









The F-8 Crusader was the US Navy's first practical supersonic fighter. In September 1951, the navy announced a call for bids from major aircraft manufacturers for a supersonic fighter capable of carrier-borne operations. Although supersonic technology was still in its infancy at the time, the designers at Chance-Vought were able to win the contract on June 29, 1952. The prototype XF8U-1 flew on March 25, 1955. As the prototype cracked a sonic boom on its maiden flight, the world's first supersonic carrier fighter was born. A mere two years later, VF-32 went on line as the first squadron to be equipped with the new Crusader. The F-8 was a novel design for a single-engined, single-seat supersonic fighter, with 42-degree sweepback wings set high in a narrow fuselage and fully movable tail surfaces set low. The main air intake was set directly under the nose cone of the aircraft, where the special supersonic-compatible pitot tube was housed. Initial models of the F-8 included fighter and reconnaissance versions. The penultimate Crusader, however, was the F-8E all-weather fighter-bomber mounted with underwing pylons capable of loadouts with up to 4,000lbs of ordnance. The Crusader saw most of its combat during the Vietnam War, flying from carriers in combat air patrol fighter and antiaircraft fire suppression roles.

(Data)

Crew: one; wingspan: 10.87m; length: 16.61m; height: 4.80m; maximum takeoff weight: 15,422kg; engine: Pratt & Whitney/J57-P-20 x 1 (thrust = 4,854kg normal or 8,165kg on after burner); maximum speed: 1,823km/h at 10,640m; fixed armament: 20mm cannon x 4; maiden flight: March 25, 1955 ARCH