

Fighters Ove



The Korean War saw the end of the propeller-driven fighter era overlap with the early days of the jet age.

r Korea

Photos via Warren E. Thompson
Text by June Lee

Robert Hook photo



During the Korean War, F-86Fs fly south of the 38th parallel, back to Osan AB, South Korea. Their drop tanks are still attached, meaning they had not run into aerial opposition.

On June 25, 1950, North Korean forces swept past the 38th parallel and invaded South Korea. While North Korea had the backing of China and the Soviet Union, South Korea had the assistance of the United States and the United Nations. Spanning a little more than three years, the Korean War ended in an armistice. The war ushered in an era of new swept-wing jets while phasing out propeller-driven fighters from World War II. **11** Crewmen change a tire—chewed up by rough airstrips—on an F-51 Mustang at Chinhae Air Base. When it came to finding good landing strips, it didn't help that Korea is a largely mountainous country. **12** A Mustang with the 67th Fighter-Bomber Squadron flies over North Korea in 1951, ready to drop napalm. **13** Capt. Daniel James Jr. of the 12th Fighter-Bomber Squadron at Taegu Air Base poses in front of his Mustang. "Chappie" James flew more than 100 combat missions in Korea. He went on to serve in Vietnam and in 1975 became the first black four-star general in the US military.



1 Tom Shockley photo



2 Ed Mason photo



3 Ed Nebinger photo



Don Miller photo

1



Mario Prevosti photo

2



Doug Ramsel photo

3



Phil Hunt photo

4

11 Airmen inspect Lt. Ed Jones' Red Raider, from the 36th FBS, after it was struck by anti-aircraft fire. Note the holes in the rear fuselage. *12* Pilot 1st Lt. Mario Prevosti poses with his aircraft's "Flying Tiger"-style nose art and a young South Korean at Chinhae Air Base in 1951. *13* The Mustangs of the 39th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron had blue and white spinners, giving them the nickname "The Blinker Nose Squadron." Note the unpainted napalm tanks. *14* Capt. Cecil Foster taxis back to the 16th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron parking area after shooting down his fifth MiG. Foster racked up nine aerial victories in the Korean War.

11 Lt. Emmett Taylor (r) of the 45th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron receives congratulations for completing his 100th mission in June 1951. Taylor flew Mustangs throughout his tour. **12** Lt. Col. Bruce Hinton (l), 336th FIS commander, discusses tactics for an upcoming mission from Suwon. He scored the first MiG-15 kill for the F-86 on Dec. 17, 1950. **13** Under the Bout One project, USAF provided used F-51 Mustangs and instructor pilots to South Korea's Air Force, which had no combat ready aircraft. This F-51 was at Taegu Air Base in July 1950. The fuselage is painted with South Korea's Air Force emblem. **14** F-86 Sabre pilots wait out alert duty with a card game at Kimpo Air Base. **15** Mustangs prepare for a low-level napalm drop against Chinese troops along a mountain ridge.



1 Fred Jones photo



Wayne Jackson photo

5



2 John Henderson photo



Richard Erratt photo

4



3 Duane Biteman photo



Larry Darst photo **1**

11 Lt. Col. George Ruddell (l) and Maj. Clyde Wade (r) congratulate Capt. Joseph McConnell Jr. on a successful mission. He would become the war's highest-scoring ace, with 16 MiG kills. All three pilots were with the 39th FIS. *12* Pilots of the 40th FIS at Pohang Air Base enjoy some downtime before their next mission. *13* Time for a quick snooze in the cockpit while the crew chief does the same below. *14* Lt. Jim Isbell stands in front of his RF-51 Mustang before taking off for a mission. Isbell was assigned to the 45th TRS, nicknamed the "Polka Dots."



Doug Canning photo **2**



Richard Erratt photo **3**



4 Stan Newman photo

1 | Maintainers change the engine of an F-86A Sabre at Kimpo in late spring 1951. The F-86 became an iconic aircraft of the Korean War as it went up against the new Soviet MiG-15s. The MiGs had a better climb and turn rate and higher ceiling, but the skills of US pilots prevailed. **2** | This F-86 was destroyed by Polikarpov Po-2s at Suwon Air Base. The Po-2, often flown as the infamous “Bed Check Charlie,” would come in below radar and attack air bases late at night with small bombs. These attacks were more annoying than harmful, yet some caused serious damage. **3** | Lt. Bruno Giordano of the 334th FIS at Kimpo sits in the cockpit of an F-86. Behind him are sandbag revetments, which helped protect aircraft from shell fragments. **4** | The rear fuselage of Lt. Col. Glenn Eagleston’s F-86A after a MiG caught up with him over MiG Alley. Eagleston—who had been one of the top aces of World War II—managed to land safely at Suwon, but the aircraft was a total loss.





Les Sundt photo

1



John Henderson photo

2



George Banasky photo

3



Earl Shutt photo

4

111 Pilots of the 36th FBS pose in front of the F-86F Rosalie at Suwon in 1953. 121 F-86s hidden under camouflage netting. Sabres based at Kimpo and Suwon made those sites a hot target. 131 Crew chief Sgt. George Banasky (r) smiles for the camera with a fellow airman in front of an F-86. The tail colors of this aircraft represent the 18th Fighter-Bomber Wing. 141 Ruddell, commanding officer of the 39th FIS, is seated in his F-86 MiG Mad Mavis. He would have seven more red stars painted on his F-86 before the armistice in July 1953. The armistice stopped the fighting, but the Korean War technically never ended, and USAF airmen and fighters remain in South Korea to this day. ■