

KOREA

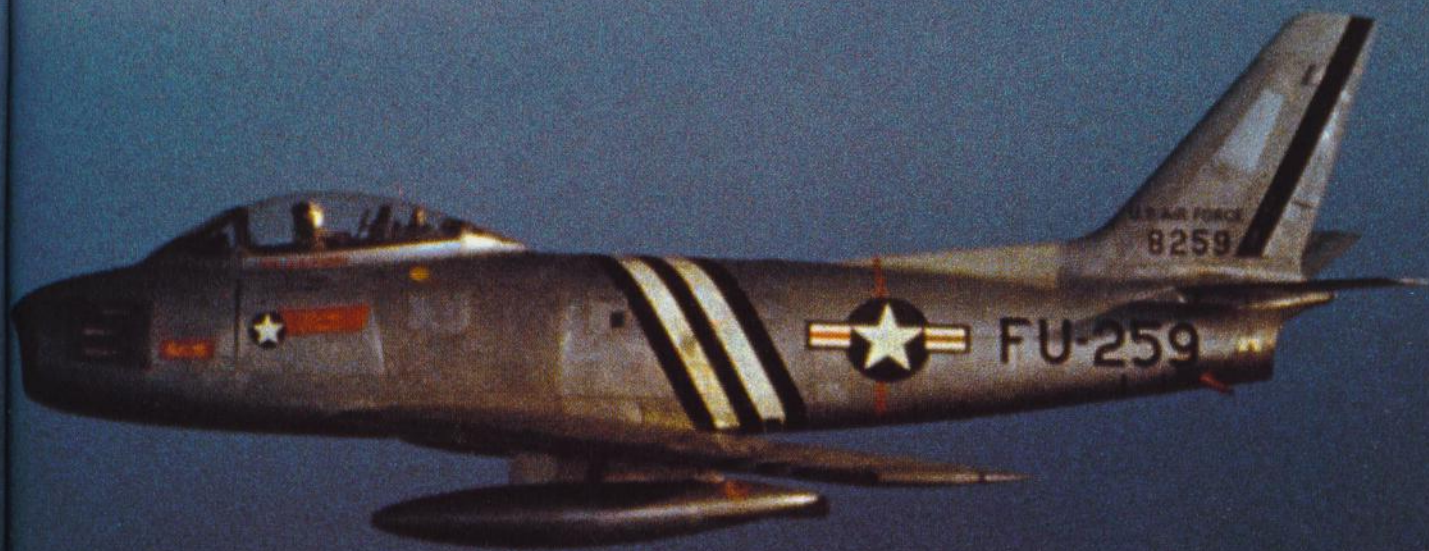
THE AIR WAR 1950-1953

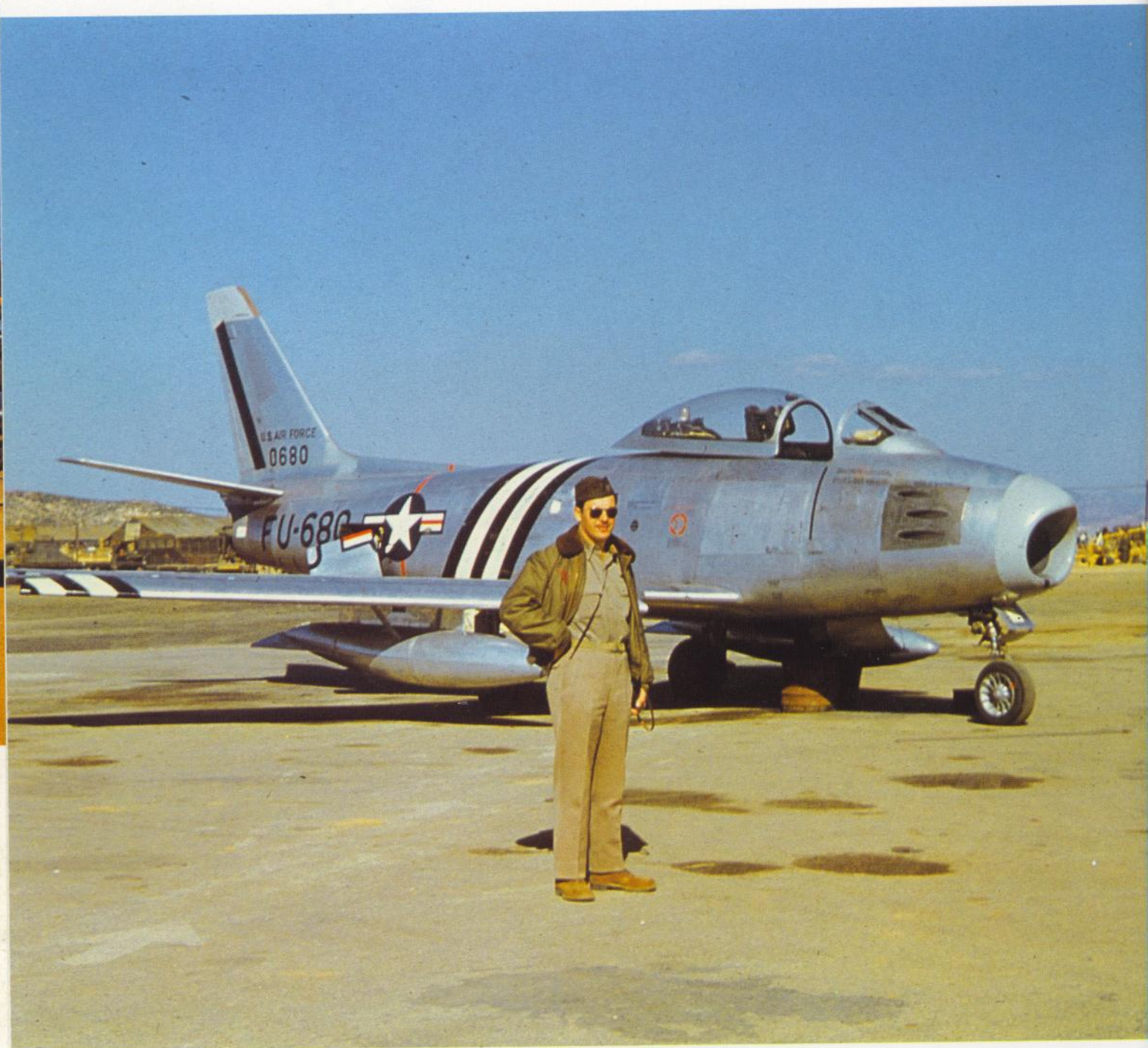


Jack C Nicholls & Warren E Thompson

Silver Sabres

The 45th Fighter Interceptor Wing, based at New Castle County Airport, Delaware, was the USAF's most experienced jet fighter unit, and the obvious choice when it wanted to send an F-86 Wing to Korea. After trading some of its older aircraft with other F-86A units, the Wing was ready to go. The aircraft of 334th and 335th Fighter Interceptor Squadrons were sent to Korea on board the USS *Cape Esperance*, while the 336th FIS aircraft went by tanker. The 336th flew their first sweep on 17th December 1950, in aircraft marked with prominent black and white stripes on the fuselage and wings.
(William Taylor)





Left A North American F-86A Sabre of the 4th Fighter Interceptor Wing. The Sabre was the only UN fighter capable of meeting the MiG-15 on even terms, although in some respects its performance and armament were inferior. When using tactics which took advantage of the MiG's superior rate of climb, it was a difficult target, but time and again the USAF pilot's superior training and tactics gave them the edge. By the time it was all over, 792 MiGs had fallen to the F-86, for only 58 losses in air combat. *(Harrington)*

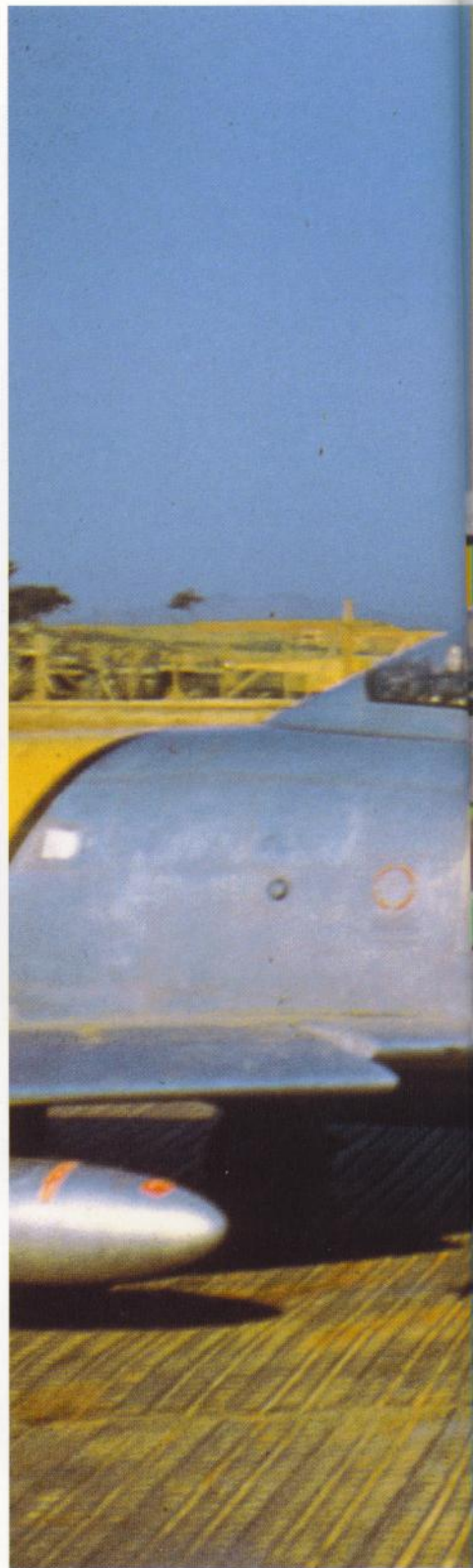
Right Capt Manuel 'Pete' Fernandez, a pilot with the 334th FIS, was one of the leading aces of the Korean war, with 14 MiG-15 victories scored between October 1952 and May 1953. The 334th was a nest of aces, since Fernandez' squadron mates included Jabara with 15 kills, Davis with 14, and with 10, Frederick 'Boots' Blesse, author of 'No Guts, No Glory' (for many years the USAF's main treatise on tactics). *(Bruno Giordano)*





Above James Jabara was the first jet ace in Korea, and went on to become the second highest scoring ace of the war with 15 kills, all of them MiG-15s. Here he is seen being interviewed after his fifth and sixth victories, scored on 20 May 1951. A Captain during his first tour, during which he scored six kills, he returned to Korea and the 334th FIS as a Major to down a further nine enemy aircraft. (*Ed Fletcher*)

Right The 4th FIW's black and white bands were replaced by black-edged yellow recognition bands in late 1951, when F-86Es replaced the A-model Sabres, and when the 51st FIW also re-equipped with F-86E Sabre from the F-80 Shooting Star. An extra black-edged yellow band across the fin served as a wing marking, while the individual squadrons applied their badges to the forward fuselage. (*Ernie Atkinson*)









Left The Indian's head insignia identifies this FIW F86E as belonging to the 335th FIS. The 335th was the top-scoring unit of the war, with no less than fourteen of the USAF's 39 Sabre Aces, four with ten kills each. The Squadron's pilots claimed a total of 218½ air-to-air kills. (*Harry Jones*)

Above Richard Keener, an F-86 pilot with the 335th, poses in front of the sign in front of the 4th FIG's Operations area. The monthly total of MiGs destroyed had not been put up, but would have been impressive. During the war the Group destroyed 477½ air combat victories, and destroyed four further enemy aircraft on the ground



FORCE F-16-16
NO 52-2857
MILITARY

Left F-86Es of the 335th ready to go, sitting on the alert pad at Kimpo (K-14). Most MiG kills were achieved during routine escort missions, or on patrols over the Yalu. When MiGs were encountered, their appearance often differed greatly. Some were camouflaged, some were silver, and some carried huge areas of colour (often red). The quality of the enemy pilots varied as much as the colour schemes worn by their aircraft. Some used their aircraft to devastating effect, employing hit and run surprise attacks which the Sabres could not counter, while others seemed unable even to take simple evasive action without colliding or spinning out of control. Some enemy pilots simply ejected when threatened!



Above right Jeff Dibrell, a pilot with the 336th FIS, flew this F-86E, *Peg 'O My Heart/Tiger Shack*, which was relatively unusual in carrying a gaudy looking sharkmouth. Personal markings on the 4th's Sabres became progressively larger and more gaudy as the war progressed. (Dibrell)

Below right Sabre scoreboard! Captain Chuck Owens of the 336th FIS had an impressive tally of kills, including trucks and tanks, on his aircraft, *El Diablo*. Some of the nine air-to-air kills were not scored by Owens who did not gain the coveted five-kill 'Ace' status. (Hintermeier)





Above Pictured in a revetment at K-14 is *Honest John/Stud*, mount of the 4th FIG's CO, Col Walker Mahurin. This aircraft later carried five and half kill markings, and the silhouette of a railway locomotive. The black background for the stars-and-stripes rocket badge of the 336th FIS was also removed. (William K Thomas)

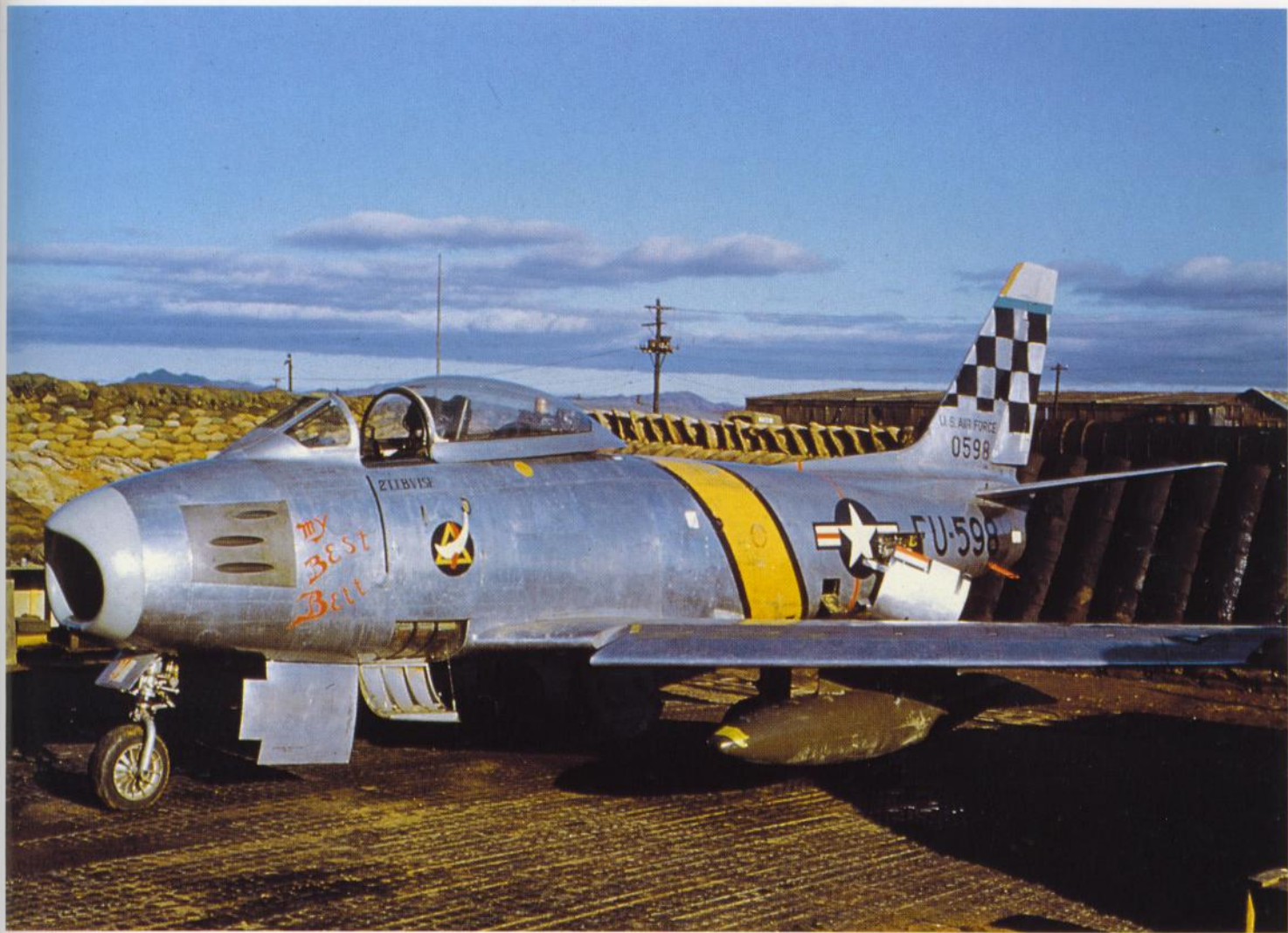
Right Twenty-five F-86Es are visible in this view of a portion of the flight deck of the USS *Cape Esperance*. Delivery of these aircraft in July 1951 allowed the re-equipment of the F-80C-equipped 51st FIW, giving the USAF two F-86 Wings (with about 130 aircraft) in Korea to meet the estimated total of 445 Red Chinese MiG-15s. By July 1951 the 4th FIW had also re-equipped with the F-86E, whose hydraulic controls and all flying tail gave much improved handling, especially at high speed. (Harry Dawson)







Perhaps the most aptly named Sabre of the war was this F-86E, flown by Capt Corbell of the 39th FIS, 51st FIW. The activation of a second Sabre Wing initially caused some problems. The maintenance and supply organization had been finding it hard supporting one Wing, and when the second formed, the situation quickly reached crisis point, with shortages of spares and even fuel tanks. In February 1952, for example, 45 per cent of the Sabres were grounded. (Shutt)



My Best Bell was the personal aircraft of 2nd Lt Bernard Vise, a pilot of the 16th FIS. The black chequers on the tail were the Wing marking of the 51st FIW, while the squadrons added a narrow coloured band above the chequers: blue for the 16th FIS, red for the 25th, and yellow for the 39th. Japanese-made fuel tanks had very different separation characteristics when jettisoned, and were painted olive drab so that pilots would know immediately which type they were carrying. (*Vise*)



Above Third Sabre Wing to form was the 18th FBW, a long-time Mustang operator, which converted from its ageing prop-driven fighters to F-86Fs in January 1953, after moving from K-46 (Hoengsong) to K-55 (Osan), a brand new airfield. Originally the aircraft carried a dark blue fin band with white stars superimposed. The 12th FBS trimmed this with yellow, while the 67th used red. (FG Smart)

Right When the 18th FBW's last unit, the South African Air Force No 2 Sqn re-equipped with Sabres, their orange, white and blue colours were adopted as the Wing marking. Each squadron used a unit badge on the forward fuselage, and the 67th painted the noses of its Sabres with a red and yellow band, while the 12th chose a black-edged yellow band. *Sandra* of the 12th FBS was flown by Capt John Jamieson. (Ken Smith)







Above left This aircraft, named *Hard's Hornet* was flown by Lt Robert Hard of the 67th FBS from Osan and carried nose art and its name on the port side. The squadron's 'Fighting Cock' badge, complete with boxing gloves, was carried on both sides under the cockpit. The F-86F was an excellent fighter bomber, since although it carried a smaller load than the F-84, over a shorter distance, it could deal with the MiG-15 without needing an escort. The only major problem was that it was a poor vehicle for the delivery of napalm, since its attack speed was rather high. (Carroll Blum)



Below left With the 500 lb bombs and two fuel tanks underwing, Vic Collier's *Super Duck* is almost ready to taxi out from its dispersal at K-55 for a mission over North Korea, shortly before the ceasefire which began at midnight on 27 July 1953. (Vic Collier)

Right The last USAF unit in Korea to receive the Sabre was the 8th Fighter Bomber Wing, which traded in its F-80Cs to receive brand new F-86Fs. Col WB Wilmet, the Wing CO, flew this aircraft, *Miss Tena*, whose fin sunburst bore the colours of the three assigned squadrons: blue for the 35th, red for the 36th and yellow for the 80th Fighter Bomber Squadrons. These up-engined Sabres were actually capable of climbing as high as the MiG-15, and nearly as quickly, but their primary role was close air support. (James Carter)







Left Lt Joe Lynch, a pilot with the 35th FBS, relaxes on the wing of his Sabre after a sortie, still wearing his G suit, Mae West, and parachute. The words U.S. AIR FORCE was added to the Sabre's colour scheme in June 1953. (Lynch)

Above The 18th Fighter Bomber Wing was a long-term Mustang operator, and did not convert to jets (in the shape of brand new F-86F Sabres) until February 1953, when it moved from Chinhae to Osan. The 18th's Sabres wore a colourful red, white and blue fin flash, the colours previously worn by one of the Wing's Mustang units, No 2 Sqn, SAAF. The Wing was proud of its association with the South Africans, and did everything it could to acknowledge their considerable contribution, ordering, for example, that the US National Anthem be preceded by the first few bars of its South African equivalent on all official occasions. (Dwight Lee)