

EARLY WW11 ERA NAVAL AIRCRAFT COLOR SCHEMES

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Please note that only the color schemes of select naval aircraft were considered in preparing this article due to space considerations in the NL – Editor.

In October of 1940, the Bureau of Aeronautics issued a new set of directives for painting U.S. Navy aircraft. Carrier tail colors were as follows:

USS Saratoga, CV-3 ... White

USS Lexington, CV-2 ...Lemon Yellow

USS Ranger, CV-4Willow Green

USS Yorktown, CV-5 ...Insignia Red

USS Enterprise, CV-6 ... True Blue

USS Wasp, CV-7Black

The flight section colors were applied to the engine cowling on aircraft powered by an air cooled engine. In the case of an airplane powered by a liquid cooled engine, a band 12 inches wide was applied beginning at the nose of the airplane. The section Colors were as follows:

1st section (a/c # 1,2,3) Insignia Red

2nd section (a/c # 4,5,6 White

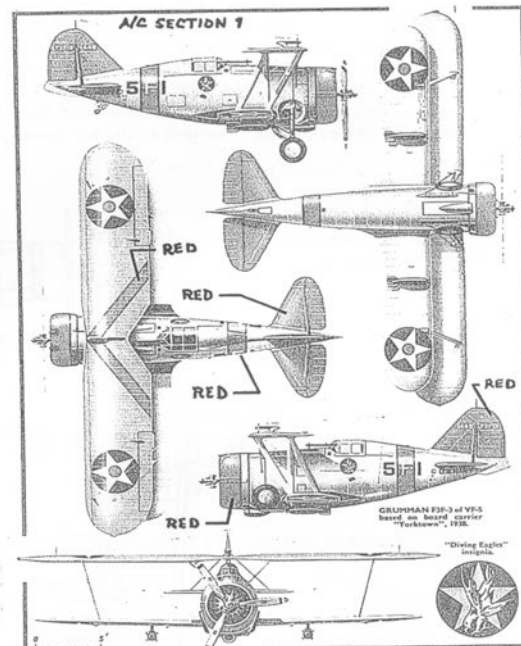
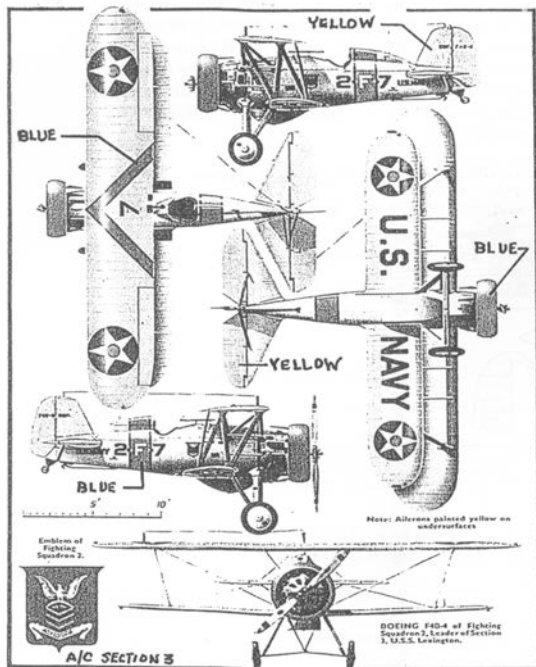
3rd section (a/c # 7,8,9) True Blue

4th section (a/c # 10,11,12) Black

5th section (a/c # 13,14,15) Willow Green

6th section (a/c # 16,17,18) Lemon Yellow

On the wings, a chevron was to be applied matching the section color for the aircraft. Where possible, the chevron color was to be applied so that the apex of the chevron aligned with the center of the pilot's cockpit. Application of the section color to the fuselage of the airplane occurred only in the case of a section leader's aircraft.



Battleships usually carried only 3 aircraft, and these were generally used for observation and scouting missions. These aircraft, assigned to VO squadrons, had their empennage painted in accordance with Bureau of Aeronautics directives as follows:

VO-1 -Insignia Red	USS Arizona BB-39 USS Nevada BB-36 USS Pennsylvania BB-38
VO-2-White	USS California BB-44 USS Oklahoma BB-37 USS Tennessee BB-43
VO-3 - True Blue	USS Idaho BB-42 USS Mississippi BB-41 USS New Mexico BB-40
VO-4-Black	USS Colorado BB-45 USS Maryland BB-4 USS West Virginia BB-48
VO-5 - Lemon Yellow	USS Arkansas BB-33 USS New York BB-34 USS Texas BB-33

All cruisers carried 4 planes, except for CL-4 to CL-13 of the Omaha class which carried only 2 planes. The section colors of these 4 an 2 plane units were marked with a vertical band in the proper color: - 4 Insignia Red, - 8 White, - 12 True Blue, -16 Black, and - 20 Willow Green. This vertical band marking was painted on the engine cowling. The two plane unit's cowl markings actually followed the same pattern as carried and battleship aircraft, i.e, the first airplane in the section had the entire frontal section of the cowling painted, and the 2nd airplane only had the top half of its cowling painted. The difference was that while aircraft number 3 in a carrier squadron would normally have the bottom half of it's cowling painted Red; aircraft number 3 of a two 2 plane unit-would have it's entire cowling painted White.

The Bureau of Aeronautics also detailed specific tail markings for cruiser based scouting squadrons (VCS). The markings were to be applied to the elevators and rudder of each airplane. The assignments were as follows:

VCS - 2 True Blue - Double Horizontal Stripe	VCS - 6 Black - Single Horizontal Stripe USS Minneapolis, CA-36 USS Astoria, CA-34 USS New Orleans, CA-32 USS San Francisco, CA-38
VCS - 3 Insignia Red - Double Horizontal Stripe USS Concord, CL-1 USS Cincinnati, CL-6 USS Milwaukee, CL-5 USS Omaha, CL-4 USS Trenton, CL-1	VCS - 7 Willow Green - Single Horizontal Stripe USS Quincy, CA-39 USS Tuscaloosa, CA-37 USS Wichita, CA-45 USS Vincennes, CA-44

VCS - 4 True Blue - Single Horizontal Stripe
 USS Northampton, CA-26
 USS Houston, CA-30
 USS Pensacola, CA-24
 USS Salt Lake City, CA-25

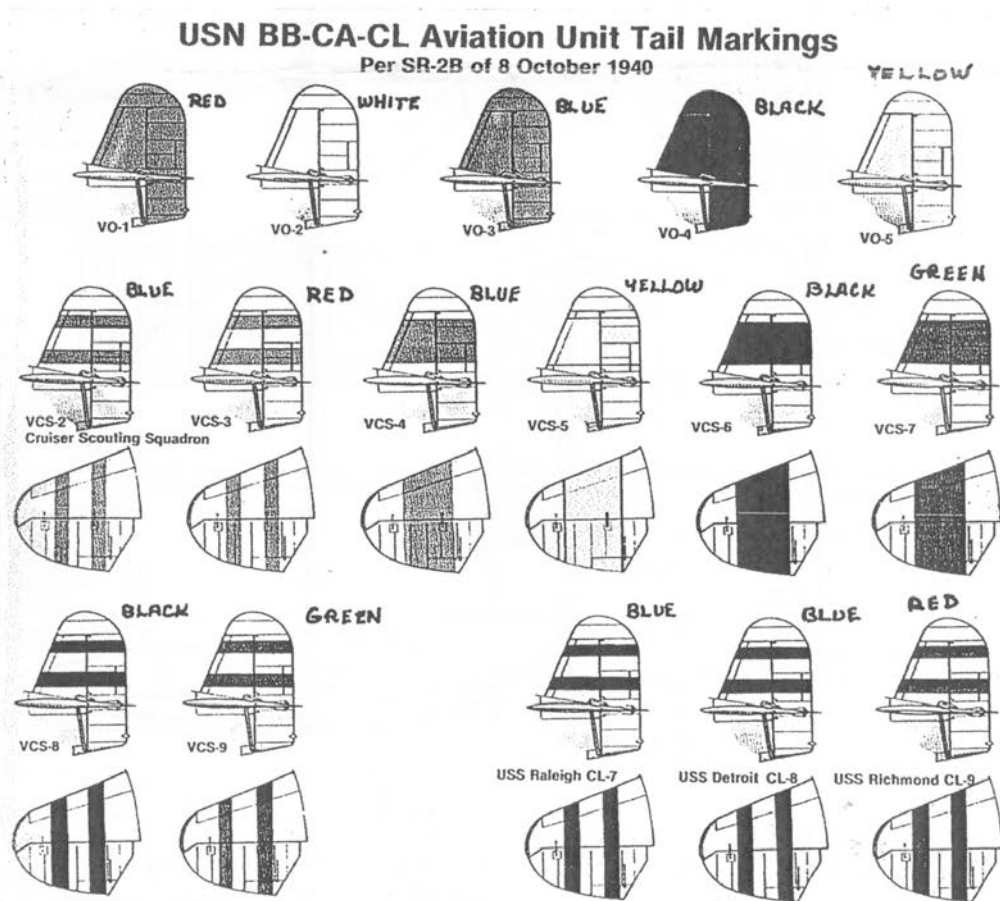
VCS - 8 Black - Double Horizontal Stripe
 USS Philadelphia, CL-41
 USS Brooklyn, CL-40
 USS Nashville, CL-43
 USS Savannah, CL-42

VCS - 5 Lemon Yellow - Single Horizontal Stripe
 USS Chicago, CA-29
 USS Chester, CA-27
 USS Louisville, CA-28
 USS Portland, CA-33

VCS - 9 Willow Green - Double Horizontal Stripe
 USS Honolulu, CL-48
 USS Boise, CL-47
 USS ST. Louis, CL-49
 USS Phoenix, CL-46

Other Cruisers:

USS Raleigh, CL-7 Insignia Blue - Double Horizontal Stripe
 USS Detroit, CL-8 Insignia Blue - Double Horizontal Stripe
 USS Richmond, CL-9 Insignia Red - Double Horizontal Stripe



The painting of US Navy aircraft in bright colors came to an end a few months (December of 1940) after the directives were issued when the Bureau decided that low-visibility paint schemes should be adopted by the fleet to lessen the chance of giving visual aid to the enemy.

