



My Favorite Sabre Story by Lon Walter

Sabre Jet Classics

Volume 1 Number 2

Summer 1992



The feature publication of the Sabre Jet Historical Society

**Meet Dick Becker, Korea's Second Jet Ace • Photo Album
The History Of The F-86E • Our Goals And Objectives
The First Sabre Versus MiG-15 Combat • And Much More!**



A Maryland Air Guard F-86E

12 PAGES!

Photo Credit: Courtesy of the Maryland Air National Guard via Jess Mitchell

Flight Lines



Two District of Columbia Air National Guard F-86A Sabres prepare for start up at summer camp at Otis Air National Guard Base in 1954. Photo courtesy of Joe Radoci

Our Goals And Objectives

Welcome back for the second edition of *Sabre Jet Classics*. We hope you will be pleased with this expanded issue. We pushed our budget this quarter to squeeze out a twelve-page issue for several reasons. First, it is difficult to write and assemble the "smaller" eight-page issues: articles are trimmed too much to make them fit, there are not enough photographs included to properly highlight the stories, and there is not enough space in each issue for a "balance" of topics. In short, an eight-page issue is too confined to do the job well. Second, this twelve-page issue will show you what we wish every issue of *Sabre Jet Classics* could be: *more like a magazine*, and less like a newsletter. As you have noticed, we always use a magazine-styled format. Our goal is to see enough members join the *Sabre Society* so that each issue of *Sabre Jet Classics* will be at least 16 to 20 pages long; in short, a magazine, and no longer thought of as a newsletter. Can that be done? Of course! But how? By *increasing our membership*. If other fighter aircraft organizations that are open to anyone with an interest in the subject

aircraft (we have the same criteria) can have 1,500 to 2,000 members at higher annual dues and publish a quarterly 16-page newsletter, then why can't we do as well, or *better*? The solution? *Tell your friends* who flew, maintained or just plain loved the F-86 about *joining* us. It is that simple. Greater membership will give us the ability to publish improved and expanded issues of *Sabre Jet Classics*. By now, you have seen what the *Sabre Society* is capable of. There is no reason why we cannot do more with *Sabre Jet Classics*, and do it *better* than anyone else's warplane historical group. The interest is *here* with the *Sabre Society* to expand, and the people associated with the Sabre are out *there* to be located and asked to consider joining us. Together we can build *Sabre Jet Classics* into a showcase for the F-86 and the people associated with the Sabre. Let it be known that the F-86 is *not* a forgotten fighter from a forgotten war. Our continuing membership growth will confirm that point.

Thank you for your continued interest in the *Sabre Society*. We welcome your ideas and suggestions. Please stay with us. The best is yet to come!

SUPPORT SERVICES

- Help in answering questions or problems is always available for free provided a stamped return envelope is included with your request.
- Back issues of *Sabre Jet Classics* are available while they last at \$3.00 each which includes shipping charges.
- If you receive any form of reminder letter from the Society, you are **urged** to follow up promptly in answering the request, which is only to ask for additional information. Remember, incomplete or

inaccurate information hurts **everyone** in the Society. *Please don't put off a request!*

- *Sabre Jet Classics* welcomes Sabre-related photographs and articles. All pictures will be taken care of and **returned after use**. If needed, we will work with you to polish your article and publish it. You will be credited in our magazine for your photos or articles, however, because we are an all-volunteer organization, there is no monetary reimbursement for submitted materials.

Sabre Jet Classics

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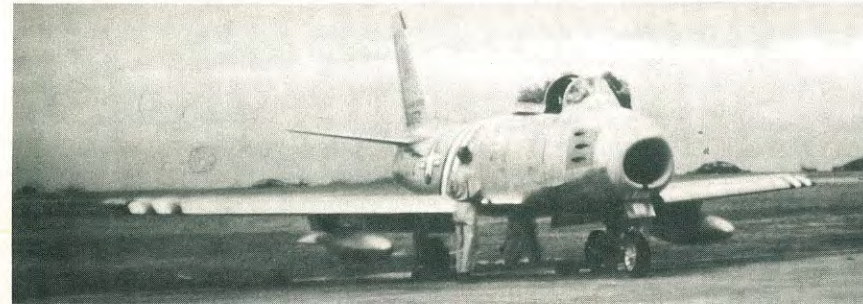
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Photo Album



Would you like to have your personal Sabre photos published in a future issue of *Sabre Jet Classics*? You bet! Let us know what you have to loan for our consideration for a future issue.

This issue we are pleased to present several of John Henderson's excellent 35mm pictures from his private collection. John was a North American Aviation factory representative assigned by contract to the Fourth Fighter Group in Korea and worked for the Group Maintenance Officer in 1950 and 1951 while the Fourth was based at Kimpo and later Suwon. Several of John's other pictures appear throughout this issue of *Sabre Jet Classics*. Our sincere thanks to John Henderson for his assistance.



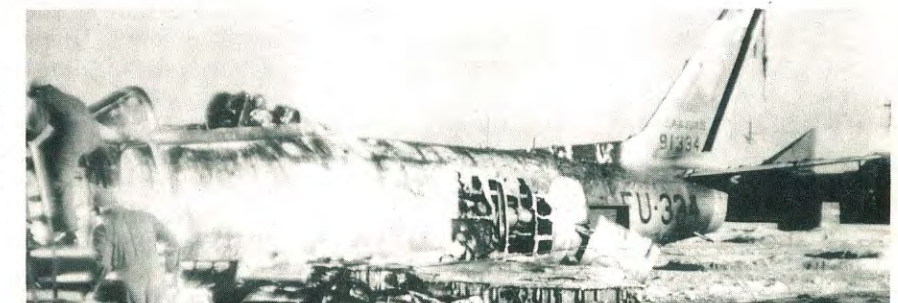
Dave Waters, a North American Aviation team mechanic, inspects a 4th FG F-86A-5 at Suwon in 1951.



Captain Don Stuck, the 336th's Maintenance Officer; Lieutenant Colonel Bruce Hinton, the Commanding Officer of the 336th; and John Henderson, North American Aviation factory representative, as seen in 1951.



After four months of leaving their Sabres in the open, the Fourth finally used camouflage netting to cover their F-86s and make them less vulnerable while on the ground.



On June 14, 1951, "Bedcheck Charlie" scored a victory with his third bomb and destroyed "334" on the ground at Suwon. Several other Sabres were damaged, requiring sheet metal repair and canopy changes.



A hot start on a 4th FG F-86A-5. Major Billy Hovde aborted his start, but then restarted too quickly. The result was a fire blast out the tail section. Fortunately, no injury or damage resulted.



Photo courtesy of Dick Becker

Meet Dick Becker,



The first week at Kimpo where twice it snowed heavily on the Fourth's Sabres.

Photo courtesy of John Henderson

Korea's Second Jet Ace

On September 9, 1951, an estimated 70 MiG-15s attacked 22 F-86As from the Fourth Fighter Group's 334th and 335th Fighter Squadrons, but the Fourth prevailed. During these engagements, Captains Richard S. Becker of the 334th and Ralph D. "Hoot" Gibson of the 335th both achieved their fifth and final MiG kills to become the second and third jet aces of the Korean War, behind Captain James Jabara who had become the first American jet ace on May 20, 1951. (Jabara later died in an automobile accident in 1966.)

Sabre Jet Classics interviewed Dick Becker about his F-86 experiences, both in the United States as well as Korea. Here we present his complete interview describing what it was like to fly the early Sabres stateside as well as during the initial days of the Korean War when the Sabres were often greatly outnumbered in combat...

Q: When did you receive your wings and what was your first assignment?

A: I graduated from flying school in February 1949. I was assigned to the 334th Fighter Squadron, an Eagle Squadron, at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland where I flew the F-80 Shooting Star.

Q: How many hours did you fly the F-80?

A: About 150 to 200.

Q: Did you transition into the F-86 soon after that?

A: Yes. All three squadrons of the 4th Fighter Group moved to Langley Air Force Base in Virginia in summer 1949. We immediately received the F-86A. I flew to the factory in Los Angeles and picked up three.

Q: Was it difficult to transition into the Sabre?

A: Not at all.

Q: What training did you receive to transition into the Sabre?

A: To go from the F-80 to the F-86, I flew to North American, and George Welch checked me out in the Sabre. I read the pilot's handbook, got in the airplane, made one familiarization flight locally and then flew to Langley Field.

Q: You immediately did a cross-country trip in a new Sabre?

A: Absolutely! I signed for it, and another pilot and I came back together. He did the same thing. He had not checked out in the Sabre, either. We both took one local flight and flew back to Langley in formation. We did not have drop-tanks. We skipped across the country with each leg of 450 miles.

Q: When the war broke out, when did your squadron's situation change from peace-time to preparing for Korea?

A: In July or August 1950, one squadron went to Andrews, one was transferred to New Castle County Airport, Delaware, and the last went to Dover, Delaware. I went to New Castle County with the 334th Squadron. One day in the middle of November 1950, a general

visited our base. He came from the Pentagon to look the outfit over. I have no idea who he was. He talked to the 4th Fighter Group and the 4th Fighter Wing commanders who were also at New Castle. We were called together that evening. We were told to report to North Island in San Diego, California in 72 hours to board an aircraft carrier for Japan. The other squadrons were given the same instructions. We flew 75 F-86s west. The Navy had a small aircraft carrier waiting called the *Cape Esperance*. We arrived at North Island 72 hours later. We did not board the carrier immediately. It had been on a shake-down cruise and broke down. We had a five to ten day delay before starting for Japan. We were caught in a typhoon. It was a 15 day trip. We had aircraft below deck and the flight deck was completely filled. We docked at Yokohama, Japan, and our aircraft were barged to Kisarazu to be cleaned and flown to Johnson Air Base. We then took a composite outfit to Korea consisting of 32 airplanes with pilots from each outfit. I was in Jim Jabara's flight. We and Lieutenant Colonel Eagleston were the only ones from the 334th. There were people from the 335th, the 336th and some Wing and Group personnel. We went to Kimpo Air Base south of Seoul. We soon flew our first combat. Our mission was to engage the MiG-15. We did not have any other assignment such as air-to-ground. We engaged the MiG-15, weather permitting

every day, and generally at our convenience. Our missions were planned by our group commander, John C. Meyer, who was quite a Second World War ace. My squadron commander was a great World War Two ace named Glenn Eagleston. This was in early December. We flew combat from Kimpo until the Chinese communists overran the air base in early January 1951. Then we returned to Japan.

Q: What intelligence was available on the MiG-15?

A: Our group went because we had the Sabre about as long as any other outfit, and we were probably the best trained United States Air Force group. Four or five weeks before, MiG-15s had engaged several F-51s and F-80s. The Air Force found that the combat capability of those aircraft was inferior. That is why they sent the F-86 as soon as possible. As far as intelligence, we knew very little about the MiG-15. What we learned was developed as we started air-to-air combat. Originally our tactics were similar to those used in the Second World War, but we made changes as we fought. Our first pilot to shoot down a MiG-15 was the squadron commander of the 336th, Lieutenant Colonel Bruce Hinton.

Q: Were the early flying tactics used by the F-86s similar to those flown by the F-80 to entice the MiGs to attack?

A: We never had more than 16 aircraft in the air at one time in the beginning. We were outnumbered five to one in a fight, and sometimes as high as ten to one. It was not unusual for a flight of four Sabres to take on 30 to 40 MiGs.

Q: So there was no need to lure the MiG-15s into combat?

A: Not at all. The minute we flew near the Yalu River, they came over from Antung, China.

Q: Please describe your first victory?

A: The first victory I claimed, which was not a victory because it was listed as a "probable" kill, was when I flew on Jim Jabara's wing. He later became our first jet ace. We took on at least 20 enemy aircraft. He took ten and they split, and I took the other ten. After a tremendous battle, we were separated. Neither had a wingman. I hit one of the MiGs between 800 to 1,400 feet. I had him burning in a flat spin. He went through an overcast sky estimated at 4,000 feet to 5,000 feet. Eight other pilots were coming to help and saw that MiG going down. I wrote the intelligence report that went to Fifth Air Force headquarters, but it was returned as a "probable" because we did not see the MiG hit the ground! There was no question he was gone. That was my first kill which ended as a "probable". I remember my third and fourth. I got two in one mission in August 1951. I had a flight of four. There were eight MiGs. We climbed behind them when they did not see us. We got within 1,200 feet before they turned. I closed to 500 feet and hit the leader. He immediately snapped to the right and bailed out. His wingman turned straight and level. He was no problem. I hit him hard, and he blew up in my face. I remember my second victory. That happened in April or May 1951. I started at 47,000 feet and fought with him for at least ten minutes. We ended on the deck flying between

the mountains. I finally hit him, and he crashed into a mountain within a mile of the Yalu River. For my last victory on September 9, 1951, I had a flight of four. We broke into two groups while engaging at least 40 aircraft. My element leader and I split the MiGs to eight aircraft ahead of me. They finally broke. One section turned left and the other right. I told my element leader to take those on the right while I took the ones on the left. We picked the last MiG and quickly closed on him. From then on, I had a horrible time returning to base because they were all over us. While I was in Korea from December 1950 until September 1951, we did not have a kill ratio of 14 to 1. That occurred later. When I was there, the communists had their absolutely best pilots flying. I believe they had mostly Russian pilots.

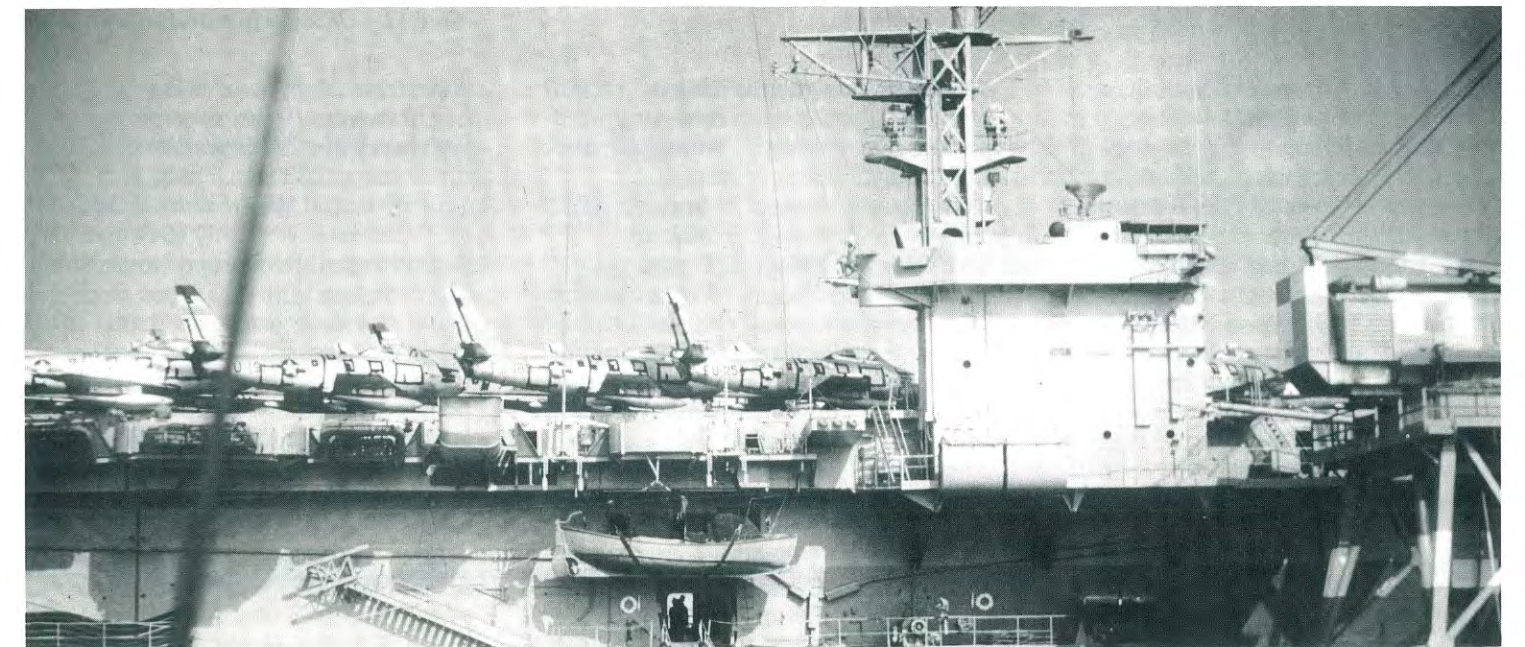
Q: What were the most difficult problems you encountered in combat?

A: We were constantly outnumbered. We never had all three squadrons in Korea at once during our first six months. We always kept at least one and sometimes two squadrons at Johnson Air Base in Japan. But we always had at least 24 Sabres in Korea. Probably by September or October 1951 we had all three squadrons there, but I am fairly certain we never had over 50 flyable aircraft.

Q: When you flew on a mission, did you feel overwhelmed by the opposition, or were you confident you would be successful?

A: The ultimate goal of a fighter pilot is combat. After our first four or five missions, combat became like a boxing

The U.S.S. *Cape Esperance* in November 1950 before leaving port at the North Island Naval Air Station near San Diego. The Fourth's Sabres were not yet coated with protective grease to prevent saltwater corrosion in this picture. Photo courtesy of John Henderson



match. It was either him or me while protecting my wingman, but it was a fight to the death. It was also a short fight. Sometimes during an entire day of combat, a dogfight may last only four to eight minutes, but it was so violent that we were exhausted when we landed.

Q: How may combat missions did you fly in Korea?

A: I flew 82. We had weather problems or waited for other pilots who were flying. After I got my fifth MiG, I was sent home. There was another pilot in the 335th named Ralph "Hoot" Gibson who got his fifth MiG that same day. Within an hour after we landed, we received telegrams from the Secretary of the Air Force stating we were returning to the United States. We did not have a choice. I guess the Air Force figured we were more valuable to the enemy if we were shot down. We were fighting over enemy territory the entire time. That is also what happened to Jim Jabara as well as our fourth jet ace, Dick Creighton.

Q: Did you feel when you went into combat against much higher odds that your training and equipment were adequate for the mission?

A: I had total confidence in the F-86. It took anything the pilot could handle. We could not tear it apart no matter how we flew it, unless we hit the ground! My training was excellent with absolutely the best people in the 334th Squadron. My group commander, squadron commanders, flight commanders and operations officers were the best pilots in the Air Force. I had absolute, total confidence. When I became a flight commander, the pilots in my flight were excellent. When we went to Korea, and this is important to say, we were exceptionally good. Of course, this is something all fighter pilots do: boast about how great they are, and I think as we get older, we get better! But I can honestly say every pilot I flew with, especially in my squadron, was exceptional, although some were not as aggressive as others.

Q: What did you think of the MiG-15?

A: It was an excellent aircraft, but it had disadvantages. It had better firepower with a 37mm cannon and two 23mm cannons. It had a better rate of zoom. It turned better than we did, but we outdove it. Our speeds were about the same. The biggest problem was that we were outnumbered so greatly. When we split up, we had to watch our tail. Without knowing it, someone was on us.

Q: Did it take prolonged firing with your six .50 calibre machine guns to knock a MiG-15 down?

A: Not if we got close. I remember one MiG I shot down when I was within 300

feet with all six .50 calibre guns firing down his tailpipe, and in a short time, he blew up. It did not take a long burst. If we fired from 1,500 feet with a deflection shot, we had a problem. I never found the six .50s to be a problem. Some time after I left, they experimented with four 20mm cannons in several Sabres for a short period, but returned to the six .50s.

Q: Were the six .50 calibre machine guns effective?

A: They were all we had! If we wanted 20mm cannons, however, there was only room for four.

Q: Were you ever hit by cannon fire from a MiG?

A: No. I did get quite a few pieces of a

Tucson, the Midwest or over the Rockies. It was desolate. We saw the MiG air base at Antung across the Yalu River. Our fights went anywhere from 48,000 feet down to a hundred feet.

Q: Did the MiGs use their better rate of climb to leave when they knew they could not win?

A: Yes. They then popped straight across the Yalu River, and we had orders not to follow.

Q: Did your squadron support raids on dams or bridges?

A: We flew what we called "top cover" or a "screen." It was not like the Second World War because we escorted B-29s and we were so much faster. We engaged as many MiGs as possible so they



Photo courtesy of John Henderson

A Fourth Fighter Group F-86A-5 at Kimpo during the winter of 1950-1951 before canopy covers were available, typical of the Sabres flown by Dick Becker and other early Sabre pilots in Korea.

MiG in my face once as it blew up ahead of me. Its flying pieces broke my windscreen and canopy. I struggled back with no hydraulic pressure.

Q: Was the return fire from the MiG's cannons more deadly although they fired fewer shots?

A: Yes, if the 37mm or 23mm cannons hit us, you are exactly right. Both had explosive shells. It only took one or two hits to be blown up, but I do know some pilots who were hit in the tail section who came back. If we were hit in the fuselage or near the engine with an explosive shell, it was the end. We were down.

Q: What did MiG Alley look like?

A: We normally arrived over MiG Alley at 45,000 feet. It looked like flying over

would not engage our B-29s. I remember, however, one mission where I watched three B-29s go down. I saw all three crews bail out. There must have been 90 to 100 MiG-15s attacking those B-29s, and we were only 16 Sabres. Our B-29s frequently bombed North Korea. They engaged the MiGs, but the B-29s could not defend against them. There was no comparison. Probably we should compare the German Me 262 jet fighter during the Second World War flying against the B-17 or the B-24. That is a similar comparison with the B-29 and the MiG-15 over Korea. It shot down bombers with no problem.

Q: Did you ever attack the North Korean capital, Pyongyang?

A: On one mission and only one mis-

sion, and I have no idea why we flew this, we lined up 24 F-86s. We took off in the early morning. As the sun came up, we flew in from the east and strafed an airfield near Pyongyang. For the life of me, I do not know why we flew that mission, nor do I know what we accomplished. I never questioned it. It was a mission the Joint Operations Center asked us to perform I believe in April 1951. We were also restricted, because we had so few F-86s, from going after ground targets. We were air-to-air. I flew another mission, however, near the Yalu River where I shot rockets at tanks. I flew a third with a flight of four after we had been standing on alert. The communists brought troops south from the Yalu River along the west

tion." It was used more as code. We had only so much fuel to engage in combat when we were near the Yalu River. When we departed, they sent another 8, 12 or 16 more MiGs as we worked our way back. It was awfully hard each time when another group of aircraft or two came to meet us as we headed south. We kept turning so they did not shoot us down.

Q: It seems there were many missions where the flight home was not the easiest part of the trip?

A: The flight home was sometimes the hardest part of the trip! We just did not head south. We may begin heading south, but we would look above and see 24 more aircraft, and we might have

eral times. That trip home was a long way back without an engine!

Q: Was the F-86 a good "glider"??!

A: There is not a jet aircraft I know of, except the U-2, that is a good glider! But if we had enough altitude, it was no problem. We did not have much of an airfield at Suwon with 5,000 feet of runway and a small sidestrip. We landed on one side of the runway and taxied back on the other. We had two-way traffic on the same runway.

Q: How firm did your controls get when you flamed out?

A: Our controls got a little stiff, but we had no problem. I had deadsticked the F-86 before I went to Korea. I knew what it was like. We had procedures where we flew over the field perpendicular to the runway and then made a 270 degree turn into the runway. If we had a certain altitude, we worked our way in. I remember once bringing home a flight of four and everyone deadsticked in! Once we got down, our commander and operations officer did not appreciate it very much! Sometimes it was necessary. Often we got into fights with our flight of four, and we may be fighting against 30 to 40 MiGs. We may have been behind them but we did not want to let them go, because if we turned south and started home, they were on our tails. It was not always easy getting out of the area. And of course, we were fighting over enemy territory.

Q: Do you have a favorite F-86 story?

A: Every pilot will say the aircraft they believe was the best was the one they flew in combat, and I will always state the best aircraft I flew was the F-86. I think if you talk to Chuck Yeager, he will say the P-51 was the best aircraft, even considering the X-1. This is true of pilots who flew combat in Vietnam as well. I have great respect for the F-86. I had extensive time flying it. It was a tremendous aircraft.

Q: Do you have any final thoughts on the Sabre?

A: When the Sabre was built, it was absolutely the best aircraft the Air Force had. The "A", "E" and "F" models were their best air-to-air interceptors. I understand the "H" was built as an air-to-ground aircraft, but I never flew it. **There was nothing better than the Sabre as years went by.** Undoubtedly, I felt the F-104 was probably our best interceptor as far as performance, but it was not an aircraft for younger pilots without tremendous experience. I am certain that today the F-16 is considered the Cadillac of interceptors.

Thank you, Dick!

four! Then we re-engaged in combat, and then worked our way back. I remember once Bill Yancey and I were way north, and we landed 15 minutes after the rest of the squadron. We both ran out of fuel probably south of Pyongyang. Then we glided and deadsticked our Sabres into Suwon!

Q: Did you have a procedure to follow?

A: We had one great advantage in Korea. The jetstream always flowed from northwest to southeast. We always had a 100 miles per hour tailwind going home which helped. We climbed and took all the altitude we could. We kept the throttle wide open until the engine quit. Then we set our best glide speed and started home. This happened sev-

The F-86E



The improved day fighter Sabre Jet model following the F-86A was the F-86E. It was ordered on January 17, 1950, and serial number 50-579 first flew on September 23, 1950 with George Welch at the controls. The "E" was started in late 1949 by Fred Prill and Ed Kindelberger, a nephew of Dutch Kindelberger, the president of North American Aviation. A total of 456 "E" Sabres were built with deliveries to the Air Force beginning on February 9, 1951. The new Sabre was first allocated to the Air Defense Command's 33rd Fighter Interceptor Wing by May 1951. The "E" was sent to Korea by July 1951. The "flyaway" cost for each F-86E was \$219,457.

The F-86E was powered by a General Electric J47-GE-13 turbojet rated at 5,200 pounds of thrust, the same as the

last F-86A. The wingspan was reduced by one inch to 37 feet. The length was six inches shorter at 37 feet. The height was nine inches shorter at 14 feet. Maximum speed was the same at 679 miles per hour at sea level with cruise at 537 miles per hour. The service ceiling, however, fell to 47,200 feet. The range increased to 848 miles, but the armament with six .50 calibre M-3 machine guns remained.

Mechanical engine control remained on the F-86E, and there continued to be no autopilot. Full hydraulic aileron and horizontal tail control with an artificial aileron and horizontal tail feel system was added. These elements made what North American referred to as "super controls." An artificial feel system was added as air loads were no longer transmitted to the control stick, and therefore no stick feel was present. The

artificial feel system added stick "feel" into the control column by a system of spring bungees attached to the controls. These applied loads according to the degree of control stick deflection. The trim switch on the rear top of the stick actually repositioned the bungees to a different load-free spot. The same sliding canopy and ejection system remained.

The most noticeable change on the F-86E, or North American Models NA-170 and NA-172, was the addition of a new "all flying" tail. Externally the "A" and the "E" were similar, but the "E" added a raised fairing at the base of the vertical fin and rudder above the all flying tail. This fairing contained the controls for the new horizontal tail. Instead of only the elevator controlling the Sabre, the entire horizontal tail section now moved. The change provided improved control for the F-86E through the transsonic speed range, and it eliminated control reversal caused by aerodynamic forces. The all flying tail combined the horizontal stabilizer and the elevators into one unit which, while acting as one, provided longitudinal control for the Sabre. It was hydraulically operated and did not have trim tabs. The all flying tail reduced most of the negative effects of compressibility and the loss of control associated with flying at higher Mach numbers. It also made the controls more effective with less required movement of the horizontal tail. The ailerons were also hydraulically operated without trim tabs. To change the trim on either the elevator or the ailerons, the position of the artificial feel system was changed on the control stick. The rudder, however, used a conventional cable system with an electrically adjusted trim tab. The "E" and the "A" were otherwise virtually identical.

The F-86E-1 used a V-shaped front windscreen, the same as the F-86A-5, as did the E-1 and E-5 only differed by minor changes in their instruments. The E-6 (serial numbers 52-2833 to 52-2892) was a Canadian-built Canadair Sabre Mk.2, sixty of which were bought by the United States Air Force for Korea to increase its supply of Sabres (Hank Buttlemann's Sabre on the first cover of *Sabre Jet Classics* was one of these Canadair Sabres). These Sabres were modified with United States Air Force equipment at North American's Fresno, California location in July 1951. They used the same J47-GE-13 turbojets as the American-built F-86E. The E-10 added a flat front windscreen. One F-86E-10, serial number 51-2721, set a world speed record of 635.685 miles per hour over a 100 kilometer course on

Top right: The first F-86E-1, serial number 50-579, was powered by a J47 turbojet, the same as the last F-86A-5 Sabres. A temporary probe was attached to this Sabre's upper air intake during flight tests.

Photo courtesy of North American Aviation (Rockwell International)

Top left: The Maryland Air National Guard flew a mix of various F-86E models between 1955 and 1957 after transitioning from the F-51D Mustang. The Sabre in the middle, for example, serial number 52-2853, was actually a Canadair Sabre Mk.2.

Lower left: A Maryland F-86E on landing approach with its speed brakes open and landing gear down. Picture taken at Dover Air Force Base.

Middle right: An early morning take off of a Maryland Air Guard F-86E in 1956 from Friendship Airport (now Baltimore Washington International), south of Baltimore. Note the V-shaped windscreen.

Lower right: the MD ANG 104th Fighter Squadron commander's F-86E-6 as photographed in 1955. Major Edwin Warfield III's Sabre was also a Canadair Sabre Mk.2 which probably saw service in the Korean War while with the Air Force.

The last four photos are courtesy of the Maryland Air National Guard via Jess Mitchell

August 17, 1951. This Sabre was later transferred to Korea and flew with the 25th Fighter Interceptor Squadron while trimmed as "Lady Margaret." F-86E production ended in April 1952, and the United States Air Force accepted its last "E" in October 1952.

F-86Es used serial numbers 50-579 to 50-689, 51-2718 to 51-2849, 51-12977 to 51-13069, 52-2833 to 52-2892, and 52-10177 to 52-10236. F-86Es were phased out of the United States Air Force beginning in April 1954, not long after the end of the Korean War. Many of these Sabres were transferred to Air National Guard fighter squadrons who flew them as late as 1960. Other foreign Sabre-equipped units flew the F-86E under the Military Assistance Program as late as 1958. Several Royal Air Force F-86Es were redesignated F-86M when given to other NATO air forces.

The history of later Sabre models will be reviewed in future issues of Sabre Jet Classics.



My Favorite Sabre Story

by Brig. Gen. Alonzo J. Walter, Jr., USAF (Ret.)

Lon Walter is one of our *Sabre Society's* technical advisors. We asked him to write an article for our new column, "My Favorite Sabre Story," to lead off this new feature section in *Sabre Jet Classics*. Here is what Lon told us ...

I went to Korea in November 1950 as part of the original contingent from the Fourth Fighter Group sent to counteract the new MiG-15 threat. I was a Second Lieutenant with the 335th Fighter Squadron at Andrews Air Force Base when we were ordered to North Island Naval Air Station, California, where our F-86A-5 Sabres were to be loaded onto small "jeep" carriers for the journey. We crossed the Pacific on the *USS Cape Esperance*. The *USS Boxer* carried other squadrons, as did a large cargo ship which departed San Francisco. Our intended base was Pyongyang, the captured capital of North Korea, but while we were en route, the Chinese forces overran that area. We went instead to Johnson Air Base, Irumagawa, Japan, which is near Tokyo. This served as our heavy maintenance base and was always home for one of our three fighter squadrons from the Fourth while they rotated to and from K-13 at Suwon, Korea throughout my tour, which ended in August 1951. The Fourth later moved from Suwon to Kimp'o in late August 1951.

I flew 48 combat missions and was a wingman throughout my tour in Korea. Aside from being credited with one MiG-15 damaged (more about that later—in my heart I believe that MiG went down), my main claim to fame was having flown and been associated with many of the great aces of that time. Jim Jabara was my tentmate when he got his fifth and sixth kills on the same mission. I flew with J. C. Meyer, Glenn Eagleston, Billy Hovde, Gabby Gabreski, Jim Brooks, Hoot Gibson, Dick Becker, and many others from time to time. I believe one aspect about our pilots from this era is generally misunderstood. One reads frequent references to the superior training and experience of the F-86 pilots from the United States. This was true of the old timers who were the flight and element leaders. But virtually every wingman, such as myself, was *fresh out of flying school*. I had 75 hours flying the F-86, the first jet I flew, but I NEVER

FIRED THE GUNS until my first combat mission. We had faith and discipline, however, and the "old heads" were great teachers. They were the "shooters" while we were the "lookers" who watched their tails in combat.

We all loved the F-86, and we quickly recognized there was only one advantage the MiG-15 possessed. The MiG could outclimb us above 28,000 feet. But we never would have traded that feature for our precious ability to outdive, and thereby outaccelerate, the MiG. This gave us the ability to disengage at will when things turned sour and come back to fight another day. This saved many American pilots' lives. There was literally nothing we yearned for. We knew we had the better aircraft by far. Furthermore, the MiG pilots did some incredibly stupid things in combat, although there were a few very good ones which I personally never encountered. During my tour in Korea, however, I saw no change in MiG aggressiveness. Most of all, they were unpredictable. This led us to believe we were encountering a mix of "instructors" and "students". We felt the North Korean and/or Chinese pilots were being trained by the Russians, and when a new class was ready for its final exam, their instructors brought them south of the Yalu River for a fight. We were often frustrated during those days because they came over so infrequently.

I would like to share with you my two most memorable missions. These were the only times I saw MiG-15s extremely close up. The first was in early May 1951, possibly on the 5th or 6th. I was flying with "Awning Blue" flight ("Awning" implying our 335th Squadron) as their number two man, "Awning Blue Two". My element leader, who was also my flight leader, was Major Ernest W. Mack. At the time, we patrolled as four flights of four. This made maneuvering at higher altitudes very demanding. We maintained our sixteen ship integrity until a fight began, and then each flight of four broke off on its own. Elements would often be unable to remain as a flight of four, and instead they would fight as two-ship teams. It was RARE, however, that a wingman lost his element leader. Our orders were to disengage and return home *immediately* if we found ourselves alone for any reason.

As we patrolled back and forth along the Yalu River at 35,000 feet, we observed a formation of more than sixteen MiG-15s slightly below flying in the opposite direction. Our squadron leader called for a descending left turn so that we could drop in behind the MiGs, but he cautioned that there may be another formation waiting for us. He was correct. As we began our attack, we were jumped by a second group of MiGs, and a melee ensued. At one point, I observed an F-86 shooting at a MiG, with another MiG on his tail, followed by still another '86 behind that MiG! It was a huge, deadly, four aircraft "Lufberry Circle", all firing at one another.



Lon Walter while at the Pentagon during his last active duty assignment from 1978 to 1979.

Photo courtesy of Lon Walter

Our radios were filled with chatter as they always were when a fight started, whereas our radio discipline was excellent while we were patrolling. Our group commander, Colonel Johnny Meyer, made certain of that. As a wingman, I was hanging on to Ernie Mack. He was tracking a lone MiG at long range. I was on his left wing scanning his three to six o'clock area. Ernie fired at his MiG while at long range. I, however, must have watched him shooting for too long. When I awoke after fifteen to twenty seconds at most, I looked over my left shoulder, and there, on my left wing with

his speed brakes open, was *another* MiG, *not more than fifteen feet from us!* He looked as if he was trying to join our flight! As I watched, it was clear he was unable to slow down and would overshoot our formation. He closed his speed brakes and accelerated up and away to our left (remember the MiG could outclimb us handily at this altitude). As he did, I yelled, "Awning Blue Lead, we have a bandit at ten o'clock. He is really close! Take him!" But by the time Ernie shifted from his first target, my MiG "wingman" was long gone.

Ernie and I still discuss this story at our reunions, and we both wonder what that MiG was doing? He could easily have shot one or both of us down. Were his guns jammed? Maybe he had forgotten to arm his switches, or was he trying to defect? We will never know, but I did get a *very* close look at that MiG-15. Its pilot was wearing a black leather helmet with a black oxygen mask, and his eyes were as big as saucers, just like mine! I should mention that it would have been a simple task for me to open my speed brakes, slide in behind that MiG, and shoot at him at point blank range. I did not because we wingmen were ingrained to call targets to our leaders, and not shoot unless it was a question of safety or we had been instructed to do so by our leaders.

My second memorable mission occurred on July 11, 1951. My call sign that day was "Dignity White Two" ("Dignity" meaning our group commander, J. C. Meyer, was leading the mission), and I was flying with Captain Bruce Cunningham. We were at 28,000 feet listening to radio chatter that indicated a fight was going on nearby. We were trying to find the fight, but as sometimes happened, we became separated from the other participants shortly after the fight began. I was flying almost line abreast off White Lead's right wing in an absolutely clear blue sky. We were flying at about Mach .85. Suddenly I saw what looked like pink roman candle balls flashing between our two Sabres! These were, of course, 37mm tracers. I followed the tracers back to their source, which was a MiG-15 firing away, but he was too far out of range. He was alone. I called, "Dignity White Lead, we have one shooting at us at six o'clock, but he is way out." Bruce replied, "I do not have him, but keep him in sight."

The MiG continued firing, and he was closing on us much faster than I thought. I also realized he had now shifted his aim in *my* direction! I called again, "White Lead, break left! He is firing at ME! Bruce Cunningham broke so hard that later we

found he had popped rivets in his ailerons, and I thought I would blackout trying to stay with him. As I pulled into my hard turn, the MiG passed *between* us! He overshot badly. This MiG had North Korean markings with a red nose. Then he made a *second* mistake: he headed *down*. Since Bruce was turning away from the MiG, he could not see this, but I was in the perfect position to take the MiG. I called Bruce, "White Lead, I am on the MiG. We are headed down!" Bruce replied, "Okay, White Two, you take him. I will cover your wing."

This was my first, and as it turned out, *only* chance in Korea to be a "shooter". It was easy to stay close behind the MiG as he stayed in a descending left turn. I actually had to reduce power and use my speed brakes to avoid overrunning him. But unfortunately, my lack of training hindered me. I could not find the gunsight image in my windscreen! In later years, I became an excellent aerial gunner, and I have often reviewed my



A Fourth Fighter Group F-86A-5, the same as flown by Lon Walter, taxis past the camera during early 1951 in Korea.

Photo courtesy of John Henderson

engagement with this MiG with deep regret. I was *so close*, however, and I began blasting away with my six .50s, but as I now know, I was shooting *behind* the MiG. He was obviously scared, and he kept turning tighter and tighter as we picked up speed in our diving turn. Suddenly, and with great quickness, the MiG snaprolled and went into a flat spin! This happened so rapidly that I almost *collided* with the MiG, which seemed to have stopped in front of me. Instinctively, I squeezed the trigger and pulled hard on the stick. This corrected my previously poor shooting, and I "walked" my machine gun fire across the MiG immediately behind his cockpit as I zoomed past him barely avoiding a mid-

air collision. I observed several API (armor piercing - incendiary) strikes, but I was now so low on fuel that I could not stay any longer, and so I returned to Suwon.

Later during our debriefing, I claimed the damage I observed on that MiG-15. Two MiGs were shot down that day and were confirmed by other pilots. Strangely, another pilot reported that as he returned, he observed a single MiG heading north, and he saw the pilot bail out for no apparent reason. One of our debriefers asked me if I was sure I had not seen my MiG pilot bail out? I had to reply I did not. Bruce Cunningham said he watched the MiG recover from its spin and head north, but he was not able to give chase. I have always felt the odds were good that the "unforced" bail out was my MiG target, but I will never be able to prove it. The damage I inflicted, or the damage caused by the high-speed snaproll, or both, most likely convinced the MiG pilot that his aircraft was too

badly damaged to land. It should also be noted that later during the testing of a MiG-15 after the Korean War, it was revealed that the MiG's controls became extremely heavy at high speeds, and that *the MiG-15 had a tendency to snaproll and spin at high angles of attack around Mach .8.*





The Air Force Museum's F-86A is trimmed to resemble the Sabre flown by Lieutenant Colonel Bruce Hinton when he shot down his first MiG-15 on December 17, 1950.

Photo courtesy of the Air Force Museum via Dave Menard.

The First Sabre versus MiG-15 Combat

The following account has been reviewed by Colonel Bruce H. Hinton for accuracy.

Poor weather over Korea kept the Sabres on the ground until late morning on December 17, 1950. F-86A-5s from the Fourth flew their first combat patrol that day from Kimpo. Lieutenant Colonel Bruce Hinton, the commander of the 336th Fighter Interceptor Squadron and a veteran pilot, led a flight of four F-86s north to patrol MiG Alley near Sinuiju, across the Yalu River from Antung, China. Colonel Hinton used F-80 radio call signs, flying patterns and altitudes to deceive and entice the MiGs into combat. The trick worked. While the Sabres patrolled in a finger four formation at 25,000 feet, four MiGs took off from Antung to attack. The MiGs approached at 18,000 feet climbing in a southeasterly direction near Sinuiju. Colonel Hinton radioed the other Sabres to release their droptanks, but his own radio was not working. They did jettison their droptanks, however, and dove on the MiGs as the MiGs paralleled the Yalu River. As Colonel Hinton banked to close behind the MiGs, he became separated from his flight. The Sabres closed at 410 knots and 20,000 feet while increasing their airspeed at maximum power. The MiGs dove and then began a climbing left turn. Colonel Hinton's airspeed on his early F-86A exceeded the red line on his machmeter at this point. Then the MiGs broke. Colonel Hinton fired a long burst from his six .50 calibre machine guns hitting the second MiG-15 in its right wing and fuselage. Leaks were seen from the MiG which began smoking. Colonel Hinton then fired a long burst and saw fire exit the MiG's tailpipe as smoke was seen coming from the rest of the enemy plane. He fired another long burst, and fire covered the entire rear of the MiG's fuselage. As the MiG slowed, Colonel Hinton opened his dive brakes and throttled the engine back. The MiG was given another long burst. Pieces flew off as the MiG rolled on its back and went down. The stricken MiG-15 crashed ten miles southeast of the Yalu River. Colonel Hinton fired 1,200 rounds on his attack. One other MiG was damaged by Captain Morris Pitts, but all three remaining MiGs outran the Sabres across the Yalu River to Manchuria. Colonel Hinton later flew a victory roll as he returned to Kimpo.

This picture is believed to show Lieutenant Colonel Hinton's first "kill" being painted on the left side of his Sabre at Kimpo.

Photo courtesy of John Henderson

