

50th
Anniversary
of a Record
Navy Flight

Author's note on an unofficial record: the significance of Dosé's and Miller's flight was that it was not a "Project" anything. That is the beauty of it. It was a last-minute event set up by the U.S. Navy to portray the advances in the capabilities of new naval aircraft. They knew that President Eisenhower, et al., would be on the USS Saratoga to observe naval exercises east of Jacksonville and thought it would be a good idea to "just do it."

John Glenn's "Project Bullet" six weeks later was a very official record run that had been set up well ahead of time to be a "big thing," and it certainly was. Remember, Dosé and Miller only had about a week to get this organized! I may be wrong, but I doubt that Ike even knew much ahead of time that this was to take place. These types of flights will probably never happen again due to the restriction of supersonic flight over the U.S.
W. Northup

TOWARD THE END OF MAY 1957, Capt. Robert Dosé, CO of VX-3 based at NAS Atlantic City, New Jersey, received a call from a friend at DCNO Air Operations asking whether he could—in about a week's time—set up and make an historic carrier-to-carrier, Pacific to Atlantic flight, specifically on the anniversary of D-Day, June 6. President Eisenhower, top government officials, Navy admirals and members of the press were to be aboard the carrier USS *Saratoga* on the East Coast. Dosé said, "Sure." So it was a go.

MACH 1.0+

CRUSADER DASH

By William Northup



In their F4U-1 Crusaders, VX-3 CO Capt. Bob Dosé and Lt. Cmdr. Paul Miller go around a huge thunderstorm over Jacksonville, Florida, during their Mach descent toward their landing aboard the carrier USS *Saratoga*. (Illustration by Bill Northup.)



PHOTO BY TED CARLSON/FOTODYNAMICS

AT THE CHANCE VOUGHT FACTORY IN DALLAS, TEXAS, Dosé and his wingman, Lt. Cmdr. Paul Miller, picked up a new Crusader for Miller that was equipped with the new in-flight refueling modification. Also in Dallas, Dosé's older F8U-1 Crusader was modified with this new refueling probe as well.

The F8U-1 Crusader was a helluva machine. The previous year, Cmdr. Duke Windsor had set a speed record of 1,015.429mph. Not only that, he was ordered to "Hold it to just over 1,000mph" by the brass, and the F8U-1 had a very long cruise range compared to other fighters of that time.

The San Diego to Jacksonville flight was planned to be two legs, with in-flight refueling over Dallas because that city was only six miles off the route. It was calculated that they would go into afterburner (A/B) and go supersonic at a specific time on each leg with a safe margin of fuel remaining to refuel airborne on the first leg, and on the second leg to make a "Mach descent" to a carrier landing aboard *Saratoga*. The first leg was to be 13 minutes supersonic, and 17 minutes on the second—longer on the last because they would start from 25,000 feet after refueling and not from ground level.

During the descent to the tanker they gave Dallas a "really good" sonic boom! Not intentionally, of course.



Capt. Dosé climbs out of his F8U-1 after landing on the USS Saratoga, June 6, 1957. (Photo courtesy of Bob Dosé via author.)

CRUSADER CHRONOLOGY

- 1955** The first test flight of the Crusader was on March 25, 1955, and Chance Vought test pilot John Conrad took it past Mach 1.0. This was the first production, non-experimental fighter type to do so in level flight.
- 1956** On August 21, 1956, Duke Windsor took the No. 12 production F8U-1 aloft over the China Lake 15-kilometer course, and with a full load of guns and ammo, he proceeded to set a speed record of 1,015.428mph. It could have gone faster, but Windsor was ordered by the brass to hold it to just over 1,000mph. Windsor, the Crusader and Chance Vought were awarded the Thompson Trophy, the Collier Trophy and, for the first time ever, a Certificate of Merit from the Bureau of Aeronautics.
- 1957** On June 6, 1957, Bob Dosé and Paul Miller set the unofficial record detailed in this article. On July 16, 1957, John Glenn and Charlie Demmler in two photo F8U-1Ps flew *Project Bullet*. Los Alamitos, California, to New York. Glenn set the record of three hours 23 minutes, with an average speed of 726.55mph, which equates to approximately Mach 1.1. Demmler aborted due to a broken refueling probe.
- 1999** The last Crusader was retired by the French Navy—Squadron 12F Lascars. On October 28, 1999, the last F8U-1 launched from a carrier was piloted by Lascars CO Cmdr. Antoine Guillot from the French carrier *Foch*. The last Crusader flights were during the 1999 to 2000 winter. After these flights ended, the Lascars hosted a big party that celebrated the Crusader and all F8U-1 pilots everywhere.



On July 16, 1957, John Glenn (pictured here) flew an F8U-1P during the *Project Bullet* speed run. (Photo via Air Age archives.)

CHARACTER OF THE CRUSADER

Pilots loved the Crusader for mostly two reasons. One: its performance. It was fast! You could climb to 40,000 feet in two and a half minutes. Not only that; you could fight and pull 4G at this altitude. Two: the mission—air-to-air superiority. This training is fun-flying for any real fighter pilot. You went up and practiced air combat maneuvers all the time.

And there were guns. The F8U Squadrons kept to this doctrine all the time—everywhere. The F-4 Squadrons (prior to 1969 and Top Gun) trained exclusively in radar intercepts and missile shoots. Boring! When it came to the reality of air war, they were not ready for this type of air combat.

VF-211 CO Hal Marr and his wingman Phil Vampatella were the first Crusaders pilots to down MiGs in the Vietnam War. (Illustration by Bill Northrup.)

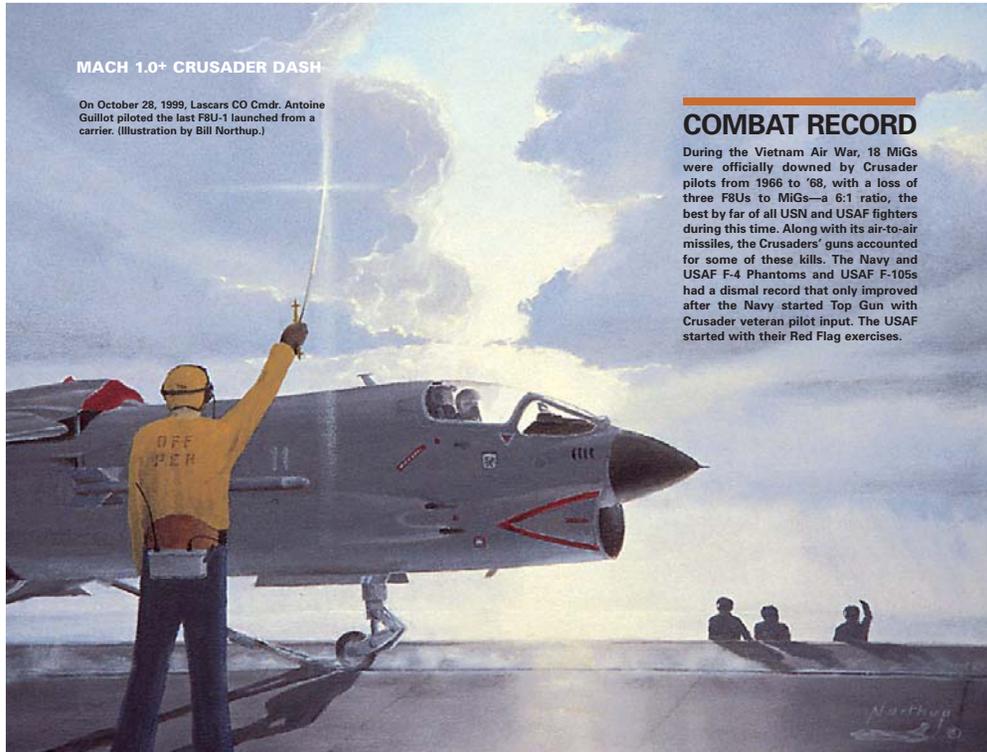


Phil Vampatella
VF-211

Hal Marr
VF-211

MACH 1.0+ CRUSADER DASH

On October 28, 1999, Lascars CO Cmdr. Antoine Guillot piloted the last F8U-1 launched from a carrier. (Illustration by Bill Northup.)



COMBAT RECORD

During the Vietnam Air War, 18 MiGs were officially downed by Crusader pilots from 1966 to '68, with a loss of three F8Us to MiGs—a 6:1 ratio, the best by far of all USN and USAF fighters during this time. Along with its air-to-air missiles, the Crusaders' guns accounted for some of these kills. The Navy and USAF F-4 Phantoms and USAF F-105s had a dismal record that only improved after the Navy started Top Gun with Crusader veteran pilot input. The USAF started with their Red Flag exercises.

They figured to go to 43,000 feet and fast-cruise to the point at which afterburners were lit and then accelerate to Mach 1.7. This was the maximum speed allowed for the early Crusaders owing to directional instability above that Mach number. Later F8U-1s had ventral fins that allowed Mach numbers above 1.9.

A practice flight was made from Dallas to San Diego. Dosé and Miller went west to the point at which they were to go into A/B for the 13 minutes of the first leg eastbound. They turned, went into burner, accelerated to 1.7 Mach and headed toward Dallas and the awaiting AJ Savage tanker plane. During the descent to the tanker, they gave Dallas a "really good" sonic boom! Not intentionally, of course. They had taken on enough fuel on the practice flight, so they were sure the new in-flight refueling system worked properly, and then landed at NAS Dallas. Later that evening, Chance Vought test pilot John Conrad told them, "You guys almost knocked me out of my bathtub."

P & W'S KEEP ON TICKIN'

The engine chosen for the Crusader was the Pratt & Whitney J-57; with 10,000-pound thrust and 15,000 with afterburner, this was one of the most reliable engines built during this time. If an F8U went down, it usually was the fault of other circumstances—not the engine's.

The next day, they flew to NAS Alameda in California and the F8U-1s were loaded aboard the USS *Bon Homme Richard*. The carrier then headed to San Diego.

June 6, 1957

Capt. Dosé and Lt. Cmdr. Miller launched, joined up and headed east on the first leg of their flight. They climbed in A/B to 43,000 feet (in only about 4.5 minutes!), came out of A/B and continued the flight plan. This plan was all set except for one place: the White Sands Missile Range. The USAF had not previously cleared them through that air space. Capt. Dosé alerted the air controllers seven minutes out that they were coming, and they were cleared 35 seconds prior to crossing into that air space! Dosé said "It wouldn't have made any difference because we were coming through regardless."

Thirteen minutes prior to the descent point to the tankers waiting near Dallas, they went into burner, accelerated to 1.7 Mach and

MACH 1.0+ CRUSADER DASH



An F8U Crusader air refuels from Grumman AJ tankers—the same type of tanker aircraft used in the ocean to ocean flight. (Photo courtesy of Pensacola Museum archives via author.)

held this Mach to the descent point. They then went out of A/B, descended, met the tankers, plugged in, took on a full load of fuel and again went into A/B, climbing to 43,000 feet for the last leg.

Dosé remembers, "It was one of those rare days: a beautiful, clear, dark-blue sky all across the southern states." They didn't get any help from the jet stream that day; there wasn't much wind at all. For the last leg's 17 minutes of supersonic flight, they went into A/B near the middle of Alabama. As they pressed on, the Crusaders wanted to go faster, so not to exceed Mach 1.7, they started a slow climb. While reporting to the FAA over eastern Alabama, the controller exclaimed "What the hell are you guys flying?" The pilots grinned. They were really hauling!

During the slow climb on their way toward Jacksonville, the Crusaders had attained an altitude of 47,500 feet as they arrived at the descent point. Over Jacksonville, Dosé recalls, "... was the biggest and tallest thunderstorm I had ever seen; it must have topped out at about 60,000 feet. I decided to go around the north side of it." About 50 miles east of Jacksonville, the carrier group cruised with many ships. They broke Mach 1.0 in their descent and headed for the *Saratoga* where President Eisenhower, his staff and others awaited their arrival. They came by the ship just above deck level, about 100 feet out, doing 650 knots. That got everyone's attention! Three hours and 28 minutes—an unofficial record!

Now Dosé realized they'd have to kill off all excess speed to be in good shape to get aboard on the first pass. Every Navy pilot knows you have to look good around the boat. He decided to go a little farther upwind then break for the turn downwind, and he pulled a lot of G to help kill off the excess speed. The Crusader was reluctant to slow up, but at last, Dosé arrived on final approach with



President Eisenhower discusses the epic flight with Capt. Bob Dosé (near left) and Lt. Cmdr. Paul Miller (second from the left) after they landed on the carrier. (Photo courtesy of Bob Dosé via author.)

220 knots, slow enough to raise the wing and drop the gear. He said, "I had about 142 knots very close in and added a lot of power. I made a big correction near the ramp and caught the number-three wire. Paul Miller got aboard OK also. He had a little more time to slow down for his landing. Later, the LSO, Lt. Sharp, remarked to his CO, Capt Dosé, "Skipper, that was a dilly!"

After climbing down from their cockpits, they were surrounded by the press before being greeted by President Eisenhower. Dosé remembered Ike as being "a very impressive gentleman who was very interested in all the details of our flight."

After the festivities, Capt Dosé and Lt. Cmdr. Miller launched and headed home to Atlantic City. Their Crusaders had performed flawlessly. Their unofficial record still stands. ▶

Capt Dosé's Crusader, with arresting hook retracted, clears the landing area and taxis forward after trapping on the USS *Saratoga*. (Photo courtesy of Pensacola Museum archives via author.)

