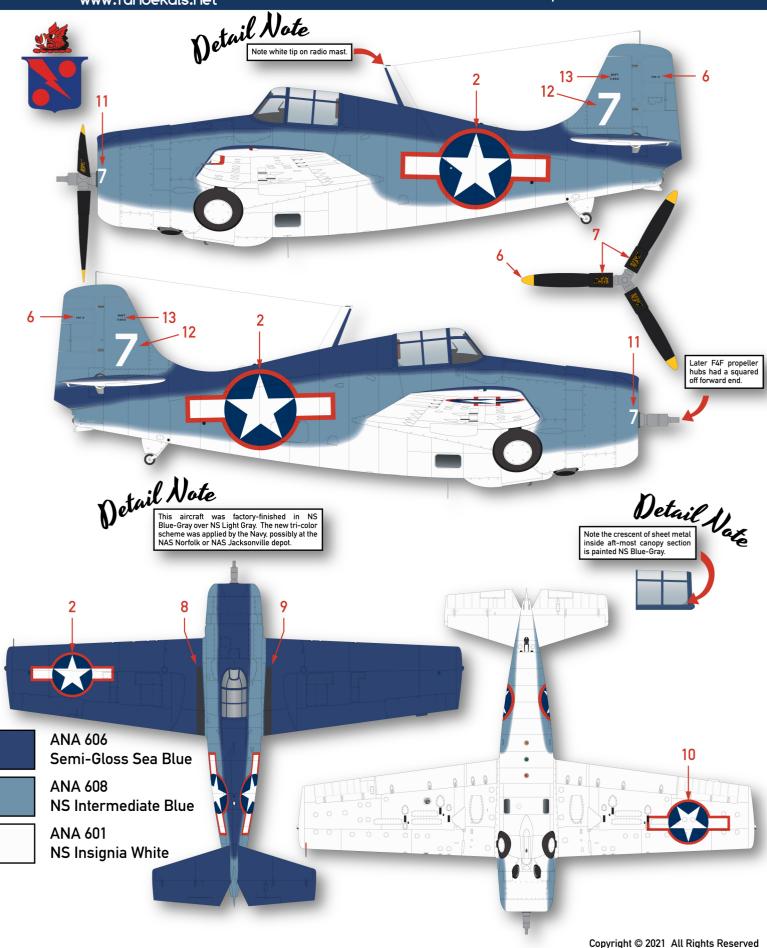
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www.fundekals.net

F4F-4, BuNo 11852

Lt (jg) George Harris, VF-4 USS Ranger, CV-4

Operation Leader, 4 October 1943



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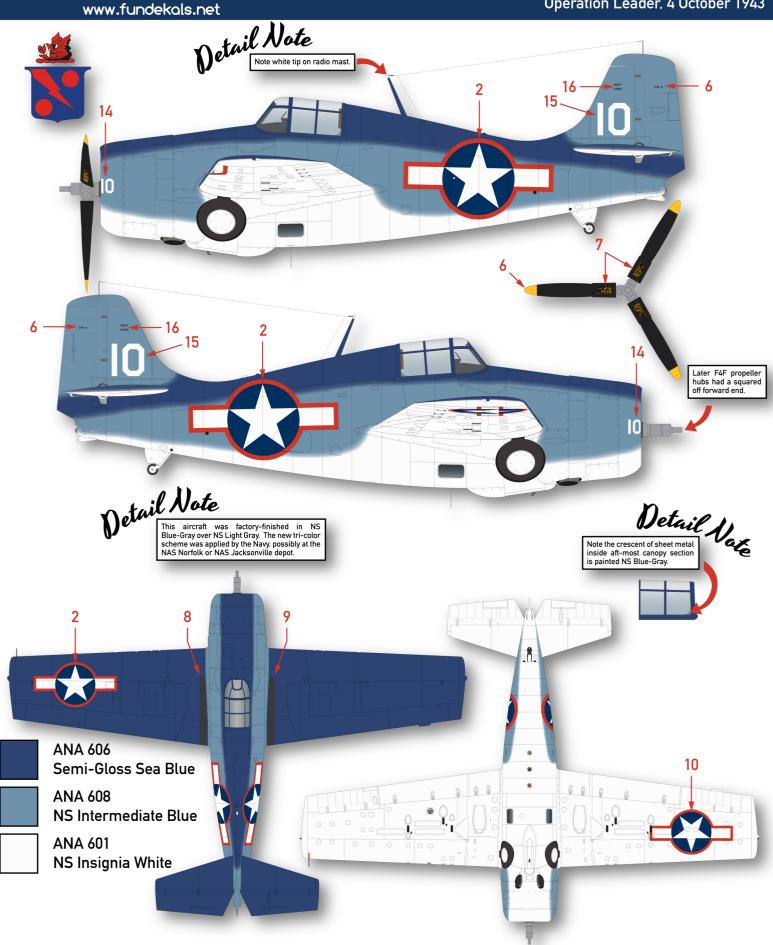
F4F-4, BuNo 11954

Lt (jg)s Will "Dub" Taylor & D.S. "Diz" Laird, VF-4

USS Ranger, CV-4

Operation Leader, 4 October 1943

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Operation Leader

SECRET

AIRCRAFT ACTION REPORT

024744

X. ATTACK ON ENEMY SHIPS OR GROUND OBJECTIVES

Not applicable.

XI. TARGETS, RESULTS OF ATTACK

Not applicable.

XII. TACTICAL AND OPERATIONAL DATA

At 1427-1430 (GCT), seven F4F-4's teck off from U.S.S. RANGER as Combat Air Patrol cour Task Forse in connection with Operation "LEADER". (Fight F4F-4's had been so tood on the flight dock, but one aircraft received a "down" and was unable to take off.) The aircraft were in two divisions, one composed of four planes and .d by Lt. E.F. Craig, the other composed of three planes and led by Lt. E.N. Seiler. Lamediately after take-off the F4F-4's assumed Combat Air Patrol over the Task Force at an altitude of 1000 feet.

At 1445 (GCT) the division led by Lt. Craig was vectored 540 degrees and then 190 degrees to an unidentified aircraft approximately twenty-two miles from the earrier. At 1458 (GCT) Lt. (jg) B.N. Mayhow, flying at approximately 6000 foot, sighted a Ja-88 ducking in and out of a cloud formation at about 3000 foet. Lt. (jg) Mayhow made a high side attack firing a long burst from full to half deflection. Smoke was observed coming from the port engine of the Ju-88 after this attack. Lt. (jg) D.S. Laird made a similar attack immediately following 10. (jg) Mayhow and statos that he obtained hits. The enemy turned toward the attackers, and a second rum was made on the Ju-88 by the same two F4F-41. jg) Laird made a high side run on the enemy's starboard side and Lt. (jg) Laird made a high side run on the enemy's pert side. Following this attack the Ju-88 disappeared into a cloud. The F4F-4's maneuvered to intercept it when it emerged, but discovered that the Ju-88 had crashed into the sea. The splash was observed as was also a large ring of flame on the water where the aircraft pinged. During the attack the dorsal turnet of the Ju-88 was seen to return fire. No survivors from the Ju-88 were seen by the participating pilots. After the destruction of the Ju-88, the F4F-4's resumed combat Air Fatrol.

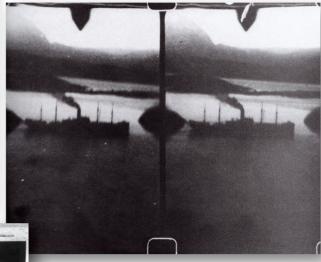
At 1510 (GCT) the sarrier attempted to vector Lt. Seiler's division to an oridantified airoraft. Though Lt. Seiler received the vector he was unable to asknowledge because his transmitter was out, and the carrier then vectored for Craig's division. On avector of 115 degrees thirteen miles distant from the carrier a He-115 was sighted flying in a rain squall at an altitude of approximately 200 feet. Upon contact the He-115 made a 180 degree left turn.

At 1514 (GCT), the F4F-4's attacked. Lt. Craig same in first, followed at close interval by Lt. (jg) Mayhow, Ensign LlA. Hensloy, and Lt. (jg) Laird, all making a team rum on the enemy's port side. The pert engine of the He-115 was seen to sawking after Lt. Craig fired, and burst into flames by the time Lt. (jg) Laird's attack was in progress. A second attack on the He-115 was in progress when the enemy aircraft crashed into the sea. The plane disintegrated when it crashed. Wrockage was observed on the water. During the attack the rear-seat gunner of the He-115 returned fire. Lt. Seiler, circling the wreckage a few moments later, observed three survivors in the water, one of whom appeared to be surrounded by a pool of blood. Lt. Seiler was unable to advise the carrier of finding the survivors because of the aforementioned defective transmitter and was unable to make his wingman understand his hand signals to send the message to the ship. The survivors of the He-115 were not secovered.

Operation Leader was an attempt to counter the German fleet based in Norway, including the battleships Tirpitz and Scharnhorst, and the heavy cruiser Lützow. The British home fleet had been drained by sending ships to the Indian Ocean and the Far East, leading the Royal Navy to request backup from the U.S. Navy. USS Ranger and her battle fleet were dispatched, and sailed from Scotland on 2 October 1943 to attack the German fleet in the area near Bodø, Norway. This action would mark the first time the U.S. Navy and the F4F Wildcat would see action against the Germans directly, and remains virtually unknown to this day.

The operation was launched on 4 October 1943, with notable success. While several US aircraft were downed, but the Germans lost a disproportionate number of vessels and aircraft, and the operation was considered the first proof that the Royal Navy and the U.S. Navy could work together cooperatively in combat operations.

Until Operation Dragoon (the invasion of southern France) in 1944, Leader was the last time the U.S. Navy encountered German opposition. USS Ranger became a training carrier based in the U.S. in early 1944, and never again met the enemy in battle - the only pre-war U.S. carrier never to have seen action against the Japanese.



Above: Gun camera footage of the German freighter La Plata under attack by LCDR Moore.

Left: He-115B (W.Nr. 1866) coded K6+MH of 1./Ku.Fl.Gr. 406 piloted by Oberfeldwebel Friedhelm Schulz falls to the guns of VF-4's F4Fs.

Below: Shrapnel damage to LCDR Moore's F4F.







747-3 Details Detail Vage

Grumman produced the F4F-3 in four distinct groups. Each had its own unique configuration as shown in the illustrations below. All Grumman-built Wildcats featured Bronze Green cockpits, and Grumman's unique light grey (a very light, almost off-white color) inside the cowlings, wheel wells, and other interior areas.

F4F-3 Group A

BuNos 1848-1896 delivered to VF-4 (later VF-71) Dec 1940 - Jan 1941. Probably never used in combat.

BuNos 2512-2538 delivered to VF-71 and VF-42 Feb 41. Some used in combat. 2512, 2517, 2526, 2530, and 2537 converted to F4F-3P.

F4F-3 Group B

BuNos 3856 - 3874 delivered to VF-42 and VF-71 in Jun 1941. Never used in combat, but later used as stateside trainers.

F4F-3A Group C

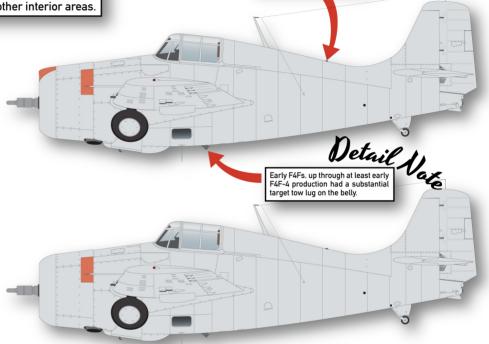
BuNos 3875 - 3969 delivered to VF-5, VF-6, and VMF-111 in May - Jun 1941. Most aircraft saw combat with VF-2, VF-3, VF-6, and VMF-212. 3918 converted to F4F-3AP photo reconnaissance fighter.

The F4F-3A had a single-stage, two-speed supercharger, and had markedly inferior performance compared to other F4Fs with two-stage superchargers.

F4F-3 Group D

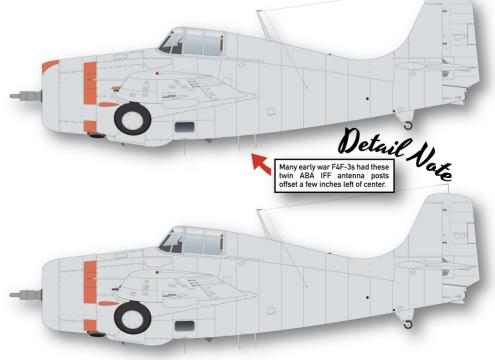
BuNos 3970-4057 delivered to VF-3, VF-5, VMF-121, VMF-211, and VMF-221 between Jul - Sep 1941.

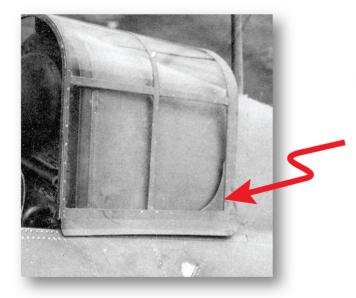
BuNos 12230-12329 delivered Jan - May 1943 and used only for stateside training.



F4F-3s had only the blue formation light on the spine. No

white light as on later variants



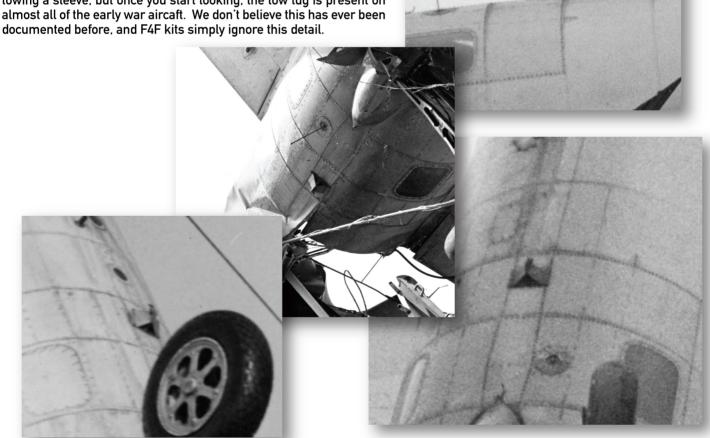


Main Canopy

The sliding canopy on F4Fs had this crescent shaped piece of sheet metal on the *inside* of the glass. It was factory finished in the external camouflage color, but when aircraft were repainted, it was usually left in the original color. Thus, on early F4F-3s that left Grumman in overall NS Light Gray, that is the color you see, even when the aircraft was repainted in Blue-Gray. On later aircraft, this part would have been NS Blue-Gray on the Atlantic ASW scheme and tri-color repaints.

Target Tow Lug

F4F-3s and at least some F4F-4s and FM-1s had a rather large, substantial target sleeve towing lug on the centerline of the lower fuselage as seen in these photos. Utility aircraft of the day were invariably obsolete biplanes that lacked the performance of the more modern fighters, so the Wildcat was recruited to provide a more realistic target speed. We've never seen a photo of an F4F actually towing a sleeve, but once you start looking, the tow lug is present on almost all of the early war aircaft. We don't believe this has ever been documented before, and F4F kits simply innove this detail



Bonus Markings!!



Photo: USN

This was just too cool not to include, even though it's not a Wildcat! We had the room, and we were printing the colors needed for the badge anyway, so why not? This is a TBF-1C of VC-13 off the USS Core, carrying the rarely seen ASW Scheme I, basically as seen on the F4F-4. Note the very softly sprayed edges between the colors - something characteristic of aircraft repainted at depot level (probably NAS Norfolk in this case). It appears the white has been carried up across the wing tips as on the F4F (note the white pitot mast on the left wing). Although it's difficult to say for certain, we might be persuaded that the upper wing insignia is slightly toned down. Note that the VC-13 badge has a blue outer ring - something seen on a few later FM-1s and FM-2s of the squadron.

Being a Grumman-built TBF, this aircraft would have had a Bronze Green cockpit interior, with the very pale grey used by Grumman on the inside of the cowling.

The aircraft lacks the rocket rails under the wings, indicating it was probably aboard USS Core during her first or second combat cruises in 1943, probably at the same time as our first three subject F4F-4s. Note that it does have the mast mounted Yagi antennas under the wings however.

