PRETTY IN PINK: NAVY FIGHTER JET PAINTED FOR BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

News / Events / Festivals

The fight against breast cancer picked up a powerful new ally -- a retired US Navy fighter jet. And of course, it's pink.

A Grumman F9F-8 Cougar, painted a vivid shade of pink called "Heliconia," has been unveiled on the flight deck of the World War II aircraft carrier USS Lexington, anchored at Corpus Christi, Texas.

In support of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the Cougar will be on the deck through October 31.

Special paint

It won't stay pink forever though. A special procedure -- applying liquid dishwashing soap to the latex paint -- keeps the pretty paint job from becoming permanent.

The Lexington was decommissioned in 1991 and converted to a naval aviation museum a year later. Rusty Reustle, director of operations and exhibits at the USS Lexington museum, said he got the idea after seeing filmmakers employ the technique aboard the ship during production of the 2001 Ben Affleck film, "Pearl Harbor," CNN affiliate KRIS reports.

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Showoff planes

This isn't the first time Cougars have been the center of attention. During their hay day in the 1950s, the Navy used single-seat versions of these planes to showoff their best pilots.

The Navy chose the Cougar as the first swept-wing plane for the elite Blue Angels flight demonstration team.

They were speedy

For their time, these single-engine jets were fast. Military aviation geeks will tell you that the Cougar's 35-degree swept wings allowed it to go as fast as 90% of the speed of sound at altitudes of 35,000 feet. In 1954, three F9F-6 single-seat versions of the Cougar flew from coast-to-coast in less than 4 hours, for the first time.

Grumman made almost 2,000 Cougars for the Navy and Marines, according to the National Naval Aviation Museum. They were used for various roles, including fighters, ground attack planes, photo reconnaissance, and training aircraft. During the Vietnam War, the two-seater version was used as a forward air control aircraft.

Delta's 'Pink Plane'

Of course the Cougar isn't the first airplane painted to support breast cancer awareness. Delta Air Lines' "Pink Plane" -- a specially painted widebody Boeing 767-400ER -- flies hundreds of thousands of miles a year, raising awareness for the Breast Cancer Research Foundation.

The plane is painted to look like it's been wrapped by a giant, bright pink ribbon. It's also branded with the BCRF logo.

During October, flight attendants aboard the special 767 wear pink uniforms and sell pink products to raise money for the BCRF.

For 12 years, the carrier has organized annual survivor flights with women who've beaten the disease -- including Delta employees. The flights are nicknamed "Breast Cancer One."

The program has raised $11 million for the BCRF since 2005, according to Delta, and 37 different research projects have benefited from those funds.

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