

Profile provided by Warbird Alley, with permission of Buck Wyndham

PROFILE: Grumman F8F Bearcat

(Variants/Other Names: See *History* below)

HISTORY:

The Bearcat was the last of Grumman's piston-engine carrier-based fighters. Two **XF8F-1** prototypes were ordered in November 1943, and the first of these was flown on 21 August 1944. Grumman decided once again to utilize the most powerful engine available at the time, the Pratt & Whitney R-2800 Double Wasp -- the same engine that had powered both their Hellcat and Tigercat designs. This time, the engine was fitted to the smallest, lightest airframe that could be built. This resulted in a highly maneuverable, fast airplane with a rate of climb 30% greater than the Hellcat.

Production of the **F8F-1** began just six months after the first flight of the prototype, and the first airplane was delivered to the US Navy's VF-19 squadron on 21 May 1945. The Navy's order totaled 2,033 airplanes, and Grumman contracted with General Motors to build the Bearcat under license, with the designation **F8FM-1**. Only a few Bearcats had been delivered to the Navy when the end of the war halted production. Grumman cancelled 1,258 of its Bearcats, and General Motors cancelled its entire order of 1,876. Production resumed after the war, and several variants were produced, including the **F8F-1B**, with four 20mm cannon in place of the previously-fitted 12.7mm (0.5 inch) machine guns; several night fighter variants (**F8F-1N** and **F8F-2N**); and a photo-reconnaissance version (**F8F-2P**). Production continued until May 1949.

At least 24 US Navy squadrons flew the Bearcat, some until as late as 1952, after which some were sold to the French Armee de l'Air for combat operations in Indo-China. Another 129 Bearcats were sold to the Thai Air Force.

NICKNAMES:

Beercat (Armee de l'Air)

SPECIFICATIONS (F8F-1B):

Engine: 2,100hp Pratt & Whitney R-2800-34W Double Wasp 18-cylinder radial piston engine

Weight: Empty 7,070 lbs., Max Takeoff 12,947 lbs.

Wing Span: 35ft. 10in.

Length: 28ft. 3in.

Height: 13ft. 10in.

Performance:

Maximum Speed at 19,700ft: 421mph

Cruising Speed: 163mph

Initial Climb Rate: 4,570 feet per minute

Ceiling: 38,700ft

Range: 1,105 miles

Armament:

Four 20mm cannon

Hard points for two 1,000lb bombs, or four 127mm (5-inch) rockets, or two 150-gal fuel tanks

NUMBER BUILT: 1,266

NUMBER STILL AIRWORTHY: ~10