

Gordy Williams took this magnificent shot of JF-2 V148 while on a flight out of Port Angeles, Washington, during 1937. Williams, and aviation enthusiast and photographer based in Seattle, carefully recorded the USCG aircraft in some of the finest portraits taken. (Gordon S. Williams)

DUCKS FOR THE COASTIES

WITH VERY TIGHT BUDGETS BECAUSE OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION, THE UNITED STATES COAST GUARD WAS HAVING A DIFFICULT TIME FINDING A RUGGED AIRCRAFT THAT COULD ASSIST WITH THEIR DEMANDING MISSION. THEY FOUND AN IDEAL AIRCRAFT IN THE GRUMMAN DUCK

BY MARSHALL WAINWRIGHT

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE WILLIAM T. LARKINS COLLECTION

Over the past few months, the United States Coast Guard has been a regular fixture on the national news. The unusual number of natural disasters has called upon the USCG's unique resources to come to the aid of Americans in distress. Accordingly, the orange-and-white helicopters of the USCG were seen rescuing people in distress while USCG cutters aided in

water rescues. For this story, we have to go back to the early 1930s when the Great Depression was gripping the United States and dollars were hard to come up with. The fledgling air arm of the USCG was searching for a new aircraft that would be rugged and reliable for the search-and-rescue mission.

That aircraft was being designed and built by Grumman as the JF series of amphibians. Work began on Design

G-7 in June 1931 and the US Navy ordered one XJF-1 prototype (BuNo 9218) under contract 26467. Power came from a Pratt & Whitney R-1532-62 radial of 700-hp. The Navy wanted an extremely rugged aircraft with multiple capabilities. One of those was a requirement for catapult launch, but this was eliminated during construction. The prototype was completed at Grumman's new Farmingdale

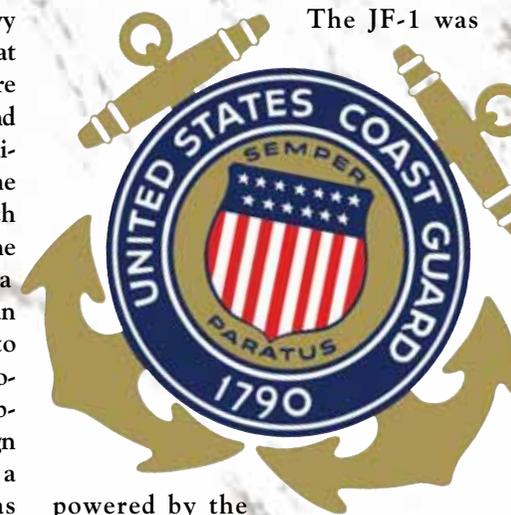
factory and it made its first flight on 24 April 1933 with Grumman test pilot Paul Hovgard.

After brief factory testing, the prototype was handed over to the US Navy on 4 May 1933 for advanced testing at NAS Anacostia. However, there were several problems. Navy test pilots found that the XJF-1 had excessive longitudinal instability. This was traced to the original vertical fin and rudder, which were considered too small. The plane was flown back to Farmingdale and a quick fix was made in the form of an enlarged vertical fin. Flown back to Anacostia, it was found that this temporary modification had fixed the problem. Grumman would go on to redesign the vertical tail and this resulted in a much larger unit. The Navy was pleased with this fix, but the prototype was written off when it crashed in the James River on 8 March 1934.

The Navy's flight testing had shown the design to be ideal for the

utility mission and the service placed a production contract for the JF-1 and 27 of this variant were constructed (BuNos 9434/9455 and 9523/9527).

The JF-1 was



powered by the R-1830-62 Twin Wasp of 700-hp.

Officials at the Coast Guard had noted development of the JF with interest. It appeared to be the ideal aircraft for the service's search, res-

cue, and patrol duties. Accordingly, a contract was placed for 15 JF-2s. These aircraft were unarmed, fitted with a Wright R-1820-102 Cyclone radial of 750-hp, the tail hook was eliminated and a radio direction finder was added.

As can be seen in the sidebar, the USCG Ducks were rapidly delivered and the Coast Guard decided to publicize their new craft by going after a number of records. On 20 December 1934, Cmdr. Elmer F. Stone set a record speed with Duck V167. Flying a 3-km course set up at Buckroe Beach, Virginia, he recorded 191.734-mph which was a record for the type of aircraft. On 25 June 1935, Lt. Burke went after a 100-km record while carrying a 500-kg payload. He recorded 173.945-mph, which was again a record for the type. On 27 June 1935, the USCG won another record for amphibians when the pilot of a JF-2 managed to coax the Duck to an altitude of 17,877-ft.