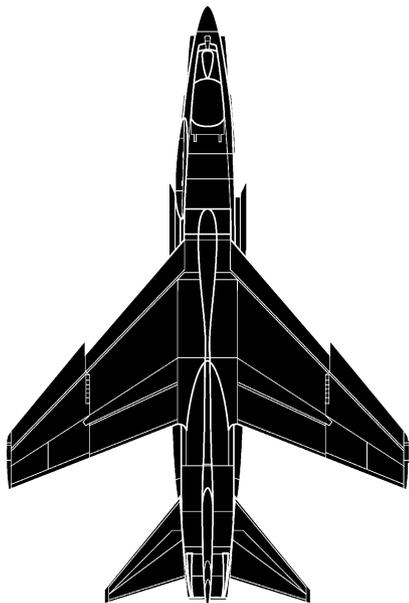


Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

F-8 Crusader



The F-8 Crusader was beloved by its Navy and Marine Corps pilots. It was the first carrier-based fighter to exceed a speed of 1,000 mph. Though intended to be a day-only, clear-weather air superiority fighter, this Vought aircraft was later given limited all-weather capability. The Crusader is often referred to as the “Last Gun Fighter.” Built around four 20 mm cannons, it was the last US fighter to rely on guns as primary armament.

The all-metal aircraft featured a unique two-position, variable-incidence wing which could be raised hydraulically seven degrees, enabling the aircraft to land and take off at low speeds while giving the pilot excellent visibility. It was not the prettiest aircraft in the fleet—Crusader featured a gaping chin inlet and a slab-sided fuselage—but it was

aerodynamically sophisticated. Features included a midspan dogtooth extension of the chord, designed to alleviate pitch-up, and wings with inboard and outboard leading edge flaps.

The aircraft gained national fame with a series of high profile record-setting flights, including one by Maj. John Glenn, who in 1957 flew supersonic from coast to coast. In 1962, the RF-8 variant played a crucial role in the Cuban Missile Crisis, providing essential low-level photographs, of Soviet and Cuban deployments. It was active primarily, however, in the Vietnam War, where its guns came in handy during close-in dogfights with North Vietnamese MiGs. The Crusader also served as a bomb truck, employed against communist forces in South Vietnam.

—Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: USMC F-8E Crusader—BN #150663—of VMF(AW) 312 (“the Checkerboards”), as it looked in late 1965.



In Brief

Designed, built by Vought ★ first flight March 25, 1955 ★ crew of one ★ one P&W J57 turbojet engine ★ number built 1,264. **Specific to F-8E:** max speed 1,120 mph ★ cruise speed 560 mph ★ max range 1,100 mi ★ armament four 20 mm cannons, two Sidewinder missiles, rocket pack, two 2,000-lb bombs or two Bullpup missiles ★ weight (max) 34,000 lb ★ span 35 ft 2 in ★ length 54 ft 6 in ★ height 15 ft 9 in.

Famous Fliers

Medal of Honor: James Stockdale. **Notables:** Dick Bellinger, Donald Engen, Paul Gillcrist, Charles Klusmann, Harold Marr, Paul Speer. **Record Setters:** John Glenn (coast to coast, three hours, 23 minutes), Duke Windsor (1,015 mph).

Interesting Facts

Originally designated the F8U ★ reputed to be an “ensign killer” for its early control difficulties ★ flew in first combat against North Vietnamese MiG-17 (April 1965) ★ posted best kill ratio (6:1) of any US fighter in Vietnam War ★ nicknamed “gator” by its crews ★ suffered from high accident rate ★ used by Marine Corps for close air support ★ enjoyed longest service (until 1987) in photo-recce variant ★ played major role in Cuban Missile Crisis ★ flown off a carrier with wings folded ★ became only aircraft to use the AIM-9C—a radar-guided Sidewinder.



Crusaders on deck, with wings raised seven degrees.