

# The History of VMFA-112

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(Photo courtesy of VMF-112 Wolfpack at Guadalcanal Website)

**Above:** Guadalcanal's Henderson Field was named in honor of Maj. Lofton R. Henderson, the commanding officer of VMSB-241 who fell while leading his squadron at Midway.

**Center of page:** VMF-112's first squadron patch bore the image of the "Wolfpack."



(Photo courtesy of VMF-112 Wolfpack at Guadalcanal Website)

The F4F Wildcat was the best fighter aircraft available to the Navy at the beginning of the war, and pilots flying the type soon evolved tactics for dealing with the more maneuverable Zero - keeping above the Zero, not attempting to dogfight, but diving to escape. If a dogfight were necessary, its sturdy construction afforded protection and enabled it to absorb a great deal of damage.



(Photo courtesy of VMF-112 Wolfpack at Guadalcanal Website)

**Above:** Lt. Jimmy Johnson points to damage caused by a Zero while over the Russell Islands.

**Right Corner:** Commanding Officer Maj. Paul J. Fontana, brought the squadron to Guadalcanal and would receive the Navy Cross for gallantry as well as the Distinguished Flying Cross.

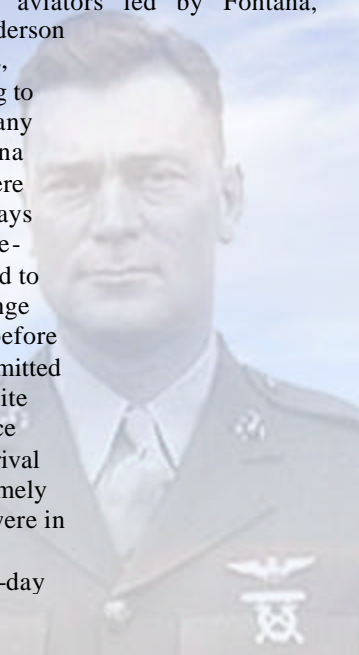
Marine Fighter Squadron 112 was commissioned four months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, on March 1, 1942, in San Diego under the command of Maj. Wilfred J. Huffman. Huffman's tenure of command, however, was relatively brief. He was relieved on May 11 by Maj. Paul J. Fontana. Over the coming months, the fledgling squadron began to slowly receive several F4F Wildcats and F2A Buffalos for training. Less than six months after the squadron's activation, the United States began its first offensive against the Japanese when the First Marine Division (Reinforced) landed on Guadalcanal and other nearby isles in the southern Solomon Islands on Aug. 7, 1942. The primary objective of the assault was the capture of an airfield the Japanese had begun to construct on Guadalcanal's northern shore.

The completion and utilization of this airfield by the Japanese would enable them to threaten the supply lines that stretched across the Pacific from the United States to Australia and New Zealand. Should the enemy succeed in severing this lifeline, any allied counterstrike in the South Pacific would be delayed indefinitely and would open the way for an assault against Australia itself. Indeed, the Imperial Japanese Navy pressed for just such an assault, but the Army resisted the Navy's plan, pleading insufficient manpower. Until the final days of the war, the Japanese Army would place a higher priority on operations in China and the presumed threat of its long-time enemy Russia than against the greater threat posed by the American offensives in the South and Central Pacific. The assault in the southern Solomons marked the opening of the protracted and bitter campaign for the island group that lay across the Coral Sea to the northeast of Australia.

The struggle for Guadalcanal quickly became a question of which side would be able to reinforce its strength on the island as the Japanese tried to build sufficient forces to drive the invaders into the sea, and the Americans clung stubbornly to their perimeter around the vital airfield. It was imperative for the Americans to complete the airfield and then to get enough aircraft on the island to defend against the daily Japanese air raids and to cut the seaborne lines of communication that allowed the enemy to land his reinforcements virtually uncontested.

The first American squadrons to reach Henderson Field were Marine Fighter Squadron 223 (VMF-223) and Marine Scout Bombing Squadron 232 (VMSB-232.) The airfield was named in honor of Maj. Lofton R. Henderson, the commanding officer of VMSB-241 who fell while leading his squadron at Midway. These squadrons arrived on Aug. 20, 1942 and were followed ten days later by VMF-224 and VMSB-231. The constant grind of combat, the appalling living conditions and a host of exotic tropical maladies quickly sapped the strength of the squadrons on the island, but the Americans were determined to hold Guadalcanal. As a result, a constant stream of groups and squadrons were dispatched to the South Pacific, including Marine Aircraft Group 11 (MAG-11), of which VMF-112 was a component. Despite the relatively brief training period of virtually all the squadrons of the group, events in the Solomons required its dispatch into the combat area. All things considered, its combat readiness would have to have been considered hardly more than marginal at best, but the Japanese were not disposed to give the allies a respite. MAG-11, minus aircraft, sailed from San Diego on Oct. 15, 1942 aboard S.S. Lurline, bound for Noumea.

As MAG-11 arrived at its destination, the former luxury liner was unloaded, and in place of the men of the newly arrived group, the tired survivors of the ordeal of Guadalcanal rapidly took their places as the ship prepared to return them to San Diego. The first elements of the squadron, ten aviators led by Fontana, arrived at Henderson Field on Nov. 2, 1944. Expecting to see combat at any moment, Fontana and his men were granted nine days to become somewhat acclimated to their new, strange surroundings before they were committed to action. Despite their initial grace period, their arrival proved to be timely because they were in place for the climactic, three-day





Naval Battle of Guadalcanal fought on Nov. 13, 14 and 15. They were a welcome addition to the hard-pressed "Cactus Air Force," as the aviation units based on the island were collectively known. The coming engagement was a battle that involved all elements of the forces of their respective nations. While the action is remembered primarily for thunderous, bloody and confused naval engagements during the nights of Nov. 13 and 15, it was the power of the Cactus Air Force that smashed the largest enemy convoy to attempt to bring reinforcements and supplies to the island. It was these same aircraft that administered the coupe de grace to H.I.J.M.S. Hiei, the first Japanese battleship to be sunk by American forces in World War II.

Their first combat did not go well for VMF-112. Some of its members were among those scrambled from Henderson Field to intercept an enemy air raid against the supply ships that arrived at Guadalcanal shortly after dawn on Nov. 11, loaded with much-needed supplies and Marine aviation technical personnel. Heavy cloud cover caused the intercepting F4F Wildcats to miss the Japanese aircraft. Unfortunately, these same clouds afforded the escorting enemy fighters an opportunity to ambush a portion of the American fighter force, and the Japanese made the most of it. They shot down a half-dozen, killing four pilots, including Master Technical Sgt. William H. Cochran, Jr., of VMF-112.

Cochran's death would be avenged that same afternoon, however. The enemy was desperate to smash the American reinforcement convoy. The morning attack had scored some near misses against the transports but had failed to inflict serious damage, but more attacks would follow. The afternoon strike was composed of torpedo-armed, land-attack aircraft and their fighter escorts. Provided with ample warning by the coast watchers and by radar, the Americans prepared to receive the enemy. Sixteen American fighters waited at high altitude, and Fontana led half that number at a lower altitude. The same clouds that had so badly hampered the effectiveness of the intercepting fighters earlier in the day again allowed the enemy to approach their targets unseen. However, when they emerged from their milky shield at 500 feet, they were some distance from their intended victims.

The F4Fs led by the commander of VMF-112 were the first to get at the enemy aircraft, but those from high altitude were able to gain tremendous speed in their dives and engaged shortly after those under Fontana. The clouds had forced the escorting enemy fighters to remain close to the strike aircraft, thereby depriving them of any altitude advantage. At altitudes that ranged from 50 to 500 feet, the

American fighters inflicted grievous wounds on the enemy. Amid the black bursts from the ships' heavy anti-aircraft batteries and glowing tracers from their lighter automatic weapons, the fighters sent one Japanese aircraft after another splashing headlong into Sealark Channel, leaving only scattered flotsam and streaks of flaming gasoline to mark their graves. The defending fighters quickly ran out of targets and claimed two-dozen enemy aircraft destroyed. In addition, the ships' wildly optimistic gunners claimed a whopping 43 enemy aircraft shot down. Actual enemy losses were nowhere near that high, and most of those that fell were victims of the American fighters. Despite the wildly enthusiastic claims, the enemy had in fact suffered crippling losses. Of the 16 torpedo bombers that had attacked the ships, 11 were shot down or ditched as they attempted to stagger back to their base. Of the five that did manage to return, many carried dead or wounded crewmen and none ever flew again. At least one of their escorting fighters was shot down also. These losses were so severe that the enemy's potent torpedo armed land attack aircraft were reduced to mere spectators in the climactic battle to come. Among the squadron's pilots that led the early scoring were Fontana with three kills in two days and Lt. Jefferson J. DeBlanc, whose victories mounted at a steady pace.

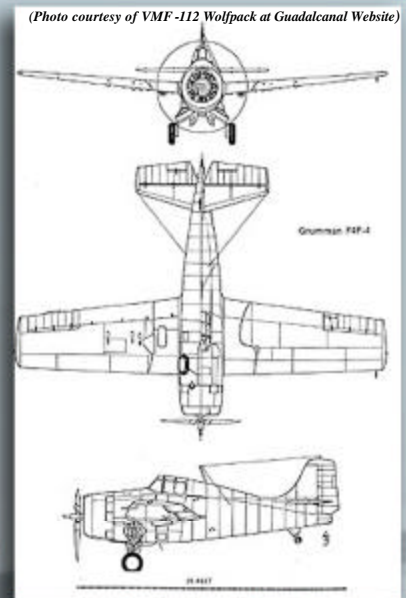
The naval battle opened during the early morning hours of Nov. 13, when an outnumbered American surface force collided headlong with a Japanese force centered around two battleships. The result was one of the most confused and bloody surface engagements of the war. In exchange for a Japanese battleship crippled, a destroyer sunk and several other ships damaged, the Americans lost four destroyers sunk, a light cruiser scuttled and a two heavy cruisers heavily damaged. Another damaged American light cruiser fell victim to a submarine as she attempted to withdraw from the battle area the following day. This high price purchased a night free from a Japanese bombardment of the vital airfield, and the coming of dawn would prove how costly their failure would be to the enemy.

During the second day of the battle, the fighters of the Cactus Air Force were heavily engaged in swirling combat above the Japanese convoy as it continued southeastward down the Slot toward the island. VMF-112's first mission of what would prove to be a long, hectic day was an early morning combat air patrol led by 2nd Lt. Archie G. Donahue, sent aloft in response to a radar contact. The aircraft detected by the American radar was an enemy fighter patrol dispatched to cover the battered Hiei as she struggled to clear the area. Initially, the Americans were unaware to the serious plight of the enemy dreadnought.



(Photo courtesy of VMF-112 Wolfpack at Guadalcanal Website)

*The constant grind of combat, the appalling living conditions and a host of exotic tropical maladies quickly sapped the strength of the squadrons on the island, but Marines like Jeff DeBlanc (left) and Jack Maas were determined to hold Guadalcanal.*



(Photo courtesy of VMF-112 Wolfpack at Guadalcanal Website)

### **Grumman F4F-4 Hellcat**

**Engine:** Pratt & Whitney R-1830 radial, 1,200hp

**Armament:** Six 5-inch machine guns and two 100 pound bombs

**Maximum speed:** 328 mph at 21,000 feet;

**Climb:** 2,265 feet per minute

**Ceiling:** 37,500 feet

**Range:** 845 miles  
**Weights empty/loaded:** 5,342/8,152 pounds

**Span:** 38 feet; **Length:** 28 feet 9 inches



*(Photo courtesy of VMF-112 Wolfpack at Guadalcanal Website)*



*Lt. Jefferson J. DeBlanc would go on to fight in several other Marine fighter squadrons and would be honored with the Distinguished Flying Cross, five Air Medals, and Purple Heart.*



*(Photo courtesy of VMF-112 Wolfpack at Guadalcanal Website)*

*Maj. Paul Fontana would receive the Navy Cross, seen here, for gallantry as well as the Distinguished Flying Cross.*

Fearing another attempt to bombard the airfield into impotence, the wounded battleship received more attention from the Americans than was warranted. Far from attempting to bring the airfield under her guns, she was desperately attempting to escape. Due to her proximity to Henderson Field and the belief that she was attempting to shell the field, she was the target of many of the early strikes. Donahue's three F4Fs divided their time between searching for the enemy aircraft detected by radar and attempting to provide cover for the strike aircraft swarming after Hiei. As a result, they failed to notice enemy aircraft above them until it was almost too late. The Marines were bounced by five Japanese Zeros, but the enemy's first pass missed their intended victims, and a fierce fight quickly developed at low altitude. The enemy paid for the failure to take advantage of their initially favorable tactical position, and Donahue and 2nd Lt. Howard W. Bollman each claimed a Zero. Emerging from that fight, Donahue's trio joined with other Marine fighters covering a torpedo strike against the wounded battleship. Jumped by Japanese fighters as they made their runs, the torpedo bombers screamed for help. As the Japanese fighters scattered to hunt the strike aircraft, they were ambushed by the Marine fighters. Donahue, Bollman and 2nd Lt. Wayne W. Laird received credit for a Zero apiece, with Laird and a pilot from VMF-122 sharing credit for a fourth enemy fighter. Marine claims amounted to nine in this brief fight. Again, the Japanese paid a stiff price for their failure to make the most of an initially advantageous tactical position. Hiei received more damage from torpedo hits, and her fate was sealed.

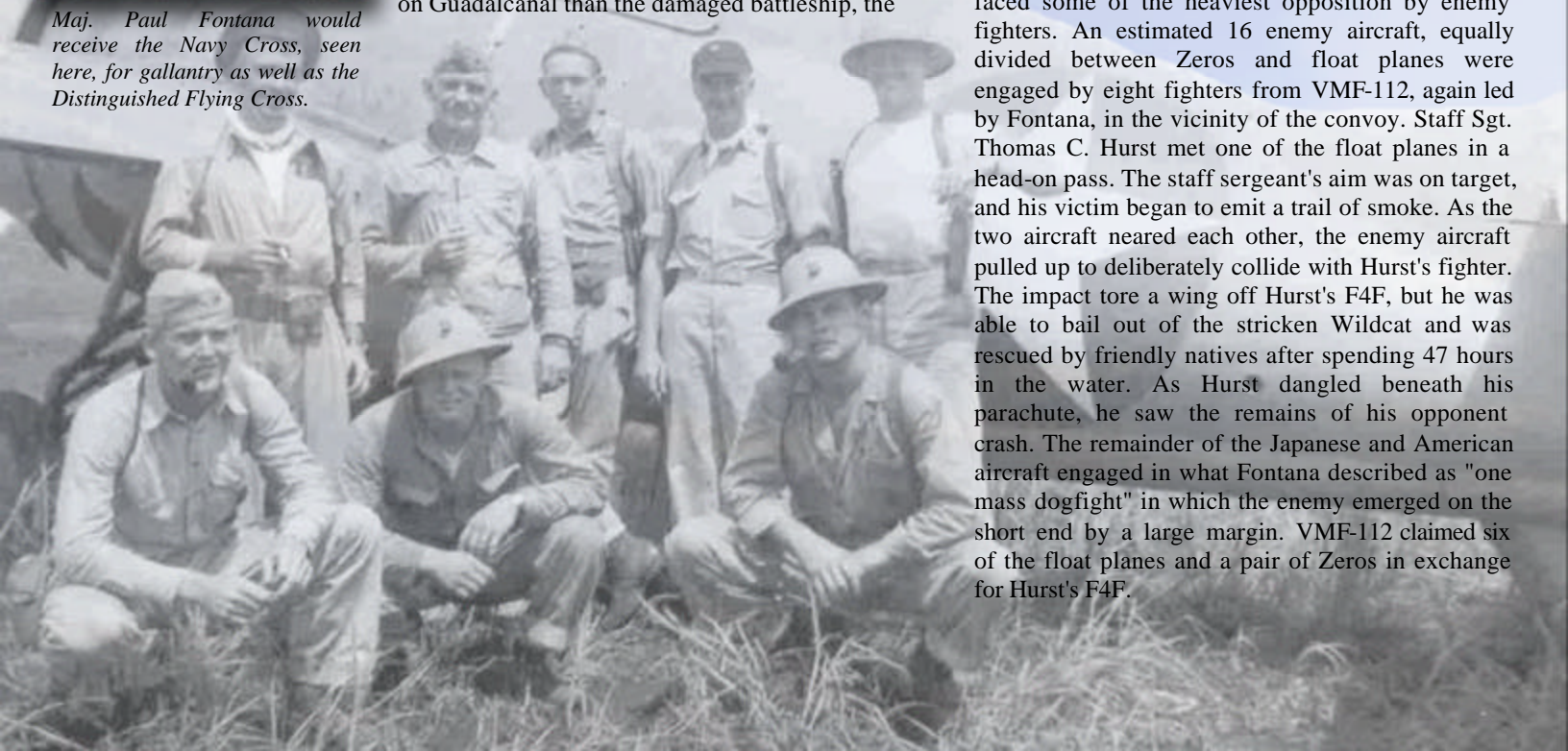
As the strikes were taking place, reports were received from the scouts dispatched northwestward up the Slot to search for the enemy reinforcement convoy. Correctly determining the convoy represented far greater danger to American positions on Guadalcanal than the damaged battleship, the

first of several attacks against the transport group was prepared.

At 11:00 a.m., the first aircraft of a 38-plane strike climbed into the air above Henderson Field. It circled as the remainder of the strike aircraft joined into formation and set off after the enemy. Included in the total were a dozen fighters, including eight F4Fs of VMF-112 led by Capt. Robert B. Fraser. As the strike force reached the convoy and prepared to attack, it was attacked from above by the enemy combat air patrol of a half-dozen Zeros. The oncoming enemy fighters were sighted by 2nd Lt. James G. Percy, who alerted Fraser to the danger from above. The Marines broke upwards into the enemy, setting up a head-on firing pass for both groups of fighters. The comparatively lightly armed and armored Zeros were badly overmatched by the rugged construction and heavy battery of six 50-caliber guns of the Wildcats, and as the formations passed through each other, several of the enemy were destroyed or damaged.

Throughout the day, the Americans hammered the convoy as it doggedly continued toward its objective despite the mauling it received. While some among the Americans may have questioned the enemy's tactics, none could question the courage or tenacity of the Japanese. Each strike inflicted more and more damage. Ships were torn apart by bomb and torpedo hits, drifted dead in the water with dead men manning their engineering spaces or limped northwestward back toward their bases, damaged too heavily to continue. When no enemy fighters were present to challenge the strike aircraft, which was most frequently the case, the American fighter escorts covered the strike aircraft by thoroughly strafing the enemy to kill or distract the ships' anti-aircraft gunners.

One of the last and heaviest strikes of the day faced some of the heaviest opposition by enemy fighters. An estimated 16 enemy aircraft, equally divided between Zeros and float planes were engaged by eight fighters from VMF-112, again led by Fontana, in the vicinity of the convoy. Staff Sgt. Thomas C. Hurst met one of the float planes in a head-on pass. The staff sergeant's aim was on target, and his victim began to emit a trail of smoke. As the two aircraft neared each other, the enemy aircraft pulled up to deliberately collide with Hurst's fighter. The impact tore a wing off Hurst's F4F, but he was able to bail out of the stricken Wildcat and was rescued by friendly natives after spending 47 hours in the water. As Hurst dangled beneath his parachute, he saw the remains of his opponent crash. The remainder of the Japanese and American aircraft engaged in what Fontana described as "one mass dogfight" in which the enemy emerged on the short end by a large margin. VMF-112 claimed six of the float planes and a pair of Zeros in exchange for Hurst's F4F.





Darkness finally brought an end to the convoy's ordeal. By that time, only four enemy transports remained of the 11 that had sailed so confidently from the Shortlands only a few days earlier. These four were ordered beached north of the American positions on Guadalcanal in a final effort to deliver a portion of the supplies and reinforcements so badly needed by the Japanese ashore. The following day, these four were mercilessly bombed, strafed and shelled until they were little more than gutted wrecks whose remains are visible today, more than 60 years after the great battle. In addition to the ships themselves, most of their supplies were destroyed by the incessant American attacks.

After their November defeat, the Japanese never again made a serious attempt to drive the American forces from the island. Instead, they tacitly admitted defeat and began planning to withdraw their surviving forces from "Starvation Island," as Guadalcanal became known among the Japanese. In recognition of its valor and its contributions to victory during its service on Guadalcanal, VMF-112 was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for the period Aug. 7 through December 9, 1942. In addition, Maj. Fontana received a well-deserved Navy Cross for his outstanding leadership and personal courage during the critical Naval Battle of Guadalcanal.

Shortly after the turn of the New Year of 1943, the Americans began to strike northwestward at the enemy bases and shipping further to the north in the island chain. On Jan. 31, a strike was launched against enemy shipping off the island of Kolombangara in the Central Solomons. Escorting the strike was a six-plane division of VMF-112 led by the previously mentioned Lt. DeBlanc. Japanese fighters attempted to intercept the bombers but were engaged by VMF-112 before they could intercept the strike aircraft. During the ensuing fight, two Zeros were claimed while the remainder was prevented from interfering with the bombers. As the strike aircraft recovered from their attacks, they were beset by a number of Rufes, the nimble, float-equipped version of the Zero. Responding to the calls for help from the strike aircraft, DeBlanc disengaged from the fight with the Zeros and, rolling his aircraft into a dive, attacked the float planes. The sudden appearance of the Wildcat in their midst distracted the Rufes and allowed the strike aircraft to withdraw without being molested any further. At this point, DeBlanc could have joined the bombers as they rapidly departed for Guadalcanal. Instead, he calculated the odds and elected to stay and fight. He soon added the scalps of three Rufes to the three kills, with which he was credited during the previous two months, but his aircraft sustained moderate damage in the process, and he broke off the

engagement to set a course for home.

Almost as soon as he was settled on a course for Guadalcanal, he was jumped by two Zeros, perhaps survivors of the earlier melee at higher altitude. DeBlanc flamed the two enemy aircraft, but his F4F was fatally damaged in return. He bailed out of his rapidly disintegrating fighter at low altitude and landed in the water near the Japanese-held island of Kolombangara. He reached the shore safely and was rescued by friendly natives who turned DeBlanc and another downed Marine aviator over to an allied coastwatcher on nearby Vella Lavella. The two were rescued and returned to Guadalcanal. For his actions that day, DeBlanc received the Medal of Honor.

The following day, VMF-112 was involved in another stiff fight when an enemy force of five dive-bombers and 30 fighters struck American shipping that lay off Savo Island. The raid cost the Navy U.S.S. DeHaven (DD-469), but in return, the defending fighters claimed twenty-one of the enemy. Capt. Robert B. Fraser and Lt. Gilbert Percy of VMF-112 claimed three and four kills respectively. Both would become aces with six kills, and Fraser later would command the squadron.

Within a few days, VMF-112 was withdrawn from Guadalcanal to Espiritu Santo for a brief respite from the rigors of combat in the Solomons. There it began to transition from the Grumman F4F-4 Wildcat that had served it so well during its combat tour on Guadalcanal to the new Vought F4U-1 Corsair, the aircraft that it would fly for the remainder of its World War II service. It should be noted that while it is somewhat unusual for a squadron to transition to a new aircraft in a forward area, the press of combat overrode the normal course of events. The superiority of the Corsair over the Wildcat and its Japanese opponents was so great that virtually all the Marine F4F-equipped squadrons that remained in the Solomons transitioned to their new aircraft in the New Hebrides.

During the late spring and early summer, a policy of rotation of squadron commanders was instituted within Solomons Fighter Command. As a result, Fontana stepped down from the leadership of VMF-112 on March 27, 1943, and Fraser assumed command the following day. In turn, Maj. Herman W. Hansen relieved Fraser on July 9, 1943. After slightly more than two weeks at the helm of the squadron, Maj. Gregory "Pappy" Boyington, who would go on to command the famous "Black Sheep Squadron" of VMF-214, relieved Hansen on July 26. Hansen then relieved Boyington on August 12 and would remain in command of VMF-112 for more than two years.



*(Photo courtesy of VMF-112 Wolfpack at Guadalcanal Website)*

*Although it was highly irregular for a unit to transition aircraft during a combat tour, the Wolfpack traded its Wildcats for the new Vought F4U-1 Corsair during a quick withdrawal from Guadalcanal to Espiritu Santo only to gear up for a third and final tour that ended the war in the Pacific.*



*(Photo courtesy of National Archives)*

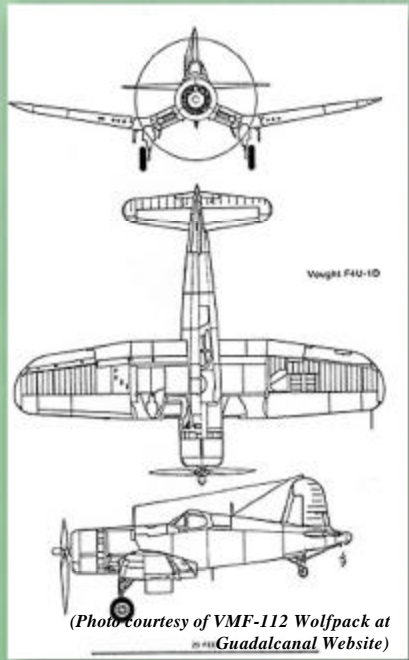
*Above: Before his ultimate claim to fame as a combat ace of 27 kills and commanding officer of the "Black Sheep" Squadron of VMF-214, Maj. Gregory "Pappy" Boyington briefly held command of the Wolfpack in July of 1943 and gave it back to Maj. Herman W. Hansen in August.*

*Below: The Vought F4U Corsair, was one of the "greats" of air fighting in World War II. Fast, rugged and packing a great punch with its six machine guns and considerable bomb load, the Corsair was at first rejected by the U.S. Navy as a carrier-borne fighter as a result of its high landing speed. After its success with the U.S. Marines and carrier use by the Royal Navy, however, the Corsair was accepted by the U.S. Navy. This aircraft was also called "Whistling Death" by the Japanese due to its unique sound in flight.*





A group shot of the aviators of VMF-112 on their third combat tour on Guadalcanal.



### Vought F4U-ID Corsair

**Engine:** Pratt & Whitney R-2800,

2,000hp

**Armament:** Six .5-inch machine guns plus two 1,000 pound bombs or eight 5-inch rockets

**Maximum speed:** 417 mph @ 19,900 feet

**Rate of Climb:** 2,890 feet per minute

**Ceiling:** 36,900 feet

**Range:** 1,015 miles normal

**Weights empty/loaded:** 8,982/14,000 pounds

**Span:** 41 feet; **Length:** 33 feet, 4 inches

**Below:** Marines on Iwo Jima get close air support from the Corsair.

(Photo courtesy of National Archives)

Its transition to the Corsair completed in May 1943, VMF-112 returned to Henderson Field. Despite the fact that Guadalcanal was firmly in American hands, the Japanese made several attempts to crush allied air power there. The first of these major enemy offensives fell in early April while the squadron was in the process of reorganizing with its new fighter aircraft. The enemy attempted several heavy raids during the next few weeks, but the attacks were countered by the aircraft of the Solomons Fighter Command, and VMF-112 continued the impressive string of victories it had begun the previous November. A major Japanese attack against Guadalcanal occurred on May 13. It was intercepted near the Russell Islands by 15 Corsairs of VMF-112 and VMF-124. In the fight that followed, 15 Japanese aircraft were destroyed in exchange for the loss of three American fighters. The high-scoring ace of the engagement was Capt. Archie Donahue of VMF-112's "Wolfpack," who destroyed four Zeros. Added to the single kill he recorded the previous November, Donahue became the squadron's first Corsair ace.

On June 7, several allied squadrons, including VMF-112, which claimed seven of the 23 enemy aircraft shot down, intercepted an enemy raid of VMF-112 aircraft. During this engagement, Lt. Sam Logan went to the rescue of a New Zealand P-40 Warhawk, that had been surrounded by a number of enemy aircraft. The lieutenant was successful in his rescue attempt, but his F4U was set ablaze by the Zeros' guns, and he bailed out. Logan was riding a good 'chute toward a water landing when one of the Zeros initiated a firing pass at the helpless American who presented an inviting target as he dangled beneath the canopy of his parachute. The enemy missed on this first and several subsequent firing passes, then changed tactics. He attempted to slice Logan apart with his propeller. He succeeded in removing parts of both the lieutenant's feet before Logan was rescued by another New Zealander whose gunfire drove off the Zero. Logan made it to the water with no further adventures and was rescued by a J2F amphibian. He survived his harrowing experience, but his days in combat were over.

In the same engagement, the previously mentioned Lt. Percy was forced to abandon his damaged Corsair while making 350 knots at an altitude of 2,000 feet. Although he successfully exited from the cockpit, his parachute failed to open, and he fell toward a virtually certain death. He struck the water feet first, his useless parachute trailing above him.

Miraculously, he survived his fall, despite a fractured pelvis, two sprained ankles, numerous wounds from enemy fire and a three-hour swim. After a year in the hospital, the rugged lieutenant returned to duty.

In late summer of 1943, the squadron completed its service in the Solomon Islands and returned to the United States for rest and reorganization. It arrived at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, Calif. on September 5, 1943. When the squadron completed its period of rest, it was ordered to carrier qualification and was subsequently redesignated a carrier squadron, VMF(CVS)-112, on November 5, 1944. Despite the redesignation, VMF-112 and the other Marine squadrons that were carrier qualified, the (CVS) portion of the designation was seldom used because it was merely a "paper" change in designation to indicate carrier qualification.

During its second combat tour beginning in December 1944, the squadron was assigned as a component of the Carrier Air Group-82 aboard U.S.S. Bennington (CV-20). Bennington, U.S.S. Hornet (CV-12), U.S.S. Wasp (CV-18) and U.S.S. Belleau Wood (CVL-24) made up Task Group 1 of Task Force 58, and there were an even dozen additional carriers among the other four task groups of the Fast Carrier Force, Task Force 58. By this period of the war, Task Force 58 [or 38] represented the largest grouping of carriers in history. But, it was only one portion of the fleet, and the Fifth Fleet [or Third Fleet, depending upon whether Admiral Spruance or Admiral Halsey, respectively, was in command] was the largest and most powerful fleet in the history of warfare at sea.

In February 1945, the Wolfpack was part of a large carrier group from the U.S.S. Bennington attacking the Japanese home islands. The squadron supported missions over and Tokyo and provided close air support for Marines during the invasion of Iwo Jima.

VMF(CVS)-112 aviator Lt. Warren E. Vaughn was shot down over Chichi Jima and captured by the Japanese. During a post-war investigation, it was discovered that Vaughn had been beheaded by his captors. As a result, 12 Japanese officers were tried for war crimes. Eight were executed and four received life imprisonment.



By the completion of World War II, the Wolfpack was credited with the destruction of 140 Japanese aircraft in aerial combat, ranking it third among Marine Corps squadrons in terms of enemy aircraft destroyed. VMF-112 returned to the United States where it was deactivated on Sept. 10, 1945. Its time of inactivity was relatively short, however, as the United States began to rebuild some small amount of the strength that had served it so well during the war years. The squadron was reactivated on July 1, 1946 as the Marine Air Detachment, Marine Air Reserve Training Command at Naval Air Station Dallas in Grand Prairie, Texas. As such, it was among the first of the wartime squadrons to receive a new lease on life in the Reserves.

The squadron began its reserve service equipped with the same aircraft it had flown in the latter stages of World War II, the Vought F4U-4 Corsair. When war erupted in Korea in June of 1950, the squadron remained a component of the reserves and was not recalled to active duty. However, many of the "Weekend Warriors" of the squadron were ordered to the Far East to fill the ranks of the squadrons committed to combat.

The Wolfpack's days in piston-engine aircraft came to close in the '50s with the introduction of the Grumman F9F Panther. Four years later, North American FJ-3 and 3/M Fury fighters filled the flightline. The Fury was a naval version of the successful F-86 Sabre Jet. In 1959, the "Wolf Pack" earned the Pete Ross Safety Award. The unit briefly transitioned to the AF-1E Fury (formerly the FJ-4B) in 1962.

By August 1963, they made the leap into supersonic flight with the F-8A Crusader. VMF-112 and its sister

squadron, VMF-111 were the first Marine Reserve squadrons to acquire the F-8, due in large measure, to their proximity to the Vought plant in Grand Prairie, Texas where the Crusader was manufactured.

The squadron was assigned to MAG-41 in February 1965. On Oct. 22, 1965, its sister squadron, VMF-111, was deactivated, with Leatherneck personnel and aircraft to be absorbed by VMF-112, making it one of the largest reserve squadrons in terms of the number of aircraft assigned. In July 1967, the unit changed its name to the "Cowboys," and redesigned the squadron insignia to reflect the local Dallas Cowboys NFL team.

In 1970, another Crusader squadron, VMJ-4, flying the photoreconnaissance version of the fighter, the RF-8G, joined the unit. The unit eventually received reworked models of the Crusader, the F-8K, and later, the F-8H in 1971. With the added all-weather capability of the F-8H, VMF-112 was redesignated VMF (AW)-112 on November 1, 1971.

In early 1976, the squadron upgraded to the McDonnell Douglas F-4N Phantom II, and became Marine Fighter Attack Squadron-112. They later flew the ultimate Navy/Marine version of the Phantom, F-4S, in 1987. On Jan. 18, 1992, VMFA-112 became the last Marine squadron to fly the Phantom II, thus ending the Marine Corps' 31-year relationship with the famed Phantom.

The Cowboys then made a successful transition to the McDonnell Douglas F/A-18A Hornet. On October 8, 1992, Capt. Joe "Crip" Riley flew the first Hornet sortie for the Cowboys. VMFA-112 moved to Naval Air Station-Joint Reserve Base Fort Worth in September 1996.



(Photo courtesy National Archives)

*The North American FJ- and AF-1E Fury fighters filled the flightline of VMF-112's new home aboard NAS Dallas in the '60s. The Fury was a naval version of the successful F-86 Sabre Jet.*



(Photo by Col. Mike Hixson)

*With the manufacturer of the Vought Crusader across the runway from VMF(AW)-112 at NAS Dallas, the newly renamed "Cowboys" found great support for aircrews and maintenance.*



(Photo by Gunnery Sgt. Rusty Baker)

*Above: The aging "A" model of the Hornet has now been upgraded to the "A+" platform propelling the fighter/attack aircraft in contention with the much newer F/A-18C and D models. Improvements include upgrades in radar, navigation, and night vision systems.*

*Across: Reserve Marine aviators posing with a F-4 Phantom on the flightline of NAS Dallas.*

(Photo by George Hall)

*Below: A F-4S Phantom releasing Mk-82s on a bombing range near MCAS Yuma, Ariz. The Cowboys were the last Phantom squadron in the Navy/Marine Corps only to be outlasted by F-4 "Wild Weasel" squadrons in the Air Force.*

(Photographer Unknown)







(Photo courtesy MAG-41 PAO)

*Plane captain sergeants Denis Long (left), Brian Hobson and Rusty Baker refer to their busy flight schedule during the Cowboy's first Hornet deployment at MCAS Yuma, Ariz. on July 14, 1993.*



(Photo courtesy MAG-41 PAO)

*Above: Teaming up in their first international exercise together, a KC-130T 'Hercules' from Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 234 (VMGR-234) awaits to refuel four Hornets from her sister squadron, VMFA-112, as they fly over the pyramids of Cairo in Operation Bright Star in the summer of 1999.*

*Across: The Wolfpack's most recent squadron patch*

*Below: Two Cowboy Hornets relive history as they fly over Iwo Jima's Mount Suribachi during their Western Pacific deployment in the summer of 2004.*



In 2002, VMFA-112's aircraft were reconfigured to the F/A-18A+ platform. The aircraft underwent improvements in radar, navigation, and night vision systems. VMFA-112 also worked alongside Naval Air Weapons Stations-China Lake testing the new AIM-9X Sidewinder (Air Intercept Missile) as well as the Joint Direct Attack Munition.

The Cowboys were the first Reserve squadron to deploy on a Western-Pacific exercise since the Korean War. In the summer of 2004, the squadron supported Operation Jungle Shield and Exercise Southern Frontier while operating out of Japan, Guam, and Australia.

In 2005, VMFA-112 deployed to Oerland Main Air Station, Norway, for the multinational exercise: Battle Griffin. The exercise was conducted to enhance cohesive operations between multinational forces and hone air-to-ground combat skills. The Marines experienced cold weather and harsh conditions during the exercise.

Currently, VMFA-112 has been working closely with sister squadron Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron-234 on what has been called the "Herc/Hornet Expeditionary Package". The conceptual program would allow an F/A-18A+ to land on a hasty runway refuel and rearm quickly without having to return to base, as is the current operating procedure. The program would be in keeping with the Marine Corps nature of self-sufficiency.

The current squadron commanding officer is Lt. Col. William T. Collins.