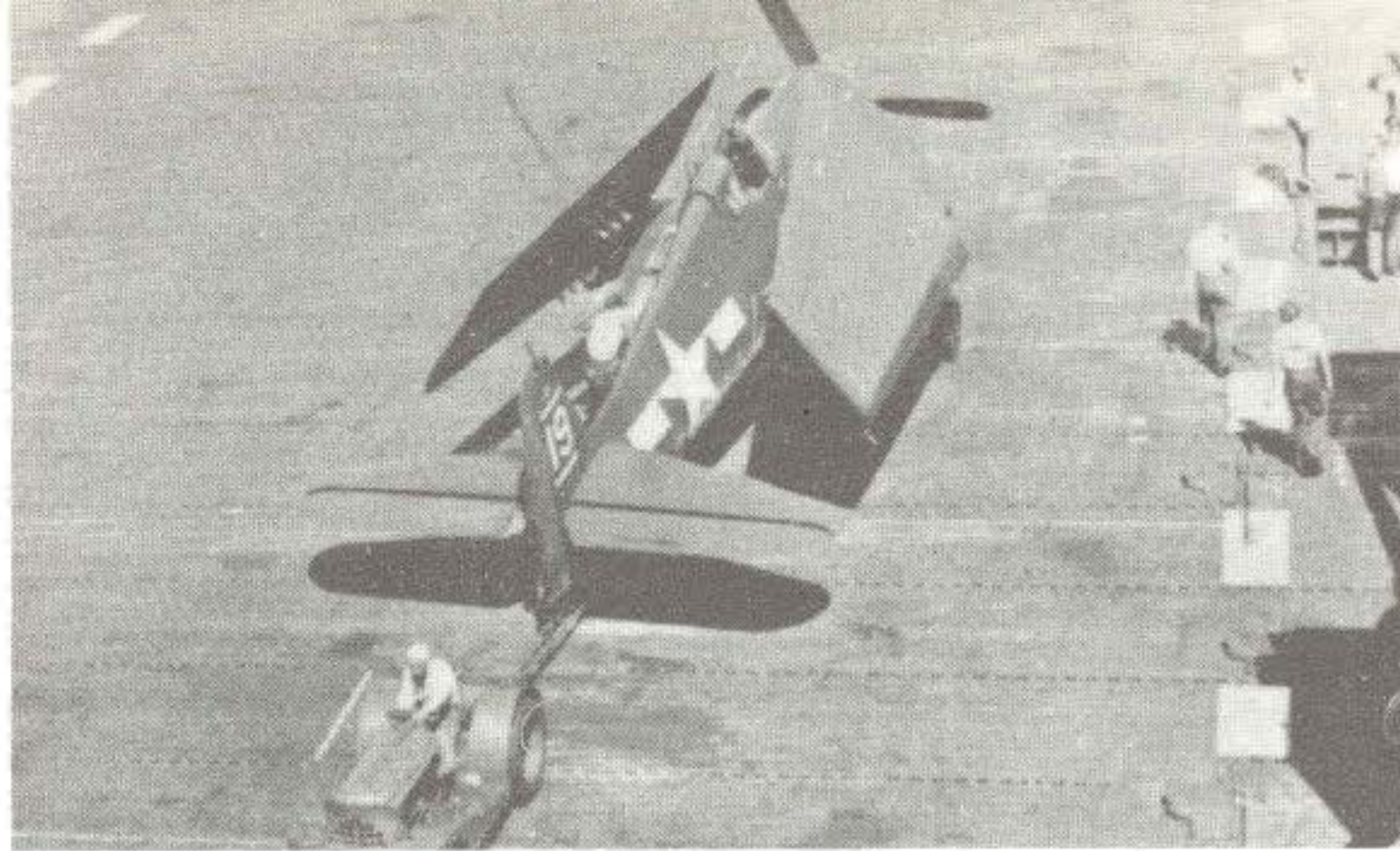


Below: Positioned on the starboard catapult, this VF(N)-41 F6F-5N awaits the catapult officer's turn up signal; 'Independence', 10 October, 1944. (US Navy)





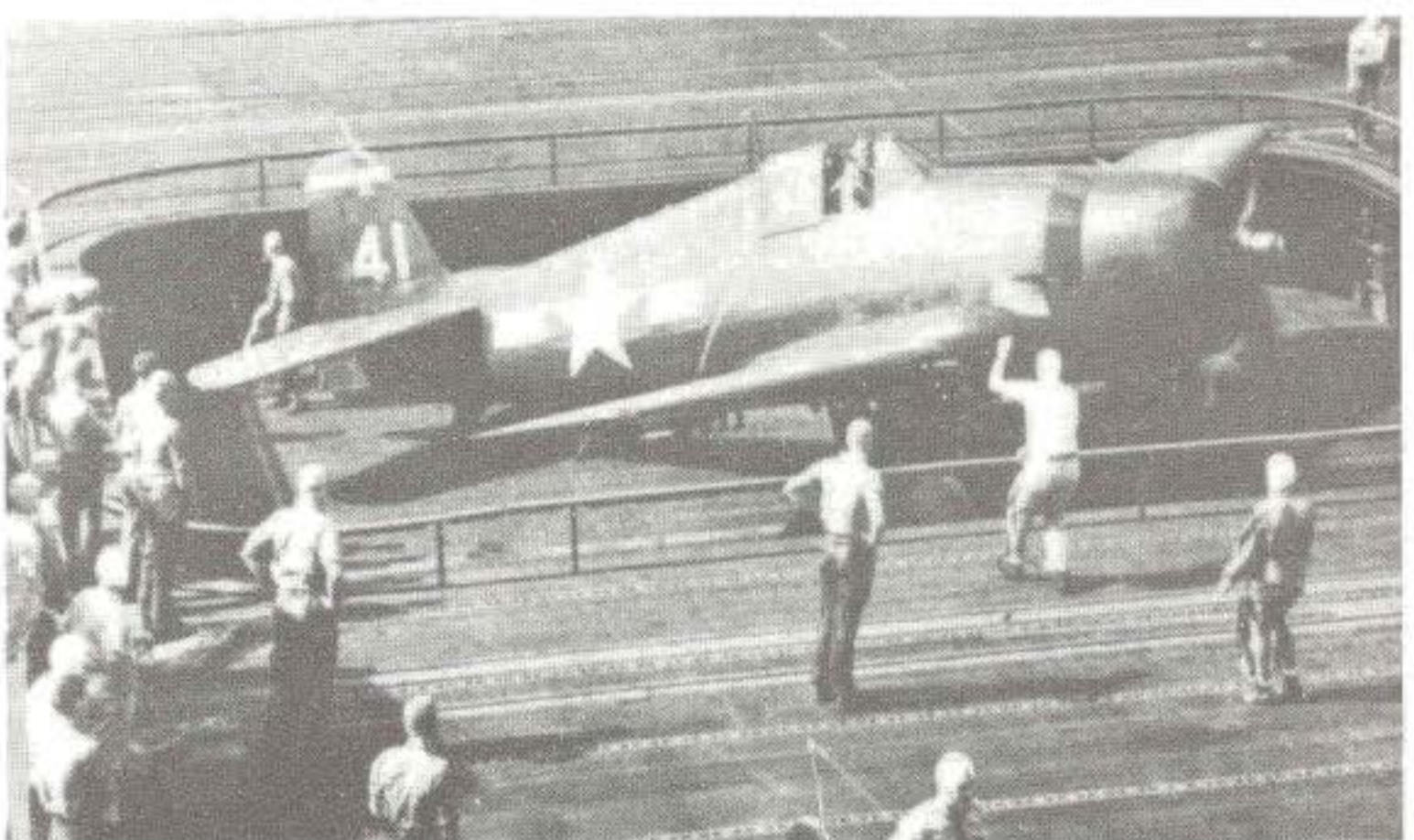
Above: One of VF-8s F6F-3s being respotted on 'Bunker Hill's' flight deck; off Formosa. 12 October, 1944. (US Navy)



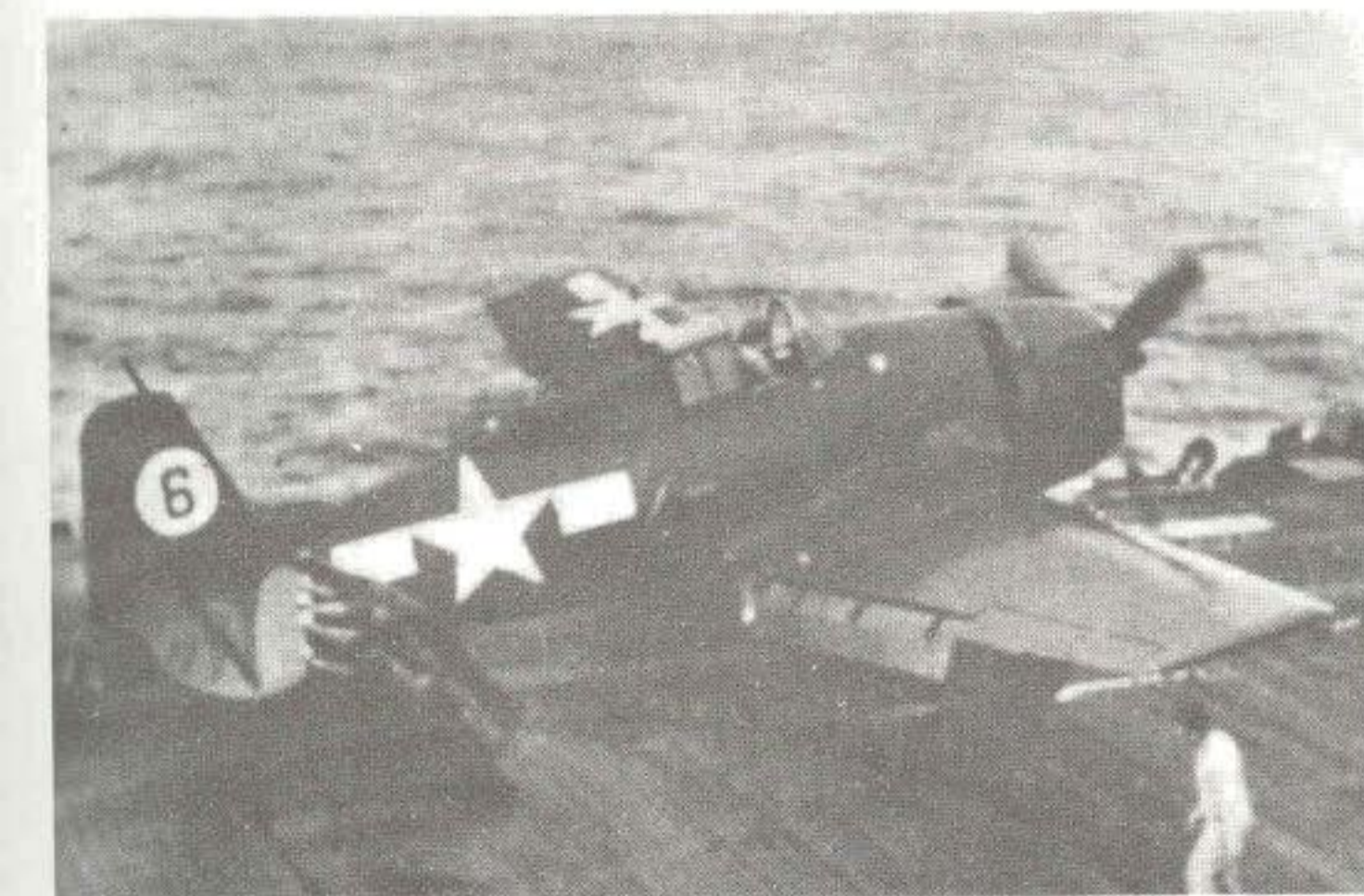
Above: An early model F6F-5 of VF-8 on 'Bunker Hill' following mission over Formosa; 12 October. On the early morning fighter sweep, 15 VF-8 Hellcats, 8 F6F-5s and 7 F6F-3s, had engaged more than 50 Zekes, Oscars and Nicks over Taien Airfield and claimed 32 destroyed, 3 probably destroyed and 13 damaged. Although no Hellcats were shot down, 4 were damaged, one of which crash landed and was pushed over the side. (US Navy)



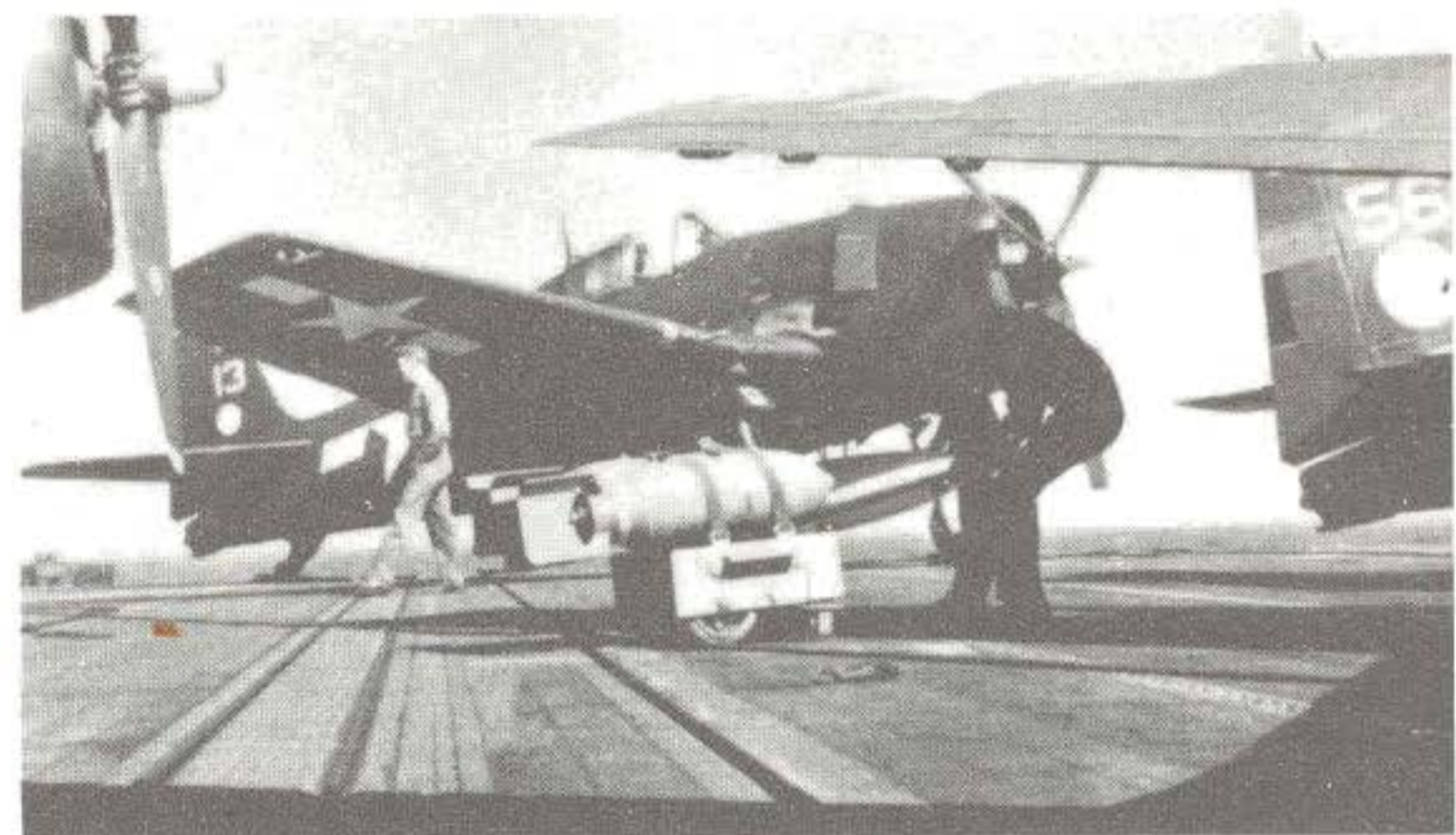
Above: VF-20 pilots man their F6F-5s as 'Enterprise' prepares to launch a strike on the Manila area; 15 October, 1944. (US Navy)



Above: A VF-15 F6F-5 comes up on 'Essex' after elevator; 22 October, 1944. (US Navy)



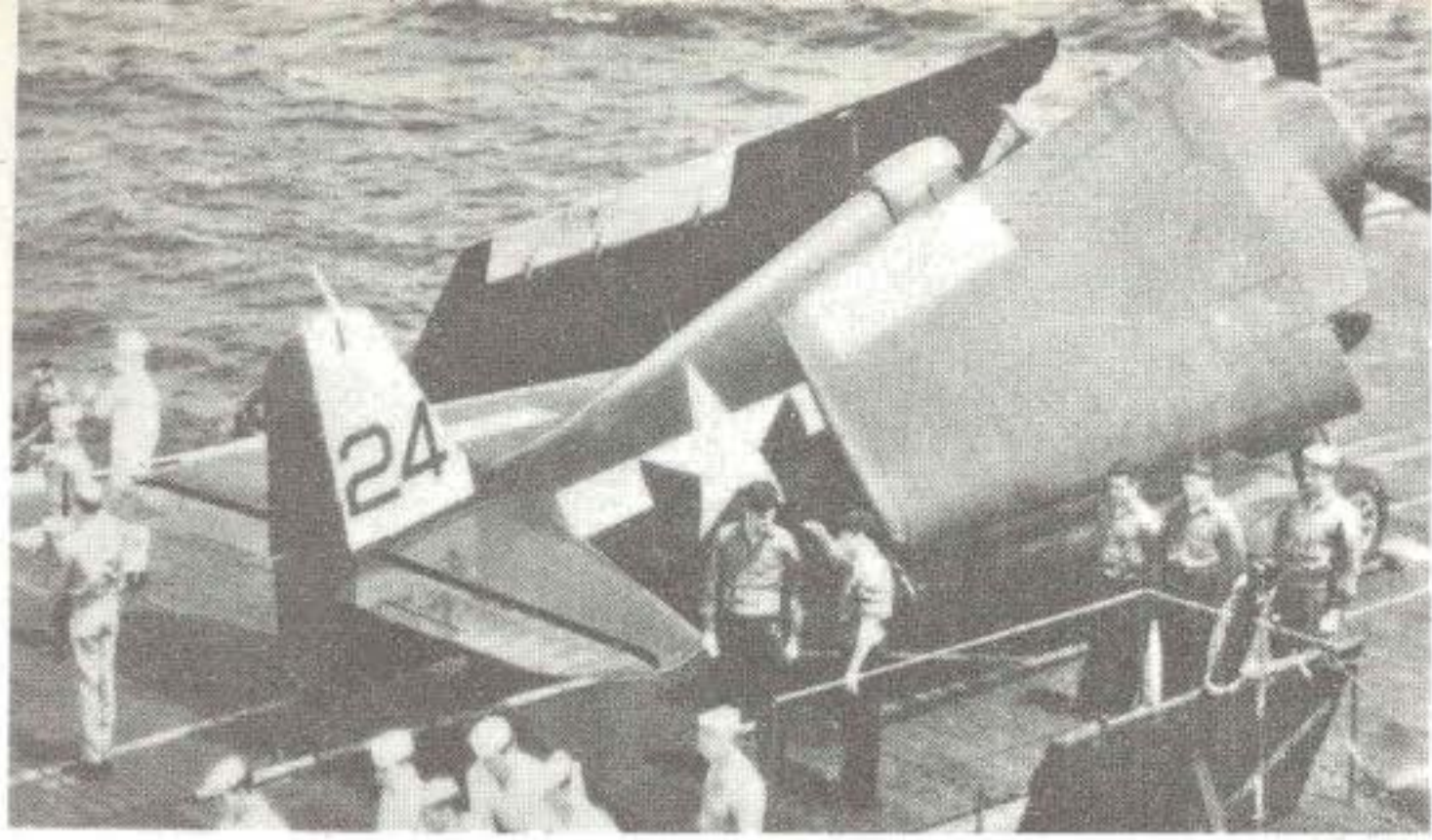
Above: An F6F-5 of VF-21 being positioned on 'Belleau Wood's' catapult; late 1944. The white circle with black number superimposed was the standard 'Belleau Wood' marking for most of 1944. (US Navy)



Above: Early model F6F-5s of VF-11; late 1944. Note that the 'Hornet' marking varied in size. (US Navy)

Below: Catching a wire on 'Sangamon' (CVE-26) is an F6F-5 of VF-37; off Leyte, 26 October, 1944. (US Navy)





Above: A faded and dirty F6F-3 of VF-18 on 'Intrepid' during operations off Leyte, 29 October, 1944. On this date, 'Intrepid' was hit but not seriously damaged by a Kamikaze (Tojo). (US Navy)

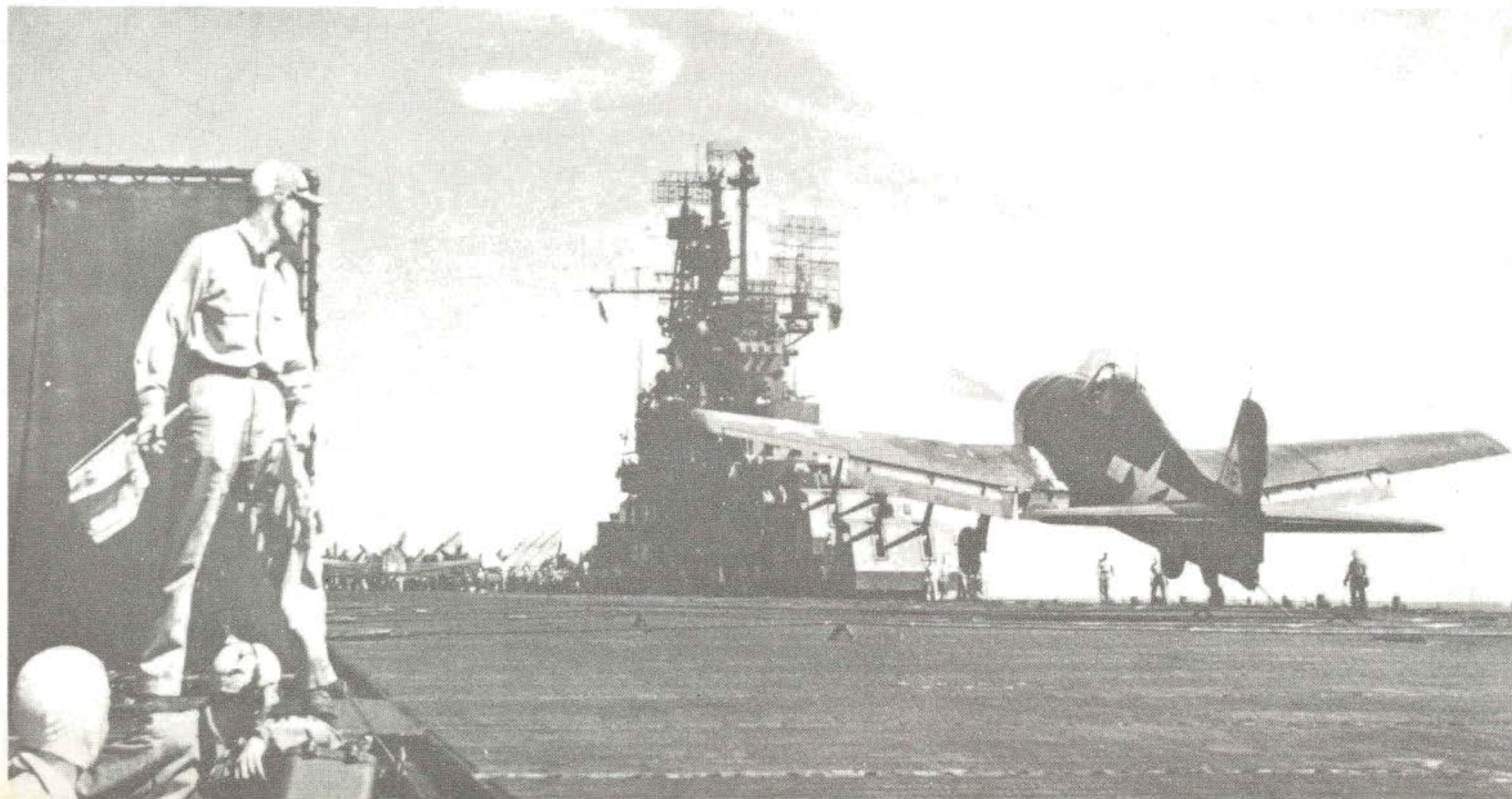


Above: A VF-18 F6F-5 being pushed onto the hangar deck from 'Intrepid's' deck edge elevator; 29 October, 1944. The white cross at the top of the vertical fin was used on all Air Group 18 aircraft, but varied in size. (US Navy)



Above: An early model F6F-5 of VF-7 positioned on 'Hancock's' port catapult; 6 November, 1944. The Air Group's marking, a horseshoe, was a natural marking for "Lucky Seven". Note the single turtledeck light, which was common to the majority of -5s. F6F-3s and only a few -5s had two turtledeck lights. (US Navy)

Below: A VF-20 F6F-3 settles into the arresting gear aboard 'Lexington'; December, 1944. On 22 November, Air Group 20 had transferred from 'Enterprise' to 'Lexington', and retained the triangle marking in one of only two known instances where the aircraft markings were transferred to another carrier. (US Navy)





Above: "Murderer's Row" at Ulithi Atoll, December, 1944. F6F-5s of VF-80 spotted on Ticonderoga's forward flight deck. In the background, left to right, 'Wasp', 'Yorktown', 'Hornet' and 'Hancock'. Note variation in size and shape of the Air Group 80 chevron marking. (US Navy)



Above: An F6F-5 of VF-20 leaves the 'Lexington' as she approaches Ulithi at the completion of Air Group 20's combat tour; 25 January, 1945. (US Navy)



Above: Nosing over in the barriers, this VF-29 F6F-5 displays the 1945 'Cabot' markings to advantage. The wing markings were applied to the upper surfaces only, on Air Group 29 aircraft. (US Navy)

Below: A VF-29 F6F-5, in 1945 'Cabot' markings, goes over the side on a bad take off; 11 February, 1945. (US Navy)





Above: F6F-5s of VF-81 aboard 'Wasp' en route to the first carrier strikes on Japan; 12 February, 1945. Non-standard style numbers were used in the tail markings of most 'Wasp' aircraft in 1945. Noteworthy is the high gloss finish. The glossy sea blue finish of the F6F-5 included a factory applied coat of wax. (US Navy)



Above: 'Saratoga's' day fighter squadron, VF-53, operated F6F-5s. The stripe on the horizontal stabilizer is believed to have been used as a means of recognition between the day and night aircraft. (US Navy)



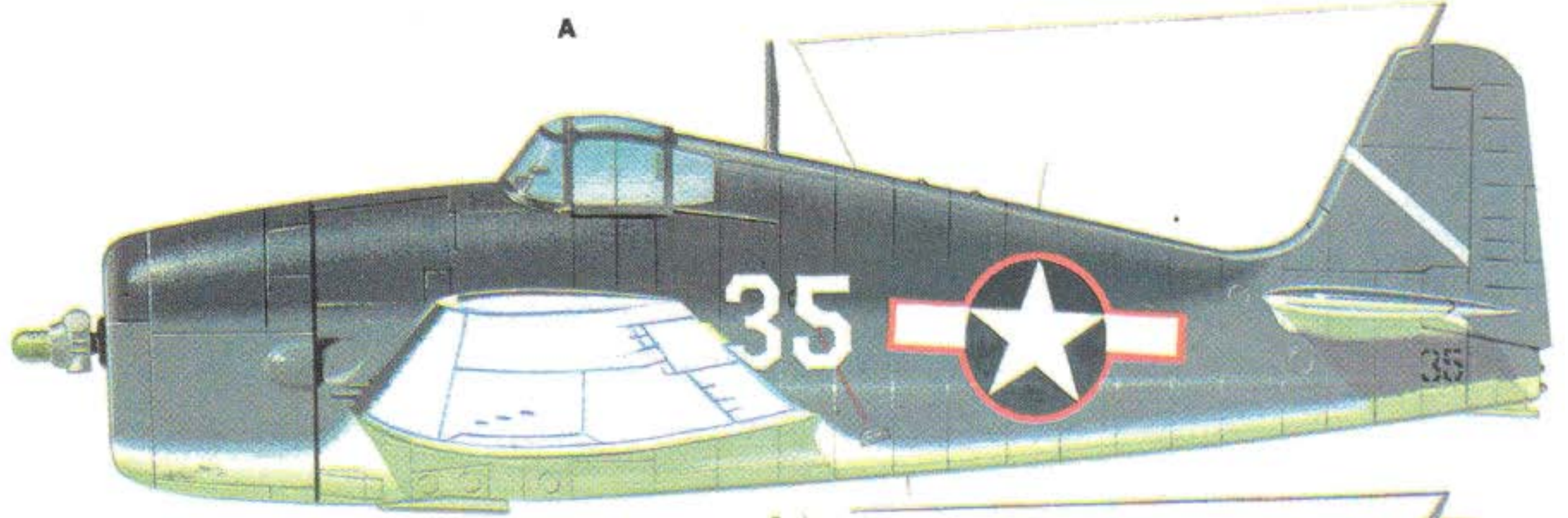
Above: Early model F6F-5s of VF-9 about to take off from 'Lexington' for strikes on Tokyo; 25 February, 1945. (US Navy)

Below: VF-9 F6F-5s on 'Lexington's' flight deck; February, 1945. 'Lexington' markings applied to the upper surfaces on both wings of Air Group 9 aircraft, were applied to the upper right and lower left wings of Air Group 94 aircraft in June, 1945. (US Navy)

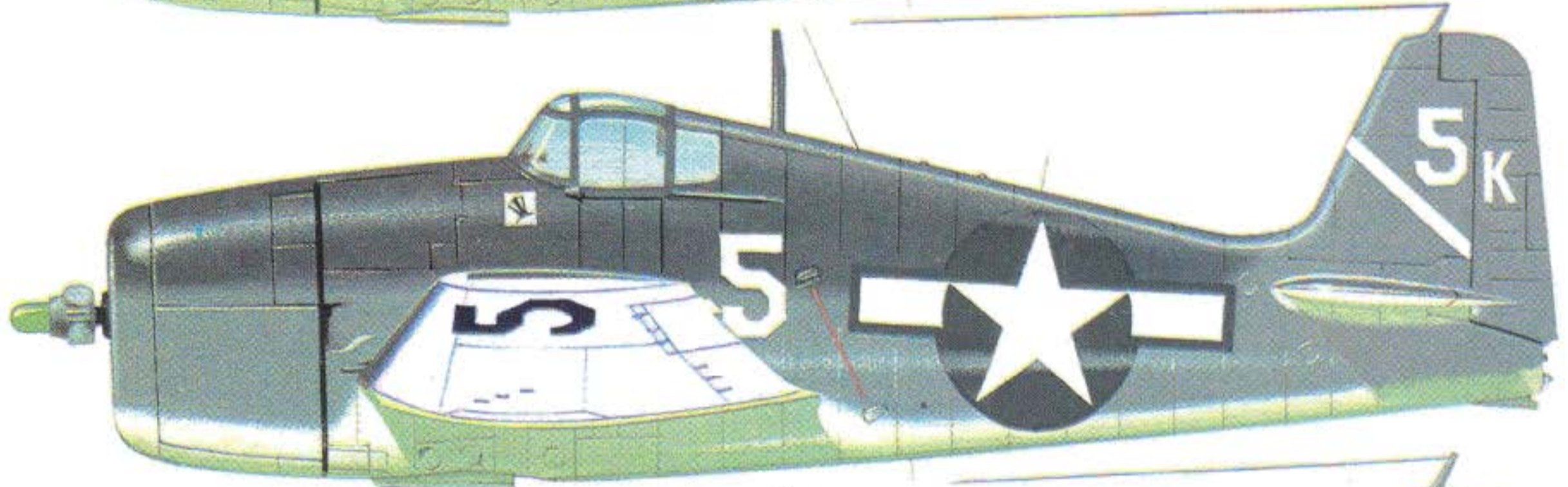


A

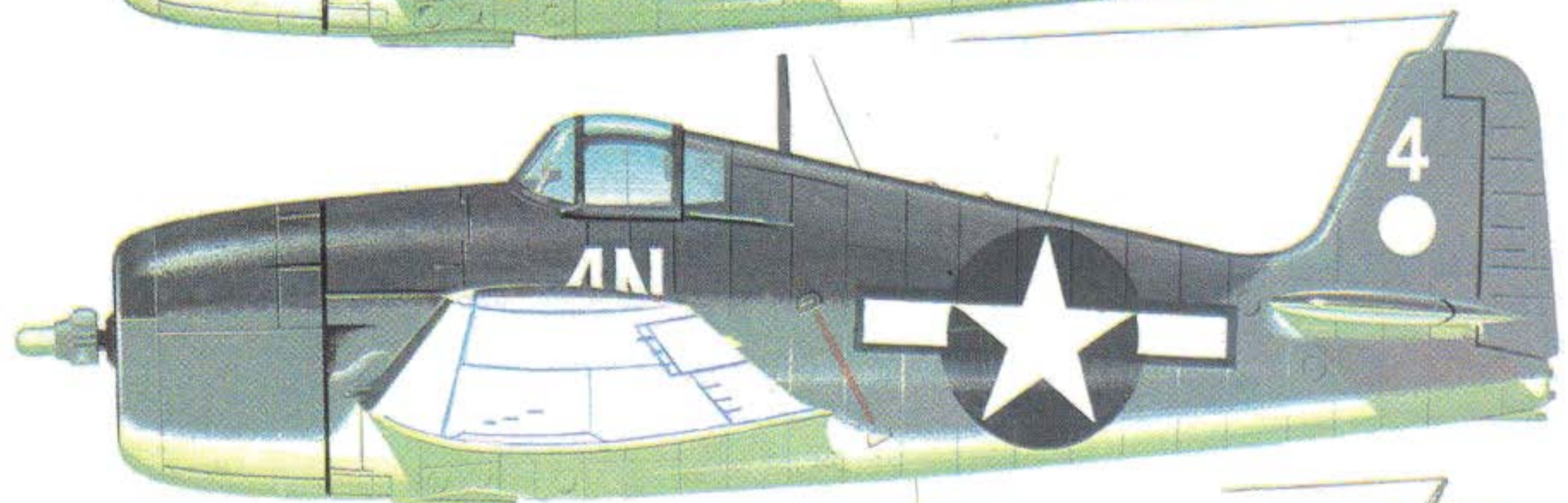
1
F6F-3 Hellcat, VF-5, USS Yorktown (CV-10). August 1943.



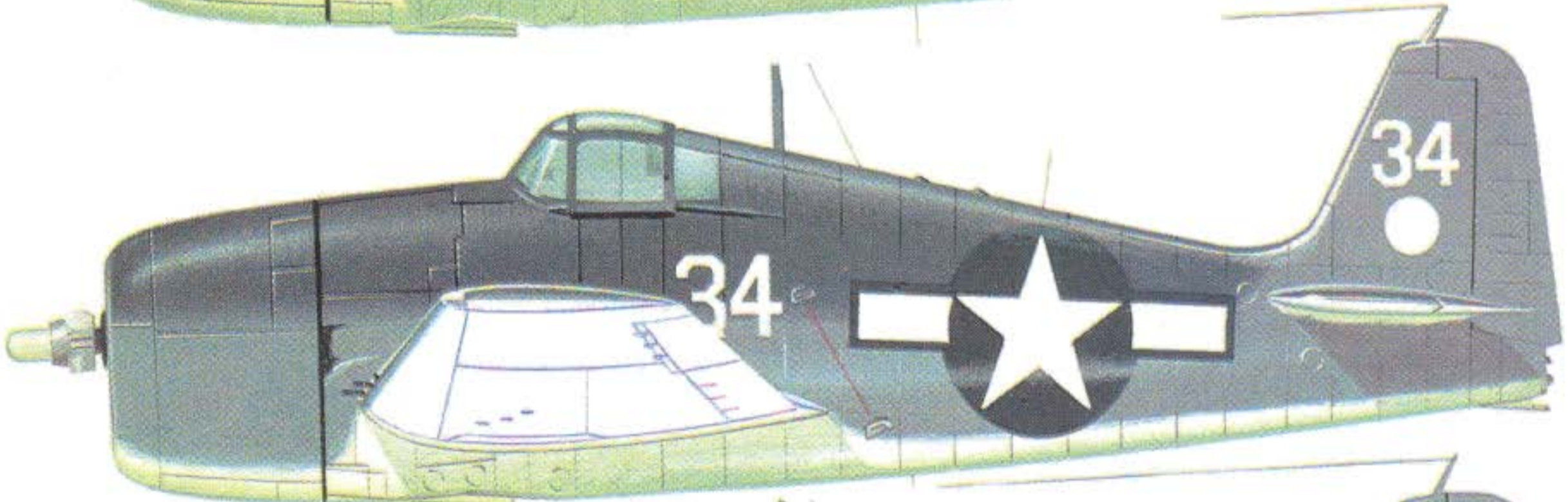
2
F6F-3 Hellcat, VF-1, USS Yorktown (CV-10). June-July 1944.



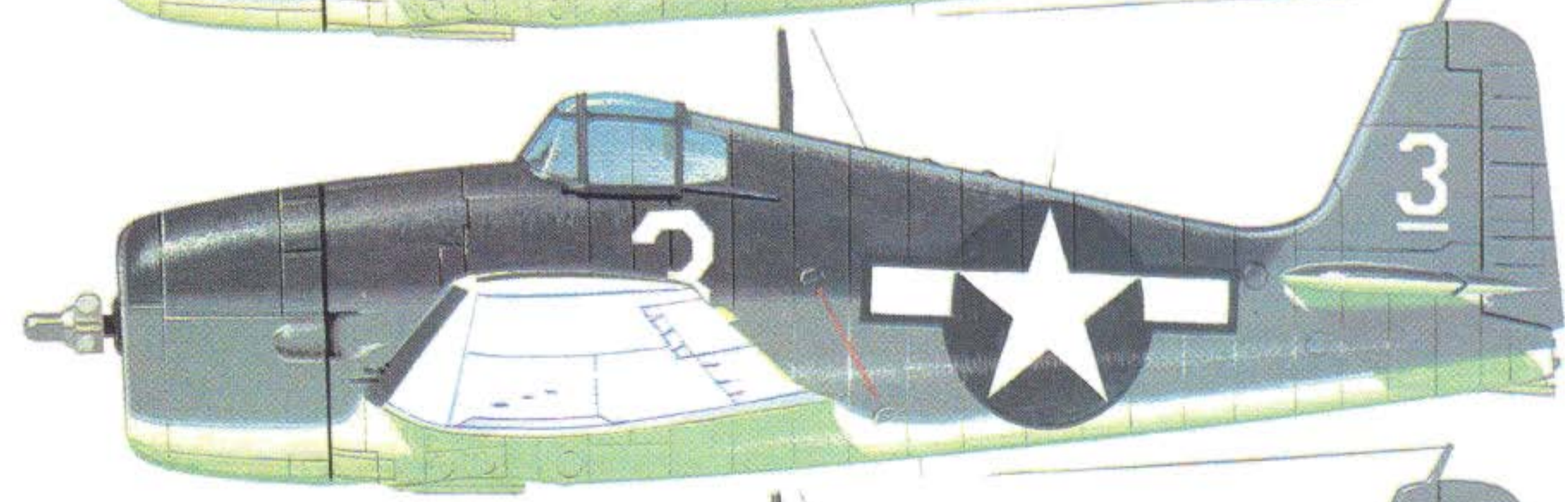
3
F6F-3N Hellcat, VF-2, USS Hornet (CV-12). June 1944. Code 4N under cockpit.



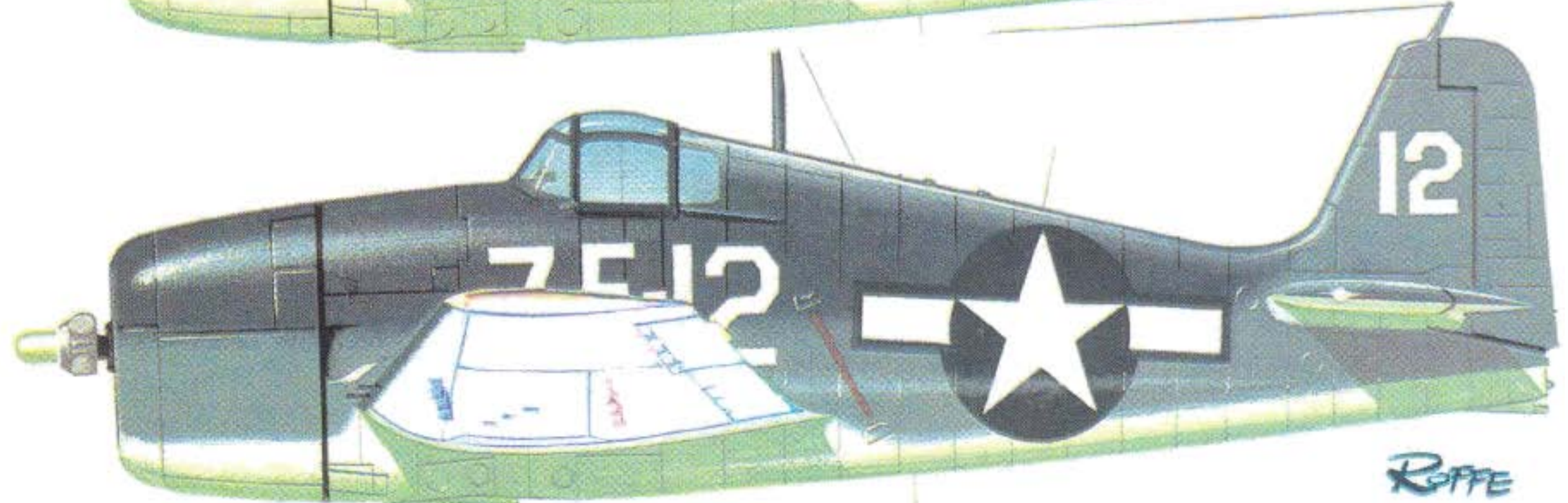
4
F6F-3 Hellcat, VF-2, USS Hornet (CV-12). March-September 1944.



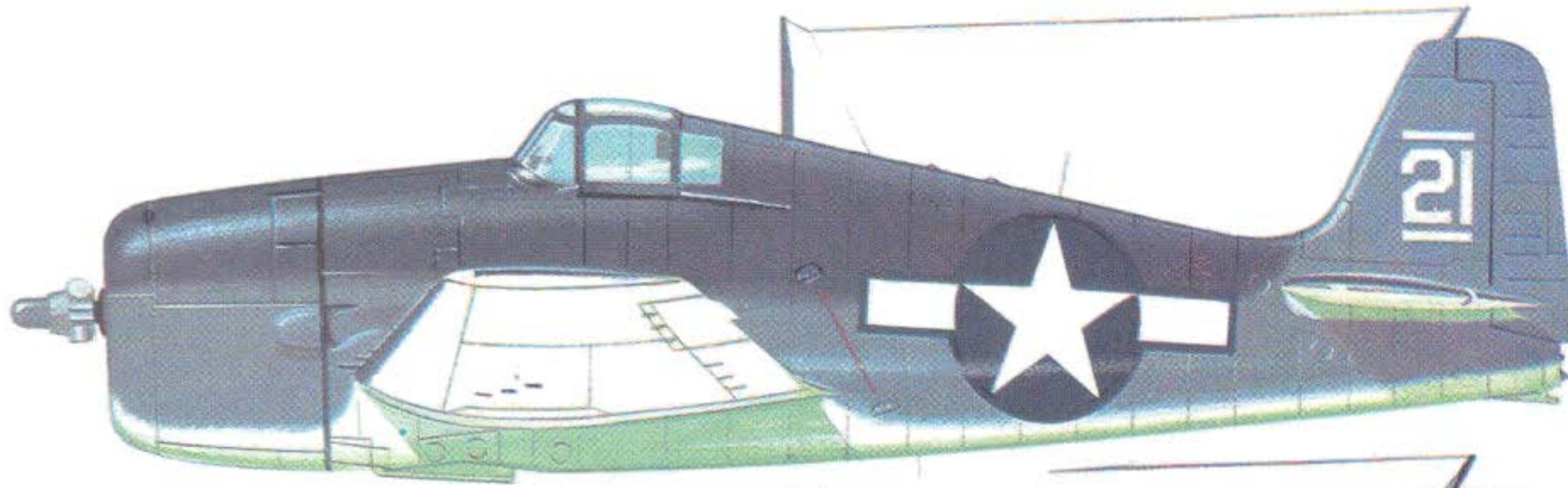
5
F6F-3 Hellcat, VF-6, USS Intrepid (CV-11). February 1944.



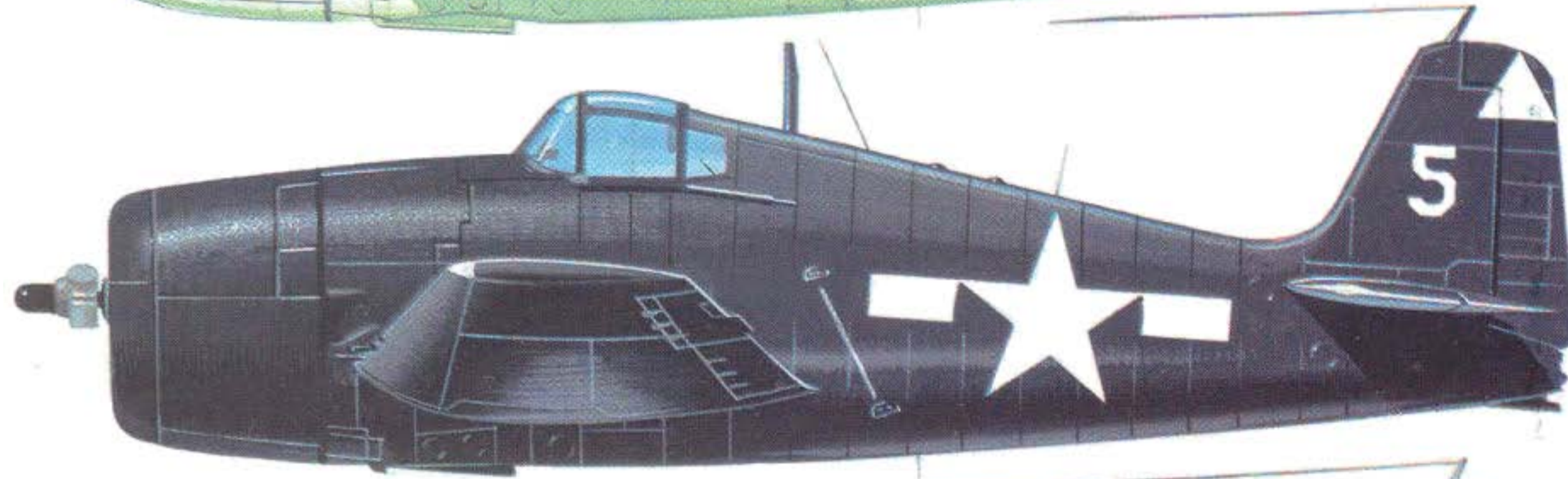
6
F6F-3 Hellcat, VF-7, USS Hancock (CV-19). June 1944, during shakedown cruise along Atlantic Coast. Code 7-F-12 under cockpit.



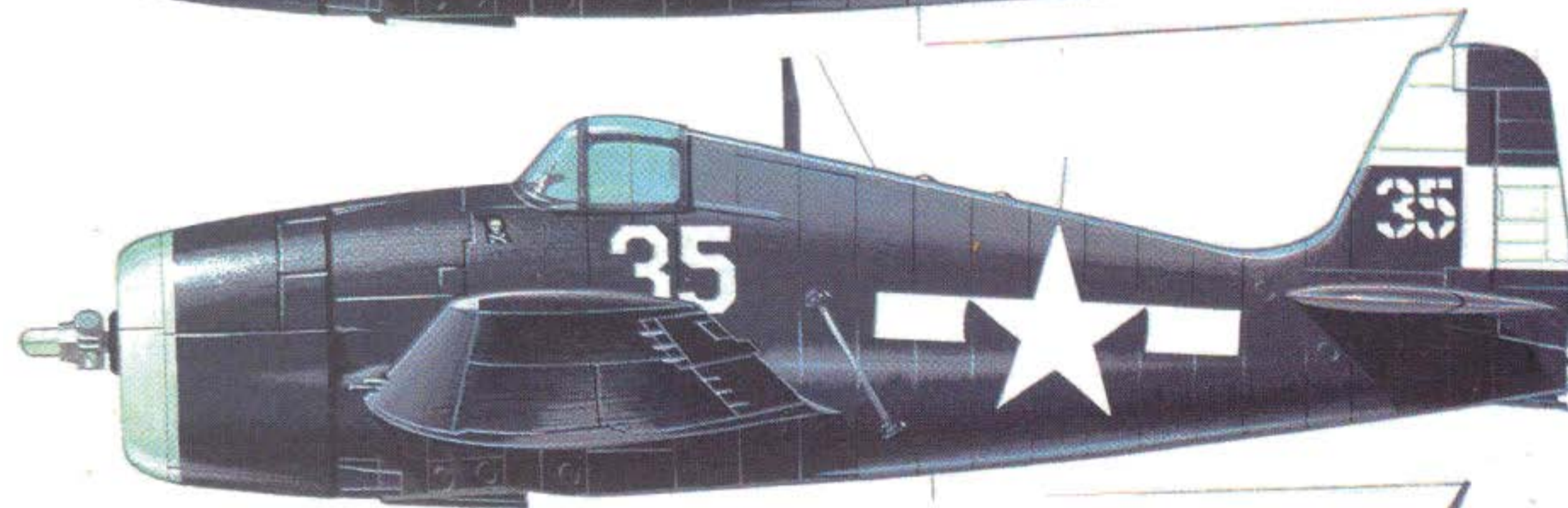
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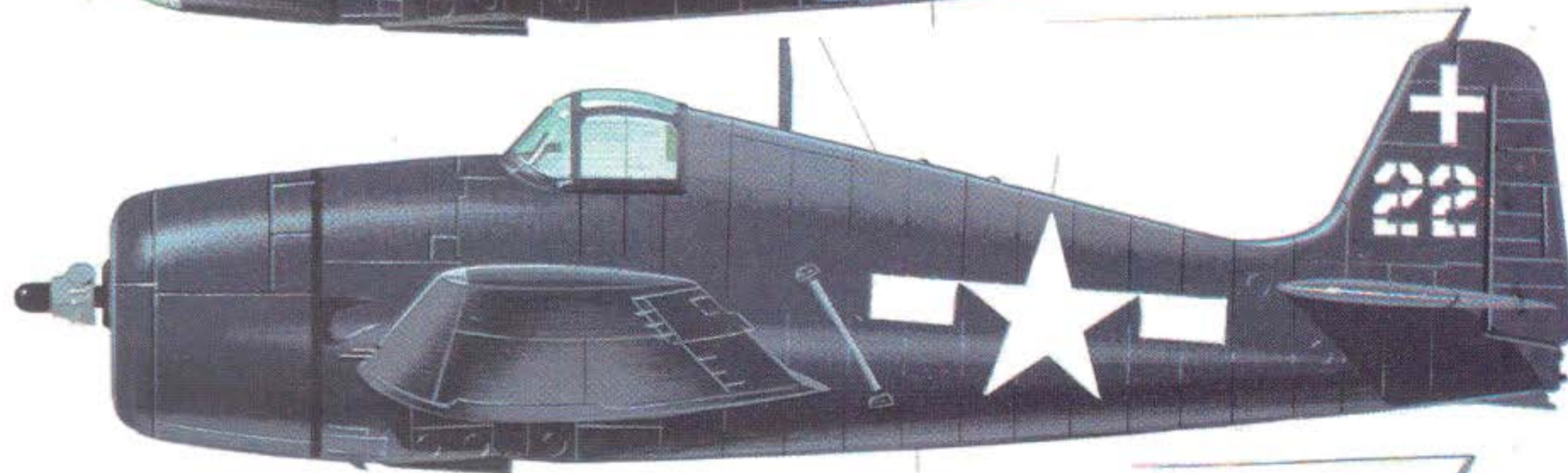
1
F6F-3 Hellcat, VF-8, USS Bunker Hill (CV-17). March–October 1944.



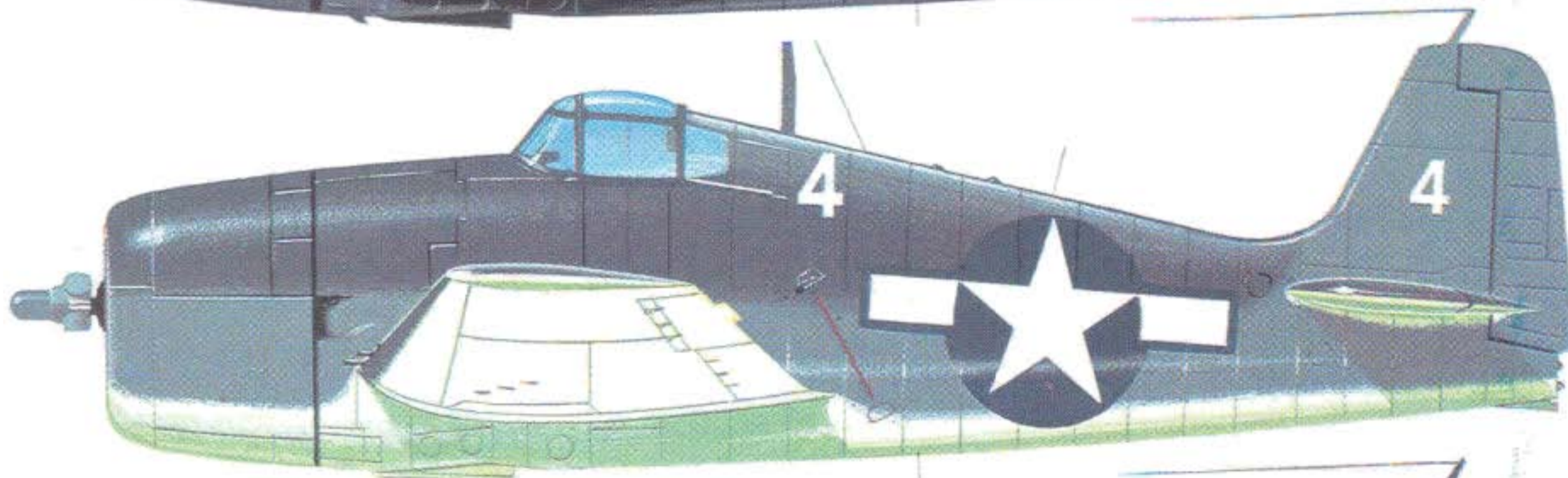
2
F6F-5 Hellcat, VF-14, USS Wasp (CV-18). May–November 1944.



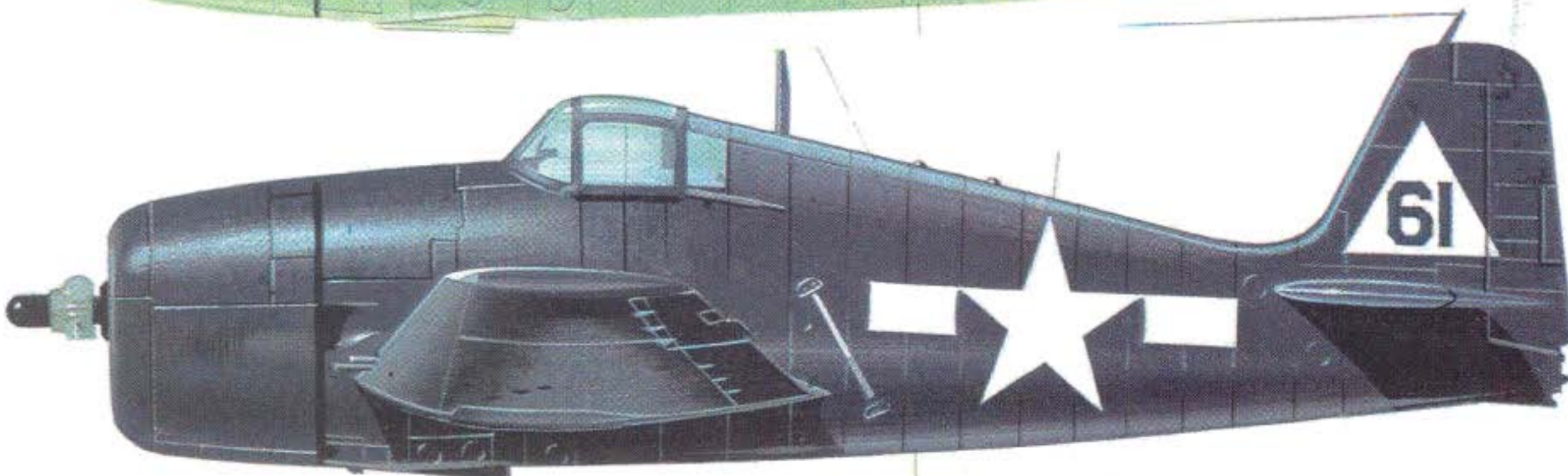
3
F6F-5 Hellcat, VF-17, USS Hornet (CV-12). March 1945.



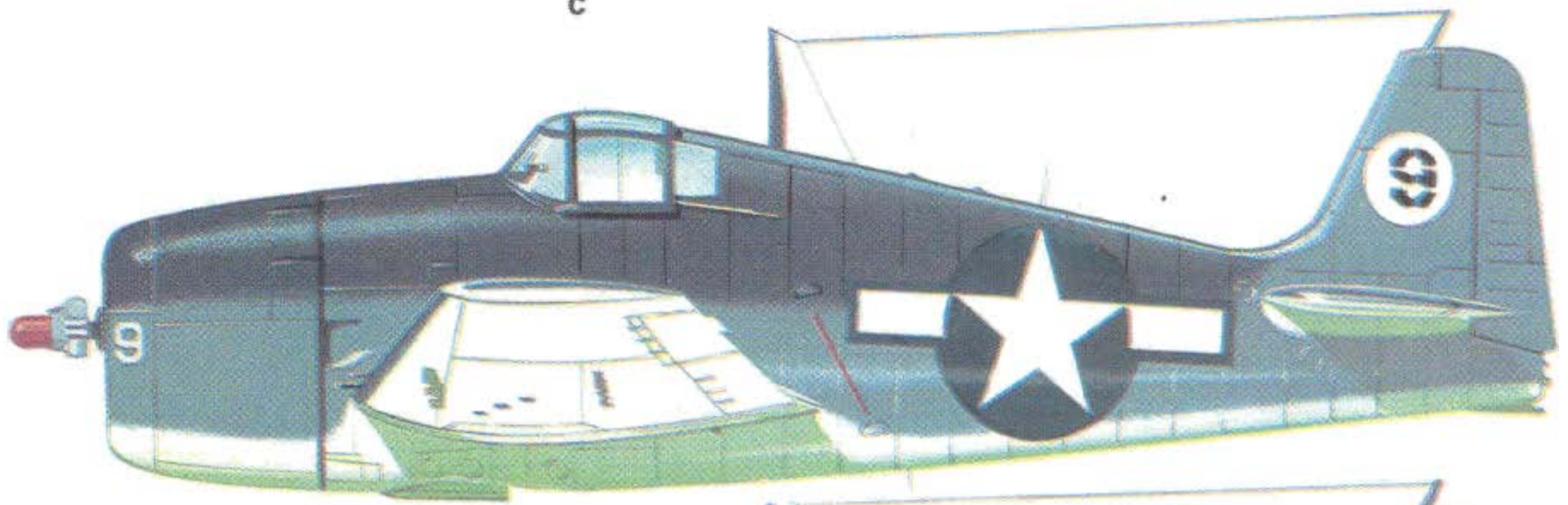
4
F6F-5 Hellcat, VF-18, USS Intrepid (CV-11). September–November 1944.



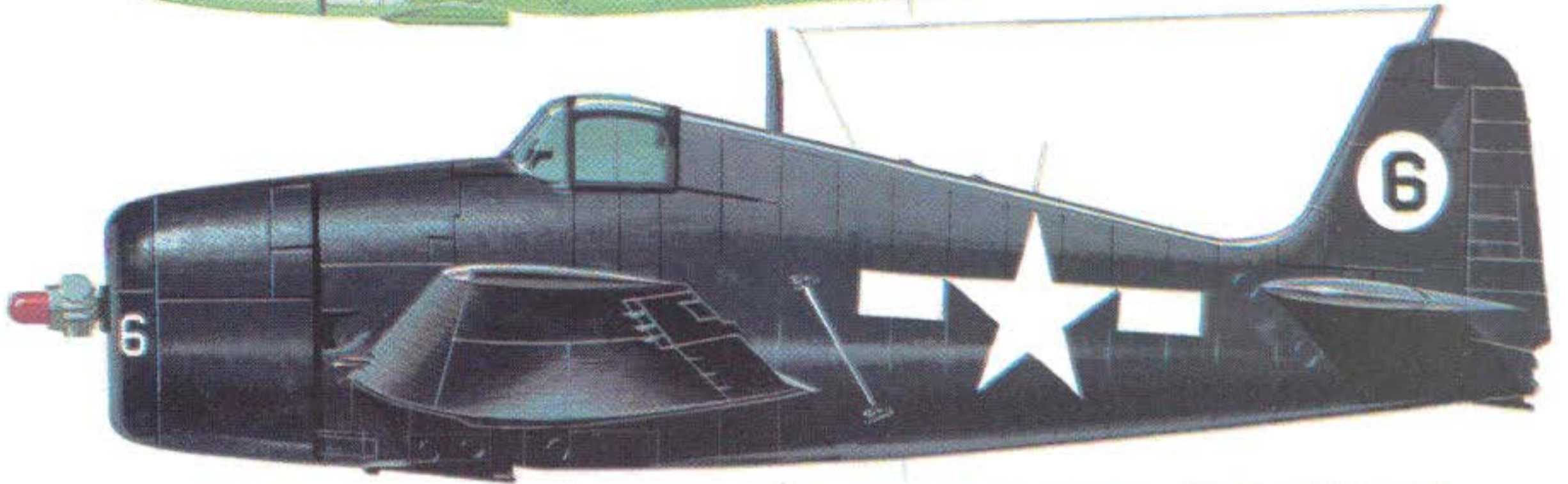
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F6F-3 Hellcat, VF-19, USS Lexington (CV-16). July–November 1944.



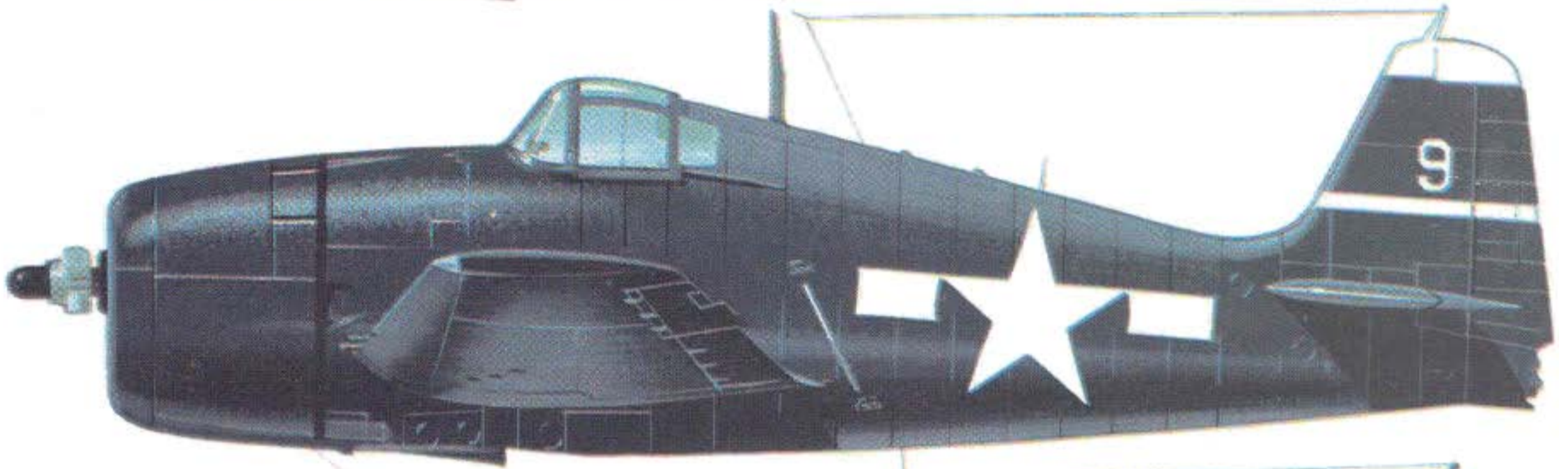
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F6F-5 Hellcat, VF-20, USS Enterprise (CV-6). August–November 1944. USS Lexington (CV-16). December 1944–January 1945.



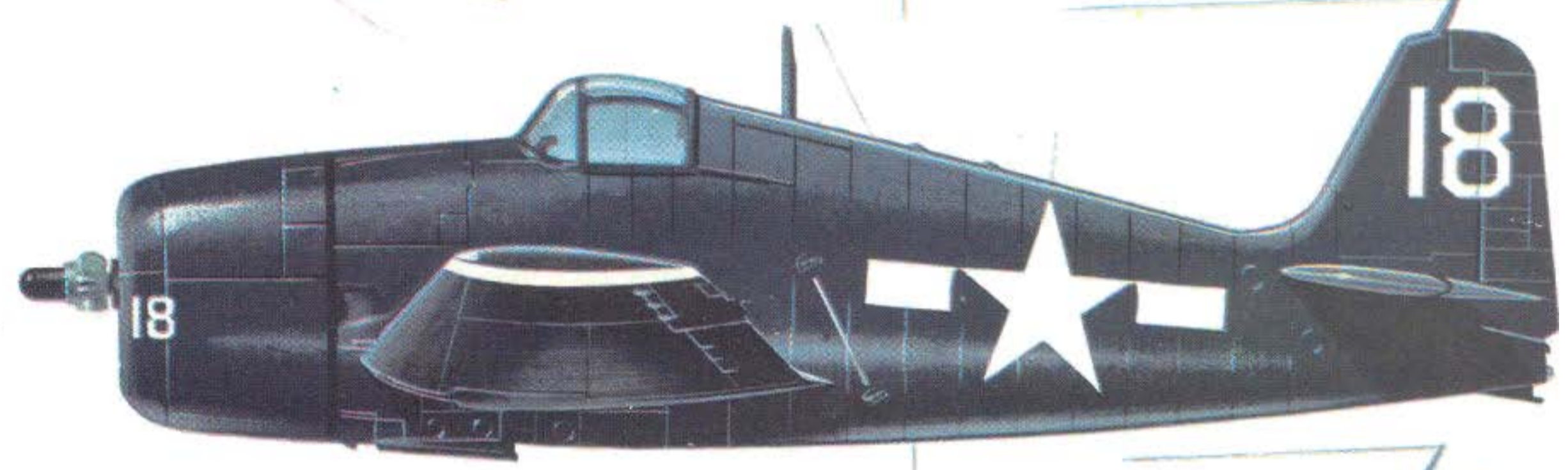
1
F6F-3 Hellcat, VF-21, USS Belleau Wood (CVL-24). August 1944.



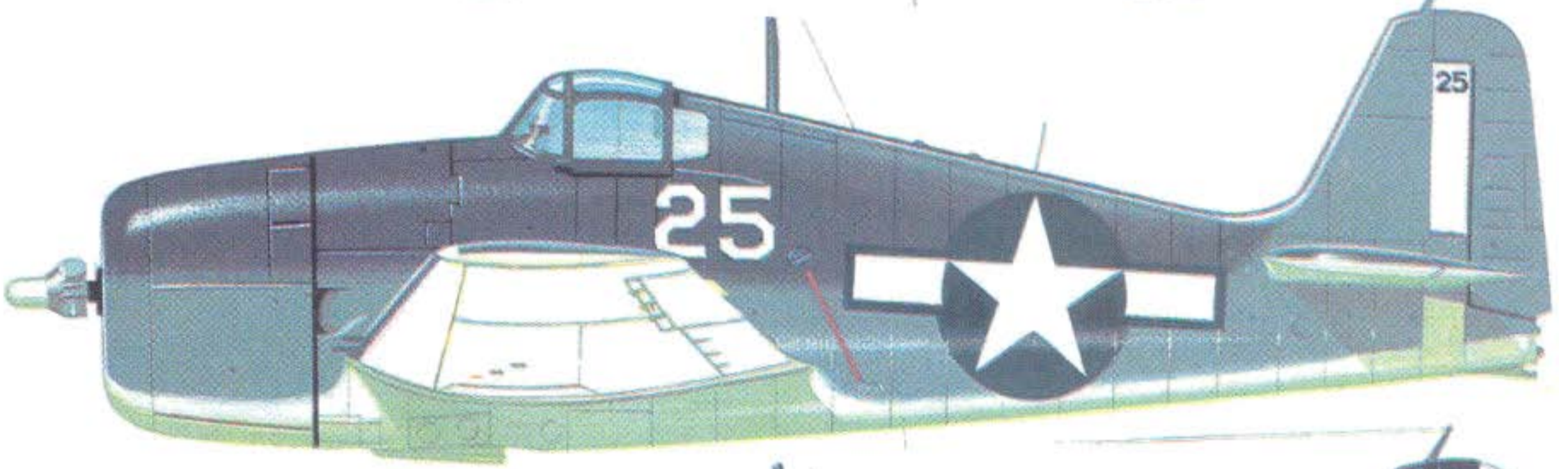
2
F6F-5 Hellcat, VF-21, USS Belleau Wood (CVL-24). September 1944.



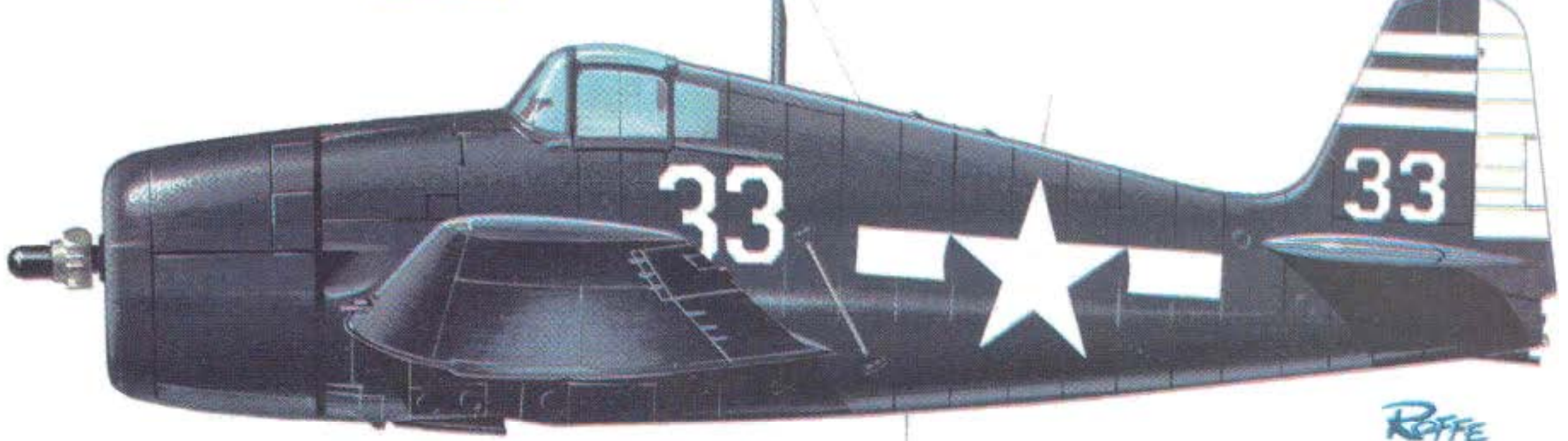
3
F6F-5 Hellcat, VF-22, USS Cowpens (CVL-25). September 1944-January 1945.



4
F6F-5 Hellcat, VF-28, USS Monterey (CVL-26). October 1944.

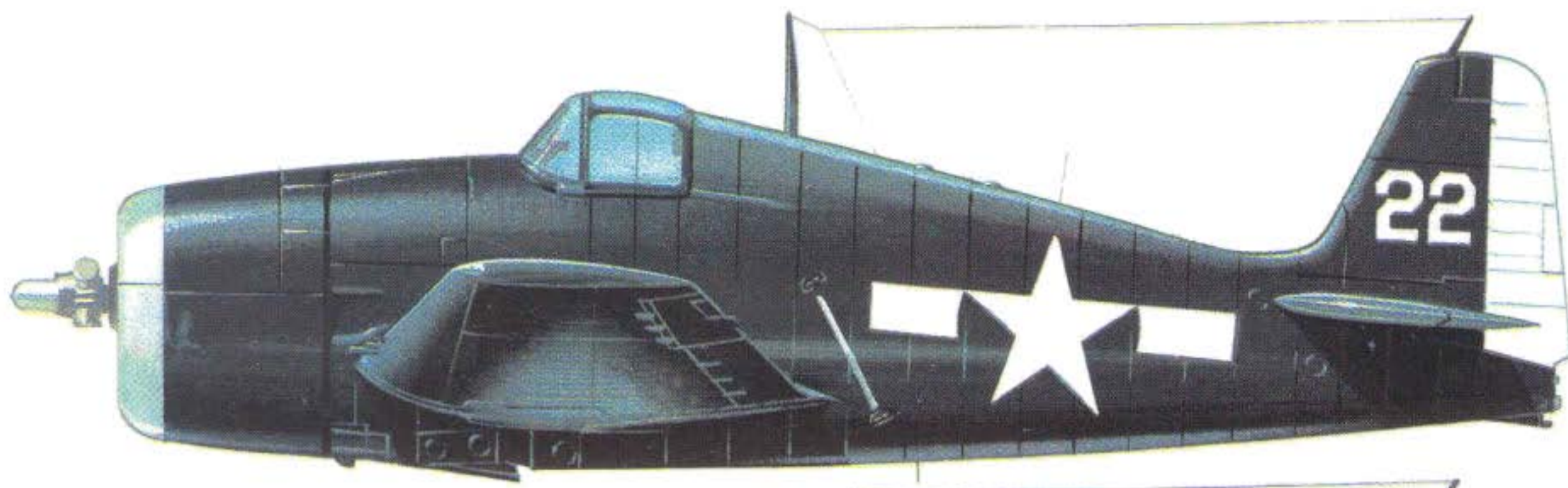


5
F6F-3 Hellcat, VF-29, USS Cabot (CVL-28). October 1944.

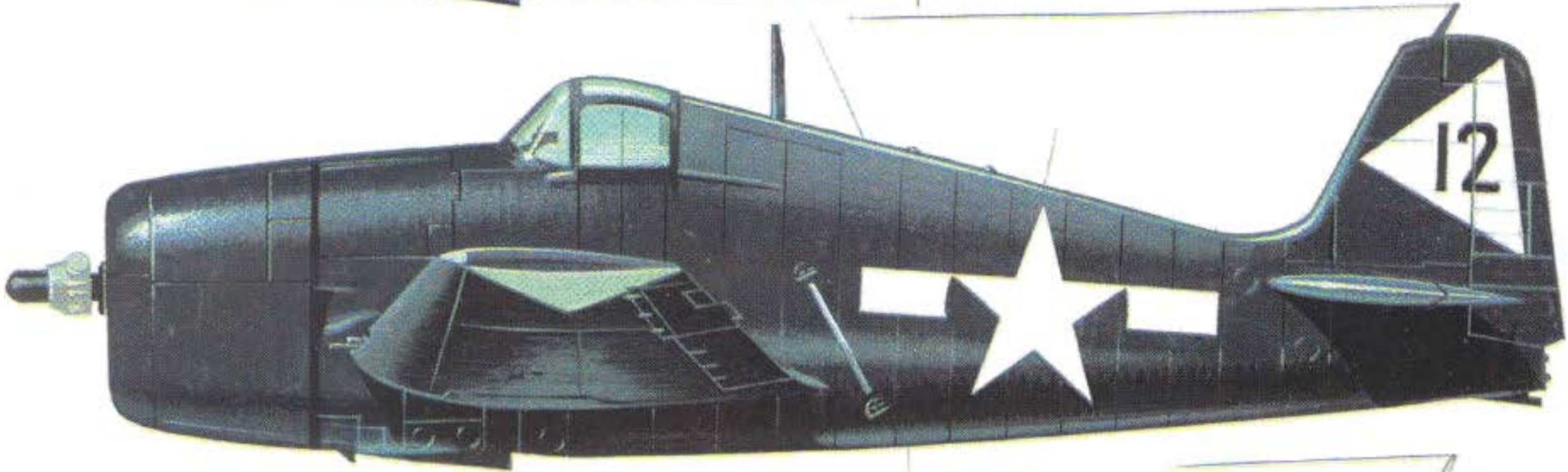


6
F6F-5 Hellcat, VF-29, USS Cabot (CVL-28). March 1945. The same markings were used by VF-32 aboard Cabot, September 1945, except that wing markings were on starboard upper and port under surfaces. VF-32 did not see any combat while based on the Cabot.

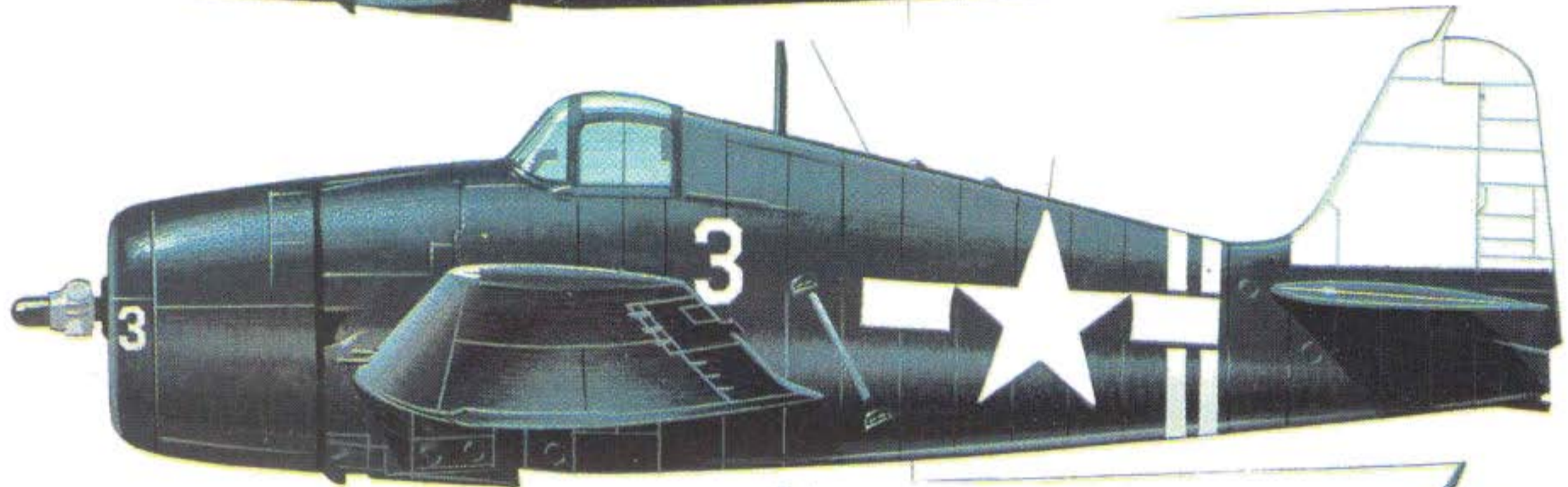
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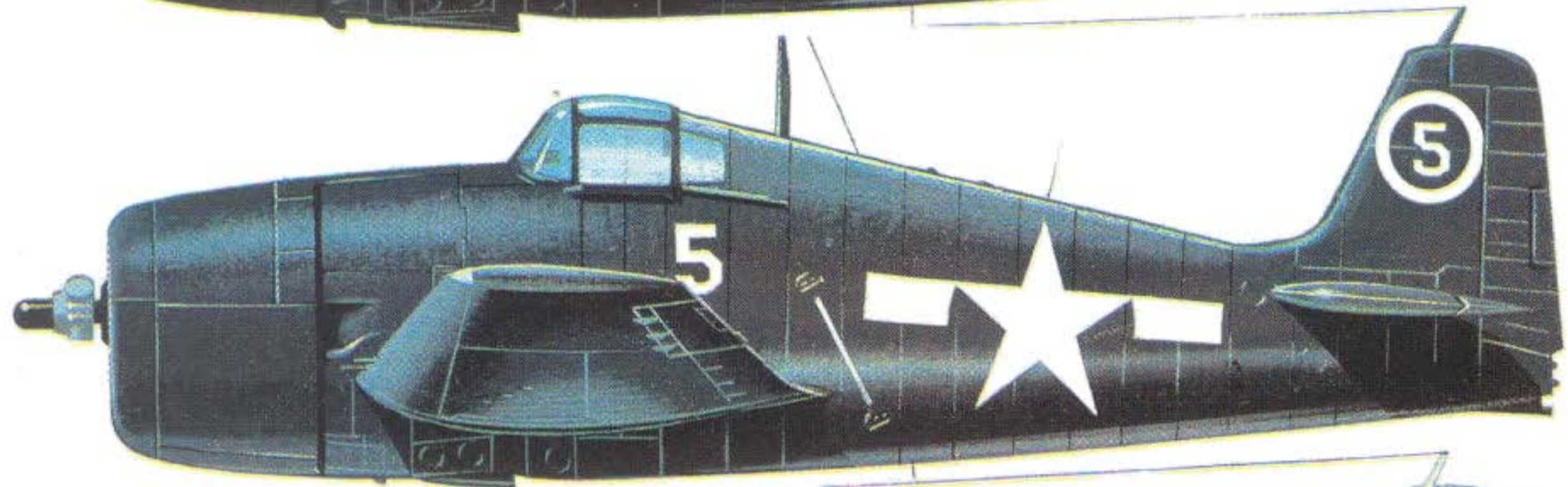
1
F6F-5 Hellcat, VF-30, USS
Belleau Wood (CVL-24).
March 1945.



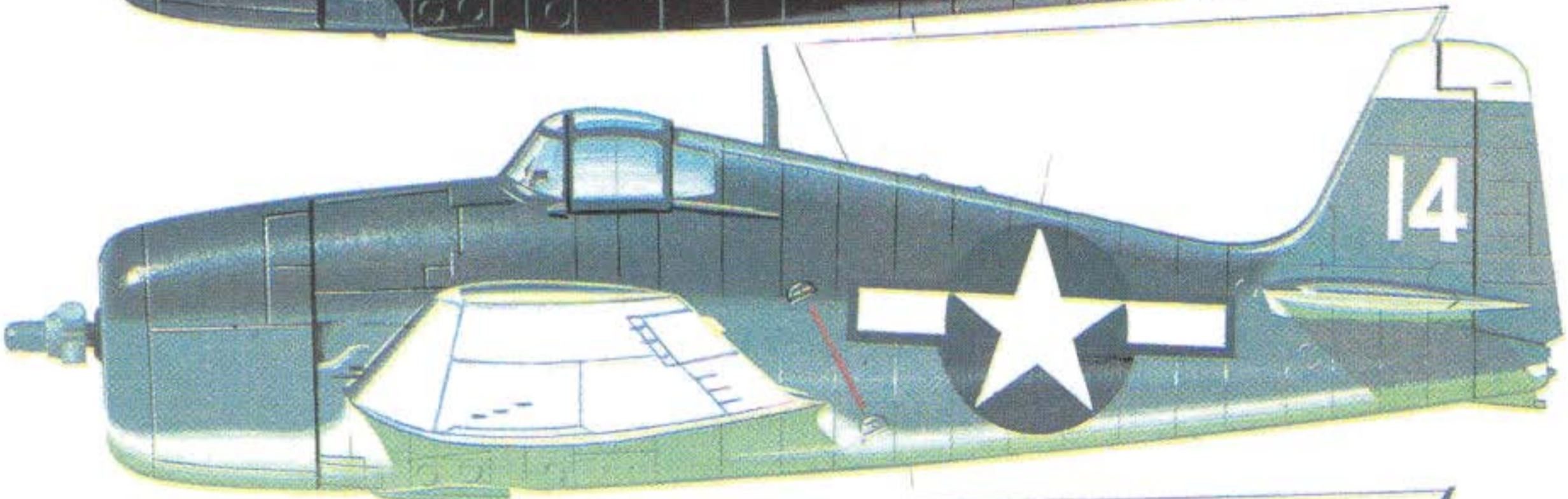
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F6F-5 Hellcat, VF-34, USS
Monterey (CVL-26). July 1945.



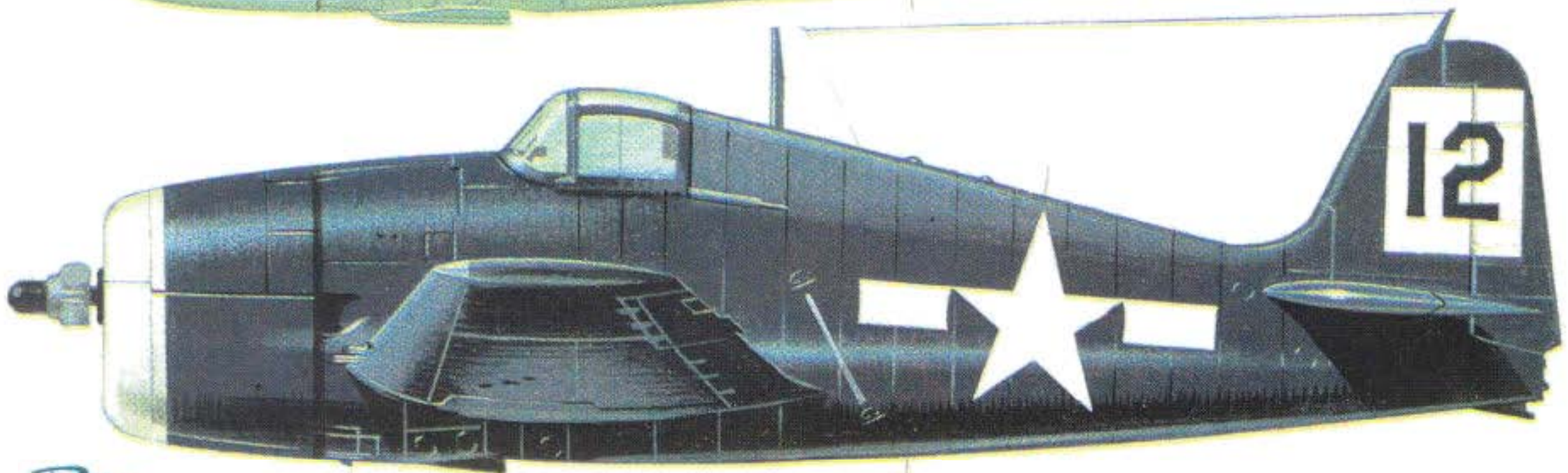
3
F6F-5 Hellcat, VF-40, USS
Suwanee (CVL-27). July 1945.
Most VF-40 aircraft had fuselage
number preceded by the letter
D eg., D10, D15.



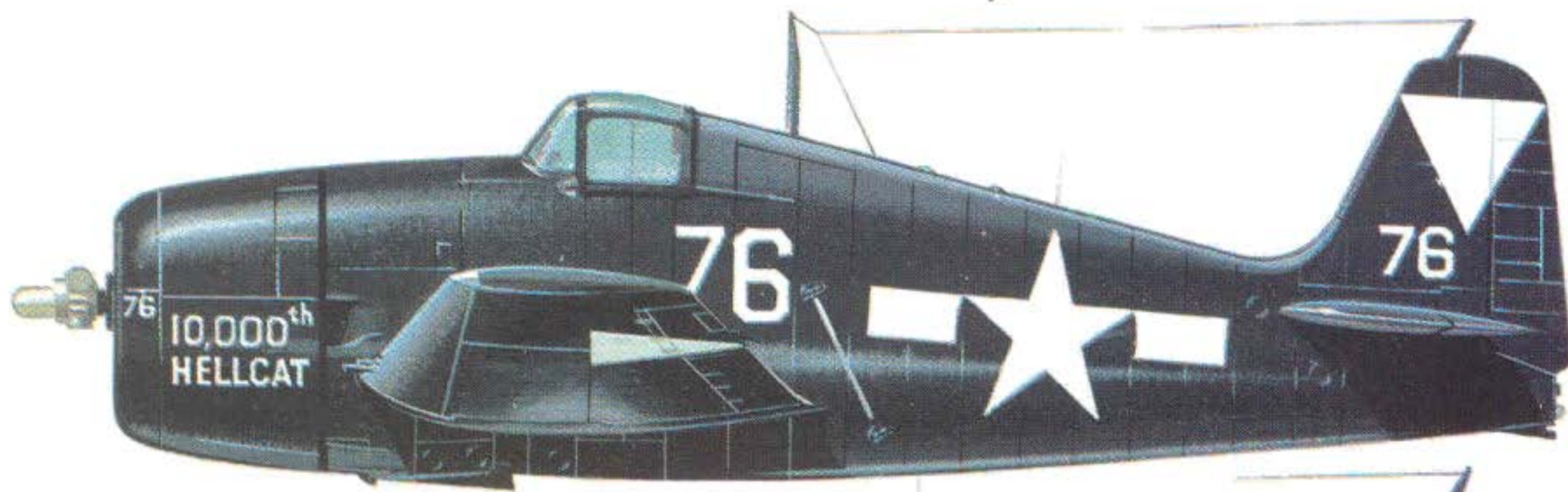
4
F6F-5N Hellcat, VF(N)-41, USS
Independence (CVL-22).
September 1944-January 1945.



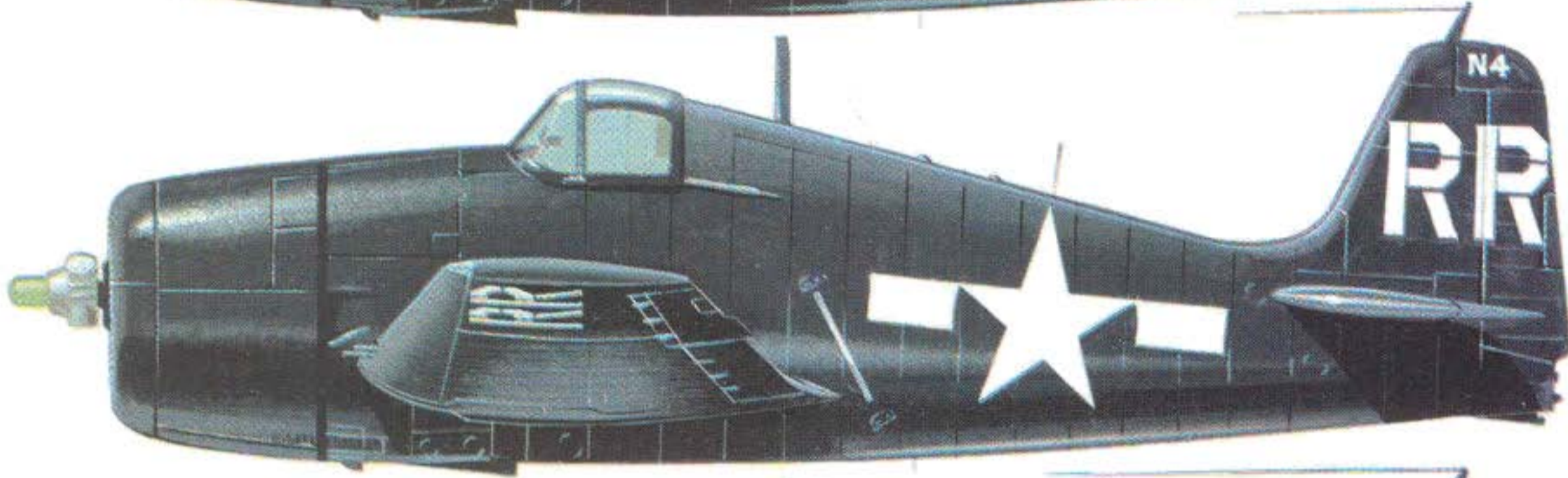
5
F6F-3 Hellcat, VF-44, USS
Langley (CVL-27). October 1944



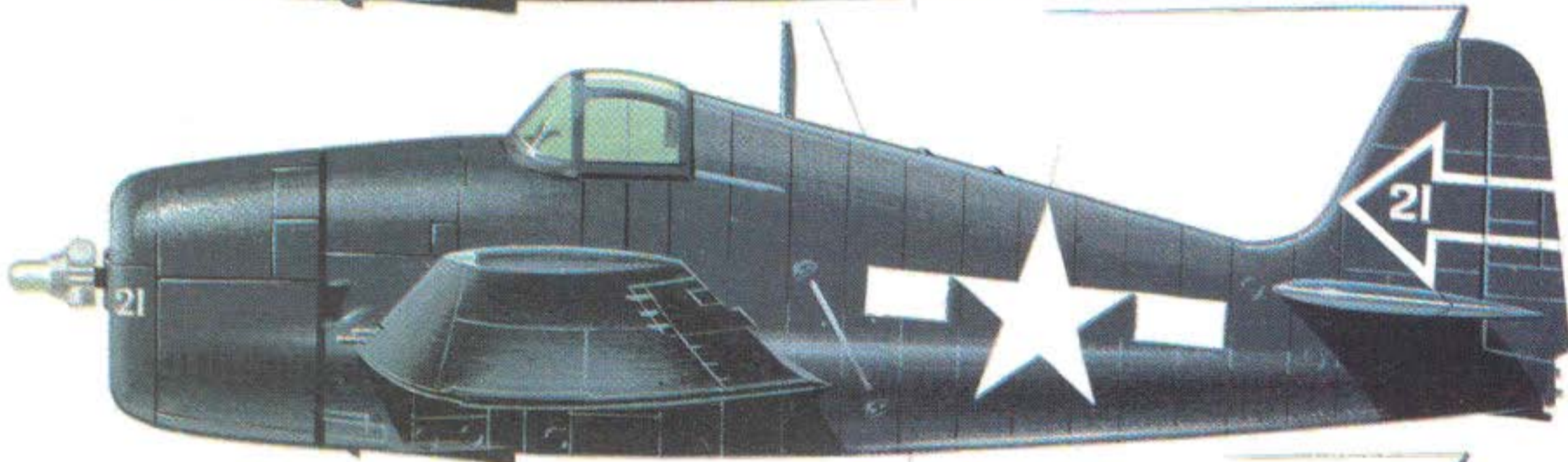
6
F6F-5 Hellcat, VF-45, USS San
Jacinto (CVL-30). March 1945.



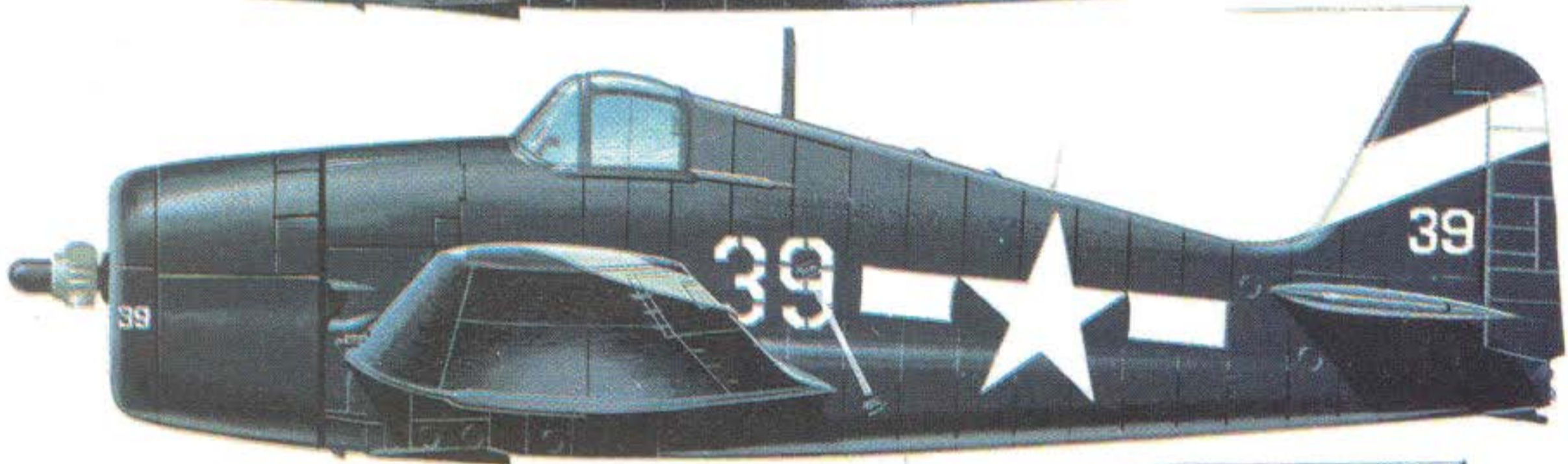
1
F6F-5 Hellcat, VBF-87, USS
Ticonderoga (CV-14). June 1945.



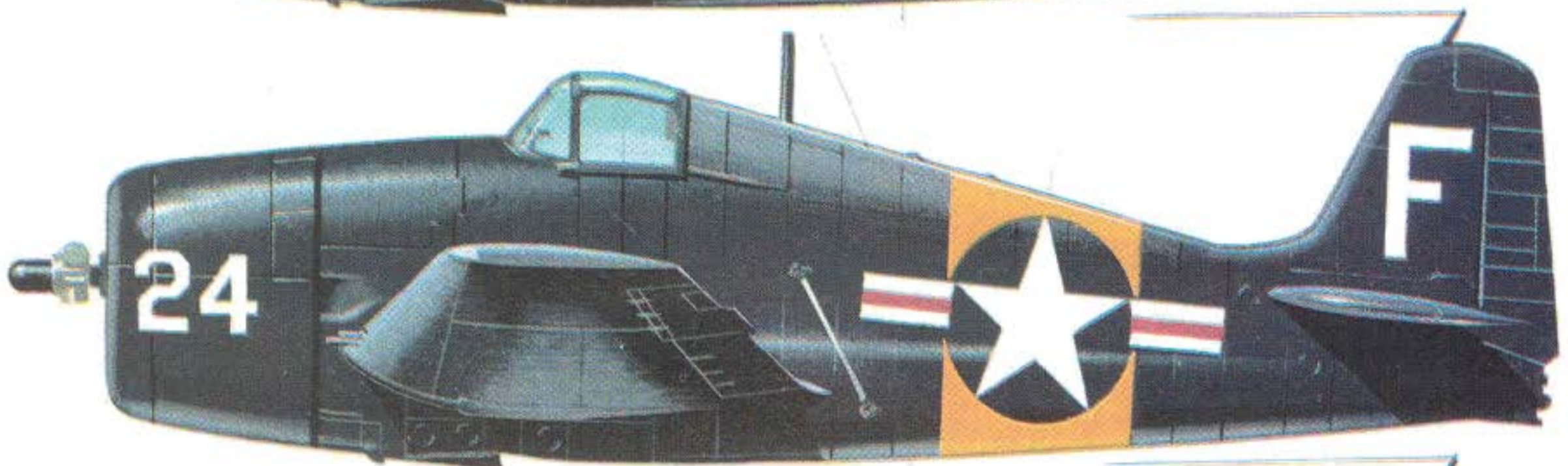
2
F6F-5N Hellcat, VF-88, USS
Yorktown (CV-10). August 1945.



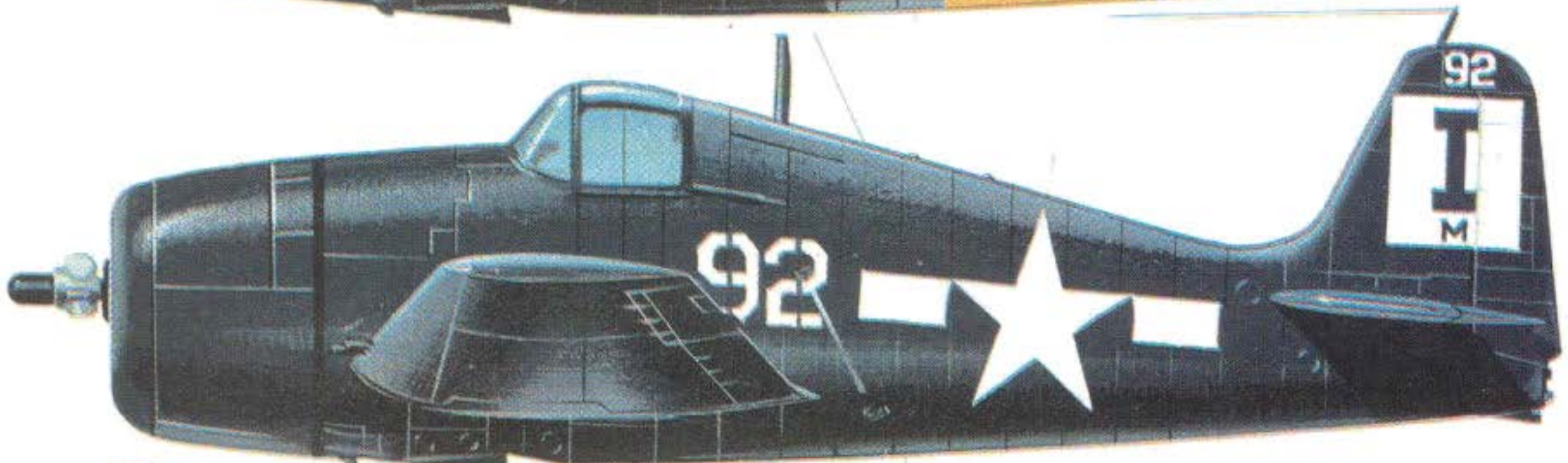
3
F6F-5N Hellcat, VF(N)-90,
USS Enterprise (CV-6). January-
May 1945. The under wing star
and bar in the insignia was light
grey.



4
F6F-5 Hellcat, VF-94, USS
Lexington (CV-16). July 1945.
The same markings were used
by VF-9 aboard Lexington in
February 1945, except that
wing marking was applied to
upper surface of both wings.

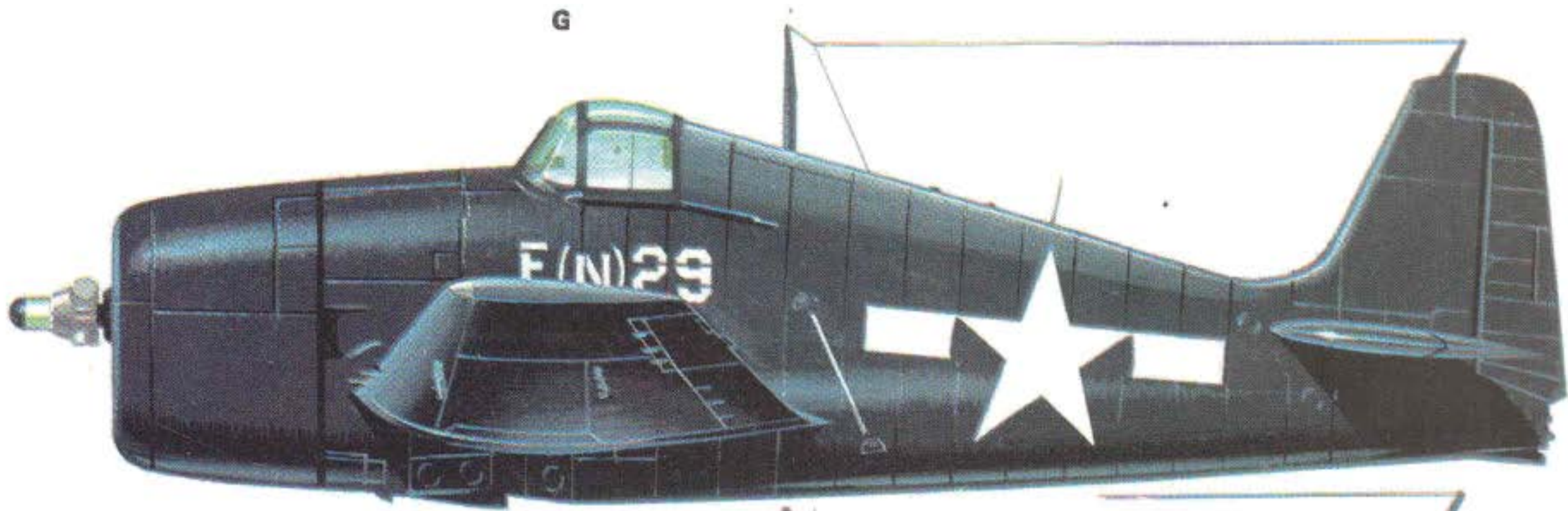


5
F6F-5 Hellcat, VF-878 (Reserve
Unit), NAS Oakland, California,
1949.

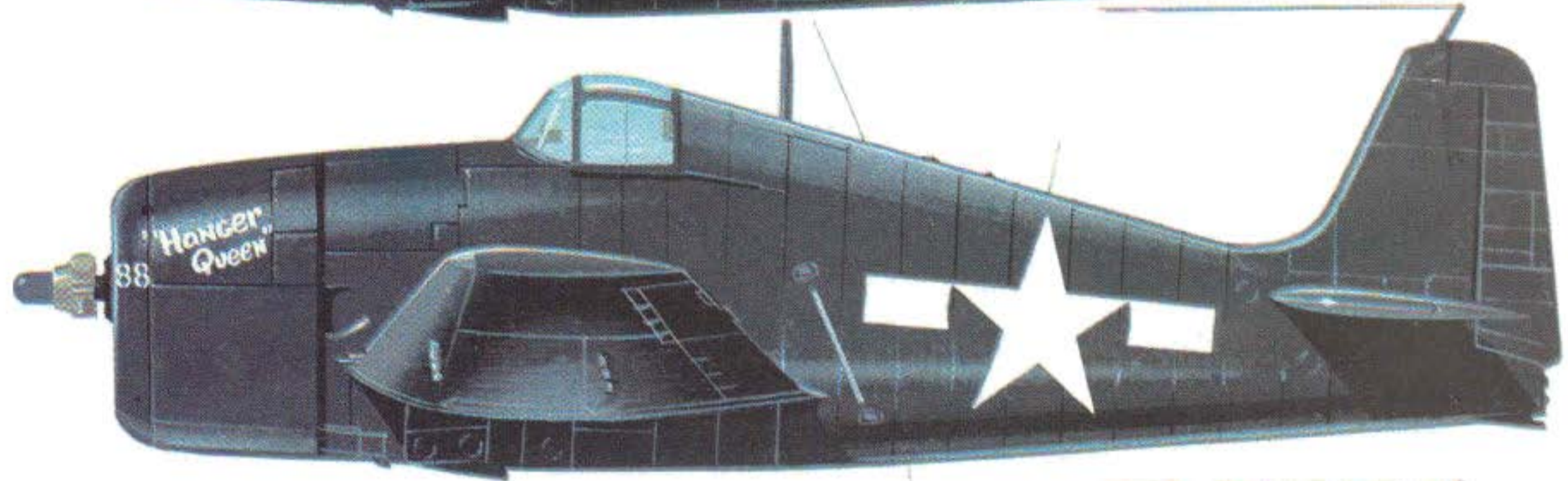


6
F6F-5N Hellcat, USS Block
Island (CVE-106), MCVG-1,
Marine Corps. May 1945.

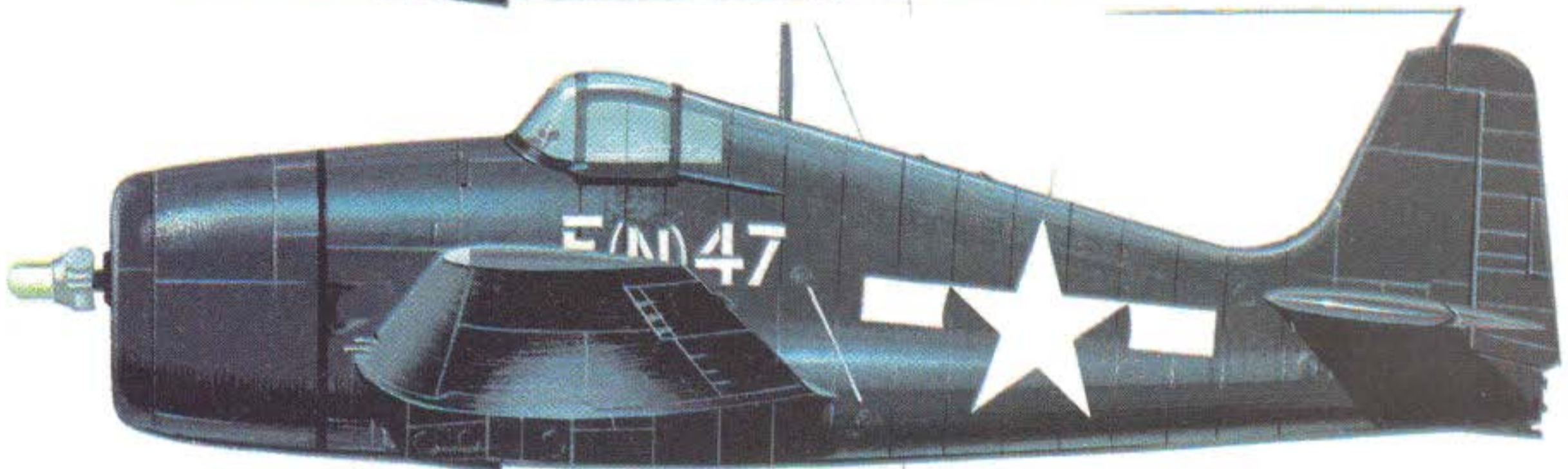
1
F6F-5N Hellcat, VMF-511, USS
Block Island (CVE-106). Marine
Corps. February 1945, during
shakedown cruise. Code under
cockpit F(N)29.



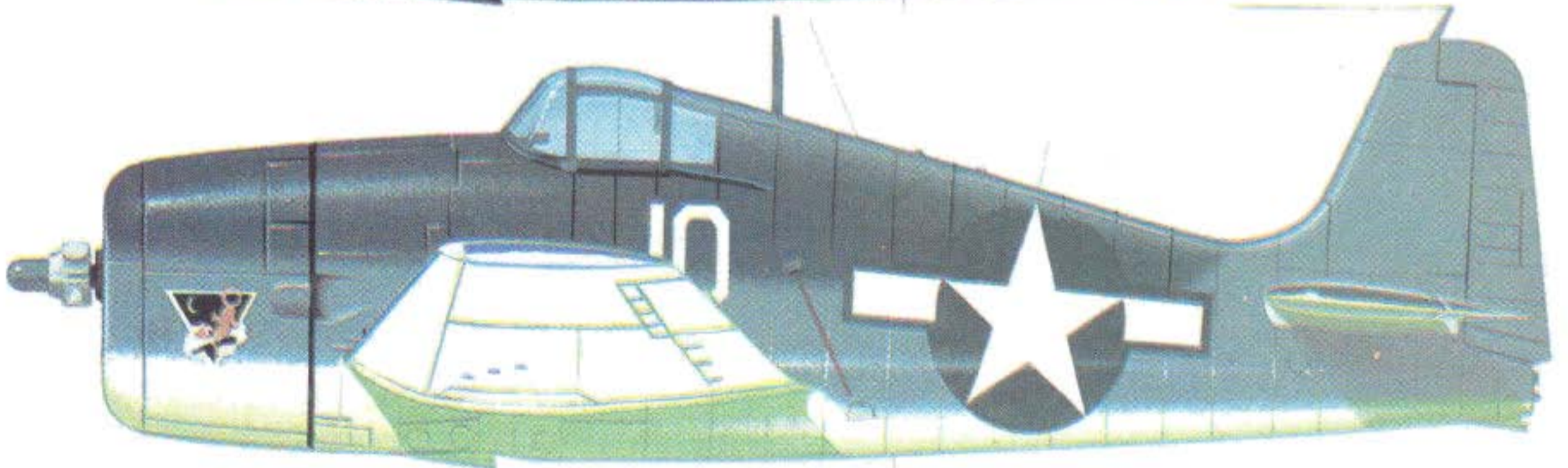
2
F6F-5N Hellcat, VMF-511,
USS Block Island (CVE-106).
Marine Corps.



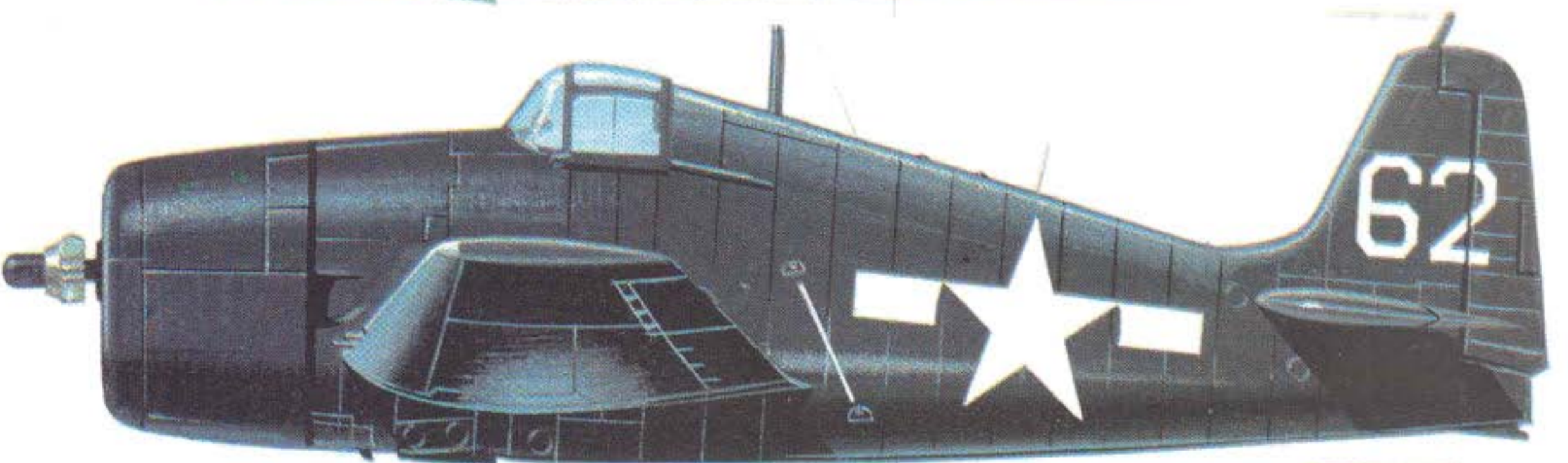
3
F6F-5N Hellcat, VMF(N)-541,
Marine Corps. Falalop Island,
Ulithi Atoll, Caroline Islands,
July 1945. Code under cockpit
F(N)47.



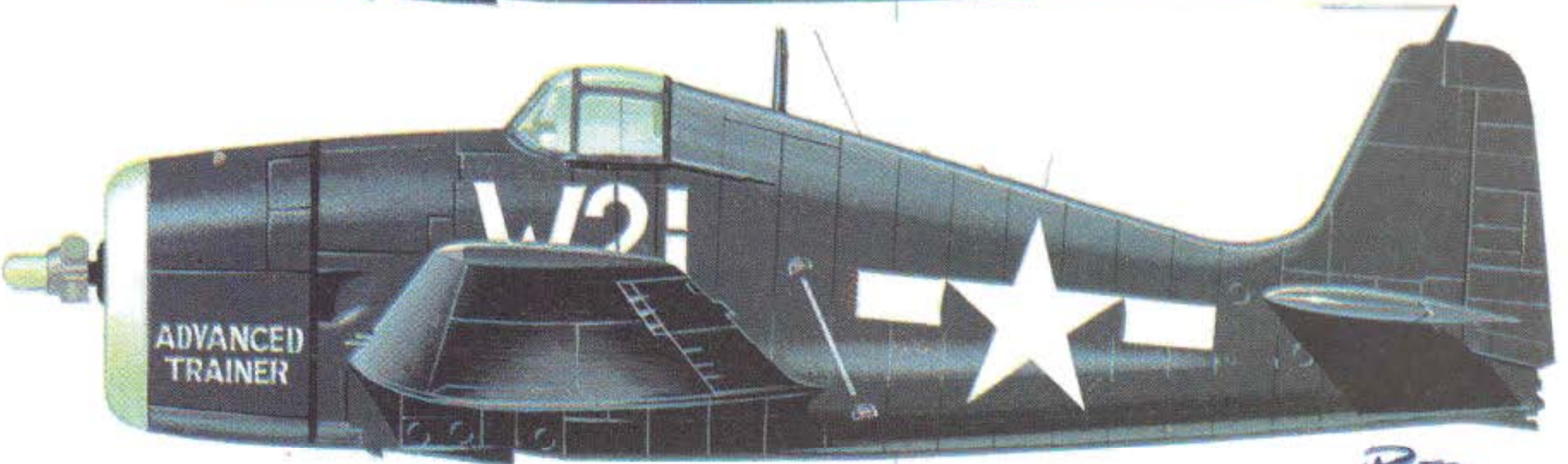
4
F6F-3N Hellcat, VMF(N)-534,
MAG-21. Guam, July 1944 to
end of war.



5
F6F-5P Hellcat, VMD-354,
operating out of Falalop Island,
Ulithi Atoll, Caroline Islands,
April 1945.

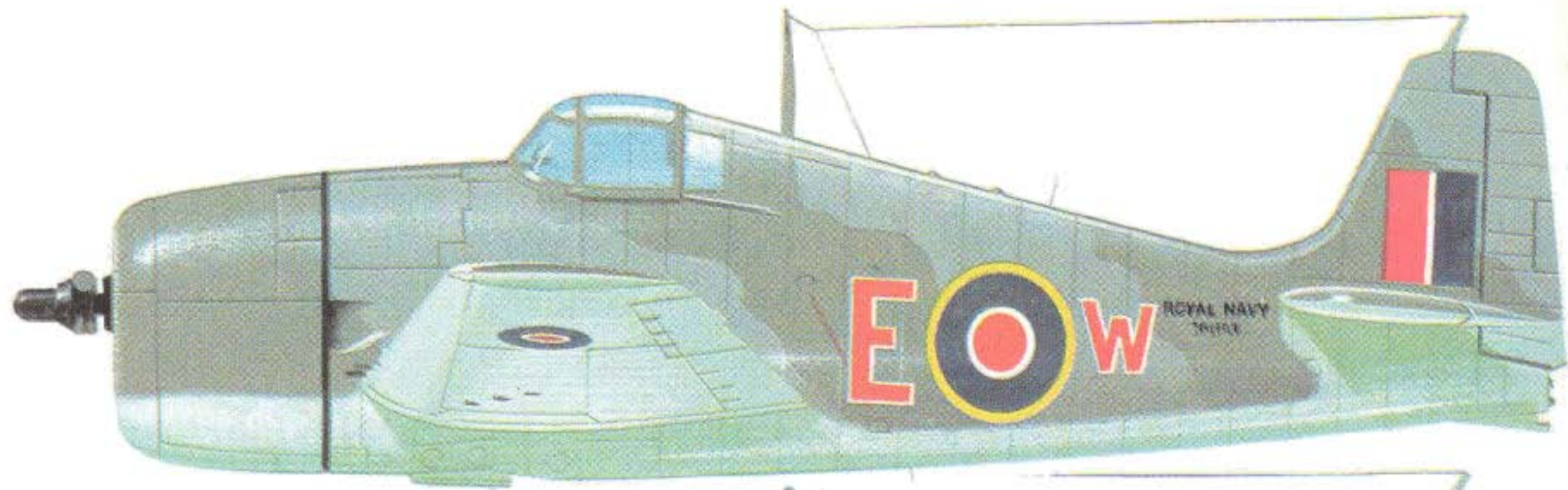


6
F6F-5 Hellcat trainer based on
Eaw MCAS, Oahu, late 1945.
Marine Corps. Code under cock-
pit W21.

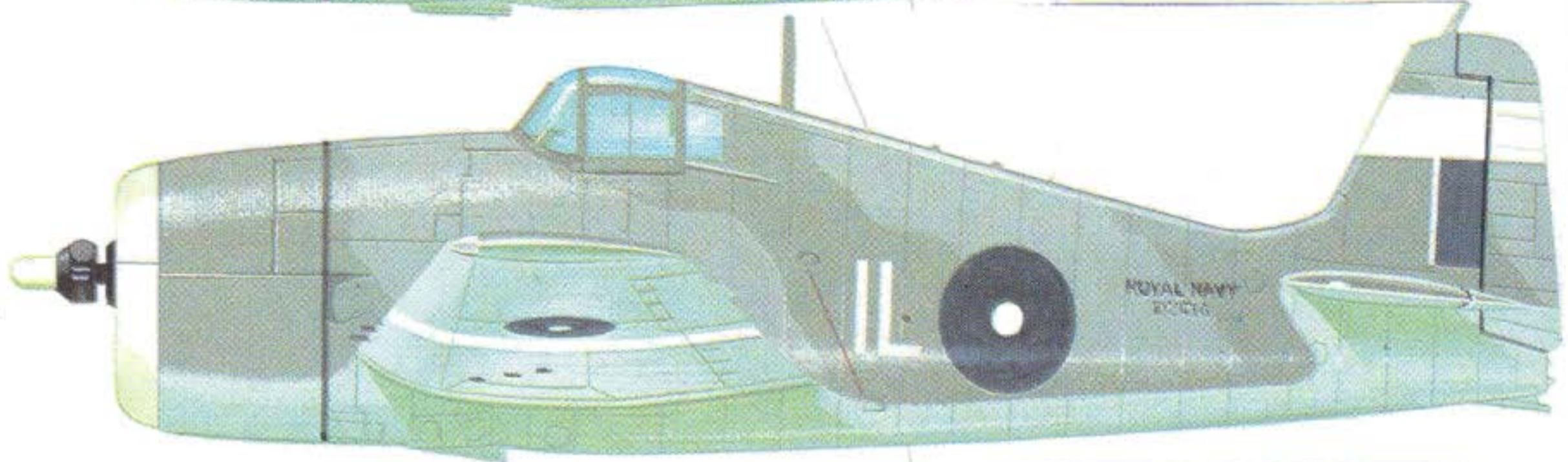


Roffe

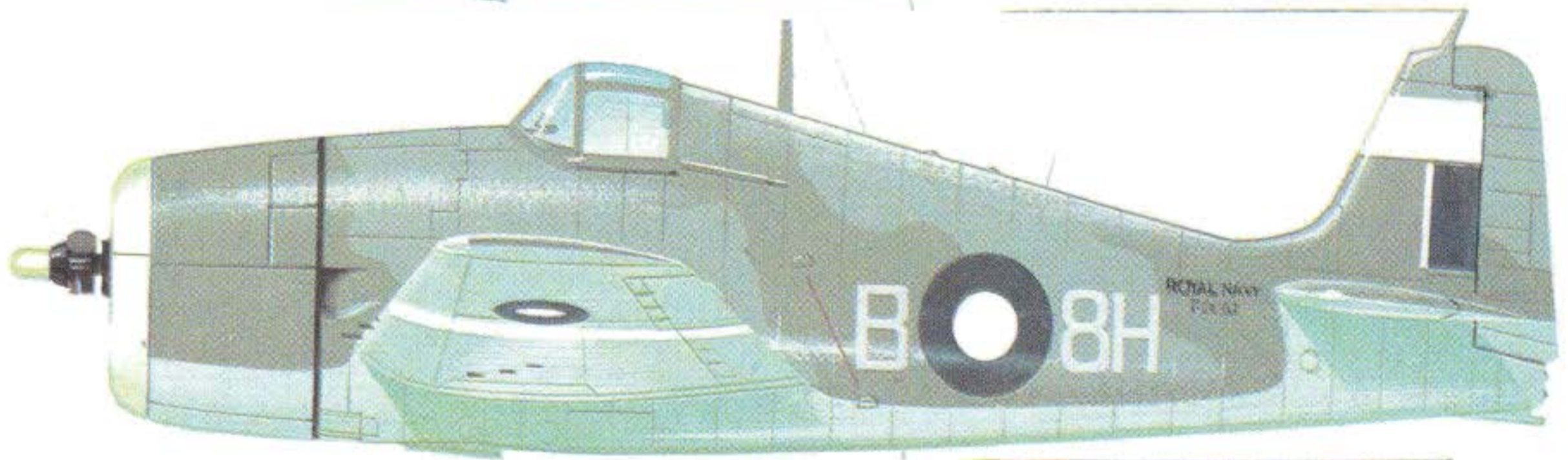
1
Hellcat Mk. I, No. 800 Squadron,
Fleet Air Arm, HMS Emperor,
Tirpitz operations, 1944.



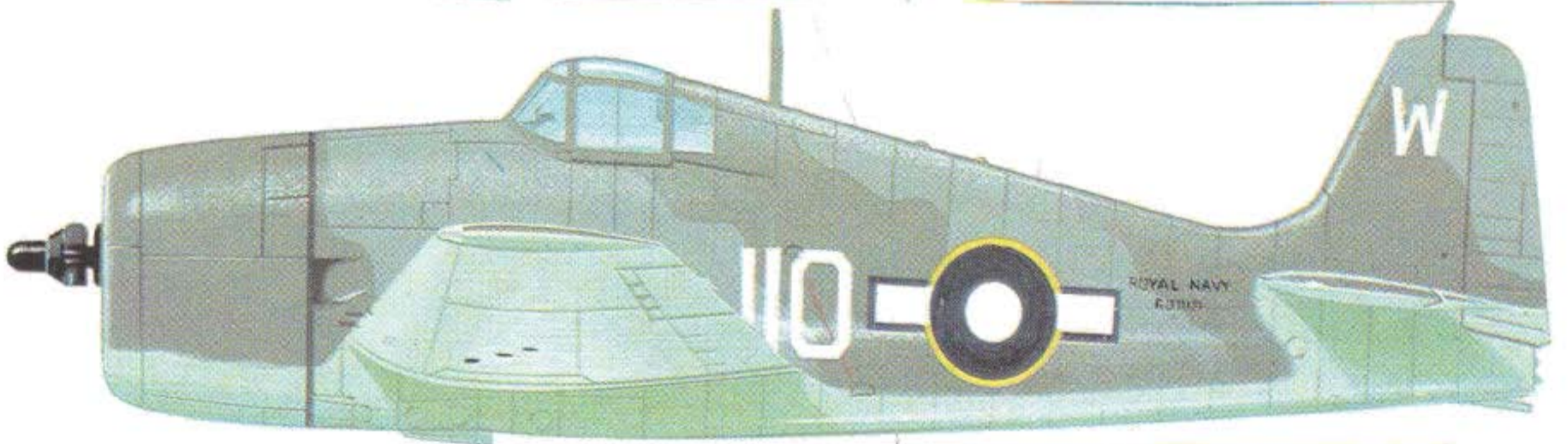
2
Hellcat Mk. I, No. 808 Squadron,
Fleet Air Arm, HMS Khedive.
Operations off Sumatra, April 1945.



3
Hellcat Mk. II, No. 896 Squadron,
Fleet Air Arm, HMS Empress.
Operations off Phuket Island,
Thailand, July 1945.



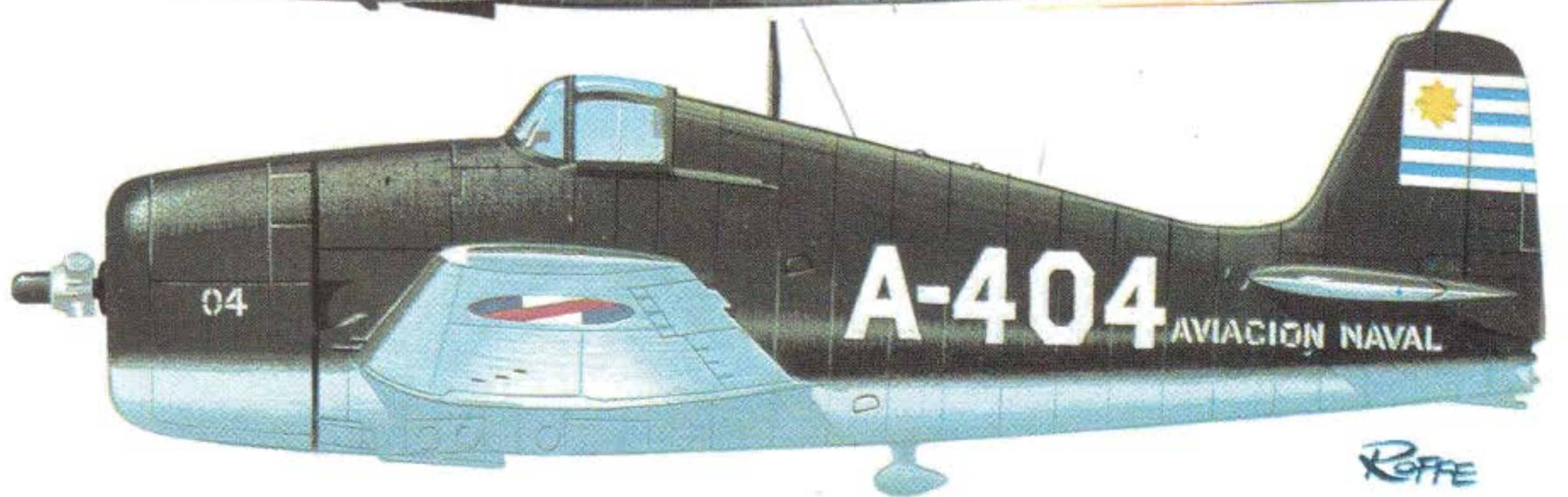
4
Hellcat Mk. I, No. 1832 Squadron,
Fleet Air Arm, HMS Indomitable.
British Pacific Fleet, Task Force
57-2, 1945.



5
F6F-5 Hellcat, Flotille 1,
Aeronavale, French Indo-China,
1945.

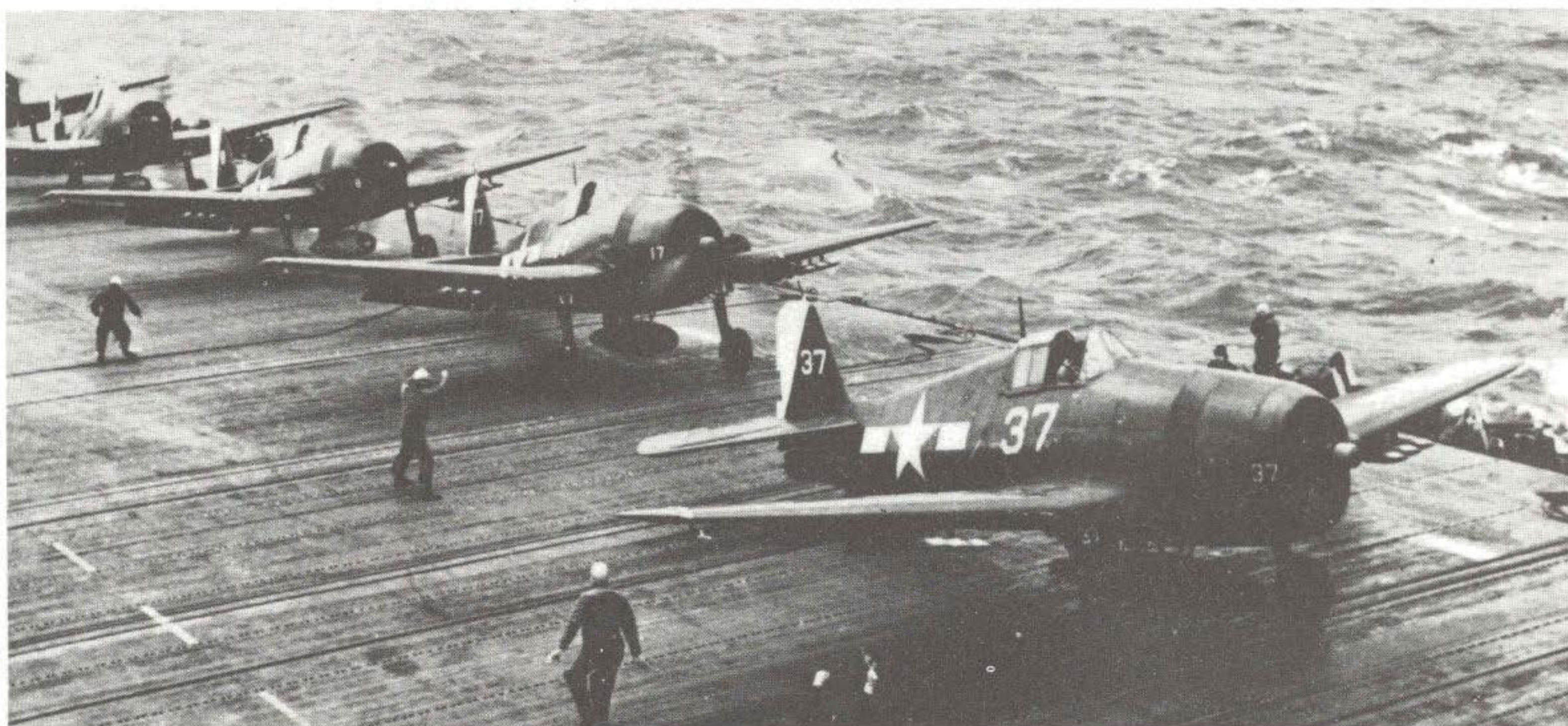


6
F6F-5 Hellcat Fighter-Bomber,
Servicio Aeronautica de la
Marina Uruguay.



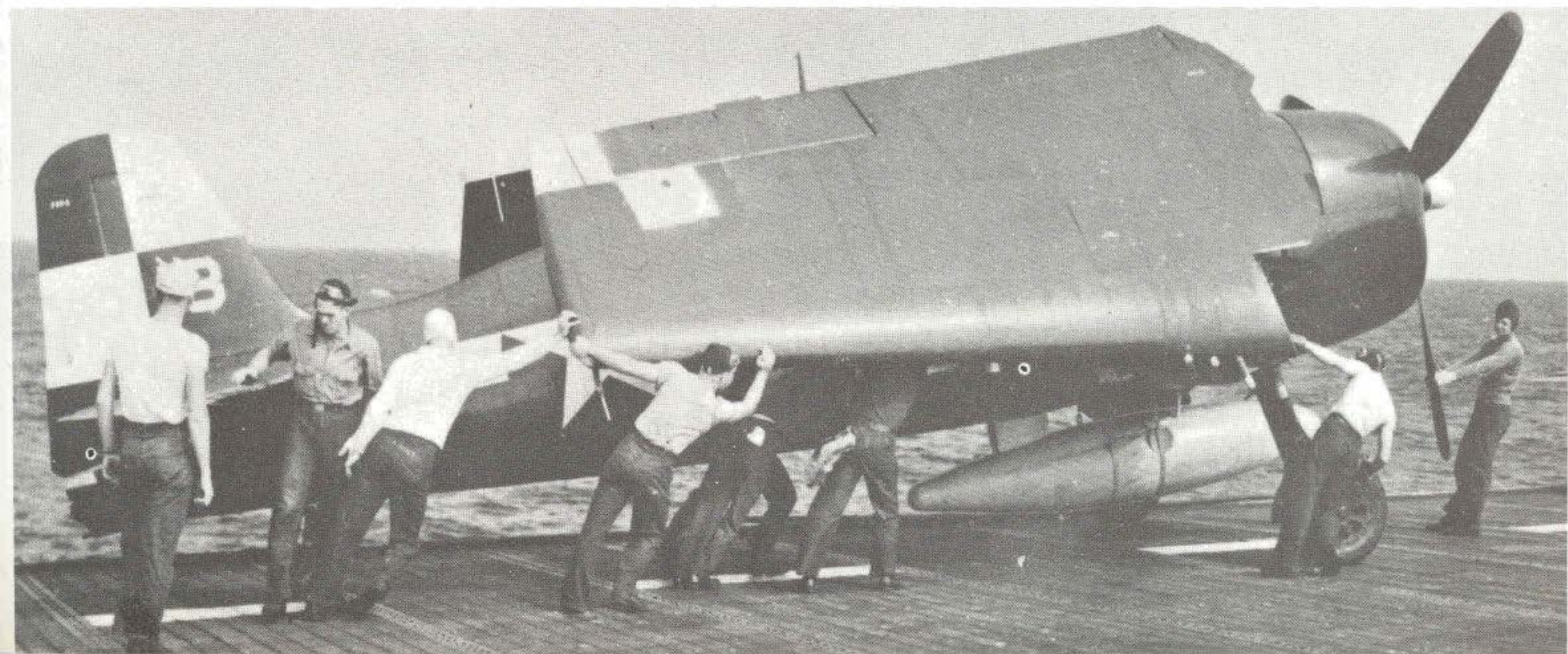


Above: A VF-3 F6F-5 with 'Yorktown's' unmistakable markings; January, 1945. (US Navy)



Above: Rocket laden F6F-5s of VF-3 prepare for launching from 'Yorktown' for Tokyo strike; February, 1945. The new 'Yorktown' markings were applied on 12 February, just prior to the first raids on Tokyo. These same aircraft and markings were taken over by VF-9 in early March. (US Navy)

Below: The folded wings provide an excellent view of 'Hornet's' 1945 markings on this VF-17/VBF-17 F6F-5; 14 March, 1945. White belly tanks, originally intended for use with the F6F-3, were quite often used on F6F-5s. (US Navy)





Above: White cowls, shown here on F6F-5s of VF-45 on 'San Jacinto', were used on aircraft of several carriers for about one week during operations off Kyushu in mid-March, 1945. (US Navy)



Above, left: A late model F6F-3, one of the last to see combat service from the Fast Carriers, still in use by VF-17 in March, 1945. Although some war weary F6F-3s were returned to the US, reconditioned, and painted with the overall glossy sea blue camouflage, they were used only for training purposes. All F6F-3s in the combat areas were finished with the 1943 three-tone camouflage. All F6F-5s came from the factory with the overall glossy sea blue camouflage. (US Navy)

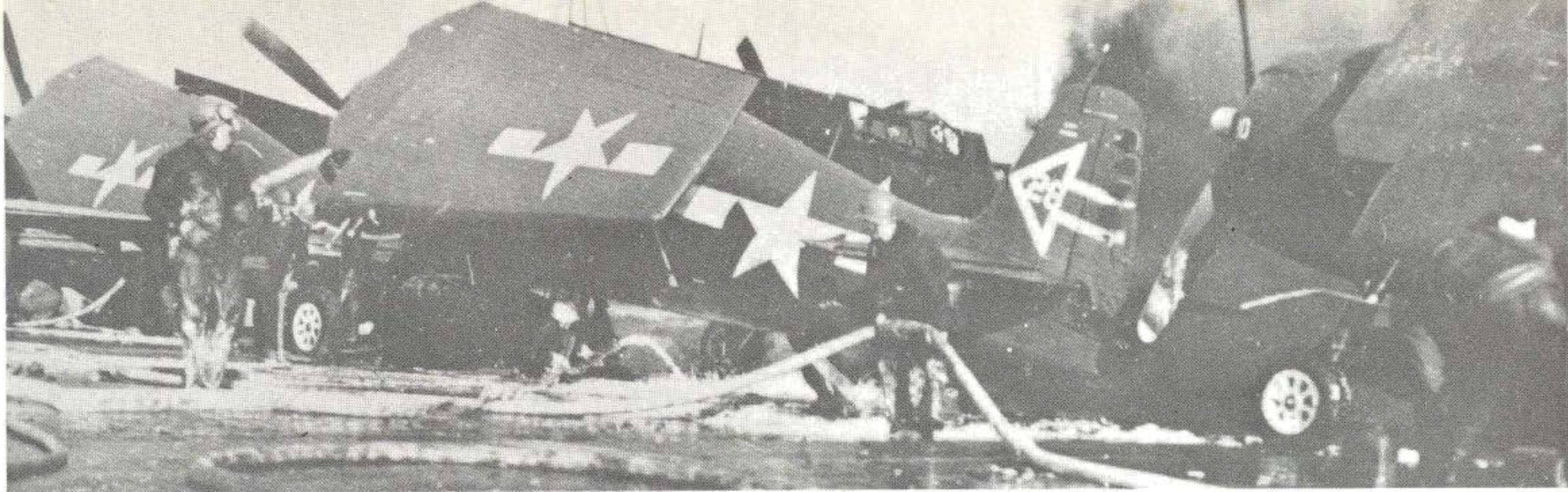
Above, right: A "checkertail" F6F-5 of VF-46 aboard 'Independence' during operations off Kyushu on 18 March, 1945. The checker markings were also applied to the upper and lower surface of the right aileron. (US Navy)



Above: A VF-45 F6F-5 on 'San Jacinto's' port catapult; late March, 1945. The method of applying the tail numbers is unknown, but is believed to have been one of painting black numbers over the white rectangle rather than masking off the number before painting the rectangle. (US Navy)

Below: VF-45 F6F-5s on 'San Jacinto': late March, 1945. The rear view affords a partial view of the white rectangle carried on the upper right wing tip. (US Navy)





Above: F6F-5Ns of VF(N)-90 aboard 'Enterprise'; 20 March, 1945. The damage in evidence here was the result of two 5 inch proximity fused shells from other ships. Fired at attacking Japanese aircraft, the shells exploded just forward of 'Enterprise's' island and shattered several full belly tanks. The resulting conflagration destroyed most of VF(N)-90's F6F-5Ns and -5Es. (US Navy)



Above: An F6F-5E of VF(N)-33 on 'Sangamon' (CVE-26), off Okinawa; 22 March, 1945. The tail marking is virtually identical to that used by VF-6 on the 'Intrepid' in early 1944. The significance of the unusual marking on the aft fuselage is unknown. (US Navy)

Below: Air Group 33 on 'Sangamon'; 22 March, 1945. VF(N)-33's F6F-5Ns are lined up along the port deck edge, and across the rear deck are several F6F-5Es. Note the variation in colouring on the -5 radar domes. (US Navy)



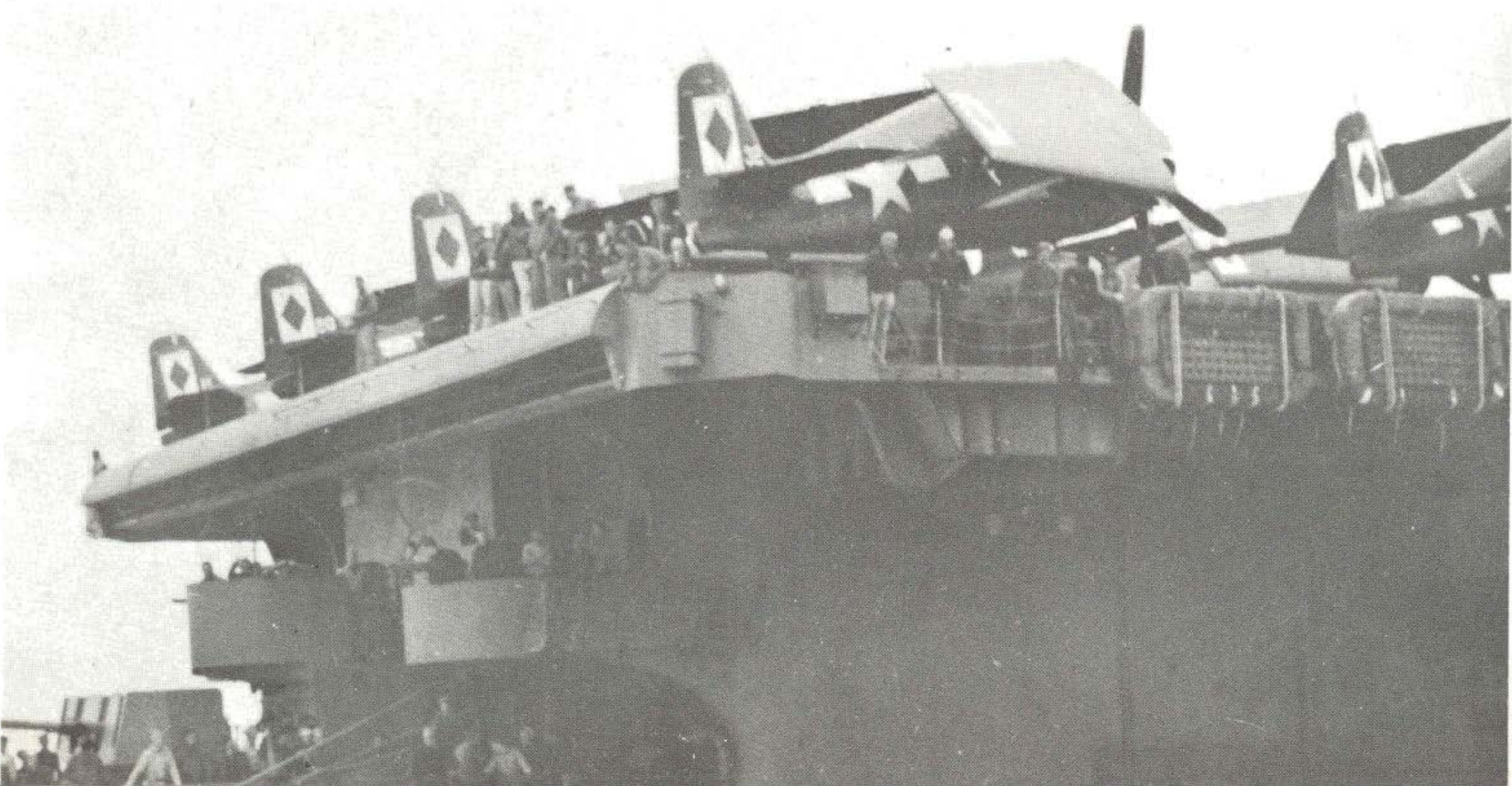


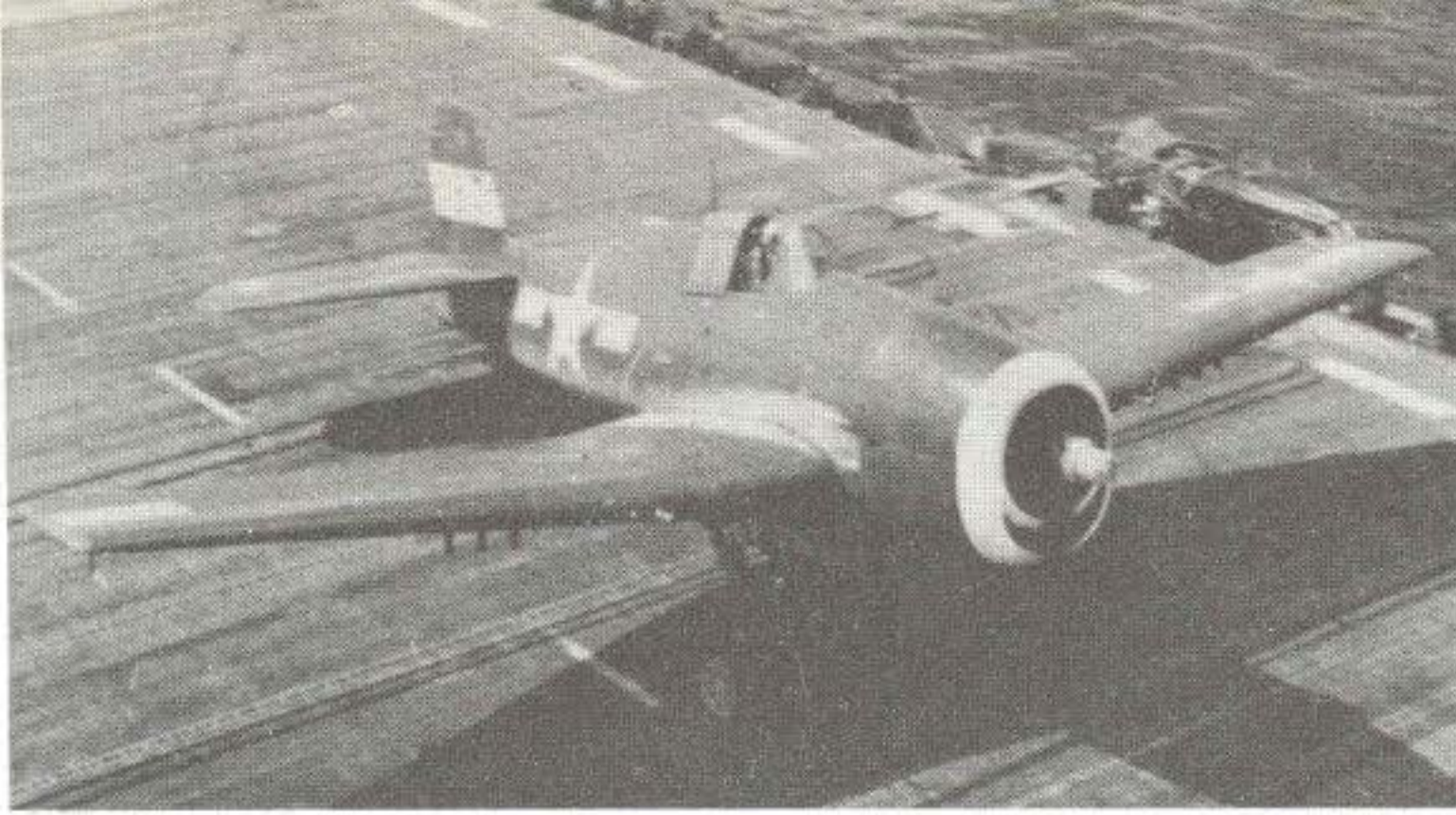
Above: One of VF-17's F6F-5s approaching 'Hornet's' deck edge elevator; March, 1945. VF-17's "Skull & Crossbones" emblem is marked just forward of the windshield. (US Navy)



Above: The case for the angled deck carrier; floating over the barriers into parked aircraft resulted in many injuries, fatalities and destroyed aircraft. These VF-46 F6F-5s on 'Cowpens' show evidence of having had markings on the upper surface of both ailerons at one time, but those on the left were apparently painted over. Number 12 has no markings on its ailerons. March, 1945. (US Navy)

Below: F6F-5s of VF-23 on 'Langley; March, 1945. Wing marking was applied to the upper right wing only. (US Navy)





Above: Exhibiting the white cowl used in March, 1945, this VF-86 F6F-5 off 'Wasp' was photographed after landing aboard 'Belleau Wood'. The irregular marks on the elevators appear to be repair work patches. The white rectangle wing marking was applied to upper right and lower left wings of Air Group 86 aircraft. Air Group 81, which preceded Air Group 86 on the 'Wasp', carried the marking on the upper right wing only. (US Navy)



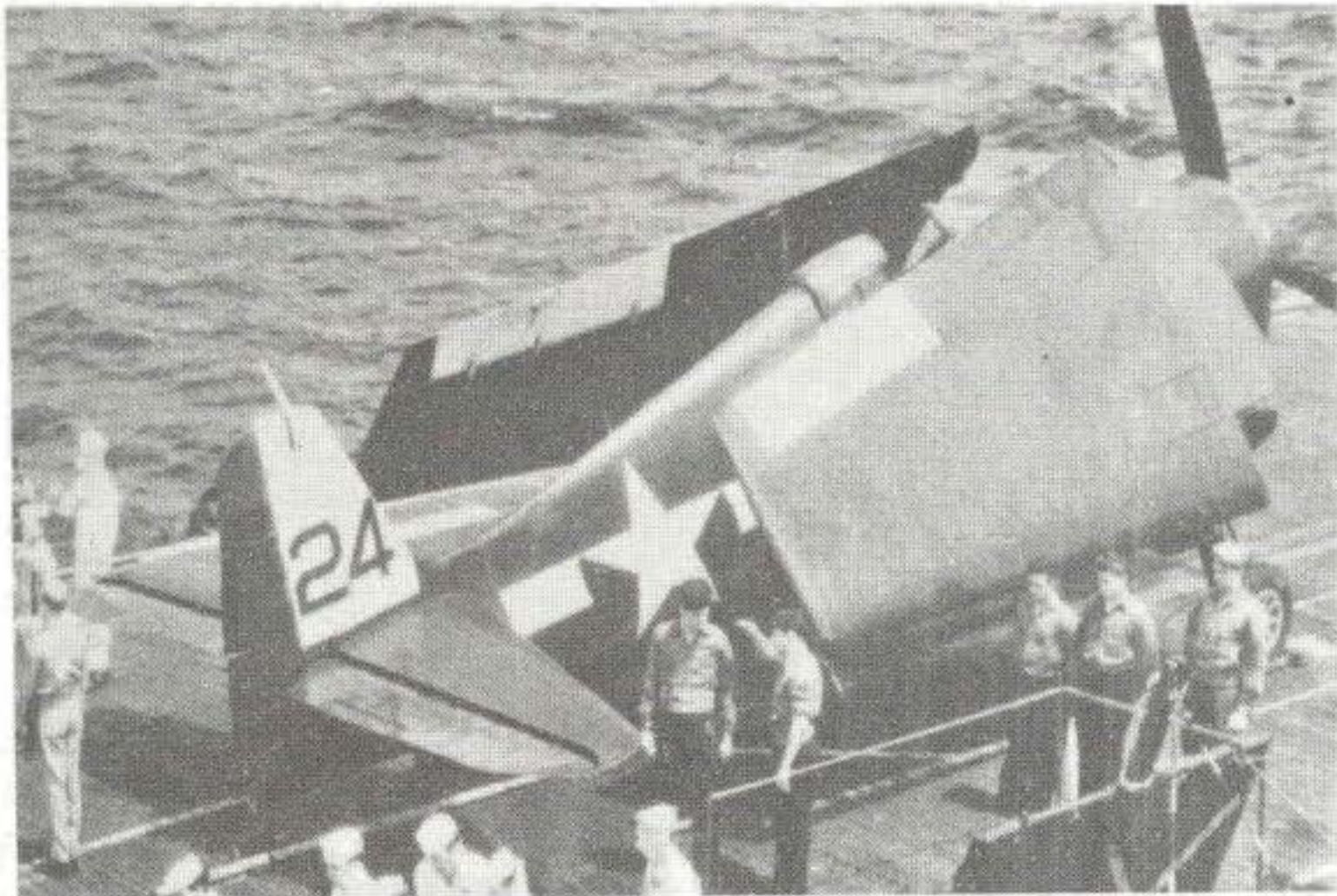
Above: Rocket armed F6F-5s of VF-30 lining up for take-off on 'Belleau Wood'; March, 1945. Wing marking was applied to the upper surface of both ailerons. (US Navy)



Above: A VF-30 F6F-5 damaged by AA fire over Okinawa returned safely to 'Belleau Wood'; 25 April, 1945. In the 6 April Kamikaze assault, 14 VF-30 pilots on CAP over Okinawa shot down 46 enemy aircraft and shared in the destruction of two others. (US Navy)



Above: Although it has hooked the next to last arresting wire, this VF-25 F6F-5 has nicked the first barrier wire with its prop; 'Chenango' (CVE-28), 14 April, 1945. (US Navy)



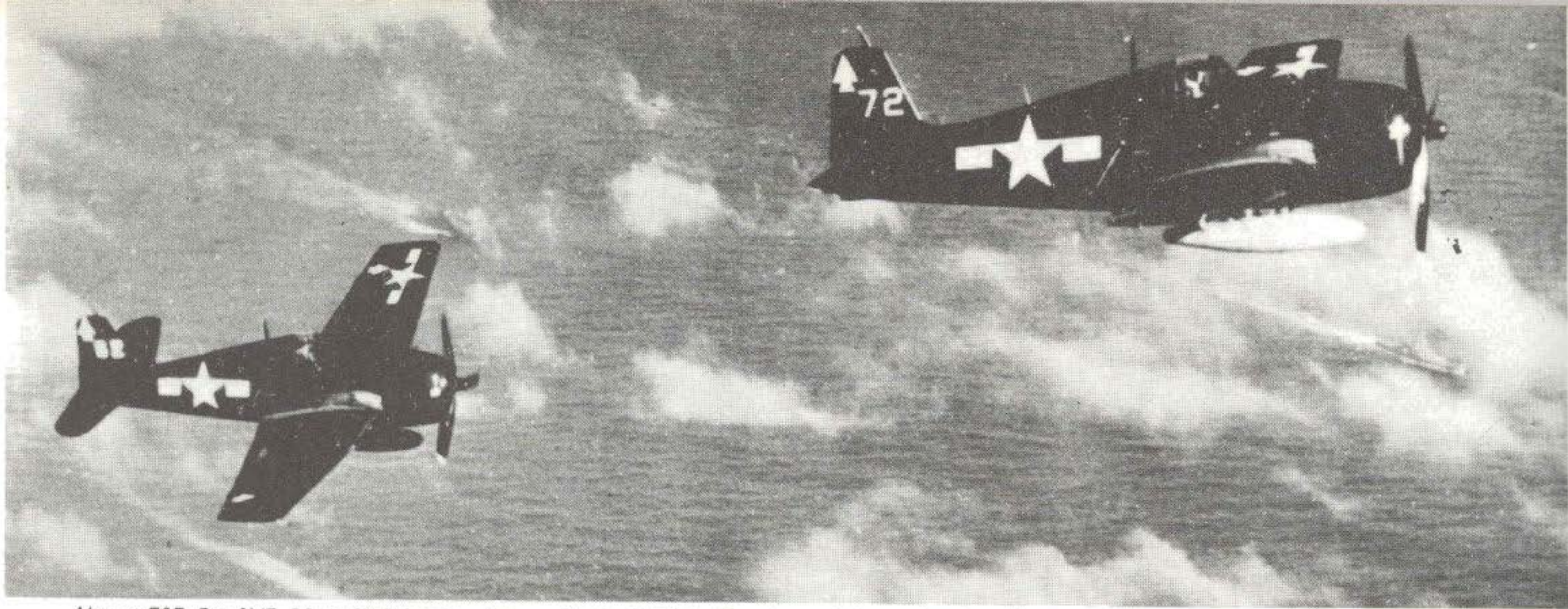
Above, left: An F6F-5 of VF-47 on 'Bataan'; 18 April, 1945. Both surfaces of both ailerons were white. (US Navy)



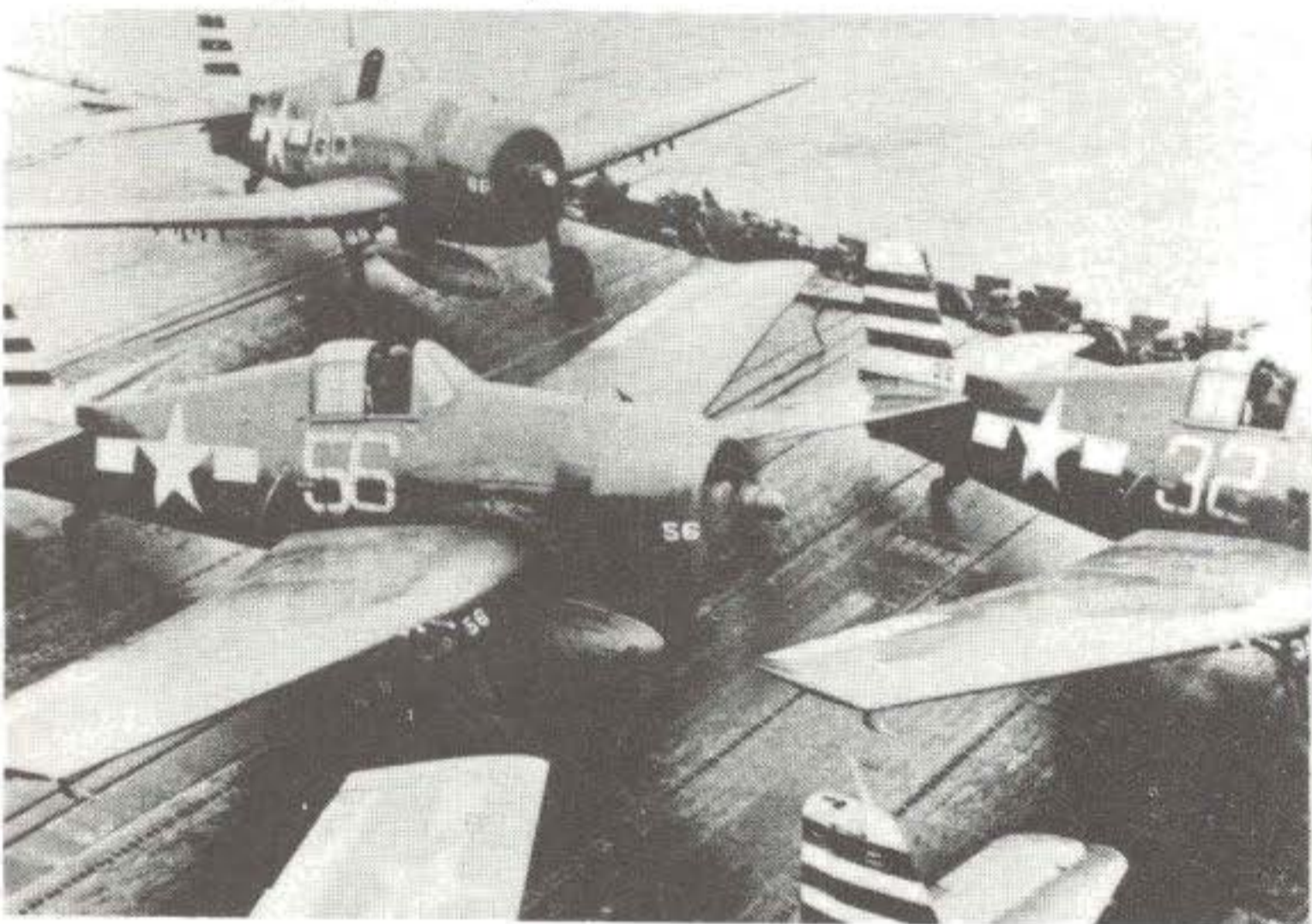
Above, right: With rockets intended for targets on Okinawa, VF-83 F6F-5s line up for take off on 'Essex'; 19 April, 1945. What appears to be an outline of the wing and tail markings is merely overspray beyond the area covered by masking tape when the markings were applied. Wing markings were applied only to the upper right wing. (US Navy)

Below: F6F-5 of VF-6 off 'Hancock' about to be catapulted from 'Suwanee', off Okinawa; 21 April, 1945. (US Navy)





Above: F6F-5s of VF-82 on CAP over Task Force 58; April, 1945. 'Bennington's' arrowhead marking was applied to upper and lower surfaces of both wings. (US Navy)



Above: F6F-5s of VF-12/VBF-12 on 'Randolph', off Kyushu; May, 1945. Ailerons were white on both upper and lower surfaces. Most 'Randolph' aircraft were marked with fuselage number of non-standard proportions. (US Navy)



Above: Model builders take note! It isn't really necessary to take painstaking care in positioning your decals. The temporary paint used to apply the markings on these VF-12/VBF-12 F6F-5s shows severe weathering effects on the portions of the two aircraft in the foreground. (US Navy)



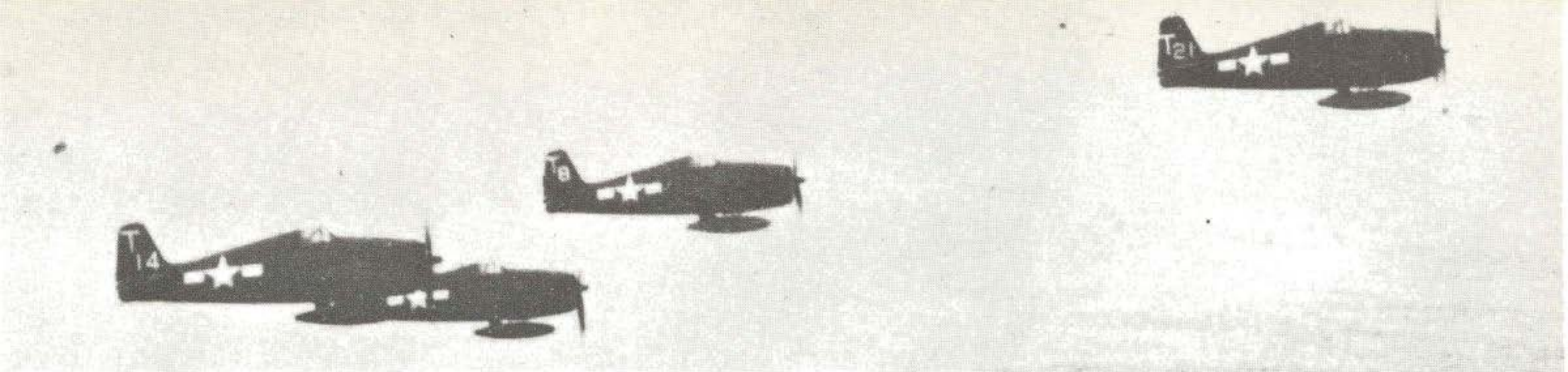
Above: 'Ticonderoga's' VBF-87 receives the 10,000th Hellcat; left to right: LCDR Charles Ingalls; W. R. Clark, Grumman representative; CDR Porter Maxwell, C.O. VBF-87; CDR Everett L. Phades; May, 1945. (US Navy)



Above: CDR Porter Maxwell making the 'Ticonderoga's' 10,000th landing in the 10,000th Hellcat. 'Ticonderoga's' triangle marking was applied to the upper right and lower left wing surfaces. The underwing marking is discernable in this photograph. (US Navy)

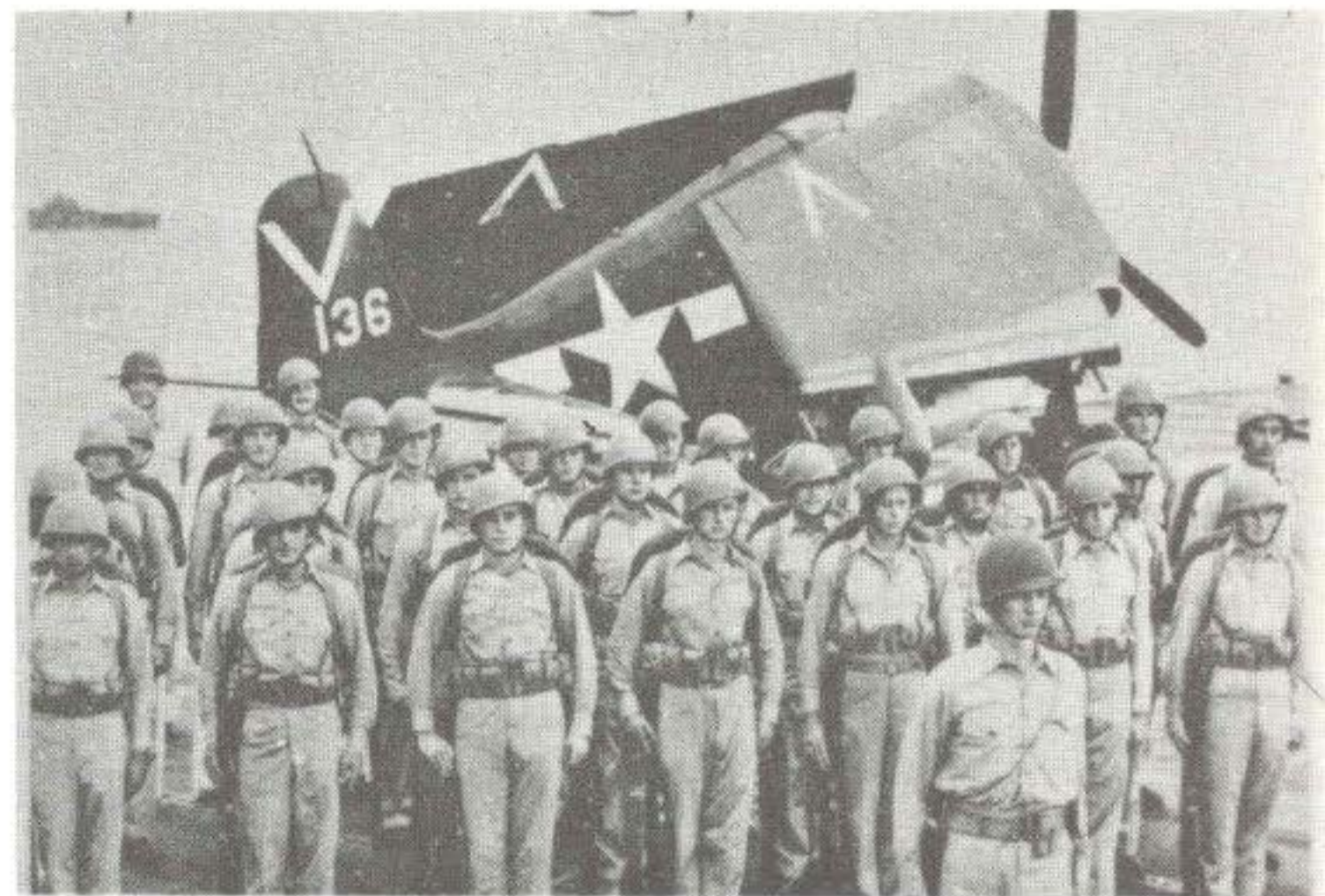
Below: VF-34 F6F-5s on 'Monterey'; 17 June, 1945. When 'Saratoga' was put out of action on 21 February, VF-53 was redesignated VF-34 and attached to the 'Monterey'. (US Navy)





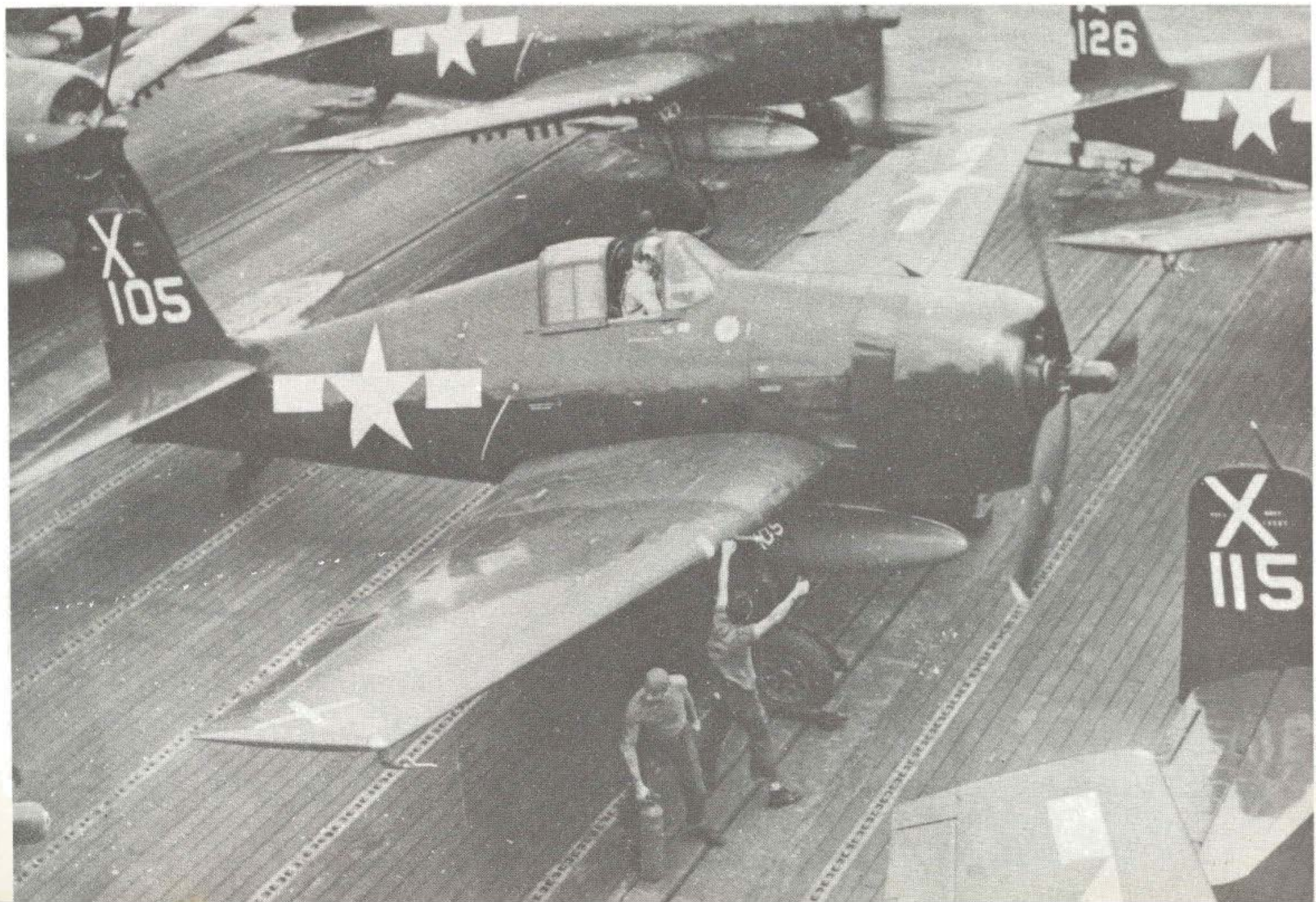
Above: VF-47 F6F-5s off 'Bataan' exhibit the final war markings, the letter identification used during July and August, 1945. Although instituted by official directive, the change from geometric to letter markings was not implemented by all carriers. (US Navy)

Below, left: While the Fast Carriers were changing from geometric to letter identification markings, the CVEs were applying their first officially assigned geometric markings. The large number of CVEs in service dictated rather extensive markings such as those shown here on one of VF-40's F6F-5s; 2 August, 1945. Most VF-40 F6Fs carried a letter D in front of the fuselage number throughout their service aboard 'Suwanee'; number 3, shown here, lacks the D. (US Navy)



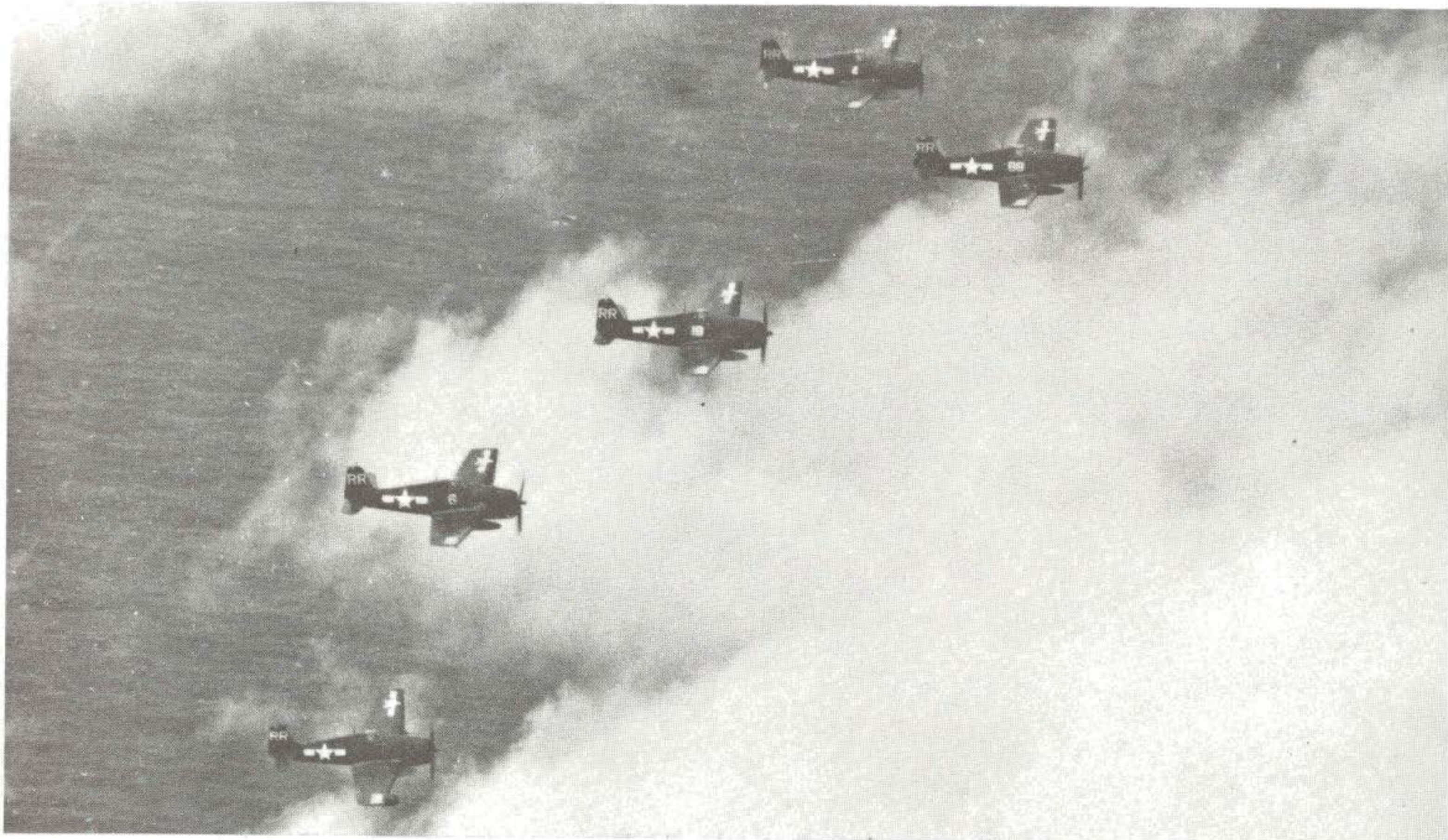
Above, right: An F6F-5N of VF-87 on 'Ticonderoga'; 19 August, 1945. The change from the triangle marking to the letter V was a relatively simple process, requiring only the painting out of a portion of the triangle. (US Navy)

Below: F6F-5 of VF-86 on 'Wasp'; 24 August, 1945. The change from geometric to letter marking was done on a time permitting basis, and for a time, Air Group 86 aircraft carried a conglomerate combination of the two marking systems. (US Navy)





Above: VF-27 F6F-5s aboard 'Independence'; August, 1945. Unusual, is the application of the aircraft number to the upper right wing surface. (US Navy)



Above: VF-88 Hellcats of 'Yorktown'; 22 August, 1945. Although the official marking instruction called for the letter markings to be applied to upper right and lower left wing tips, the instructions were not always followed. (US Navy)

Below: F6F-5N of VF-88 with 'Yorktown's' RR marking; 22 August, 1945. Note the absence of a fuselage number. (US Navy)





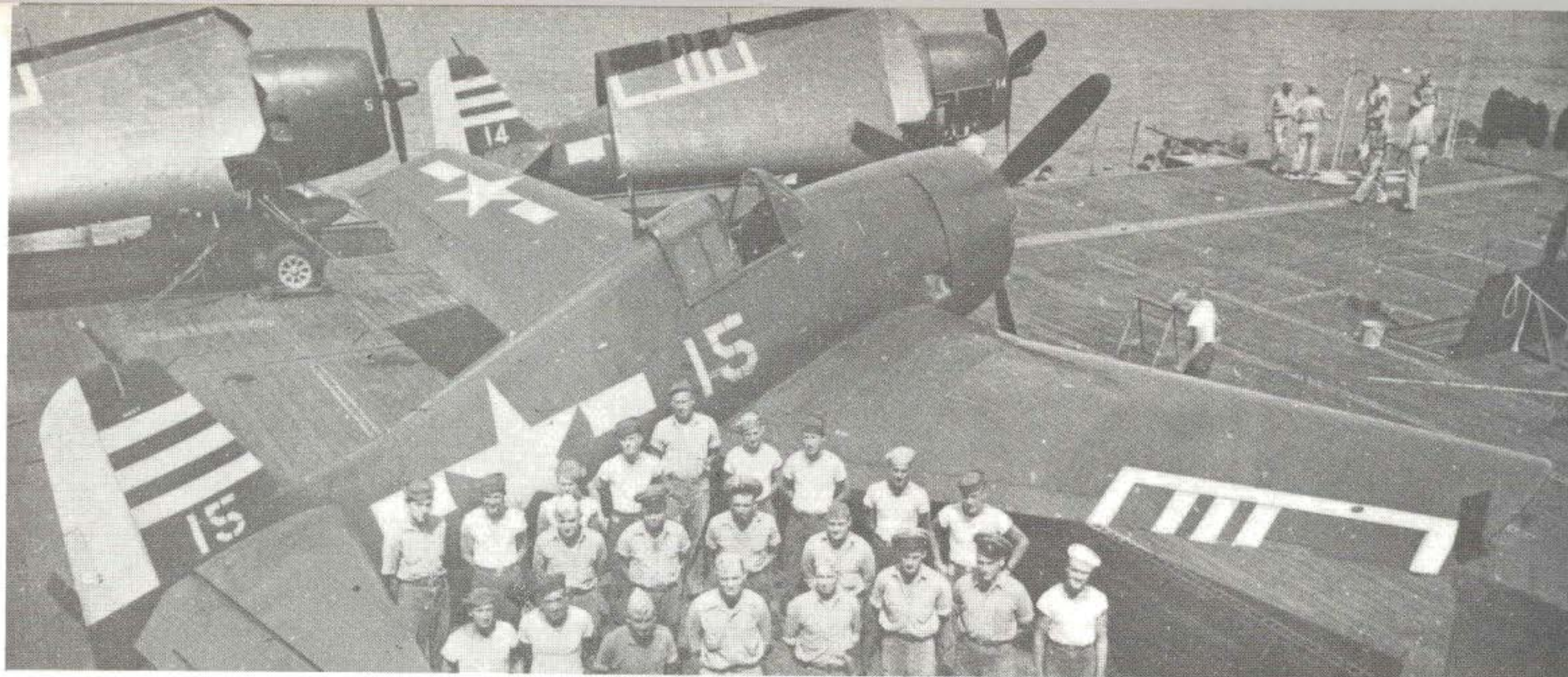
Above: VF-16 F6F-5s on 'Randolph'; August, 1945. On 28 July, 1945, in one of the few serious encounters with enemy aircraft over Japan, eight VF-16 pilots shot down 12 Franks and one George without loss to themselves. (US Navy)



Above: A VF-40 F6F-5 being catapulted from 'Suwanee'; 30 August, 1945. (US Navy)

Below: One of VF(N)-91's cannon armed F6F-5Ns over Shanghai on 12 September, 1945. The 'Bon Homme Richard' was the fourth night carrier to engage in combat operation during the war. On the night of 13 August, Ens. P. T. McDonald of VF(N)-91 shot down two Nicks and two Franceses, and damaged a third Frances. (US Navy)





Above: VF-32 F6F-5s with 'Cabot' markings; 19 September, 1945. Note that the wing marking application differs from that applied to VF-29 F6Fs earlier in 1945. VF-32's only combat action with the 'Cabot' was a strike on Wake Island on 1 August. After the 1 August strike, VF-32 was decommissioned and 'Cabot' became the only all-fighter CVL of the war period. (US Navy)



Above: An F6F-5 of VBF-13 over Hawaii; September, 1945. In training when hostilities ceased, Air Group 13 had not been assigned to a carrier. This F6F is believed to have been with VF-16 on 'Randolph' in July and August. It shows evidence of having had previous markings painted out. (R. Odeja)

Below: From the Reserve Unit at N.A.S. Floyd Bennett, New York, this F6F-5 shows the post-war, international orange reserve stripe. (Grumman)





Above and below: A VMF(N)-534, F6F-3N from which the radar dome has been removed. Part of MAG-21, VMF(N)-534 Hellcats were the first USMC aircraft to land on Guam following the invasion on 21 July, 1944, and the first on Guam in 13 years. Remaining on Guam for the duration of the war, VMF(N)-534 shot down the only Japanese aircraft sighted in the area, a Myrt courier on a flight from Truk to Iwo Jima in early February, 1945. (USMC)



Below: Line-up of VMF(N)-534 Hellcats along the runway on Guam. Corsairs taking off and Avengers parked in the distance. (USMC)





Above, left: An F6F-5N of VMF-511 on board 'Block Island' (CVE-106) during her shakedown cruise in February, 1945. The markings displayed were typical of most USMC land based F6F night-fighters. (USMC)

Above, right: A VMF-511 F6F-5N with flak damaged tail unit is jettisoned over the side of 'Block Island' (CVE-106). (USMC)



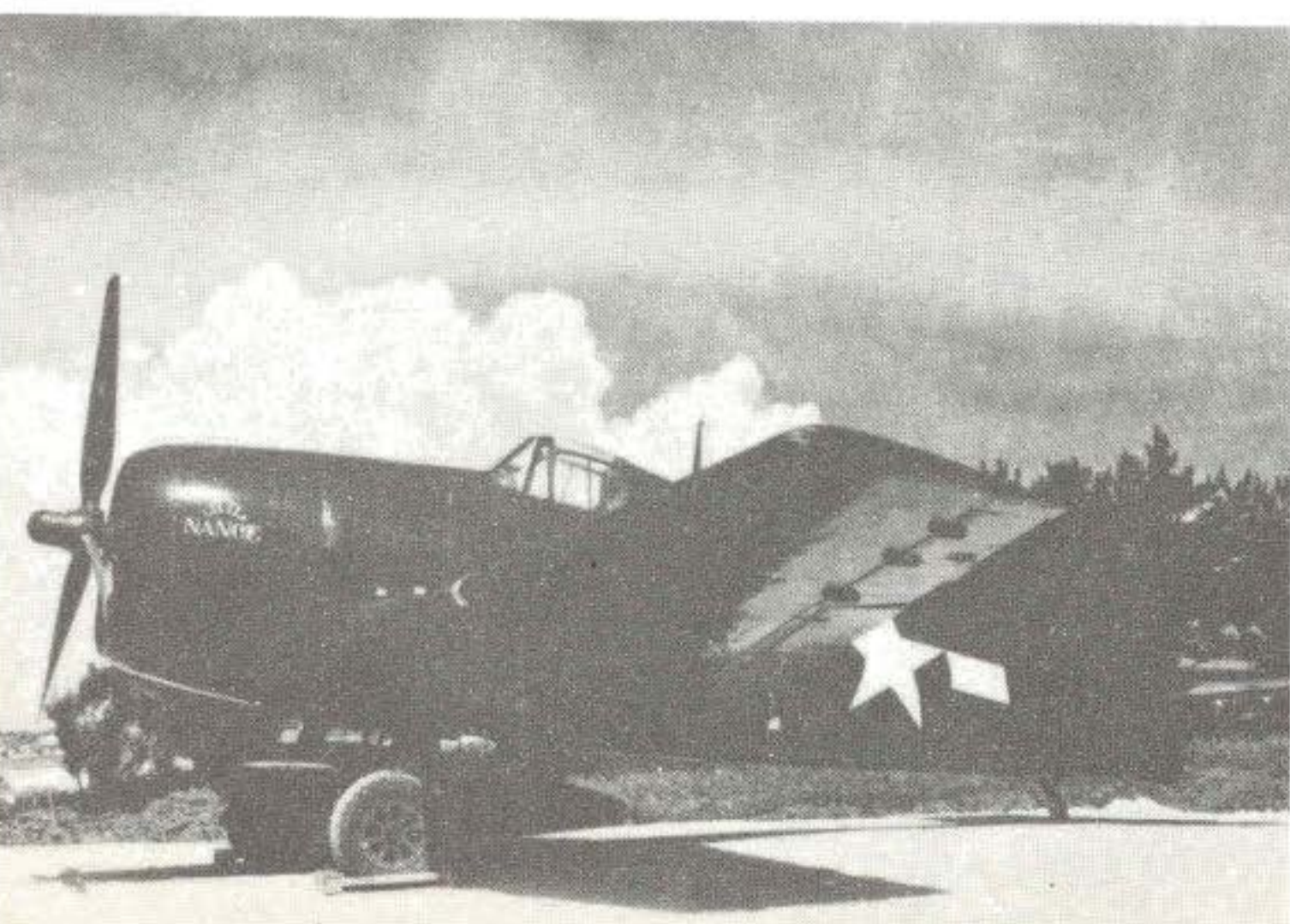
Left: An F6F-5P of VMD-354 operating out of Falalop Island (Ulithi), Caroline Islands in April 1945. (USMC)



Left: An unmarked F6F-5N of VMF(N)-533 flying out of Iwo Jima, 27 June, 1945. (USMC)

Below, left: F6F-5N 'Little Nance' of VMF(N)-533 on Ie Shima, 27 June, 1945. (USMC)

Below, right: Although the main portion of the squadron was stationed at Peleliu, elements of VMF(N)-541 operated from Falalop Island where this shot was taken on 14 July, 1945. (USMC)





Above: United States Marine Corps F6F-5's on a training flight out of Ewa (Oahu) in late 1945. (USMC)



Above, left: An F6F-5P of VMD-354 on Guam, 1945. (USMC)



Above, right: F6F-5 on Puget Sound (CVE-113) during carrier qualification training for USMC pilots, 1945. (USMC)

Below: The catapult officer gives the launch signal to send one of VMF-511's F6F-5N's off 'Block Island'. With the first Marine Corps Air Group to have their own carrier, VMF-511 had previously been assigned to Project 'Danny' (Operation Crossbow) intended to employ the 11-75 'Tiny Tim' rockets against German V-1 sites. The sites were captured before the project could be put into action. (USMC)





Above: Good atmosphere shot of the batsman on the Escort carrier HMS 'Ravager' bringing in a Hellcat Mk. I in the late afternoon of a winter day in January, 1945. (MoD Admiralty)

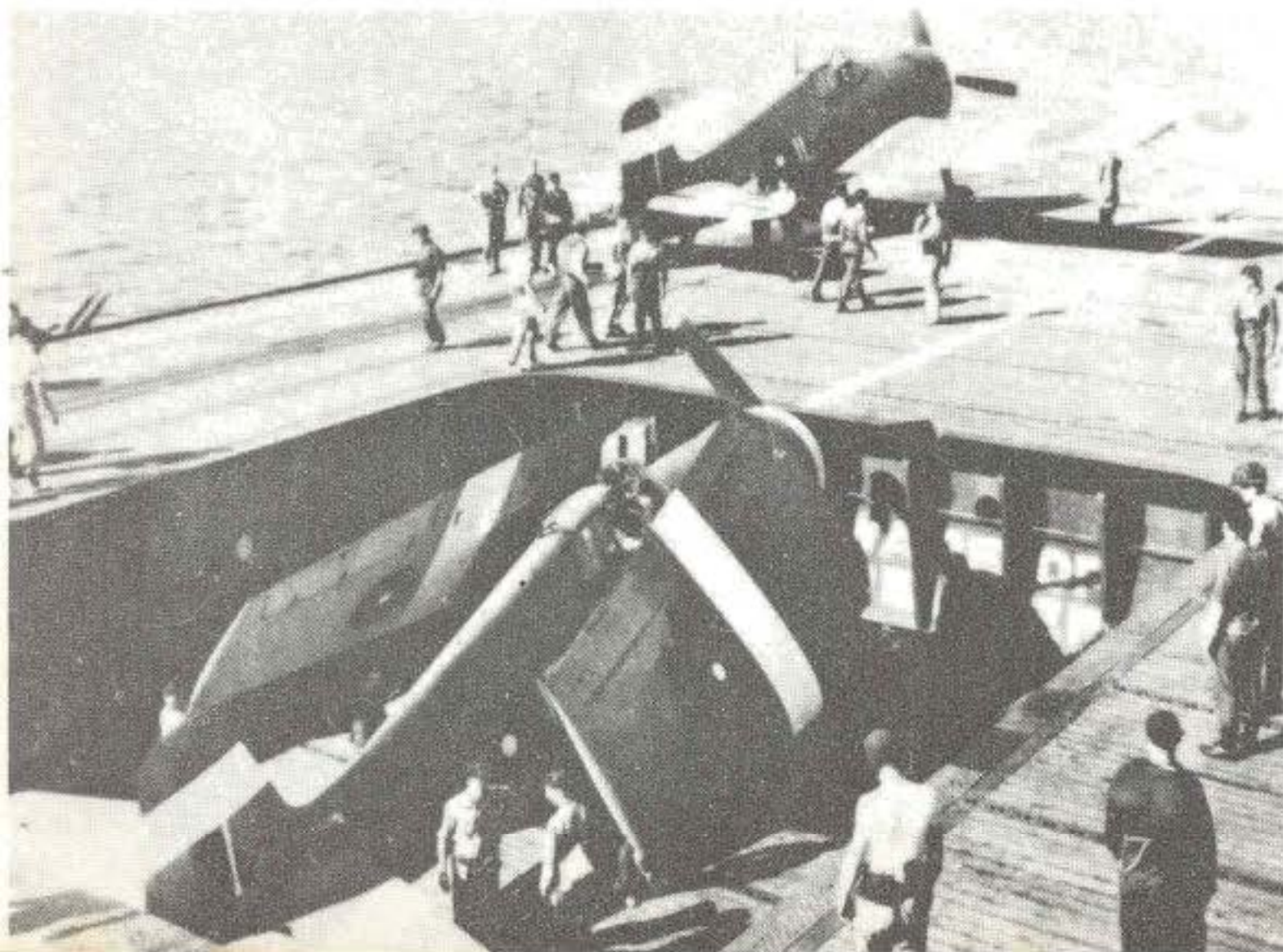


Above: Hellcat Mk. II of an East Indies Fleet Escort Carrier going round again. Note small size of underwing roundel. (MoD Admiralty)



Above: Hellcat with arrestor wire hooked on HMS Ravager. (MoD Admiralty)

Below: Hellcats of No. 808 Squadron on HMS Khedive being readied for operations off the Sumatran coast in April 1945. (MoD Admiralty)

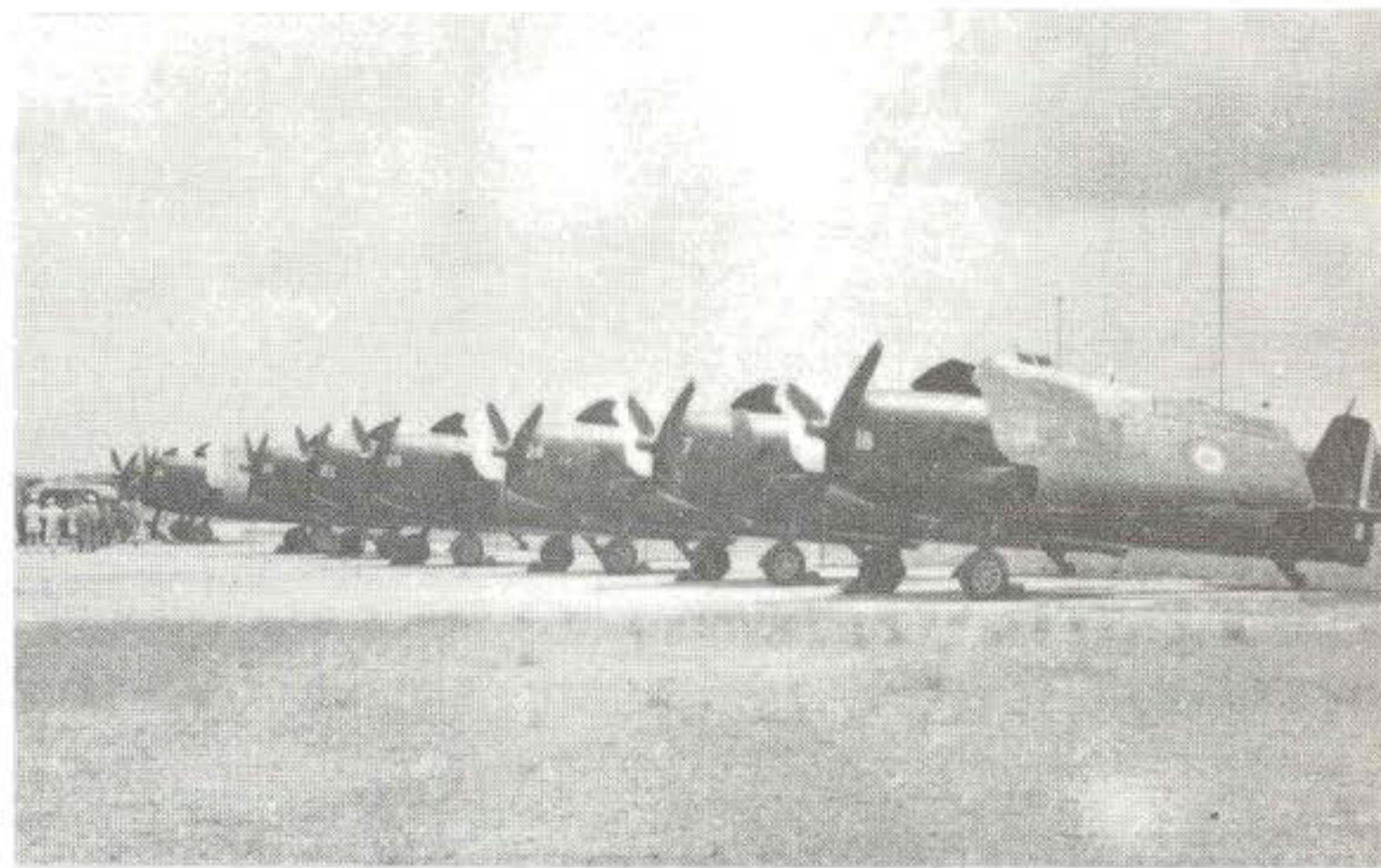


Below: Hellcats ranged on the flight deck of HMS Emperor during operations off the Norwegian coast, 1944. (MoD Admiralty)





Above & below: F6F-6 Hellcats of Flotille 1, Aeronavale, French-Indo China. All aircraft in overall Sea Blue Gloss, note aircraft number repeated on cowl, under tail-plane and on undercarriage door.



Above & below: F6F-5 Fighter Bomber in post WW II service with the Uruguayan Servicio Aeronautica de la Marina. Other known identification numbers applied to Uruguayan Hellcats are A-402, A-403, A-406 and A-453. (N. Mendiburu via Garry Kuhn)

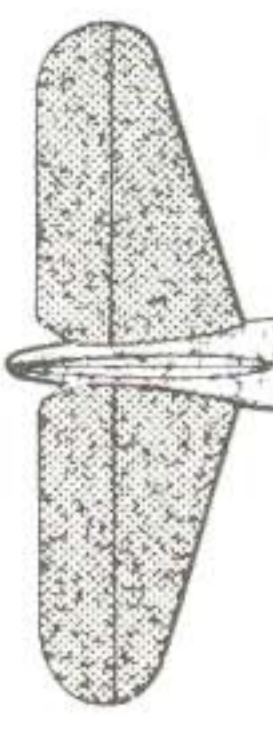


A2 etc.
Standard upper surface scheme.

A2
VF-1, 'High Hats',
port and starboard.



A2 Grey
(See note A2)



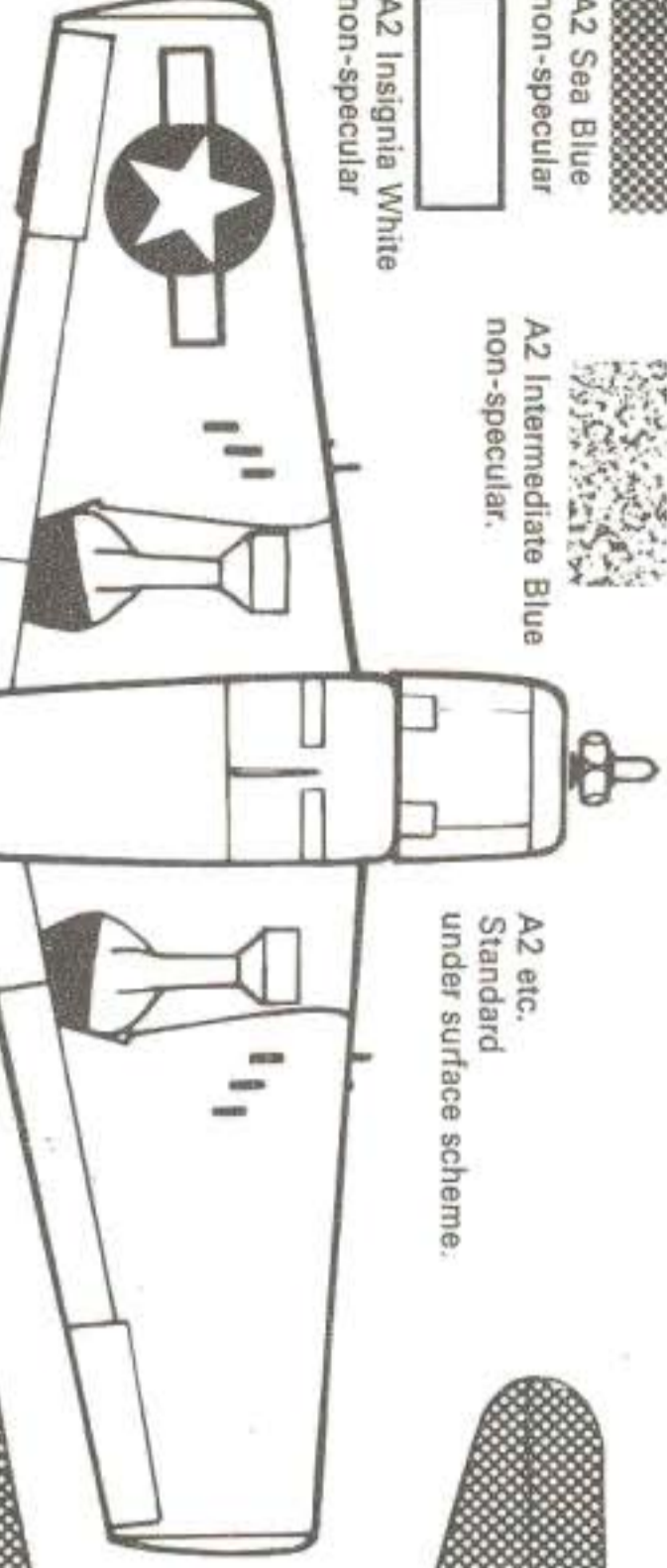
B3
VF-17. Upper surfaces port
and starboard only.

A2 Sea Blue
non-specular

A2 Intermediate Blue
non-specular.

A2 etc.
Standard
under surface scheme.

A2 Insignia White
non-specular



A2 etc.
Note: Insignia colours.
Star and rectangles to be
Insignia White on fuselage and
under surface of wing,
on upper surface of wing,
Pale Grey obtained by mixing
one part of Insignia White.

Note: Insignia Blue
shown as black
for clarity.

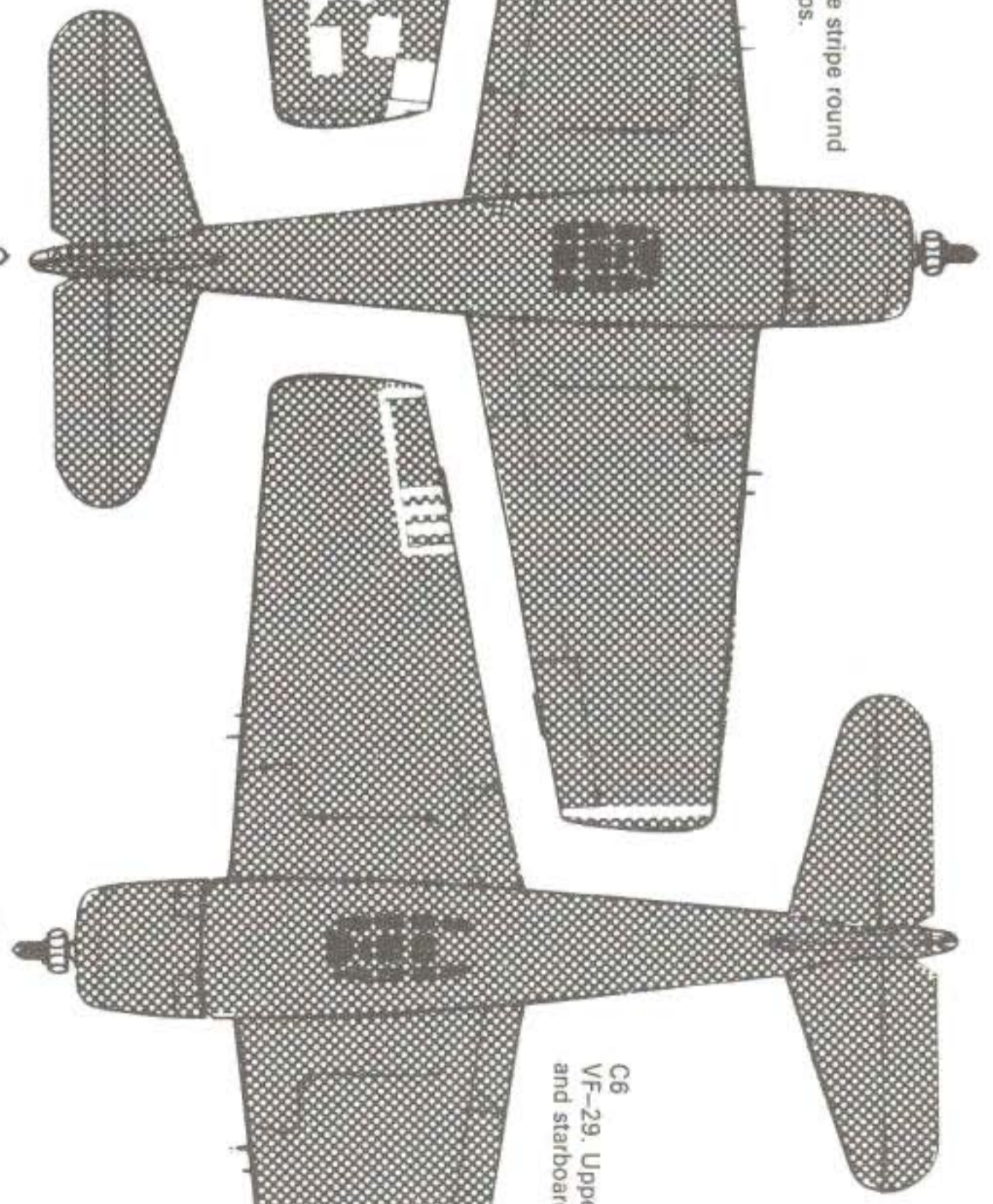


E1
VF-46. Marking varied,
on some a/c starboard upper
only on others on both port
and starboard upper surfaces only.

C4
VF-28. White stripe round
both wing tips.



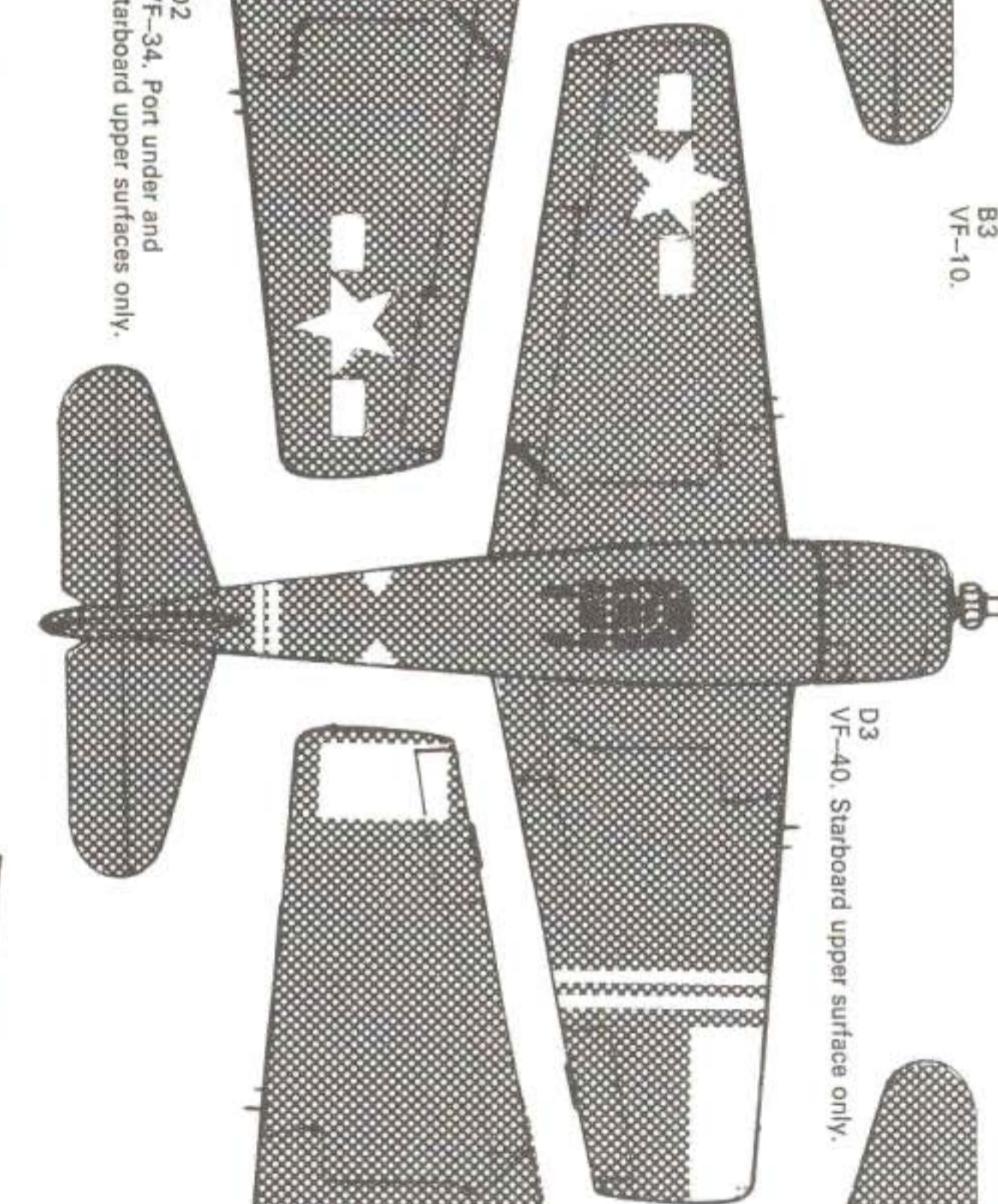
B3
VF-10.



C6
VF-29. Upper surfaces port
and starboard only.

Gloss Sea Blue
Gloss Insignia White

D2
VF-34. Port under and
starboard upper surfaces only.



D3
VF-40. Starboard upper surface only.

D1
VF-30. Upper surfaces port
and starboard only.



E5
VF-51. Port and starboard
upper and under surfaces.



F4
VF-94. Starboard upper and
port under surfaces only.



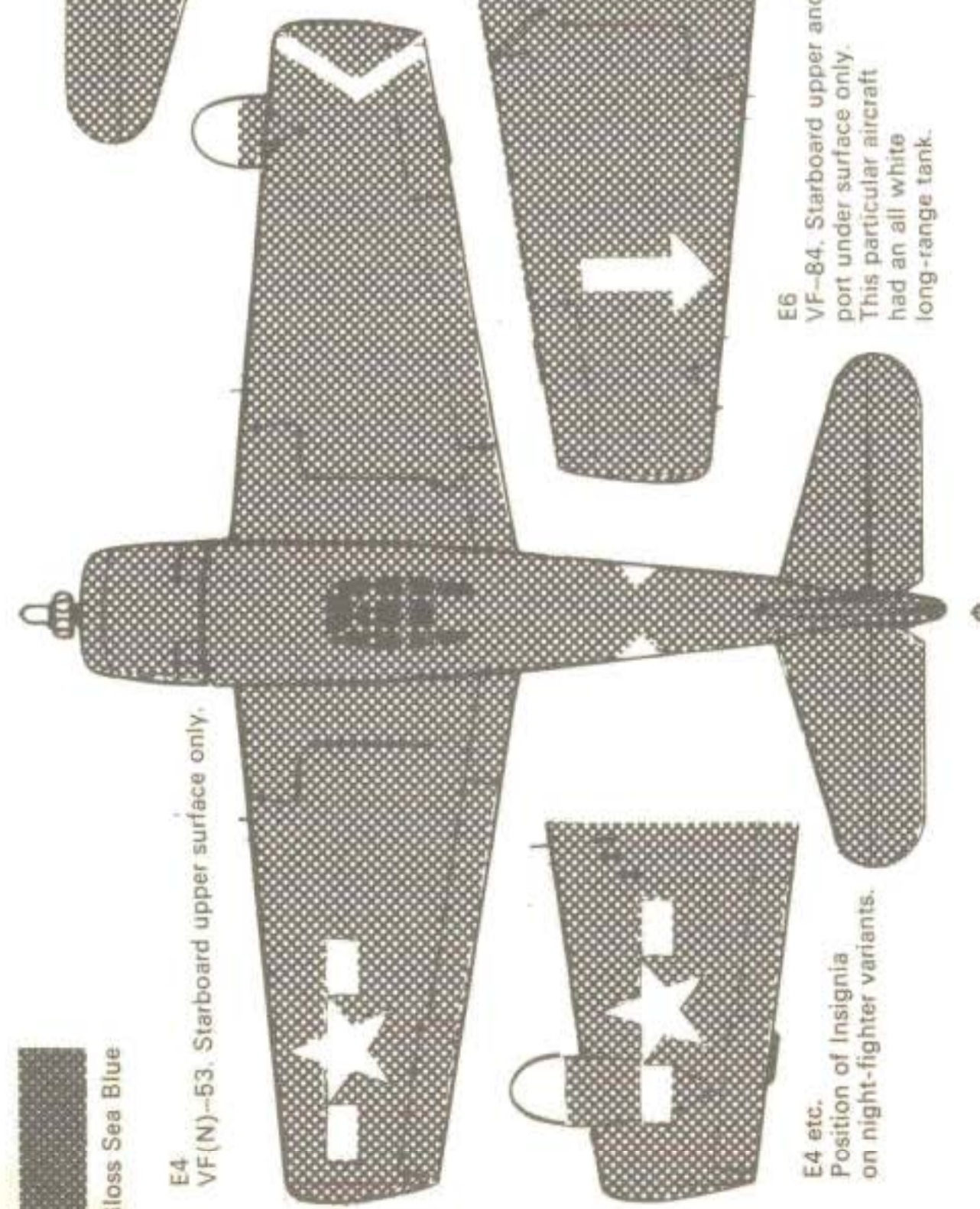
F2
Starboard upper and
port under surface only.



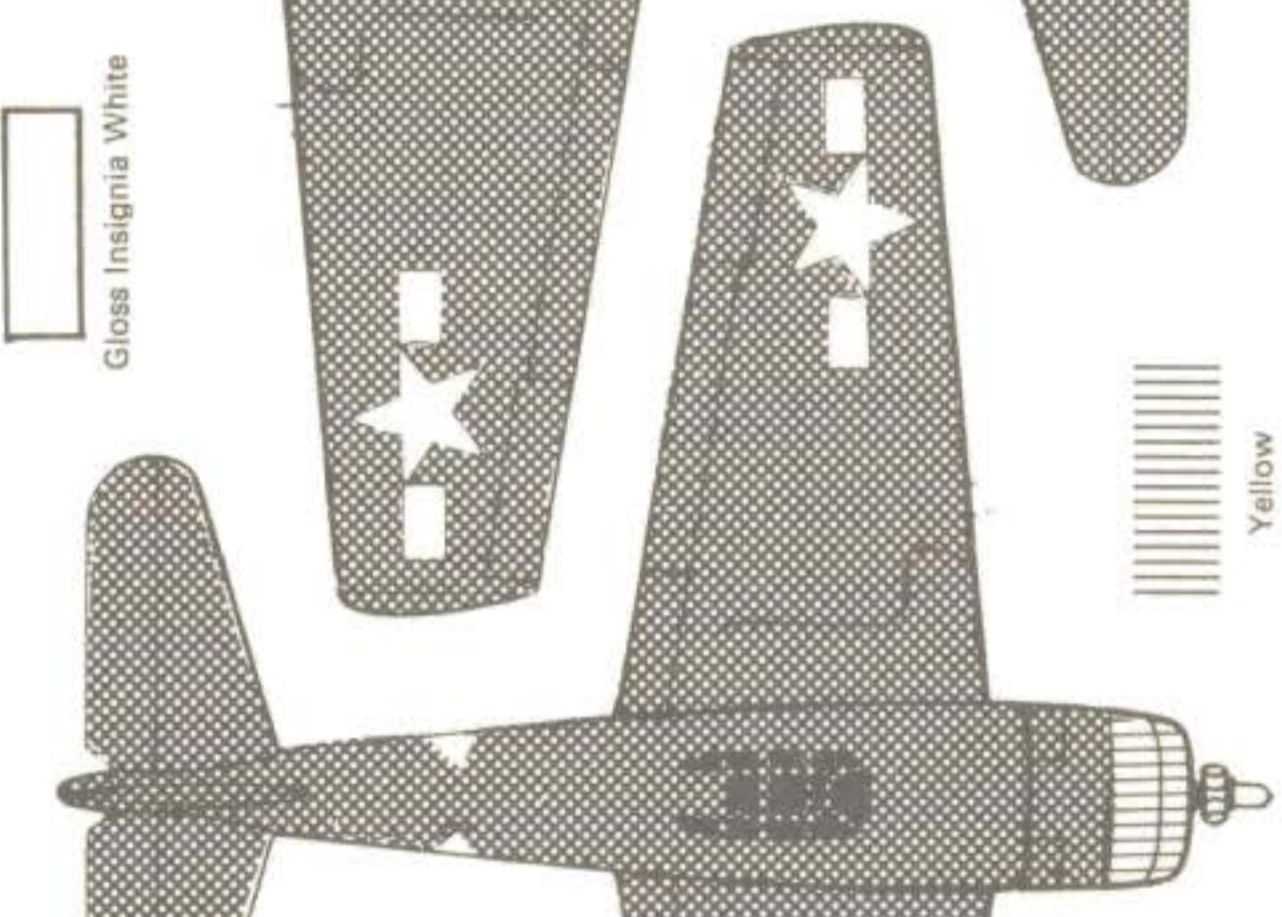
R/R



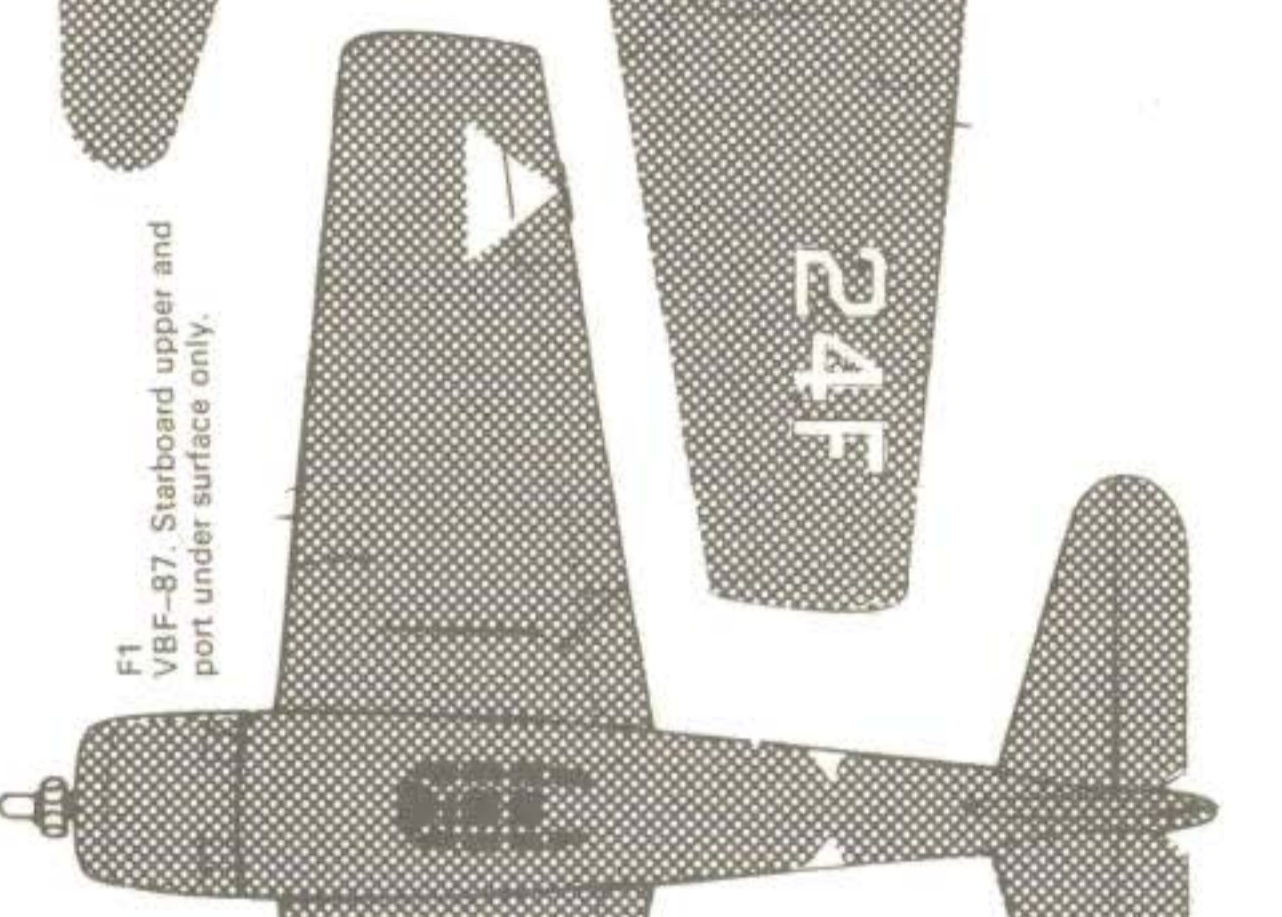
Gloss Sea Blue



E4
VF(N)-53. Starboard upper surface only.



E6
VF-84. Starboard upper and port under surface only. This particular aircraft had an all white long-range tank.



F1
VBF-87. Starboard upper and port under surface only.



F5
VF-878. Starboard upper surface only.



F5 etc.
Standard under surface
Insignia position.



Gloss Insignia White



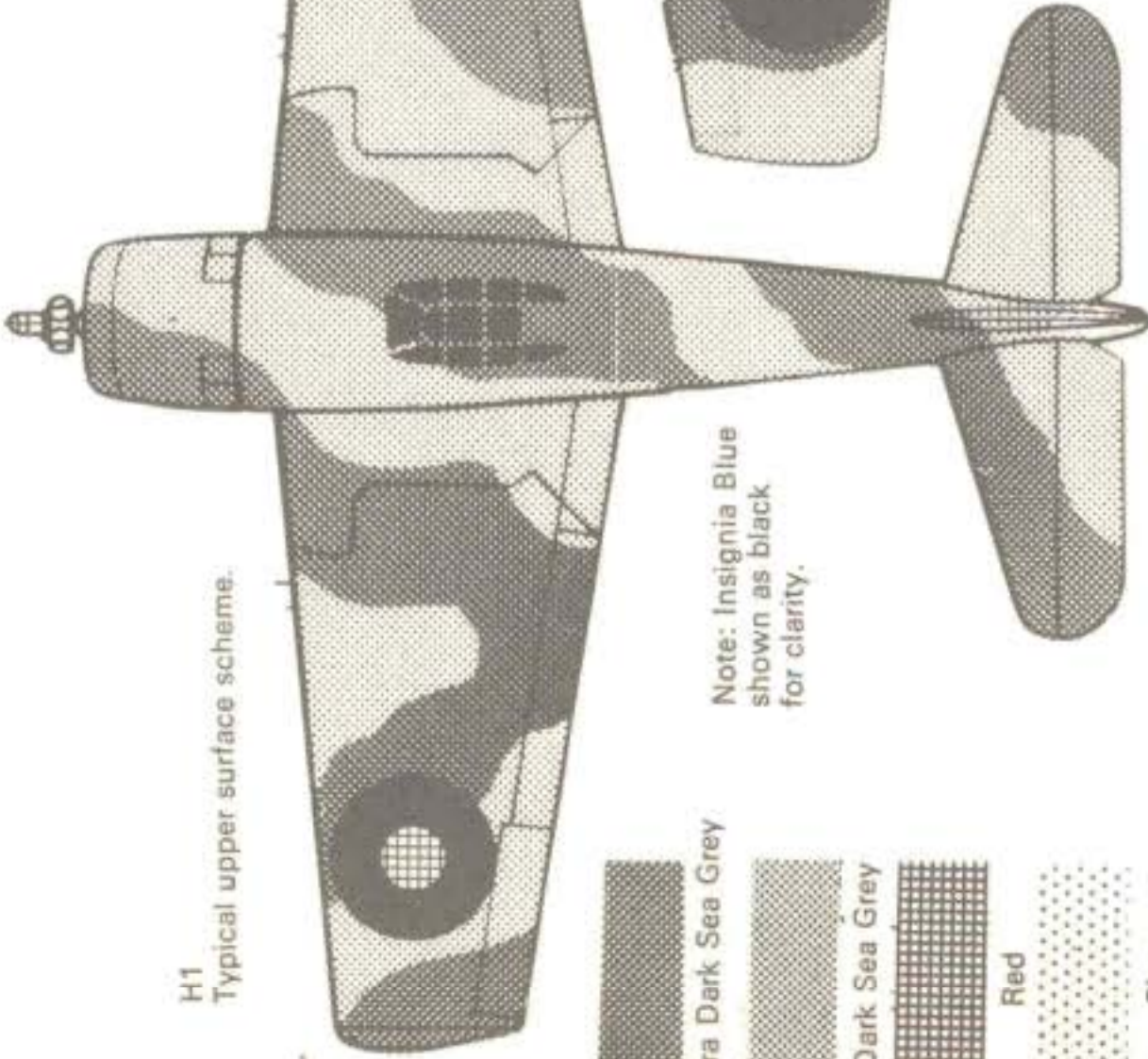
Yellow



Olive Green



E4 etc.
Position of Insignia
on night-fighter variants.



H1
Typical upper surface scheme.



Extra Dark Sea Grey



Dark Sea Grey

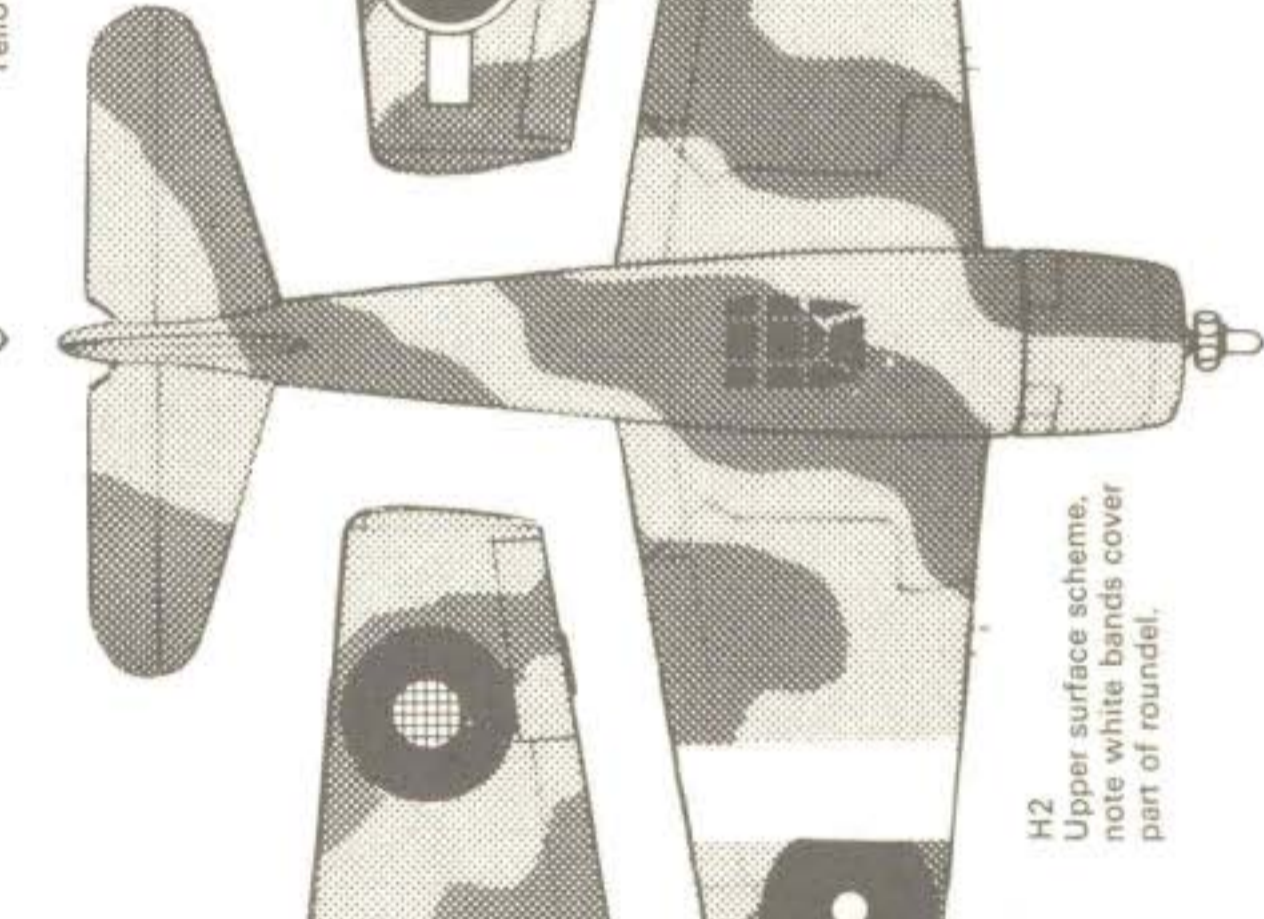


Red

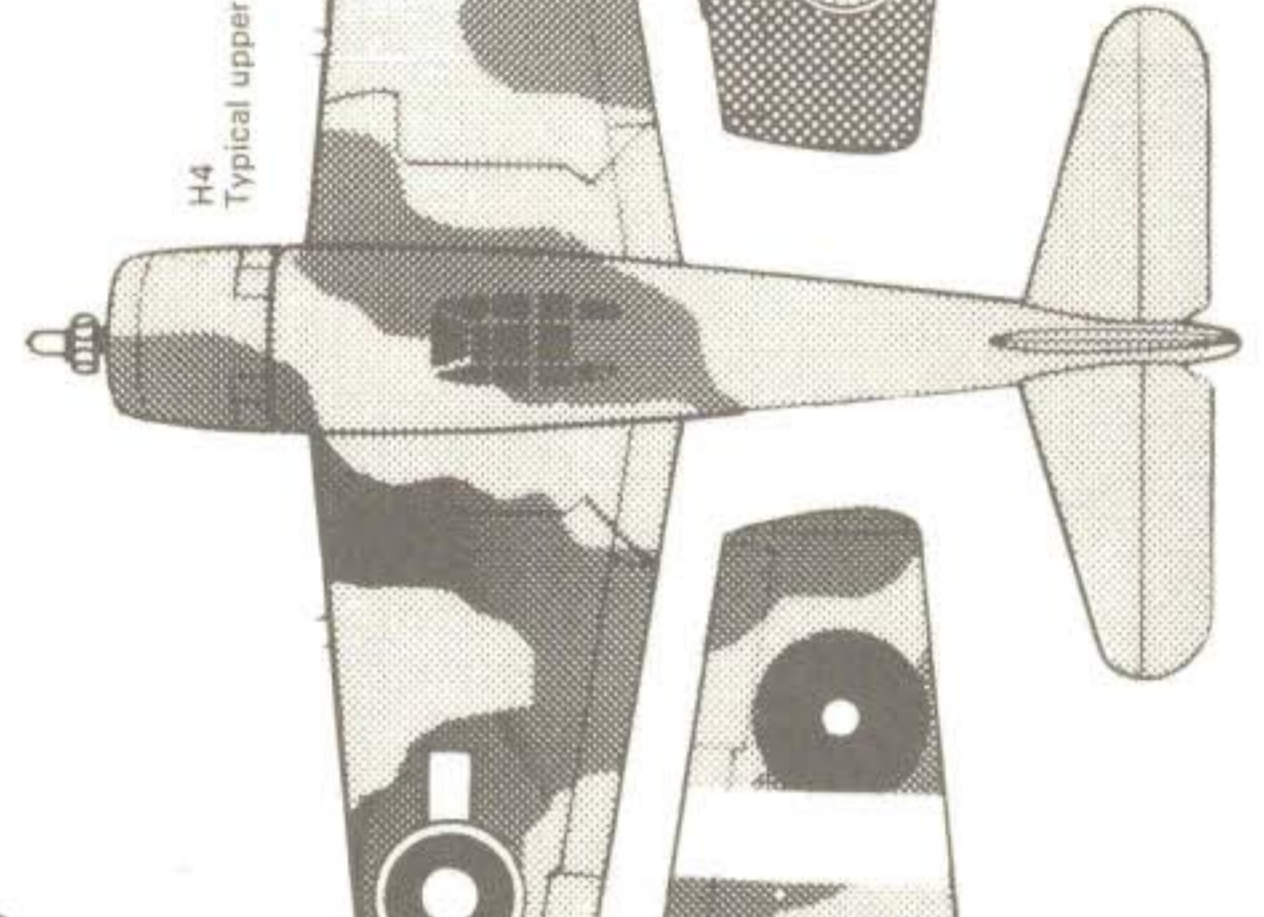


Sky

Note: Insignia Blue shown as black for clarity.

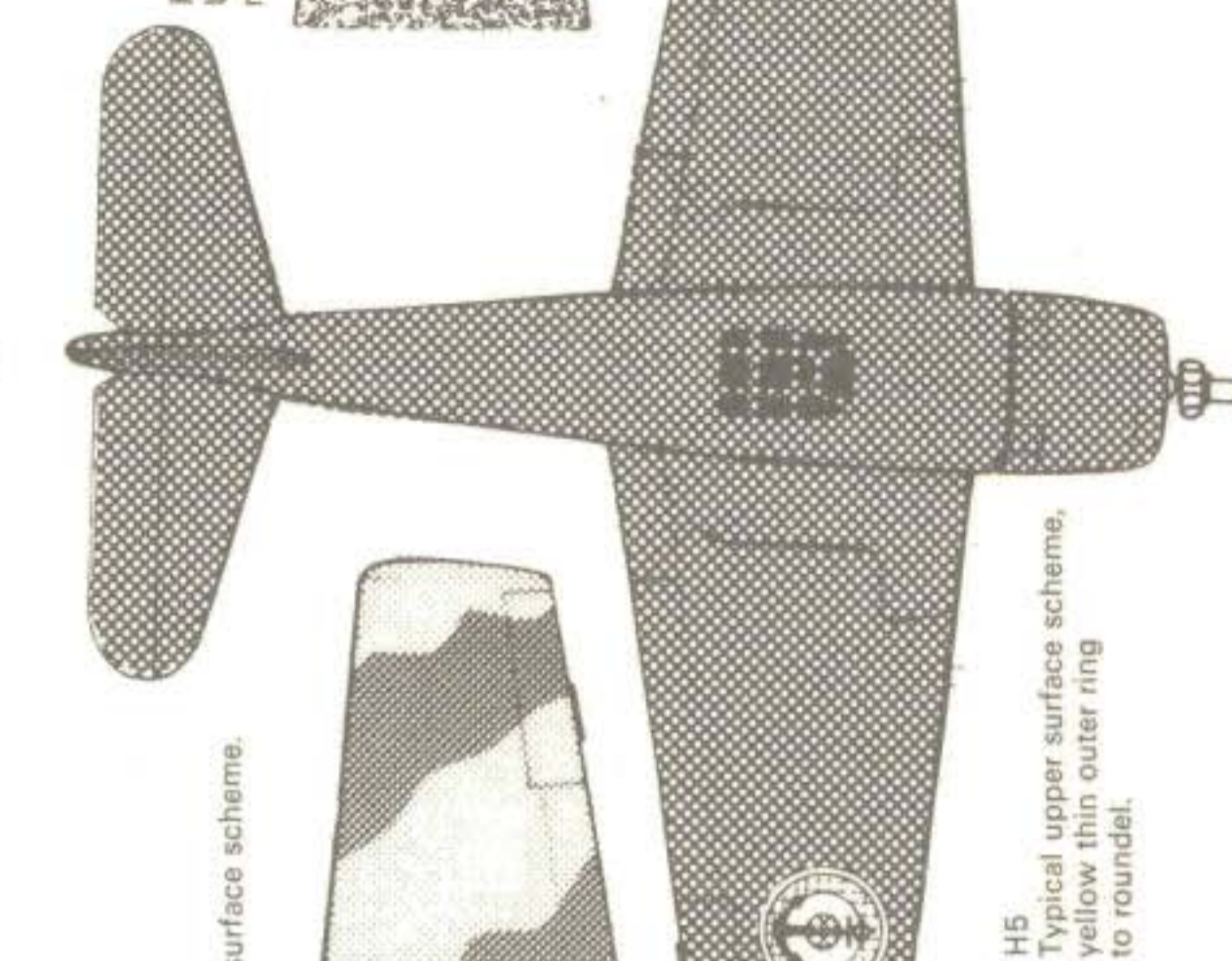


H2
Upper surface scheme, note white bands cover part of roundel.



H4

Typical upper surface scheme.

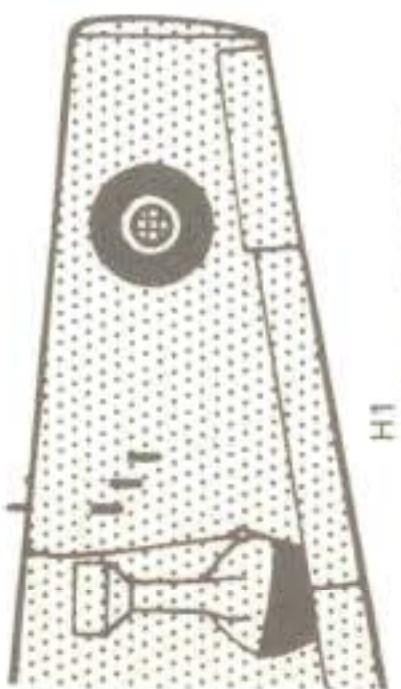


H5
Typical upper surface scheme, yellow thin outer ring to roundel.



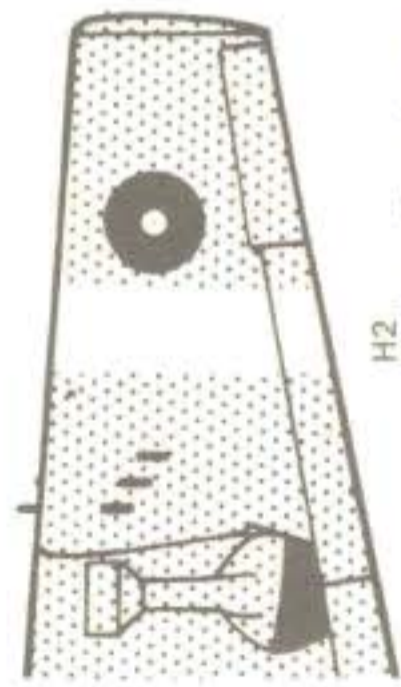
H6

Upper surface scheme, roundel port and starboard.



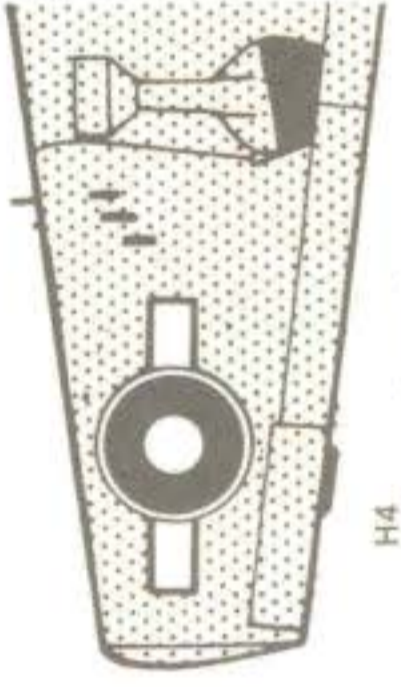
H1

Under surface scheme, roundel port and starboard.



H2

Under surface scheme, roundel port and starboard.



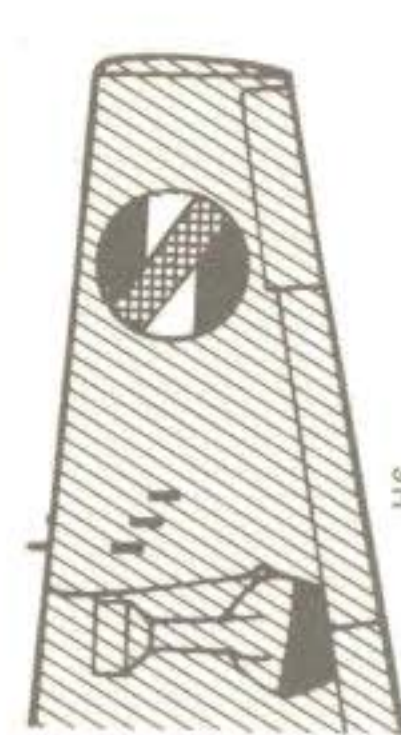
H4

Under surface scheme, roundel USN positions.



H5

Typical under surface scheme.



H6

Under surface scheme, roundel port and starboard.



Medium Blue



Pale Blue

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SPECIFICATION: GRUMMAN F6F-5 HELLCAT

Span	42ft. 10in.
Length	33ft. 7in.
Height	13ft. 1in.
Wing area	334 sq. ft.
Power plant	One 2,000 h.p. Pratt & Whitney R-2800-10W
Armament	Six fixed forward-firing 0.50in. machine guns, or two 20mm. and four 0.50.
Performance	Max. speed, 380 m.p.h. at 23,400ft.; initial climb, 2,980ft./min.; service ceiling, 37,300ft.; range, 945 st. mls.
External load	2,000lb. bomb load under centre section, six RP under each outer wing.

HELLCAT PRODUCTION:

F6F-3 : 4,423*	F6F-5 : 6,436**	*Of these, 252 were delivered to the Royal Navy as the Hellcat I
F6F-3N : 205	F6F-5N : 1,189	
F6F-3E : 18		**Of these, 930 were delivered to the Royal Navy as the Hellcat II

Front Cover, top to bottom

F6F-3 Hellcat, VF-27, USS Princeton (CVL-23). May-October 1944.
 F6F-5 Hellcat, VF-12, USS Randolph (CV-15). May-July 1945.
 F6F-3K Hellcat used in 'Operation Crossroads', atom bomb tests at Bikini Atoll, July 1946.
 Hellcat Mk. II, No. 804 Squadron, HMS Ameer, British Pacific Fleet, 1945.