

# RF-4B PHANTOM AN OPERATIONAL HISTORY



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*Representing the final variation of markings for the RF-4B is this example, 157346/RF-31 of VMFP-3, taxiing past the fence at Yokota AB in Japan on 22 July 1984. The aircraft is finished in the low-viz Tactical Paint Scheme, which was introduced to the RF-4B fleet in 1983. All markings are matt black.* (Masanori Ogawa)

The story of the RF-4B begins in the late 1950s. Even though the US Navy was operating the successful F8U-1P (RF-8A) reconnaissance version of the Crusader at the time, McDonnell tried their luck and submitted a proposal for a reconnaissance version of their new Phantom along with the initial Model 98 proposal for the F4H-1 (later F-4A) that was submitted to the US Navy. The Navy had no need for the aircraft at this time; it had a large fleet of relatively new F8U-1Ps which did the same job, and later added RA-5Cs for strategic reconnaissance as well. Congress simply denied to appropriate funds for the project. The night reconnaissance capabilities of the aircraft, however, proved interesting enough for the USMC (who also flew the F8U-1P) and on 21 February 1963 the USMC signed the initial order for nine RF-4Bs, which were based on USAF's RF-110A (later RF-4C), a programme which was initiated in January 1961. The RF-4C prototype made its first flight on 8 August 1963. At first, the RF-4Bs were known as the F4H-1P, but this was changed to RF-4B on 18 September 1962, when the US armed forces adopted a common type designation system.

Actually, both the RF-4B and RF-4C were very similar aircraft. Compared to the F-4B or F-4C, both had a redesigned and lengthened nose, containing an AN/APQ-99 forward-looking radar with terrain-avoidance and terrain-following modes; it could be used for ground mapping as well. The nose itself was specially designed to hold several types of cameras which could be installed in three stations (numbered 1, 2 and 3, with 1 being the forward-facing camera). Station 1 carried a single forward oblique or vertical KS-87 camera, station 2 was able to carry a single KA-87 low-altitude camera and station 3 usually carried a single KA-55A or KA-91 high-altitude panoramic camera. In addition to these, KS-91 or KS-127A cameras could also be carried in the RF-4B. The cameras were fitted on rotating mounts which enabled the pilot to aim them at targets. This was not a feature on the RF-4C which had fixed cameras. The films used by the cameras were either black and white, color, black and white infra-

red, or camouflage detection film. The films could be developed inside the camera itself and ejected from the aircraft in-flight for the benefit of commanders on the ground. Just forward of the tailfin, the aircraft was equipped with photo flash cartridge ejectors which would illuminate the sky during a nocturnal mission, giving the aircraft its night reconnaissance capability. Other notable equipment included an AP/APQ-102 recce Side-Looking Airborne Radar (SLAR) which had antennas faired into the lower fuselage sides, just ahead of the intakes. This system tracked both moving and fixed targets. The belly of the aircraft held an AN/AAD-4 infrared reconnaissance system. All reconnaissance equipment was operated from the rear cockpit of the aircraft, which had no flight controls.

The first 34 RF-4Bs produced retained the basic airframe of the F-4B, except for the modified nose, that is. The final twelve aircraft (153114 to 153115 and 157342 to 157351) were hybrid aircraft, built with the larger wheels and thick wing of the F-4J, but with an RF-4C fuselage and fin. The final three aircraft also had the smoothly-rounded camera bulge under the nose instead of the more angular one; this actually reduced drag and turbulence and also increased interior space. This feature was not retrofitted to the older aircraft; USAF RF-4Cs



Resplendent in Vietnam-era high-viz markings, RF-4B 153109/RM-22 of VMCJ-1 is seen here taking off from Naha AB, Okinawa, in January 1972. The base was used by the USA at the time, JASDF did not take over until 1979. (Hideki Nagakubo via Stephen Miller)



The first operational squadron to receive the new RF-4B was VMCJ-3 at MCAS El Toro (CA). The example above, 151980/TN-15 is seen here visiting Andrews AFB (MD) a few weeks after delivery to the unit. The chevron on the tail is green, the other markings are black. Note the white radome.

(21 November 1965, Richard Sullivan via Stephen Miller)



RF-4B 153092 was delivered on 11 February 1966. It is seen here on the ramp at MCAS Cherry Point (NC) a few weeks after delivery, on 9 April 1966. It carries the code (CY-1) and markings of VMCJ-2.

(Richard Sullivan via Stephen Miller)

also sported both types of noses. The first RF-4B, 151975, flew on 12 March 1965; and following a gap in production between 1967 and 1970, the final example was delivered to the USMC in December 1970.

## SQUADRON SERVICE

Following operational testing with McDonnell and the NATC at NAS Patuxent River (MD), the first operational unit to receive the type was VMCJ-3 at MCAS El Toro (CA) which received their first aircraft in May 1965. Compared over the older reconnaissance aircraft in the country like the RF-8A Crusader, the

Phantom provided a considerable jump in capabilities but this also required a lot of additional training to allow the crews to master the new systems and a different way of operating reconnaissance aircraft, considering the aircraft had a two-man crew while the pilot in the Crusader was alone. VMCJ-3 was the RF-4B training unit for the other two RF-4B units.

Later in 1965, VMCJ-2 at MCAS Cherry Point (NC) became the second unit to receive RF-4Bs; these fully replaced their old RF-8As in 1966. The final unit followed in October 1966 and this was VMCJ-1, based at MCAS Iwakuni in Japan. They received their first RF-4Bs that same month; the aircraft were crewed by newly-trained ex-VMCJ-3 crews. Following the delivery of the RF-4Bs to Japan, a new group of pilots started training with VMCJ-3 and upon graduation, these replaced the crews in Southeast Asia, and so on. Shortly after the initial move to Iwakuni, operations were shifted to South Vietnam and the RF-4Bs started flying combat operations. During 1967, the final USMC RF-8As were phased out.

An interesting feature of VMCJ-3 was that each of the squadron's pilots had a unique number assigned, irrespective of which of the squadron aircraft types he flew. This number was reflected in the call sign he used, for example "Tango November One Seven".

## VIETNAM

As related above, the first RF-4Bs reached Vietnam in October 1966 and they took over from VMCJ-1's old RF-8A Crusaders. The reconnaissance missions flown by the Phantoms were mainly flown in support of USMC strike missions. The RF-4Bs, escorted by Marines F-4Bs or F-4Js also operating out of Da Nang, would try to obtain relevant target information prior to a strike, and would also return for the Bomb Damage Assessment (BDA).

The RF-4B was mainly used to fly reconnaissance missions over the northern part of South Vietnam, but also occasionally ventured into Laos and North Vietnam. By January 1968, the squadron had eight RF-4Bs on strength in Vietnam (plus eight EF-10Bs and four EA-6As). Main advantage of the RF-4B over the old RF-8As was the aircraft's all-weather capability; it incorporated the infra-red sensors and side-looking airborne radar mapping capacity into a normal photographic platform, something which the RF-8A was unable to do.

Da Nang was a huge base located close to the sea near the city of Da Nang, about 65 miles south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) which formed the border between North and South Vi-



A few years following the photograph above, VMCJ-2 had adopted their trademark black tail, which also incorporated the Playboy bunny on the rudder. The aircraft involved is 157344/CY-1. (MCAS Cherry Point, 24 July 1974, Jim Sullivan via Stephen Miller)





In the years following the war in Vietnam, VMCJ-1 was based at MCAS Iwakuni (Japan). RF-4B 153091/RM-602 is seen here parked on the base's flightline in March 1975. The aircraft carries standard high-viz markings and what appears to be an AN/ALQ-101 ECM pod on the wing pylon. The tail is black with yellow markings. (Bruce Trombecky via Patrick Roegies)

etnam. It was used jointly by the USMC (who mainly based A-6As and F-4Bs there), the USAF (one of the main unit was 366th TFW with F-4Cs and F-4Ds, but the base was host to numerous support units) and the US Army, with various support units. The base was very busy, in 1968 the base logged an average of 55,000 fixed wing aircraft movements (67,000 if the helicopters were included) per month! On the down side, the base had its problems with VC attacks and was on the receiving end of many VC rocket and mortar attacks, and over twenty aircraft were destroyed during these attacks. For example, on 10 May 1968, VMCJ-1 bore the brunt of such an attack: two of the squadron's EA-6As and an RF-4B received moderate damage during a VC rocket attack on the base.

During the war in Vietnam US forces were able to use several reconnaissance platforms. One of these was the high-performance RA-5C Vigilante, operating from carriers in the Gulf of Tonkin. At the time there was some discussion as to which aircraft was the better one, the RA-5C or the RF-4B. The RA-5C had a better sensor suite, but proved to be more vulnerable. Although it was faster than the Phantom (it carried all fuel internally and did not have drag-inducing external fuel tanks), this was offset by the G-limitation of the Vigilante airframe, which was about +3 G, which meant that it was more vulnerable to SAMs. The Phantoms were often better able to outmanoeuvre an approaching SAM, which in the end resulted in fewer combat losses.

During the unit's four-year stay in Vietnam, four RF-4Bs were lost to various causes. For more details see the production list.

On 14 July 1970, combat operations were suspended and the unit moved back to Iwakuni in Japan. They started flying routine peacetime training missions, but were prepared to return to South Vietnam, should the need arise. VMCJ-1's EA-6As were indeed recalled in 1972, but the RF-4Bs remained at Iwakuni while the war in Vietnam lasted.

### CARRIER OPS

There are reports that the RF-4B was initially deemed unsuitable for carrier operations because of its long nose which impaired visibility on final approach. This was correct; Maj D F Beak, an RF-4B pilot, described it as follows: "visibility in close was interesting. Other than that, it was an excellent aircraft around the boat". Ultimately, only two pilots made over 200 traps in the RF-4B while Maj Beak 'only' made 199! However, he made 86 night landings.

The first carrier operations by VMCJ-1 were conducted during 1974; the RF-4Bs were the only carrier-capable recce assets in Japan as no RF-8Gs were based in-country. The squadron started qualifying pilots for an upcoming cruise on board the USS Midway (CVA-41) that summer. While deployed, the RF-4Bs were assigned to Detachment 101 which was nicknamed the 'Golden Hawks'; the aircraft received modexes in the 6xx range. Usually, three aircraft were taken aboard, with five crews flying them, supported by five officers and about 100 other support personnel. The first official cruise started on 18 October 1974; on that date Midway departed Yokosuka for a three-month cruise. Several of VMCJ-1's EA-6As were on board as well. Deploying RF-4Bs on board the Midway soon became

### A ROOSTER'S TALE

Former VMCJ-3 squadron member Charlie Carr has an interesting 'sea story' to tell: "One time, VMCJ-3 deployed to Yuma for a pre-Westpac exercise and stayed for about 2-3 weeks. Liberty was spent in the surroundings of Yuma until it was midnight, then everyone moved over to Winterhaven for after-hours drinking. A good spot was the "Red's Roost" where the liberty was basic. Red had a big Rhode Island red rooster which he kept in some sort of cage on the bar. He also had a 18-year old wife who evidently was not caged. One night, Sandy Carter, Roger Williams and I were in there, hustling the wife and eye-balling the rooster. Long story short: we diverted Red's attention, stole the rooster, took him back to the Q where we lodged him on our head. Man, that was one pissed off chicken! Because the squadron colours were green, someone got some green food dye, coloured the rooster green, got some string and promptly walked the rooster around the flight line and the officer's club for two or three days. This, as you can imagine, got old, and as the bamboo grapevine was saying that Red was going to blow away the culprits who stole his chicken, we ran a ruse and put the rooster back in "Red's Roost" a couple of nights later, unnoticed by Red. Unfortunately, Red was not as protective of his wife."

VMCJ-1's primary mission while in Japan. A few days before the start of a cruise, the squadron would start packing everything they would need during the cruise and loaded everything aboard a C-130 which then flew to Atsugi. At Atsugi, everything was offloaded again and transferred to commercial trucks which transported everything pierside at Yokosuka.

The first cruise lasted until 20 December 1974; a second one was made in January and February 1975, followed by the third from 31 March 1975. This cruise proved to be a very eventful one; as the carrier was nearby when the US evacuation of Saigon started; this evacuation was also known as 'Operation Frequent Wind'. This took place on 29 and 30 April 1975. Midway became a helicopter 'hub',



Illustrating the carrier capability of the RF-4B is 157345/RF-117 of VMFP-3, which catches the No.3 wire on the USS Midway on 13 April 1983. In 1982, VMCJ-1 changed its range of modexes from 61x to 11x. (US Navy photo PH2 David B Loveall)

#### A BURIED HOOK

It was a cool and breezy Sunday afternoon... the Sea of Japan was pond calm and the Old Girl (USS Midway) was rock steady. We were manned up in the gear, getting ready to trap one inbound. A lazy day, or so we thought, when out the crystal clear, azure sky appeared the unmistakable dull black, twin trails of smoke on the horizon. A certain un-named Marine Colonel and his unsuspecting RIO were inbound to the Midway Maru in a VMFP-3 RF-4B Phantom. The raw, brutal appearance of the aircraft, sleekened by the graceful line of its elegant, elongated nose and lack of SHOW (Shit Hanging Off Wings) save two long drop tanks, seemed to be born for flight. In the skilled hands of thousands of the world's finest aviators, that has certainly been the case.

Then came Colonel "I've gotta get me some carrier traps to keep me current, or I don't know how I'll afford the payments on that new Porsche". So, here comes this plywood driver, with everything hanging and looking like he's about three lights low on the lens. My topside gear crew and I are watching him float all over the sky as the smoke grows thicker and longer from his Phantom. I can only imagine what his RIO is thinking as he feels the wallowing motion building.

We look at the LSO platform, wondering how many times the VMFP-3 Paddles has already screamed into the radio. As our dauntless hero crosses the round down, after an agonizing eternity, Paddles hits the wave off lights. The RF slams into the deck at least twenty feet off center and a hundred feet long of three wire. The burners light too late, but the Phantom claws its way off the angle, determined to save itself from a watery grave, regardless of what the guy driving is doing. The Colonel heads back into the track for another try. This time he's short and left. Another bolter. The caring voice of the Air Boss booms over the 5MC, "Tell him one more try, then he's Bingo for Brains!!!!"

The ham-fisted Colonel is clearly well behind the plane again, as he gets the call for the ball one more time. He's in the groove, very low, and then over the ramp, and KA-WHUMP!, he cracks it so hard I swear I saw his mains push his wings up into a V. His burners light, and off he goes again. In the gear, we swear we see something fly down the deck. Small, a couple of bolts maybe. We run down to the round-down and, Lo and Behold, there's his hook, buried in the deck. Buried in the deck! The Air Boss dropped the F bomb and that was the last we saw Colonel "get me qualled". I shit you not!

(submitted to the Midway forum)



Part of the static show at the open house at MCAS Iwakuni on 5 May 1975 was this RF-4B of VMCJ-1, 153102/RM-615. The badge on the tail is a white disc with a red '1' with a yellow bird of prey superimposed. (Toshiyuki Toda via Stephen Miller)





One of the early efforts to tone down Navy and Marine combat aircraft is illustrated by RF-4B 153108/RF-120 of VMFP-3, seen here at Yokota AB in Japan on 12 December 1981. All markings were applied in medium-grey . (Masanori Ogawa)

receiving thousands of US and South Vietnamese refugees. As no fixed-wing operations were possible at all, the RF-4Bs were parked on the hangar deck. Following conclusion of the operation, the carrier sailed to Thailand to offload the dozens of US and Vietnamese helicopters. In late May 1975 Midway was back home; needless to say not a lot of hours were logged by the RF-4Bs!

#### RF-4B UPGRADE

Following the end of the war in Vietnam, it was realized that the aircraft's sensor suite was becoming outdated and ongoing sensor developments prompted the initiation of an update effort. From 1975 onwards, the surviving RF-4Bs were upgraded as part of 'Project SURE' (Sensor Update and Refurbishment Effort). This included a complete electrical rewiring of the airframe and some local strengthening, the latter to ensure safe

carrier operations. They were fitted with an improved inertial navigation system and a datalink. Also, the SLAR was updated (with the AN/APD10B) as was the infrared recce system (now AN/AAD-5). The aircraft was also fitted with an internally mounted ALQ-126 electronic countermeasures system, which could easily be recognized by the cable ducts fitted on the sides of the intakes. Finally, the engines were upgraded from J79-GE-8 to J79-GE-10 engines. The prototype aircraft, 157348, made its first flight on 17 December 1977. All subsequent modifications were carried out at NARF North Island (CA).

#### RF-4Bs IN ONE UNIT

In 1975, the Navy reorganized its VMCJ squadrons and all RF-4Bs were concentrated in VMFP-3, a new unit which was activated at MCAS El Toro on 1 July 1975. Since earlier that year, RF-4Bs had been arriving at El Toro in preparation for the

#### RF-4B CRUISES:

##### VMCJ-1 cruises on Midway:

from 18oct7	to 20dec74	Det.101	RM 60x	Westpac + Vietnam
13jan75	18feb75	Det.101	RM 60x	Westpac + Vietnam
31mar75	29may75	Det.101	RM 60x	Westpac + Vietnam
VMFP-3 cruises on board Midway				
04oct75	19dec75	Det1	RF 61x	Westpac + Indian Ocean
13mar76	26apr76	Det1	RF 61x	Westpac + Indian Ocean
19may76	22jun76	Det1	RF 61x	Westpac
09jul76	04aug76	Det1	RF 61x	Westpac
01nov76	17dec76	Det1	RF 61x	Westpac
11jan77	01mar77	Det1	RF 61x	Westpac
19apr77	05sep77	Det1	RF 61x	Westpac
27sep77	21dec77	Det2	RF 61x	Westpac + Indian Ocean
11apr78	23may78	Det2	RF 61x	Westpac
09nov78	23dec78	Det2	RF 61x	Westpac
11jan79	20feb79	Det2	RF 61x	Westpac
07apr79	18jun79	Det2	RF 61x	Westpac + Indian Ocean
20aug79	14sep79	Det2	RF 61x	Westpac
30sep79	20feb80	Det3	RF 61x	Westpac + Indian Ocean
14jul80	26nov80	Det1	RF 61x	Westpac + Indian Ocean
23feb81	05jun81	Det2	RF 61x	Westpac + Indian Ocean
26jun81	16jul81	Det2	RF 61x	Westpac
03sep81	06oct81	Det2	RF 61x	Westpac
26apr82	18jun82	Det2	RF 61x	Westpac
14sep82	11dec82	DetB	RF 11x	Westpac + Norpac
25feb83	09may83	DetC	RF 11x	Westpac + Norpac
02jun83	08aug83	DetC	RF 11x	Westpac
25oct83	11dec83	DetC	RF 11x	Westpac
28dec83	23may84	DetB	RF 11x	Westpac + Indian Ocean



This photograph illustrates the transition period from three RF-4B squadrons to a single squadron. This photograph, taken outside the NARF at NAS North Island (CA) in October 1975, shows RF-4B 153096/TN-7. Although still carrying full VMCJ-3 markings, the 'CJ' in the unit's designation has been painted out on the fuselage, ready to be replaced with 'FP'. At the time the photograph was made, VMCJ-3 had already been disbanded and the aircraft was officially assigned to VMFP-3. (Bruce Trombecky)

change. Personnel of the former VMCJ-3 formed the nucleus of the new VMFP-3, which was part of the 3rd MAW (Marine Air Wing). All EA-6As were assigned to VMAQ-2 at MCAS Cherry Point. VMCJ-1 soldiered on for a few more weeks to give the new squadrons a chance to organize themselves while the RF-4B force in Japan remained fully operational. The VMCJ-1 RF-4Bs were conducting carrier qualifications in August 1975, but on 1 September 1975 the unit was finally deactivated and VMFP-3 took over the detachment in Japan from that date.

Initially, the RF-4Bs deployed six RF-4Bs to Japan, which stayed for about two years and were used by the various detachments, before the entire complement was rotated with a fresh set of birds, all recently out of rework, from the USA. In 1977 the detachment was reduced in size to four aircraft, and from 1980 the aircraft were rotated back to the USA on a yearly rotation basis.

The squadron's official mission was 'to conduct aerial multi-sensor imagery reconnaissance to include aerial photographic, infrared, and SLAR radar reconnaissance in support of Fleet Marine Force operations'. In addition, the squadron was also responsible for the training of RF-4B crews and development and operational testing of various new reconnaissance systems. The unit was divided into four sections: one main thirteen-aircraft unit at home at El Toro and three dets at Iwakuni (Japan), within the USA and at Hawaii, although the latter two were no permanent fixture. Numbers of aircraft involved in these dets ranged from two to six aircraft. However, it was not uncommon for the squadron to have all three detachments deployed at the same time. Additionally, the occasional deployment to NAS Roosevelt Roads (PR) was made.

Becoming an RF-4B pilot included about twenty hours in an Air Force simulator and twenty hours flying 'plain' F-4s with VMFAT-101, fol-

lowing which a prospective pilot was teamed up with a RIO, become operational as a recce crew and qualify on the boat, all in the space of less than a year. Maj Beak recalls: "Carrier operations were not easy. There were many good aircrew that didn't qualify and went to other aircraft. Otherwise, life in the squadron was exceptionally fun, with plenty of deployments and cross-country opportunities to get out of town and just fly."

Life in the squadron consisted of a continuous series of exercises and other events. Although there is no need to list them all, some are worth recounting: on 27 September 1977 a detachment departed for a cruise on board the USS Midway. During the cruise, the carrier participated in exercise 'Midlink 77', which was a two-day exercise hosted by the Iranian Navy. VMFP-3 provided the recce assets during the exercise; Iranian Phantoms and F-5s took part in the exercise as well. The squadron also participated in most, if not all, 'Team Spirit' exercises of the period. These were joint Korean – Japanese – US exercises. On 1 September 1978, the squadron deployed three RF-4Bs (153092/11, 153101/16, 153106/22) to Goose Bay in Canada, from where they continued to Keflavik and their final



A rather unique set of toned down markings was displayed by 151979/RF-04 of VMFP-3 when it visited Andrews AFB (MD) on 23 August 1980. The aircraft was painted in the standard gull grey camouflage, and carried black lettering. The anti-glare shield surrounding the cockpit and the squadron's tail markings were in single a contrasting grey colour, while the star & bar was painted in two different greys, rather like a negative of a photograph.

(Eugene Zorn via Stephen Miller).



VMFP-3 Iwakuni deployments:

aug75	- feb76	det.1	153107/610, 153093/611, 153106/612, 153105/613, 153109/614, 153102/615
feb76	- aug76	det.A	153107/610, 153093/611, 153106/612, 153105/613, 153109/614, 153102/615
aug76	- feb77	det.B	153107/610, 153093/611, 153106/612, 153105/613, 153109/614, 153102/615
feb77	- aug77	det.C	153093/610, 153102/611, 153105/612, 153106/613, 153107/614, 153109/615
aug77	- feb78	det.A	157342/610, 157344/611, 157349/612, 157350/613
feb78	- aug78	det.B	157342/610, 157346/611, 157349/612, 157350/613
aug78	- feb79	det.C	157342/610, 157346/611, 157349/612, 157350/613
feb79	- aug79	det.A	157342/610, 157346/611, 157349/612, 157350/613
aug79	- feb80	det.B	157342/610, 157346/611, 157349/612, 157350/613
feb80	- aug80	det.C	151977/610, 151981/611, 151983/612, 153105/613
aug80	- feb81	det.A	151977/610, 151981/611, 151983/612, 153105/613
feb81	- aug81	det.B	153110/115, 153092/116, 153103/117, 153108/120
aug81	- feb82	det.C	153110/115, 153092/116, 153103/117, 153108/120
feb82	- aug82	det.A	157348/115, 157342/116, 157345/117, 157347/120
aug82	- feb83	det.B	157348/115, 157342/116, 157345/117, 157347/120
feb83	- aug83	det.C	151978/115, 151979/116, 151983/117, 153109/120
aug83	- feb84	det.A	151978/115, 151979/116, 151983/117, 153109/120
feb84	- may84		no deployment
may84	- nov84	det.C	157351/00, 157346/31, 157349/34, 157350/35
nov84	- may85	det.A	157351/00, 157346/31, 157349/34, 157350/35
may85	- nov85	det.B	157346/31, 157349/34, 157350/35, 157351/36
nov85	- may86	det.C	157342/27, 157345/30, 157347/32, 157348/33
may86	- nov86	det.A	157342/27, 157345/30, 157347/32, 157348/33
nov86	- may87	det.B	153105/21, 153108/24, 153109/25, 153110/26
may87	- nov87	det.C	153105/21, 153108/24, 153109/25, 153110/26
nov87	- may88	det.A	153095/14, 153105/21, 153108/24, 153110/26
may88	- nov88	det.B	151978/03, 151983/07, 153096/15, 153107/23
nov88	- may89	det.C	151978/03, 151983/07, 153096/15, 153107/23

destination of Vandel AB in Denmark, where they took part in the huge NATO exercises 'Bold Guard' and 'Northern Wedding'. The deployment itself was known as 'Agile Kiwi'. The aircraft returned home on 24 September 1978. This was a very interesting deployment, as it also involved four EA-6As, eight AV-8As, twelve A-6Es and twelve F-4Js, all from USMC units. Those were the days!

During the 1979-1980 Iranian hostage crisis, VMFP-3 Det.1 deployed to the area on board the USS Midway. On 4 November 1979, militant followers of the Ayatollah Khomeini, who had come to power following the overthrow of the Shah, seized the US Embassy in Tehran and held 63 US citizens hostage. The USS Midway arrived on station in the northern Arabian Gulf on 18 November 1979 and was joined by the USS Kitty Hawk (CV-63) on 21 November 1979. Both carriers, along with their escort ships, were joined by the USS Nimitz (CVN-68) and her

escorts on 22 January 1980. The USS Midway was relieved by USS Coral Sea (CV-43) on 5 February 1980 and returned home, ending RF-4B presence in the area. On 24 April 1980 an abortive attempt to rescue the hostages was made, this alone would warrant a separate and very interesting article! On 14 July 1980, the Midway departed for the Indian Ocean again (still in connection with the Iranian hostage crisis) and on 17 August the carrier relieved USS Constellation (CV-64) and joined the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN-69) task group which still was on contingency duty in the Arabian Sea. Midway spent a total of 118 days in the Indian Ocean during 1980. The hostages were finally released, with the help of Algerian diplomats, on 20 January 1981.

### DRAWDOWN

In 1984, the addition of HS-12 to CVW-5 meant that the USS



Having just come to a stop, a groundcrew member is busy placing chocks on the starboard wheel. The aircraft involved is 153110/RF-115 of VMFP-3. Note the 'USS Midway' titles on the fuselage. (14 April 1982, Donald McGarry via Stephen Miller)



Illustrating the gloss colour schemes applied by VMFP-3 (as related in the main text) are the pair of RF-4Bs shown above. On top is 157351/RF-36 at El Toro on 22 July 1990. This aircraft is painted in the one-off gloss black scheme with white titles. (via Patrick Roegies) The bottom photograph shows RF-4B 157350/RF-35 in the original gloss grey scheme, as seen at El Toro on 20 June 1990. This scheme was applied to all the flyable aircraft in the squadron but could only be encountered during the final months of RF-4B operations. (Bob Greby)

Midway ran out of hangar space, forcing the RF-4B det to remain ashore. Actually, between February and May 1984 no RF-4Bs were deployed to Japan at all. The final RF-4B cruise on the USS Midway took place early in 1984. During this final cruise they lost an RF-4B off the USS Midway on 25 January 1984. On that date Capt Mike Healey (pilot) and Maj John Yencha (RSO) were conducting a recce mission over the Indian Ocean when they suddenly experienced a hydraulic failure. They immediately headed for the ship and entered the hold-

the Corps, the USMC lost a lot of reconnaissance knowledge which was realized when ATARS entered service.

Sometime during 1990 the squadron's maintenance department was asked to repaint an RF-4B (151981), which had been withdrawn and was about to be transferred to the museum at El Toro. The museum provided the paint, as it was to be painted in the old gloss grey scheme, instead of the Tactical Paint Scheme the aircraft were in at the time. When the aircraft

ing pattern overhead the Midway while waiting for the next recovery cycle. A tanker was scrambled to aid in the recovery. The best way to make the recovery was discussed with the people on board the carrier and Healey initiated the emergency landing gear extension system which extends the landing gear pneumatically. After doing this, they found that the main gear was down but the nose gear was still in the 'up' position. More discussions followed and it was decided to make a barrier arrestment. The deck was cleared of the cables and the barrier was rigged. Healey turned for a 5-mile straight-in approach, blew down the flaps and from 1 mile the LSO took over, guiding the crippled Phantom to a safe landing. The Phantom caught the barrier, but suffered damage to the nose and never flew again.

In the mid-1980s it was planned to replace the Phantoms with a recce version of the Hornet, the RF-18A. This was to be a dedicated reconnaissance aircraft, unlike the ATARS-equipped F/A-18Ds the Corps uses nowadays. These plans fell through, however. The RF-4B was nearing the end of its service life in the late 1980s and it was decided to retire the aircraft, even without a successor on hand. The final RF-4B detachment to Iwakuni departed Japan in May 1989. The RF-4B also was the final naval F-4 in active fleet service; only a few F-4Ss would outlive them in reserve USMC units. With the early deactivation of the unit and the former squadron members being scattered around



Photographed while on approach to Yokota AB (Japan) on 19 December 1982 is RF-4B 157342/RF-116.

(Masanori Ogawa)



was finished everyone liked it so much that the squadron c/o, Lt-Col Pastuf, authorized a flyable aircraft to be painted in the gloss scheme. All said and done, they painted the name of MAG-11's c/o, Col Reisch, on the canopy rail. He was shown the aircraft, liked the paint job and authorized the unit to paint all the aircraft in the gloss scheme, on the understanding that if something happened and the unit was required to deploy, the planes would be repainted in the old scheme. By this time deactivation was only about nine months away and only six flyable Phantoms were left in the unit, so the painting started. Midway through the whole process, someone pointed out that, since VMFP-3 was a recce unit, they should have at least one 'negative'. LtCol Pastuf gave the go-ahead and they continued to paint one of the jets in the black scheme. Reportedly, neither the MAG-11 c/o or the wing CG were very enthusiastic about the black paint scheme but with the impending deactivation they were letting the unit have some fun....

In 1989 the unit started retiring its RF-4Bs; the last four RF-4Bs left the unit (and El Toro) on 17 August 1990, with the unit being inactivated on 30 September 1990, ending USMC involvement in tactical reconnaissance for the time being.

## RF-4B PRODUCTION LIST

The following is a condensed version of the RF-4B's service life. Assignments to the individual detachments of VMCJ-1 and VMFP-3 at Iwakuni and periods at the NARF at North Island have not been included.

- 151975 RF-4B-20-MC b/n 671 f/f 12mar65 d/d 16jun65. Noted flying with McDonnell may65/jun65, transferred to NATC 07jun65. Assigned to VMCJ-3 13oct65 (coded TN-1 at one point), to MASDC (8F004) 15dec70, departed storage on 05may78. Rework at NARF North Island from 08may78, Assigned to VMFP-3 29nov79 (coded RF-01 nov79/apr80). Lost on 25apr80 nr Mesquite (TX). Collided with RF-4B 151983 in dense clouds. Both crewmembers ejected safely, 151983 landed safely.
- 151976 RF-4B-20-MC b/n 747 f/f 06apr65 d/d 27may65. Assigned to VMCJ-3 27may65 (coded TN-19 jul65). Transferred to VMCJ-1 30jul68 (coded RM, modex unknown). Lost on 18oct68 in the Gulf of Tonkin, five miles offshore and 30 miles north of Hue, off the coast of North Vietnam. Aircraft was hit by ground fire during a photo run north of the DMZ. The port engine had to be shut down but damage was too severe and 151976 crashed in the sea. Both crewmembers ejected safely and were rescued by a USAF helicopter.
- 151977 RF-4B-20-MC b/n 777 f/f 27apr65 d/d 07jul65. Assigned to VMCJ-3 on 08jul65 (coded TN-2 at one point and TN-14 in 1970). Entered storage at MASDC (8F001) on 10dec70. Departed storage again on 05may78. Assigned to VMFP-3 22aug79 (coded RF-02 aug79, coded RF-610 in 1980 and later that year it received a code in the RF-1xx range, coded RF-02 oct84/jul87 and RF-00 apr88/oct88). To AMARC (8F325) 10mar89. Last noted there jul07.
- 151978 RF-4B-21-MC b/n 865 f/f 08jun65 d/d 01jul65. Initially delivered to NATC for some service test work but assigned to VMCJ-3 (coded TN, modex unknown) on 21jul65. Placed in storage at MASDC (8F005) 07jan71 and departed again 05may78. Assigned to VMFP-3 18sep79 (noted as RF-03 as early as aug79, l/n apr83, coded RF-115 may83/nov83, RF-03 oct84/oct88). To AMARC (8F328) 24may89. Last noted there jul07.
- 151979 RF-4B-21-MC b/n 897 f/f 29jun65 d/d 27aug65. Assigned to VMCJ-3 (coded TN-4 at one point) on 27aug65. Entered storage at MASDC (8F003) on 14dec70, departed again 05may78. Assigned to VMFP-3 on 08mar80. (coded RF-04 as early as aug79, l/n as such in 1982, coded RF-116 may83/jan84) and was with Det.1 on board the Midway on 25jan84, when the aircraft was extensively damaged when the nose gear collapsed during a barrier engagement on the carrier. Transferred to the custody of NARF North Island on 22mar85 where it was finally declared a write-off. Noted on the dump at North Island nov89/apr94. Probably scrapped.
- 151980 RF-4B-22-MC b/n 968 f/f 23jul65 d/d 30sep65. Assigned to VMCJ-3 on 01oct65 (coded TN-15 nov65). Entered storage at MASDC (8F002) 14dec70, departed again on 05may78. Assigned to VMFP-3 22jun79 (coded RF-05 aug79/apr89), stored at AMARC (8F333) on 12jul89. Last noted there jul07.
- 151981 RF-4B-22-MC b/n 1012 f/f 25aug65 d/d 09oct65. Assigned to VMCJ-3 on 19oct65 (coded TN, modex unknown). Stored at NARF North Island between 10jan67 until 10aug67 when it entered rework. It was re-delivered to VMCJ-3 on 30sep68 (coded TN-19, date unknown, and TN-4 in 1975). To VMFP-3 on 01jul75 (coded RF-1 dec76 and RF-06 in oct79, coded RF-611 in may80 and RF-06 again in aug80, to RF-115 in mar81 and coded RF-06 again may82/may84, noted without any markings in oct84 and RF-06 again apr85/mar90). Preserved at MCAS El Toro (CA) between aug90/apr92. Following the closure of El Toro, the airframe was moved to the Air Park at MCAS Miramar (CA) (oct99/feb08, marked 'RF-06')
- 151982 RF-4B-23-MC b/n 1053 f/f 23sep65 d/d 11jan66. Assigned to the NATC at Patuxent River for some test work on 11jan66. returned to McDonnell Douglas at St Louis (MO) for modifications on 24mar66 and was assigned to the NATC again on 07oct68. Entered squadron service on 06sep69 when it was assigned to VMCJ-3 (coded TN, modex unknown). Written off 18jan71 in a crash at NAS Lemoore (CA).
- 151983 RF-4B-23-MC b/n 1103 f/f 24sep65 d/d 01dec65. Remained in use with McDonnell Douglas dec65/feb66. Assigned to VMCJ-3 on 04may66 (coded TN-3 in jun71). Was with NARF North Island between 06may75 and 14sep79. Assigned to VMFP-3 on latter date (coded RF-07 oct79/dec79, RF-612 early in 1980, RF-116 aug80/mar81, RF-07 jun82/aug82, RF-117 may83/oct83, RF-07 again oct84/oct88). To AMARC (8F330) 25may89. Last noted there in jul07.
- 153089 RF-4B-24-MC b/n 1161 f/f 28oct65 d/d 26jan66. Assigned to VMCJ-3 on 26jan66 (coded TN-16 in jan66). Written off on 15jan69. While flying over the Sitton Peak in the Santa Ana mountains (CA) and on approach to MCAS El Toro in bad weather, the aircraft stalled and crashed.
- 153090 RF-4B-24-MC b/n 1182 f/f 10nov65 d/d 14jan66. Assigned to VMCJ-3 on 14jan66 (coded TN, modex unknown). Written off on 06may66. Crashed in the Pacific Ocean off NAS Miramar. The aircraft stalled during an aerobatic manoeuvre and entered an unrecoverable spin. Both crewmembers ejected safely.
- 153091 RF-4B-24-MC b/n 1203 f/f 09dec65 d/d 31jan66. Assigned to VMCJ-3 on 04feb66 (coded TN, modex unknown). Reassigned to VMCJ-1 at Da Nang on 11nov68 (coded RM-17 jun69/may72 and RM-602 sometime in 1975) and reassigned to VMFP-3 on 20oct75 (coded RF-10 oct80/apr89), to AMARC (8F337) on 02aug89, last noted there in jul07.
- 153092 RF-4B-24-MC b/n 1218 f/f 18dec65 d/d 11feb66. Assigned to VMCJ-2 at Cherry Point on 17feb66 (coded CY-1 in apr66).



RF-4B 157348 was used by the Naval Air Test Center (NATC) at NAS Patuxent River (MD) as a pattern aircraft for the 'Project Sure' upgrade programme for the RF-4B fleet. This included an onboard systems upgrade as well as airframe strengthening. The aircraft has a red tail with the NATC badge on top and the Project 'Sure' badge on the bottom of the tail. (Stephen Miller)

- Reassigned to VMCJ-3 on 15mar71 (coded TN-1 date unknown). Aircraft was loaned or temporarily assigned to the NATC between 22nov71 and 12mar72. To VMFP-3 on 01jul75 (coded RF-11 sep78/aug80 and RF-116 in nov80. Reverted to RF-11 in may81, coded RF-116 again aug81/feb82, RF-11 jul86/jul89. To AMARC (8F339) on 19sep89. Last noted in jul07.
- 153093 RF-4B-24-MC b/n 1243 f/f 30dec65 d/d 28feb66. Assigned to VMCJ-2 on 06apr66 (coded CY-2 in 1968). Reassigned to VMCJ-1 at Iwakuni on 13dec70 (coded RM-15 may71/nov71, RM-611 in 1972, RM-15 again jul72/feb74, coded RM-613 in aug75 but also carried RM-601 at one point in time). Assigned to VMFP-3 on 12sep75 (coded RF-611 aug76/feb77, RF-610 feb77/aug77, RF-12 aug80/jul89). The aircraft was reassigned to NATC at Patuxent River on 26apr85 but flew in the old VMFP-3 markings for several years until it was placed in storage at AMARC as 8F338 09aug89. Last noted in jul07.
- 153094 RF-4B-24-MC b/n 1263 f/f 25jan66 d/d 04mar66. Assigned to VMCJ-3 on 09mar66 (coded TN, modex unknown) and was reassigned to VMCJ-2 on 22mar68 (coded CY modex unknown). Back to VMCJ-3 on 20dec70 (coded TN, modex unknown), the squadron became VMFP-3 on 01jul75 (coded RF-13 from 1978 to aug80 but noted without markings may82/sep82. RF-13 again feb83/apr89), To AMARC (8F335) 19jul89). Last noted there jul07.
- 153095 RF-4B-25-MC b/n 1295 f/f 15feb66 d/d 08apr66. Assigned to VMCJ-2 on 11apr66 (coded CY-3 in 1968). Reassigned to VMCJ-3 on 02dec70 (coded TN modex unknown), to VMFP-3 on 01jul75 (coded RF-14 mar78/may89), to AMARC (8F327) 24may89. Last noted there jul07.
- 153096 RF-4B-25-MC b/n 1321 f/f 20feb66 d/d 30mar66. Assigned to VMCJ-3 on 04apr66 (coded TN modex unknown) but reassigned to VMCJ-2 on 22mar68 (coded CY modex unknown). Went back to VMCJ-3 on 03jan71 (coded TN-7 oct72/jun75), to VMFP-3 on 01jul75 (coded RF-15 aug80/oct88). During its period with VMFP-3, the aircraft was temporarily assigned to the NATC, between 01sep84 and 09may85. To AMARC (8F329 25may89). Last noted there jul07.
- 153097 RF-4B-25-MC b/n 1343 f/f 16mar66 d/d 17may66. Assigned to VMCJ-2 on 24may66 (coded CY, modex unknown). Suffered damage in an accident on 10jul70 and was sent to NARF Cherry Point for repairs on 20aug70 (noted there in feb72). Repairing the aircraft did not prove viable and it was struck-off charge at Cherry Point on 13mar72.
- 153098 RF-4B-25-MC b/n 1367 f/f 16mar66 d/d 17may66. Assigned to VMCJ-2 on 26may66 (coded CY-5 in 1966). Went to VMCJ-3 on 19dec70 (coded TN-8 mar71/sep74), to VMFP-3 on 01jul75 (coded RF-8, carried bicentennial markings and was named 'The Spirit of America' in oct75). Written off in a crash on 22oct75 somewhere in the desert in Arizona. The pilot lost control while performing ACM. Both crewmembers ejected from the aircraft but the pilot was killed.
- 153099 RF-4B-25-MC b/n 1391 f/f 26mar66 d/d 07jun66. Assigned to VMCJ-2 on 08jun66 (coded CY-6 and CY-9, both on unknown dates). Reassigned to VMCJ-3 on 30jan71 (coded TN-9 mar72/jan75). To VMFP-3 on 01jul75 (coded RF-9 oct75/jan76 – although sporting a new tail code, it was still marked VMCJ-3 during this period) and was written off 25oct76. It crashed near Tinker AFB (OK); it stalled during a join-up manoeuvre with another RF-4B.
- 153100 RF-4B-25-MC b/n 1413 f/f 07apr66 d/d 01jun66. Assigned to VMCJ-2 on 01jun66 (coded CY, modex unknown) and written-off on 06aug68. Location of the crash is unknown, but it crashed while performing aerobatics.
- 153101 RF-4B-26-MC b/n 1431 f/f 05jun66 d/d 13jul66. Assigned to VMCJ-3 on 15jul66 (coded TN, modex unknown). Reassigned to VMCJ-1 at Da Nang on 28oct66 (coded RM-15 in sep69, RM-00 jun70/aug71, RM-600 jul74/jan75. Was also coded RM-10 at one time). Reassigned to VMFP-3 on 20oct75 (coded RF-10 aug76/sep76 – carried bicentennial markings during these dates and was named 'Spirit of America'. Became RF-16 sep78/may81). Written off on 22may81. It crashed near Elgin (NV), while performing unauthorized aerobatics shortly after take-off from Nellis AFB (NV).
- 153102 RF-4B-26-MC b/n 1448 f/f 26may66 d/d 11jul66. Assigned to VMCJ-3 on 13jul66 (coded TN, modex unknown). Reassigned to VMCJ-1 at Da Nang on 28oct66 (Coded RM-26 in jun67, RM-16 in dec69 and was noted totally devoid of markings in jun70, then to RM-615 may75). Reassigned to VMFP-3 (coded RF-615 aug76/feb77, RF-611 feb77/aug77, RF-17 dec77/aug80, RF-611 aug81 and RF-17 again may82/jun89). To AMARC (8F336) 26jul89. Last noted there in jul07.
- 153103 RF-4B-26-MC b/n 1463 f/f 03jun66 d/d 29jun66. Assigned to VMCJ-3 on 01jul66. Reassigned to VMCJ-1 at Da Nang on 28oct66 (coded RM-25 in may67). Assigned to VMCJ-3 on 05may70. (coded TN-10 in 1973/jun75). To VMFP-3 on 01jul75 (initially coded RF-12 (date unknown) but this was changed to RF-20 nov78/oct80, coded RF-117 nov80/feb82 and RF-20 code oct83/apr89. To AMARC (8F332) 12jul89). Last noted there in jul07.
- 153104 RF-4B-26-MC b/n 1479 f/f 10jun66 d/d 16sep66. Assigned to VMCJ-3 on 16sep66 but reassigned to VMCJ-1 at Da Nang a few weeks later on 28oct66 (coded RM modex unknown) and remained active until written off on 12sep67. It crashed north of Cha Vanh, about 60 miles southwest of Da Nang, South Vietnam. It flew into a mountain, killing both crewmembers. The cause of the accident was never determined. The date has also been quoted as 11sep67 which is incorrect. This was the first RF-4B loss in Vietnam.
- 153105 RF-4B-26-MC b/n 1495 f/f 20jun66 d/d 29aug66. Assigned to VMCJ-3 on 30aug66 but reassigned to VMCJ-1 at Da Nang on 28oct66 (coded RM-28 in jun67 and RM-18 feb70/dec71, coded RM-604 dec74 and RM-603 at an unknown date, RM-611 in aug75 and RM-613 sometime during 1975). On 12sep75 it was reassigned to VMFP-3 (coded RF-613 aug76/



An RF-4B that displays a unique set of markings is seen here: 153105/RF-21 at Yokota AB on 13 February 1988. First of all, the letter 'A' has been added next to the unit's designation, which denoted 'Detachment A' which was in residence at Iwakuni at the time. Also, the Det's badge included two rolling dice, which appeared on the tail instead of the usual markings. (Masanori Ogawa)





RF-4B 153095/RF-7 of VMFP-3 at MCAS El Toro in oct78. Note the extended ram-air turbine. The tail markings are dark blue with white markings. The markings on the fuselage and the anti-glare shield are black. (Bruce Trombecky via Patrick Roegies)

- feb77, RF-612 feb77/aug77, RF-612 feb77/aug77, RF-21 aug79/nov79, RF-613 in jun80 and then in nov80 it used a code in the RF-1xx range. Coded RF-21 again dec80/jul89), to AMARC (8F334) 19jul89. Last noted there jul07.
- 153106 RF-4B-26-MC b/n 1515 f/f 08jul66 d/d 26aug66 . Assigned to VMCJ-3 on 26aug66 but was reassigned to VMCJ-1 at Da Nang on 28oct66 (coded RM-22 in aug68 and RM-19 in jan71. It was noted without markings in apr71/may71, to RM-609 jul74). Assigned to VMFP-3 on 28aug75 (coded RF-612 aug76/feb77, RF-613 feb77/aug77, RF-22 sep78/jul89. To AMARC (8F326) on 18apr89, still current jul07.
- 153107 RF-4B-26-MC b/n 1533 f/f 04aug66 d/d 23sep66. Initially assigned to VMCJ-3 on 07oct66 but was reassigned to VMCJ-1 at Da Nang on 28oct66 (coded RM-31 jun67 and RM-20 nov69/may71 and was also coded RM-19 at one time. Coded RF-614 jul75). On 28aug75 it was reassigned to VMFP-3 (coded RF-610 may76/feb77, RF-614 feb77/aug77 and RF-23 oct79/may89. To AMARC (8F331) 25may89, still current jul07.
- 153108 RF-4B-27-MC b/n 1553 f/f 11aug66 d/d 05oct66. On 28oct66 the aircraft was assigned to VMCJ-1 at Da Nang (coded RM-32 in jul67 but also coded RM-21, date unknown) . On 09jan75 the aircraft was assigned to VMCJ-3 (coded TN-2 may75). On 01jul75 it was assigned to VMFP-3 (coded RF-24 aug80/oct80 and RF-120 nov80/feb82. Coded RF-24 again oct83/dec88). To AMARC (8F324) 23dec88, still current there jul07.
- 153109 RF-4B-27-MC b/n 1571 f/f 17aug66 d/d 01oct66. Assigned to VMCJ-3 on 03oct66 but was reassigned to VMCJ-1 at Da Nang on 28oct66 (coded RM-22 oct66/oct70, noted uncoded between apr71/may71, coded RM-22 again may71/jan72. Coded RM-614 in aug75 but was also noted as RM-604 at one point). On 13sep75 the aircraft was assigned to VMFP-3 (coded RF-614 between aug75/feb77 and RF-615 in late feb77, RF-17 may77 and RF-25 aug80/apr83, coded RF-120 may83/nov83 and RF-25 again apr85/oct87) but was lost in an accident on 19oct87. It crashed on the Crow Valley range, 70 miles north of Subic Bay in the Philippines. During a recce mission, a photo flash cartridge exploded inside aircraft instead of ejecting and the aircraft caught fire, following which the crew ejected safely.
- 153110 RF-4B-27-MC b/n 1590 f/f 01sep66 d/d 16nov66. Assigned to VMCJ-2 on 18nov66 (code CY, modex unknown) and was reassigned to VMCJ-3 on 20apr68 (code TN, modex unknown). It moved to VMCJ-1 on 30jul68 (coded RM-25 jan69, noted without codes mar69/apr69. Coded RM-24 aug70/mar71, was uncoded again aug71/nov71 and returned to RM-24 in 1973. Coded RM-607 mar75). On 20oct75 the aircraft was assigned to VMFP-3 (coded RF-10, date unknown, RF-26 aug80/oct80. RF-115 nov80/apr82, RF-26 again may83/sep89). 153110 was officially SOC at MCAS El Toro on 18sep89. It was noted at El Toro in a WFU condition between apr90/nov92 and had been put on display by may93 (still coded RF-26). Upon closure of El Toro the aircraft was moved to MCAS Miramar, where it was stored in a compound between oct99/oct02. Its eventual fate is unknown.
- 153111 RF-4B-27-MC b/n 1610 f/f 22sep66 d/d 02nov66. Assigned to VMCJ-3 on 02nov66 (code TN, modex unknown). Moved to VMCJ-1 on 09may67 (coded RM-23 jul68/jan71 and uncoded jul71/sep71. Coded RM-605 nov74). The aircraft was written off on 03nov74 when it stalled on approach to the USS Midway and crashed alongside the ship. Unfortunately, one crewmember was lost. At the time of the crash, Midway was located 57 miles southwest of NAS Cubi Point, Philippines.
- 153112 RF-4B-27-MC b/n 1631 f/f 23sep66 d/d 02dec66. Assigned to VMCJ-2 on 02dec66 (code CY, modex unknown). Reassigned to VMCJ-3 on 11apr68 (coded TN but modex unknown) and still with the unit when it was written off in an accident at NAS Fallon (NV) on 10may72. During take-off the pilot over-rotated the aircraft and it crashed next to the runway, killing both crewmembers.
- 153113 RF-4B-27-MC b/n 1652 f/f 07oct66 d/d 11jan67. Assigned to VMCJ-2 on 11jan67 (coded CY but modex unknown) but was written off in a crash on 20jul67. Further details are not known.
- 153114 RF-4B-27-MC b/n 1673 f/f 22oct66 d/d 16jan67. Assigned to VMCJ-2 on 16jan67 (code CY, modex unknown). Reassigned to VMCJ-3 on 28jun67 (only with the unit for a few weeks so probably no code applied) and to VMCJ-1 at Da Nang on 16jul67 (code RM but no modex known). It was written off at Da Nang AB, South Vietnam, on 25dec67. While making an arrested landing at the base, the cable snapped and struck the Phantom's tail, causing the nose to pitch up. The pilot tried to go around but the aircraft stalled and crashed. Both crewmembers ejected but unfortunately the RIO was killed.
- 153115 RF-4B-27-MC b/n 1687 f/f 07nov66 d/d 22jun67. Following its first flight in 1966, the aircraft remained in use with McDonnell Douglas at St Louis as a test aircraft until 22jun67 when the aircraft was assigned to VMCJ-3. Reassigned to VMCJ-1 at Da Nang on 16jul67 (code RM but no modex known) but was written off on 02mar68. The aircraft was shot down near Muang Bac, 50 miles southwest of Da Nang AB, in South Vietnam. Both crewmembers ejected safely and were rescued by an Army helicopter.
- 157342 RF-4B-41-MC b/n 3689 f/f 02apr70 d/d 02jun70. Assigned to VMCJ-2 on 02jun70 (coded CY-00 in 1973). Moved on to VMCJ-3 on 21feb75 (coded TN, no modex known), and when VMFP-3 was activated on 01jul75, to that unit. (coded RF-19



153105/RF-21 photographed at El Toro in November 1979. Tail markings are green, with the chevrons and fox's head painted gold. All other markings are black. The aircraft on the left carries the official markings for the period. (Michael Grove via Stephen Miller)

- jan76, RF-610 aug77 to oct79, RF-27 aug80, RF-116 nov82/apr83, RF-27 again jul83/apr90 and was recoded RF-00 jul90/ aug90). Stored at MCAS Cherry Point (NC) oct98, it had been fully restored to display status by apr02 and had been put on display outside the Havelock tourist center (nr MCAS Cherry Point), by mar03. Last noted in may08 (coded CY-00).
- 157343 RF-4B-41-MC b/n 3704 f/f 01may70 d/d 24jun70. Assigned to VMCJ-2 on 24jun70 (coded CY, modex unknown). The aircraft was involved in a landing accident at MCAS Cherry Point on 02feb73 and went to NARF Cherry Point on 20apr73, where it was determined that the aircraft could not be repaired; it was officially declared a write-off on 22mar74.
- 157344 RF-4B-41-MC b/n 3717 f/f 08jun70 d/d 10jul70. Assigned to VMCJ-2 on 10jul70 (coded CY-2 in 1973, CY-1 in jul74 and CY-20 in 1975. Reassigned to VMCJ-3 on 08mar75 (probably never repainted in their marks, see later) and on 01jul75 it became part of the new VMFP-3 (noted still carrying the old code 'CY-20' but with VMFP-3 markings! In dec76 it was coded RF-20 in dec76 and RF-611 in sep77. The aircraft was written off in a crash on 27sep77. One of the aircraft's engines caught fire during take-off from NAS Atsugi (Japan) and both crewmembers abandoned the aircraft shortly after. Unfortunately, the aircraft crashed in a residential area at Eda Chou, Midori Ku, which is 10 miles northwest of Yokohama. Unfortunately, three civilians on the ground were killed as well as six others injured; the crew managed to eject safely.
- 157345 RF-4B-41-MC b/n 3735 f/f 16jul70 d/d 26aug70. Assigned to VMCJ-2 at Cherry Point on 26aug70 (coded CY but modex unknown). Temporarily assigned to H&MS-14 between 31jan73 and 08feb73 but returned to VMCJ-2 – the purpose of this assignment remains unknown, H&MS-14 used a few TA-4Fs. On 11mar75 the aircraft was reassigned to VMCJ-3, and to the new VMFP-3 on 01jul75 (coded RF-21 may76/dec76 and RF-30 nov79/mar81. Coded RF-117 nov82/apr83). Assigned to NATC between 02nov84 and 01mar85 and returned to VMFP-3 on the latter date (noted as RF-30 apr88/ aug90), Placed in storage at AMARC as 8F340 on 01aug90 and still current jul07.
- 157346 RF-4B-41-MC b/n 3749 f/f 29jul70 d/d 08oct70. Assigned to VMCJ-2 on 08oct70 (coded CY-4 in 1971. Was also noted as CY-3 at one time). Like 157345, also temporarily assigned to H&MS-14 between 05jan73 and 20dec73 and returned to VMCJ-2. On 19mar75 it was reassigned to VMCJ-3 and to VMFP-3 on 01jul75 (coded RF-22 nov75/dec76, RF-611 1978/oct79 and RF-31 aug80/jul90). Stored (in a protective bag) at MCAS Cherry Point (NC) aug90/aug99. Fate unknown, probably scrapped.
- 157347 RF-4B-43-MC b/n 3849 f/f 04sep70 d/d 30oct70. Assigned to VMCJ-2 30oct70 (coded CY-5 in 1973). Moved on to VMCJ-3 on 17mar75, and to VMFP-3 on 01jul75 (coded RF-32 mar78/oct80, RF-120 jul82/may83 and RF-32 oct83/ may90). The aircraft was lost in a crash in the Pacific off San Clemente Island (CA) on 09may90.
- 157348 RF-4B-43-MC b/n 3870 f/f 11sep70 d/d 12nov70. Assigned to VMCJ-2 on 12nov70 (coded CY, modex unknown). Moved to H&MS-14 at Cherry Point on 18dec72, where it remained until 02may74 (see 157345) when it was assigned to VMCJ-2 again. Even though VMCJ-2 ceased to exist in jul75, it remained on their charge until it was officially transferred to the NATC at Patuxent River on 01nov75. It went back to McDonnell Douglas on 18jun76 and then returned to NATC again on 16sep77. These moves were made as 157348 was the prototype aircraft for the 'Project Sure' modification program. As soon as test work had been completed the aircraft was sent to NARF North Island for rework on 20dec77. Upon completion, on 20sep79, it was assigned to VMFP-3 (coded RF-33 nov79/oct80, RF-115 nov82/apr83 and RF-33 again oct83/ jul90). The aircraft was then stored at NAS China Lake (CA) from 06aug90 to nov96. It had returned to NAS North Island for restoration to display standard by jan99 and was preserved in the China Lake Museum of Armament & Technology Air Park, NAS China Lake in sep05. Last noted there in jan07.
- 157349 RF-4B-43-MC b/n 3892 f/f 15oct70 d/d 02dec70. Assigned to VMCJ-2 on 02dec70 (coded CY-6 may73). On 07feb75 it was transferred to VMCJ-3 and progressed to VMFP-3 on 01jul75 (coded RF-25 jul76, RF-612 aug77/oct79, RF-34 aug80, RF-01 oct83 and RF-30 later in oct83, and finally RF-34 mar85/jul90). Stored at MCAS Cherry Point (NC) (oct90/ apr01. Preserved in the National Museum of Naval Aviation, NAS Pensacola (FL) nov03/sep08
- 157350 RF-4B-43-MC b/n 3913 f/f 05nov70 d/d 27jan71. Assigned to VMCJ-2 on 27jan71 (coded CY-8 at one time) Reassigned to VMCJ-3 on 07feb75, and VMFP-3 on 01jul75 (coded RF-26 dec76, RF-613 aug77/feb78, RF-01 oct83 and RF-35 jan87/aug90). Initially, the aircraft was dumped behind the Naval Air Depot at MCAS Cherry Point, but later moved to the F-4 storage line at the base (apr97/aug99). The aircraft was finally broken up at the Naval Air Depot at Cherry Point late in 1999.
- 157351 RF-4B-43-MC b/n 3937 f/f 01dec70 d/d 24dec70. Assigned to the NARF at NAF Warminster on 28dec70. Went back to McDonnell Douglas for some modification work on 28apr71, following which the aircraft was assigned to the NATC for more test work on 09jun71. Operational service with VMCJ-2 started on 24aug71 (coded CY-9 in mar73). On 13mar75 the aircraft was reassigned to VMCJ-3 but entered rework at NARF North Island on 25apr75. It remained there for some considerable time and was not assigned to the NATC until 07jan78. It was assigned to VMFP-3 on 26jul78 but quickly returned to NARF North Island on 30oct78. It was finally assigned to an operational unit, VMFP-3, again on 29jun81. Why the aircraft stayed at the NARF for six years remains a mystery! It was coded RF-00 dec81/mar85 and RF-36 aug88/ aug90. Stored at MCAS Cherry Point (NC) in apr95/oct98, but was stripped of usable parts at the NAD at Cherry Point in 1999; the remains of the aircraft were placed in storage again at Cherry Point and last noted in apr01.



