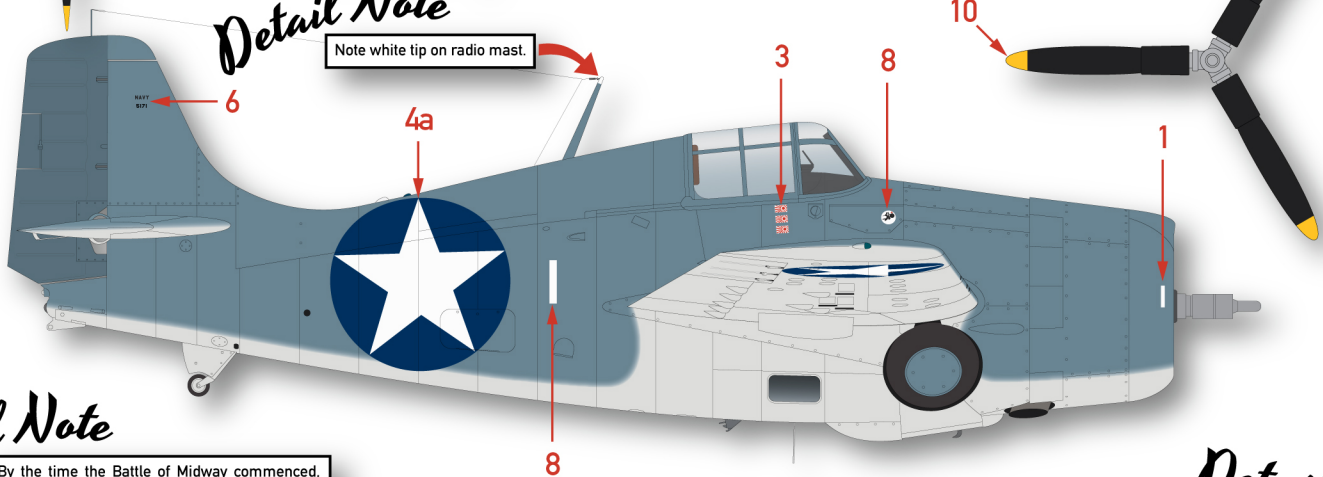


Detail Note

Note white tip on radio mast.

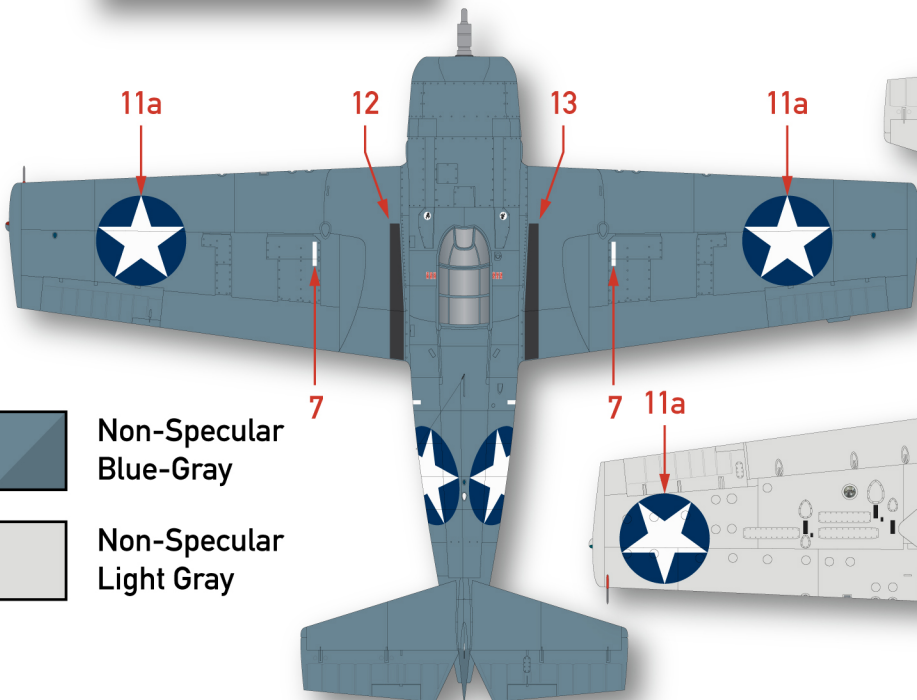


Detail Note

By the time the Battle of Midway commenced, the Navy had ordered the red center spot and the red/white rudder stripes removed on all combat aircraft. Photos of F4Fs of this period clearly show a darker shade of NS Blue-Gray visible on the rudders where the stripes were overpainted.

Detail Note

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

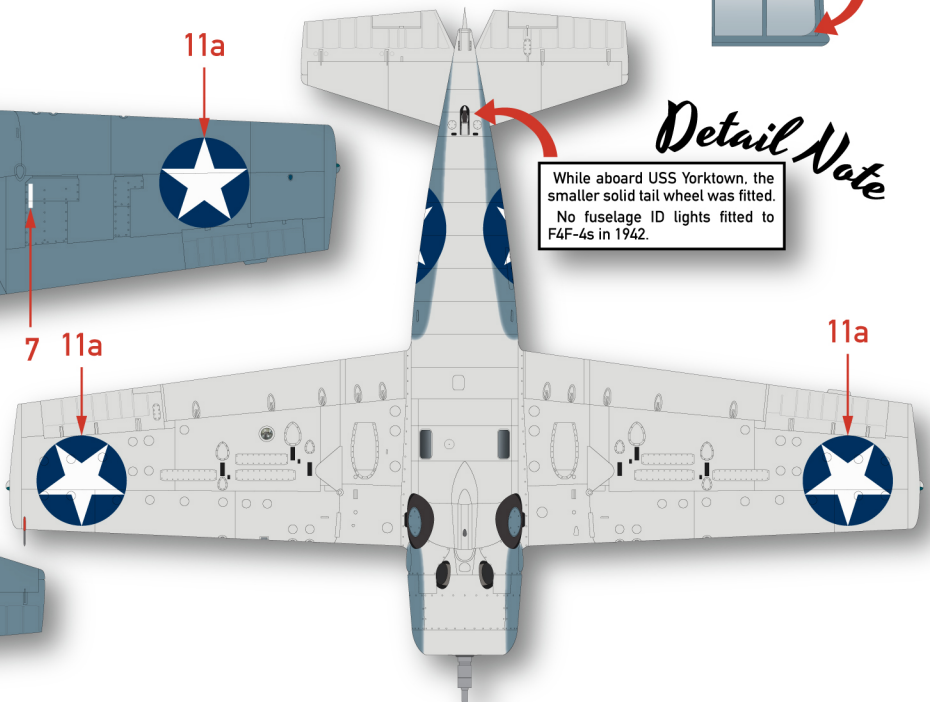


Detail Note

While aboard USS Yorktown, the smaller solid tail wheel was fitted. No fuselage ID lights fitted to F4F-4s in 1942.

Non-Specular Blue-Gray

Non-Specular Light Gray



USS Yorktown at Midway

Commander Jimmy Thach made two fateful sorties on the first day of the Battle of Midway, 4 June 1942. On his first sortie he and five pilots from VF-3 made a desperate attempt to protect TBDs of VT-3 as they attacked the main Japanese carrier force. Although VF-3's pilots claimed five A6M2 Zeroes destroyed (Thach himself was credited with three), none of the Devastators returned. During this engagement Thach was flying F4F-4 #23 BuNo 5093.

After Thach's flight landed, Yorktown was attacked by dive bombers from the Hiryu and temporarily put out of action. Desperate crews fought what must have seemed a losing battle to get Yorktown back into the fight. Thach tried to put together a new CAP as her previous airborne protection had had to put down on the Enterprise.

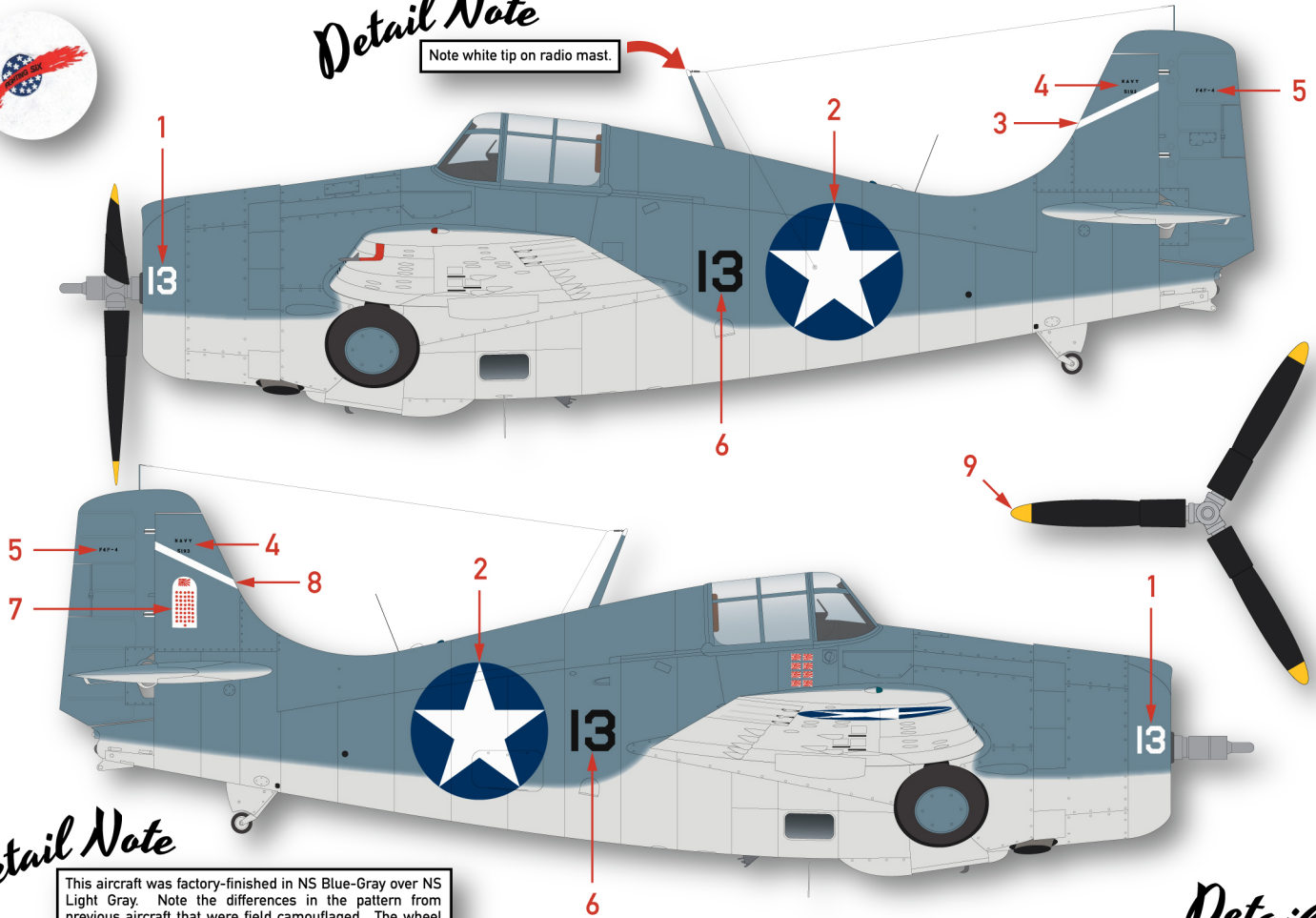
Thach's original Wildcat (F-23) had been damaged during the earlier attack on the Japanese carriers. His assigned F-1 BuNo 5171 was considered a spare Wildcat and was spotted on deck. Meanwhile, thanks to the heroic and almost superhuman efforts of her crew, Yorktown was brought back to life. She initially began making 5 knots...then 17 knots, as the battle raged on.

At the precise moment Thach launched, Lt. Joichi Tomonaga lined up his B5N2 Kate torpedo planes from Hiryu for their run at the Yorktown. Thach barely had enough time to charge F-1's guns and crank up the landing gear before making a tight turn to the right. Immediately Tomonaga's Kate came into view, and Thach poured a long burst from 5171's guns into the left wing of the attacker, setting it alight. Much to Thach's dismay Tomonaga held his course for one more moment and the torpedo dropped just as the left wing buckled. Tomonaga's Kate, BI-310 then crashed into the sea while its torpedo sped toward the Yorktown's stern... which it narrowly missed.



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).

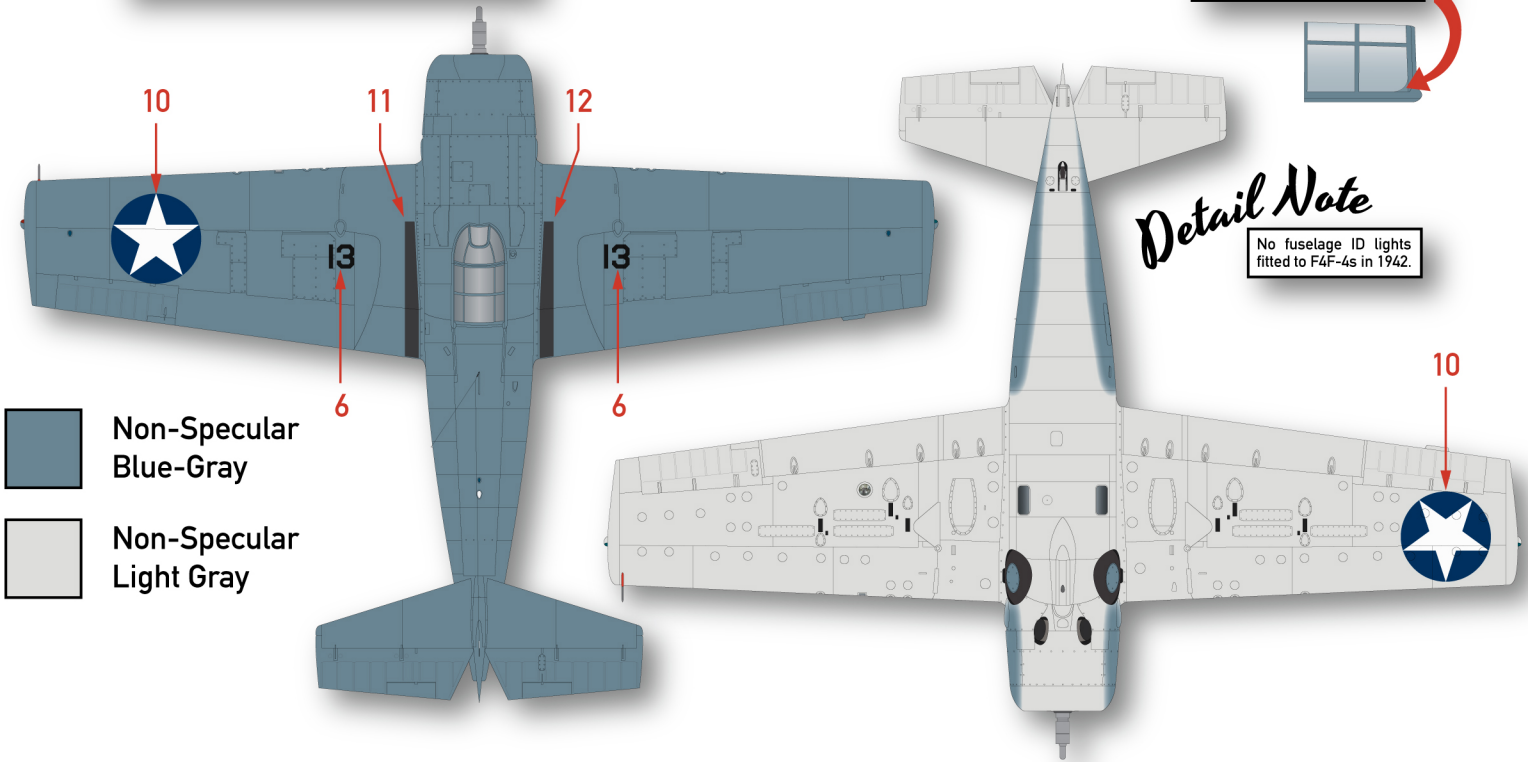
Detail Note

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Detail Note

No fuselage ID lights fitted to F4F-4s in 1942.

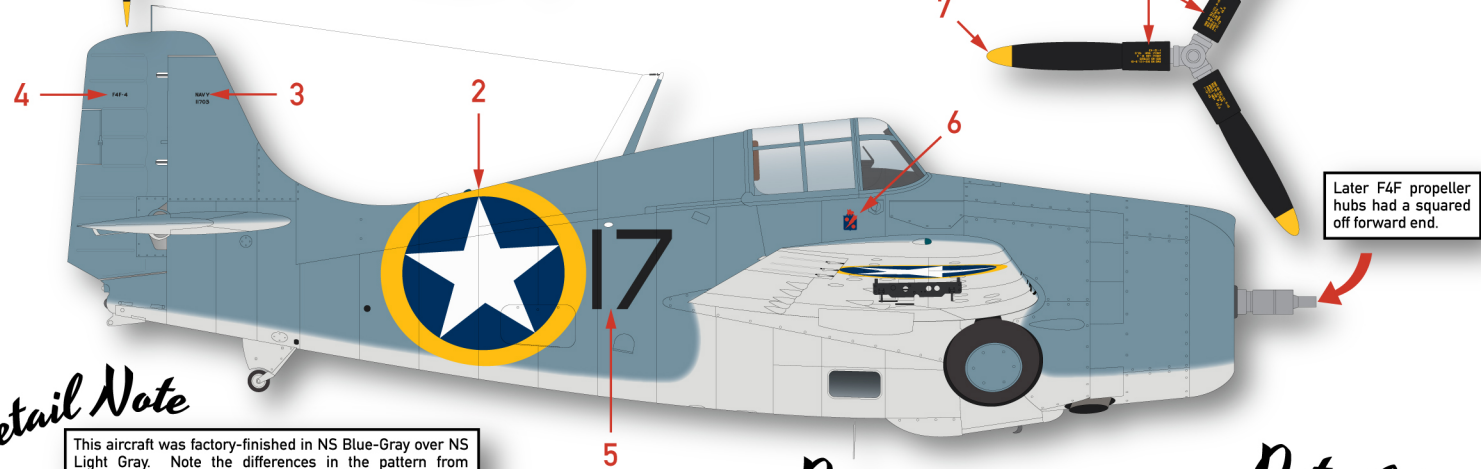
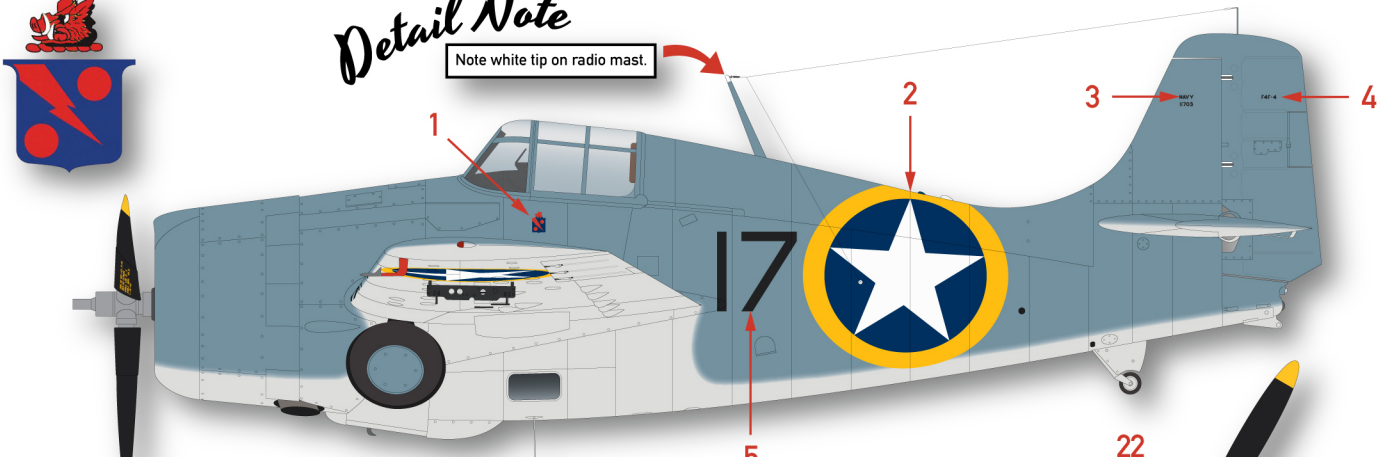


- Non-Specular Blue-Gray
- Non-Specular Light Gray



Detail Note

Note white tip on radio mast.



Later F4F propeller hubs had a squared off forward end.

Detail Note

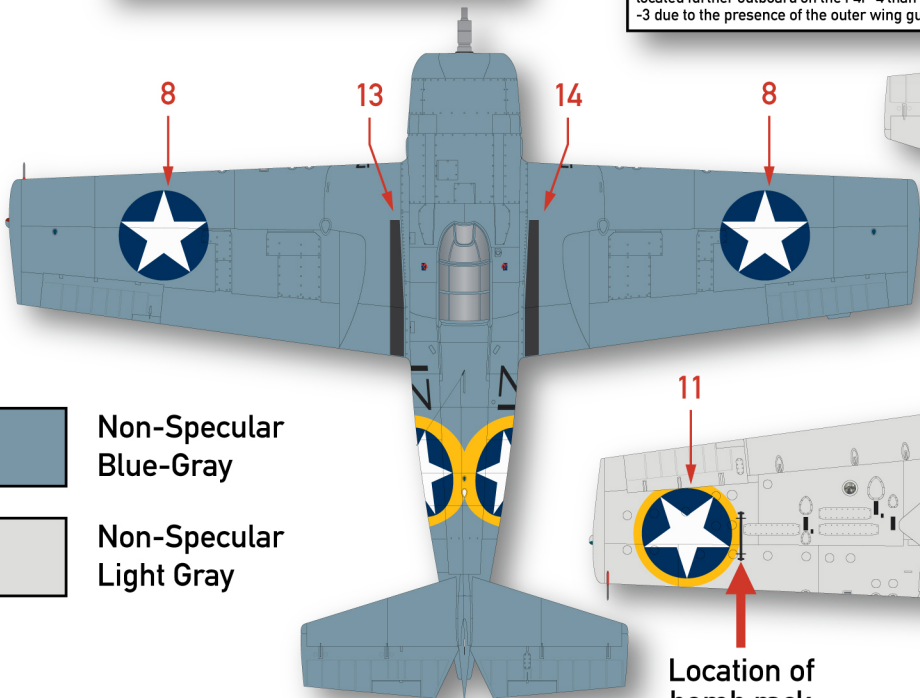
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Detail Note

VF-41 Wildcats carried wing bomb racks during Operation Torch missions. They were located further outboard on the F4F-4 than the -3 due to the presence of the outer wing guns.

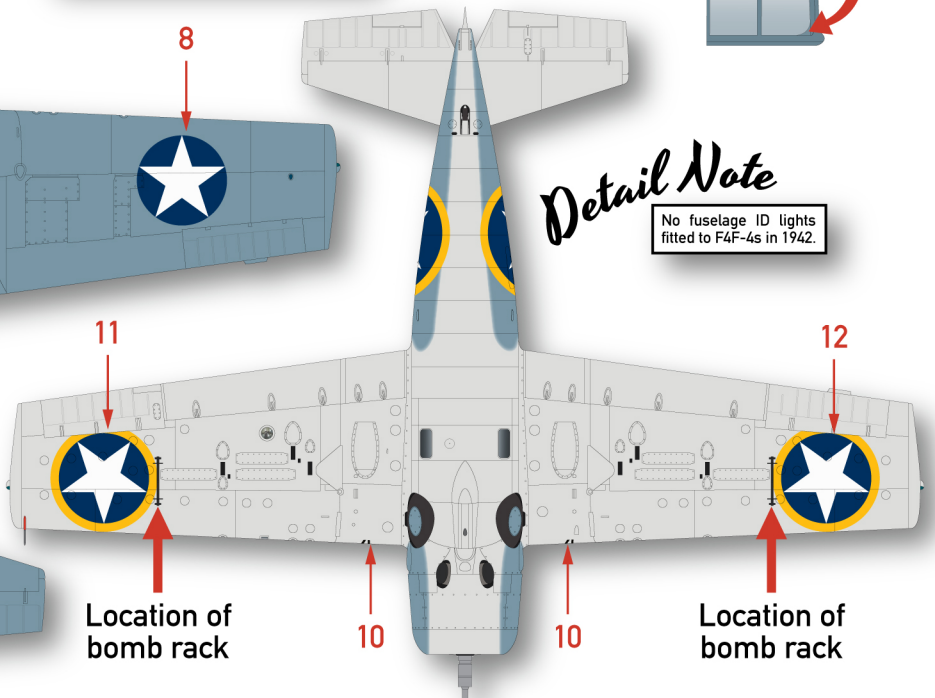
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Detail Note

No fuselage ID lights fitted to F4F-4s in 1942.



Location of bomb rack

Location of bomb rack

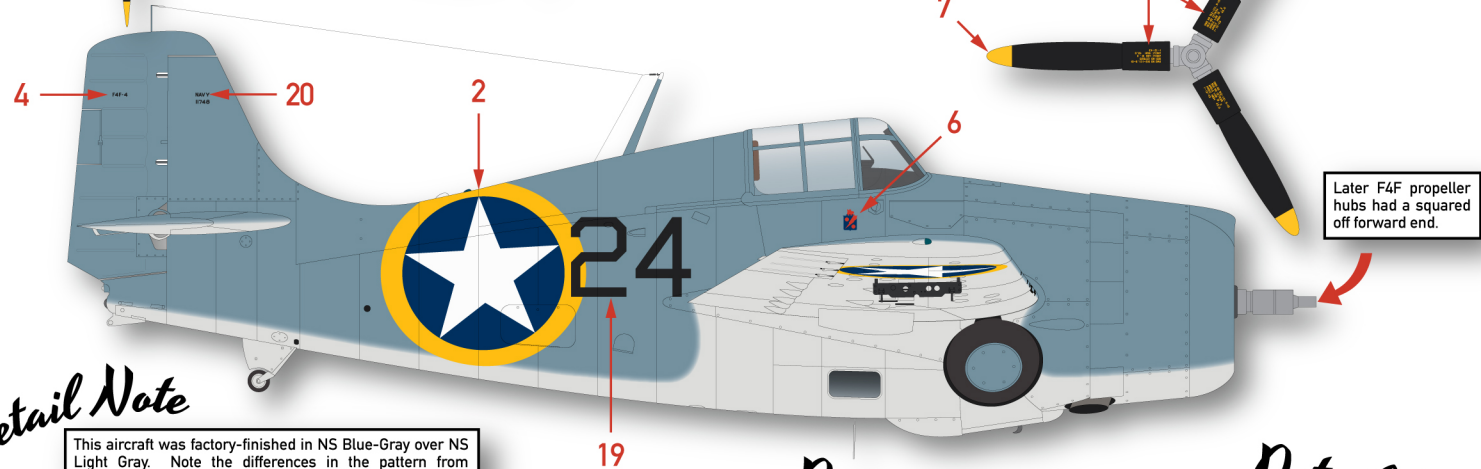
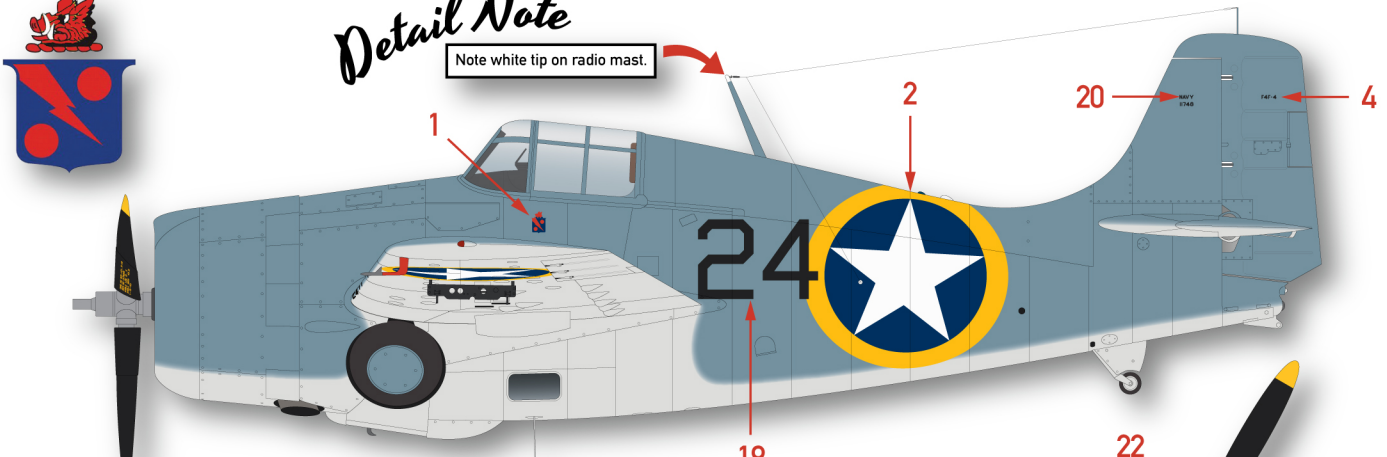
Non-Specular Blue-Gray

Non-Specular Light Gray



Detail Note

Note white tip on radio mast.



Detail Note

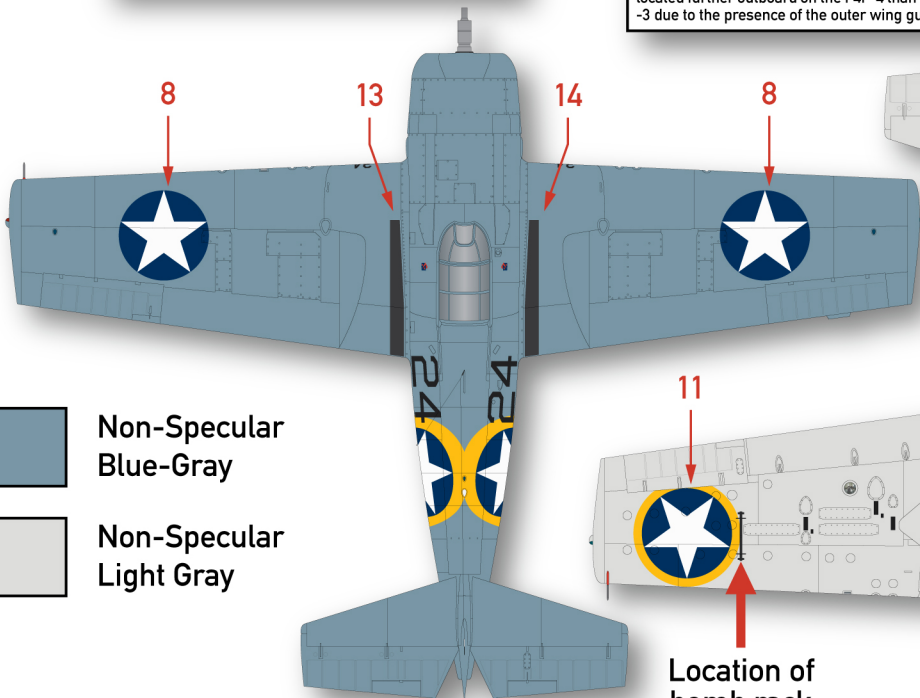
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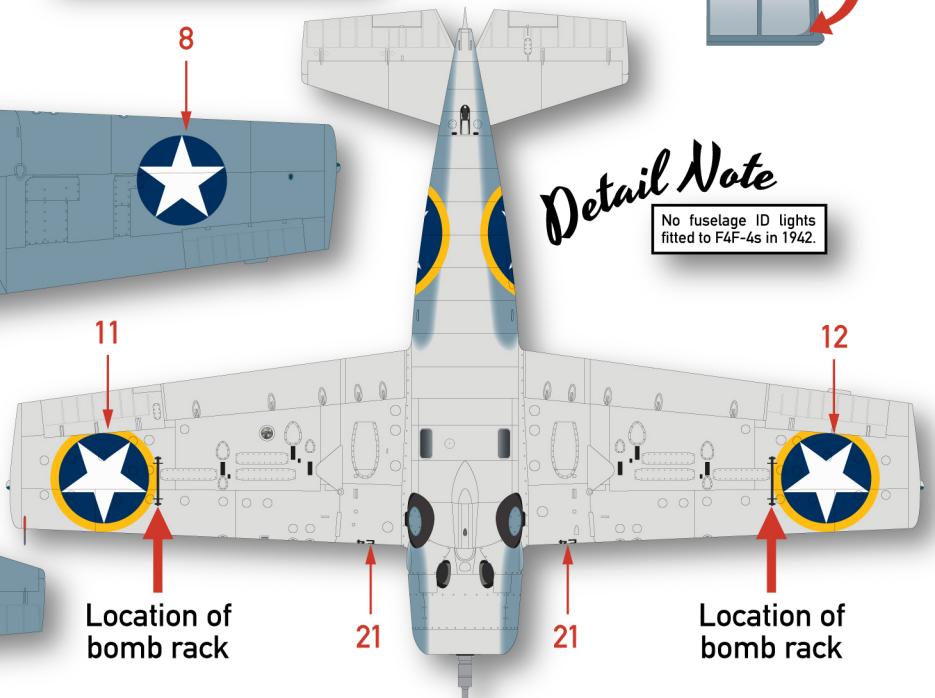
Detail Note


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Detail Note

No fuselage ID lights fitted to F4F-4s in 1942.



 Non-Specular Blue-Gray

 Non-Specular Light Gray

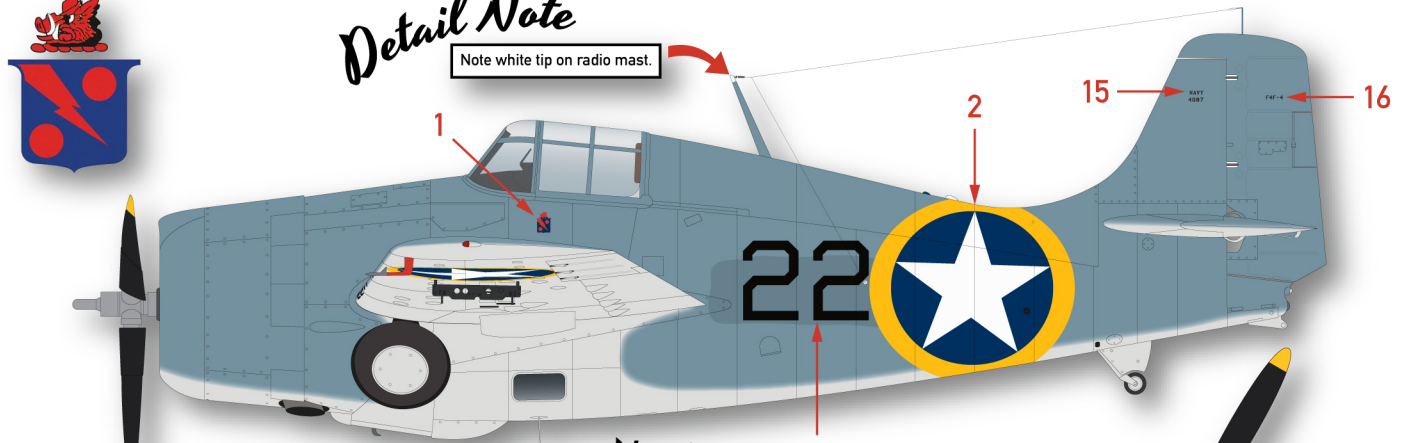
Location of bomb rack

Location of bomb rack



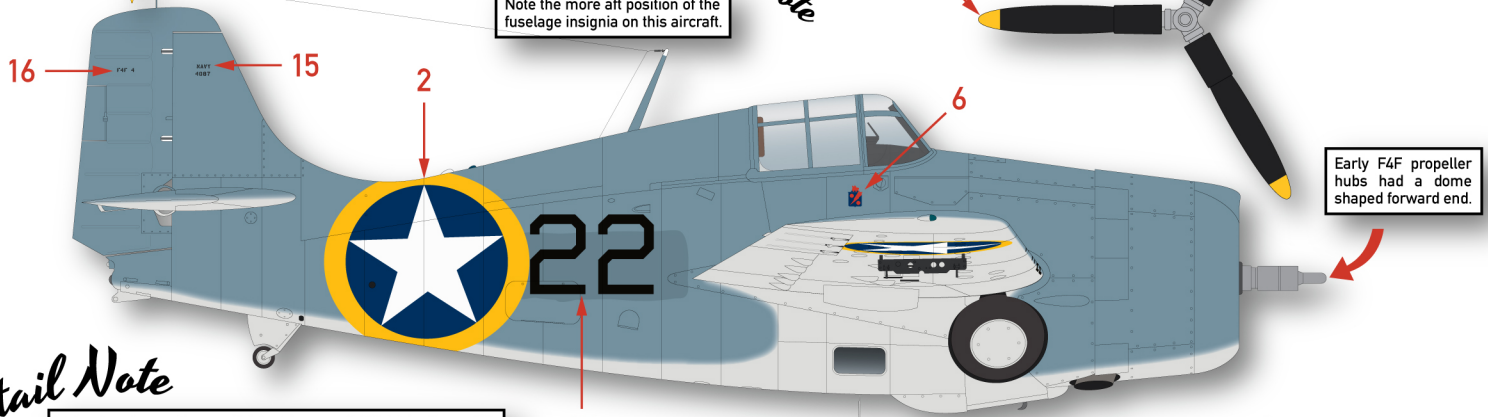
Detail Note

Note white tip on radio mast.



Markings Note

Note the more aft position of the fuselage insignia on this aircraft.



Early F4F propeller hubs had a dome shaped forward end.

Detail Note

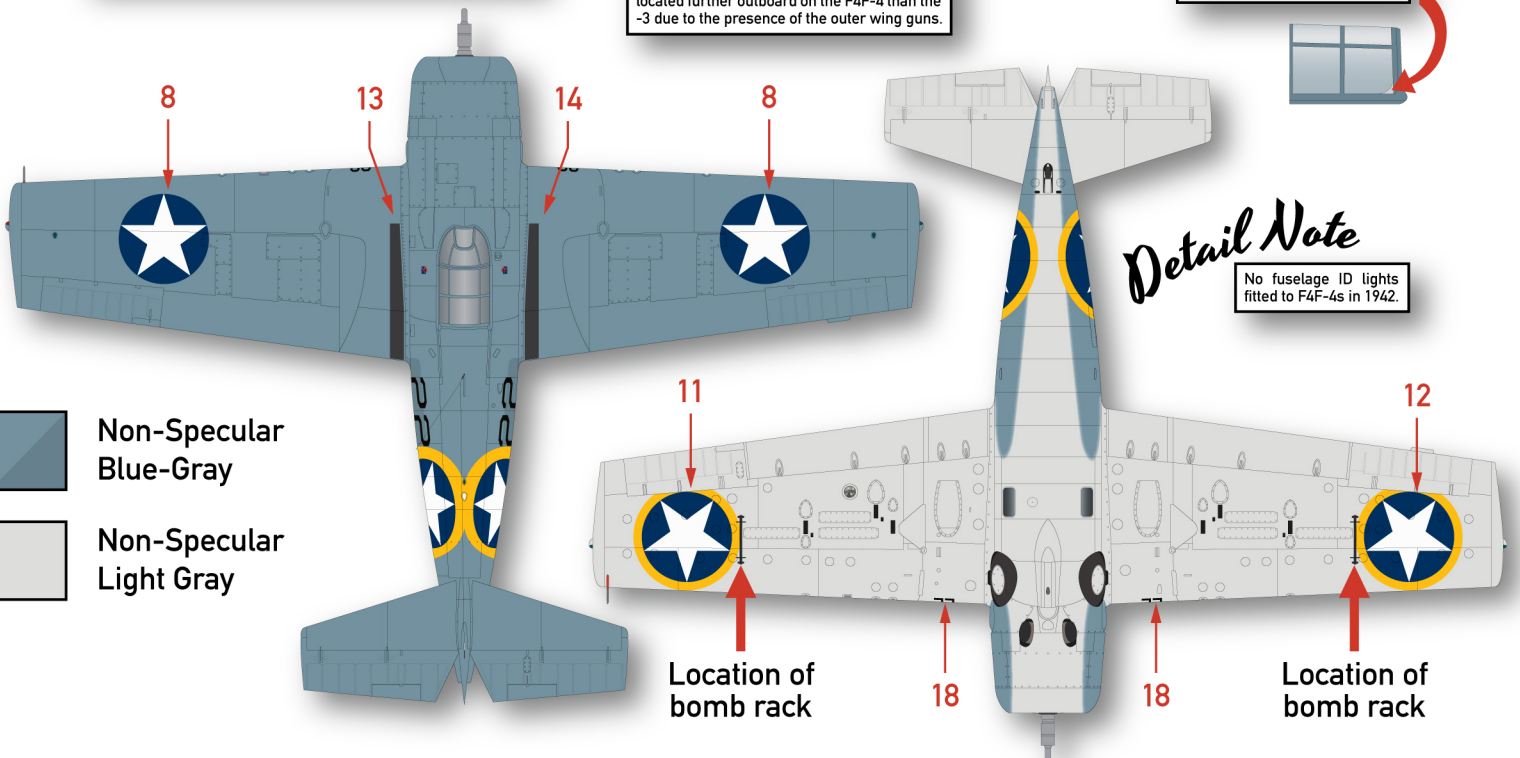
This aircraft was factory-finished in overall NS Light Gray. NS Blue-Gray was applied after delivery. Note the NS Light Gray wheel covers and the darker patches of NS Blue-Gray covering the previous "41-F-22" codes. Also note the red pitot mast - common to all F4F-4s. Cockpit was Bronze Green, and the cowling interior and wheel bay were Grumman light grey (almost off-white).

Detail Note

VF-41 Wildcats carried wing bomb racks during Operation Torch missions. They were located further outboard on the F4F-4 than the -3 due to the presence of the outer wing guns.

Detail Note

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



Detail Note

No fuselage ID lights fitted to F4F-4s in 1942.

Non-Specular Blue-Gray

Non-Specular Light Gray

Location of bomb rack

Location of bomb rack

Operation Torch

8 November 1942

A high-level meeting of Allied commanders held in London in late July 1942 ultimately led to the plan to invade French-held North Africa. US commanders were strongly opposed, preferring instead to go for an invasion of Europe later in the year. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill insisted on a landing in North Africa in order to put pressure on the German Afrika Korps and relieve British forces based in Egypt. Ultimately the plan for a North Africa invasion won out, and Operation Torch was born.

A complicating factor was the consideration of how the Vichy French forces occupying the planned invasion area in Morocco would react to an Allied invasion. Some commanders believed they would refuse to fight their former allies, while others - who turned out to be right - believed that the French would hold a grudge about the perception that they had been abandoned by the British in 1940. Many Vichy French pilots based in North Africa were veterans of the fierce combat against the Luftwaffe in 1940. They were equipped with a rather ragtag collection of Curtiss Hawk 75s and various French types, but they were well trained and highly motivated to protect French colonies on the African continent.

The American invasion force was centered around the largest US aircraft carrier in the Atlantic, USS Ranger (CV-4), with her two squadrons of F4F Wildcats, VF-9 and VF-41. Ranger was the first US carrier built as a carrier from the keel up, but she was much smaller than other fleet carriers of the day. But in late 1942 she was the only fleet carrier available in the Atlantic, so with four escort carriers and various supporting warships, the fleet headed toward the coast of Morocco.

In order to quickly distinguish the two Wildcat squadrons, VF-9 retained the traditional style of aircraft numbers (ex: 9-F-18), while VF-41's Wildcats had their "F" codes overpainted with fresh Blue-Gray, and a much larger two-digit number applied. Also of note are the yellow rings around the fuselage and lower wing insignias added especially for Torch.

At 0615 on 8 November 1942, some 30 miles northwest of Casablanca, French Morocco, Ranger and her escorts launched aircraft to cover amphibious landings at three places along the coast, and Operation Torch officially began. Ranger's two F4F squadrons, after having been shot at by their own escort vessels enroute to the Moroccan coast, soon encountered fierce Vichy French resistance, quashing any idea that Vichy forces would welcome the invasion. VF-41's Lt. Maynard Furney, flying F4F-4 #21, and Lt (jg) Charles "Windy"



Ranger's F4Fs having their guns tested prior to the invasion of North Africa in early November 1942. VF-41 adopted the large fuselage numbers to differentiate its aircraft from those of VF-9, which kept the pre-war style identifiers. Note the overpainted "41-F-22" on BuNo 4087, while its sister "21" lacks it. Perhaps it was a replacement that had not been issued to a squadron prior to joining VF-41.

Shields, flying #22, attacked Cazes airfield. Vichy French fighters from GC II/5 rose to meet them, most of them flying American made Curtiss Hawk H-75s, with the rest flying Dewotine D.520s. In the melée that followed, Grumman fighters tangled with Curtiss fighters, both sides exacting a heavy toll. Shields claimed two H-75s shot down. He may have also destroyed a D.520 and a Douglas DB-7 trying to take off before he, too was shot down. Shields was able to bail out and was interned in Casablanca before being repatriated a short time later. Shields gained one more victory (a Ki-61 Tony) while flying F6F Hellcats with VF-4 in the Pacific.

Rounding out the fourth section was F4F-4 BuNo 11748 #24 flown by Ensign Will "Dub" Taylor. Taylor claimed a D.520. We will hear more about "Dub" in the section on Operation Leader.

The leader of VF-41's third section was Lt George H. "Spanky" Carter in Wildcat #17 BuNo 11703. Carter dropped his two AN-M-54 incendiaries near a DB-7 that appeared to be refueling, but saw no fires. Carter continued to strafe Cazes airfield and made an aerial claim against an H-75 before he, too was shot down. An eyewitness claimed the French pilot circled "Spanky's" Wildcat as it headed down as if to make sure the American was uninjured. Then wagged his wings and sped off back to the fight.



Operation Torch 8 November 1942

Ranger's air group is prepared for launch early on the morning of 8 November 1942. Operation Torch represented the first test of the American doctrine of amphibious landing in the Western Hemisphere, and would provide valuable experience for the much larger landings that would follow in places like Anzio and Normandy.



A later block F4F-4 (note the NS Blue-Gray wheel covers) showing the yellow lower wing insignia surround as well as, interestingly, a bomb rack mounted much further outboard compared to our F4F-3s. We have not found documentation on this feature.

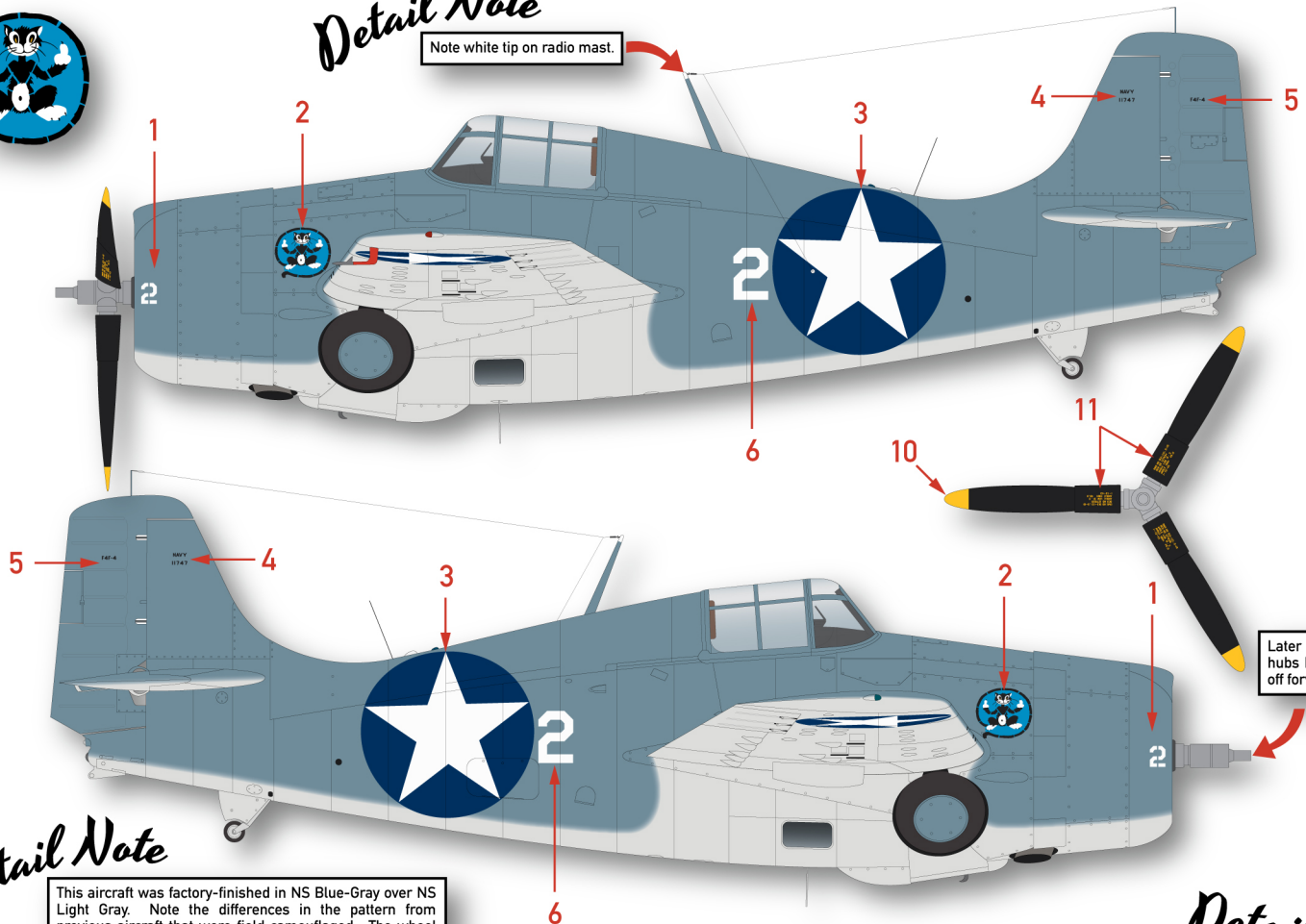
One of the early production F4F-4s showing the NS Light Gray panel inside the aft sliding canopy. Note the white tip on the antenna mast, the circular fresh air intake just below the windscreen, and the tiny VF-41 insignia on the side of the fuselage.





Detail Note

Note white tip on radio mast.



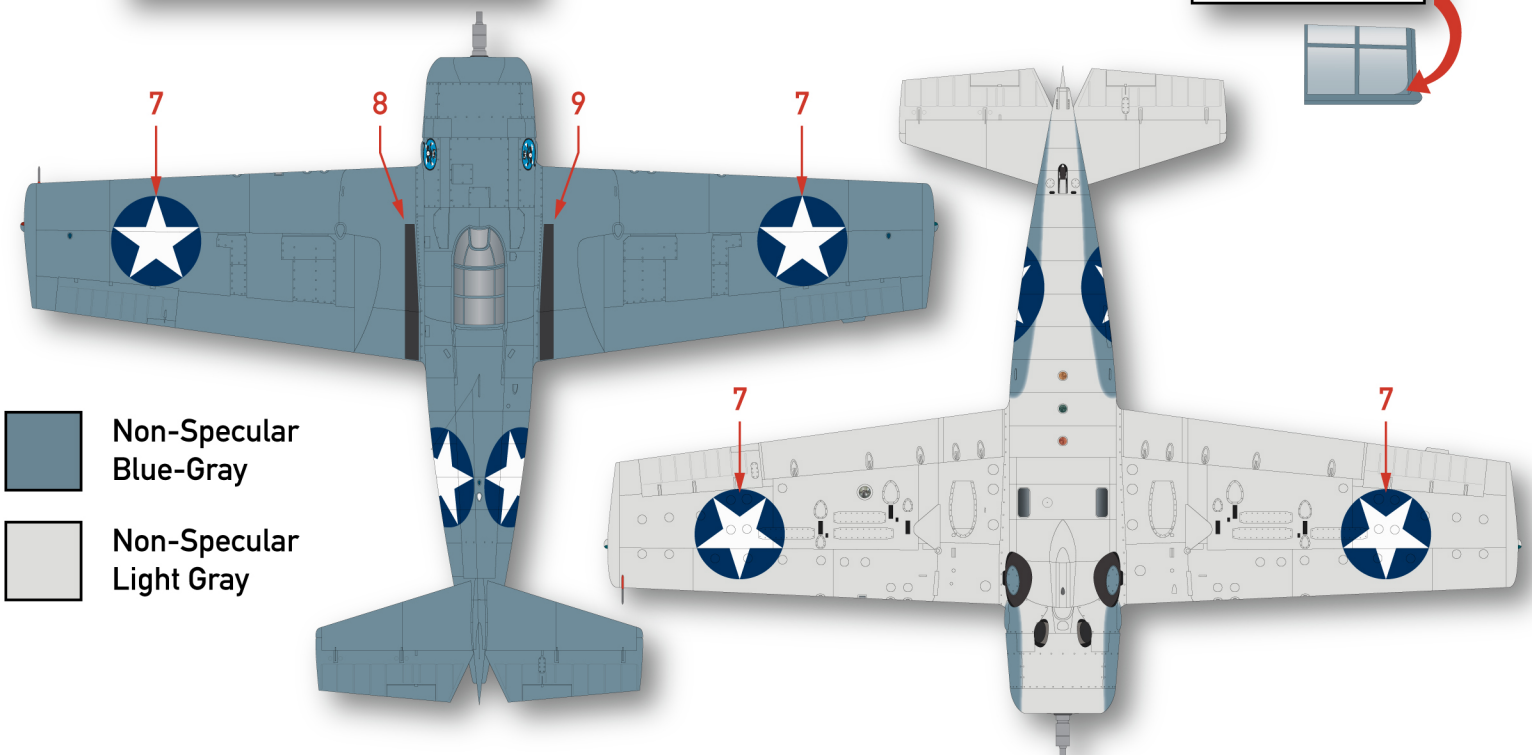
Later F4F propeller hubs had a squared off forward end.

Detail Note

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Detail Note

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Non-Specular Blue-Gray

Non-Specular Light Gray