

30,000 feet, it was full daylight. As we got well over North Korea, we test fired our guns. When training back at Nellis AFB, we had only two guns activated. Now, it was quite different when all six guns fired at the same time. We had the radar-type pipper on our windscreen and the first 25 or so bullets were tracers. All six streams of tracers were supposed to converge at the center of the pipper. I also noticed that when all .50-calibers fired, it slowed the aircraft down considerably. As soon as our drop tanks emptied, we dropped them. When we did this, I saw eight tanks falling like bombs. I later marveled at the sight when we had a 16-ship flight and all of the guns were fired at once and all of the tanks came off together.

“On this first mission, we flew over Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea. The city looked pretty well bombed out. There seemed to be a main street that was used as a landing strip earlier, but it had bomb craters all over and appeared to look as if it had not been repaired. Just as we arrived over Pyongyang, the anti-aircraft guns started shooting at us with some big guns. The shells were exploding all around us and we kept turning every few seconds as we had been taught. They must have been firing 120mm shells or bigger to reach that high, and they were tracking us with radar. The shells were set to explode at our altitude and when they detonated, they made a big black cloud with a flash of orange flame in it. The rounds were exploding behind our Sabres and then would move closer. We would make a break and the flak would move right up into the area we would have been if we hadn’t changed course.

“After we moved on beyond the Pyongyang area, the flak stopped and we flew southeast to the China Sea. Our flight leader pointed out a small island named Chodo, which was occupied by our forces, and it was the place to bail out over if you couldn’t make it back to Kimpo. They had a great air-sea rescue unit based there. It was close enough to the mainland of North Korea that they were shelled almost every night. If the enemy risked shelling the island during the day, Chodo would call in fighter-bombers to silence the guns. My first mission into MiG territory was uneventful and we did not see any enemy aircraft.

“When we returned back to Kimpo, the outgoing missions of at least three squadrons were just starting to fire up and take off. The Australians would line up with at least 16 Meteors, each armed with what looked like eight or more rockets. They would all go off in a few minutes and then about 30 minutes later, they would all be back without their ordnance. Their missions were mostly to Haeju Peninsula, and apparently they did not carry much fuel. Often they were off after the F-86s and returned before the Sabres got back. They were mostly going after targets of opportunity. We had plenty of contact with the Aussies, as they were attached to our 4th Wing at Kimpo.”

1ST LT. WILLARD P. “BILL” DUNBAR  
336TH FIGHTER INTERCEPTOR SQUADRON



“Some of the paint schemes on the MiG-15s varied during my tour. Some were all powder blue, and some were all silver with just red stars painted on the wings and fuselage. Right before I finished the required number of missions, I saw some MiGs painted in a dark green. A few that I encountered had yellow markings. Our intelligence people surmised that quite a few different Soviet air regiments were rotating into Antung from all over Russia, probably to be gain valuable experience in a combat environment.



Lt. Willard P. “Bill” Dunbar Jr. poses beside one of his 336th Squadron Sabres at Kimpo AB (K-14). Lieutenant Dunbar would leave the Air Force after Korea and fly for American Airlines until retirement. He also flew with the Air Force Reserve for many years after active service. (USAF)



“We always suspected that the MiGs we were fighting were flown by Russian pilots. I recall a mission I was on with Capt. Robbie Risner, in which he got a kill. He shot the canopy off of the MiG and slightly overshot him. This put Risner right along side the crippled MiG. The enemy pilot’s helmet was gone and he was shaking his fist at him. The pilot had red hair and a light complexion, so he definitely was not oriental. The canopyless MiG made a fast break for the airfield at Antung at about .9 Mach. He landed way too hot and rolled it up in a ball of dirt and dust about a mile off the end of the runway.

“The tactics used by the enemy pilots at the time I was shot at, was like the ones you see on some of the documentaries, where they put a single aircraft out as a decoy while a flight of five stayed low. If a flight of F-86s came after the decoy, the trailing MiGs would accelerate up, from below, into firing position. With the weight differential they had, it was easy to do that. This tactic seemed to be preferred because of the diving restrictions that we knew about the MiG. If we had known more about the tactics they were using, we would have done much better. But, this knowledge evolves over a period of time. The pilots who followed after I left got better and better, because of intelligence briefings, etc., based on the experience we had gained. This was also true for the aircrews that were in combat before I arrived to fly with the 336th.

“Toward the end of the Korean War, the MiGs had gone to a four-ship formation, very similar to what the F-86s had been using all along. But we never saw this during my tour, as they were still using six-ship formations against us. The only variation of this that I witnessed was when we encountered a two-ship at low altitude, and there was a possibility that they had been out on a weather reconnaissance mission.

“As far as combat damage vulnerability of the F-86 goes, I always thought it was a very strong airframe. I remember one mission in which a MiG came up behind Earl Brown’s Sabre and put a 37mm right through his left wing close to the main spar. It was a hole you could stand up through. Anyway, Gene Rogge came up behind the MiG and shot him off of Brown’s tail. I saw the combat film of this and it was spectacular. You could see the big puffs of smoke coming from the MiG’s cannon as it fired at Brown. The MiG must have fired five or six rounds of 37mm before you saw Rogge’s .50 caliber rounds completely engulf it. The tracers converged all over the cockpit area, and in seconds, the MiG exploded.

“I flew with Maj. Felix Asla, C.O. of the 336th Squadron, several times before he was shot down and was present with my flight leader when the event occurred. I had followed flight lead in a Mach-1 dive from 35,000 feet to about 15,000 feet to get on a MiG-15’s tail. I pulled seven Gs in the pull-up and turn to stay with lead and the MiG. That MiG just pointed his nose up and



*These two 16th Squadron pilots are fully suited up and ready to fly on a minute’s notice. They are on five-minute alert, which means they had to have most of their gear on and stay close to the aircraft in case the call came for a scramble. This was taken during cool weather, so they have their survival suits on also. (Robert Mount)*

climbed away in a 180-degree turn to over 40,000 feet. Lead never got within 3,000 feet of him. After we got back to Kimpo, he asked me if I had seen the MiG shoot down an F-86. I had not. I was too busy clearing our tails and flying my A model



*Just as soon as the maintenance crews finish the minor maintenance, the pilots are standing by and ready to strap in. Evidently, this F-86 is being readied for a test hop after the ground crews corrected any of the write-ups from the pilot who last flew it on a mission. This was taken on the 51st Wing’s flight line at Suwon in early 1952. (Dean Juhlin)*





*This crippled MiG-15 has taken some .50-caliber rounds up his tailpipe and is losing speed. His efforts to get back to the safety of the Yalu proved to be fatal. This was taken in the dead of winter, as can be seen with the Yalu frozen over below. (USAF)*

Sabre at those speeds and Gs. Turned out it was Major Asla that he had seen the MiG shoot down. A couple of 37mm cannon rounds had shot his entire left wing off!

“The action was so fast that he never had the chance to see if Asla had bailed out when his Sabre was hit. We pieced together the radio chatter later and figured out that Asla thought the MiG was his wingman (Red Two), who had become separated from him. Asla was making a slow turn to the left, and the MiG was in perfect join-up position. Joe Logan was the wingman and he later died in a bailout over the Yellow Sea, when he was flying wing for Robbie Risner. They’d been in a fight and Joe had been shot up. His ‘86 lost its fuel and Robbie tried to push him with the nose of the Sabre. Got him out to sea where he bailed out, but he drowned in his chute. One of the rescue SA-16s recovered the body.

“I had flown wing for Major Asla on 4 July 1952, when the F-84 Thunderjets hit the North Korean Military Academy graduation exercises with napalm. Needless to say, the MiG-15s were everywhere! We soon got separated from our element, and I kept trying to vector the major into MiGs I saw in a big swirling fight from low altitude to over 38,000 feet above the area the F-84s were working. I vectored him toward a lone MiG I saw heading southwest down the Yalu River. At this point, we passed a MiG pilot in his chute at 30,000 feet. He was holding onto the risers and made no sign of seeing us pass. The major was on one side of him and I was on the other. I probably passed within a hundred yards of him at around .95 Mach. His brown leather helmet, flight suit, and boots were quite visible. He must

have had an oxygen bottle to be conscious at that altitude. He did have on a mask and goggles. We had no intentions of shooting at him. I don’t know of any case in which our pilots shot MiG pilots in their chutes.

“We continued after the MiG that was heading southwest, making a 90-degree left turn to the southeast, but Major Asla didn’t see him until he made the turn and did not cut him off. Then, the MiG made another 90-degree turn to a northeast heading and Asla got within 3,000 feet and took a shot. Fuel vapor came off the MiG, but the major was unable to close. Another quick turn to a northwest heading, and he was still unable to cut him off in the turn. I had been playing every turn and was now 1,000 feet above and a quarter-mile to the left and in front of the hapless MiG. Asla was still unable to close, so I requested permission to go in from my position of advantage and finish the kill. At this time, we were below bingo fuel, so we were forced to turn around and head home.

“We had crossed the Yalu on the last leg of this pursuit, but probably not more than five miles. Major Asla had 4.5 kills to his credit and this was his 99th mission. He had not been logging his missions since June, trying to get another kill to make ace. If he had been able to close on the MiG, it would have been an easy shot and he would have made ace. About a month later, Asla lost his life when a MiG got in behind him. I flew with a lot of damned good pilots over the course of my tour. They all knew how to get the most out of their aircraft. When they had the advantage, they aggressively took it, and when they lost the advantage, they broke it off and left. On one mission, I had a



*Capt. Ted Coberly’s Margaret Ann receives some special attention from the ground crews right before a mission. Captain Coberly was on the aircraft carrier USS Cape Esperance when it brought the new F-86Es into the war. He flew with the 334th Squadron and received the DFC when he destroyed two MiG-15s on 13 December 1951. (Ted Coberly)*



chance to jump five MiGs in front of me, but I had become separated from my wingman. Since I was all alone, I did not press it. It might have produced a couple of kills, but on the other hand, I might have become a statistic with no witnesses to my demise.”

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The peace talks were in full swing at Panmunjom in mid-1952, but no one was really putting much stock in their ability to end the war quickly. The job was going to have to be done on the ground. Thus far, the interdiction and night intruder results registered by Fifth Air Force had done a magnificent job in keeping the Chinese logistics efforts under control. Their ground forces had not been able to build up enough supplies to sustain a major offensive. They still held a distinct edge in sheer manpower, but they could not utilize this advantage without food and supplies. Records show that Chinese POWs knew they were beaten more than a year before the war ended. The overwhelming Allied airpower had spawned this mind set.

The key to all of the above was being able to send the fighter-bombers to any target in North Korea, at will, with very little risk from enemy fighters. This advantage could easily have slipped away if air superiority had been jeopardized. This is why FEAF Intelligence was so emphatic about monitoring all of the air activity that was continuing to build up at several bases north of the Yalu River in Manchuria. Both the Soviets and Chinese always feared that the FEAF might extend the air attacks to other targets that were located north of the Yalu. Technically, it was a safe haven, but yet it was not. There were enough American Sabre pilots harassing Antung that these fears were entirely rational, at least to the Communists. The general staff within both of these organizations knew that the only key to victory in Korea was to have the upper hand in the air.

It was for this reason that the Communists undertook a major construction program to build more airfields north of Antung. The greater Antung complex had grown to seven airfields by late summer of 1952. Slightly north from these bases was the second biggest MiG base in the area, Mukden. There had been a lot of activity within this realm, as it was the most advantageous base to house bombers. It was far enough north of the Yalu to discourage the prying eyes of the RF-86A photoreconnaissance Sabres, and the aggressive Sabres very seldom ventured that far into forbidden territory. There were six airfields under construction or already operational in this area.

UN Intelligence sources had determined that by midsummer 1952, the Chinese Communist Air Forces had probably reached its authorized strength of 22 air divisions, which equated to 1,830 aircraft. More than half of this number were considered fighters, mostly MiG-15s. Of course, these num-



The 4th Fighter Wing rolled out the red carpet for Actress Betty Hutton's entertainment troops at Kimpo. They threw a wingwide party for the group and Ms. Hutton was the guest of honor. Here she receives a cake along with two of her female entertainers. Second from the right is the 4th commander, Col. Harry Thyng. (USAF)

bers covered China as a whole. But, most of the totals were based within Manchuria, which meant they could be readily used over North Korea without much notice. This was only a drop in the bucket, compared to the number of Soviet Union



This was one of the best pictures taken of the big MiG base at Antung, as there wasn't much haze to distort the picture. The airfield in the distance is Ta-tung-kao. This base and Ta-ku-shan were the newest bases built to support the Antung Complex. (Dick Petercheff)