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## **Historical aircraft, part of series tested by New Hampshire's Alan Shepard, on long-term loan**

December 13, 2011

CONCORD, NH – U.S. Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Congressman Charles F. Bass (R-NH-02) today welcomed the arrival of a vintage 1956 U.S. Navy XF8U-2 Crusader jet to the McAuliffe-Shepard Discovery Center in Concord. The aircraft was one of the series of jet planes tested by New Hampshire's own Alan Shepard, the United States' first astronaut.

Shaheen and Bass worked with the U.S. Navy's National Museum of Naval Aviation in Pensacola, Florida and the Department of Defense to secure a long-term loan of the aircraft, which will soon be on display at the McAuliffe-Shepard Discovery Center.

**Shaheen** said, "This display is one that I hope would have made Astronaut Shepard proud. The Crusader is a proud piece of naval aviation history and American innovation. I hope it can help inspire a new generation of New Hampshire students to reach for great heights."

**Bass** said, "The arrival of this great piece of history is terrific news for New Hampshire and reflects the tremendous achievements made in American innovation. It will be a welcome addition to the McAuliffe-Shepard Discovery Center's already comprehensive collection and a fitting tribute to an accomplished New Hampshire native. I encourage Granite Staters to visit this remarkable new exhibit when it opens."

"This Crusader will serve to inspire a new generation," stated **Discovery Center Executive Director Jeanne Gerulskis**

"What forms will flight take in the future? How did engineers in 1950 envision the breakthroughs that led to the development of the Crusader? How can New Hampshire citizens be involved in designing ground-breaking new technologies that will help us all soar to new heights? Thanks to Senator Shaheen and Congressman Bass, we will be able to draw visitors in with this exciting new exhibit, and engage them in science and engineering exhibits and programs that can answer some of these questions."

Derry native Alan Shepard took to the skies years before his first space mission. An accomplished and capable pilot, Shepard enrolled in the U.S. Navy Test Pilot School and became a Navy test pilot during one of the most exciting times in aviation history, the advent of the jet plane. Shepard put his life on the line time after time as he tested the Navy's new and modified planes, including the F8U Crusader.

Originally built by Vought Aircraft, the Discovery Center's new Crusader aircraft has been refurbished and was recently on display in Dallas at the Vought Aircraft Heritage Foundation before arriving at its new home in New Hampshire. The Crusader, originally an F8U-1, was the fifth airplane to come off of Vought's Crusader production line and was the first production Crusader to be delivered to the U.S. Marine Corps. Later, it was returned to Vought, which

modified it into the second XF8U-2 prototype.

The Crusader was the fastest Navy fighter of the 1950s. Most of the Navy fighter aircraft developed during this time could fly at only high subsonic speeds. Just two of these 1950s aircraft could break the sound barrier: the Grumman F11F Tiger (max speed, Mach 1.1) and the Vought F8U Crusader (Mach 1.75). The aircraft flew its first combat missions as part of photo reconnaissance flights over Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 and later logged strike and combat air patrol flights during the Vietnam War.

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