

HISTORY OF THIS AIRPLANE

Model: F9F-2

Bureau #: 123072

Civil Registration: † N72WP

The F9F was Grumman's first jet fighter. Officially designated as a "carrier-based jet-engined fighter-bomber and photo-recce aircraft", the first flight of the prototype XF9F-1 Panther took place on 24 November 1947.

The Panther is of conventional design with straight wings and excellent low speed handling, making it ideal for carrier-based operations. Grumman built more than 1300 of these aircraft; the first of 567 F9F-2s reached the fleet in May 1949.

The Panther was the first carrier-based jet to see action over Korea (6 August 1950), and went on to perform almost half the attack missions flown during the conflict by US Navy/Marine Corps units.

This particular aircraft has significant combat history, flying with at least three different squadrons in Korea. On October 17, 1952 it was struck in the left aileron by small arms fire while flying with VF-112 off *USS Essex*. Two months later, with VF-23, a wing was hit by .50 caliber fire.

During the last weeks of the war this plane was serving with VF-93, CAG NINE aboard *USS Phillipine Sea*. In July 1953 a 37mm shell exploded under the nose, causing damage "beyond shipboard repair".

Some 20 years later, Air Service & Supply Company of Tulsa, OK acquired the airplane as scrap. Jack Levine and Bill Pryor of Pontiac, Michigan bought the hulk, and spent from 1979 to 1983 rebuilding the plane to airworthy condition. They also used parts used from the remains of another Panther acquired from NAVICP in Philadelphia (BuNo137810).

The first flight of the rebuilt aircraft took place on July 30, 1983. This F9F-2 won the Warbird Grand Champion prize at Oshkosh in 1984.

Aviation attorney Arthur Wolk bought the plane in October 1985 following the death of Jack Levine in a P-51D Mustang crash. He continued to fly it on the warbird circuit under the banner of the Philadelphia-based Flying Warbirds Foundation. In 1997 Wolk crash-landed the plane after a takeoff from Kalamazoo, MI, in 1997. Badly injured in the crash, Wolk donated the remains of the plane to the nearby Kalamazoo Aviation Museum.

Eight years later, that museum sold the damaged aircraft at auction, and the Panther eventually arrived in RI in July of 2006. It has been undergoing another restoration in North Kingstown ever since, under the guidance of Stan Essex, who was a Panther