



Flight testing for the Panther was largely handled by NATC. Shown here is an F9F-2. (Steve Ginter)

### F9F-3 Production

Fifty-five F9F-3s were built, including the lone prototype (BuNo 122476) and 54 F9F-3s (BuNos 122560-122562, 122564-122566, 122568, 122571, 122573-122585, 123020-123043, and 123068-123076).

Because of the delays noted, the F9F-3 was actually the first production Panther delivered to the fleet. On 8 May 1949, VF-51, then stationed at NAS San Diego, received its first Panthers. The F9F-2 was assigned to the



An F9F-2 Panther is removed from the arresting gear while another is waived off. Visible as a speck in the background is a third Panther beginning its roll into the groove as it prepares for final approach. (Bert Kinzey)

Blue Angels in late August 1949, and then a few weeks later to VMF-115, the first USMC squadron to receive the Panther. The Navy's first fleet squadron to operate the F9F-2 was VF-111, also stationed at NAS San Diego. VF-31 was the first East Coast squadron to operate the Panther, having received its first F9F-2 in December 1949, along with four experienced pilots from VF-51 to assist with transition. Fieldwork was completed in the early spring and carrier qualifications were completed on 6 April aboard USS *Philippine Sea* (CV-47) after 286 landings.

By mid-1950, the Navy had eight squadrons equipped with Panthers, including two F9F-3 squadrons, VF-51 and VF-52, aboard USS *Valley Forge* (CV-45), which was the first U.S. Navy carrier to launch air strikes against North Korea during the Korean War. (A more detailed discussion of the Panther's involvement in the Korean War is found in Chapter Six.) During the early 1950s, the F9F-2 and F9F-3 served in 22 U.S. Navy active squadrons, at least 15 Reserve squadrons, and six Marine Corps squadrons, providing the bulwark of the Navy and Marine Corps' air-to-ground attack capability. Although the Panther distinguished itself in Korea, the introduction of the high-performance swept-wing jets during the mid-1950s meant that the Panther's career would be a short but notable one. By 1956, the F9F-2 and F9F-3 Panthers had been phased out of operational fleet squadrons and saw service primarily with Navy Reserve units, Auxiliary Training Units (ATUs), and in the training command. The last Marine Corps units, VMF-213 and VMF-234 based in Minneapolis, were retired in 1958.



A colorful view of an F9F-2B at sea parked on a carrier deck during the Korean War. When the war began, Navy Panthers were used in the air superiority fighter role and also performed strafing runs using their 20mm cannons. True air-to-ground capability was added with the F9F-2B, which deployed with VMA-311 and Navy fleet squadrons beginning in January 1951. Note the propeller-driven Douglas AD Skyraiders and Vought F4U Corsairs parked with their wings folded in the background. (Northrop Grumman Center)



A Marine Corps Panther is seen in front of the island of the carrier Franklin D. Roosevelt (CVB-42). (Steve Ginter)



Photo Panther pilots enjoyed panting nicknames on their Panthers, like this "Peepin' Tom" painted on a VC-61 F9F-2P. Other more famous names were "Like," "Look," and "Pic." Notice the pilot's colorful name, Lt. Papa San Young. (Steve Ginter)



A VF-51 F9F-2 and VC-61 F9F-2P are readied for missions. The crew appears to be working on the Panther's guns. (Steve Ginter)