


SABRES Over MiG ALLEY

Editor's Note: Years ago while dining with R. A. Bob Hoover and Chuck Yeager, the conversation turned to the favorite airplanes flown by each of these aviation superstars. North American Aviation seemed to win the day, for it was the legendary P-51 Mustang that won hands down in the prop fighter category, and for both men, without hesitation, it was the F-86 Sabre for jets. Described by Hoover as "a very honest airplane", the Sabre ranked high on many an Air Force fighter pilot's list of superlative flying machines.

By Warren E. Thompson

Photos courtesy of the author, and the WINGS & AIRPOWER historical archive.

In this compelling story of the world's first aerial jet combat, we proudly welcome back to the fold a former *WINGS & AIRPOWER* contributor, and one of the great aviation writers of our time, Mr. Warren Thompson. Join us now as he takes us on an historical journey back to the early 1950s and provides a close-up look at the rigors of Air Force life during the Korean War. Watch for additional stories by Warren in upcoming issues as we commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the end of that historical conflict.



A flight of four 16th Squadron Sabres, flying south at 40,000 feet, makes its way back to Suwon AB after a combat mission over MiG Alley. These aircraft - all apparently F-86E-10s - were from 'A' Flight with Captain Phil Hunt flying lead. (Courtesy of Capt. Phil Hunt).

The exciting accounts of aerial duels over Europe and the Pacific in World War II captured the imagination of the American public, but these would pale a few years later, when large numbers of swept-wing jet fighters tangled at 40,000 feet over the Yalu River. It was to be a pivotal time in history; the first acid test for the fledgling United Nations and the first armed conflict between the Free World and Communism. However, what makes the battles over North Korea so significant is the fact that they would mark the last of the 'swashbuckling' fighter pilots that used experience and raw skill to fight their way in close for a kill. The development of the air-to-air missile would soon end the 'up close and personal' dogfights and the emotional release experienced by victorious pilots after this era, would not remain on the same level.

In early November 1950, the MiG-15s began venturing south of their Manchurian sanctuary and this spelled potential danger for all UN aircraft that were flying missions above Pyongyang. The only stopgap fighter types on hand capable of defending themselves in the air were the straight-wing Lockheed F-80 and the Navy's Grumman F9F Panther. Of course, they were not in the same speed class as the MiG, so something had to be done immediately to protect the airspace over UN ground forces.

The Pentagon answered the urgent call by sending the 4th Fighter Wing (composed of three squadrons) over with their F-86A

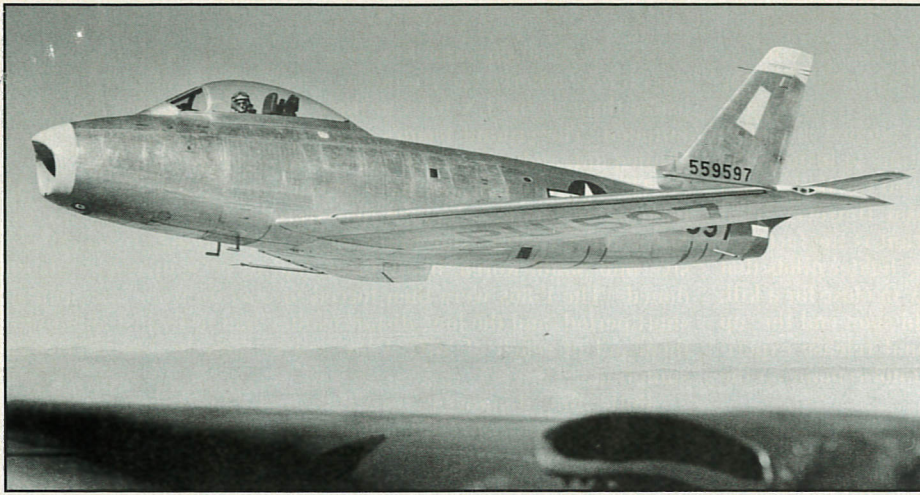
Sabres. At about the same time that this decision was being made, the Chinese entered the ground war with a major offensive which broke through the UN lines to the extent that a mass retreat was initiated. The ground troop's slogan "Home by Christmas" was snuffed out, and now it was a matter of survival.

The Sabre squadrons were fighting at a great disadvantage from the beginning, although they were successfully keeping the MiGs under control. Due to the successful Chinese ground offensive into South Korea, many bases had to be temporarily abandoned. The F-86s were then forced to operate from Japan for a short period, and the long distances they had to fly just about put them out of reach of MiG Alley due to their healthy fuel consumption.

Both the distances involved and the crude facilities from which the 4th Group had to operate never diminished their aggressiveness toward the MiGs. Although the kill rate was very low during the early months of 1951 (there were no recorded kills between 22 December 1950 and 31 March 1951), the action would begin to pick up soon. On 20 May, Captain James Jabara became the first jet ace in history. On this particular mission, he bagged his fifth and sixth kills. It was a difficult achievement to accomplish because the MiGs were not coming up to fight and there were only a total of five kills recorded for the entire month.

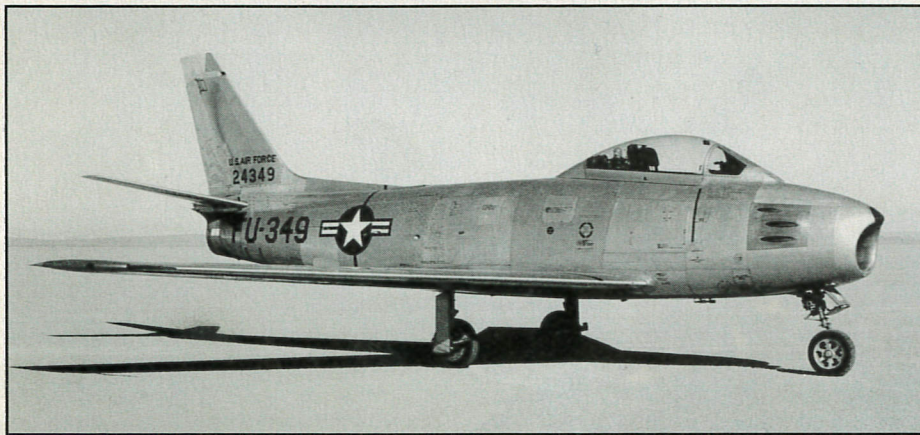


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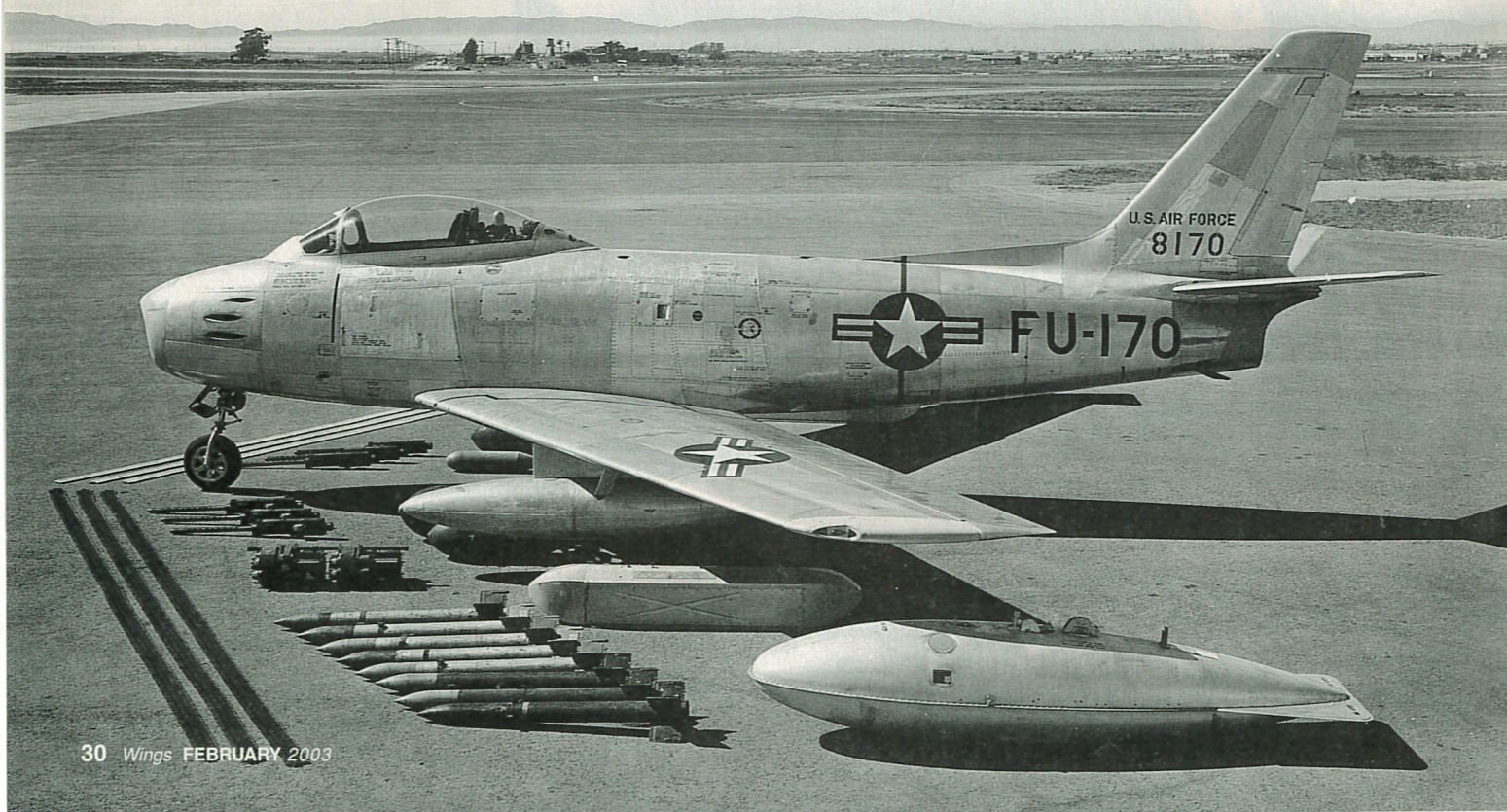


Above: Nice shot of North American Test Pilot George 'Wheaties' Welch aloft in the XP-86 prototype over Muroc (soon to be Edwards AFB) in late 1947, taken from co-pilot's seat of the chase B-25. Aircraft first flew on October 1st that year. Note absence of armament and short pitot tube at top leading edge of the vertical stabilizer. This machine became the first jet aircraft to fly at supersonic speed.

Below: Production model F-86A armed with six .50 caliber cannons. Clean lines epitomized the jet age as aerial combat took a giant leap forward in terms of speed and altitude. As sleek and modern as this aircraft was in the early 1950s, the Sabre signaled the end of the line for close-in dogfighting, sometimes so intense that it was described by pilots as "like having a knife fight in a phone booth".



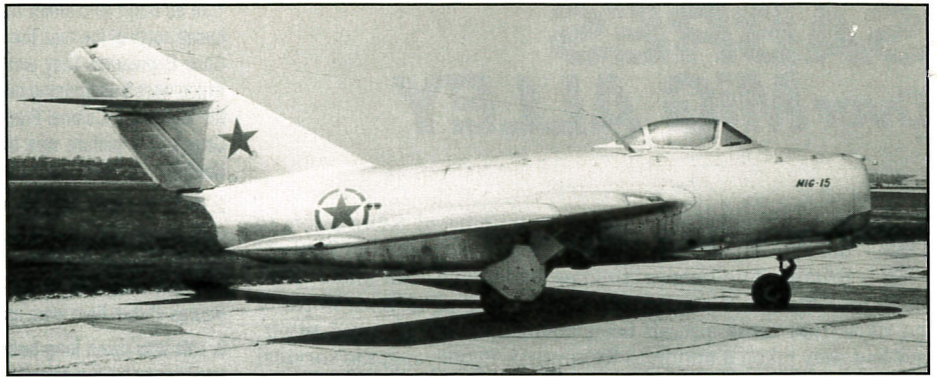
Below: Early morning shot of a factory fresh F-86A on the ramp at North American's satellite facility at Palmdale, California in summer of 1951. Note armament spread out in front of the aircraft that included ammo belts for the .50-caliber guns (shown on either side of nose gear), ground attack rockets, bombs (inboard) and external fuel tanks.



MiGs below us and called my flight down on them. At the time, we were at 20,000 feet and slightly southeast of Sinanju. I dived and closed on the first one quickly with my first burst setting him on fire with pieces of the MiG coming off back toward me. I stayed on him and kept firing until the pilot punched out. While I was on this MiG, someone called out that there were bogies on my tail so I broke into a diving roll. As I came out of it, I saw a lone MiG right below me. With a speed advantage, I closed rapidly and fired a burst that completely engulfed his cockpit area. He pulled straight up and I followed.....still shooting. I observed more hits around his cockpit as he snapped over and went straight down. He crashed in a fiery explosion just south of Sinanju and I didn't see a chute."

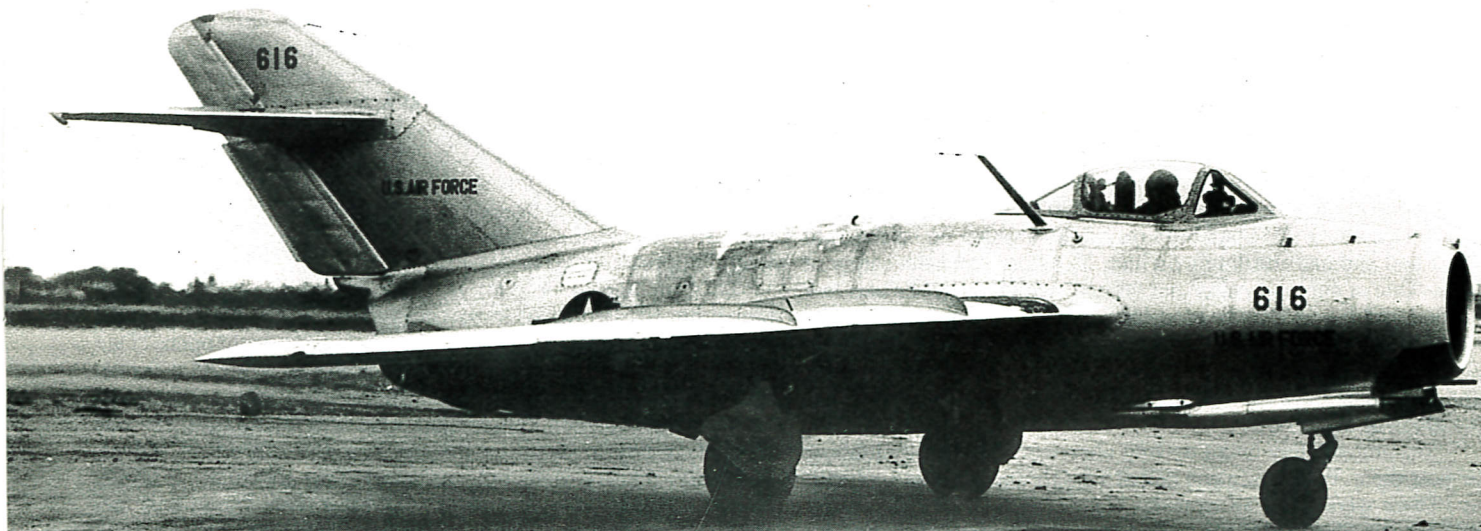
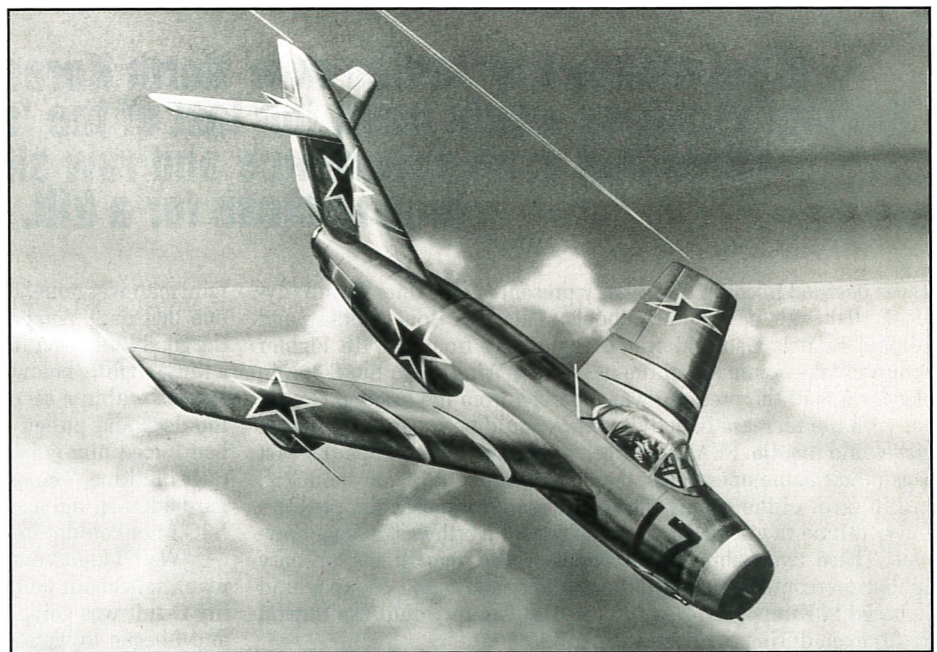
In the four months prior to September (May-August), there were a total of only 32 confirmed MiG kills. The next four months were very active and it proved to be an indicator of what was to come. For the four-month period from September to December, there were 111 MiG-15s shot down by Sabres. There was an easy explanation to this explosive activity in that the large number of enemy fighter pilots going through the combat training regimen would, sooner or later, have to face the F-86 pilots because that was the only way they could gain the experience. Beginning in September, evidently, that time had come. Once again, it was the 4th Fighter Group that shouldered the responsibility during these myriad engagements.

Below: This MiG-15 was flown to South Korea by its defecting North Korean Pilot in September 1953, and was evaluated by the Air Force at Okinawa and eventually Wright Patterson AFB, OH. Comparative thrust with an F-86 was studied by connecting the two aircraft tail-to-tail with chains hooked up to a strain gauge, and then firing up both engines!



Above: Study of the Russian-built MiG-15 shows a smaller and more primitive aeronautical design than the F-86, but still a most formidable opponent for aerial combat. Armed with twin-23mm guns and a single 37mm cannon, the MiG could climb faster and operate at higher altitudes than the Sabres, giving them a distinct tactical advantage.

Below: Classic early-1950s 'spy rendering' of the enemy fighter shows the MiG's rather hefty wing fences required to channel span-wise airflow for high-speed maneuverability. Many MiGs were lost to accelerated stalls in combat at low altitude rather than actual gunfire from an attacking F-86. Powerplant of the early model MiG-15 was a Soviet copy of the Rolls-Royce 'Nene' turbojet.



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You could equate the heavily outnumbered Sabre pilots to the RAF's Hurricane and Spitfire pilots during the Battle of Britain. Intelligence sources concluded that there were probably 800 MiG-15s scattered out over several airfields north of the river. Had these aircraft been manned by experienced pilots, and had they taken a notion to fly south of Pyongyang, the survival of the Sabre force would have been in serious jeopardy. The sheer number of MiGs that the Soviets had supplied to China would probably have exceeded the total production of swept-wing fighters in the United States at that time. With only one American fighter group providing the barrier patrols, some days saw 32 Sabres locked up with as many as 150 MiGs. These odds were often encountered twice in the same day.

The increase in communist air activity over MiG Alley forced another major decision by FEAFF high command. In the fall of 1951,

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it was decided to equip the already present 51st Fighter Group (flying F-80s) with new F-86E models. This was done quickly and Colonel Francis Gabreski was brought over from the 4th Fighter Group to take command of the new Sabre Wing. With the F-86E in place, some of the pressure was removed from the original Group, but with the increase in activity, they would both have as much as they could handle. FEAFF Intelligence estimated that when the 51st began their Sabre operations, the odds dropped down to about 7:1, still in favor of the enemy. The MiGs would increase the pressure and continue to vie for air supremacy over Northwest Korea, however. These two Sabre organizations would remain the primary fighter interceptor units until the war ended. The 4th Group would be based at Kimpo (K-14) while the 51st Group would use Suwon (K-13) even during the post-war period.

The MiG displayed one capability that always kept the Sabre pilots on the defensive. Most of the aces from the World War II era will tell you that the only thing better than speed is altitude. Both of these attributes were carried over into the jet age. When it came to perching up at extreme altitudes, the MiG-15 had no competition. Part of their training program was to fly in large formations far above the F-86 patrols and even though, most of the time, they made no effort to engage, there was always the possibility, so the fighter pilots always kept an eye on them. Most of these formations were above 50,000 feet which was out of reach for the aggressive American pilots.

Lt. Colonel Al Kelly, flying with the 25th Fighter Squadron, recalls one of these instances where all hell broke loose and it came down from above. "We had been on a fighter sweep up on the Yalu River and had had absolutely no luck. The skies had been empty of MiGs. One of our guys called out "Bingo" which meant he was low on fuel and it was time to head back. As we swung around to the south, the sky started raining drop tanks! As I looked up, there were at least three flights of MiGs bouncing us. We had not seen them and they must have been at 50,000 feet or better as we were cruising along at 38,000 feet."

"We immediately broke up into elements and started climbing to meet them. We got into one hell of a gaggle and everyone got split up. There were MiGs all over the place and the radio was full of BREAK RIGHT.....BREAK LEFT....etc. I looked around and my

1. In an effort to counter the increased number of MiG-15s that were operating from bases north of the Yalu, the Air Force rushed the newer F-86E models over on the USS Cape Esperance. They would be used to equip two squadrons from the 51st Wing which were transitioning out of their weary F-80Cs. The 51st would be commanded by the legendary Colonel Francis Gabreski, who was moving over from the 4th Fighter Group. This picture was taken in mid-Pacific during some rough weather. (James Hardin).

2. As late as mid-1952, the working conditions for the maintenance troops were still quite crude. Weather permitting, engine changes were performed out in the open as seen in this picture. The in-service rate remained high, however, because of the work ethic and dedication of the ground crews. This was taken at Kimpo AB and all of the Sabres shown here were assigned to the 4th Fighter Group. (Irv Clark).

3. This was taken long before the Sabre bases at Suwon and Kimpo built protective revetments for the aircraft. At this time in 1951, the 4th Fighter Group's F-86s were parked out in the open and were vulnerable to attacks from the night marauding Po-2s. The camouflage netting helped somewhat during the hours of darkness. (John Henderson).

4. During the Sabre's tenure in Korea, there were a significant number of exchange pilots from other branches of the military and other countries that were allied with the UN forces. All of these pilots did an excellent job in the F-86 and many claimed MiG-15 kills. This 336th Sabre, "Anchor Man" was assigned to a Navy exchange pilot Lt. F.E. Blackman. This was taken on the alert pad at Kimpo. (Dick Erratt).

wingman was gone. He probably took off after a MiG (he didn't get one that day). Anyhow, I cranked my neck around into positions the good lord never intended it to go and guess what?..... There was a MiG, slightly below me, and he had me dead in his sights! I guess he was within a second of firing at me, so I split-S'd, heading for the deck and pulled out about ten feet from the water. I thought I had forced him to back off, but when I looked again, he was right in behind me. The only thing I could do was honk it around in a hard left turn and just keep pouring the coal to her in hopes that the MiG pilot couldn't turn with me."

"Well, I found that little island below the mouth of the Yalu and man...talk about pulling some 'G's', I pulled so many that I thought my G-suit was going to pop! Anyway, we went around four times and I began to wonder whether I was going to make it out in one piece. About that time, someone yelled on the radio "Hey....Checkertail, he stalled out and hit the water....That was the end of the MiG! A fellow pilot saw the whole thing and confirmed the kill for me. Needless to say, there was some wild celebrating in the officer's club that night!"

Dueling with large numbers of MiG-15s was only one facet of the danger that F-86 pilots faced on a combat mission. First of all, they were operating far from their bases and with no aerial refueling; they had to keep one eye cocked on the fuel gauges to make sure they could make it back home. Many Sabres were lost to fuel starvation after fighting the good fight. There was also the chance that a MiG-15's deadly cannons would inflict serious damage and the return flight would become more hazardous than usual. Finally, there was always the possibility that some vital part of the Sabre would not perform up to expectations.

Lt. Sam Reeder, a pilot in the high scoring 335th Fighter Squadron, recalls one of those times when things didn't go right and he was definitely in the wrong place for it to happen. "One bright and sunny day, we arrived on station at about 45,000 feet, flying just south of the river. I was still having problems in keeping up with my squadron commander, who was flying lead. He was probably trying to bend the throttle over the full power indent. Suddenly, the fire went out and everything got quiet...FLAME OUT! Of course, everyone within 50 miles, both friend and foe, could see the white plume of vaporized fuel trailing behind me. I

(Text continued on page 39)



5. This was probably the most photographed Sabre in Korea because of its nose art. The pilot, Lt. James Thompson of the 39th Squadron, shot down a MiG-15 that had a Dragon painted down its fuselage. His crew chief, in turn, painted one similar on his F-86F. It was named "The Huff". (Robert Groszer).

6. The 334th Squadron had always been a part of the famous 4th Fighter Group, dating all the way back to their Spitfire days in World War II. The Group racked up the biggest kill total of any fighter outfit in World War II (1000+). This F-86E-5 was assigned to Lt. Drury Callahan of the 334th. It survived the war and would end up flying with the 35th Fighter Wing long after the war ended. (Drury Callahan).



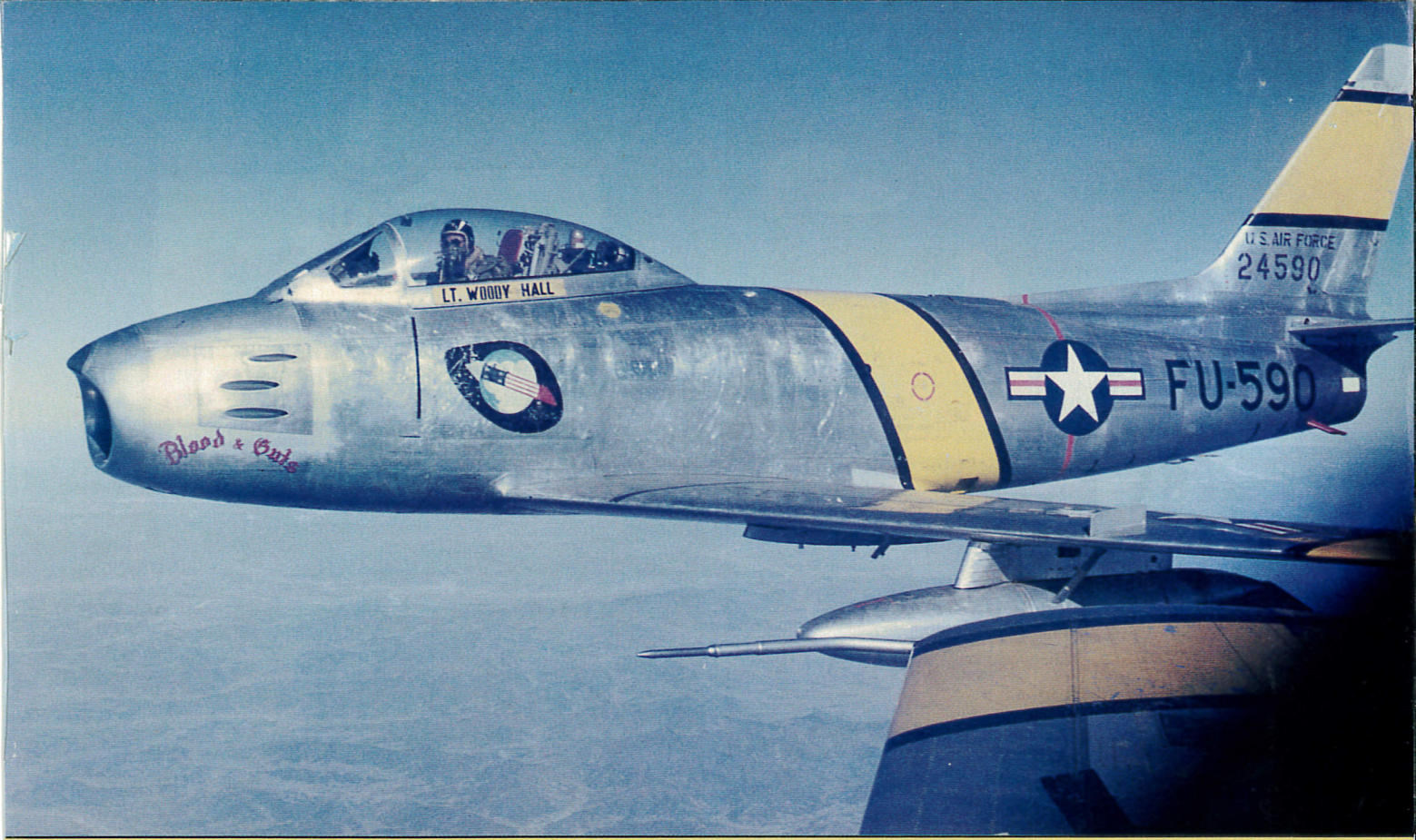
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Above: This unusual picture was taken over North Korea and the flight of 39th Squadron Sabres had finished their CAP and were forming up for the flight back to Suwon AB. The F-86F shown here was assigned to the squadron commander and jet ace, Lt. Colonel George Ruddell. (Kent Savage).

Below: One of the Korean War's highest scoring Sabres moves into tight formation for a photo session over South Korea. This was an "E" model originally assigned to Captain Cliff Jolley of the 335th Squadron who was credited with 7 confirmed kills. Later in the war, the aircraft was transferred over to the 336th Squadron as noted by the emblem painted on the fuselage. (Houston Tuel).





Below: Lt. Woodrow Hall, pulls in close to fellow 336th pilot, Lt. Robert Lund for a quick snapshot. This was taken in mid-summer of 1953 over Korea. The parent 4th Fighter Group would remain on South Korean soil for about sixteen months after the war ended. However, they would still remain in the Far East by settling at Misawa AB in Japan. (Robert Lund).

Below: The right element of a 335th flight are shown heading north for a combat air patrol (CAP) with external fuel tanks full and intact. The trailing Sabre #954 is an F-86F-10 which survived the war and went on to serve with the Chinese Nationalist Air Force on Taiwan. (Karl Dittmer).





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THIS MONTH		GRAND TOTAL	
KILLS	00★	KILLS	220★
PROBABLES	0★	PROBABLES	00★
DAMAGES	0★	DAMAGES	000★

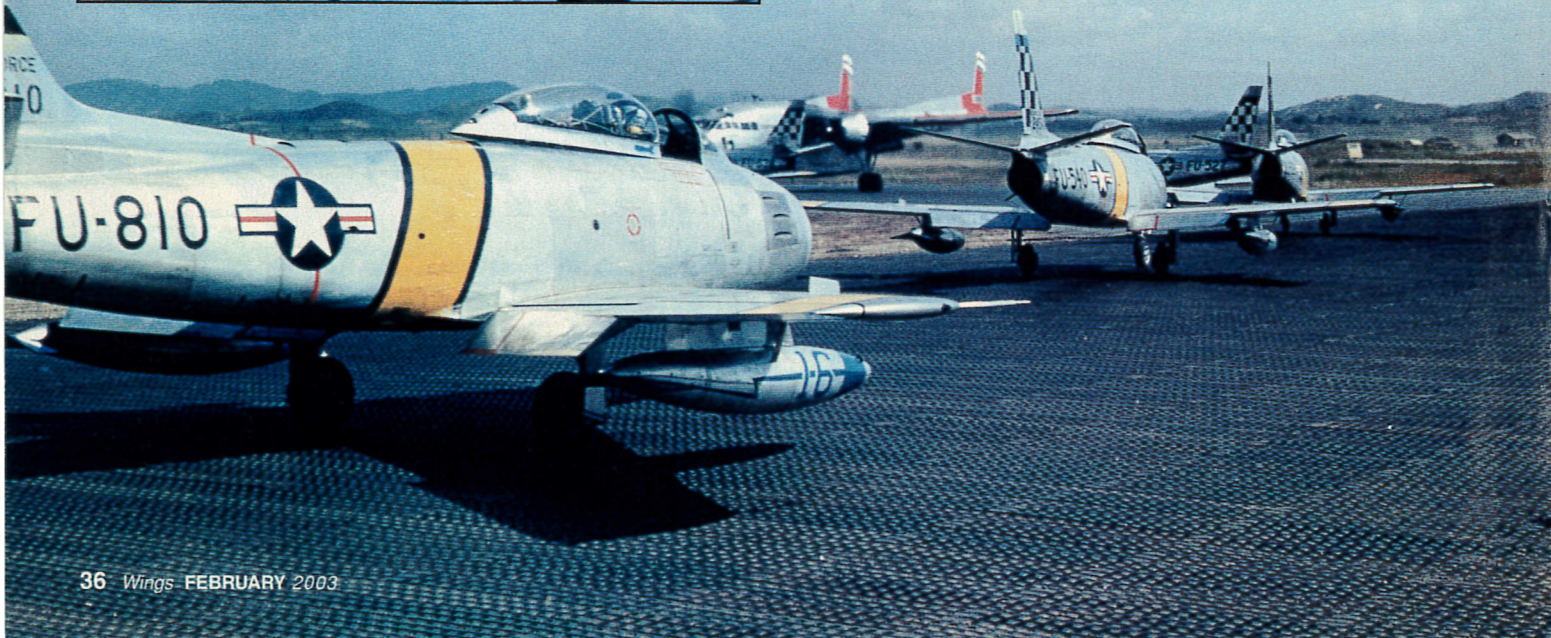
Lt. Col. VERMONT GARRISON C.O.



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Below: Waiting for their turn for takeoff, this flight of 16th Squadron Sabres are loaded and ready for action over MiG Alley. Note the C-119 that has turned on to the main runway and starting its takeoff roll. Suwon AB was always this busy during daylight hours, as it not only housed the 51st Fighter Wing and an F-94 Squadron, but also the 8th Fighter Bomber Wing that was in the process of trading in their F-80s for new F-86Fs. (Kent Savage).



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1. Three of the most experienced Sabre pilots in Korea are shown here. Left to right; 39th Squadron commander Lt. Col. George Ruddell (5 kills), Captain Joseph McConnell (16 kills) and Major Clyde Wade (1 kill). This was taken right before McConnell was sent home as the top ace of the war. (Larry Darst).

2. Lt. John Winters reads a book while pulling alert duty with the 25th Fighter Squadron. When the scramble order came, he could be airborne in just minutes to intercept any unidentified aircraft. Lt. Winters finished his combat tour with one MiG-15 kill on 12 July 1953, two weeks before the war ended. (Sam Young).

3. Sabre Ace, Major Vermont Garrison, straps in for another combat air patrol over MiG Alley in support of the fighter bombers. At this point he already had four kills. His victories were made between February 1953 and mid-July 1953. His fifth and sixth kills were made on 5 June '53. (Norman Green).

4. The highest scoring squadron in the Korean War was the 335th. You can tell by their scoreboard (Spring 1953) that they had an enviable record. This was taken in front of the squadron operations building at Kimpo AB. (Dick Keener).

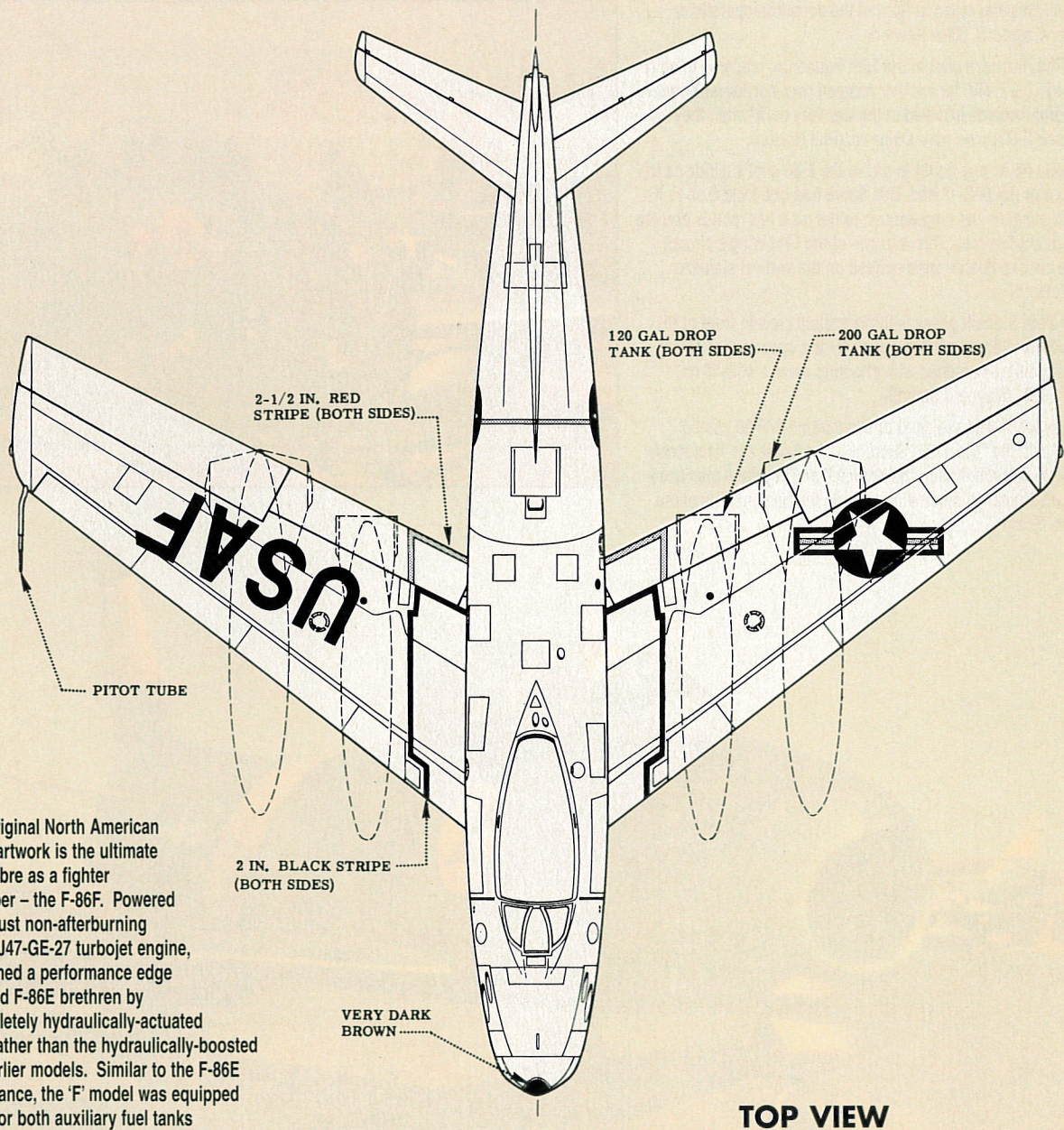
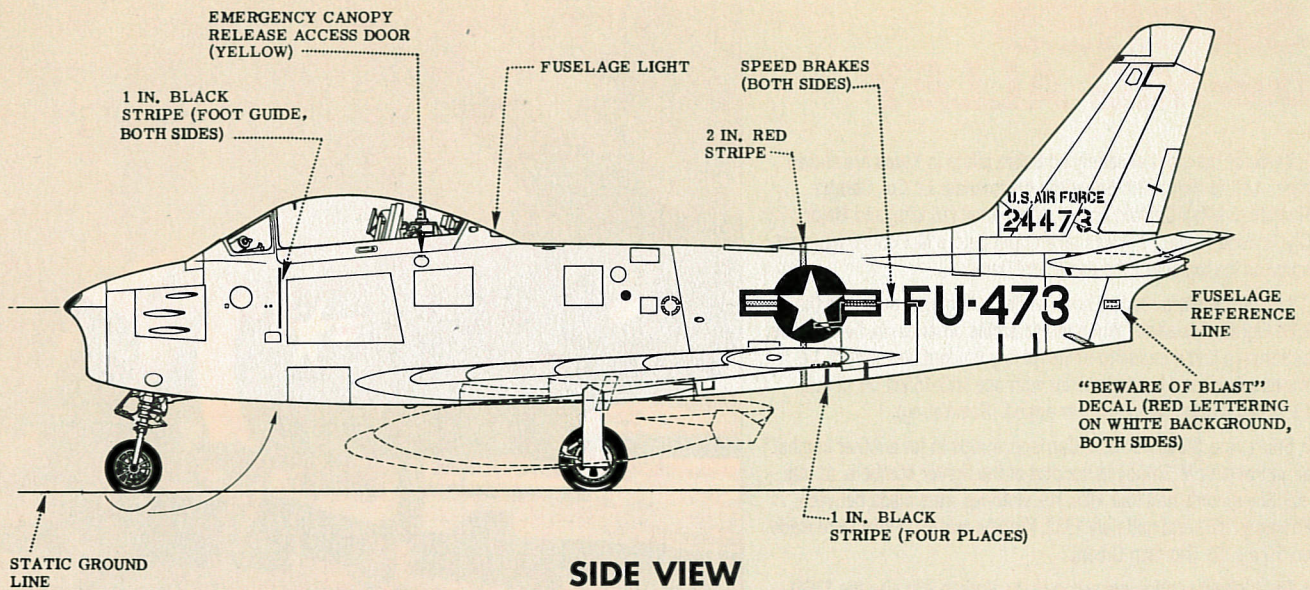
5. 1st Lt. Phil Norton, a pilot in the 25th Squadron, prepares to start the engine in his F-86E for another mission over northwest Korea. The squadron became involved in the war very early when they brought their F-80s over from Okinawa. (Phil Norton).

6. There was never any doubt in any of the F-86 pilot's minds as to what firepower the MiG-15 had. This Sabre had one locked on to its six o'clock position just long enough to get off a few rounds and the damage speaks for itself. This was one of the 51st Wing's aircraft before the checkerboards were painted on the vertical stabilizer. (George Jones).

7. Captain Pete Stogdill poses with his ground crew in front of his 334th Squadron Sabre as it is prepped for the upcoming mission. Captain Stogdill was credited with shooting down a MiG-15 on March 29, 1953. (Maynard Stogdill).

8. Lt. Edwin Scarff was assigned to this 334th F-86F-30 named "Jackie's Boy". The "Block-30" Sabre was the latest and final model of the F-86 to be brought into the Korean War. They were also used to equip two Fighter Bomber Wings during the final months of the war. (Edwin Scarff).





Shown here in original North American Aviation factory artwork is the ultimate version of the Sabre as a fighter and fighter-bomber – the F-86F. Powered by a 6,000-lb.-thrust non-afterburning General Electric J47-GE-27 turbojet engine, the 'F' model gained a performance edge over its F-86A and F-86E brethren by featuring a completely hydraulically-actuated control system rather than the hydraulically-boosted system of the earlier models. Similar to the F-86E in overall appearance, the 'F' model was equipped with provisions for both auxiliary fuel tanks and external stores to allow the aircraft to operate in the fighter bomber role.

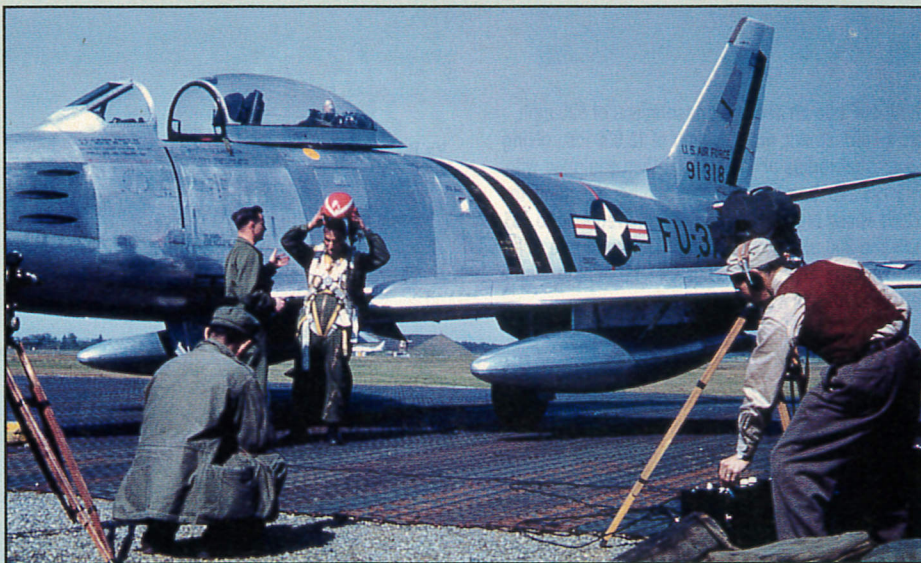
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announced my situation and headed for the China Sea, which our Navy controlled, and in the worst case, where I would have a chance for an Air-Sea rescue. My flight, and probably at least one other began weaving above me to provide cover. I don't recall any evidence of MiGs in the area, but it was comforting to have lots of help!"

"The drill, of course, is an air start. The F-86 had a wonderful array of emergency systems, which was one of the reasons that it was heavier than the MiG. The air start procedure should not be initiated above 18,000 feet, as I recall, so I had this long quiet 180 knot glide to the southwest, with my canopy icing up so I could only look straight ahead through the armor plated windscreen. The procedure was "air-fire-fuel". You can drain the tail pipe by pulling the nose up a bit and then establish enough air flow thru the engine to get up to about 18 percent rpm. Emergency ignition switch goes on, and then with the emergency fuel pump on, you open the throttle..... Whumpff....it started the first time. The canopy cleared and we all flew home. It could have developed into something far worse! As an epilog, they did not do anything to the aircraft until the same thing happened to a Lt. Colonel a couple of weeks later. Then....they decided a little work on the engine back in Japan, might be necessary."

The MiG-15 was probably brought into the Korean Theatre of Operations by the Soviets in an effort to stop the B-29 bombers and the large number of fighter bombers that were leveling all of North Korea's war-making potential. Just about all of Russia's interceptor aircraft that were designed and produced during the Cold War period had one purpose - to intercept



Above: The first jet ace in history was Captain James Jabara. It created a media sensation comparable to anything that happened in the war. This was taken back at Johnson AB Japan a day or so after he had made his 5th and 6th kills. The Air Force generated these shots for publicity back in the states. (Ed Fletcher).

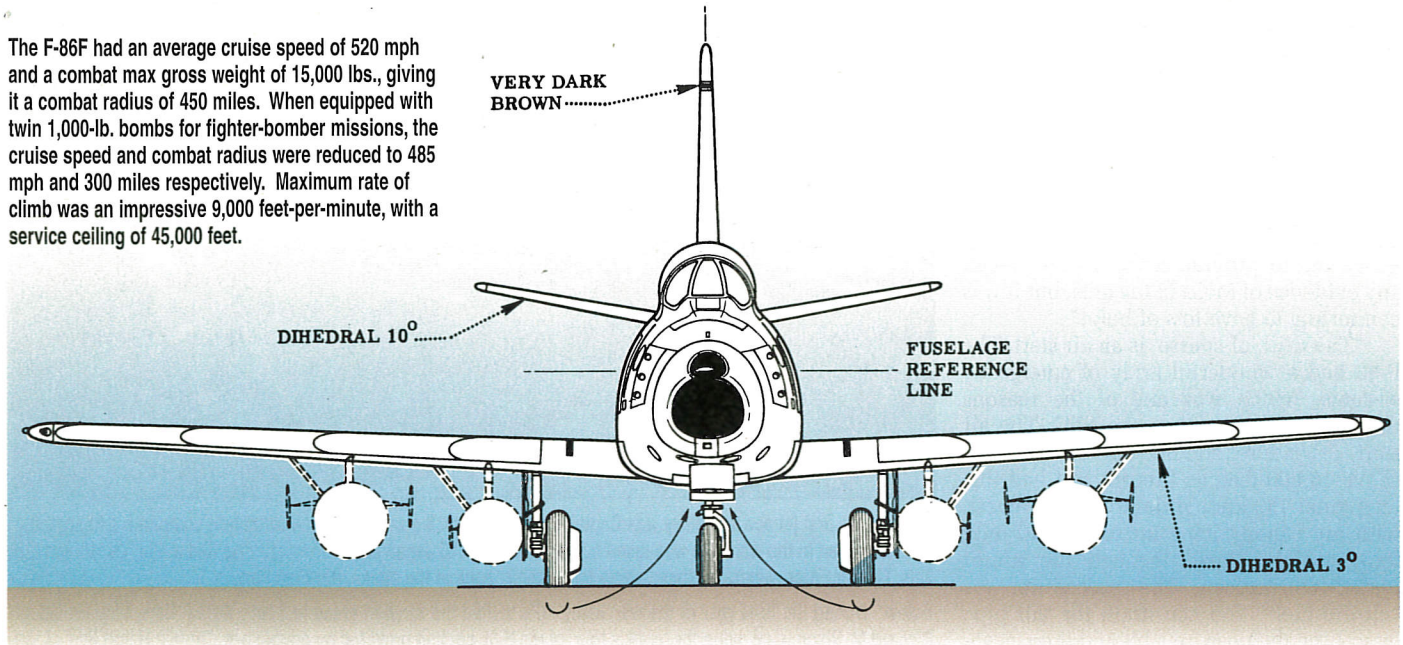
Below: During the final year of the war, many VIPs visited the forward areas in South Korea. Here, Vice President Richard M. Nixon is enjoying the 'cook's tour' of the F-86 cockpit provided by double ace Captain Ralph Parr of the 334th Fighter Squadron. This was taken on the flight line at Kimpo AB. (Don Showen).



Below: Captain Manuel Fernandez became the 26th jet ace of the war. He continued his tour and finished as one of the top MiG killers of the war with 14.5 kills. His first kill was confirmed on 4 October 1952 and his final one was made on 10 May 1953. This picture was taken after his 10th kill 21 March 1953 and it was significant in that he had earned his 9th and 10th on the same mission. (Jimmie Pierce).



The F-86F had an average cruise speed of 520 mph and a combat max gross weight of 15,000 lbs., giving it a combat radius of 450 miles. When equipped with twin 1,000-lb. bombs for fighter-bomber missions, the cruise speed and combat radius were reduced to 485 mph and 300 miles respectively. Maximum rate of climb was an impressive 9,000 feet-per-minute, with a service ceiling of 45,000 feet.



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Below: "Wyoming Thunder" was a well known F-86E assigned to Major Elmer W. Harris of the 25th Squadron. The port .50 caliber guns are easily seen in this picture. Unfortunately this aircraft did not survive the war as it was lost in mid-November 1952. (Donald Porter).

and destroy high altitude bombers that were a threat to their airspace. They were not focused on moving into another country and taking on large numbers of hostile fighters in high-speed, low-altitude aerial battles. Of course, they were forced into this situation in order to get at their bomb-carrying adversaries.

Later in the war, many of the sharp-shooting Sabre pilots provided some input into what they thought about the MiG-15. Most agreed that its biggest deficiency was probably the lack of an effective fire-control system and its outstanding overall flying performance was somewhat hampered by this. It packed three deadly cannon (two 23mm and one 37mm) which were very effective against the slower and bigger bombers, but when it came to the high 'G', twisting and turning dogfights, it needed guns that would fire a large number of rounds in a very short period of time. On the other hand, the F-86 was equipped with six .50-caliber machine guns that could deliver this, but they didn't have the knock-down power that a MiG's cannon had. The pilots unanimously stated that if they had rapid firing cannon, they would be able to score more kills. This input led to a top secret project known as GUN-VAL, later in the war, which put a few F-86Fs equipped with four 20mm cannon, over North Korea for testing. The test was carried out by a few designated pilots that flew out of Kimpo AB in Sabres that carried 4th Group markings. It was successful and led to the use of cannon in future fighter aircraft types.

As the warmer weather began to creep in during the early spring of 1953, the pilots of both interceptor wings were already red hot. The rosters of all six squadrons were jammed with



pilots, eager to fly and fight. The final statistics for the month of May showed that the U.S. lost a total of twelve Sabres, but most of these were due to ground-fire (against the new fighter bomber Sabres) or other causes that were not attributed to the MiG-15. Of the 1500+ MiGs sighted during that month by F-86 pilots, over 530 were actually engaged, which resulted in close to 60 confirmed kills. However, there were several experienced Sabre pilots that were shot down by MiGs during the final few months of the war. Some were rescued and a

few ended up as POWs. This list included double ace Captain Harold Fischer who was a POW until long after the war ended.

Anytime two large formations of jets started mixing it up at high altitudes, the situation could get crazy in a matter of seconds. A few of the American pilots that got shot down were in close proximity to their squadron mates but didn't remember seeing their wingman close by. With all of the pilots involved in individual dogfights, some lost wingmen and yet didn't see what happened because of their own distractions. This was the way it was on both sides and unless you've been there, it is very difficult to visualize such a situation. Lt. Lee Brewer, one of the 335th pilots recalls what he witnessed when a Sabre went down, and how he found out the details years later.

"On one of those big MiG sweeps, we ran into a lot of them and the formation broke down quickly into numerous individual fights. Suddenly, I found myself all alone, with no one in sight! With this being the case, I headed out over the Yellow Sea which was a safer area than over MiG Alley. I was making "S" turns



This group of experienced 16th Squadron pilots pose beside Lt. Lewis Sykes's F-86 at Suwon AB. Note that they are outfitted in their new "Poopy Suits" that would protect them in case they had to bail out over water during the bitter cold winter months. These saved quite a few pilots from freezing to death before they could be rescued. (Allen Enslin).

in order to keep my tail and underside clear, when I spotted a MiG on the left, paralleling my course. I immediately turned into him and he did the same thing to me, beginning a scissors maneuver. As we were to cross almost on a collision course, I fired a snapshot and hit his left wingtip. When I reversed, he had pulled up and away."

"I continued on my way and seconds later I spotted an aircraft up ahead and low, trailing smoke. It was an F-86 from the 51st Wing slowly descending (identified by its checker tail paint scheme on the vertical stabilizer). I slowed down to see what was happening, all the time glancing back at my six o'clock position. At that time, I saw a MiG maneuvering at slow speed at my four o'clock. I turned into him and accelerated, reversing as he passed. I expected to see the MiG finish off the stricken Sabre, but he slid right on by and climbed away. Looking back at the F-86 again, I saw a parachute below it and off to the side. I circled once, watching my six while I radioed "homeplate" and gave them the grid coordinates of the bailout. Fuel was getting low, so I headed for Kimp'o. A rescue cap was scrambled, but they found nothing."

"After the war ended and the POWs were returned, I was based at Nellis AFB. It was here that I met the pilot that I had seen in the chute. He told me that he never saw me or the MiG because he was too busy trying to get out of his smoke filled Sabre cockpit. His canopy would not blow off, his ejection seat would not fire nor would the canopy open manually. He was trapped. He got out by firing his .45 caliber pistol through the canopy, making a hole big enough to exit. After getting out, he ran in a westerly direction for two days, but was eventually captured. He was very lucky to have made it out alive."

FEAF records state that there were 78 MiG-15's shot down in June 1953 followed by 34 during the final month of the war. The sharp drop for July showed that not as many MiGs were up as had been in the past and this was probably due to the fact they knew the war was going to be over soon and it would prove nothing to lose more aircraft. All efforts to get enough supplies to the Chinese ground forces for a sustained offensive had failed and now it was a matter of holding on to the territory

they already controlled. The new F-86Fs were now the dominant model in the Air Force inventory and they impressively ruled the skies over northwest Korea.

The 8th and 18th Fighter Bomber Wings, operating the older F-80 and F-51 respectively, were ready to convert over to the new F-86F-30, which was the new fighter bomber version of the Sabre, in early 1953. These pilots not only had to be proficient in bombing, but were also required to learn the air-to-air role as well. Their accomplishments during the final three months of the war were outstanding. Although June 1953 proved to be the record month for MiG kills, it was also a bad month for the Sabre. Twenty seven F-86s were lost to different causes with the fighter bomber version again suffering the heaviest losses. They were having to go up against some of the most sophisticated Triple-A that had ever been faced in the war. Eighteen of the losses were aircraft assigned to the 8th and 18th Wings.

The Korean War, often referred to as "The Forgotten War", set the tone for the remainder of the Cold War. It stopped the spread of Communism and it served to graduate hundreds of career fighter pilots that would put their knowledge and experience to good use, teaching future generations of Air Force, Marine and Navy pilots. A significant percentage of Sabre pilots who flew combat in 1951 had no previous combat experience.

However, USAF records state that eleven of the initial 4th Wing aces had experience in World War II. Some of the new pilots actually fired their Sabre's guns for the first time in combat.

Most of the young fighter pilots who got their start during the Korean War went on to fly much more sophisticated aircraft such as the North American F-100 Super Sabre, the Republic F-105 Thunderchief, and McDonnell's F-4 Phantom. When asked what aircraft was their favorite to fly, however, the answer seemed to be unanimous in favor of America's first true Air Superiority Fighter - the ol' F-86 Sabre. 🍀

NORTH AMERICAN F-86 SABRE: KOREAN WAR COMBAT STATISTICS

Total Sorties Flown.....	87,177
Sabres Lost in Combat.....	110
Total Number of MiG-15's destroyed	792
Other Enemy A/C Types Destroyed	18
Total Number of Enemy Aircraft Destroyed in the Air.....	810
Sabre Pilots KIA or MIA	102
Total Average Number of F-86's Involved in the War	185