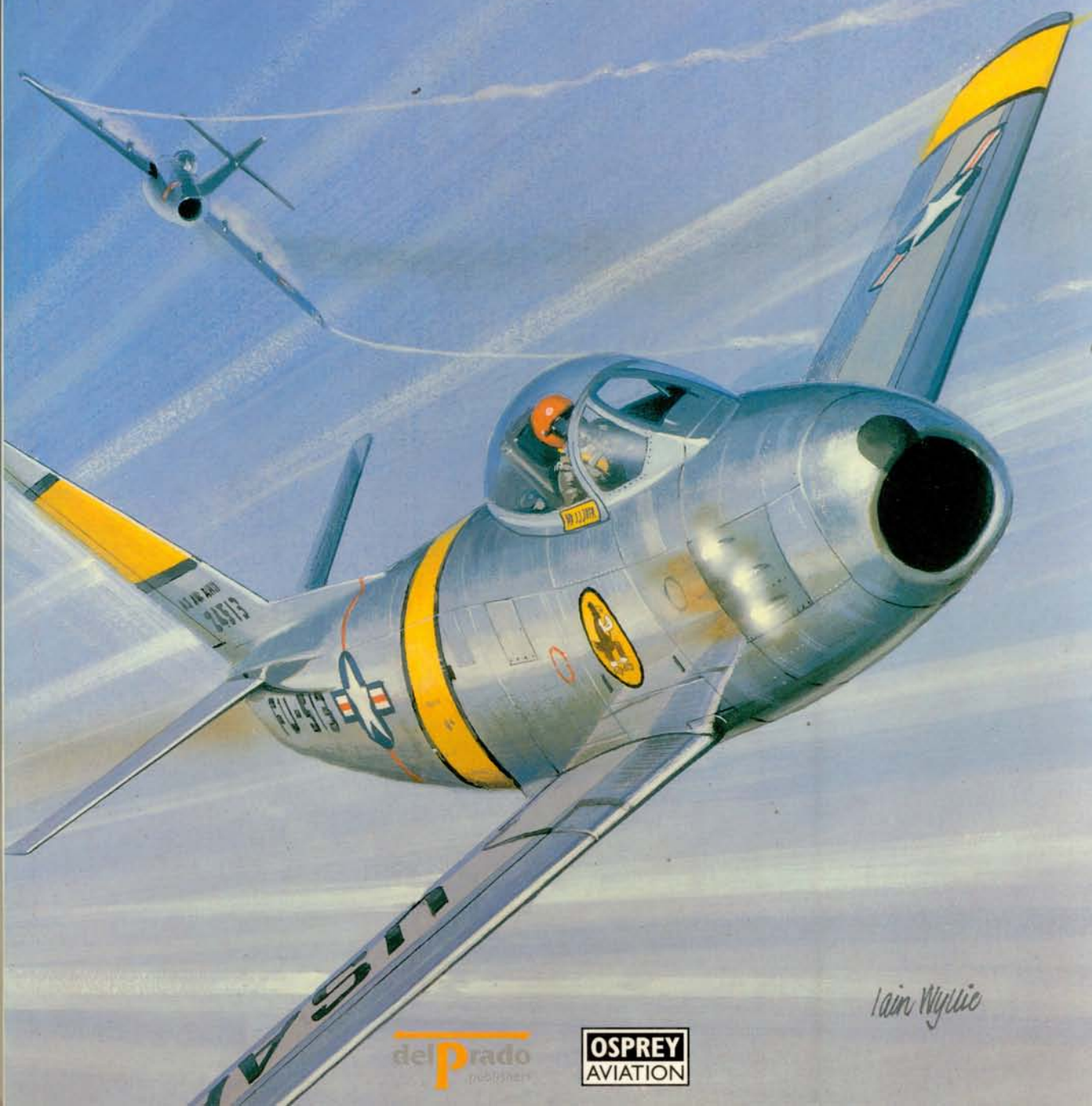


AIRCRAFT

OF THE ACES: MEN & LEGENDS

ALLIED ACES OF THE KOREAN WAR



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Front cover

Second ranking USAF ace in Korea with 15 kills, Maj James Jabara goes head-to-head with a formation of 16 MiGs at high altitude over Uiju on 26 May 1953. On this day he was leading a four-ship of F86Fs of the 334th FIS/4th FIW on a patrol along MiG Alley when he spotted the large communist formation crossing the Yalu. Without hesitating, he immediately engaged the Russian jets head-on, scattering the silver fighters all over the sky. Jabara claimed two kills from this mission – one jet he shot down whilst the other went into an uncontrollable flick roll attempting to evade a Jabara aggressive collision course attack. These were his eighth and ninth victories of the war

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FROM PROPS TO JETS

Before daybreak on Sunday, 25 June 1950, amid squalls of rain, North Korean forces invaded South Korea with 90,000 men and hundreds of Russian-made T-34 tanks. Aerial support for the invasion took the form of 150 prop-driven combat aircraft, including Lavochkin La-7s, Ilyushin Il-10 Sturmoviks and Yakovlev Yak-3s, -7s, -9s and -18s. Also reported, possibly in error, were North Koreans flying Bell F-63 Kingcobras, 2456 of which had gone to the USSR under Lend-Lease six years before.

The principal American fighter in the Far East at the time was the F-80C Shooting Star. The USAF's Far East Air Forces (FEAF) HQ was sited in Tokyo, and commanded by Lt Gen George E. Stratemeyer. Maj Gen Earle E. Partridge, of FEAF's Fifth Air Force, had at his disposal the 8th Fighter-Bomber Wing (FBW) (F-80Cs) at Itazuke, Japan, augmented by the 68th Fighter All-Weather Squadron (F(AW)S) (F-82 Twin Mustangs). At Misawa was the 49th FBW with F-80Cs, whilst located near to Tokyo at Yokota was the 339th F(AW)S with F-82s. On Okinawa was the 51st Fighter-Interceptor Wing (FIW) (F-80Cs), augmented by the 4th F(AW)S (F-82s). B-29s were nearby on Guam.

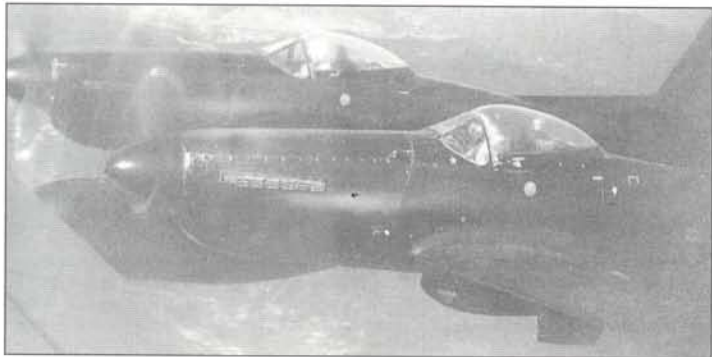
The closest aircraft carrier was USS *Valley Forge* (CVA-45), sailing near Hong Kong, with fighter squadrons VF-51 and -52 with F9F-3 Panthers and VF-53 and -54 with F4U-4B Corsairs embarked. A second carrier, USS *Philippine Sea* (CVA-47), was also steaming towards the war zone.

ENTER THE F-82

On 27 June 1950, North Korean fighters swarmed over Kimpo airfield. Maj James W. 'Poke' Little, commander of the F-82G-equipped 339th F(AW)S, was one of the pilots in the air that day. The 4th and 339th had augmented the 68th at Itazuke, thereby producing the largest F-82 force ever mustered – all of 20 to 22 aircraft!

'Poke' Little had already become an ace flying with the 75th Fighter Squadron, 23rd Fighter Group – lineal descendants of the AVG's 'Flying Tigers' – in the China-Burma-India Theatre in World War 2. He had been credited with seven victories comprising six Zero fighters and one unidentified bomber, and now he was about to add another air-to-air kill to his Form Five, or flying record, but not just yet. Maj Little is credited with firing the first shot from an American gun

Although it wasn't the principal USAF fighter in the Far East – that honour belonged to the F-80C Shooting Star – the F-82G Twin Mustang nevertheless equipped three squadrons in the FEAF when the Korean War began on 25 June 1950. Early Twin Mustangs had been flown by two pilots – a ludicrous arrangement – throughout the Air Force, but the radar-equipped F-82G nightfighter carried a radar operator in the right-hand seat instead. This F-82G (46-383) of the 68th F(AW)S, piloted by Lt William 'Skeeter' Hudson, with Lt Carl Fraser as radar observer (RO), shot down a Yak-7U on 27 June 1950, thus officially achieving the first aerial victory of the war





F-82G 46-357 was the aircraft flown by 1st Lt Charles Moran when he racked up one of three Twin Mustang kills against North Korean prop-driven fighters on 27 June 1950. Moran's F-82 did not escape the encounter without damage, however, and this snapshot illustrates the hits it took in the tail from the attacking North Korean pilot in a Lavochkin fighter



Although *Bucket O' Bolts* was the mount used by Fraser and Hudson to down their Yak, it wasn't their 'name' aircraft – that honour rested with this suitably customised F-82G. By the time this detail shot was taken in the autumn of 1950, 'Skeeter' Hudson had made captain

in the Korean War, but is not, however, one of the two contenders for first aerial victory.

Lt Hudson and Lt Carl Fraser went into action in their Twin Mustang 46-383, nicknamed *BUCKET O' BOLTS*, of the 68th F(AW)S. Assigned a defensive mission over Kimpo airfield for the second day in a row, Hudson and Fraser shot down a two-seat Yak-7U. This suc-

cess is usually cited as the first aerial victory of the Korean War, but Twin Mustang pilot, 1st Lt Charles B Moran, could have been first.

Radar observer Fraser recalls *BUCKET O' BOLTS* engagement. 'We were circling over Kimpo when two North Korean fighters came up out of some low clouds and started after Charlie Moran and Fred Larkins, who were flying in the number four F-82G in our flight. The North Koreans' shooting was a little better than yesterday and they shot up Charlie's tail.

'My pilot, "Skeeter" Hudson, slipped around and got on the tail of their flight leader. When he realised that we were there, he pulled up into some clouds and tried to shake us off. Fortunately, we were so close to him that we could see him even in the middle of the clouds. Our first burst hit the rear of the fuselage and knocked pieces off. The Yak pilot racked it over in a steep turn to the right and we gave him another burst along the right wing. This set the gas tank on fire and took the right flap and aileron off. By this time we were so close we almost collided with him.

'I could clearly see the pilot turn around and say something to the observer. Then, he pulled his canopy back and climbed out on the wing. Once again he leaned in and said something to the observer, but the latter was either scared or wounded as he never attempted to jump. The Yak pilot pulled the rip cord and the chute dragged him off the wing, just before the 'ship rolled over and went in.

'The action took place below 1000 ft. Later, we found that Moran had evaded his Yak and stalled out. When he recovered he found himself dead astern of the other Yak and shot it down.'

Maj Little, 339th commander, flying a racetrack pattern at higher altitude over Kimpo, saw the engagements below and heard 1st Lt Charles B Moran of Hudson's flight (in 46-357) say that he was being shot at. 'Poke' Little quickly led a pair of Twin Mustangs down into the fight. Within minutes, Maj Little had also shot down another North Korean fighter, and two other 339th pilots claimed victories.

The Twin Mustang seemed an unlikely candidate to be dominating Korean skies as it wasn't a jet, or even a well-known prop-driven aircraft. It had been created by joining two XP-51F fuselages (not P-51Hs, as widely reported) through a large centre wing section that housed the armament, plus a large parallel chord, single-piece, horizontal stabiliser. The fuselages were lengthened by 4 ft 9 in just aft of the radiator, and the area of the vertical fin was increased. The powerplant consisted of two liquid-cooled 2270 hp Allison V1710 piston engines, with opposite-rotating props to reduce torque – these gave the Twin Mustang a maximum speed of 460 mph at 21,000 ft. The version used in the Far East was the



Line up shot of the 68th F(AW)S at Misawa air base, Japan, during the hectic summer of 1950. At far right is 46-383, alias **BUCKET'O' BOLTS**, which claimed the first kill of the war just a matter of weeks after this shot was taken. Note how most of the Twin Mustangs wear nicknames on their noses

F-82G nightfighter, equipped with a SCR-720C search radar mounted between the paired fuselages. According to Lt Col Douglas E Smith of the 4th F(AW)S, 'Our particular aeroplanes sat in rows at the Downey, California, plant of North American from 1946 until 1948 while the Air Force tried to think up a useful role for them'. These gloss-black fighters were to continue in action with the 4th, 68th and 339th F(AW)Ss until mid-1951 when replaced by jets.

The F-82G was armed with six .50-calibre Colt-Browning M3 machine-guns mounted in the centre wing section, and firing exactly between the propeller arcs of the two engines. The aircraft carried 400 rounds per gun, 'which was a lot of ammunition', in the words of 1st Lt Randal Adams, adjutant of the 68th F(AW)S.

The third day of the Korean War, and the first of aerial combat, was still unfolding when the 8th FBW's 35th Fighter Squadron (FS), nicknamed the 'Panthers', flying F-80s out of Itazuke, became the first American jet squadron to down an enemy aircraft – the 8th FBW had three units, the 35th; the unnamed 36th; and the 80th 'Headhunters'. The wing was also responsible for the F-82 force. Capt Raymond E Schillereff led four F-80s into the Seoul area and caught a quarter of Il-10s interfering with US transports loading at Seoul's Kimpo airfield – all four Ilyushins were shot down. Capt Schillereff and Lt Robert H Dewald each chalked up a kill, whilst Lt Robert E Wayne was credited with downing the remaining two Il-10s. The attackers succeeded, however, in destroying seven Republic of Korea Air Force (RoKAF) aircraft – T-6 Texans on the ground at Seoul City Airport.

The F-80 Shooting Star had been designed in 1943 and was America's first operational jet fighter. The F-80Cs employed in Korea were powered initially by a 4600 lb thrust Allison J33-A-23 turbojet engine, whilst late production C-models received 5400 lb thrust J33-A-35s. The F-80C was armed with six .50 cal machine-guns, with 300 rounds per weapon, in the nose. Assigned to the Orient purely as interceptors, the FEAF's F-80Cs initially lacked underwing shackles to carry bombs, although they were soon modified to fit (typically) two wingtip fuel tanks, a pair of 1000 lb bombs and eight underwing rockets. There was a price to be paid with this configuration, however. Due to centre-of-gravity problems, an F-80C loaded for an air-to-ground sortie could not carry the full load of 1800 rounds for its guns. The F-80C saw service with the 8th, 49th and 51st FWs in Korea.

Despite the successes of Capt Schillereff and other F-80 pilots in jet-versus-prop air battles, no one was yet convinced that the Shooting Star was the right aircraft to deal with the North Korean Air Force. Some

pilots felt that jets like the F-80 used up too much fuel and were, ironically, too *fast* to dogfight with the slower Yaks and Lavochkins. An article published by the Associated Press noted that it would take an F-80 as much as 40 miles to pull out of a high-speed pass (obviously an exaggeration), and that the Yaks could easily manoeuvre inside the turning radius of the US jet.

The 8th FBW attempted to overcome these problems by using its F-80s in a rather novel way. Fully loaded with .50 cal ammunition, but carrying none of the usual bombs or rockets, the F-80s flew to the Han River, near Seoul, and set up patrol orbits at 10,000 ft. They remained on station for 15 to 20 minutes, and if enemy aircraft appeared they engaged them. If not, the F-80s swooped over Seoul and made one or two passes against hostile road traffic, before returning to Itazuke.

By the morning of 28 June 1950, the North Korean army had broken through the resistance around Seoul and was storming the city. Truman gave MacArthur authority to evacuate only Americans. At first, air operations were restricted to South Korean airspace, and from bases in Japan and Guam, B-26s, B-29s, F-80s and F-82s opposed the assault.

MORE F-80 KILLS

On 29 June 1950 North Korean pilots bombed and strafed Suwon. The main terminal building at Kimpo was also riddled with holes from bombing and strafing.

The F-51 made its debut on 29 June, 1st Lt Richard J Burns shooting down an Il-10 and Lt Orrin R Fox going one better by claiming a pair. Later in the day F-51 pilot Lt Harry T Sandlin shot down a La-7.

On 30 June, F-80s from Itazuke again tangled with North Korean fighters, Lts Charles A Wurster and John B Thomas (both from the 36th FBS/8th FBW) each shooting down a Yak-9. By now, the North Koreans had seized virtually all of Seoul, forcing Ambassador Muccio and his staff to abandon the embassy and flee from Suwon, which was to be overrun within days.

At this juncture, a Washington decision gave MacArthur free rein to employ US air power throughout the Korean peninsula 'against air bases, depots, tank farms, troop columns and other purely military targets such as bridges'. Within 24 hours, MacArthur also had authority to commit US ground troops, the 24th Infantry Division under Maj Gen William F Dean moving from Japan to Pusan. The United Nations security council, still able to act despite a Soviet boycott, passed a resolution supporting the defence of South Korea. Sixteen nations were to supply troops to fight the communists, whilst the USA, Australia and Britain would supply combat aircraft. South Africa also committed a fighter squadron, using borrowed American F-51s, whilst Canada rotated pilots through USAF units on exchange duty.

On 30 June 1950, the Iwakuni, Japan-based, F-51Ds of the Royal Aus-



When the Korean War began, the F-80C Shooting Star was the principal US fighter in the Far East. Pilots found it to be the best machine in the inventory for strafing, but the jet was rarely able to outmanoeuvre North Korea's propeller-driven Yakovlevs and Lavochkins, nor were the American jets initially equipped to carry bombs or rockets for air-to-ground duties. These Shooting Stars belong to the 8th FBW, the first USAF jet unit to see combat and shoot down an enemy aircraft



PASSION FIT was one of a handful of semi-retired F-51Ds given a brief reprieve from the scrap heap at Itazuke and issued back to its former unit within the partly F-80-transitioned 8th FBW. This machine wears the yellow fin strip of the 80th FBS, and was the personal mount of Lt Don Robertson. One of Robertson's squadron mates at the time was Lt Orrin R Fox, who shot down a pair of Il-10s on 29 June 1950

italian Air Force's (RAAF) No 77 Sqn were ordered to join the defence of South Korea. A week later, the unit suffered its first combat loss (on 7 July) when Sqn Ldr G Strout's Mustang was hit by ground fire and failed to return from a mission along the coast of North Korea.

Meanwhile, under MacArthur, Stratemeyer and Partridge, an allied air arm took shape to respond to the

continuing North Korean advance, including the North Korean air threat.

On 3 July 1950, eight F9F-3 Panthers of VF-51 'Screaming Eagles' launched from the wooden deck of *Valley Forge* to escort a strike on Pyongyang airfield. It was the first combat sortie ever by jet-propelled US Navy aircraft, and in the melee over Pyongyang, Ens E W Brown and Lt(jg) Leonard Plog each shot down a Yak-9. Two other VF-51 pilots destroyed Yaks on the ground.

The Navy was slower than the Air Force in adopting swept-wing fighters, and never had one in Korea – the straight-winged Panther remained the standard 'nautical' fighter throughout the war. The Navy/Marine Corps operated the F9F-2 with the 5000 lb thrust Pratt & Whitney J42-P-6 (license-built Nene), the F9F-3 with the 4600 lb thrust Allison J33-A-8 and the F9F-5 with the 6250 lb thrust Pratt & Whitney J48-P-6A (license-built Tay) turbojet engine. Aircraft with six wing pylons were initially designated F9F-2B, whilst all Panthers were armed with four 20 mm cannon.

Suwon duly fell. C-54 Skymasters brought in the first American ground troops to face North Korea's T-34 tanks, but they were ill-prepared, ill-equipped and quickly overrun. The tanks kept coming.

If the Shooting Star was too fast for air-to-air combat with Yaks, it was also too fast for the air-to-ground support duties now foisted upon it. 'The F-80 was an extremely stable platform for gunnery and bombing', remembers one 8th FBW pilot from the early days of the war, 'but we also knew that we couldn't "jink" or take evasive action if we wanted to have much prospect of hitting the enemy'. Pilots who'd triumphed in aerial engagements were frustrated by their air-to-ground role as the war went from bad to worse.

On 20 July 1950, Taejon fell to the North Koreans. Only the Nakdong River at Taegu – the northern demarcation of what soldiers called the Pusan Perimeter – lay between the invaders and the sea. That day, F-80 pilots 2nd Lt David H Goodnough and Capt Robert L Lee (35th FBS/8th FBW) each shot down a Yak-9. Although the Korean War was now in a critical period, there was not to be another air-to-air kill for 103 days (until November 1).

On the ground, the war was going poorly for the UN allies, but at least the North Koreans still had no jet aircraft and failed to provide any air support for their troops. With 20 aerial victories in the first month of the conflict, the Allies could legitimately claim to have swept the North Korean air arm from the skies over the peninsula.

Warplanes from the British carrier HMS *Triumph* were now part of the



When the Korean War began on 25 June 1950, the USS *Valley Forge* (CVA-45) was cruising near Hong Kong with a carrier air group of combat aircraft, whilst a second carrier, USS *Philippine Sea* (CVA-47), was en route. 'Happy Valley's' air group included VF-51 and -52 with F9F-3 Panthers and VF-53 and -54 with F4U-4B Corsairs. On 3 July 1950, Panther pilots Ens E W Brown and Lt(jg) Leonard Plog of VF-51 each shot down a Yak-9

fight in Korea, although they did not immediately see air-to-air action. RAF pilots also served exchange tours with American units, as well as being assigned to the RAAF's No 77 Sqn. By 22 July 1950, US Navy pilots were carrying out especially difficult close air support missions in the Pusan pocket.

On 1 August 1950, *Philippine Sea* arrived off the coast of Korea, joined by the escort carriers USS *Badoeng Strait* (CVE-116) and *Sicily* (CVE-118). Aboard CVA-47 was Carrier Air Group 11, with VF-111 and -112 (F9F-2 Panther), VF-113 and -114 (F4U-4 Corsair) and VA-115 (AD-4Q Skyraider) aboard. *Badoeng Strait* carried Marine Corps squadron VMF-323 'Death Rattlers', flying F4U-4 and F4U-4B Corsairs. *Sicily*, with World War 2 ace Capt James S Thach at the helm, came into the war with VMF-214 'Blacksheep' embarked, the unit being equipped with F4U-4B Corsairs. Soon, Marine F4U-5Ns of VMF(N)-513 'Flying Nightmares', a nightfighter unit commanded by Maj J Hunter Reinburg, began operating from Itazuke. The missions flown by these squadrons set a pattern of operations for others to follow over the next three years.

On 5 August 1950, Maj Louis J Sebille, commander of the newly-arrived 67th FBS/18th FBW, led a flight of Mustangs against North Korean artillery and troop positions dug in along a riverbank near Hamchang, flying F-51D 44-74394. Sebille hit his target, banked, circled, and radioed in his wingmen to make a strafing pass.

This F9F-2B belongs to VF-721, an activated reserve squadron operating from USS *Kearsage* (CVA-33) on the carrier's only Korean combat cruise between 11 August 1952 and 17 March 1953





This formation shot was taken just after the first anniversary of the FEAF's involvement in Korea, four of the main combatant types being put up for a one-off fly-by. Leading the quartet is a soon to be retired F-82G of the 68th F(AW)S, with its replacement, the F-94B, sitting off its right wing. To the Twin Mustang's left is a 35th FIW F-80C, whilst in the trail slot is an F-86A of the 4th FIW – all four types enjoyed varying degrees of success against communist aircraft

Ground fire sent shells whipping around the Mustangs. Seville's aircraft was hit, and he called in his wingman to survey the damage. The latter thought it was serious and urged him to return to Taegu. Instead, Seville again rolled in on the target and opened fire with his six machine-guns. Hit many times on this final pass, he flew straight into the concentration of enemy troops, where his F-51 exploded in their midst. For sacrificing his life, Maj Louis J Seville posthumously became the first flier in Korea to be awarded the Medal of Honor.

SOUTH AFRICANS

South Africa's role in Korea got under way on 5 September 1950 when No 2 'Flying Cheetahs' Sqn formed under World War 2 ace, Commandant S van Breda Theron. The unit was to operate as part of the USAF's 18th FBW for the entire war, suffering terrible losses on low-level bombing and strafing missions – ironically, they never scored a single aerial victory during the conflict.

VMF(N)-542 'Flying Tigers' arrived at Kimpo on 19 September 1950 and soon had 24 twin-engine, two-seat, F7F-3N Tigercats in place. Also arriving at Kimpo were VMF-212 'Lancers' and VMA-312 'Checkerboards' (both with F4U-4 Corsairs). The USAF, too, began to move into the Seoul region's principal airfield.

Korean waters were breached on 8 October 1950 by USS *Leyte* (CVA-32) with fighter squadrons VF-31 (F9F-2 Panthers), -32 and -33 (F4U-4 Corsairs), as well as VA-35 (AD-3 Skyraiders). HMS *Theseus* replaced *Triumph* off the Korean coast, enabling the Royal Navy to introduce the Hawker Sea Fury, which equipped No 807 Sqn.

On 8 October 1950, two F-80s strayed into the Soviet Union and strafed an airfield. In later years, the US pilots portrayed this foul-up as a purposeful show of resolve which kept Russia out of the war. In fact, the mistake infuriated the latter, and heavily influenced their decision to move an anti-aircraft corps, including two MiG-15 air defence divisions, into Manchuria.

By 13 October 1950, Wonsan was in UN hands, and USMC Tigercats and Corsairs began flying combat missions from the recaptured airfield soon after. Pyongyang fell a week later.

ENTER THE MiG

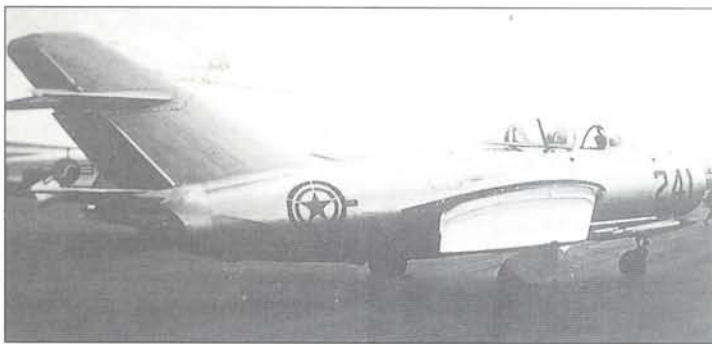
On 1 November 1950, six swept-wing jet fighters attacked F-51D Mustangs. The jets came from across the Yalu River – the border to China which Allied pilots were forbidden to cross. No one in the West – not in G-2 (intelligence) or in Gen Mac-Arthur's command post in Tokyo – knew much about the swept-wing jet fighters reported by Mustang pilots on 1 November. Instead, the Americans were busily planning for the war to end before the coming Christmas holidays! Lt Col Clure Smith, an F-80C pilot with 1.5 kills from World War 2 who now commanded the 25th FIS/51st FIW, returned from a sortie with a gun-camera photo of a MiG-15. No one seemed to think it mattered *what* the Chinese were flying as the enemy, after all, was North Korea.

This premise was totally wrong. The MiG-15s were being flown on combat patrols by Russians, and on the rare occasion when the Allies monitored the Russian language in VHF radio transmissions, the assumption was made that Soviet advisors were helping out with pilot conversion. In fact, at this stage of the conflict red-nosed Russian MiG-15s were being both flown and maintained by Russians at all times.

An enigma in the West at the time of its debut over Korea, the MiG-15 was named after the Soviet Union's Mikoyan-Gurevich design bureau and was a mid-wing monoplane incorporating 35 degrees of wing sweep, its flight surface based in part on the same German swept-wing research which contributed to the Sabre. The maiden flight of the MiG (on 30 December 1947) came just 90 days after the Sabre's, the jet being initially powered by the 4500 lb thrust RD-45F turbojet inspired by the British Nene – examples of this revolutionary engine had been sold to the USSR soon after the war. The MiG-15 was armed with one 37 mm NS-37 and two 23 mm NS- or NR-23 (the NR being faster firing) cannons, and it boasted a maximum speed of 640 mph at 10,000 ft.

On 8 November 1950, 1st Lt Russell J Brown was flying an F-80C Shooting Star (49-0713, *ELENE*) normally assigned to 1st Lt Jack Smith of the 16th FIS/51st FIW (Brown belonged to the 26th FIS) on a mission from Kimpo. He and his wingmen turned aggressively into half a dozen MiG-15s, splitting up the formation and sending five scurrying back across the Yalu towards Antung. The sixth MiG broke in the wrong direction and appeared below Brown's F-80.

'Damn', Brown said out loud, 'I'm going to get him'. He pushed over and dived behind the MiG-15. Though all but one of his guns was jammed, Brown unleashed bursts of .50 calibre gunfire which struck the fighter, set it afire, and sent it spinning in engulfed in flames. This was history's first jet-versus-jet aerial victory.



The MiG-15 made its first appearance in-theatre when four of the Soviet-built jets attacked F-51s over North Korea in November 1950. Armed with one 37 and two 23 mm cannon, and able to begin an air-to-air engagement at higher altitude than any Allied fighter (including the F-86), the MiG-15 was a formidable opponent. The example shown here wears standard North Korean markings (a red star in a red circle, surrounded by a blue circle) although 'native' pilots only began flying the MiG-15 very late on in the 1950-53 conflict

In a stunning move, China inserted half a million troops into North Korea. Beginning on 26 November 1950, hordes of Chinese soldiers attacked across the front. It happened overnight while Allied intelligence experts were 'asleep at the switch', and UN forces awoke to find their positions opposed by no fewer than 50 Chinese divisions.

About 400 Soviet-built MiG-15 fighters were now at the ready on the north side of the Yalu. The Allies had no fighter to cope with the MiG-15, and it seemed poised to wrestle air supremacy by clearing the skies of American B-26s and B-29s. But despite the MiG-15 being the world's best interceptor at that point in time, it lacked the ability to be a fighter-bomber. A lightweight fighter that was neither big or complex, it was never used in Korea for long-range missions and, indeed, was conspicuous by its absence over the front lines throughout the conflict.

Being a single-purpose fighter was no impediment to the MiG-15 if it wanted to command the air-to-air arena. There was nothing to prevent it from controlling the skies up north, neutralising the Allies' bombing campaign by destroying aircraft like the B-26, B-29, F-80 and F-84 virtually at will.

SABRE DEBUT

On the day of Lt Brown's F-80 kill, the USAF ordered the 4th Fighter Interceptor Wing (FIW) at Wilmington County, Delaware, to pack up and move with its F-86A Sabres. Until then, the swept-wing jet had been the sole property of the Air Defense Command, which guarded North America against possible attack from the Soviet Union.

The F-86 was the first American fighter to exploit German swept-wing research. Conceived as a day fighter, the A-model was powered initially by a 4850 lb thrust General Electric J47-GE-1 axial-flow turbojet engine and was capable of a maximum speed of 707 mph at sea level. The first Sabre (XP-86) may have flown faster than sound *before* the first 'official' supersonic flight (on 14 October 1947) by Chuck Yeager's Bell XS-1 rocket aeroplane. Armament was six .50 cal. Over time, an improved Sabre was to become the world's premier fighter, but early F-86As, including those of the 4th FIW had technical problems galore.

The 4th, commanded by Col George F Smith, boasted some of the best jet fighter pilots in the USAF, most of them World War 2 veterans. The wing's 4th Fighter Interceptor Group (FIG) was headed by Col John C Meyer, the Eighth Air Force's second ranking ace of World War 2. Its squadrons were the 334th 'Pigeons' (later renamed the 'Eagles'), 335th 'Chiefs' and 336th FIS 'Rocketeers'. F-86As of the 4th FIW were wrapped in protective cocoons and craned aboard the escort carrier USS



On the same day that MiG-15s made their first appearance over Korea, the humble F-51 was adding more kills to its already impressive score – two Yak-3s were shot down by the 67th FBS, the operators of this battle-weary Mustang seen at Chinhae

Shortly after downing a MiG-15 on 8 November 1950 in history's first jet-v-jet engagement, 1st Lt Russell Brown poses in the cockpit of F-80C 49-737



Cape Esperance (CVE-88), which duly arrived at Yokosuka, Japan, on 1 December 1950. Later that same month the Chinese air force's MiG-15s – Soviet air forces jets in reality – began to press home the fight. Most Allied warplanes were useless against the Soviet fighter, although some MiGs took hits from UN aircraft nonetheless.



On 13 December, Lt Col Meyer moved an advance detachment of 4th FIW F-86A Sabres from Johnson to Kimpō. C-54 Skymasters brought in support personnel, who arrived to find the site virtually untenable. The base was not equipped to handle F-86As, whose number, over a fortnight, grew to 32, whilst the knowledge of an oncoming Chinese advance did little to help morale. Finally, exceedingly bad winter weather made it necessary for pilots to delay their first Sabre flights for some days.

Snow and low scudding clouds finally 'broke' north of snow-covered Kimpō on 17 December, allowing the hulking six-foot two-inch Lt Col Bruce Hinton, commander of the 336th FIS 'Rocketeers', and pilot of an F-86A-5 (49-1236 *Squawee*), to lead 'Baker Flight's' four Sabres on the wing's inaugural patrol over the Yalu. They were flying what was to become known as a fighter sweep – bait to get the communist MiGs airborne. The slab of land along the Yalu was soon nicknamed MiG Alley.

The 'Chinese' (actually Russians) apparently mistook Hinton's Sabres for slower F-80s. Warned by his wingman that MiGs were coming their way, Hinton turned his flight to engage four of the enemy jets. The MiGs crossed his flight path a mile ahead and Hinton ordered drop tanks to be jettisoned, only to find that his radio was malfunctioning. Confusion followed as Hinton dropped his tanks and accelerated ahead of his flight. He quickly turned behind an element of two MiGs, whose pilots apparently thought that they could simply outrun the fighter behind them. Hinton dived after the MiG flight leader and was able to get on his 'six o'clock' position. He fired a short burst and saw what looked like debris falling away from the MiG – the jet was also streaming fluid, possibly fuel.

Hinton then took on the number two MiG and found himself bucking in his jet wash. He adjusted his position and fired a long burst which hit the MiG's engine. Hinton stayed in a left turn behind his opponent and had a spectacular view of the Russian fighter. He closed in and fired again, keeping his trigger depressed. The rear section of the MiG was consumed by flames and the jet rolled on its back and went plummeting to earth. It crashed 10 miles southeast of the Yalu, and there was no parachute. Bruce Hinton had just scored the first aerial victory to be credited to the F-86.

This kill had not been achieved easily though, Hinton having nearly exhausted his Sabre's full load of 1802 rounds. He'd fought aggressively and he'd shown that American pilots, generally, were more skilled than their Chinese adversaries. But Hinton had also shown that the MiG-15 was damnably difficult to bring down out of the sky.

On 19 December, Lt Col Glenn T Eagleston, 334th FIS boss and Sabre pilot, damaged a MiG-15. It was a modest start that added to Eagle-

F-80C pilots racked up half a dozen MiG kills, but the straight-wing Shooting Star with its centrifugal-flow jet engine was quickly relegated to air-to-ground work. These jets wear the blue nose paintwork and red fuselage and tail strips of the 16th FIS/51st FIW – 1st Lt Brown scored his historic MiG victory in a jet from this unit



On 10 November 1950 Lt Cdr William Thomas Amen, pilot of a US Navy F9F-2 Panther, shot down a MiG-15 at low altitude, then posed for this portrait the following day. Amen was commander of VF-111 'Sundowners', part of Air Group 11 aboard *Phillipine Sea*, at the time

ston's 18.5 kills previously scored with the 353rd FG in Europe during World War 2. On 22 December, MiGs bounced a flight of eight Sabres and shot down Capt Lawrence V Bach's F-86A, which took cannon hits in the wing roots and spun away in flames – their first Sabre kill was made possible simply because the MiG could fly higher than the F-86A.

Also on 22 December, Navy exchange pilot Lt Cdr Paul E Pugh led a four-jet flight in company with four other Sabres. Pugh heard MiGs called while cruising 20 miles south of the Yalu at 32,000 ft. He turned his flight into the threat, only to see a MiG-15 pass close aboard – too close in fact to shoot. The two fighters passed canopy-to-canopy and Pugh racked his Sabre into a hard reversal, picking up the bandit diving for the undercast. Pugh later said, 'I cut across his turn and fired. I hit him pretty good. Then he disappeared into the cloud deck'.

In pursuit, Pugh broke into the clear and found the MiG flying straight and level at about 500 ft. 'I just "drove" up behind him', Paul recounted, 'and got the MiG kill'. That same day Lt Col Eagleston was also credited with destroying a MiG-15. His kill was scored during an eight-Sabre prolonged fray with 15 MiGs in a twisting, close-quarters, dogfight. MiG-15 victories were also credited to Col John C Meyer (adding to his 24 kills with the 352nd FG in World War 2), 1st Lt Arthur L O'Connor and Capts John Odiorne and James O Roberts.

On 30 December 1950, Lt Cdr Pugh became the first F-86 pilot to rack up a second MiG kill, whilst Capt James Jabara opened his account with a probable. The Sabre-equipped 4th FIW could now claim eight kills and two probables against just one air-to-air loss (although Pugh's second victory, inexplicably ignored by the USAF, never became part of its records). These eight kills were to remain the total score for the whole of 1950, and were to be the final such victories for more than three months.

SABRE VERSUS MiG

4th FIW pilots had by this stage learned that early F-86As had at least as many mechanical problems as any other new aircraft. Pilots particularly encountered problems with unreliable gun chargers, but worse still, their opponents always looked down at the Sabres from a higher altitude with impunity. If they chose to remain at maximum height, no F-86 could get near them. The MiGs controlled the time and place of every fight.

The comparison between the F-86 and the MiG-15 was to be made again and again by men on both sides. The latter was able to fly higher, thus offering a decisive advantage at the start of a battle. Early Sabre models were inferior in other respects, too, and a Soviet perspective on the comparison between the F-86 and the MiG is offered by Korean veteran, Maj Gen Georgy Lobov.

'The MiG-15 in its main characteristics surpassed all similar enemy aircraft except the F-86. In comparison with the latter, the MiG had a better rate of climb and thrust-to-weight ratio, but was somewhat inferior in manoeuvrability and radius of action. Their maximum flight speeds, however, were roughly equal. The F-86 had a better fuselage aerodynamic form. This fighter gained speed in a dive faster than ours and had a lesser 'sink' rate than the MiG-15 when recovering from a dive.



1st Lt Evan W Rosencrans achieved the difficult feat of damaging a MiG-15 while flying an F-80C on 12 December 1950 over Sinuiju. The meeting between the swept-wing communist fighter and the straight-wing American jets was reported by US pilots as 'a new type of air warfare used by the communists', as the MiGs attacked as a flight instead of coming in singly

'The MiG-15 armament was more powerful and consisted of two 23 and one 37 mm (cannon) in a good arrangement. The American fighters and fighter-bombers had up to six 12.7 mm (.50 calibre) Colt-Browning machine-guns scattered along the wing'. In fact, while prop-driven US fighters had wing guns, jet fighters had guns in the nose. A notable advantage of the F-86 was its better sighting equipment, especially the radar rangefinder which automatically made corrections for range. On the MiG-15, range to target was determined visually and the data input by hand into a semi-automatic sight.'

Facing a superior number of MiGs, 4th FIW commander, Col George F Smith, became the first of many (quickly joined by group commander Lt Col Meyer) to complain to Fifth Air Force HQ that his Sabre force was hamstrung with intolerable supply and maintenance problems. Though working conditions at Kimpo were not as bad as anticipated, despite the snow and cold, there was almost nothing to work with. Small, simple, replacement parts needed to keep the jets in the air were almost impossible to obtain, and while the Chinese swarmed down the pike, support problems kept Sabres grounded, eroding morale, and giving the MiG pilots the upper hand.

The 4th FIW's newly-arrived Sabres were destined to reside at Kimpo for a mere three weeks before being kicked out by the Chinese. Meyer, Hinton, Frey and others struggled to defeat weather, maintenance problems and flagging morale to get into action against the MiGs. New Year's Eve was filled with the frenetic activity of men preparing to evacuate. As 1951 began, 500,000 Chinese poured southward. MiG-15s, nominally belonging to Chinese air divisions but really piloted by Russians, dominated MiG Alley along the Yalu River, but stayed north of the battlefield. With the Chinese approaching, chaos reigned at Kimpo airfield. Equipment was dismantled and convoys moved out. The 4th FIG (F-86A), 51st FIG (F-80C) and 67th TRS (RF-51D) were being withdrawn.

The 4th consisted of 32 aeroplanes and a composite group of pilots headed by Col Meyer, who ordered that some Sabres had to be flown out before the New Year began. On 1 January a distracted airman was sucked into the engine air intake of an F-86A and killed, a mishap perhaps compounded by the urgency of the Chinese onslaught, and proof that working around jets was a serious business. The Sabre's presence in Korea ended the next day. Capt Howard M Lane flew out the aircraft which had taken the airman's life and now lacked an air speed indicator. On his wing, Capt Max Weill flew the 32nd, and last, Sabre.

Other members of the 4th FIW, including MiG-killer, Lt Col Bruce Hinton, were left behind with no Sabres. They got out of Kimpo on the night of 2 January in a C-54 as the airfield came under attack from small-arms fire – it was almost completely surrounded by the Chinese. The enemy were coming through the wire as the transport lifted off, and they overran the South Korean capital in the early hours of 4 January 1951.

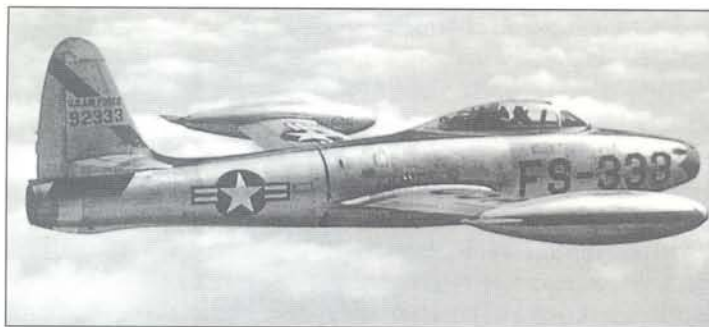
CHINESE ASSAULT

As 1951 unfolded, UN forces were to halt their withdrawal, launch a counter-attack, and recapture Seoul. But they were to go no further. The battle lines on the ground hardly changed in the months and years ahead.

Beginning 14 January 1951, an F-86A detachment of the 4th FIW

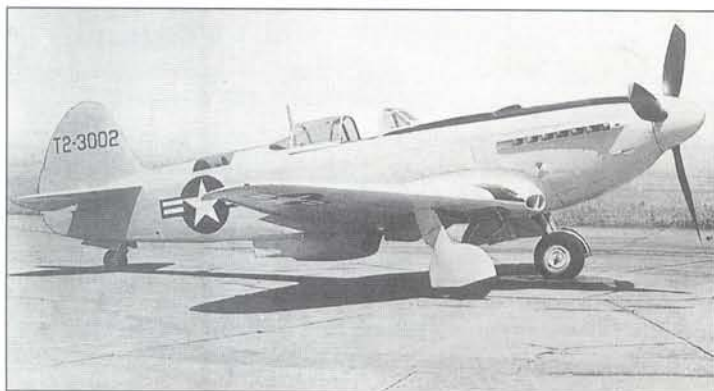


The first man to open the Sabre's MiG killing account in Korea was Lt Col Bruce Hinton, and he did so on 17 December 1950 in this very F-86A-5 (49-1236), nicknamed *Squawnee*. Commander of the 4th FIG's 336th FIS, Hinton was leading the group's very first combat patrol over the Yalu when he achieved this historic kill, the attacking quartet of MiGs apparently mistaking the Sabre four-ship for Shooting Stars



In one of the great ironies of the war, the first double-MiG kill was scored not by the ever-dominant F-86, but by its more humble second, the F-84. This feat was achieved on 23 January 1951 by Lt Jacob Kratt in an F-84E of the 522nd FES/27th FEG, his unit being tasked with 'fragging' Sinuiju as a diversionary strike whilst B-29s attacked Pyongyang

The Yak-9 was the most advanced fighter in the North Korean inventory when the fighting began on 25 June 1950, but by early 1951 had ceded its pure fighter role to 'Chinese' MiG-15s. This Yak-9P was captured after the Allies reversed the tide of war with the Inchon landing and overran communist airfields. Evaluated at Cornell Aero Lab and test-flown at Wright-Patterson AFB in 1951, the Yak was later displayed briefly at the Air Force Museum in the 1950s, but was sadly scrapped soon afterwards



returned to Korea to begin flying air-to-ground missions from Taegu, far in the south – 158 sorties were flown in this first attempt to use the Sabre as a fighter-bomber. 21 January 1951 brought a momentary change in fortune for the FEAF. Lt Col William E Bertram was up near the Yalu in one of the first F-84Es brought to Korea by the 27th Fighter-Escort Wing (FEW). In a

glancing engagement with MiG-15s from the other side of the river, Thunderjet pilot Bertram managed to get solid hits with .50 calibre bursts, duly shooting the MiG out of the sky.

On 23 January, while B-29s were attacking Pyongyang, Col Ashley B Packard, commander of the 27th FEW, persuaded higher-ups to 'frag' (assign) his F-84Es to hit the airfield at Sinuiju, just south of the Yalu. Thirty-three Thunderjets took off from the pierced-steel runway at Taegu, flew north, and hit the airfield by surprise. The first eight, assigned a strafing role, began working the place over, but once the rest of Packard's force had descended over Sinuiju, MiGs scrambled from Antung. A battle ensued, and four of the latter were shot down by Lt Jacob Kratt (two kills) and Cpts Allen McGuire and William W Slaughter. For reasons which are unclear, McGuire's kill does not appear on official records – all Thunderjets returned home safely.

The F-84 was the USAF's final jet fighter to have straight wings, and was severely underpowered at first. Following its maiden flight (on 28 February 1946), it faced myriad problems resulting from ever-increasing structural weight and low engine thrust. The Korean War's F-84D version (which entered combat after the F-84E) was modestly powered by the 5000 lb thrust J35-A-17D, and the E- and G-models, also used in Korea, offered only small improvements in terms of thrust. The F-84 had been ordered by the USAF from Republic to insure against the failure of the Sabre, and pilots knew it.

The E-model had a lengthened fuselage (by 12-in) to improve cockpit accommodation, revised wingtip tanks and a radar gunsight. The G-model offered greater power with its 5600 lb thrust J35-A-29, but its primary mission was outside the scope of the Korean problem – it was the

first single-seat fighter designed from the outset to carry atomic bombs. Korean F-84D, E- and G-model Thunderjets were armed with six .50 cals, with 300 rounds per gun, and could it haul up to 6000 lb of external bombs and rockets. The F-84G was credited with a maximum speed of 616 mph at 10,000 ft.

The F-84Es of Col Packard's 27th FEW flew 2076 combat sorties in January 1951, before moving

from Taegu back to Itazuke. The Thunderjet had a better range than the F-80, and the 27th FEW continued sorties from Japan against communist ground targets.

SABRE RETURN

The F-86 returned to the war in earnest when the 4th FIW moved back to Korea, this time to Suwon. Just before their arrival, a slashing attack by MiG-15s on 1st March damaged no fewer than ten B-29s, three of which made emergency landings at Taegu. The reappearance of the Sabres blunted the MiG threat to the B-29 force.

Later that month, Gen Stratemeyer cabled USAF chief of staff Gen Hoyt S Vandenberg, describing his concern for the vulnerability of F-51s and F-80s to MiG attack. He requested that all Fifth Air Force fighter-bomber wings be re-equipped with F-84E Thunderjets. Vandenberg approved the request, but it was not to materialise for another two years.

By now, the principal characteristics of the Sabre versus MiG confrontation were becoming clear. The MiG-15 enjoyed the important advantage of a much higher service ceiling. While a 'clean' F-86A could barely struggle along at 42,000 ft, the MiG-15 cruised at 50,000 ft or higher. Since the Sabres had to travel north from 200 miles south of MiG Alley, they had to spend most of their fuel commuting, and had little time to spend in combat. Unlike the MiGs, the Sabres had no GCI (ground control intercept) network to vector them onto an enemy aircraft, although the radar station on Cho-do island, callsign 'Dentist', was helpful some of the time. Most advantages seemed to rest with the communist side, however.

On 12 April, three bomber groups hit the Sinuiju bridge again. MiGs swarmed down through Sabre screens and escorting Thunderjets, and at least two B-29s were shot down and five damaged. This furious fighting, marked by aggressive MiG attacks on B-29s, brought the USAF a total of 11 kills, including seven MiGs downed by Superfortress gunners (of ten claimed), plus three 'probables' by F-84s.

Jim Jabara destroyed his third MiG during this period, tying him with F-84 pilot Kratt as the top-scoring flyer in Korea. Lt Col Hinton also got his second, as did Col Meyer – the final Korean victories for both men.

The 28th BS's hard-pressed B-29 crews added another laurel when gunner, Sgt Billy G Beach, was credited with two MiG-15 kills. Single victories were credited to five more B-29 gunners, and to Sabre pilot Capt Howard M Lane (336th FIS).

At this juncture, MiG-15s were still being flown by Soviet air divisions belonging to the 64th Independent Fighter Aviation Corps. The Soviets respected their American adversaries, and were not above acknowledging their own mistakes, as Maj Gen Georgy Lobov was to recall later:

Although B-29 crews came in for some rough treatment at the hands of MiG-15 pilots, who employed slashing attack tactics to make full use of their speed and height advantage, the remote barbette gunners in the Superfortresses occasionally got their own back. This B-29 of the Kadena-based 19th BG boasts two MiG kills alongside its growing tally of completed bombing missions – the outsize bomb symbols denote that this particular Superfortress had had its bomb-bay modified to carry the huge 'Tarzan' earthquake bomb



Still only a captain at this point, James Jabara of the 334th FIS/4th FIW began to come to prominence in the spring of 1951 as he steadily claimed a string of MiG kills. In this candid shot, he is seen holding his familiar blood red bonedome whilst conversing with a fellow 'Eagle' from his squadron at a damp Suwon. Behind him is the Sabre he used to down his first confirmed kill on 3 April 1951



'The first Soviet MiG-15 pilots did not have enough combat experience. It was one thing to defeat F-51s and F-80s, and quite another to face the F-86. Soviet commander Evgeny Pepelyaev confirmed that pilots needed to sharpen their tactics. Of course, the main goal of Soviet fighter aviation was not the scores of Sabres shot down but, rather to neutralise the bombers. From this point of view, avoiding combat was justified.

MORE CORSAIRS

The Corsair pilots started building up a modest tally of aerial victories on 21 April 1951 when two F4Us from VMA-312 chanced upon a rare outing by North Korean Yak-9s. Capt Phillip C DeLong, a World War 2 ace with 11 kills, and 1st Lt Harold D Daigh were jumped by four Yaks near Chinnampo. The Corsair pilots out-manoeuvred the enemy and Lt Daigh quickly knocked one of the Yaks down with a burst from his .50 calibre guns. Capt DeLong then shot down two more while Lt Daigh damaged the remaining Yak as it made a run for safer skies to the north.

The gull-winged Corsair was the last US propeller-driven fighter in production, and was a truly great aeroplane. Powered by a 2250 hp Pratt & Whitney R-2800-42W radial engine in the case of the F4U-4 (most used in Korea), the Corsair was credited with a maximum speed of 395 mph at 20,000 ft. The air-cooled engine was a boon when fighting at low-level, where metal was flying around and survivability was a real issue. No less than 12,571 Corsairs were manufactured (the last being delivered in January 1953), and in Korea, versions employed included the F4U-4, F4U-4B, F4U-5, F4U-5N, F4U-5NL and F4U-5P.

Heavy fighting saw four MiG-15s shot down on 22 April 1951, Jabara achieving the unprecedented by bagging his fourth kill. Eagleston and Yancey each claimed their second, and final, victories of the war, whilst 1st Lt Richard S (Dick) Becker (334th FIS) scored his first. The high-scoring Jabara had not yet finished battling the MiG-15, however, as he was allowed to remain at Suwon after the 334th rotated back to Japan (one squadron stayed in the rear while two flew from Korean soil).

Except for brief flare-ups, fighting in MiG Alley dramatically subsided in the spring of 1951, just as a final spasm of terrain-swapping approached its end thousands of feet below. On 24 April, Lt Col William J Hovde of the 4th FIW headquarters flight shot down a MiG-15, which was to be the last aerial victory for four weeks. Hovde had earlier scored 10.5 kills with the Eighth Air Force in World War 2.

Meanwhile, FEAF officers agonised over whether the lumbering B-29 could hack it in skies where the MiG-15 came and went as it pleased. The FEAF's B-29 force was commanded by Maj Gen Emmett 'Rosie' O'Donnell, Jr, who had available both the 98th and 307th BGs, on loan from Strategic Air Command. These had replaced the 22nd and 92nd BGs, which had been on the scene at the war's beginning. In addition, O'Donnell had the 19th BG which had belonged to the FEAF all along. Each group, with three squadrons, was authorised 33 bombers, giving O'Donnell – on paper at least – 99 Superfortresses. But the MiG force kept whittling that number down, and morale in the units was dangerously low.

In April 1951, Gen Douglas MacArthur was relieved and replaced by Lt Gen Matthew B Ridgway. It was the most publicised sacking of an officer since the Civil War, and Truman expressed 'regret that General of the

Army Douglas MacArthur is unable to give his wholehearted support to the policies of the United States government'.

The following month Jabara – now flying with the 335th FIS – racked up his fifth and sixth victories on the 20th in F-86A-5 49-1318. His achievement was all the greater because he was flying off balance at the time with a hung droptank.

At the age of 27, Jim Jabara was not merely an ace, but a seasoned World War 2 veteran. The son of a Wichita grocer, he claimed that the MiG could outrun and outclimb the F-86 above 30,000 ft. Jabara also said that he wished he had four 20 mm cannon instead of six .50 cal. The Sabre's A-4 radar-ranging gunsight was superior to the MiG's sighting system, and the former's 1802 rounds of ammunition stood a better chance of hitting something (despite inflicting less damage), but MiG pilots enjoyed heavier armour protection. Still, Jabara felt the F-86 was 'the best jet in the world, and the MiG the second best'.

With Jabara confirmed as the first ace, it could be said that the USAF had a simple kills accreditation system in place. However, it was by no means easy to be credited with an aerial victory. The rules for a confirmed kill were strict, and required at least two of the following – eyewitnesses, gun-camera film or a confirmed sighting of wreckage on the ground. These requirements were far more rigid than those in place in Europe during World War 2 (where, among other things, aircraft destroyed on the ground were counted within the Eighth Air Force). There is agreement that the desire to 'make ace' strengthened morale, not just of pilots but of the crewchiefs and armourers who worked on the jets, but at times it also led to a breakdown of discipline and to needless casualties.

In at least one of the 4th FIW's squadrons, pilots became so 'MiG happy' that they ignored basic tactics, took risks, and, as happened intermittently, crossed the Yalu. Jabara, Becker, Gibson and others of this era later claimed that they shot down more MiGs than anyone said, but were faced with a dilemma – everybody wanted to be an ace, but nobody wanted to be relieved from combat for breaking the rules of engagement.

On the same day as Jabara's fifth kill, a MiG-15 was credited to Capt Milton E Nelson, a pilot from the 335th FIS. Three more MiGs fell on 31 May 1951, two to Sabre pilots and one to a B-29 gunner. The next day, two B-29 gunners and another F-86 pilot toted up additional MiG kills.

Also in May, the Royal Australian Air Force's (RAAF) No 77 Sqn retreated from Pusan to Iwakuni and began the transition from battle-weary Mustangs to Meteor F.8 twin-engine jet fighters. These machines were sent out directly from Britain aboard the carrier HMS *Warrior*, with later shipments of F.8s eventually arriving in Australia for domestic use.

An F-86 from the USAF was detached to Iwakuni to fly comparison tests with a Meteor and, in

VMA-312 had a hectic war, operating firstly from forward airfields close to the war zone, and then returning to seaborne duties from the light carrier USS *Bataan* (CVL-29). The vessel spent most of its time cruising in the Yellow Sea off the west coast of Korea, and tours alternated between ship and shore for the Marine Corsair units throughout the conflict. In spring 1951 the 'Checkerboards' spent three months aboard ship, and on 21 April 1951, three Yak-9s were destroyed by Capt Phillip C DeLong and Lt Harold D Daigh near Chinnampo





Following James Jabara's double MiG killing feat to become an ace on 20 May 1951, he returned to Suwon to discover that he had been vaulted into the position of most famous post-World War 2 pilot in the USAF up to that point in the Korean conflict. Media attention was immediate, and here he is seen posing at Johnson air base, in Japan, in front of the F-86A-5 he flew to become an ace

heart attack in May 1951 and was replaced by Lt Gen Otto P Weyland, an ex-fighter pilot.

On 1 June, Lt Simpson Evans, a US Navy exchange pilot serving with an F-86 unit, was credited with a MiG-15 kill. Just over a fortnight later, on the 17th, an intruding Polikarpov Po-2LSh biplane dropped two bombs on Suwon. Some UN officers dismissed the mostly-canvas Po-2 as a nocturnal nuisance with no purpose except to annoy. Few Americans knew, however, that *Wehrmacht* troops on the Eastern Front during World War 2 feared the Po-2, and believed that its crew could 'look' into each window to see if soldiers were inside a house. By destroying one F-86A (49-1334), and seriously damaging eight more, this single incursion by 'Bedcheck Charlie' – the nickname given to the Po-2 – had inflicted far more harm to the Sabre force than the MiG-15 had so far achieved.

Po-2 crews seemed to mock the Americans. Their mount was difficult to detect on radar, and hard to spot with the naked eye. Capt Edwin B Long was aloft near Seoul on the night of 30 June when ground radar vectored him toward an intruder. Accompanied by radar operator, WO R C Buckingham, Long took his F7F-3N Tigercat north of the capital and began looking.

'The slow, very manoeuvrable, biplane was next to impossible to get a clean shot at. It took three passes for me to get him lined up. But when I did, the tremendous firepower of the Tigercat did the job quickly, and he went down into the side of a mountain in a fiery crash'. Long remembers that 'his' Po-2 was a black biplane with a radial engine, and he believes that he was fired upon from the rear cockpit by a hand-held weapon, probably a PPSH-41 7.62 mm 'burp' gun. The Tigercat pilot belonged to VMF(N)-513, the squadron known as the 'Flying Nightmares', which was now equipped with both F4U-5Ns and F7F-3Ns – he had just racked up the first victory of the conflict for Marine nightfighters.

The Tigercat was a shoulder-wing monoplane with outer wing panels that folded for carrier stowage. Though it flew for the first time in World War 2 (on 2 November 1943), the Tigercat was too late to see action in that war. Powered by two 2100 hp Pratt & Whitney R-2800-34W Double Wasp 18-cylinder engines, and capable of 435 mph at 22,200 ft, the Tigercat had a gross weight of 25,720 lb, which was less than some single-engined aircraft. The F7F-3 had four 20 mm cannon in the wing roots and four .50 cal machine-guns in the nose, and could carry up to 2000 lb

effect, to behave like a MiG. An argument boiled up between the USAF and the RAAF over how the Meteor should be used, with No 77's boss, Sqn Ldr Dick Cresswell, claiming that it should serve as an interceptor. This was the role eventually allocated to the unit, although there existed serious doubts in the American camp that the straight-winged Meteor could survive aloft with the MiG-15.

Lt Gen George E Stratemeyer, commander of the FEAF, suffered a

The RAAF's No 77 Sqn converted from the F-51D to the Meteor F.8 in the early months of 1951. At first, there were hopes that the Meteor could handle the MiG-15, but the British-designed fighter proved to be no match for the Russian fighter in a dogfight. Soviet literature claimed that Russian MiG-15 pilots flying from Manchuria once shot down a dozen Meteors in a day, which was probably more than the unit ever got into the air at once! Photographed at Puson in March 1951 this view shows an early F.8 sitting alongside one of the last F-51Ds on the squadron's books



of bombs. It never did serve on carrier decks but, along with the F4U-5N, was all-important to the USMC's war against 'Bedcheck Charlie' and other nocturnal activities.

A look at the situation at the end of June showed grim statistics for UN pilots. The Chinese – increasingly taking over flying duties from the Russians – now possessed 445 MiGs, opposed by a mere 44 F-86As then on strength with the 4th FIW in Korea. While the Americans were clearly outnumbered, the situation was even worse than it looked, with Col Herman A Schmid, who had replaced Col George F Smith as the 4th's boss observing that it took 'maintenance miracles' to keep *half* of his Sabres in the air. While Schmid appeared to be outnumbered ten-to-one, his Sabres actually faced a *twenty-to-one* disadvantage, vis-a-vis the Chinese.

Deliveries of the MiG-15bis with improved performance began in the summer of 1951. This new marque was powered by a 5952 lb thrust Klimov VK-1 engine which boosted its maximum speed to 677 mph at 10,000 ft. The MiG-15bis also introduced changes in wiring, hydraulics and cockpit layout, which made it a more effective air-to-air fighter.

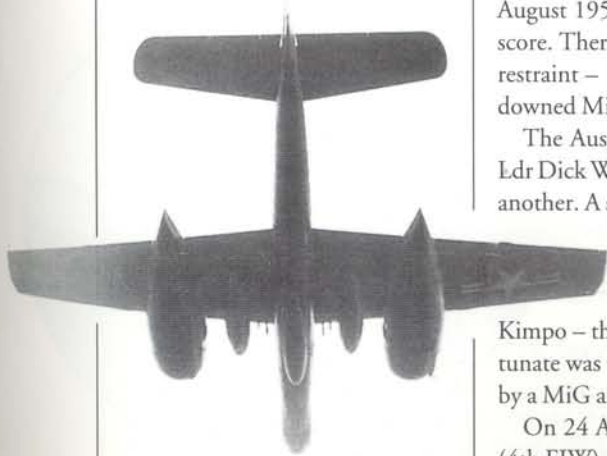
Three of the USAF's most capable Sabre pilots racked up MiG-15 aerial victories on 8 July. Col Francis S Gabreski, commander of the 4th FIW's 4th FIG, was the 'old man' of the trio. The top living US ace had scored 28 kills with the 61st FS/56th FG in Europe, and he had now claimed his first in Korea. 1st Lt Richard S Becker bagged his second MiG, whilst the least known of the trio was Maj Franklin L Fisher of the 4th FIW HQ Flight – this was his first success.

July also saw Capt Milton E Nelson (335th FIS) shoot down his second MiG-15 and 'Hoot' Gibson his third. B-29 gunner Sgt Gus C Opfer of the 3rd BS was credited with two MiGs. On 29 July, F-80C pilot 1st Lt William W McAllister (16th FIS/51st FIW) claimed a MiG-15. On 8 August 1951, 1st Lt Richard S Becker claimed two MiGs to double his score. There was certainly 'ace fever' in his 334th FIS, but there was also restraint – years later Becker claimed that both he and other pilots had downed MiGs which were never credited.

The Australians had their first MiG encounter in August 1951, Sqn Ldr Dick Wilson diving behind one jet, only to be hit by cannon fire from another. A shell penetrated his rear fuselage, bounced around, and punctured the main fuel tank. The Meteor's port aileron was also virtually shot away, but somehow he mustered extraordinary skill and nursed his damaged F.8 (A77-616) back to Kimpo – this jet was later lost to ground fire in February 1952. Less fortunate was the pilot of A77-721, WO Ron Guthrie, who was shot down by a MiG and made a PoW. He was finally repatriated in late 1953.

On 24 August MiGs were shot down by Col Benjamin S Preston, Jr (4th FIW), and Capt Jack A Robinson (334th FIS), whilst on 2 Septem-

The Tigercat really was an awesome weapon of war, and possessed an embarrassing excess of firepower when it came to dealing with the North Korean 'Bedcheck Charlie' Po-2s that proved to be the F7F's main target



ber, 22 F-86s battled 40 MiGs in a half-hour duel which raged between Sinuiju and Pyongyang – they shot down four, which were credited to Gabreski (his second), Gibson (his fourth), Capt Richard S Johns and Maj Winton W 'Bones' Marshal. A week later a pitched duel was fought between 28 F-86s and 70 MiGs, newly-promoted Capts Richard S Becker and Ralph D 'Hoot' Gibson each claiming their fifth kills to become the second and third US aces.

The 'top brass' were trying to use their meagre F-86 strength to keep MiGs away from bomber formations, although through sheer weight of numbers the latter were often getting through. F-84Es of the 8th FBS/49th FBW on a bombing sortie were bounced by six MiGs near Sukchon on 10 September. Their flight leader, 1st Lt William Skliar, describes what happened next.

'We were on a rail cutting mission. After our bomb runs, we were rejoining when the MiGs dove down on us. I called a break into the lead MiG and when he saw us turn he reversed direction. At that moment, another MiG came across my path in a rapid turn about 1200 ft in front of me. I laid my "Hog" (as the F-84 was nicknamed) into as tight a turn as possible and managed to draw a lead. We were at near max range for our .50s, but I got some good long bursts in. After a glance around to check where the other MiGs were, mine just disappeared. Knowing that the enemy often tried to decoy us into chasing them, I backed off in favour of getting everyone back together. At least I had the satisfaction of knowing that some of their decoys had almost bought the farm. I was credited with a "probable".'

Fourteen MiGs and three F-86s went down in air-to-air fighting in September. The favourable kill ratio was a cruel and misleading statistic. Able to fight only when and where the enemy chose, outnumbered F-86 pilots felt that the MiG-15 was slowly getting the better of them.

On 19 September, Thunderjet pilot Capt Kenneth L Skeen (9th FBS/49th FBW) shot down the first MiG-15 credited to his outfit after being forced to jettison his bombs and abandon an air-to-ground sortie.

A further 5.5 MiG-15s were credited to F-86 pilots in September 1951, but the 'bandit trains', or large formations, attacking from sanctuary north of the Yalu, continued to enjoy the initiative in the fight. Lt Gen Weyland felt the outnumbered F-86 force was taking it on the chin. He warned the Pentagon that the Chinese 'may be able to establish bases in Korea and threaten our air supremacy over the front lines'. It was to no avail. In Washington Gen Vandenberg was told that no more F-86s could be despatched to Korea. On 20 September he informed Weyland that the means did not exist to support a second Sabre wing in Korea.

On 23 September an F7F-3N of VMF(N)-513, flown by Maj EA Van



The B-26 Invader found itself in several air-to-air scrapes during the war. On 24 June 1951 a Po-2LSH blundered in front of a B-26B flown by Capt Richard M Heyman of the 3rd BG's 8th BS, and he blasted it out of the sky. It was the only official B-26 kill of the war. This B-26B was one of the aircraft assigned to 'The Liberty Squadron' at the time of the shootdown

1st Lt Charles 'Chazz' Herron of the 51st FIW wasn't a MiG killer, but this F-80C (49-607) nevertheless wears a red star. It's possible that 607 was flown by 1st Lt William W McAllister of the Wing's 16th FIS when he shot down a MiG on 29 July 1951



COLOUR PLATES



F-86E-1-NA 50-623 *Pretty Mary & the Js*, flown by Col Harrison R Thyng, CO 4th FIW

A seasoned fighter pilot from World War 2, with kills against the Japanese and the Luftwaffe, Thyng had commanded a P-47N squadron in the Far East in 1944/45. He

attained ace status shortly before handing over the 4th FIW to Col James Johnson.



F-86F-10-NA 51-112941, flown by Col James K Johnson, CO 4th FIW

Johnson took over the 4th from Thyng and flew this anonymous, but highly polished, F-86F. It was decorated only with the badge of the 335th FIS and yellow ID bands on the wings, fuselage and, uniquely to the 4th, the tailfin as well.

Johnson believed strongly in leading from the front, and duly became one of the first double aces in Korea, scoring exactly ten kills.



F-86E-10-NA 51-2747 *HONEST JOHN*, flown by Col Walker M 'Bud' Mahurin, CO 4th FIG

Mahurin was another highly experienced fighter pilot, having scored 21 kills against the Luftwaffe in World War 2. The first of his 3.5 victory claims was with the 51st FIW, the

others being made under the auspices of the 25th FIS. This aircraft, however, was flown by Mahurin during his tenure as commander of the 4th FIG.



F-86A-5-NA 49-1281, flown by Col Glenn T Eagleston, CO 334th FIS/4th FIW

As commander of the 334th FIS, Eagleston added three MiGs to his wartime tally of 18.5. His jet wears the original identity stripes adopted by the 4th before black-edged yellow bands took over. Intake lips were sometimes painted in the squadron colour also.

low bands took over. Intake lips were sometimes painted in the squadron colour also.



F-86A-5-NA 48-259, flown by Capt (later Maj) James Jabara, 334th FIS/4th FIW

In his two tours in Korea, Jabara achieved a great deal. Claiming his fifth and sixth kills on 20 May 1951, he became the first 'ace' of the conflict, scoring these victories

in a jet with one hung drop tank! He used a string of aircraft on his way to scoring 15 victories, but his own personal jet on his first tour was 48-259.



F-86F-1-NA-2857, flown by Capt Manuel J 'Pete' Fernandez, Jr 334th FIS/4th FIW

This aircraft was often used by Jabara during his second tour, despite being assigned to one of the 334th FIS's other major aces, Capt 'Pete' Fernandez. The latter overtook

Royal Baker as the leading scorer in May 1953, and was himself overtaken by McConnell.



F-86E-10-NA 51-2821, flown by Maj Frederick C 'Boots' Blesse, 334th FIS/4th FIW

Despite his score of ten kills, Frederick Blesse's major contribution to air combat history was his treatise, *No Guts, No Glory*, a volume which had a major influence a decade later

when fighter tactics in Vietnam were shaken up to reflect his ideas.



F-86A-5-NA 48-261, flown by 1st Lt Donald Torres, 335th FIS/4th FIW

Camouflaged Sabres were a rarity in Korea, although Russian veterans often recall their opponents as having

flown painted aircraft. This faded and patched olive drab F-86A was assigned to 1st Lt Donald Torres.



F-86E-10-NA 51-2834 *Jolley Roger*, flown by Capt Clifford D Jolley, 335th FIS/4th FIW

Jolley was one of the pilots chosen for the evaluation of six factory-fresh F-86Fs fitted with solid fuel rocket motors in the tail, below the jet pipe. These modified jets initially proved successful with their extra thrust for higher acceler-

ation, Jolley scoring two of his seven victories using the rocket-equipped aircraft. Handling problems were, however, severe, and one of the evaluation pilots was killed in combat.



F-86E-10-NA 51-2756 *HELL-ER BUST X*, flown by Maj (later Lt Col) Edwin L Heller, 16th FIS/51st FIW

A veteran Eighth AAF ace during World War 2, Heller flew a succession of F-86s, all named *HELL-ER BUST*. A controversial leader, Heller pushed the rules whenever possible,

and paid scant regard to the restrictions concerning going north of the Yalu.



F-86E-10-NA 51-2740 *GABBY*, flown by Col Francis S Gabreski, CO 51st FIW

Col Francis Gabreski led the 51st with verve and drive, but not always with a strict adherence to the rules. He instituted *Maple Special* missions for example, which were unauthor-

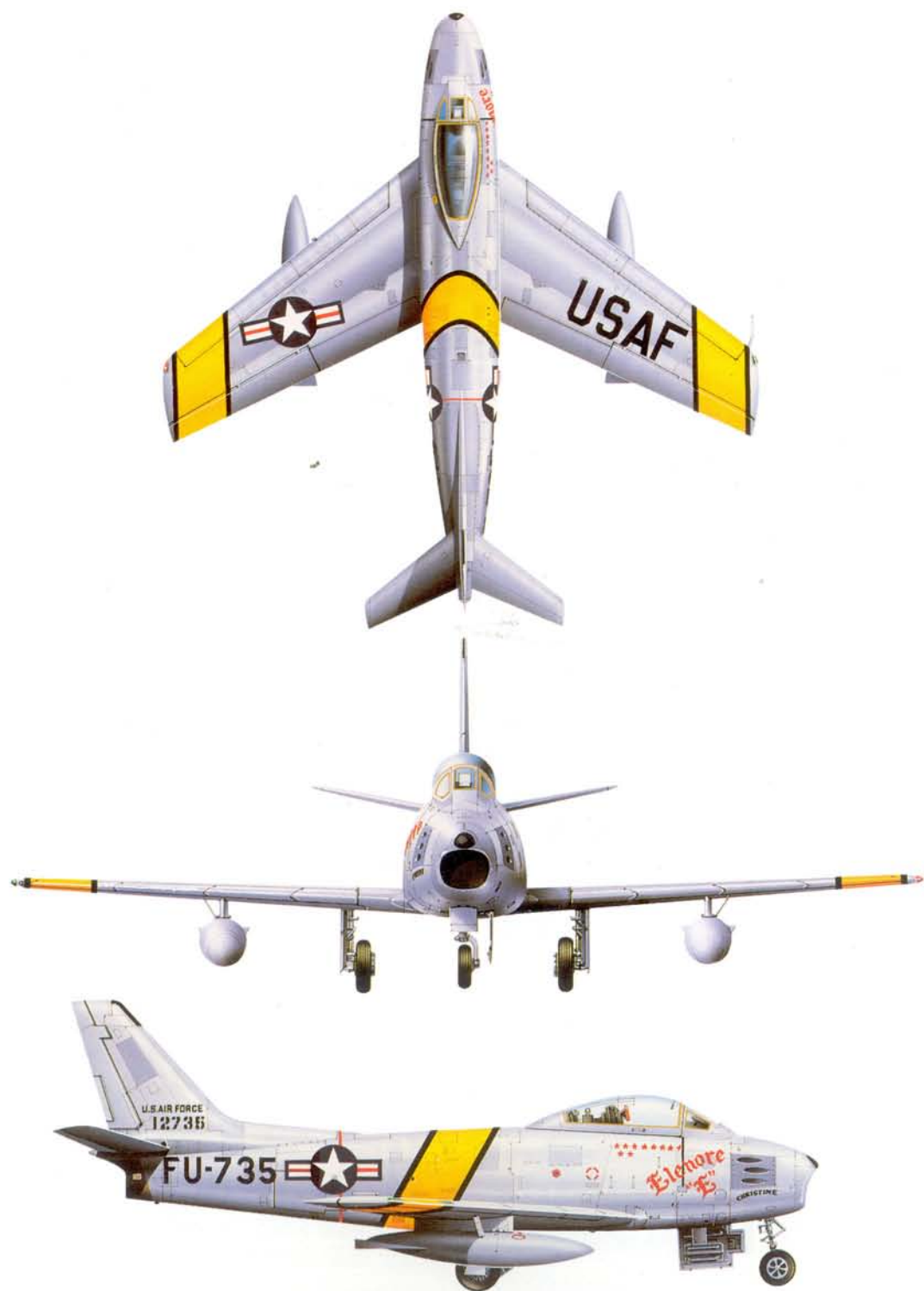
ised hot pursuits into Manchuria. These were kept secret from the brass at Suwon and only the most experienced pilots were involved.



F-86E-10-NA 51-2822 *THE KING/Angel Face & The Babes*, flown by Col Royal V 'The King' Baker, 336th FIS/4th FIW

For months the leading scorer in Korea, Col Baker ended the war with 13 kills – 12 MiGs and a single La-9. This left

him fourth on the list of top-scorers.



F-86E-10-NA 51-2735 *Elenore E*, flown by Maj William T Whisner, 25th FIS/51st FIW

William Whisner's 5.5 kills added to his tally of five German aircraft dispatched in World War 2. His aircraft lacked the checkerboard fin decoration applied later to vir-

tually all 51st FIW Sabres. The 25th FIS was the most successful of the 51st's three squadrons, scoring 110.5 victories.



F-86F-30-NA 52-4584 MIG MAD MARINE/LYN ANNIE DAVE 1, flown by Maj John Glenn, USMC, 25th FIS/51st FIW

The 25th FIS included a number of exchange pilots, none of them more famous than John Glenn. Glenn scored three kills in the Sabre, justifying the aircraft's huge and gaudy

nickname – these kills never appeared in the USAF's official records, however.



F-86F-1-NA 51-2910 BEAUTIOUS BUTCH II, flown by 1st Lt Joseph M McConnell, 39th FIS/51st FIW

UN 'ace of aces', and bettered only by a pair of Russian MiG-15 pilots, McConnell streaked past rivals Jabara and Fernandez to take the lead in the 5th Air Force MiG race. He

flew a string of Sabres, including at least three named *Beautious Butch*.



F-86F-1-NA 51-2852 DARLING DOTTIE, flown by Maj John F Bolt, USMC, 39th FIS/51st FIW

John Bolt was an 89-mission veteran Panther pilot with VMF-115 'Able Eagles' when he was chosen as one of several aircrew from the unit to serve with the 39th FIS during

the Korean War. Flying this plain F-86F, he was able to become the only Marine ace of the conflict, adding six kills to his World War 2 total of six.



F-82G-NA 46-383, flown by Lt William 'Skeeter' Hudson, with Lt Carl Fraser, 68th F(AW)S

Whilst performing a daylight CAP over Kimpo on 27 June 1950 with three other F-82Gs, the crew of 46-383 were

bounced by a flight of North Korean Yaks, but Hudson and Fraser quickly turned the tables.



F-84E-25-RE 51-493, flown by Lt Jacob Kratt, Jr, 523rd FES/27th FEW

The 27th FEW was a SAC unit tasked with long range escort, but was deployed to Korea, with its F-84Es, to operate in the less familiar close air support role. Several F-84

pilots scored air-to-air victories, but Kratt was the most successful, downing a pair of MiG-15s and a single piston-engined Yak.



F-86F-30-NA 52-4341 MIG POISON, flown by Maj James P Hagerstrom, 67th FBS/18th FBG

When the 18th FBG converted from the F-51D Mustang to the F-86F, several experienced pilots from the 4th and 51st FIWs, were transferred in to help with jet conversion. One

of these was Maj Hagerstrom, who added 6.5 kills to the two he had made with the 4th FIW.



FB-29B-60-BA 44-84057 *COMMAND DECISION*, 28th BS/19th BG (Medium), Kadena, Okinawa

The B-29 was claimed to be the second highest scoring UN aircraft of the Korean War after the Sabre, and the gunners

of this aircraft actually amassed a total of five MiG credits, making the aircraft an ace!



F4U-5N 124453 *ANNIE MO*, flown by Lt Guy 'Lucky Pierre' Bordelon, 'Detachment Dog', VC-3, detached ashore to K-6 from USS *Princeton*

Bordelon was the only non-Sabre ace of the war, and truly lived up to his nickname of 'Lucky Pierre'. Bordelon got the lucky break which saw him detached ashore with two air-

craft specifically to hunt nocturnal 'Bedcheck Charlie' raiders.



F9F-2 (BuNo unknown), flown by Lt (jg) J D Middleton, VF-781, USS *Oriskany*

After an unusual action on 18 November 1952, Middleton and his wingman, Lt E R Williams, were credited with two MiG-kills, while Lt (jg) D M Rowlands damaged a third.

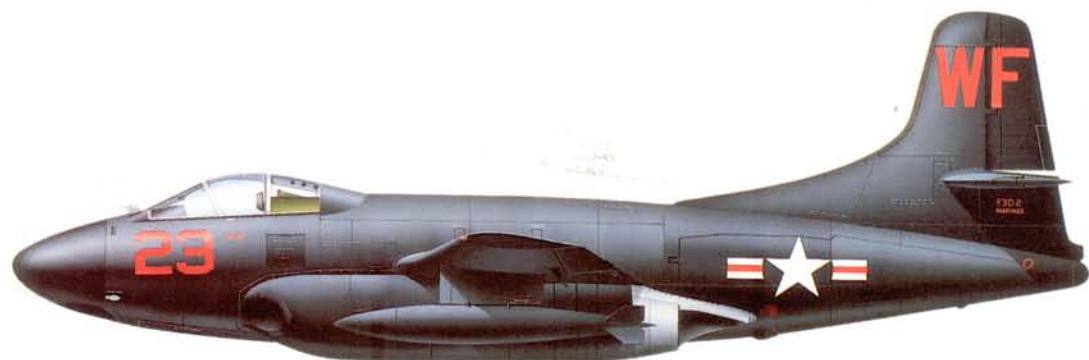
The incident was initially hushed up by the Navy, as the enemy aircraft had been Russian MiG-15s (not nominally North Korean) operating from a base near Vladivostock.



FG-1D (F4U-4) (BuNo 92701), flown by Capt Jesse Folmar, VMA-312

Folmar was able to down one of a pair of MiG-15s which attacked him and his wingman on 10 September 1952, but

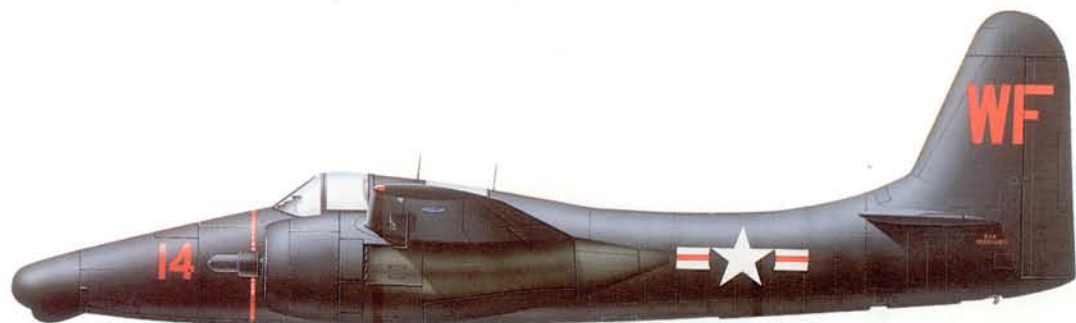
was himself shot down when attacked by four more MiGs.



F3D-2 (BuNo unknown), flown by Maj William Stratton with MSgt Hans Hoglind, VMF (N)-513

Although it was not introduced until 1952, the Skynight proved very successful, downing seven aircraft, including six MiG-15s. This success was largely due to the jet's three

radar sets: AN/APG-26 for gun ranging and lock-on; AN/APS-21 for search out to 15 miles; and the four-mile range AN/APS-28 tail warning radar.



F7F-3N (BuNo unknown), flown by Capt E B Long with WO R C Buckingham, VMF (N)-513

Tigercats were primarily used for night interdiction duties, but also mounted night CAPs in an effort to prevent nuisance attacks by 'Bedcheck Charlies'. Long scored the first

USMC night kill of the war (and the Tigercats first victory ever) on 1 July 1951, shooting down a Po-2 near Kimpo.



MiG15 925, flown by Col Yevgeni Pepelyaev, commander of the 196th IAP

Yevgeni Pepelyaev was the top-scoring fighter pilot of the Korean War, amassing his 23 victories in 108 combat mis-

sions. Pepelyaev commanded the most successful Soviet unit which participated in Korea, the 196th IAP.



Meteor F.Mk 8 A77-851 "HALESTORM", flown by Sgt George Hale, No 77 Sqn

Hale scored his historic kill on 27 March 1953 during a strafing mission against targets on the Pyongyang-Singosan road.



Sea Fury FB.Mk 11, flown by Lt Peter 'Hoagy' Carmichael, No 802 Sqn, HMS Ocean

Carmichael's 9 August 1952 kill was the first MiG 15 to fall to a piston-engined fighter, and was the only confirmed kill

by a British pilot flying a British aircraft achieved in Korea.



A 25th FIS/51st FIW 1st Lieutenant in mid-1952, dressed in army fatigues and combat boots. The pilot is also wearing an old Army Air Force olive drab flying jacket with a USAAF patch printed on the sleeve. The badge of rank is worn on a squadron-coloured baseball cap – these became very popular on the frontline bases as the war progressed. The tenth US ace of the war, Capt Iven Kincheloe was photographed on several occasions wearing a uniform similar in many respects to this one.



Capt Manuel 'Pete' Fernandez in the spring of 1953, wearing the standard service cap for officers, regulation blue flying suit and thin summer issue flying jacket. He has personalised the latter by having a large 334th FIS 'boxing pigeon' patch sewn on to its left breast. Further confirming his allegiance to the 334th, Fernandez has an appropriately coloured scarf tied loosely around his neck. He is also wearing a battered pair of brogan boots (favoured, although unofficial, footwear in the summer months), whilst in his hands, Fernandez is holding his flying helmet and Mae West.



Capt Harold Fischer in late 1952 at Suwon. He is dressed in similar regulation issue clothing as shown on Pete Fernandez, but instead of an officer's service issue cap, he is wearing a garrison, or 'overseas', cap with captain's bars pinned on – the latter are also worn on the collars of his flying suit. Attached to the 39th FIS/51st FIW, Fischer has a distinctive yellow life jacket strapped to his chest, G-suit webbing around his lower waist and legs and a bulky parachute pack strapped to his back.



One of the last aces of the war, Maj John F Bolt was also the only Marine Corps pilot to achieve this distinction in three years of fighting, although he had first to be transferred to a Sabre unit to score the required kills. Assigned to the 39th FIS/51st FIW, Bolt still wore his USMC uniform whilst attached to the USAF – 'forest green' overalls and a Navy issue A-2 leather jacket.



Col Yevgeni Pepelyaev, commander of the 196th IAP (Fighter Aviation Regiment), was the top scoring pilot of the Korean conflict. He is depicted here wearing a standard Soviet Air Force issue uniform that includes a leather flying jacket – pilots usually flew in all weathers clothed in this basic apparel as the cramped confines of the MiG-15's cockpit precluded the wearing of fur-lined suits. No distinguishing rank tabs or unit badges are visible, and his cap is very similar in style to the regulation Red Army officer's head gear.



Arguably the most famous British pilot of the Korean War was Lt Peter 'Hoagy' Carmichael, a modest Sea Fury FB.Mk 11 'driver' assigned to No 802 Sqn, embarked aboard HMS Ocean in mid-1952. He is wearing standard issue light blue, RAF style, overalls, with rank badges on the epaulettes, and a Mae West. Carmichael is clutching his 'bone dome' in his hand, whilst on his head he is wearing his 'hats-electric' – a skull cap containing a headset which was thin enough to wear underneath the basic flying helmet of the period.



4th FIG boss Col Francis S Gabreski congratulates the second and third US aces in Korea, Capt Richard S Becker (left) and 1st Lt Ralph 'Hoot' Gibson, after they each downed their fifth MiG during a dogfight over the Yalu on 9 September 1951

Capt Kenneth L Skeen of the 9th FBS/49th FBW is helped on with his straps prior to departing from Taegu (K-2) on a strike mission in his MiG-killing F-84E. His was the first aerial victory for the wing, on 19 September 1951, after his strike formation had been bounced by MiGs east of Pyongyang



Gundy and Master Sergeant T H Ullom, was searching for a Po-2, and soon made radar contact. The pilot went down to minimum speed to avoid overshooting his quarry, and at a range of 500 ft, Van Gundy spotted the Po-2 and fired 100 rounds of 20 mm ammunition at it before he overshot. The Polikarpov burst into flames and crashed.

The conflict was now permanently stalemated on the ground, but not in the air. The size and scope of the fighting along MiG Alley was altered dramatically in October 1951, one of the busiest months of the war. The outnumbered 4th FIW fought the biggest jet air battles in history over north-western Korea, some of them

involving hundreds of jet fighters. The MiG force had now increased to 525 aircraft, but was still opposed by just 44 F-86A. Not phased by these odds, the 4th continued to whittle down this huge force, destroying two MiGs on 1 October, six on 2 October, one on 5 October, one on 12 October and no fewer than *nine* MiGs (the biggest daily score yet) on 16 October.

The heightened level of aerial fighting was also marked by savage MiG attacks on B-29s. On 23 October 1951, as Superforts went after targets in the north, 100 MiGs engaged and boxed in the 34 Sabres of the screening force. The F-86 pilots shot down two MiGs, but this was no comfort to the eight B-29 crews arrayed in three flights, and escorted by 55 F-84s. Fifty MiGs got through and attacked the bomber force. A Thunderjet-versus-MiG fray on the edges of the formation proved little, except that the F-84 was not MiG-killer material.

While this struggle went on, two more B-29s were shot down. In fact, all but one of the bombers received major damage and most had casualties aboard when they diverted for emergency landings at forward airfields. It was the blackest day in the history of the medium bomber force, and it proved that daylight raids on North Korea had to end.

Russian MiG-15 pilots refer to this slaughter of B-29s as 'Black Tuesday'. The USAF drew little comfort from the fact that B-29 gunners claimed five MiG-15s and an F-84 pilot a sixth. The latter kill was accomplished by Navy Lt (and future astronaut) Walter M Schirra,

One F-86 pilot scoring regularly in the latter stages of 1951 was 1st Lt Hal Fischer (on the left) of the 4th's 39th FIS, who achieved the rare distinction of downing two MiGs in one day on 16 October. Few shark's mouths were applied to F-86s in Korea, thus making Fischer's ferocious looking Sabre a rarity amongst other 4th FIW jets



flying on exchange. An F-84E was downed in return by a MiG in the middle of the fighting.

The communists destroyed another Superfortress the following day despite an escort of 16 Meteors and 10 F-84s. The impact that the Russian pilots had on the B-29s was as dramatic as they later claimed. Unable to survive against the MiG in daylight, the bombers switched to night raids after the heavy losses of October, which the Russians claim added up to 12 B-29s and four F-84 – the official USAF figure was eight and one.

A COLONEL'S WAR

When Col Harrison R (Harry) Thyng took command of the embattled 4th FIW at Kimpo on 1 November 1951 (replacing Schmid), he was one of the most experienced combat pilots in the USAF. Thyng's first fighter had been a Spitfire, and he had racked up kills in both Europe and the Pacific. His gift was 'leadership and courage', as his orderly room chief, Staff Sergeant Gordon Beem remembers. Others recall Thyng's lack of interest in glory for himself – he often gave away his kills to other pilots.

Col Thyng arrived in Korea as the first cohort of American fighter pilots was finishing up and going home. Like these veterans, some of the new arrivals had fought in World War 2, but unlike them, these older heads had gotten out of uniform, launched careers and started families. They'd been recalled involuntarily; their average age was 30 to 32; they'd already done their part in the most horrific war the world had ever known; and they resented this new war as an intrusion into their lives.

Reporting aboard in Col Thyng's orderly room at Kimpo along with the disgruntled older veterans were a new breed – fresh pilots in their early twenties, taught to fly in 1950 and 1951. The new men were quick of reflex, less bitter, and unfettered by bad habits. Harry Thyng had jumped from props to jets without blinking, but Col Gabreski, for example, couldn't get the hang of the F-86's gunsight, and was aiming at MiGs through chewing-gum wadded on his windscreen! In contrast, a 25-year-old 'balloon' (new second lieutenant) like James F Low could tweak up the Sabre's A-4 radar-ranging gunsight and use it as naturally as an extension of his own eyes and hands. Thyng wrote that 'the proper use of the gunsight was something that needed to be emphasised more'.

He saw his pilots hamstrung by maintenance problems and outnumbered by the MiGs, so he decided to risk his new job by waving a flag of warning in the face of the Air Force Chief of Staff in the Pentagon. He sent a message in November which leapfrogged his superiors and flaunted the chain of command. The key sentences read, 'PERSONAL TO VANDENBERG FROM THYNG. I CAN NO LONGER BE RESPONSIBLE FOR AIR SUPERIORITY IN NORTHWEST KOREA.'

51st FIGHTER INTERCEPTOR WING

After Col Harry Thyng's call, USAF chief of staff Gen Vandenberg continued to be reticent about shipping more Sabres to Korea for about a month. Then, on 22 October 1951, he issued a controversial order to the Air Defense Command to send 75 F-86A/Es with pilots and crew chiefs to Alameda, California, to be loaded aboard an escort carrier for Japan.

The way was paved to equip the 51st FIW at Suwon with Sabres, initially with two units (16th and 25th), whilst the beleaguered 4th FIW was to get its third squadron.

On 27 November 1951, pilots from the 4th FIW shot down four MiGs, one of the victors being Maj Richard D Creighton, who became the war's fourth American ace on this day. He was a jet pioneer, and a much-respected leader and tactician who'd flown the F-86A to a speed record immediately before the start of the war. Two other MiG kills were credited to Maj George A Davis, Jr, boss of the 334th FIS, and another pioneer who'd flown with the USAF's first Sabre wing before the war, and was highly respected for his aggressive spirit and tactical skills. The following day, 'Bones' Marshal scored his second and third MiG kills. Another kill, greatly helped by Col Thyng coaxing the MiG into the right place, was credited to 1st Lt Dayton W Ragland, one of the USAF's first black pilots.

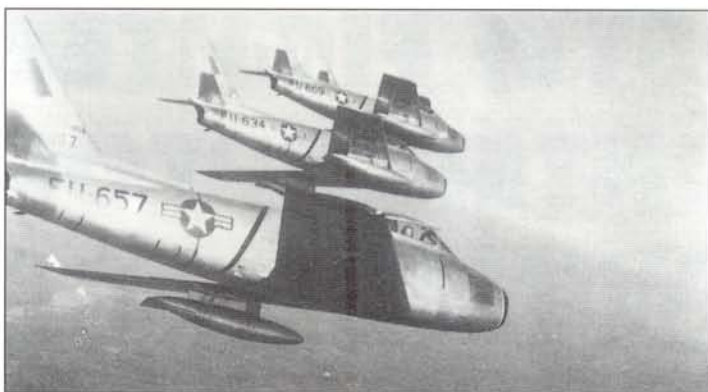
On 30 November 1951, 31 Sabres led by Col Benjamin S Preston, the 4th FIW's group commander, came upon a formation of 12 twin-engined Tupolev Tu-2 bombers, 16 La-9 propeller-driven fighters and 16 MiG-15s. This may have been an attempt to revive the North Korean air force, as UN intelligence had detected attempts to open the airfield at Uiju, south of the Yalu, and had monitored radio chatter in Korean rather than Chinese. The gaggle of aircraft found two flights of Sabres swarming



No less than 25 F-86Es can be seen in this view of the flightdeck of the carrier *USS Cape Esperance*. This shot was taken in mid-Pacific in the summer of 1951, and upon their arrival in Korea these jets were shared between the 4th and the formerly F-80-equipped 51st FIWs. A typical wing in-theatre boasted roughly 65 F-86s split between three squadrons

down on them, firing and missing. When the Sabres re-engaged, an La-9 went down, then a Tu-2.

Maj Davis added to his existing credits by claiming a Tu-2, then picked off an unwary MiG to become the war's fifth American ace. Maj Winton W 'Bones' Marshal destroyed a Tu-2 and a La-9 to become the sixth jet ace, whilst other bombers were shot out the sky by 1st Lts Robert W Akin, John J Burke and Douglas K. Evans, and Capt Raymond O Barton, Jr. Further La-9s were claimed by Col Preston (his fourth and final Korean War kill) and 1st Lt John W Honaker.



Although not of stunning quality, this photograph is nevertheless of some historical significance as it shows a three-ship of 51st FIW F-86Es carrying out one of their very first combat patrols over MiG Alley in early December 1951. The only unit markings then worn by the wing at Suwon were the yellow fuselage stripe and a suitably coloured intake lip surround, although not all Sabres exhibited the latter

YELLOW BANDS

Group commander, Lt Col George Jones, recognised that the 51st needed distinctive markings on its aircraft. To prevent F-86 Sabre pilots from mistaking each other for MiGs, the old hands at the 4th FIW had been flying with forward-slanting black-and-white stripes on the centre fuselage – similar to 'D-Day invasion stripes' worn by Allied aircraft almost a decade before – since way back in 1950. Jones didn't want to copy their stripes, so he set about designing something different.

Capt Ed Matczak, group material officer and budding artist, used grease pencils to draw a picture of an F-86 with a rearward-slanting yellow band on the fuselage, and yellow bands on the wing and tail. They were more attractive than the rival 4th's paint job, and they ended up being 28 inches wide on the fuselage (and swept back diagonally), and 36 inches wide on the wing, with a 4-inch black border in both locations.

Matczak's bands looked better and made it easier for UN pilots to distinguish a Sabre from a MiG. Col Walker H 'Bud' Mahurin, the World War 2 P-47 ace who joined the 51st some months after the bands had been applied, claimed that they were designed to set the Wing apart from the 4th, and to increase flagging morale. Later, the 51st revived the World War 2 markings pioneered by its 25th FS when it adorned the tails of its jets with black squares, thus becoming the 'Checkertails'.

The canvas for all these markings, the F-86E, provided something more substantial than a coat of paint to help boost flagging morale, however. By now, this version, with the 'all flying tail', was becoming standard, and pilots praised the way it manoeuvred with the MiG. Still, they were, as an official report at the time said, 'almost invariably outnumbered' by 'extreme odds'. MiG Alley itself was 'at the outer range of the F-86E's combat radius' and 'is over enemy territory at all times'.

Furthermore, even the worthy F-86E could not fully satisfy hard-working groundcrews. Daniel Walker, crew chief for 51st pilot Capt Iven C Kincheloe, noticed that the aileron actuators leaked (a glitch peculiar to the F-86E model) and, when the worst happened, all of the hydraulic fluid in the jet would gush out. When the aft section of the Sabre had to be removed for engine work, the spiral disconnectors were difficult to loosen or tighten properly. The canopy seal was never right. Further, even

in the E-model, designers had not yet fixed a nose wheel which was too weak, and collapsed easily. Men like Walker had to cope with a difficult supply situation which was partly responsible for Thyng's complaint. Even if these problems could be solved, the 4th FIW alone could not handle hundreds of MiGs. Though new F-86s were constantly arriving, the aircraft-out-of-commission rate spiralled rapidly upward. In January 1952, a staggering 45 per cent of all F-86s in Korea were out of commission, 16.6 per cent for want of parts and 25.9 per cent because of maintenance problems. With two Sabre wings flying combat, the need for external fuel tanks jumped, and supply levels of these essential, but often expendable, stores were nearly exhausted. Many pilots were forced to fly combat patrols with only one wing tank, thus reducing patrol time.

The numbers of both communist and Allied warplanes in the skies along the North Korean border kept going up. MiG-15 'bandit trains' surging across the Yalu often numbered 100 aircraft, pilots using their high-altitude advantage by flying at 50,000 ft and jockeying into position to 'bounce' the Americans at Mach 0.9. The 4th Wing still flew mostly older F-86As, and although these were slightly faster than the newer, more manoeuvrable, F-86Es, all of the wing's flight leaders flew E-models. This essentially meant that the bulk of the 4th's pilots had difficulty getting high enough, fast enough, in their battle-weary F-86As to take away the enemy's advantage in the critical first moments of a fight. By contrast, the 51st had new F-86Es and could swarm into MiG Alley at speed (perhaps a few mph slower than the A-model, but no slower than the enemy), attacking from near-comparable altitudes with the MiGs.

There were signs that the general skill-level of the MiG pilots was decreasing as their numbers increased. In several engagements, 51st pilots caught the MiGs from behind, broke up their ragged formations, and shot them down. For example, in January, 31 MiGs were destroyed for the loss of just five Sabres. All but a half-dozen of the kills were racked up by pilots in the second wing to operate Sabres, the 51st.

On 10 February, Maj George Davis, the leading ace of the war at that stage with 12 victories, in addition to seven kills from World War 2, tore into a MiG 'bandit train' at 32,000 ft near the Yalu, just in time to prevent the MiGs from bouncing some Allied bombers. Davis wracked his F-86E around in a tight turn to close on the MiGs, and quickly achieved his final (13th and 14th) kills. Within seconds, however, a MiG pulled in tightly behind his Sabre and shot him down.

Men who fought in that battle praise Davis' courage, but some say that this mature, seasoned, pilot was also afflicted with a touch of the 'MiG madness' which affected so many Sabre jocks. At the same time, the lives of bomber crewmen were clearly at stake, and few of Davis' buddies doubt that had he survived, he would have stayed on top as the leading ace.

With Davis' loss, the USAF was

Displaying definitive 51st FIW markings in this crisp shot is F-86E, here parked away in its revetment at Suwon. Nicknamed *Aunt Myrna* by its regular pilot, Walt Copeland, it also wears a thin red band above the distinctive chequered tail markings, thus denoting its allegiance to the 25th FIS. Copeland scored a single kill in this jet



deprived of one of its fine tacticians, and a future leader. Davis posthumously became the only Sabre pilot awarded the Medal of Honor in Korea. He was one of two F-86 pilots lost during the month, in return for a total of 17 MiGs destroyed. One of these kills, which was scored on 17 February, resulted in 335th FIS CO, Maj Zane S Amell, doubling his score, although he later became the second F-86 pilot lost in action that month. He too has been said to have been touched by 'MiG fever'.

A different kind of combat outfit, the 319th FIS, came to Suwon on 1 March 1952 as the second user of the F-94B nightfighter to enter the war. The 319th was to give new meaning to the concept of 'limited' warfare, with both pilots and radar operators (ROs) – well-trained and highly motivated – feeling that they were being sent into battle with their hands tied behind their backs. The USAF was so concerned that it might lose an F-94B, together with its secret air-intercept radar, which would be of great interest to the Soviets, that the squadron was confined to flying south of the bomb line, except for the occasional dash north.

In the air-to-air fighting, March 1952 saw the Air Force's F-86 pilots chalk up 39 MiG kills, while sustaining just three losses.

Double scores were toted up on 1 April 1952 when Capt Iven C Kincheloe and Maj William H Wescott – both members of the of the 25th FIS/51st FIW – shot down two MiGs each. The number of F-86 aces was steadily rising. New aces included Bill Whisner, CO of the 51st FIW's 25th FIS, who became the seventh jet ace, and his wing's first, on 23 February, whilst Col Francis S Gabreski became the eighth (1 April), Capt Robert H Moore the ninth (3 April), Capt Kincheloe the tenth (6 April), Capt Robert J Love the eleventh (21 April) and Maj Wescott the war's twelfth (on 26 April).

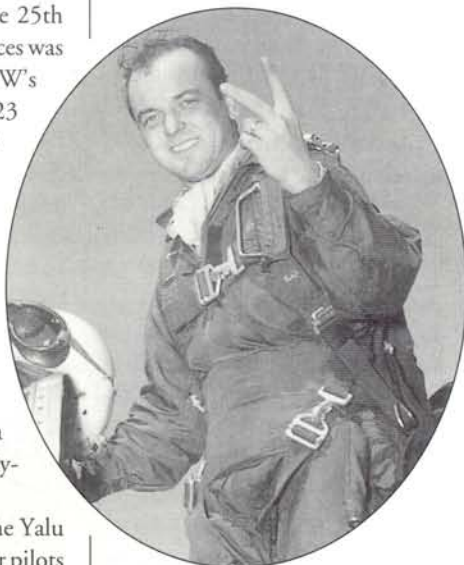
Col Gabreski – then and today America's top living ace – got his fifth kill in an F-86E (belonging to the 25th FIS/51st FIW which Bill Wescott had named *LADY FRANCES*, and the crew chief had dubbed *MICHIGAN CENTER*. Wescott got his fifth kill in the same aeroplane. The strapping Capt Iven C Kincheloe, who was six-foot-two, with silver-blond hair and the build of a football linebacker, became the first ace to get all of his kills while flying the same jet, kept flyable by crew chief Dan Walker.

In April 1952 the scoreboard for the air-to-air combat along the Yalu River was 44 MiGs to four F-86s. At several intervals during the war pilots crossed the forbidden Yalu to engage MiGs on their own turf, ignoring rules, politics and direct orders to stay out of Chinese air space. There were accidental crossings, whilst at times pilots decided on their own to jump the border deliberately. But for short periods at least this trans-border fighting involved more than just one pilot on a regular basis.

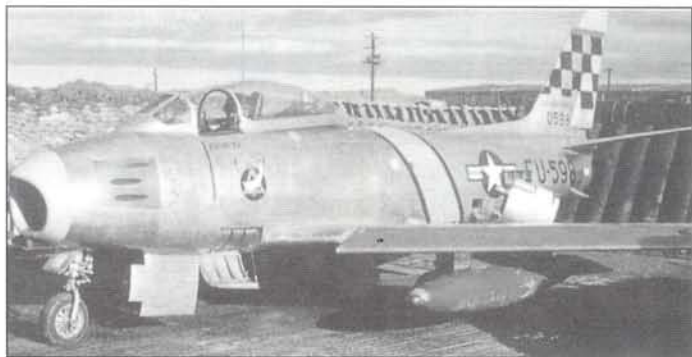
In the Suwon-based 51st FIW, Col Gabreski, Lt Col George Jones, Col Walker 'Bud' Mahurin, Maj William Whisner and others adopted a 'hot pursuit' policy, flying what they called 'Maple Special' incursions



The USAF's very latest dedicated nightfighter – the F-94B – had been in-theatre from mid-1951, but it had still to claim a kill by the time the second Starfire unit arrived at Suwon. The Starfire did eventually go on to destroy four MiG-15s at night, but proved to be too fast to deal effectively with the Po-2/Yak-18 nuisance raiders



On 1 April 1952, Maj William H Wescott of the of the 25th FIS/51st FIW, downed two MiGs, hence the gesture! He duly became the 12th US ace soon afterward on 26 April 1952. Wescott flew an F-86E which he had named *LADY FRANCES*, and the crew chief had dubbed *MICHIGAN CENTER*



Also assigned to the 51st FIW at about the same time as *Aunt Myrna* was *My Best Bett*, alias F-86E 50-0598. The mount of 2nd Lt Bernard Vise, this jet wears the blue tail stripe of the 16th FIS, as well as drab olive drop tanks, whose colour served to denote that they were built under contract in Japan – they possessed such different separation characteristics from the North American store when jettisoned that pilots had to be made aware of which type of tank they were carrying into combat

A groundcrewmen get to grips with a minor glitch in the ammunition belt feed system on this distinctively (red) striped 25th FIS F-86E. Obviously mechanics of the highest order, a positive statement on the overall operability of this jet's six Brownings is made by the row of 7.5 red stars beneath the cockpit



into Manchuria after purposely setting up situations which gave them a shot at fleeing MiG-15 pilots. These border crossings were kept secret from others at Suwon. Capt Kincheloe found out about 'Maple Special' by accident, and was inducted into the closed fraternity of participants.

Trips across the Yalu were an invitation to trouble. For example, 1st Lt Bill Ginther came back from a mission with revealing gun-camera film

after he'd attacked a MiG-15 over Manchuria. Struggling to get away, the enemy pilot had dived to earth, pulling out just in time to pass along the runway at the crowded Antung airfield. Ginther's gun camera film, as Mahurin later described it, showed 'row after row of MiGs lined up on either side of the runway', so that 'it appeared that the F-86 was flying even below the tops of the MiG tails'. While enemy technicians stood on the MiGs watching, Ginther shot down his foe and somehow got away unscathed. Upon returning to base he burned his film straight after its one and only private showing.

1st Lt Joe Cannon, who flew F-86E Sabres with the 25th FIS, remembers what it was like to fight the MiG in the following passage.

'Of the 91 missions I flew, most of them were with "Kinch" (Capt Kincheloe) and "Gabby" (Col Gabreski, 51st FIW commander). On 2 April, "Kinch" and I entered the area near Sinanju, not far from the Yalu River, at about 48,000 ft. We dropped our external tanks when we spotted three flights of MiGs 5000 ft below us. We were lucky in that we were not pulling any contrails and they had not seen us. We rolled over and dove down on them. "Kinch" bagged one as we busted through the middle of the whole damned formation – not the smartest thing we ever did. I came so close to colliding with a MiG that as I went by, I looked the pilot straight in the face and I noticed that the he had a cloth helmet on!

"Kinch" called out over the radio that it was my turn now (we alternated flying wing for each other). I pulled up hard and rolled. Going around I saw the jet I had just missed. He was heading for the Yalu, so I "split-S'ed" and came down behind him. After a three-second burst he began to burn.

'At about that moment, "Kinch" yelled, "Break left!". When I broke hard and turned my head to see who was on my tail, the entire world lit up. This MiG jockey proceeded to shoot the oxygen mask right off my face, blowing the canopy away, making my left wing half the size of my right one and shredding my rud-

der. When I punched out over the coast, several hundred miles from where I wanted to be, the MiGs set up a gunnery pattern on me coming down in the chute. "Kinch" was right in the middle of them, breaking their concentration up. MiGs were coming from everywhere. Some of them came so close, they were swinging me horizontally in the chute, but I swear that "Kinch" was behind every one that came by. What a sight! I was soon picked up by the Navy and returned to Suwon for dinner.'

SEA FURY MISSION

In the spring of 1952, the aircraft carrier HMS *Ocean* reached Korea with No 802 Sqn, equipped with Hawker Sea Fury FB.Mk 11s, embarked. Commonwealth aircraft carriers like *Ocean* operated on the west coast of Korea in the Yellow Sea, separated by the peninsula from US Navy vessels in the Sea of Japan. Sea Fury pilots regularly ran the expected gauntlet of withering gunfire to attack ground targets. One of them, Cdr Peter 'Hoagy' Carmichael, later remembered, 'Our biggest worry was flak. It kept you worried the whole time. Some of it was radar-controlled, and some used tracer. AA guns from 12.7 to 88 mm calibre were encountered, along with massed rifle and small-arms fire. Most AA weapons were very well concealed, sometimes in house in the villages, and sometimes with optical height finders, predictors and even radar. False targets were used as flak traps, and their fire discipline was excellent'.

On 13 May, an important USAF leader was lost when Col 'Bud' Mahurin was shot down and captured. Mahurin, who'd transferred to Kimpo to command the 4th FIG under the 4th FIW's Harry Thyng, was shot down by AAA on a bombing mission – he was not flying his own jet, nicknamed *HONEST JOHN* during this sortie. His loss marred the continuing, but thus far premature, effort to transform the jet into a fighter-bomber by slinging two 1000-lb bombs beneath its inboard pylons. Later attempts were more successful. During his internment as a PoW, Mahurin was forced to sign 'confessions' drummed up by his captors, which he recanted when released after the armistice.

On 26 May, a group of Skyknight pilots and support people, headed by Col Peter D Lambrecht, arrived at Kunsan, Korea. Within weeks, 14 F3D-2shad joined VMF(N)-513. Soon after, an officer who flew the F-86 regularly, Lt Gen Glen O Barcus became commander of the Fifth Air Force, reporting to FEAF chief Lt Gen Otto P Weyland. In the air-to-air conflict, May brought 27 MiG kills in exchange for losses of five Sabres. Four more men became aces: Capt Robert T Latshaw became the 13th ace and Maj Donald E Adams the 14th (both on 3 May), Lt James H Kasler the 15th (15 May) and the soon-to-depart 4th FIW commander Col Thyng the 16th (20 May). The latter was already an ace from a previous war and could have gotten more MiGs, as he was known for 'handing over' opportunities to 'bag' a kill to younger pilots who flew on his wing. However, Harry Thyng had no need to prove anything to anybody.

HONEST JOHN was the F-86E-10 Sabre flown by World War 2 ace, Col Walker 'Bud' Mahurin, who flew with the 51st FIW before transferring to command the 4th FIG, where he flew this aircraft. The Sabre also has the nickname *Stud* painted under its gun ports. Mahurin claimed that the large yellow stripes bordered in black were designed to set the 51st apart from the 4th (though the latter adopted them), and to increase morale. He was awarded aerial victories for 3.5 MiG-15s, scored on 6 January, 17 February and 5 March 1952 (1.5).



SUPERIOR SABRE

Col John W Mitchell took command of the 51st FIW on 13 June 1952, replacing Gabreski. Mitchell was the 11-kill World War 2 ace who had commanded the P-38G Lightning-equipped 339th FS, and had led the 18 April 1943 fighter mission which killed Japanese Admiral Isoru Yamamoto. In Korea, Mitchell was destined to add four MiG-15s to his tally, making him a triple ace.



The hard wing on late F-86Fs (replacing the leading-edge slats found on previous Sabres, including early F-86Fs), when combined with the all-flying tail, gave the Sabre both unmatched manoeuvrability and the chance to better the MiG-15's previously untouchable service ceiling. Steps were taken to retrofit all F-86Fs with the new solid wing. The new wing was also known as the 'G-3' wing because it replaced the leading-edge slats with a smooth, unbroken, leading surface that was extended six inches at the wing root and three inches at the wing tip. To improve the flow of air over this redesigned wing, a six-inch barrier fence was added at the 70-per cent mark on the span.

For the first time the Sabre now had the performance to outfight the MiG-15 in every regime. The hard-wing F-86F could operate at 52,000 ft, had an improved climb rate, tighter turning circle and could achieve a speed in level flight that was at least ten knots faster than the F-86E.

The 4th Wing's 2nd Lt James F Low became the 17th, and most junior, American air ace with his fifth MiG kill on 15 June. Not as young as his rank suggested (he'd been an enlisted sailor in World War 2), 'Dad' Low was just six months out of flight school. He turned inexperience to his advantage – unlike older pilots, who had to change with the advent of new technologies, Low had no trouble learning how to use the A-4 automatic ranging gun sight on the F-86E and later Sabres.

'Dad' Low later appeared as the fictional character Pell in fellow Sabre pilot James Horowitz's novel, *The Hunters*, written under the pseudonym James Salter. The novel's 'bad guy', Pell is a defiant, risk-taking, junior fighter jock, later portrayed by Robert Wagner in the film of the book. Both Low and Horowitz (who later changed his name to Salter) acknowledge that storybook figure 'Pell' is, in fact, James F Low.

The 39th FIS 'Cobras', the final Sabre squadron committed to the air-to-air campaign along the Yalu, began to receive the improved F-86F model in July 1952. F-86Fs retained the all-flying tail, which had markedly improved the jet's manoeuvrability against the MiG, but early examples also retained leading-edge slats. The F-86 was to become superior to the MiG-15 in all respects only when the slatted wing was replaced with the '6-3' hard wing.

This portrait of a busy, sandbag-guarded, Suwon flightline was snapped by ace, 1st Lt Hank Buttelmann, and it shows virtually all of the 25th FIS's F-86Es being readied for a patrol. In the foreground is the unit commander's jet, clearly denoted by the two nose stripes just aft of the gun ports – he can, in fact, be seen signing for the F-86 at the wing root, his crew chief looking on over the 'half colonel's' shoulder



Capt James Horowitz, West Point class of 1945, shot down a MiG-15 on 4 July 1952 while flying an F-86E with the 335th FIS/4th FIW. He also used a typewriter equally as effectively as his Sabre. Under the pen name James Salter, he published a novel, *The Hunters*, about Sabre pilots fighting in Korea



Aces and wingmen: 335th FIS/4th FIW pilots (left to right), James Horowitz (one MiG-15); James F 'Dad' Low (nine MiG-15s); Al Smiley; Coy Austin (two MiG-15s) and a cigar-chewing Phil 'Casey' Colman (four MiG-15s, plus five kills in World War 2)



Capt Clifford D Jolley, the 18th US ace of the war, eventually accounted for seven MiGs. Here, he holds a helmet bearing a death's head, painted for him by squadron mate Karl Dittmer, who also applied the nose art for a trio of F-86s



A victorious Lt Peter 'Hoagy' Carmichael of No 802 Sqn returns to HMS Ocean after his historic sortie on 9 August 1952. He later acknowledged that he was lucky to prevail over the poorly flown MiG-15

The 18th air ace, Capt Clifford D Jolley of the 335th FIS/4th FIW, got his fifth MiG on 8 August 1952 (after getting two kills in a single fight the previous day). The next day, Cdr Peter 'Hoagy' Carmichael of the Fleet Air Arm became the first British piston-engined pilot to shoot down a MiG-15. He was on a

rail-wrecking mission between Manchon and Pyongyang when his wingman called out that MiGs were approaching. Carmichael turned his flight of four Sea Fury fighters in a scissors manoeuvre and saw two flights of four MiGs each swarming down on him. Almost immediately, Carmichael was on a collision course with a MiG-15. Both opened fire, but neither hit anything.

The Sea Furies spent several minutes tangling with the MiGs and at one point Carmichael spotted a jet pulling out in front of fellow Sea Fury pilot Flt Lt Brian 'Smoo' Ellis, an RAF exchange officer. 'The aircraft then proceeded northwards at a reduced speed with some of the other MiGs in company. Then two more MiGs came head-on towards me, but nothing happened until I saw another down below me, going very slowly, it seemed. I turned into him and fired and closed to 300 yards, firing all the time. The MiG looked a beautiful job. It just seemed to glide through the air. I lost sight of him momentarily. I turned and looked over my shoulder and saw an aircraft go into the deck and explode. For one horrible moment I thought it was one of my boys.'

A quick radio check revealed that all four Sea Furies were okay and that one MiG-15 was not. Its pilot had made the mistake of trying to dogfight with the slower, but highly manoeuvrable, Sea Furies. Carmichael's kill had been achieved in Sea Fury FB.Mk 11 WJ232, coded '114'.

HARD-WING SABRE

In August 1952 came the most important event since F-86 pilots began to wrest the advantage from their adversaries over MiG Alley. That month, Col Mitchell's 51st FIW flew its first missions with three F-86Fs with solid leading wing edges. The '6-3' hard wing jet was the final evolution of a design which had shown extraordinary promise (with the F-86A), had been developed to improve its manoeuvrability (F-86E), and had finally cancelled out the altitude advantage enjoyed by the MiG (with the slat-wing F-86F). Sabre pilots were still outnumbered by their MiG opponents, but no longer outgunned. In the '6-3' hard wing F-86F, they commanded the battlefield.

On 4 September, Maj 'Boots' Blesse shot down his fourth and fifth MiG-15s to become the 19th American ace. That day, vastly outnumbered Sabre pilots shot down 13 MiGs and sustained four losses in a hard-fought, protracted, duel. Six days later elements of the Corps' VMA-312 'Checkerboards', which were at sea aboard the escort carrier USS *Sicily* (CVE-118), came under MiG attack. Capts Jesse G Folmar and Walter E Daniels were bounced by eight MiG-15s, which made repeated firing runs on the slower F4U-4Bs as they tried to get out of the area. After one of the MiGs completed a run on the Corsairs, instead of breaking off to

the side, the jet pulled up directly in front of Capt Folmar's guns. A quick burst of the 20 mm cannon set the MiG ablaze – the jet crashed minutes later. Another MiG retaliated with a burst of 37 mm fire which forced Capt Folmar to bale out, but he was rescued and returned to the ship. Capt Daniels was not hit and safely landed back aboard the carrier.

F-86 pilot Capt Robinson Risner (336th FIS) became the war's 20th US ace with his fourth and fifth kills on 21 September. He had flown fighters in Panama during World War 2, and then in the Oklahoma Air Guard. He had badgered his way to Korea by accepting a reconnaissance assignment, then turned on the charm to get himself shifted to F-86s.

ROCKET BOOST

In September 1952, in a misguided move, selected pilots of the 335th FIS/4th FIW at Kimpo were equipped with what one of them called 'our six secret weapons'. These were early F-86Fs modified with three internal rocket-boost motors, based upon JATO (jet-assisted take-off) bottles used to help heavily loaded warplanes get off the runway. The rockets could be fired simultaneously or in train.

As one of the pilots recalls, 'Three of these (rocket-boosted F-86Fs) had wing slats like our F-86As and Es, while the other three had hard leading-edges on the wings, which were to come with the most advanced F-86Fs.

'Capt Clifford Jolley decided we would use them in pairs with the same wing configuration rather than mixing them in a flight. Our tests also showed that the JATO was most effective when fired all at once.

'I flew three missions in the "F" in September and had mixed feelings about it. At altitude the bird would not hold stable, but would insist on gaining height for several seconds, then losing it. No matter how hard I tried, I could not stop the damned thing from doing this. We only flew them as a two-ship element, with a floating lead, and they always seemed to be out of phase with each other. In a hard turn, they reacted worse than a P-51 with a full aft-fuselage tank. I mean they tried to swap ends and it took considerable forward stick to break the inevitable stall.

'On the plus side, it sure was nice to have that extra 3000 lbs of thrust when you needed to close the gap between you and a MiG. And once the units were fired, the bird flew normally. I was flying one with Jolley shortly after he had his dunk in the Yellow Sea. Someone had reported MiGs well up-river from Antung. We got into the area, but didn't see anything until we both hit bingo fuel. Just as we turned toward Kimpo, I spotted a MiG going toward Antung on our side of the river. I called Jolley and headed for him. He mentioned our marginal fuel state, but I elected to attack anyway and closed to about 2000 ft, barely in range for our ".50s". I caught him with several bursts, but was hurrying my attack and ran out of ammo before I realised I was clos-



Capt Robinson Risner (336th FIS) became the war's 20th US ace with his fourth and fifth kills on 21 September 1952. He was one of three Korean War aces who later became PoWs in North Vietnam – the others were James Kasler and James F Low. Now a retired brigadier general, Risner is widely regarded as one of the greatest of all USAF fighter pilots

Sabres of the 4th FIW wearing the markings which were finally settled upon by late 1951 or early 1952. The jet in the foreground is a very early F-86A-5-NA, and is one of the earliest Sabres to have been employed in combat in Korea – it was also one of the last A-models left on strength with wing



Fighter ace Jolley and faithful crew chief Sgt Ernie Balasz pose in front of 'their' F-86E-10-NA, which bears more examples of Karl Dittmer's artistic creativity. The latter accounted for two MiGs on 1 August and 9 September 1952, whilst all seven of Jolley's kills were scored on his single tour with the 335th FIS 'Chiefs'



ing to effective range. I doubt that he made it to Antung, but we couldn't wait around to see.

'Capt Troy G Cope and I flew a mission in a couple of the rocket-equipped "secret weapons". We were headed toward Antung, about 50 miles out, when Cope got behind a MiG and opened fire. He fired his JATO and hosed off a few bursts, but I saw a couple of MiGs coming up behind him. They were almost within range, so I called, "Cope, you have a couple coming up behind. Call the break when you get tired of shooting at that guy". Then I got an urgent call back telling me to break left *now*.

'Hell, I was *already* to Cope's left. I made a hard break to the left and saw a MiG go past my right wing, close enough to reach out and touch. I turned back to hose him. "No! No!", came another warning call. I whipped back to the left as another MiG went by less than a hundred feet to my right. By then my bird was in a complete stall. I pushed forward hard on the stick, trying to break the stall, then glanced back at both MiGs as they tried to get into shooting position and found myself still stalling and falling. They gave up after about 270 degrees of my stalled turn. I climbed back up to altitude and the two of us headed more or less parallel to the river, toward the coast. Shortly, I saw a pair of MiGs followed by another pair crossing in front of us. I made a turn to attack, approaching at about a 30-degree angle to them. As we approached, I noticed that I was on a collision course with a third pair of MiGs! The leader was at my left and slightly high. If Cope was watching me he might not notice this pair. I called, "Cope, watch out for that other pair!"

'By then I was at a critical spot, and whipped my bird up and to the right in a half roll which put me directly over the lead MiG. That put him in a bad spot. I watched as he started to turn left, then right, then into a hard left turn. I rolled left and down. He crossed 200 ft in front of me and I considered hosing off a burst. I should have because I could have ripped him to shreds. As it was, he headed up and swung back toward the north. I knocked a few holes in his tail, then fired my JATO in an attempt to catch him. While the JATO was on I called, "Cope, I've fired my weapon. Do you have me in sight?"

'No response. "Oh hell", I thought. "He's hit that other MiG". As I approached the area I noticed MiGs at different altitudes. All were milling around two smoke columns coming up from the forest below.

'I started to make a high-speed pass to see if I could identify the types of the crashed birds, but decided against it. I wish I had taken the chance, though it wouldn't have changed anything.' Capt Cope was lost in action and the experiment with the boosted Sabres came to an end.

In September 1952, Sabre pilots of the 4th and 51st FIWs were credited with 61 MiG kills and seven probable kills, while four Sabres were lost in air-to-air combat. Capt Jolley recalled that 'only four of us were selected to fly these aircraft because they demanded a little extra "feel". They were tail-heavy and started porpoising at 35,000 ft. I was able to catch the last two MiGs I destroyed with this gimmick, but without it I might have been just as successful; because of the heavy tail "mushout" I got on a split-S to initiate the attack'. The boost scheme was abandoned.

When Col Harrison R Thyng went home after his eleven-month tenure as commander of the 4th FIW on 2 October 1952, he was entitled to feel satisfied that he'd turned the tide against the MiG-15. An ace in

two wars, and a leader willing to take risks to help his men, Thyng, as the premier American fighter wing commander of his era, has now been all but forgotten. Partly due to the colonel's efforts (the 4th enjoyed preference in pilot assignments over the 51st), the 4th wing in October 1952 was probably the finest fighter unit ever put into the field by any air arm. The press ignored Harry Thyng completely upon his return to the USA.



F-86s of the 336th FIS 'Rocketeers' launch from Kimpo airfield for a combat sweep along MiG Alley. In the foreground is a North American F-86E-10-NA *UNCLE DOMINICK II* and behind it a Canadair F-86E-6-CAN, one of 60 fighters produced for the USAF in Canada. The E-model Sabre introduced an 'all-flying tail' which enhanced manoeuvrability and narrowed the gap in performance with the MiG-15

In the late months of 1952, an incredible 30 MiGs went down during dogfights without being fired at. Sabre pilots observed a series of abrupt, uncontrollable, spins from which the Chinese pilots were unable to recover. Whatever caused these spins, the MiG pilots got better at it. In early 1953, pilots observed 24 MiGs going into spins, and although five pilots ejected or died, the others recovered. No explanation has ever emerged for this 'temporary' problem with the MiG-15.

The 4th FIW was now commanded by Col James K Johnson and the 51st by Col John W Mitchell. The two F-86 groups were constantly challenged in their thrust-and-parry campaigning along MiG Alley.

Just after midnight on 2 November, a VMF(N)-513 F3D-2 Skyknight flown by Maj William T Stratton and radar operator MSgt Hans Hoglund made radar contact with a communist jet which they believed to be a straight-wing Yak-15, although this has never been confirmed. The crew lost the contact, then re-established it. Squinting into the night sky, Stratton spotted the orange glow of the 'Yak's' jet exhaust. He fired three short bursts of cannon fire. The first caught the Yak's left wing, the second and third its fuselage area, and the it went down in flames, leaving the Skyknight crew flying through a detritus of smoke and debris. This was the first kill at night using an air intercept radar in a jet. On 8 November, Capt O R Davis scored the USMC's first confirmed jet-v-jet kill when his F3D-2 downed a MiG-15.

Col Royal N Baker, 4th Group commander, became the 21st US jet ace on 17 November 1952, and eventually claimed 12 MiGs and one La-9. Capt Leonard W 'Bill' Lilley of the 334th FIS/4th FIW got his fifth MiG on 18 November 1952 to become the 22nd ace, whilst another rare double score was toted up two days later when Capt Paul E Jones (39th FIS/51st FIW) got two MiGs in a single fight. On 22 November, Capt Cecil G Foster of the 51st became the 23rd ace.

Capt Karl Dittmer (335th FIS/4th FIW) was one of those pilots who didn't quite make ace status, his final score totalling three kills – a MiG-15 on 1 August 1952 and two more on 10 September. Dittmer was also the artist who painted the nicknames on his own *BETTY BOOPS*, on Marty Bambrick's *WHAM BAM*, on Troy Cope's *ROSIE* and on Hank Crescibene's *NEWARK FIREBALL*. In the following passages he describes what it was like to fly out of Kimpo and head for MiG Alley.

'We'd try to keep alert. The key was to spot the "bandits" when they came across the Yalu. Sometimes, we'd get help from our radar site on the



Liza Gal/EI Diablo was the F-86E-10-NA (51-2800) flown by Capt Charles D 'Chuck' Owens of the 336th FIS from Kimpo. During a hectic period in the Korean fighting, Owens was thought to have extracted a heavy penalty from the MiG-15 force on the far side of the Yalu – perhaps as many as the nine represented by kill symbols under the canopy of 51-2800. In fact, Owens, who was promoted to Major in mid-1952, was officially credited with just two MiG-15 kills on 30 April 1952 and 7 August 1952

VMF(N)-513 finally achieved success with their small force of Skynights on 2 June 1952 when Maj William Stratton, Jr, and MSgt Hans Hoglund destroyed a 'Yak-15' during a B-29 escort mission. This historic first jet versus jet night kill was soon celebrated on the side of their victorious Skynight



island of Cho-do, callsign "Dentist". Sometimes they took us by surprise. If someone spotted MiGs and had time, they'd call to let other flights know their location and general heading. One day, two of us found about 50 MiGs in a big, loose, gaggle. We jumped into the middle of them. This may sound stupid, but being outnumbered gave us one very good advantage – I knew where

my wingman was and he knew where I was, and we could shoot at everything else!

'I have no idea how many MiGs I hit, but got strikes on several. Finally, I noticed a MiG cross below and in front of me. I made a turn that aligned me for an attack, used the excess altitude to get into an excellent shooting position, then squeezed the trigger. Nothing happened. I was out of ammunition. I was also very angry. If it had been possible, I would have yanked out the control stick and beat the MiG pilot on the head with it. Instead, we went home. A few days later, I was pulling duty at the Mobile Control unit on the north end of Kimpo's air strip. From the chatter on our radio, it was obvious the troops had found MiGs. Shortly, flights were coming in with their noses blackened from firing their six .50 cal guns.

"Traffic had pretty well quit when I heard a pilot call, "Kimpo, I'm about 30 miles out at 15,000, flamed out".

"Roger. We're landing toward the south."

"Three Marine Corsairs were taxiing toward the runway. I pressed my mike button. "Kimpo Tower, hold those F4Us short. We have an F-86 coming in flamed out". They continued on. I repeated my call. No luck. They went onto the runway, with the leader and Three on the left, Two on the right. I screamed at the tower "Get those damn Corsairs off the runway!" The leader added throttle, took his time checking both magnetos, then added power and accelerated down the runway. I continued to holler at the Corsairs to get the hell off.

'Once the leader was well down the runway, Number Two went through his mag check, released brakes, and headed down the runway. I was still fuming over the mike. Number Three was just finishing his mag check when the flamed-out F-86 swooshed by him and touched down. Three, as if nothing had happened, released his brakes and passed the F-86 on his take-off roll!

'Another day, when I was not scheduled to fly, a "light" colonel who commanded the Air Base Group flew my F-86E. His wingman was flying one of the few F-86A models in our squadron. The A model had a conventional flight control system, while all later birds had hydraulic-operated flight controls. The colonel spotted a MiG quite low, so he and his wingman made a very steep dive to attack. The colonel pulled out a bit too hard and blacked out briefly. Ain't no wonder, for the gauge that records Gs that have been applied to the aircraft leaves a needle at the highest reading and it indicated 11 Gs. The bird is supposed to break at more than nine, but is stronger than engineered. Anyway, the colonel loused up his attack due to blacking out. His wingman couldn't come out of the

dive as he intended and he ended up well below the MiG, so he didn't do any good either. The overstress left small wrinkles on the fuselage, just above the wing's trailing edge. My bird was a bit faster after that!

'Another day Cliff Jolley got into a fight and with fuel way low, broke out and headed for home. However, he didn't get away unscathed. A MiG hosed his bird with one cannon shell, knocking off the left earpiece of his helmet. Jolley didn't have enough fuel to make it back, and had to eject over the Yellow Sea. He dropped the ruined helmet when approaching the water in order to see how close he was to it. Fortunately, the rescue helicopter picked him up okay.'

On the night of 10 December 1952 VMF(N)-513 registered another first. It involved one of the most experienced electronic 'wizards' in the Marines, and an air-to-air victory which required no visual contact. 1st Lt Joseph A Corvi was an F3D pilot who, when on the ground, specialised in electronics for the squadron. He and his radar operator, Sgt Dan George, were flying in the Sinanju area when the latter picked up an enemy aircraft on his scope. It was too far away for visual contact, so the radar-controlled guns were locked onto the target and Corvi opened fire at what he saw on his radar.

'We did not know that we had made this kill', Corvi said later, 'until my R/O reported a wing and flaming debris flying past us'. Thus, Corvi was the first pilot to actually locate, lock on and fire by use of the new radar equipment. The enemy were flying a Po-2, a difficult aircraft to pick up because of its partial fabric and wood construction. That same night, Corvi and George were also credited with a probable kill as well.

By December the North Koreans had employed a second aircraft type to carry out their 'Bedcheck Charlie' nuisance raids – this was the Yak-18, which had been designed as a primary trainer. Though not as numerous as the Po-2, it still became a factor in the night fighting. Only slightly easier to track on radar than the Po-2, the Yak-18 (first flown in 1945) had a basic all-metal structure with mixed fabric and metal covering. A simple, machine, it offered an enclosed canopy for its tandem, two-man, crew, although they did not hesitate to 'open up' and toss out hand-held bombs when flying over tempting targets – it does not appear that the Yak-18 had underwing shackles for ordnance. It was powered by a 160 hp M-11FR radial engine, and could drive nightfighter crews crazy with its top speed of 154 mph. With a combat radius of about 310 miles, the Yak-18 had slightly less endurance than the Po-2, but it was a threat nonetheless.



Col Royal N Baker's F-86E-10-NA was liberally adorned with appropriate artwork, the 4th FIG's CO flying this jet on several MiG killing sorties. The 21st US ace of the war, Baker had only had a single red star painted on the aircraft when this shot was taken in the late summer of 1952

Seen at the rear area maintenance base in Tsuiki, Japan, *FATHER DAN* is a F-86E-10-NA Sabre (51-2738), and it displays the Confederate battle flag and the blue-bordered red/white shark's 'dentures' of 'Tiger Flight', 25th FIS/51st FIW – three red stars can also be seen below the cockpit. This aircraft was assigned to Capt Cecil G Foster, who became the 23rd American fighter ace on 22 November 1952



A selection of Karl Dittmer's chums at the 335th FIS pose for a photo in the autumn of 1952. They are (left to right); 2nd Lt Michael E DeArmond, who became a PoW after being shot down flying an F-86E nicknamed *ERIC'S REPLY*, which was usually flown by British exchange officer, William B Harbison; 1st Lt Billy B Dobbs who was credited with four MiGs, and was later killed in a T-33 crash; Maj Zane S Amell, 335th FIS CO, who claimed two MiGs; 1st Lt Boobie L Smith who got one MiG; Capt Philip E Colman, who got five kills in World War 2 and four in Korea; and 2nd Lt Coy L Austin who claimed two MiGs



United Nations forces in Korea began 1953 confronting an air armada of 1485 aircraft, including 950 MiG-15s, 165 propeller-driven fighters, 100 Ilyushin Il-28 twin-jet bombers and 270 other types. Lt Gen Glen O Barcus, Fifth Air Force commander, was particularly concerned about the Il-28 bombers, two of which had made a provocative flyby along the Yalu. The bombers were seen this one and only time, never to reappear again.

SKYKNIGHT KILL

The F3D-2 Skyknight force in Korea had grown to 24 aircraft by early 1953 – now the Marines could provide serious help when they went north at night to escort B-29s. The corpulent Skyknight was designed as a ship-board nightfighter, though it never flew in action from carrier decks. The F3D-1 made its maiden flight in the postwar era (on 23 March 1948) and was powered by two 3000 lb thrust Westinghouse J34-WE-24 turbojet engines, mounted on the lower edges of the forward fuselage, beneath the roots of its straight wing. Pilot and radar observer sat side-by-side. The F3D-1 version when introduced in Korea had a gross weight of 26,850 lbs, making it underpowered even with twin engines, and was armed with four 20 mm cannon. The F3D-1 was credited with a maximum speed of 565 mph at 20,000 ft. The F3D-2 version introduced improvements in engine and air intercept radar, and although the type looked big and brutish, it was effective in its nocturnal role.

Maj Jack Dunn of VMF(N)-513 was flying one of the dull black Skyknights with radar operator MSgt Lawrence Fortin beside him on 12 January 1953 when they engaged MiG-15s near Sinanju. Dunn's recalls, 'It was pitch dark and we were right in the middle of it. The MiGs were all over the place. They attempted to lure us out and away from the bomber stream by flying right up to the edge of the formations and then turning quickly back towards the Yalu. We stayed right with the B-29 and they were able to bomb their targets at Sinanju with no mishaps.

'After the bombers headed back south, our F3Ds remained in the area, with our ground control vectoring us in various directions toward "bandit" activity. All of a sudden, this aircraft flew in front of us with his wing lights on. My radar operator had him on the screen and began giving me vectors to follow, while at the same time I was telling our ground control at Cho-do what we were seeing. They came back and said that there were no friendlies in the area and for us to go after him. It took the better part

of five minutes to get a "lock-on", and as we were getting closer and closer it seemed strange that an F3D could close the gap on a much faster MiG. Because of this fact, I can only guess that the pilot was "dogging it" to enable me to stay close enough to follow, but still just out of shooting range. Cho-do ground control told me we were now directly over the earlier bomber target of Sinanju. The enemy fighter commenced circling to the left, with his wing lights still on. 'At that moment, about six

searchlights from the ground switched on and caught us broadside. It was just like bright sunlight with an instant blinding effect. The AA (anti-aircraft fire) cut loose and bounced us around a bit, but we were fortunate to avoid any hits. I was able to keep turning inside the MiG more and more, this being one characteristic that our fighter definitely had over the faster enemy.

'Finally, when we had him in range, I opened up with three bursts but nothing seemed to happen. Suddenly, he started in a dive with me right on his tail. I gave him a couple more bursts on the way down. Fire was now coming from the MiG and we followed until he hit the ground in a massive explosion. In looking back on this, when we made a pass through the searchlights, the pilot of the MiG would turn off his wing lights and I could only assume that at that point he would accelerate, make a 180-degree turn, and head back toward our plane, at which time he would turn on his wing lights again. We went through the searchlight three times and on the fourth time, we got him.'

Dunn had scored the Skyknight's fourth MiG kill, but it did not prevent enemy pilots from making aggressive attempts to shoot down B-29s at night. On 28 January, Capt James R Weaver's F3D-2 claimed another MiG, and three days later Lt Col Robert F Conley downed the sixth and final Skyknight kill of the war. He had just taken command of VMF(N)-513 from Lt Col Hutchinson, and his MiG also counted as the tenth, and final, aerial kill for all USMC nightfighters.

On 17 January 1953 another VMF(N)-513 Skyknight pilot, Capt George Kross, tangled with a MiG in a duel which tested his F3D's structural strength to the limit and made him a target in his opponents gun-sight. Kross recalls, 'My radar operator, MSgt J A Piekutowski, and I were flying cover for B-29s that were bombing targets up close to the Yalu River. My tail warning radar malfunctioned just about the time our ground control sent out a 'heads up' warning as they picked up several fast-moving MiGs that were in the vicinity of the bomber formation.

'Our F3D was above the stream at 30,000 ft. Suddenly, I felt cannon fire striking the aircraft. I went into a "split-S", with both throttles wide open, and within a few seconds I was able to get into an overcast at 20,000 ft under IFR (instrument flight rules) conditions, in a vertical dive. As I started to ease out of the dive, I found no elevator response! I could move the control stick forward and aft, yet nothing happened. My first thought was that the MiG's cannon fire had severed the control cables. I also noted that the airspeed indicator was far beyond the red limited speed marker. The aircraft hit about 750 mph, or Mach 1.02'. This speed was at least 150 mph faster than the portly Skyknight was intended to fly!

'My aircraft had gone beyond its limiting Mach number and the shock wave was blanking out the tail surfaces! I cut the throttle back to idle and put the speed brakes out. This caused an intense longitudinal wallowing as the speed brakes would open, collapse, and open full again. As my speed decreased, elevator control was regained. I went through several high speed stalls in trying to round out my recovery and succeeded in returning to level flight below the overcast and just above the Yellow Sea. Indicated airspeed was about 400 kts with idle throttle settings and dive brakes still fully extended. As we got into better weather conditions, I pulled up to 10,000 ft and went to slow flight and tried the landing gear



Rugged up against the bitter Korean winter, an unidentified marine groundcrewman stands in front of 'his' immaculate VMF(N)-513 F3D Skynight at Kunsan in late 1952. The three radar sets fitted into the portly Douglas nightfighter made the jet rather maintenance-heavy for the dedicated engineering teams assigned to the unit - VMF(N)-513's nickname of the 'Flying Nightmares' was often truer for the home side than the enemy!



A more than familiar sight at Kunsan – an F3D-2 has its AN/APG-26 gun lock-on radar adjusted prior to the next sortie. VMF(N)-513 had 24 jets in-theatre by January 1953, and the maintenance effort involved in keeping them airworthy was a credit to the 'Corps. Facilities at Kunsan were basic, and the vagaries of the weather in the region played merry hell with the electrics in the Douglas jet



All the hard slog on the ground was more than worth it when a Skynight crew inflicted damage on the enemy. On 12 January 1953 Maj Jack Dunn and MSgt Lawrence Fortin did just that when they destroyed a MiG-15 near Sinanju, the communist fighter being one of several that attempted to intercept a formation of B-29s heading into North Korea. Here, Maj Dunn is seen wearing his DFC, which was awarded after his aerial success

and flaps, executing a stall just to be sure that I would have full control in the landing approach to Kunsan.'

Kross nursed the F3D home with several cannon holes in its tail and a hit between its two engines which had cut through 19 fuselage stringers before finally making impact with the escape hatch door located between the pilot and radar observer. If this wasn't bad enough, it's unlikely that either man would have been able to use the jet's downward ejection seats had it been necessary to get out, and this damage had come within inches of destroy-

ing an engine, which would have been fatal. The gruelling encounter told the Allied brass what the USMC fliers had known already – some nocturnal MiG-15s were equipped with air intercept radar.

On 24 January, Cpts Dolphin D Overton III and Harold E Fischer, Jr, both of the 51st FIW, became the 24th and 25th US jet aces. Fischer belonged to the wing's 39th FIS and had flown a tour in F-80s before the Sabre. His F-86 was *PAPER TIGER*, a spanking-new F-86F-10-NA (51-12958) with the '6-3' hard wing retrofitted in place of the leading-edge slats it had been built with.

Overton was in the 16th FIS and was pilot of an F-86 named *DOLPH'S DEVIL* (on the jet's right side, crew chief A/2C Wilbur Cothron had added a second nickname, *ANGEL IN DISGUISE*). Overton, like Fischer, attained ace status after a tour in fighter-bombers – 102 combat missions in the F-84, followed by 48 in the F-86. His first kill came on his 144th mission. During his final four sorties in the Sabre, billed at the time as 'the hottest streak in jet fighting history', Overton racked up five kills in the shortest period on record.

Overton's squadron commander was that aggressive fighter leader, Lt Col Heller, who flew at least two different F-86s nicknamed *HELL-ER BUST* – his P-51B of almost a decade before had been christened with the same nickname. Pilots in Heller's 16th FIS were regularly crossing the Yalu and jumping MiGs inside Manchuria. This was in violation of the rules, but it was also accepted practice – everybody was doing it. 'They were coming back with blackened gun ports after every sortie', recalls one officer. 'That meant they were shooting at MiGs every time they went up. That couldn't happen unless they were on the wrong side of the border'.

Another 51st FIW member recalls seeing gun camera films of a kill during this period. 'The MiG had his landing gear down and you could see that he was on final approach to land on the main runway at Antung. Those .50 cal bullets sawed off his right wing and sent it flipping around through the air, with the lowered landing wheel easily visible'. A third officer in the wing remembers, 'This was one of those periods when everybody was MiG crazy. They were willing to take chances, willing to bend the rules'. This comment was made in reference not to the entire 51st FIW, but specifically to its 16th FIS.



The sixth, and final, Skynight kill in Korea fell, rather appropriately, to VMF(N)-513's last wartime CO, Lt Col Robert F Conley. Again he was protecting B-29s from marauding MiG-15s when he claimed a single Russian fighter

On one such mission which took pilots deep into Manchuria – the exact date is a matter of dispute – Overton shot down two more MiGs (his sixth and seventh), although he was never credited with their destruction. On the same sortie Heller was shot down, a burst of well-aimed cannon fire from a MiG-15 braking his right arm, severing his control stick and disabling his ejection seat. After an uncontrollable dive from 40,000 ft (12,384 m), Heller was at low altitude when he spotted an eight-inch shell hole in his canopy. He went through the gap and glanced off his Sabre's horizontal stabiliser on the way out. His 'chute opened just in time. One officer back at base recalls talk of a Rescue Combat Air Patrol mission; 'We took a look at a map and saw where he was. He was 150 miles north of the Yalu, so there was no rescue attempt'.

Overton's sixth and seventh kills and Heller's baleout – all north of the proscribed border – were witnessed by communist truce negotiators aboard a train nearby. In wonderment, Eastern European diplomats watched Heller's parachute descend to earth. He was to be subjected to horrible mistreatment by his Chinese captors, who tried to get him to 'confess' not only to crossing the border but to doing so on the express orders of his commanders.

Among these was 51st FIW boss (and ace), Col John W Mitchell, who learned of border crossings and, as one officer remembers, 'was madder than any colonel I've ever seen'. Mitchell learned that four-ship flights had been heading north consisting of four men who were all qualified flight leaders. An airman remembers, 'we had a big flap. The day after Heller was shot down, an L-5 arrives at Suwon and there's Gen Barcus, commander of the Fifth Air Force, arriving to confab with Mitchell and raising hell'. Mitchell and Barcus made some immediate personnel changes, but as military services often do, they also chose a scapegoat – the relatively junior Capt Dolph D Overton III, who had graduated from West Point in 1949, flown 150 F-84 and F-86 missions, downed seven MiGs – and followed routine, everyday orders just like everybody else when he flew into China with Heller. Col Mitchell chose a surrogate, group commander Col Brooks, to inform Overton that he was to be stripped of ace status and shipped out of Korea immediately.

The attempt to transform Overton into a 'non-ace' was rejected by higher headquarters, but his final kills were never approved and Overton eventually left the Air Force. A man of quick wit and great charm, he is incapable of being bitter, but when he and Heller met to discuss these events for the first time 41 years later, they had much to learn about from others who'd been there – neither was at Suwon when Col Mitchell 'stood down' the 16th FIS for several days and read the riot act to its pilots.

Before the shakeup, another 'deuce act' was achieved by Capt Cecil G Foster, also of Heller's 16th FIS, who shot down two MiG-15s on 24 January 1953. Ironically, the success of January's air battles with MiGs, including those north of the forbidden border, almost certainly helped break the logjam in the armistice talks.

It was kind of an afterthought when, on 30 January, Lt Raymond J Kinsey of the 4th FIW shot down the first Tu-2 bomber to be spotted in more than a year. That day, 1st Lt Joseph M McConnell, Jr, got a MiG – he bagged another the next day. On 31 January F-94B pilot Capt Ben Fithian and radar operator 1st Lt Sam Lyons made the first official kill



The F-84-equipped 8th FBS 'Black Sheep' of the 49th FBW (commanded by Col John B Holt) pose for a group portrait which includes 1949 West Point alumnus, 1st Lt Dolphin D Overton III (second row, far right), who flew 102 missions in the Thunderjet before going on to fly a further 48 in the F-86. On 24 January 1953, after shifting to a Sabre squadron (the 16th FIS/51st FIW, commanded by Lt Col Edwin Heller), Dolph Overton became the Korean War's 24th US air ace

Although not the best quality shot to be taken in Korea, this view is nevertheless crucial to the story of the conflict's aces as it shows one of the two *HELL-ER BUST* F-86Es flown by the legendary Lt Col Edwin Heller, CO of the infamous 16th FIS/51st FIW.



credited to the 319th FIS. Their vanquished opponent is thought to have been a La-9, but is listed in the official record merely as a 'prop'.

Fithian recalls, 'It was a clear, cold, night at K-13 (Suwon air base). My RO, Sam Lyons, and I were on alert, standing about third in the "scramble" order. We heard through intelligence that there was heavy enemy air activity over North Korea. About that time, a call came in from K-13 tower asking us to scramble one of our aircraft to pace an F-80 in for a landing. The jet, an

8th FBW bird, had lost its air speed indicator. We were selected to do the job. After getting airborne, it took about 15 minutes to locate, join up, and help the F-80 back to the base. We were too heavy on fuel to land so we changed to a tactical channel and requested to be vectored into North Korea. Since one of our jets on station near Cho-do Island was having trouble with its radar, they accepted our request'. By this time, the FEAF had eased up on its restrictions on operating the F-94B, with its classified APC-33 air intercept radar, over enemy territory.

'On the way in', Fithian continues, 'I heard the F-94B ahead of us calling "no joy", which meant they could not establish radar contact. In fact, the pilot was complaining that he thought Cho-do was vectoring them in on rocks projecting from the sea. When we got within about 50 miles of the activity, Cho-do released the other F-94B for recovery to K-13 taking control of us. We were at about 25,000 ft when the controller started giving us range and direction to a "bogey". It was something like 30 miles at one o'clock. They gave us a descent order to 5000 ft and a series of turns. We ended up at 5000 ft going southeast about 10 to 15 miles west of Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea. We were six miles behind the hostile, who was doing about 130 kts. We swung in behind the bogey and continued to descend, making our first radar contact at about five miles.

'In order to get the optimum advantage with our airborne radar fire control system, we descended to tree top level. It was a moonlit night and I could see the ground under us, but not ahead. Once, I looked out and we were very close to some trees that looked like tall poplars or sycamores,

so I climbed up just a bit. I figured that the pilot probably knew the terrain well and if he could get through, we could, too. Also, the prize of the "first kill" using the F-94B was worth laying it all on the line. We made radar contact at about five miles and slowed down to 130 kts. With speed brakes extended – after getting a lock on the bogey – we started to close and climb slightly since the target was

actually at about 1200 ft altitude.

'I started firing on the radar scope. I fired a long burst and saw no results. We continued to close and I fired again. Still no hits. We were about 600 ft behind the target and I moved the stick around in about a six-inch circle and saw some flashes. We were armed with API, and they made a flash upon impact. As soon as I saw a lot of flashes, I held the stick steady and continued to fire. The enemy aircraft burst into flames and started down. He crashed with the cockpit closed.

'We called "splash one" and Cho-do gave us a vector towards another bogie about eight miles away. We were low on fuel due to our escorting the F-80 at the beginning of the flight. Our altitude was still very low and we ran into some automatic weapons fire. As we climbed out of it, my RO said we had a fire in the rear cockpit. I thought at first we had been hit by ground fire, but it turned out to be an electrical short which went away when the rear cockpit light was turned off.

'On recovery at K-13, we did a victory roll and landed. We were met in the revetment by almost everyone in the 319th. When we shut our engine off, everybody clapped their hands. After that night, it was several months before the North Koreans flew at night or at least were detected by our radar at Cho-do Island. The next time they got active, a brave young crew from my flight, Lts Wilcox and Goldberg, apparently shot one down over the water and then either crashed into the sea or hit the enemy aircraft. They called "splash", and that was the last we ever heard from them."

On 16 February 1st Lt Joseph M McConnell, Jr, of the 39th FIS/51st FIW shot down his fifth MiG. Because of a delay in confirmation, he became the 27th ace of the war. Capt Manuel J 'Pete' Fernandez, Jr of the 334th FIS/4th FIW was recognised as the 26th ace when he claimed his fifth and sixth kills on 18 February. Lt Col Royal N Baker's score of 13 kills made him the leading surviving ace of the conflict at the time.

On 27 March, Maj James P Hagerstrom flamed two MiG-15s. His eventual score was to be 8.5. Though his first two kills were scored with the 334th FIS/4th FIW, Hagerstrom claimed the remainder while flying new F-86F Sabres with the 67th FBS/18th FBG, which had converted to the new jet that very month; he was to become the 18th FBW's only ace. On 28 March Col James K Johnson, 4th FIW boss, bagged two MiGs to become the 29th US ace in Korea – he also had a kill from World War 2. The next day Lt Col George L Jones (4th FIG commander) became the 30th. Also in March Fernandez accounted for



This handclasp is dated 24 January 1953, and shows Capt Overton III (right) of the 16th FIS/51st FIW shaking hands with crew chief A/2C Wilbur Cothron after the former had shot down his fifth MiG-15

Like Col Thyng, his predecessor as commander of the 4th FIW, Col James K Johnson is one of the great US fighter leaders who never received nearly enough recognition. This portrait of double aces represents 54 MiG-15s destroyed in combat over the Yalu River. They are, left to right; Capt Lonnie Moore (10 MiGs); Lt Col Vermont Garrison (10); wing commander Johnson (10); Capt Ralph Parr (nine MiGs and one Il-2); and Maj James Jabara (15 MiGs). In the background is Johnson's F-86F Sabre, which, despite wearing nine of its pilot's ten kills, was only used to shoot down a small percentage of this total



four more MiG-15s, capping his fighting frenzy with two kills in one day.

METEOR FINALE

On the same day that Maj Hagerstrom opened his account, No 77 Sqn closed theirs with the Meteor's fourth, and last, confirmed MiG kill of the war. The jet fell to the guns of Sgt George Hale, who was flying 'his' F.8, A77-851, which bore the nickname "*HALESTORM*" (the forward fuselage of this jet is still in existence in a museum in Australia). He had been part of a four-aircraft section (led by the unit's OC, Sqn Ldr J Hubble) sent to attack installations along the Pyongyang-Singosan road.

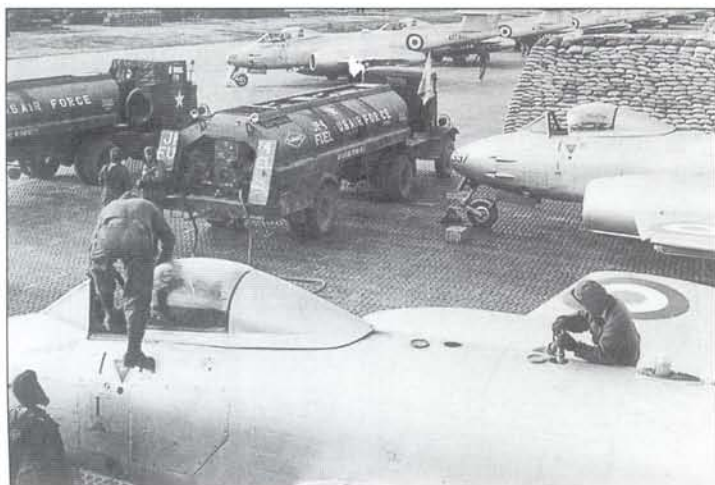
On reaching the junction at Namch'onjom, the formation split, with Hale and his wingman, Sgt Irlam, heading south. Flying in line astern formation at low-level, they soon spotted two RF-80s being chased by a pair of MiG-15s. Hale immediately 'punched' off his ventral tank and turned hard into the enemy. His aircraft still had two High Velocity Aerial Rockets (HVARs) attached to their pylons so he fired them at the MiGs – they passed between the two jets, which immediately broke left and right.

Hale tracked the jet that had headed north, and as Irlam tried to stay with him, he felt hits to his F.8. Responding to his wingman's urgent call for help, Hale forgot about the fleeing MiG and pulled around to discover that two other jets had attacked them out of the sun. Whilst Irlam headed for nearby cloud cover, Hale turned into his assailant, who in the meantime had extended his airbrakes in order to reduce speed and slot in behind the former's crippled Meteor. However, the MiG pilot still over-shot, and Hale in turn repeated his quarry's manoeuvre, but to greater effect. He was now in an ideal position astern of the slowed MiG, and he let rip with the F.8's four 20 mm cannon. The MiG was hit behind the cockpit and it rolled onto its back and lost height, spewing black smoke.

Hale was about to follow it down when two more MiGs attacked him from above. He pulled hard into them and fired, but their high-speed dive carried them safely away. However, a further pair then appeared on Hale's tail and he again turned into them, scoring hits on the trailing jet, which left a trail of white smoke (or possibly fuel) in its wake. He was now out of ammunition and the MiG escaped to fight another day. Upon his return to Kimpo, Hale discovered that his wingman's jet had no less than 112



Serving with No 77 Sqn concurrently with Sgt George Hale was Flt Lt 'Willie' Williamson, one of several RAF exchange officers assigned to the unit in the last months of the war. Later to become Air Marshal Sir Keith Williamson, he is seen here climbing into his personal F.8, *No Sweat!*, at Kimpo in October 1953



Below A busy scene at Kimpo in the spring of 1953 as most of No 77 Sqn's Meteor F.8s are fuelled up prior to their next ground attack strikes. Parked at the head of the ramp behind the bowisers is A77-851, better known as Sgt George Hale's "*HALESTORM*". This jet was used by him to claim the squadron's fourth, and last, MiG kill of the war on 27 March 1953



Capt Joseph McConnell and Harold Fischer stand in front of the former's first **BEAUTIFUL BUTCH** (F-86E 51-2753) at Suwon airfield in early 1953. Both belonged to the 39th FIS/51st FIW. McConnell was later shot down and rescued in the Yellow Sea, before going on to become the ranking American ace of the Korean War with 16 victories. Hal Fischer flew an F-86F-10-NA named **PAPER TIGER**, and had scored 10 aerial kills prior to being shot down and captured north of the Yalu River

shrapnel holes in it. His own jet wore two MiG silhouettes beneath its cockpit for a short time, courtesy of his crew chief, Bob Cherry – these were soon painted out, however, on the strict instructions of SqN Ldr Hubble as they contravened RAAF regulations.

The MiGs were busy in April, 1st Lt Joe McConnell claiming his eighth kill, but he was also shot down. Plucked from the Yellow Sea by a 3rd Air Rescue Group Sikorsky H-19 helicopter, McConnell was promoted to captain two weeks later. He soon became a double ace.

In the spring of 1953, Johnson's 4th FIW played host to Project *Gun Val*, which brought eight F-86F Sabres, equipped with four 20 mm cannon rather than the usual six .50 calibre machine-guns, to Korea for combat evaluation. Details of this programme have never emerged, but *Gun Val* was apparently part of a larger Air Force programme to evaluate 20 mm cannon, the weapon favoured by the Navy, against the .50 calibre machine guns which were standard within the USAF. Two or three MiG-15s are thought to have been shot down by *Gun Val*'s Sabres.

As most squadrons were now equipped with the F-86F, Col James K Johnson was able to say to a group of his pilots in March 1953 that they now had a fighter which was 'practically equal' to the MiG-15, with the caveat that the Sabre had to be maintained in top condition by all-important ground personnel.

In April, a MiG pilot shot down the 51st Wing's Capt Harold E Fischer who was, by now, a ten-kill double ace. Fischer was across the Yalu in Manchuria when he was downed and taken prisoner. He, like Heller, became a PoW not in North Korea but in China, and they were not released until two years after the war. By the end of the month, Capt Fernandez had downed his 11th MiG to remain one kill ahead of Capt McConnell, but still two behind the total of 13 attained by Col Baker.

On 3 May, an unknown prop-driven fighter was credited to F-94B pilot 2nd Lt Stanton G Wilcox of the 319th FIS. This was the mission referred to in an earlier quote by fellow F-94B pilot Fithian. Wilcox, and his back-seater, did not return from the mission, being lost to unknown causes. On 10 May, the night-fighting F-94Bs of the 319th FIS finally toted up their first MiG kill – Capt John R Phillips was the pilot and 1st Lt Billy J Atto the radar observer.

Capt Phillips describes the mission. 'Squadron operations figured that if we could start sending a flight up north around three or four o'clock in the morning, we just might catch the enemy south of the Yalu. On the 10th, we were flying just such a mission. The weather was poor with visibility about 300 ft in heavy rain. We launched with no problems. Heading north, we checked in with Cho-do. They told us there were heavy "tracks" south of the big Chinese base at Antung, so we climbed up to 40,000 ft until we got in the area, then eased down to around 30,000 ft – it had taken us nearly 20 minutes to climb to the higher altitude. At about this time, Atto picked up two bogeys on his scope. We started to move down on them, calling JOC (Joint Operations Center) through Cho-do, but we couldn't get permission to fire. We kept calling and trying to keep lined up on the two targets. Finally, we got the go-ahead to fire. The exhaust patterns were very distinct and they were MiGs.

'We started firing and the two bogeys split up with us going after the one on the left. The second one came around behind us to set up for a fir-



Capt Manuel J 'Pete' Fernandez, Jr, wearing the winged pigeon (which later became an eagle) emblem of the 334th FIS, holds a sign reporting on his aerial victory credits as of the day this portrait was snapped. 'MiGs HAVA YES' is a GI version of the Korean language's grammatical structure and means, simply, 'We have MiGs'. Fernandez's final score was 14.5 victories

tory and Phillips' is officially listed not as a MiG-15, but simply as a 'jet'.

Also on 10 May, while escorting fighter-bombers, Capt Fernandez shot down a MiG and shared credit for another. Added to a pair of additional kills in May, he now had 14.5 victories, and was now the top-scoring US ace of the conflict. Fernandez was not an imposing figure and was mild-mannered – scarcely the Hollywood 'jet jock' needed on recruiting posters. It's impossible to confirm, but is rumoured that among the top brass, *somebody* didn't want the leading ace to have a 'foreign-sounding' name. In the culture of the period, McConnell was not 'foreign-sounding', a fact which may have been of immeasurable help to Fernandez's chief competitor when he begged not to be sent home.

It was Joe McConnell's own ability, however, which brought about the unprecedented feat of bagging three MiGs in one day. After claiming a trio of MiGs in early May, Capt McConnell went on to shoot down a further two between dawn and dusk on 18 May 1953. This raised his tally to 16 kills, putting him, finally and forever, ahead of Pete Fernandez. McConnell's was to remain the record for the war, and was to make him its 'ace of aces'. But his pleas for more fell on deaf ears – 18 May was also the day Lt Col George I Ruddell, commander of the 39th FIS, and pilot of an F-86F called *MiG MAD MAVIS*, destroyed his fifth MiG to become the 31st ace of the war. That same day, Lt Col Louis A Green (336th FIS) bagged two MiGs, to repeat McConnell's feat.

It was, however, the latter's last day in air combat. Gen Barcus, fearful of the consequences if he should lose his top MiG-killer, is reported to have proclaimed, 'I want that man on his way back home to the United States of America before you hear the period at the end of this sentence'. McConnell reportedly packed his B-4 bag in minutes while an L-20 Beaver waited, propeller turning over, to take him up to Kimpo to catch

ing pass. We held our position and before we shot down our target, the other MiG had a lock on us. After several bursts of .50-cal rounds into the first MiG, there was a terrific flash of fire as he exploded. The concentration of the second MiG pilot was sidetracked: he immediately broke off and headed for home. Atto looked up from his scope and saw flaming debris passing by off the right wing of our F-94. When the encounter was over, we were below 15,000 ft and encountering ground fire, so we set a course for K-13. When we arrived in the area, the ceiling was now at 500 ft, so we were able to land without diverting to Japan as we had originally thought we would. The "kill" was made over Pukchin, North Korea.'

Only the front-seater in the F-94B was credited with an aerial vic-



Fernandez's great rival, Capt Joseph M McConnell, Jr, of the 39th FIS/51st FIW, cinches his seatbelt in a L-20A Beaver which will carry him from Suwon to Kimpo to catch a transport home to America. 'I want that man out of Suwon and on his way back home', barked Lt Gen Barcus, the FEAFF boss, who worried that an ace with 16 kills ought not to be exposed to further prospect of injury or death. With three MiGs downed in a single day on 18 May 1953, McConnell's tally of 16 made him the UN's 'ace of aces'. He was later killed in a postwar crash while testing an F-86H at Edwards AFB, California

a transport home. Fernandez ended up in third place among US aces after James Jabara (of whom, more shortly) finished with 15 victories.

On 26 May, Jabara, who had returned for a second tour of duty in the combat zone (again with the 334th FIS), was leading a flight of four Sabres when he sighted 16 MiGs crossing the Yalu near Uiju. Jabara led his flight into the centre of the jets, scattered them, and then pounced on a pair of MiGs which hadn't gotten out of the way fast enough. Jabara quickly forced one MiG into a fatal spin and shot down another, the eighth and ninth aerial victories for the war's original American ace.

Overall, in less than two years the Sabre pilot had gone from underdog to victor. Once outnumbered and outflown, he was no longer seriously challenged. The supremacy of the F-86 in the skies was in stark contrast to the deteriorating situation on the ground, where the Chi-

nese were gradually poking a hole in UN lines and threatening a major breakthrough.

On 7 June, the the 319th FIS (F-94Bs) racked up their third and final aerial victory, a MiG-15 – pilot was Lt Col Robert V McHale. Lt Col Vermont Garrison, who commanded the 335th FIS, scored two kills on 5 June 1953 to become the 32nd American ace – at the decrepit age, for a fighter pilot, of 37. Garrison had been credited with 7.33 victories in World War 2 flying with a sister squadron, the 336th. Capts Lonnie R Moore and Ralph S Parr became the 33rd and 34th aces on 18 June.

Col Robert P Baldwin, 51st FIG commander, became the 35th ace on 22 June 1953, and eight days later 1st Lt Henry 'Hank' Buttelmann became the 36th American ace, and the youngest (although not the most junior) at the age of 23. His eventual tally was seven.

Also, by the end of June 1953 Maj Jabara had run his kill tally up to 14, putting him within two MiGs of Capt McConnell's top-ranking score, and within half a kill of Capt Fernandez as the war's second-ranking ace. In a month of fighting which shattered all previous records, Sabres shot down 77 MiG-15s, including a record 16 in a single day on 30 June.

In July 1953, two 4th FIW F-86 pilots, Capt Clyde A Curtin and Maj Stephen L Bettinger, became the 38th and 39th American air aces. The latter was shot down and taken prisoner soon after scoring his fifth kill, and although his wingman reported his aerial victory, two further witnesses were required, so Bettinger was not confirmed as an ace until released from captivity on 2 October 1953.



Lt Guy P 'Lucky Pierre' Bordelon of VC-3 became the US Navy's only Korean War ace after a brief spell of action in mid-1953 – he was duly awarded the Navy Cross (second only to the Medal of Honor) as the pilot of this F4U-5NL Corsair for his exploits

Lt Guy Bordelon's unique F4U-5NL was comprehensively wrecked by another pilot around the time of the armistice. His machine was later scrapped in situ

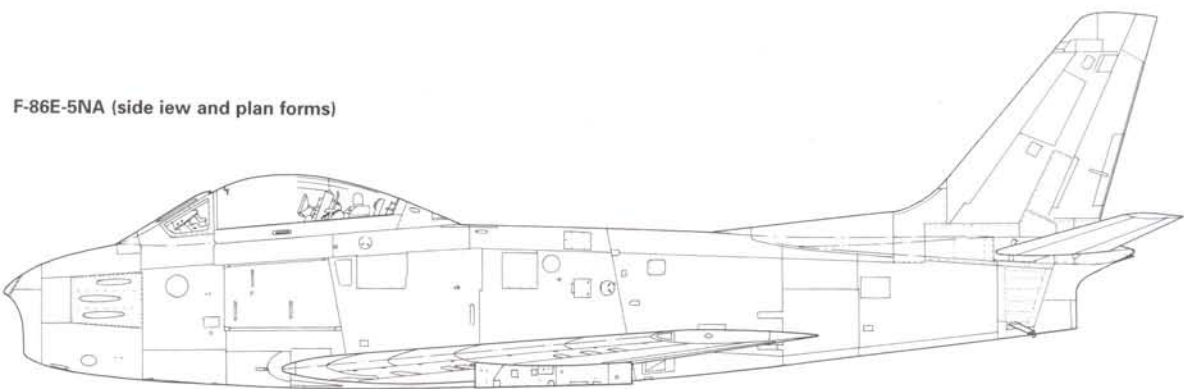


Of the 40 Americans who attained ace status in Korea, only one did not fly Sabres – the Navy's Lt Guy P 'Lucky Pierre' Bordelon, pilot of a F4U-5NL of VC-3 which operated from ashore and racked up five prop-driven 'Bedcheck Charlie' kills – the Fifth Air Force had requested piston-engined assistance from the Navy to help curb the enemy's nocturnal activities, as its own F-94Bs couldn't operate at such low speeds. Bordelon's kill list covers a pair of Yak-18s on both 29 June and 1 July 1953, and a Lavochkin fighter of unspecified type on 17 July – a very rapid streak of aerial victories. Sadly, the only 'ace' Corsair was wrecked in a mishap by another pilot just as the war ended.

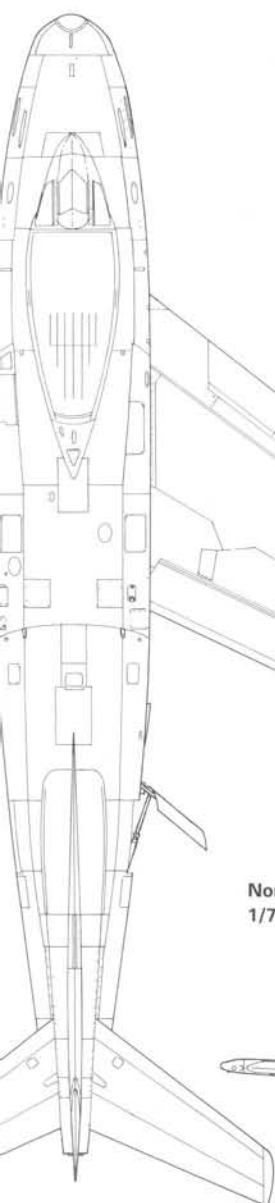
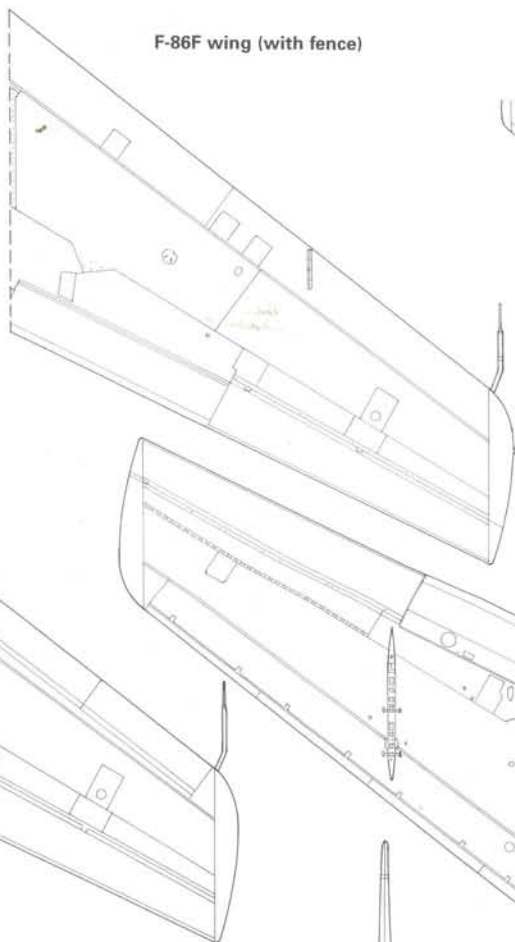
Before the truce was signed on 27 July 1953, Maj Jabara toted up his 15th kill to pass Fernandez and become the war's second-ranking MiG killer and, with McConnell, one of just two triple aces. On 22 July F-86 pilot 1st Lt Sam P Young of the 51st FIW racked up the final MiG kill of the war. The armistice was signed on 27 July to take place 12 hours after signature. Meanwhile, at mid-morning one patrol sighted 12 dark green MiGs near the Yalu, but the communist pilots high-tailed it for the river before the F-86s could engage. Shortly after noon, Capt Ralph S Parr shot down an Ilyushin Il-12 transport, after making two passes to be certain he was not making an identification mistake. Its destruction caused a diplomatic protest, and made Parr a double ace. It was also the last kill of the war.

During the Korean War, the USAF lost 971 aircraft and the Navy and Marine Corps 1033, but fewer than ten per cent of these fell in air-to-air combat. Communist figures for losses are not available, but according to US numbers the other side lost 792 MiGs in air-to-air combat, with another 143 were listed as probably destroyed. Many years after the war, a study by the Air Force, code-named *Sabre Measures Charlie*, downgraded the F-86-versus-MiG-15 'kill ratio' from 14-1 to 7-1 – the latter figure is not disputed by Russian participants. Although reduced, the 'kill ratio' achieved by Sabre pilots is still truly remarkable when one considers how totally outnumbered they were throughout the entire conflict.

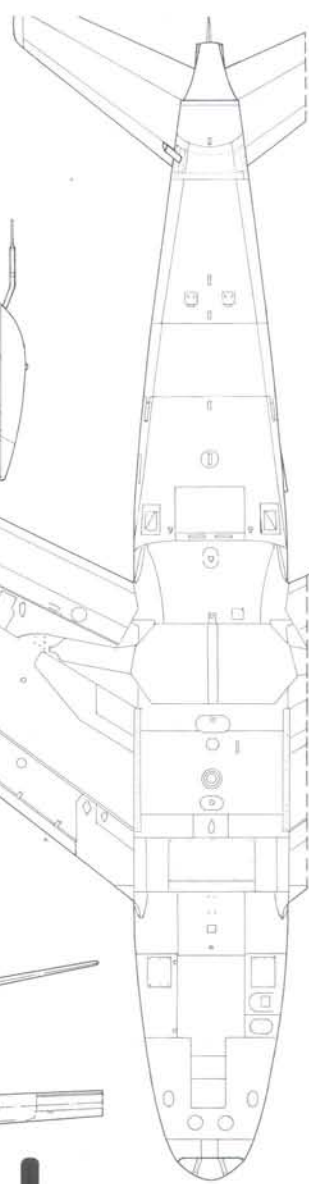
F-86E-5NA (side iew and plan forms)



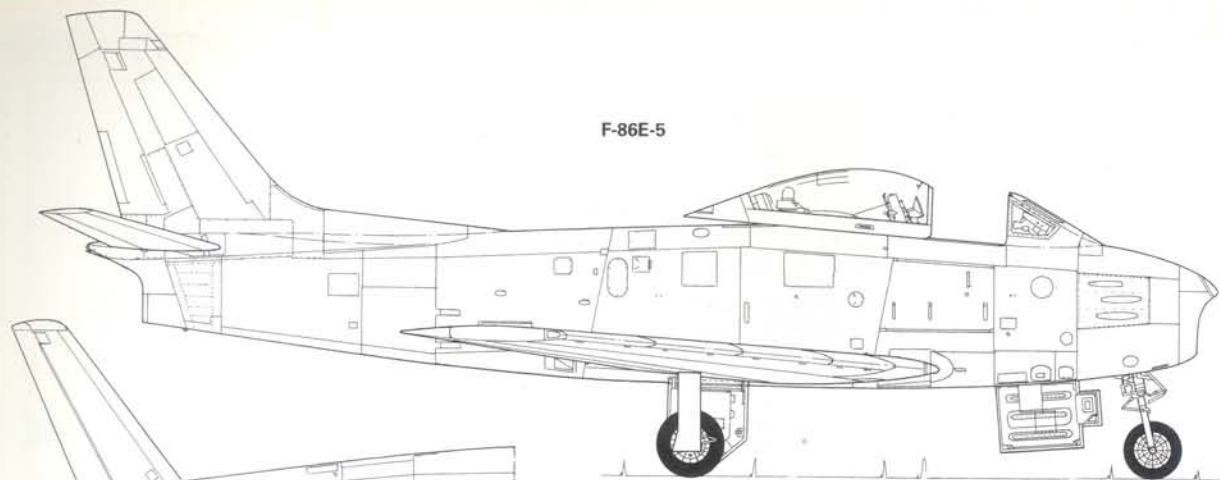
F-86F wing (with fence)



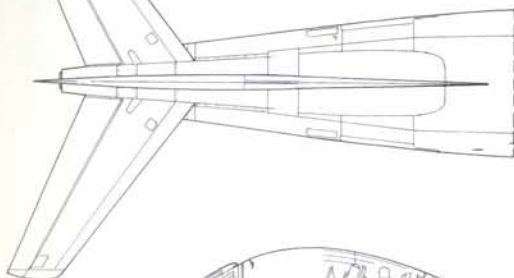
North American F-86 Sabre
1/72nd scale



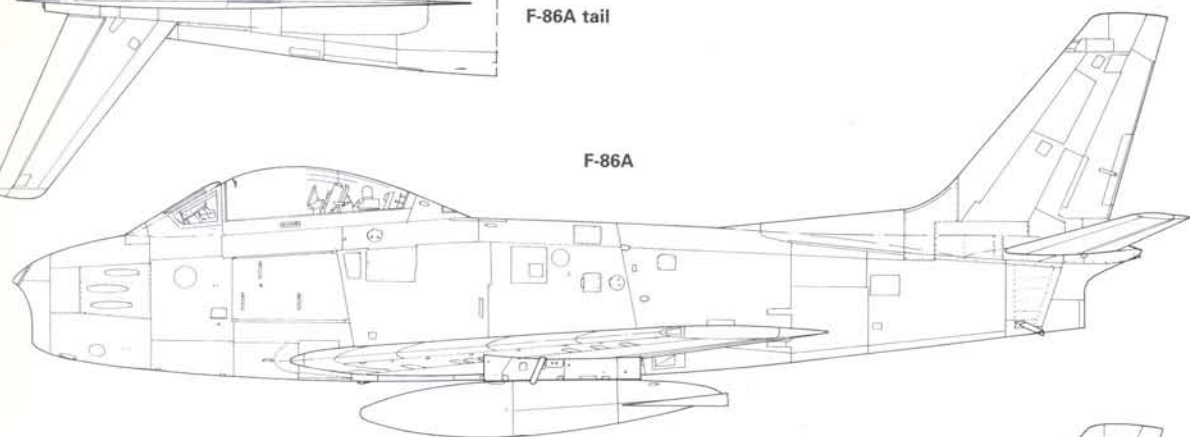
F-86E-5



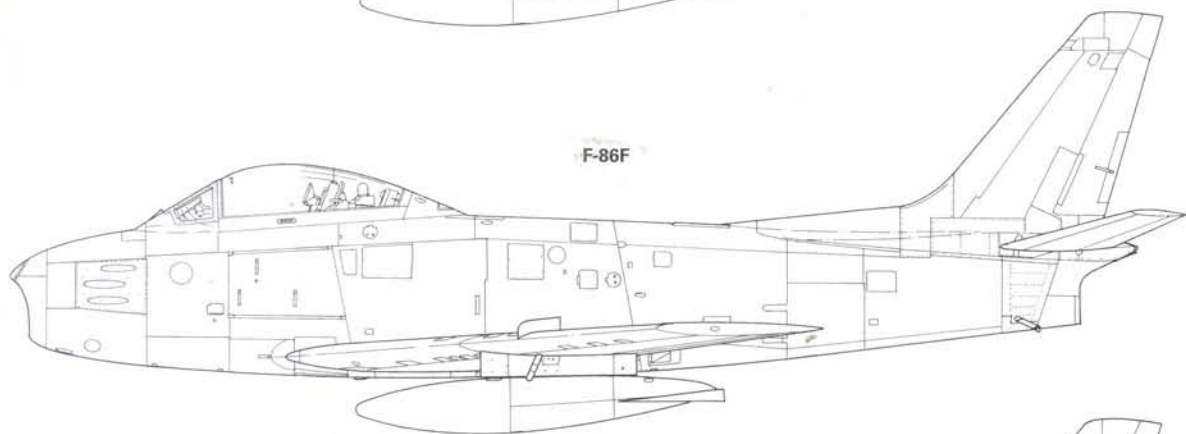
F-86A tail



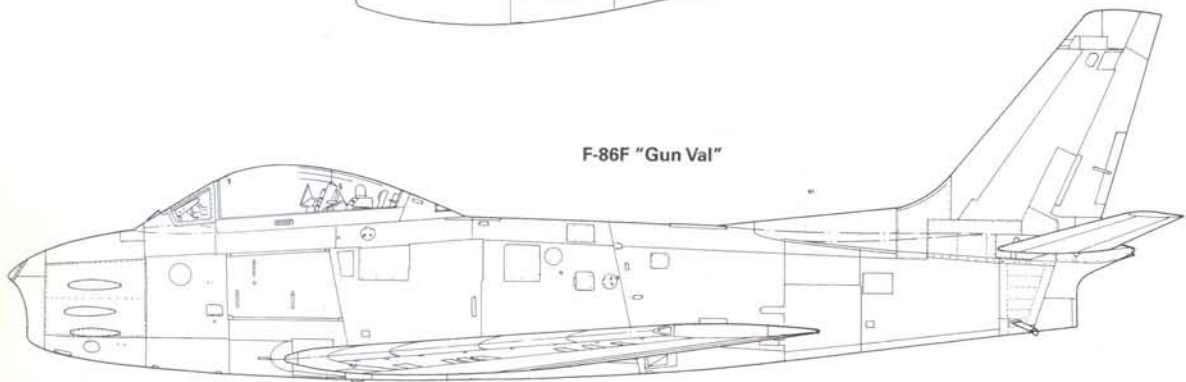
F-86A



F-86F



F-86F "Gun Val"



AIRCRAFT OF THE ACES: MEN & LEGENDS



The first virtually all-jet war, the conflict in Korea saw F-86 Sabres on the USAF take on MiG-15s of the North Korean and Chinese air forces. Although the Allied pilots were initially taken aback by the ability of the communist fighter in combat, sound training and skilful leadership soon

enabled Sabre pilots to dominate the dogfights over the Yalu River. In all 39 F-86 pilots achieved ace status, and a number of these are profiled in this volume, as are notable pilots from the US Navy,

Marine Corps and Royal Navy. MiG-15 aces are not forgotten either.



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