

# Submerged Cultural Resources Exploration Team

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**Exploration Updates**

**Fall 2006**

**Issue 2**

Welcome to the second issue of *SCRET's* newsletter for 2006. Our goal is to publish the newsletter twice each year. Each issue will focus on *SCRET's* efforts to explore and document significant submerged cultural resources in the Pacific Northwest.

## **Grumman F4F-4 Wildcat, Bureau #4097**

The focus of this newsletter is a Grumman F4F-4 Wildcat, a World War II era fighter aircraft, whose remains lie approximately 200 feet deep in Lake Washington.

Manufacturer: Grumman Corporation

Type: Carrier-based fighter

Crew: pilot

Power plant: one 1,200 horsepower Pratt & Whitney R-1830-86 engine

Dimensions: wing span, 36 feet; length 28 feet; 9 inches; height 11 feet, 10 inches

Weight: empty, 5,785 lbs.; gross, 7,952 lbs.

Performance: max. speed, 318 mph; cruising speed, 155 mph; initial climb, 1,950 feet per minute; service ceiling, 34,900 feet; range, 770 miles

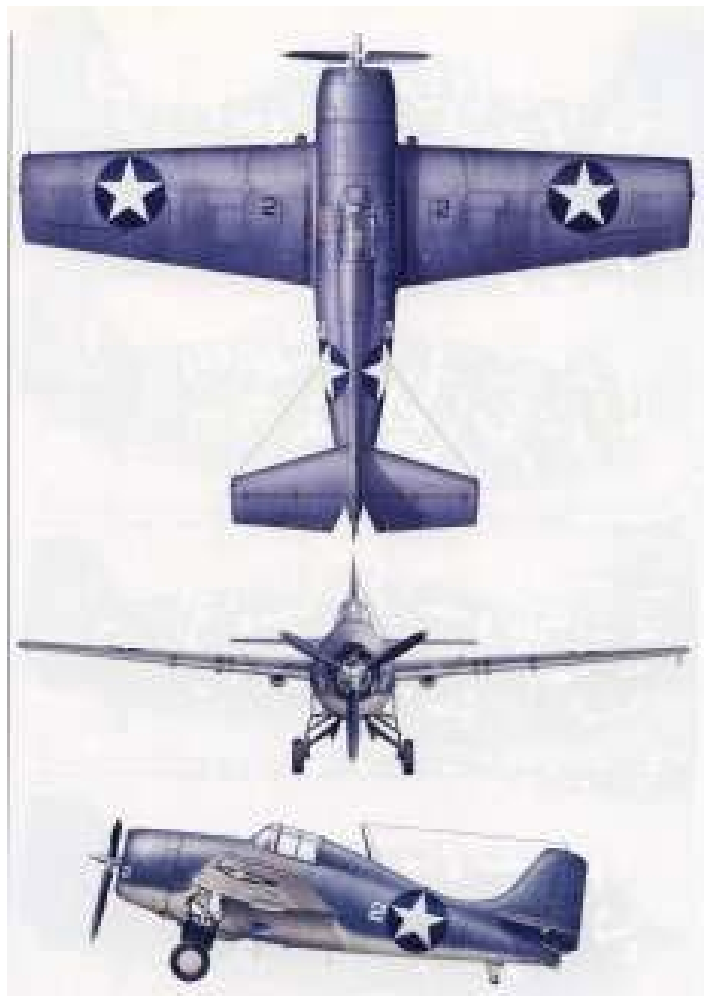
Armament: Six forward firing .50 cal. machine guns

## **History**

The Grumman F4F Wildcat was the primary Navy and Marine Corps fighter during the first year and a half of World War II. Versions of the fighter remained in active combat through the end of the Pacific War. While the little F4F could not equal the speed and maneuverability of its Japanese counterpart, the "Zero", its rugged construction and superior armament, coupled with good pilots and tactics,

resulted in it shooting down nearly seven enemy aircraft for every loss of its own.

The Wildcat's simple design and strength made it ideal for carrier operations. The Wildcat had a folding wing that would tuck up against the side of the fuselage like a bird's wing. This allowed nearly twice as many Wildcats to be carried in the same amount of deck space. Even after it was largely succeeded by the larger F6F Hellcat, the Wildcat's small size guaranteed its continued use on small escort carriers.



**Grumman F4F-4 Wildcat**



**August 17, 1942.** Operating out of NAS Seattle at Sand Point, four Avenger torpedo bombers made a simulated torpedo attack on a target in Lake Washington, located near Meydenbauer Bay. Three Wildcat fighters were simulating defense of the target. The torpedo bombers were traveling east, toward Bellevue, at about 200 knots. The three fighters made an opposing run from ahead at about 300 knots. The pilot of Wildcat #4097 held his attack too long to affect a safe recovery and the wing of his plane collided with the wing of one of the Avengers. The fighter pilot continued west, toward Seattle, lowered his landing gear to slow his plane and bailed out. The Wildcat went into the lake off Leshi.

Mrs. Marshall Dwyer, of Seattle, saw the fighter plane crash from a window of her home. "I noticed the plane gliding along, quite low," Mrs. Dwyer said. "I didn't realize it was in trouble until I saw the pilot leap out. He wasn't very high, and his parachute didn't open until about half a second before he hit the water. He must have landed very hard. His plane landed with a great splash, maybe a block from where he hit the water."  
(*Seattle Times*, August 18, 1942).



The pilot of Wildcat #4097, Ensign James Joseph Kinsella, suffered bruises on his face and arms, but was not seriously injured.

After the collision, the damaged Avenger and other aircraft flew north toward NAS Seattle. The damaged Avenger crashed into the lake off Kirkland. The pilot and top turret gunner managed to get out of the aircraft before it sank; however, the radioman/ventral gunner was trapped in the plane and drowned. (See *SECRET Newsletter*, 2005, Issue 1).

The pilot of the Wildcat was later deemed responsible for the collision. The Navy accident card cites the cause as 100% pilot error (75% judgment and 25% poor technique).

Fifty years later, Wildcat #4097 was the subject of a custody battle in Federal Court in Seattle between the US Navy and Historic Aircraft Preservation, Inc. The salvage company argued that it was entitled to ownership of the Wildcat under admiralty law because the Navy had abandoned the aircraft by failing to recover it. In 1996, the Federal Court rejected the salvage company's claim and ruled that the Navy retains ownership of the Wildcat. The Navy continues to claim ownership of the Wildcat and other WWII era planes in the lake. While the Navy



has no plans for any of the planes, it continues to refuse to allow private parties to recover the aircraft.

### **The Wildcat Today**

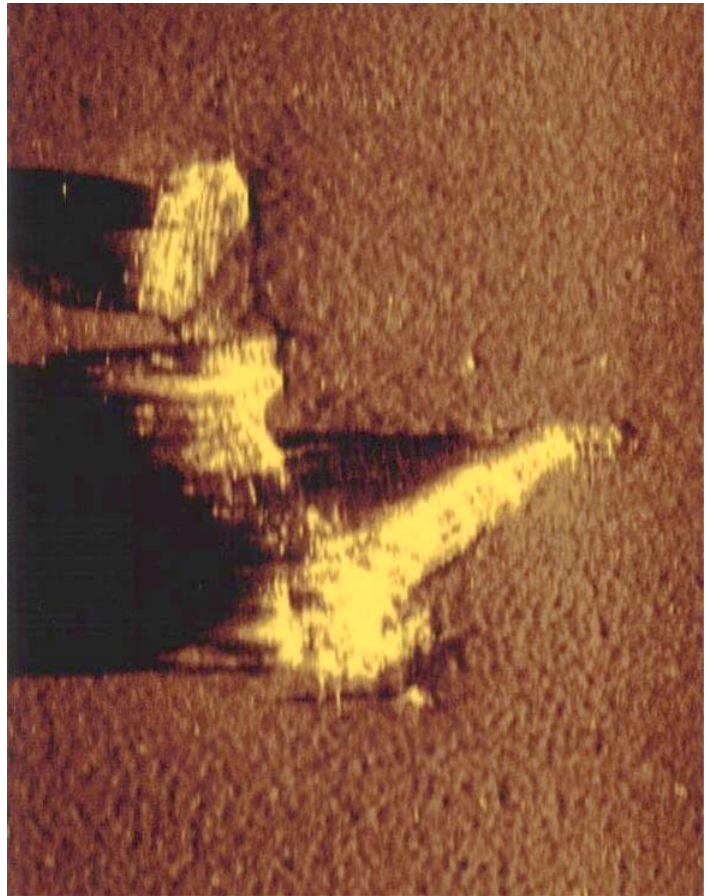
The Wildcat lies upside down on the bottom of Lake Washington, off Leshi, in 200 feet of water. The fuselage and starboard wing are intact. The port wing is not connected to the fuselage but is lying next to the plane on the bottom, near the tail. The main landing gear is in place and extended. The cockpit is buried in the silt bottom. The canopy sits next to the wing. The tail section of the aircraft is intact, although twisted at an angle. The tail wheel and hook are attached to the tail. The engine and propeller appear to be intact, but are buried in the silt bottom. The tip of one of the propeller blades protrudes from the bottom. The white star and other Navy insignia are still visible on the wings and tail.

There are court papers attached to the Wildcat from the 1996 lawsuit. Apparently, someone thought it was necessary to “serve” the plane.

The Wildcat shows the damage caused by its collision with the Avenger and subsequent impact with the surface of the lake. There is also evidence of further deterioration caused by galvanic corrosion.

### ***Artist’s Rendering of Wildcat Today***

*Provided by Peo Orvendal*



***Side scan Image of Wildcat***

Provided by Innerspace Exploration Team





*Fuselage*



*Tail Hook for Landing on Aircraft Carriers*



*Tail*



*Tail (Side View)*



*Tail (Rear View)*



*Tail Wheel*



***Main Port Landing Gear***



***SCRET Diver Joe Radosevic with legal papers***



***Main Starboard Landing Gear***



***SCRET Diver Peo Orvendal inspects canopy***



***Wing***



***SCRET Diver Joe Radosevic***

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I would like to contact *SCRET* for information on a wreck – write to [info@scret.org](mailto:info@scret.org)

I would like to become a member of *SCRET* – join on-line at [www.scret.org](http://www.scret.org)

I would like to make a financial contribution to *SCRET* – mail to *SCRET*'s address shown below.

I would like to contribute an article to *SCRET*'s next newsletter – e-mail to [wjaccard@mindspring.com](mailto:wjaccard@mindspring.com) or mail to *SCRET*'s address shown below.

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