

VII. A New Age (1954-1959)

Despite the truce in Korea, the contending forces in the world remained wary of one another and the scene of international tensions shifted from the Far East to the Middle East. Once again the Navy was called to represent the nation in a critical area; once again, Naval Aviation provided much of the muscle being flexed as a caution to adventurism by hostile powers. As world political temperatures cooled, rose and cooled again, U.S. naval forces went about their peacetime role of patrolling troubled waters, evacuating refugees and providing support to threatened friends.

All the while, the advance of science and its military applications brought new weapons and new tactics into Naval Aviation. Air-to-air and air-to-surface missiles not only became standard fleet aerial weapons but were also introduced into flight training. A whole new family of high-performance jet aircraft joined the fleet for operation aboard the modernized WW II ships and the new *Forrestal*-class carriers being built.

Special attention to the problems of antisubmarine warfare brought about the organization of task groups designed to combat this growing enemy threat. Progress was made in ASW tactics using carrier-based and land-based fixed-wing aircraft, together with helicopters and surface units. The amphibious assault mission made new strides with the concept of vertical assault, which employed helicopters to speed personnel and materials from shipboard to points ashore. At first, using a modified *Essex*-class carrier and, later, a specially designed helicopter assault carrier, this aspect of Naval Aviation grew into a considerable force.

It was not so much that the carrier had replaced the battleship as the basic element of naval power, but that aviation had been woven into every phase of naval activity. The effectiveness of carrier aviation in amphibious assault operations clearly demonstrated in Korea — where a task force gave continuous support to a field army for 37 months — that aviation had brought land and naval forces closer together than ever before.

After the end of Korean hostilities, the Navy continued its efforts in technical and scientific development. The mirror landing system and the ground level ejection seat were introduced. The keel was laid for the world's first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, *Enterprise*. Also during this time, the fleet ballistic missile *Polaris* entered its test phase.

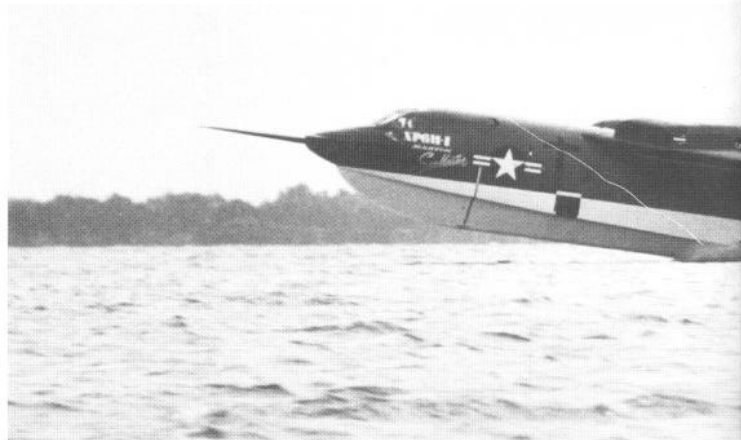
Events of the late fifties were largely dominated by exploration in space. Successful orbits by the *Vanguard* and *Explorer I* satellites provided the impetus for the Navy's involvement in the space pro-

gram. For the first time, Naval Aviators were assigned to NASA as prospective astronauts. The future held many challenges in space for Navy and Marine Corps pilots.

In the years to come, Naval Aviators would make many valuable contributions to the space effort, leaving Naval Aviation's calling card on the doorstep of the universe.

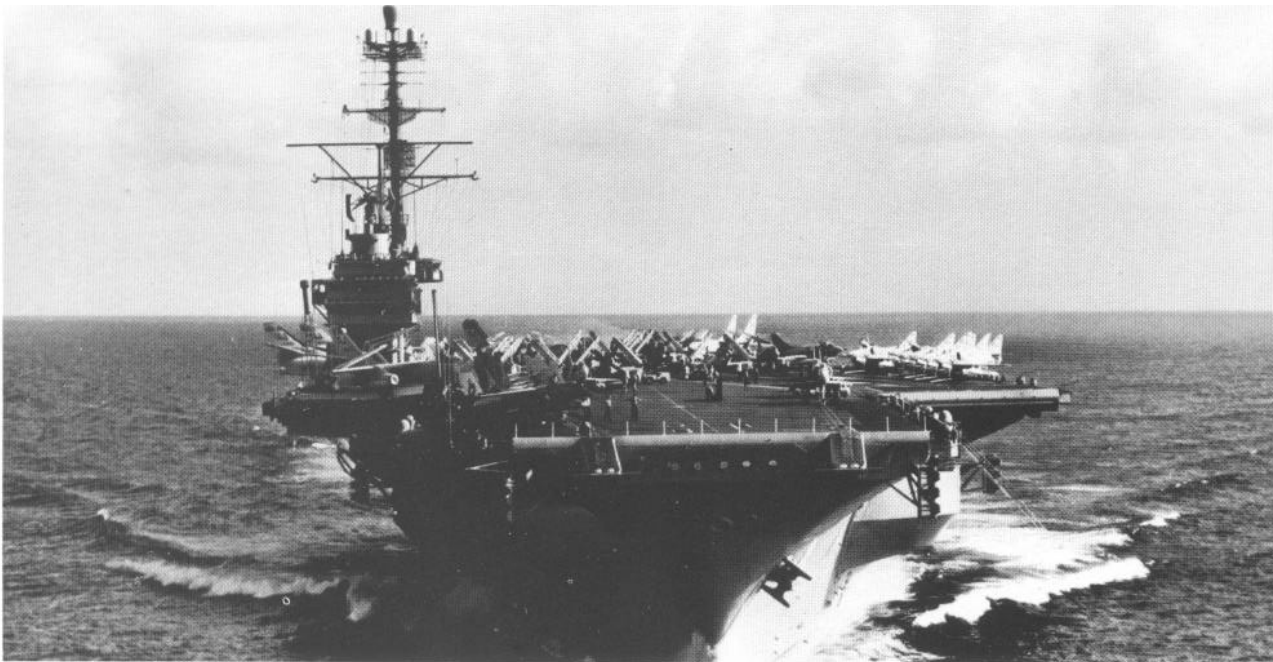


Test pilot J.F. "Skeets" Coleman made the first flight in the Convair XFY-1 vertical takeoff aircraft, known as the Pogo Stick, at NAS Moffett Field, Calif., on August 1, 1954. Although this aircraft never became operational, it provided valuable knowledge for future VTOL experiments. Coleman was awarded the Harmon International Trophy in 1955 for his contributions. USN 639930

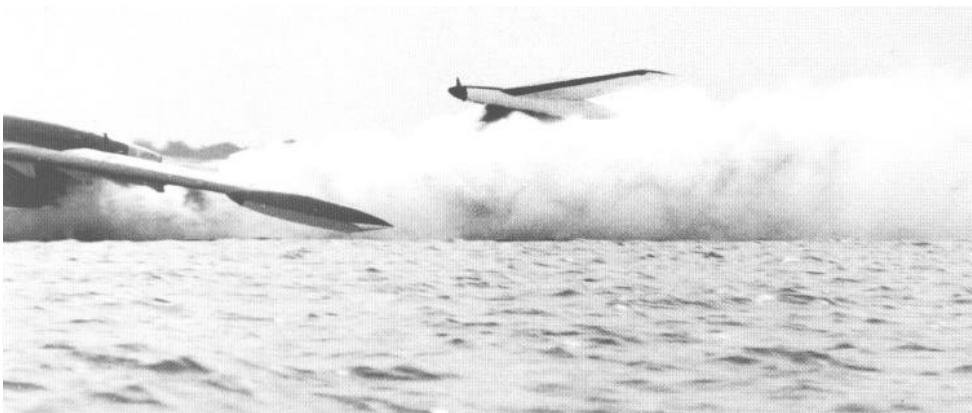




A Douglas R4D Skytrain made the first landing of an aircraft at the South Pole on October 31, 1956. The plane named Que Sera Sera, carrying RAdm. George J. Dufek, Commander CTF 43 (Operation Deep Freeze), was piloted by Lt.Cdr. C.S. Shinn. USN 805653



Forrestal (CVA-59), first of the supercarriers and first carrier designed to handle jet aircraft, was commissioned at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, Portsmouth, Va., on October 1, 1955. USN 1047009



The Martin P6M Seamaster, a swept-wing seaplane powered with four jet engines and incorporating a new hull design, made its first flight on July 14, 1955.

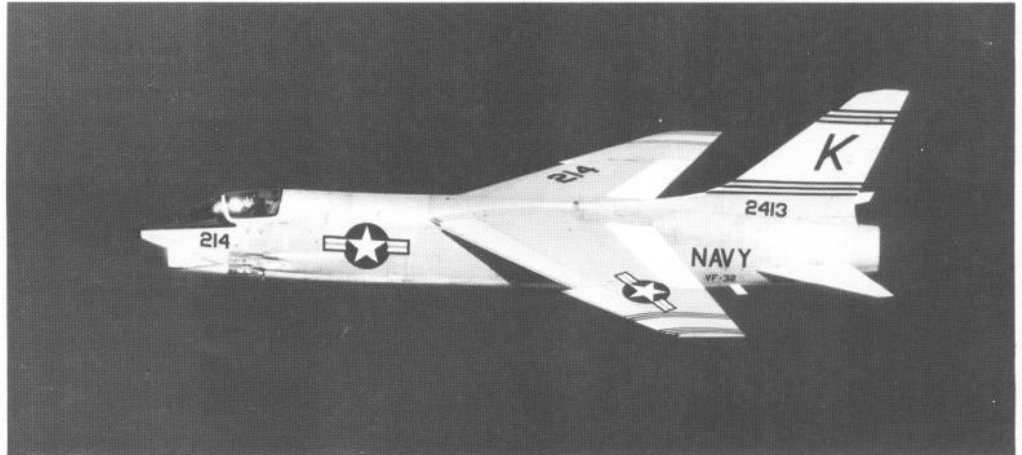
Glenn L Martin Company

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By 1957, the mirror landing system was in routine use aboard aircraft carriers. Here, a Douglas A-4 Skyhawk is reflected in Saratoga's mirror as it catches a wire on landing.

The first Chance Vought F8U-1 Crusader was delivered to a fleet unit (Fighter Squadron 32) on March 25, 1957. The XF8U-1 exceeded the speed of sound on its maiden flight exactly two years previously.



Chance Vought Aircraft, Inc.



On July 16, 1957, Maj. John Glenn, USMC, broke the transcontinental speed record in an F8U-1P Crusader at an average speed of 723.517 miles per hour. This was the first upper-atmosphere, supersonic flight from the West to the East Coast.



McDonnell Douglas Corporation

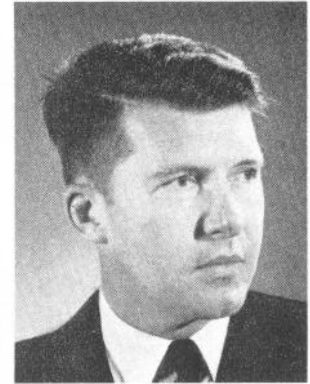


A Douglas F3D Skyknight lands aboard Antietam (CVS-36) off Pensacola, Fla., beginning the first shipboard tests of the automatic carrier landing system (ACLS).

Bell Aircraft Corporation



Carpenter



Schirra

Glenn

Shepard

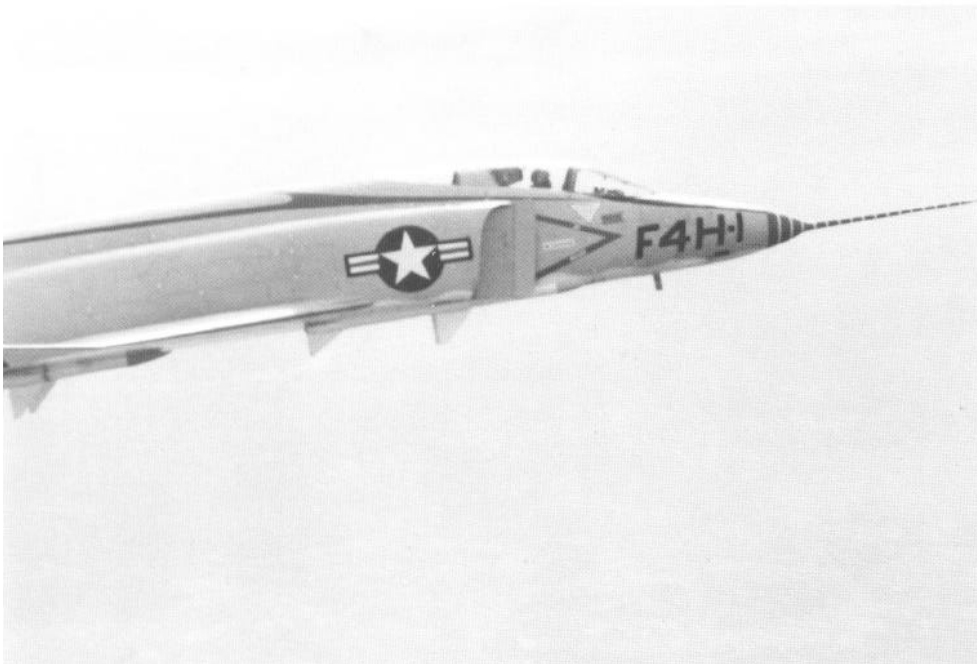


NASA

Cdr. Forrest S. Petersen made his first flight in the X-15 on August 25, 1958. Petersen made five flights in this research aircraft, which was designed to withstand extreme altitudes and speeds as high as 4,000 miles per hour.



Four Naval Aviators, three Navy and one Marine, were among the seven men selected as astronauts under Project Mercury for space exploration and manned orbital flight: Lt. M.S. Carpenter, USN; Lt.Col. J.H. Glenn, Jr., USMC; Lt.Cdr. W.M. Schirra, Jr., USN; and Lt.Cdr. A.B. Shepard, Jr., USN.



The twin-jet McDonnell Douglas F4H-1 Phantom made its first flight at St. Louis, Mo., on May 27, 1958. The aircraft was flown by test pilot Robert C. Little.