

# GRUMMAN F8F 'BEARCAT'

NAAS KINGSVILLE 1952-1954

The Grumman F8F Bearcat (affectionately called "Bear") was an American single-engine naval fighter aircraft of the 1940s. It went on to serve into the mid-20th century in the Navy and other air forces, and would be Grumman's final piston engine fighter aircraft.

The Bearcat concept was inspired by the early 1943 evaluation of a captured Focke-Wulf Fw 190. After flying the Fw 190, Grumman test pilot Bob Hall wrote a report directed to Grumman President Leroy Grumman, who then personally laid out the specifications for Design 58, the successor to the Hellcat.

Work on the Grumman G-58 Bearcat began in 1943 with the intention of providing the Navy with a high performance derivative of the Grumman F6F Hellcat. The specifications called for an aircraft able to operate from the smallest carrier, primarily in the interceptor role.

The F6F's Pratt & Whitney R-2800 engine was retained, but compared to the Hellcat, the Bearcat was 20% lighter, had a 30% better rate-of-climb and was 50 mph (80 km/h) faster. To achieve this, the range was necessarily sacrificed.

The first F8F prototypes were ordered in November 1943 and first flew on 21 August 1944, a mere nine months later. The first production aircraft was delivered in February 1945 and the first squadron was operational by 21 May, but World War II was over before the aircraft ever saw combat service.

Postwar, the F8F became a major Navy fighter, equipping 24 fighter squadrons. Often mentioned as one of the best-handling piston-engine fighters ever built, its performance was sufficient to outperform many early jets. Its capability for aerobatic performance is illustrated by its selection for the Navy's elite Blue Angels in 1946, who flew it until the team was temporarily disbanded in 1950, during the Korean War.

The F8F Bearcat was used as a fighter trainer at NAAS Kingsville from 1952-1954 by ATU-2 and ATU-202.



## General Characteristics

Length: 28 ft 3 in  
Wingspan: 35 ft 10 in  
Height: 13 ft 10 in (4.21 m)  
Empty weight: 7,650 lb  
Loaded weight: 9,600 lb  
Max takeoff weight: 13,460 lb  
Powerplant: 1 × Pratt & Whitney R-2800-30W two-row radial engine, 2,250 hp

## Performance

Maximum speed: 455 mph  
Range: 1,105 mi.  
Service ceiling: 40,800 ft.  
Rate of climb: 6,300 ft./min.  
Power/mass: 0.22 hp/lb

## Armament

Guns: 4 × 20 mm canon  
Rockets: 4×5 in unguided rockets  
Bombs: 1,000 lb. bombs