

fündekals :)

GRUMMAN F4F



WILDCATS

FD32012/FD48034

Grumman's first kitty...



Grumman's portly F4F Wildcat arguably saved the United States in the first months of WWII in the Pacific. While inferior to almost all Japanese fighters of the time (particularly the A6M2 Model 21), in the right hands and with the right tactics, even the Wildcat could - and did - put scores on the board. A direct outgrowth of the even more portly looking F3F biplane of the mid-1930s, the F4F struggled to remain relevant, yet remain it did, as it was produced and served right through the end of combat in 1945. Even with its many shortcomings, it was a better gun platform than the Brewster F2A Buffalo to which it initially lost out for production contracts.

The Wildcat eventually found a niche in areas where higher performance was not necessarily required, such as anti-submarine convoy escort duty, and combat air patrol when the threat of enemy opposition was on the wane toward the end of the war. Its small size, especially after the advent of folding wings on the F4F-4 and subsequent models, made it ideal for the smaller escort carriers.

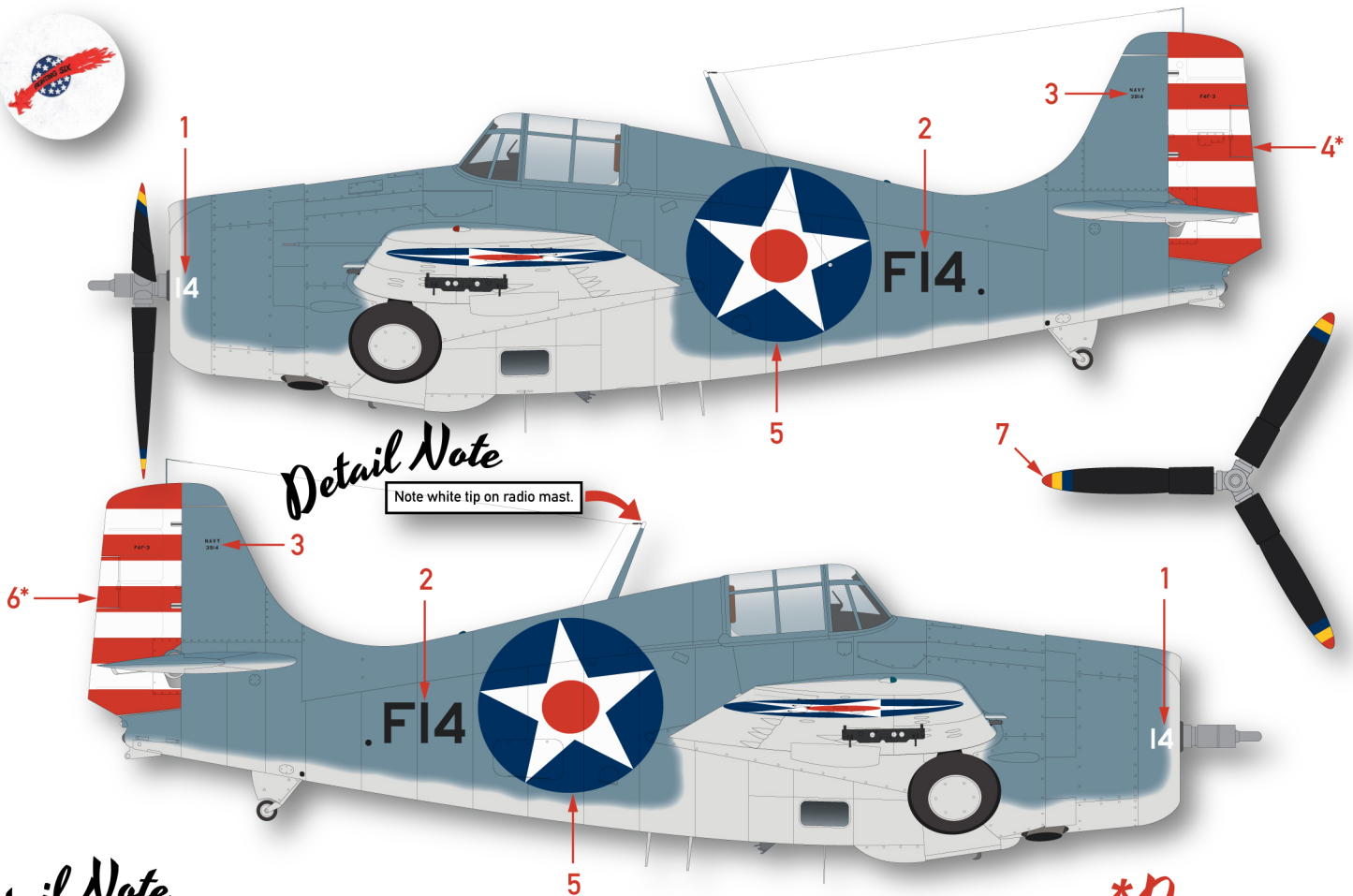
When Grumman began building the F6F in numbers that boggle the mind even today, production of the Wildcat was entrusted to Eastern Aircraft, where as the FM-1 and later FM-2, the Wildcat remained in production right through the end of hostilities in 1945.

Roughly analagous to the Army's P-40 series, the F4F was tough as nails (they didn't call it the Grumman Iron Works for nothing), and did just about everything asked of it.

We hope you will enjoy this selection of Wildcats ranging from the very opening salvos of WWII in the balmy tropical Pacific to the icy waters North Atlantic, fighting the U-boat menace.



Special thanks to Dana Bell and Lynn Ritger for their kind, patient, and generous assistance on this project.



Detail Note

Note white tip on radio mast.

Detail Note

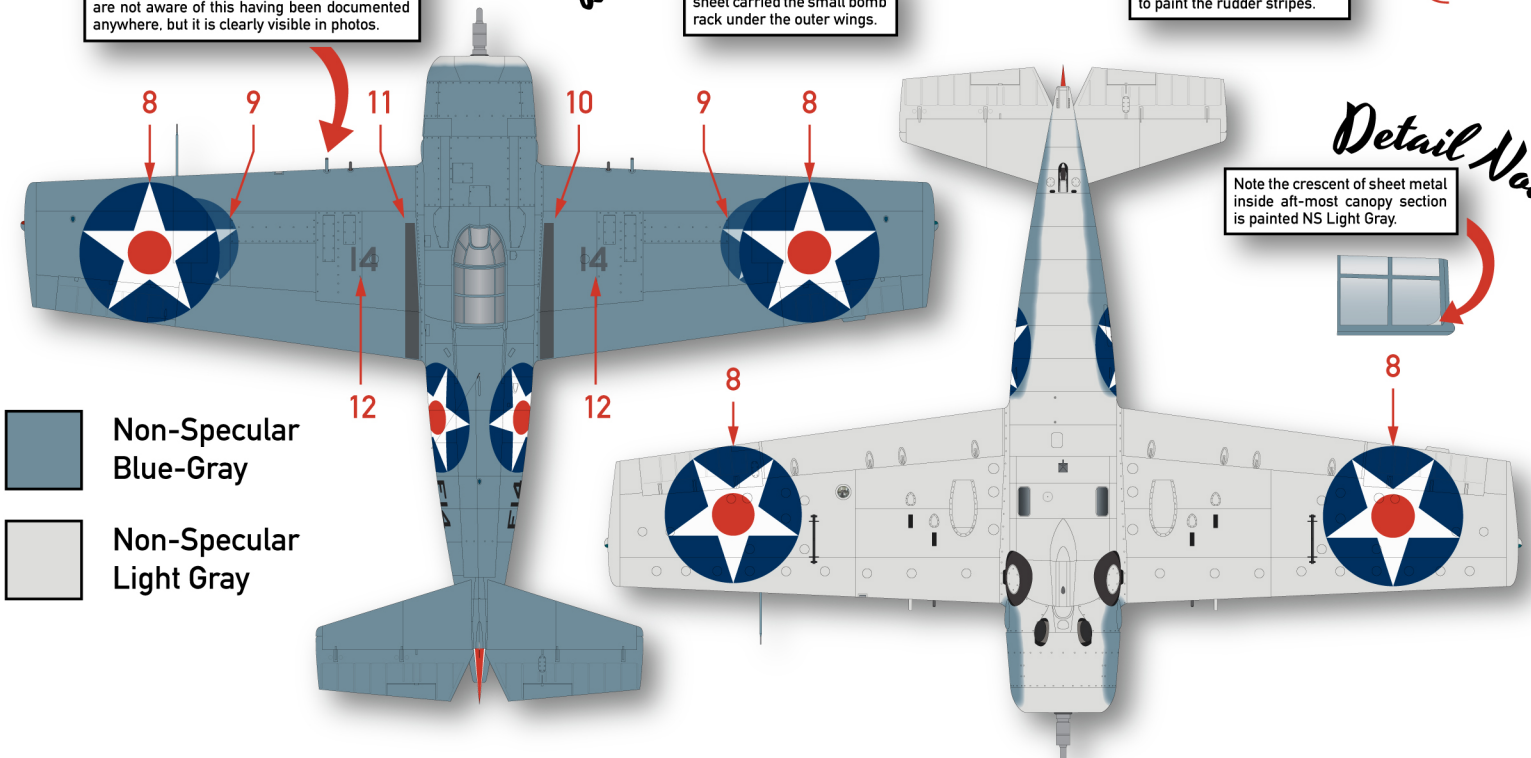
The F4F-3As had blast tubes on the outer wing guns. The opening was beveled back at approximately a 45 degree angle, with the lower edge further forward than the upper edge. We are not aware of this having been documented anywhere, but it is clearly visible in photos.

Detail Note

Both of the F4F-3s on this sheet carried the small bomb rack under the outer wings.

*Decal Note

Decals 5 & 6: Separate "F4F-3" titles are provided if you wish to paint the rudder stripes.



Detail Note

Note the crescent of sheet metal inside aft-most canopy section is painted NS Light Gray.

Non-Specular Blue-Gray

Non-Specular Light Gray

Enterprise Wildcat Markings

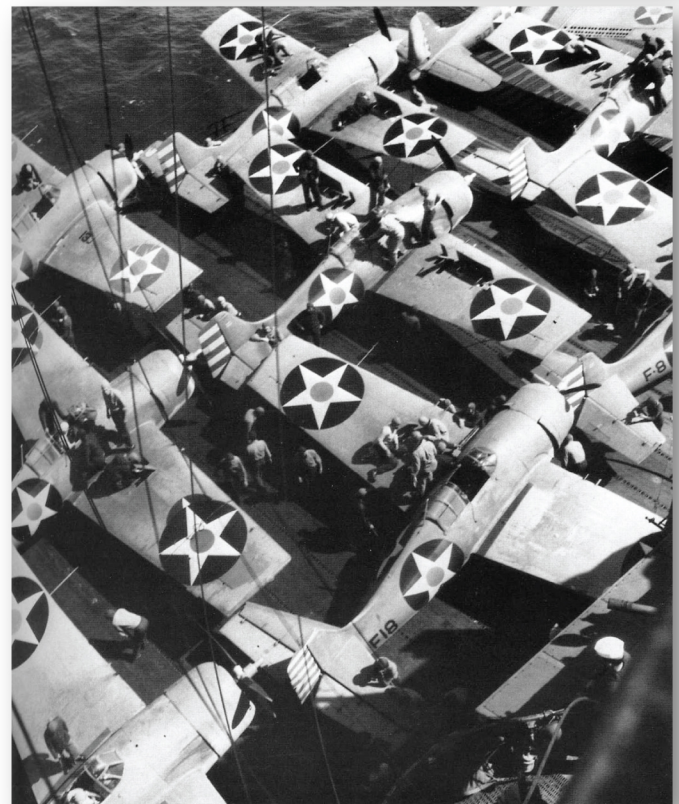
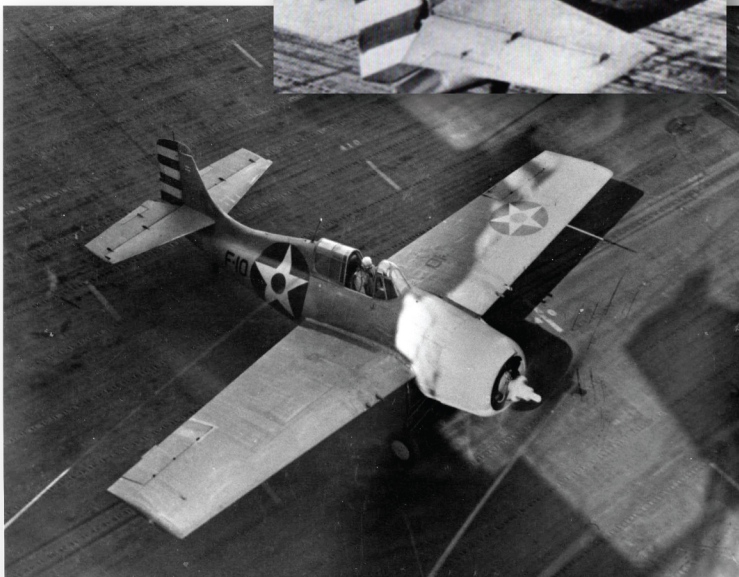
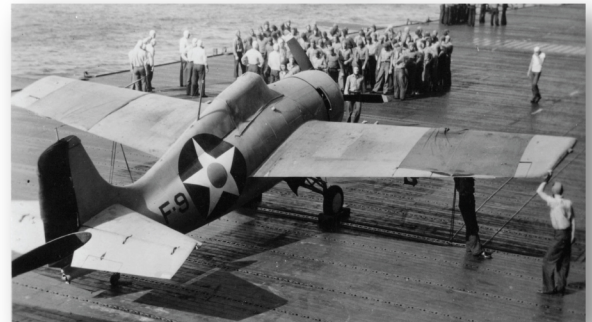
The unusual appearance of many of VF-6's F4F-3As aboard Enterprise in early 1942 has been explained in a variety of ways over the years, from "sun faded" to "salt air" to all sorts of things. These theories don't appear hold hold up, since the fuselage markings remain in fully saturated, bright colors. So once again, we tossed out everything we thought we knew about this and came at it with 'fresh eyes' to see what we could come up with.

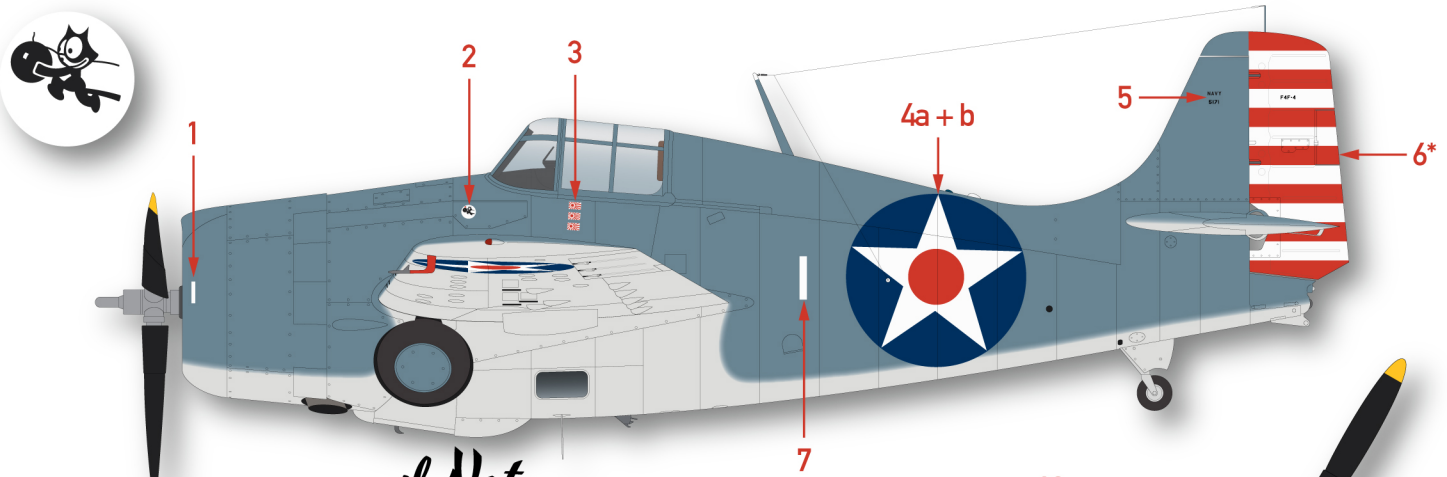
The USN implemented the NS Blue-Gray over NS Light Gray aircraft camouflage scheme in early 1941. From then until mid-1942, a dizzying number of often conflicting and confusing directives were issued covering markings and insignias. On 26 February 1941 wing national insignias were reduced from four to two, on the upper left and lower right wings. Clearly many aircraft kept all four into late 1941 however. On 26 December 1941 the Navy ordered red and white rudder stripes and the oversized national insignias - once again on both upper and both lower wings. With confusion over the exact sizes, those seen on many F4Fs such as our subject covered almost the entire chord of the wing. To avoid potential confusion with the Japanese hinomaru, the red center spot and red/white rudder stripes were ordered removed on 6 May 1942.

When you *really* examine closely what's going on on the Enterprise in early 1942, the obvious explanation jumps out at you. We firmly believe the markings are not "sun faded" or otherwise weathered or worn off - they were simply lightly oversprayed with NS Blue-Gray to tone them down. After the shooting started, it's clear that the Big-E's crew went to some lengths to make their aircraft less conspicuous when spotted on the deck, hence all the canvas tarps covering markings and reflective canopies. Toning down the markings with a light overspray would have been a quick and easy way to accomplish this. The overspray is clearly visible on many aircraft, and the real giveaway is the toning down of the black code numbers and even the non-skid walkways at the wing root. When the directive came down for oversized insignias on 26 December 1941, the new, larger insignias were simply applied over the existing markings, with no attempt to obliterate them.



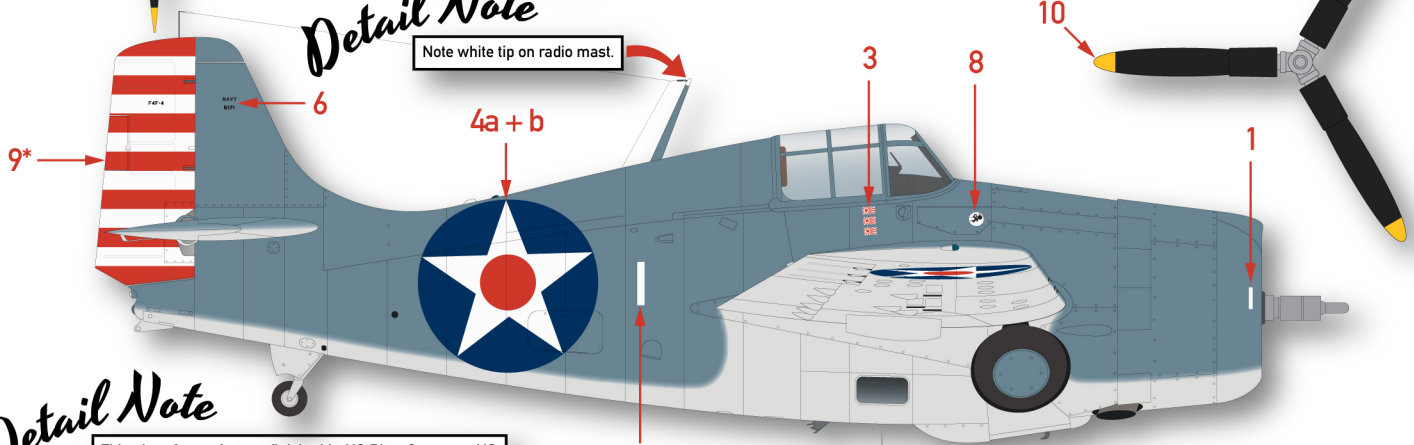
1. Paint wing NS Blue-Gray
2. Apply decals as shown
3. Lightly overspray markings with NS Blue-Gray to achieve effect seen in photos
4. Apply large insignia as shown





Detail Note

Note white tip on radio mast.



Detail Note

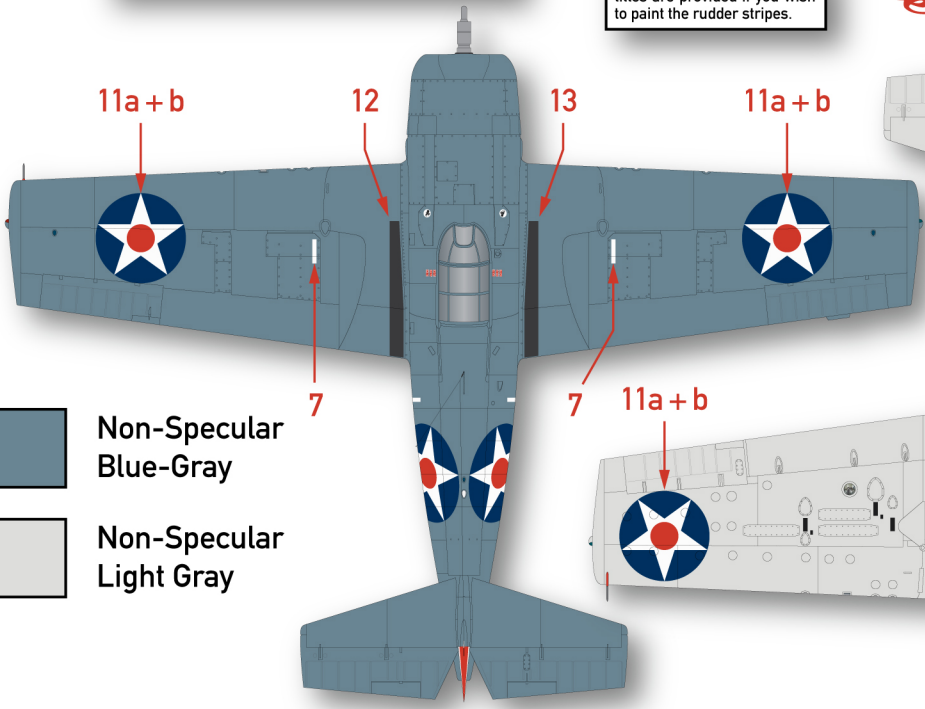
This aircraft was factory-finished in NS Blue-Gray over NS Light Gray. Note the differences in the pattern from previous aircraft that were field camouflaged. The wheel cover is now Blue-Gray, and the fuselage demarcation line is lower. Also note the red pitot mast - common to all F4F-4s. Cockpit was Bronze Green, and the cowling interior and wheel bay were Grumman light grey (almost off-white).

**Decal Note*

Decals 6 & 7: Separate "F4F-3" titles are provided if you wish to paint the rudder stripes.

Detail Note

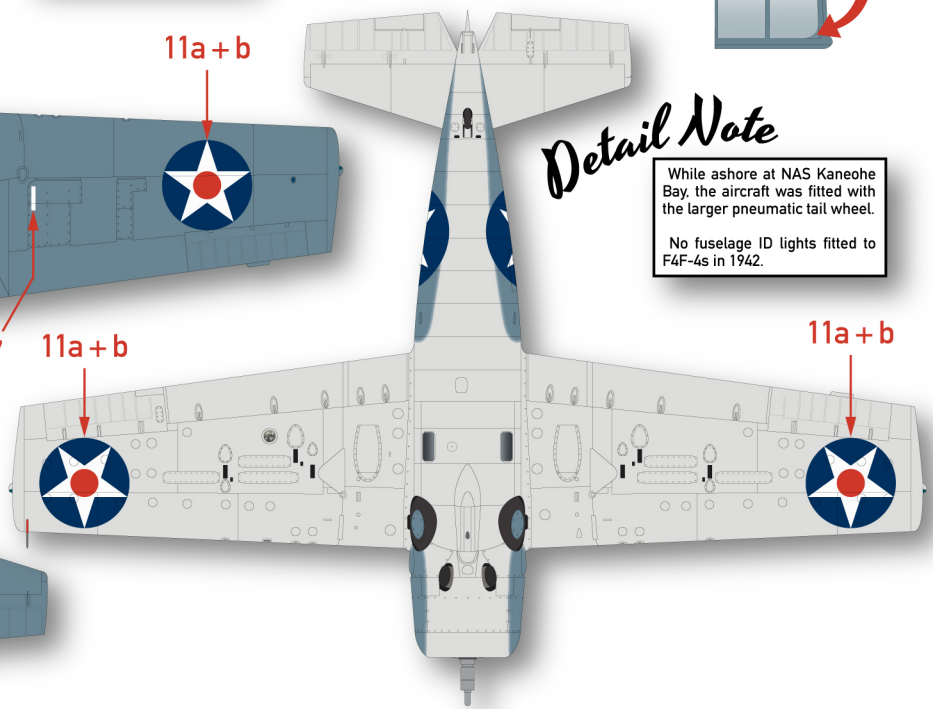
Note the crescent of sheet metal inside aft-most canopy section is painted NS Blue-Gray.



Detail Note

While ashore at NAS Kaneohe Bay, the aircraft was fitted with the larger pneumatic tail wheel.
 No fuselage ID lights fitted to F4F-4s in 1942.

- Non-Specular Blue-Gray
- Non-Specular Light Gray



NAS Kaneohe Bay

5 May 1942



On 5 May 1942 several Navy photographers captured Thach and VF-3 in action at NAS Kaneohe Bay. At left is Thach in the cockpit of BuNo 5171. Above is 5171 cranked up and about to taxi, with Thach in the cockpit. Below are two still frames showing the very low camouflage demarcation on this depot repaint (she was delivered in overall NS Light Gray), as well as the oversized markings carried at the time of the Battle of the Coral Sea a few days later.

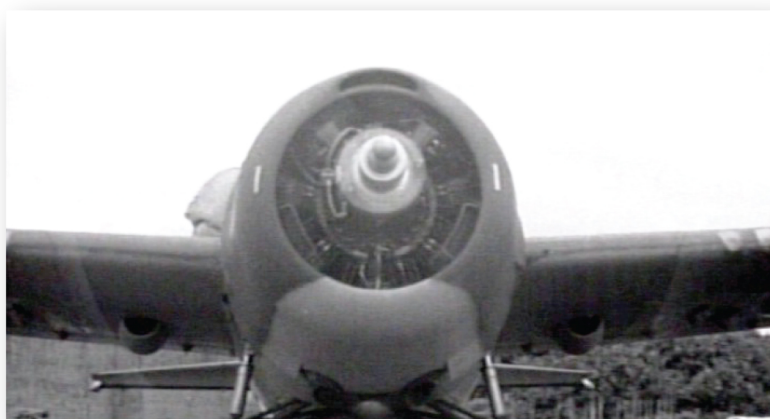
Lt. Commander John "Jimmy" Thach (19 April 1905 – 15 April 1981) hailed from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and was a 1927 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy. In June 1939 he joined VF-3 and rose to command the squadron by the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. He led VF-3 aboard USS Lexington in the initial combat in the Pacific. On 20 February 1942 Thach shared in the destruction of a Kawanishi H8K Emily flying boat. Later that same day he shot down a Mitsubishi G4M Betty bomber and shared on the destruction of another. These early victories were achieved in the F4F-3 model.

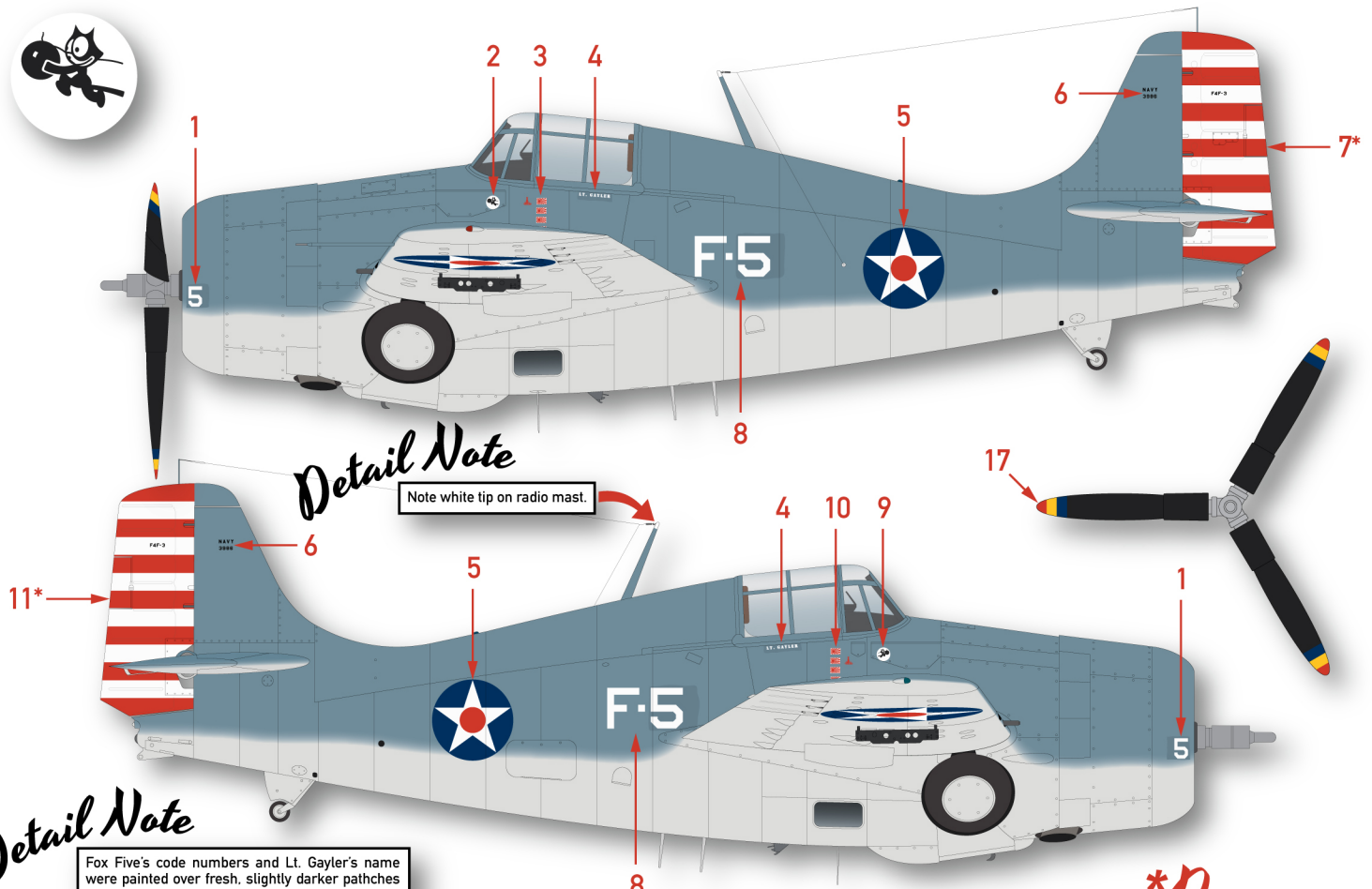
In March, Thach and VF-3 were put ashore and their F4F-3s were transferred to VMF-212 to make room for the newer F4F-4 then starting to be delivered. The new -4s had folding wings and the armament was increased from four .50 cal machine guns to six. Due to weight restrictions more guns meant fewer rounds per gun, and less ammunition meant less overall shooting time. Thach was not happy with the new arrangement prompting him to comment, "a pilot who cannot hit with four guns will miss with eight".

Thach had 27 new F4F-4s, but what he didn't have was enough pilots to fly them. During the hectic days after Pearl Harbor and the torpedoing of the USS Saratoga, there was a mad scramble to locate carrier qualified pilots to man the front line Navy fighter squadrons.

Thach had been given the unenviable task of rebuilding VF-3 in time for the next big show. Pilots from VF-42 were reassigned to VF-3, pilots headed for leave volunteered to return to combat, and even some SBD dive bomber pilots were hastily dubbed "fighter pilots" and given a quick course on the F4F and fighter tactics. Thach even searched infirmaries for pilots that were well enough to return to combat. Thus, VF-3 was reborn just in time for an appointment with destiny at Midway.

Footage from the U.S. National Archives captured VF-3 at Kaneohe Naval Air Station on 5 May 1942. Seen are the new F4F-4s that Jimmy Thach and VF-3 used in combat during the Battle of Midway. Clearly visible is Thach briefing his pilots before they take off for the cameras. The footage is of great interest to modelers (and decal makers) as Thach's "Fox-1" BuNo 5171 features prominently. In early May, BuNo 5191 and the other F4Fs were still wearing the early national insignia with the red disc in the center of the white star as well as the red and white stripes on the rudder. Before the actual battle these more colorful markings were removed. On 30 May, Thach and the squadron took off from NAS Kaneohe Bay and trapped aboard USS Yorktown.





Detail Note

Note white tip on radio mast.

Detail Note

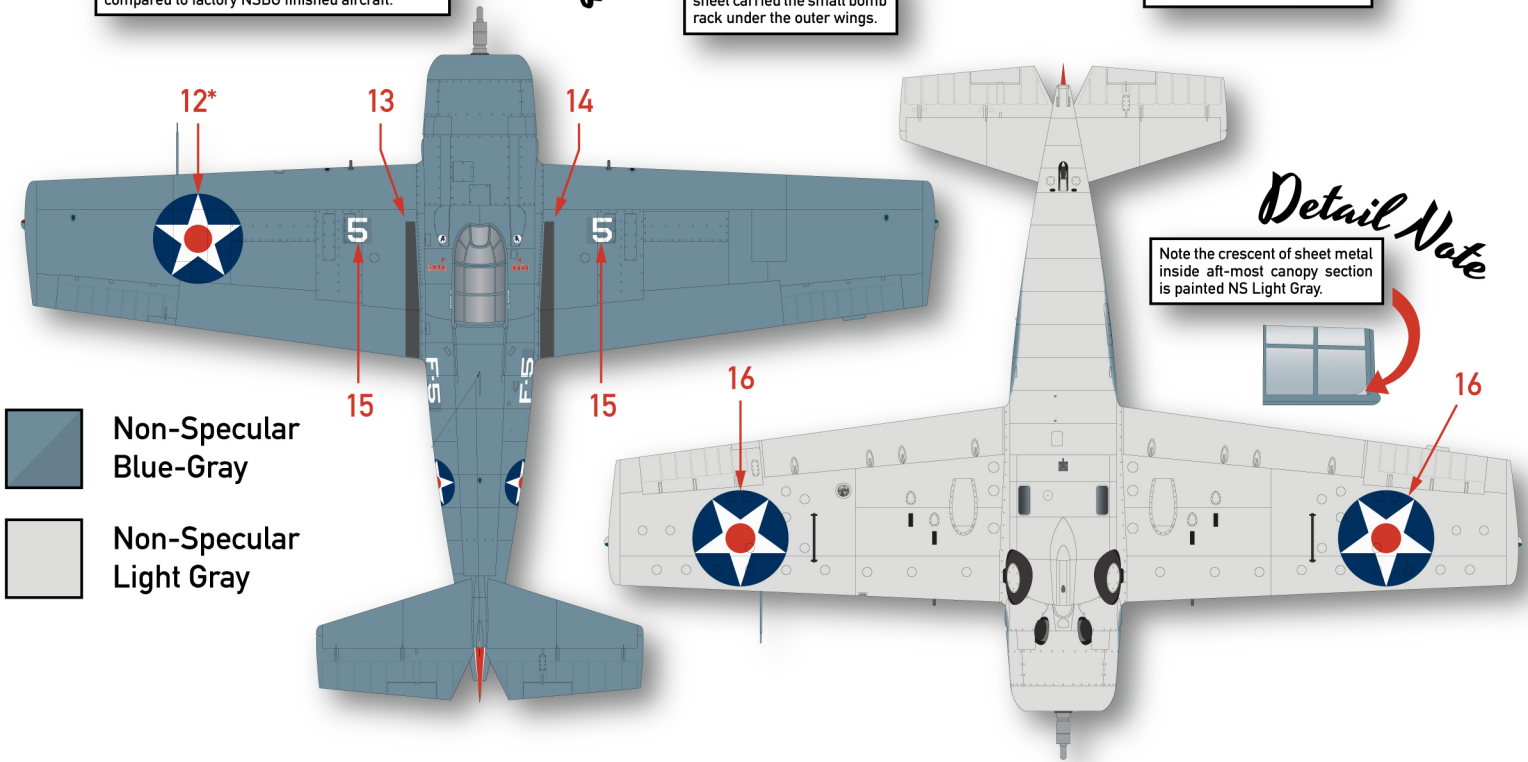
Fox Five's code numbers and Lt. Gayler's name were painted over fresh, slightly darker patches of NS Blue-Gray paint covering her previous markings. She is believed to have been F-13 previously. Delivered in overall NS Light Gray, the aircraft received the upper surface NS Blue-Gray after delivery, retaining the Light Gray wheel disks, and featuring a different camouflage demarcation compared to factory NSBG finished aircraft.

Detail Note

Both of the F4F-3s on this sheet carried the small bomb rack under the outer wings.

**Decal Note*

Decals 7 & 11: Separate "F4F-3" titles are provided if you wish to paint the rudder stripes.



Detail Note

Note the crescent of sheet metal inside aft-most canopy section is painted NS Light Gray.

-  Non-Specular Blue-Gray
-  Non-Specular Light Gray



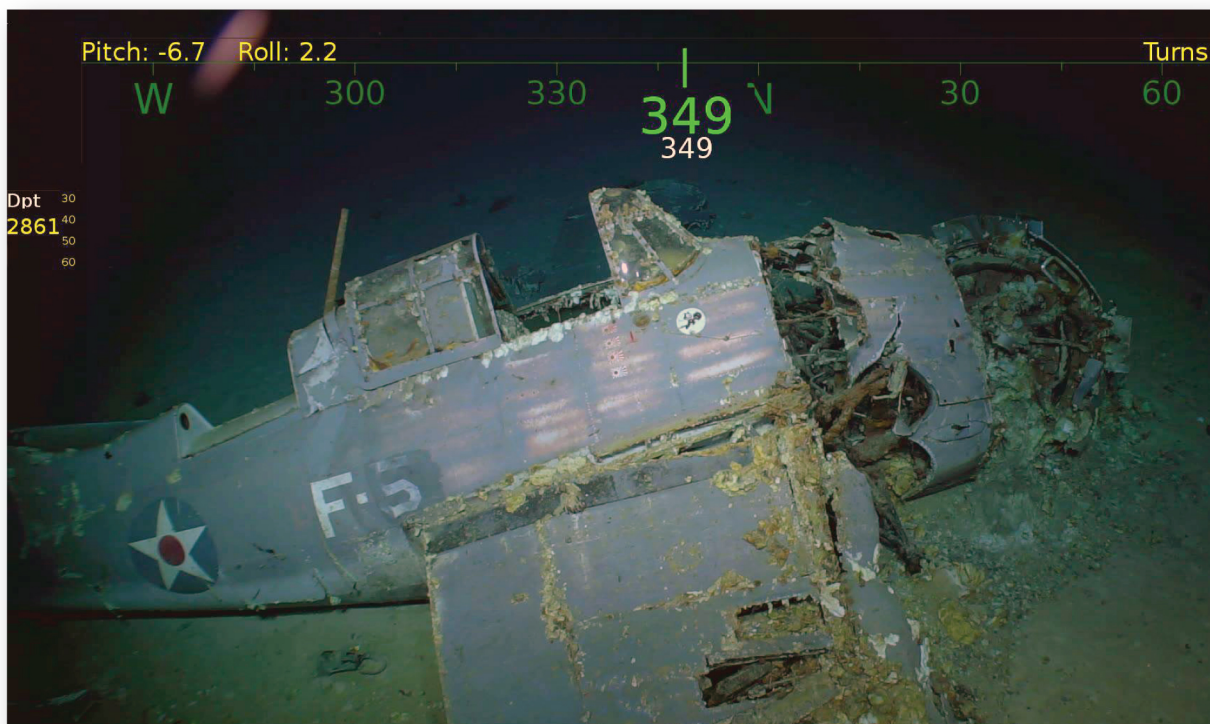
The Wreck of USS Lexington and Fox Five

In March of 2018, the Paul Allen Foundation announced that its deep sea research vessel R/V Petrel had located the wreck of the USS Lexington. Naval and aviation historians around the world were amazed and thrilled at this discovery. Resting in nearly 10,000 feet of water at the bottom of the Coral Sea, some 500 miles east of the coast of Queensland, Australia, not only did the Petrel team find the ship, but astonishingly, several of her TBD Devastors, SBD Dauntlesses, and one - one very important - F4F Wildcat. As the images from Petrel's remotely operated submersible began to be released, historians were literally agog at the condition of the ship and her remaining aircraft. It's as if someone had opened a time portal and transported us back to the 8th of May, 1942. Aside from some marine growth, the aircraft look as if they had just been placed there. Markings were still clearly visible, and in the case of F4F-3 BuNo 3986, her life raft compartment stands empty, exactly as she was left on the deck when Lexington crewmen grabbed her raft and made good their escape from the doomed carrier.

On closer examination of the photos of Fox Five, it became clear that this amazing survivor was the aircraft of none other than Lt. Noel Gayler, USN. Her markings conformed precisely to her known history, with her previous side code painted out in what still looks like fresh NS Blue-Gray. Closeups of images showing the canopy rail on each side clearly show "LT. GAYLER" stenciled in white. Her VF-3 Felix the Cat badges still show proudly - and interestingly, they lack the red "sparks" on the bomb's fuse in common with other squadron mates photographed at around the same time. She features Gayler's four kills, applied with at least two different rather crude stencils. Later the USN supplied silkscreen printed decals for this purpose, but at this stage of the war, squadrons were on their own since kills were still relatively few and far between.

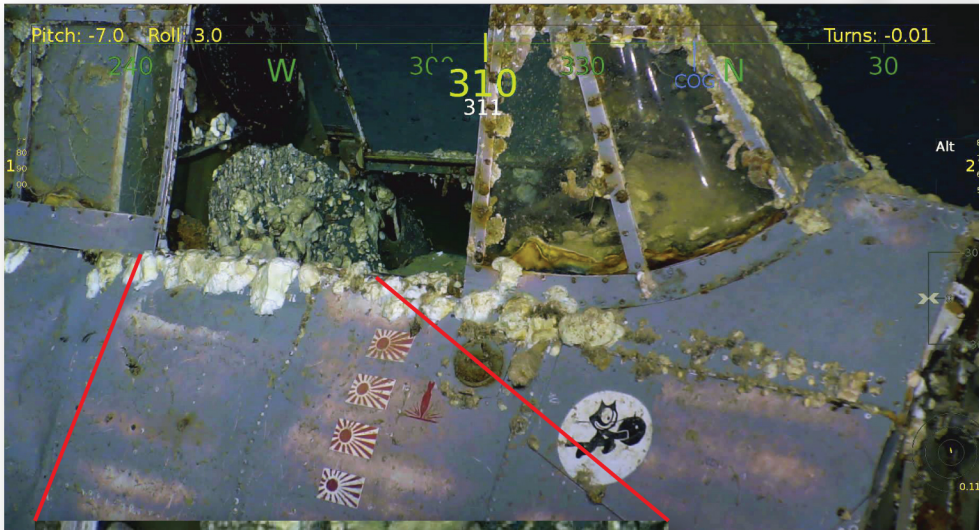
Fox Five's camouflage of NS Blue-Gray looks somewhat faded and for some reason, scoured partially away by the sea, revealing what appears to be the infamous "salmon" primer under it. Photos of Fox Five and other squadron mates taken in early 1942 clearly show she carried the then-standard layout of one national insignia on the upper left wing and none on the upper right. However, Petrel's amazing photos also clearly show that for whatever reason, VF-3's crew had applied an insignia below the left wing - or had left it there against what the directive specified. Directives regarding size and placement of national insignias were changing at a dizzying pace in late 1941 and early 1942, and Fox Five's markings reflect this. She retains her red and white rudder stripes and the red center dots in her insignias, despite a directive that was issued two days before Lexington's demise mandating their removal to avoid confusion with the Japanese hinomaru.

Enjoy these incredible photos of Gayler's aircraft. Perhaps some really talented modeler will attempt to portray this historic aircraft in a diorama depicting her as she appears today.





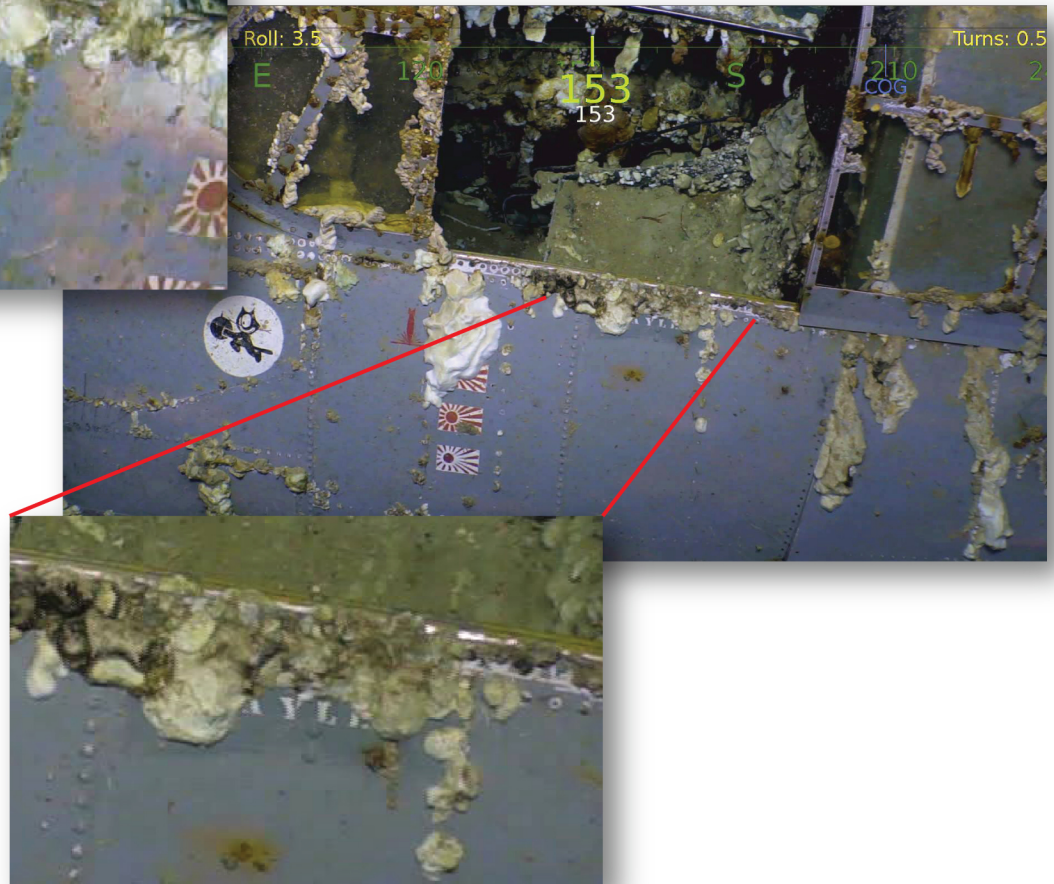
The Wreck of USS Lexington and Fox Five



A closeup of the starboard side of the cockpit area showing Gayler's four kills and the bomb mission marking denoting his participation in the Lae-Salamaua raid of 10 March 1942. In the enlargement, you can clearly make out the letters "G A" and "R" of Gayler's name. Note that Felix's bomb does not have the usual red sparks emanating from the fuse - something seen in period photos of other aircraft as well.



A similar closeup of the port side of the cockpit showing the same four kills - one done with a notably different stencil - and the bomb mission marking. In the enlargement, you can clearly make out the letters "A Y L E" of Gayler's name. The name appears to have been applied over another name (possibly Lt. Butch O'Hare), on a fresh, darker patch of NS Blue-Gray paint.





The Wreck of USS Lexington and Fox Five



A view of the lower left wing (note the pitot tube) showing that Fox Five had insignias on both lower wings. Other period photos show her with only one upper wing insignia. When oversized insignias and red/white rudder stripes were ordered on 26 December 1941, squadrons scrambled to comply, but the orders were vague and difficult to interpret. Thus, Fox Five's insignias remained the much smaller size previously ordered, though she did get the rudder stripes. It was a confusing, harried time aboard the fleet carriers in early 1942.

Another overall starboard side view showing Fox Five's missing life raft. Accounts of the evacuation of USS Lexington recount crew members taking life rafts out of the aircraft and going over the side with them. Fox Five is a ghostly reminder of that awful day. Her assigned pilot, Lt. Noel Gayler, survived the war and went on to a long Navy career, only passing on as recently as 2011 (sadly, before his aircraft was discovered...). But it looks like he could climb into the cockpit and fire up his trusty Wildcat!

