



Sabre Jet Classics

Volume 7 Number 2

SUMMER 1999

A publication of the F-86 Sabre Pilots Association



12th Reunion Report, Hoot's Hokkaido Air Force, First Operational Sabres, Flying McConnell's Wing, More!

SabreJet Classics

VOLUME 7, NUMBER 2
SUMMER 1999
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(front cover) An F-86A from the 94th FIS at March AFB, CA in late 1949, carries the 200 gallon underwing ferry tanks. The 94th FIS was the first unit to receive F-86s for operational service in February 1949. (credit - Harold G. Martin)

**Next Issue;
All Interceptor Issue,
F-86D/K/L
13th Reunion Update**

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**PLAN NOW
13TH REUNION, 18-22 APRIL
2001 IN LAS VEGAS.**

the President of the Association and Editor of the magazine. Since this is an all volunteer, non-profit organization, there will be no monetary reimbursement for submitted materials. The *SabreJet Classics* is published three times a year. Extra copies of the current issue of *SabreJet Classics* can be ordered at \$5.00 per copy, providing copies are still in stock. A subscription to SabreJet Classics is available for non-members of the F-86 Sabre Pilots Association at a rate of \$15.00 per year. Back issues, any issue prior to the current issue, are available to members and non-members at a rate of \$3.00 per issue plus a mailing and handling fee. All payments should be made payable to "F-86 Sabre Pilots Association" in care of the Las Vegas address.

THE PRESIDENTS NOTEBOOK

Having just assumed the lead of this great gaggle called the F-86 Sabre Pilots Association, I want to assure the entire organization that your leader is going to maintain the same airspeed, altitude, and heading as my predecessors. To them I give heartfelt thanks for inspired, dedicated leadership. I will endeavor to follow in their footsteps, with your help and understanding. I also want to thank you for the trust and confidence you have shown by electing me as your president.

Our Twelfth Reunion is now history and it was a huge success. Thanks to all who planned it, to all who attended, and especially to all those who helped carry it off. If you did not attend, you missed a good one. See you next time? Lon Walter will report on the convention in greater detail elsewhere in this issue. But let me add a few comments.

One of the highlights of the convention (perhaps in the history of the organization) occurred during the Board of Directors meeting, where it was moved, seconded, and unanimously approved to recognize Dee Harper's extraordinary leadership, dedication, and exhaustive work for the organization, by naming him Chairman Emeritus of

the Board of Directors. Not only was it a proper thing to do, it relieved a lot of concern on the part of the Board by insuring we will have Dee's wise counsel in the future, while relieving him of some of the day to day concerns of running the organization.

Your organization also has a new slate of officers. Serving as Vice President is Lon Walter. Your Board of Directors now include, Dan Druen, Bruce Hinton, Jerry Johnson, Bob Matasick, and Tom Griffin. Wise and able people indeed. I cannot finish telling about the convention without sharing with you the most heartwarming and comforting impression I gained from the several days I spent with the members in Las Vegas. Getting to know and observe, the staff and volunteers that make this great organization function so smoothly, was very comforting to your new man at the top. The Las Vegas contingent is unbelievable in their enthusiasm and readiness to do whatever it takes to get the job done. We could not survive without them. Whenever you get the chance - THANK THEM!

Finally some administrative details. This magazine, *SabreJet Classics*, is the official and primary means of communicating with you, the membership. With a volunteer staff, and the cost of postage, we cannot provide special treatment or repetitive announcements to the minority that is careless in their

personal responsibilities. Information concerning expiration of membership and payment of dues, is contained on your address label of each magazine. Please read and heed. It makes our job a lot easier if you remain current in your membership. Please consider a Life Membership.

Now the biggest biggie of all--- correct addresses. We are still a very mobile group. We change addresses with amazing regularity. I know that in the hustle and bustle of moving it is easy to forget to notify us (and all your correspondents) of your new address - but please take the time and effort. It is terribly important for both you and us. If we have a bad address it results in a triple expense - the original postage, the cost to return and have address service, and finally to remail it to the member once again. Your money wasted. And you miss out on this outstanding magazine, or more importantly, on timely information regarding the organization and upcoming events. We can do better. In that regard, information about the next reunion in 2001, will be in the magazine as well as instructions on registration.

Nuff said! Time to trim her up real good, extend the rudder pedals a bit, pull the visor down, kick everybody out into spread formation, and recover from a great reunion.

Glenn L. Nordin

FOLDED WINGS

Ted D. Anderson, August 4th, 1994
Clifford N. Fenell, April 20th, 1999
Frank J. Gately, June 8th, 1998
James A. Kilpatrick, 1997
Glenn R. Magathan, October 12th, 1998
Kenneth E. Pearson, April 24th, 1999
Donald A. Prescott, February 28th, 1999
Walter A. Smith, Jr., November 11th 1998
Virgil D. Wirt, November 8th, 1998

-This issue: John Roberts

To Whom It May Concern

I am the daughter of Major Donald Adams, 13th Jet Ace in the Korean War. He was killed flying the F-89 Scorpion at an August 1952 air show in Detroit, MI. Major Adams served with the 55th Fighter Group in the 8th Air Force. In Korea, he was assigned to the 51st Fighter Interceptor Wing at K-13, under the command of Col. Francis Gabreski. He was a recipient of the Silver Star and Distinguished Flying Cross.

I have been creating a website in his memory. I would greatly appreciate contact with anyone who may have known my father during his time in the Air Force. I was four when my dad was killed, and I would very much like to speak or meet with anyone who may have known him.

The website dedicated in his honor is a work in progress and can be viewed at: <http://home.earthlink.net/~bluesnurse> My family is obviously, very proud of him and we do not want his memory to fade into obscurity.

I invite contact with anyone who may have known my dad. Thank you for your time.

Nancy Adams Pritchard
PO Box 751551
Petaluma, CA 94975
<bluesnurse@earthlink.net>

Captain John Roberts (second from left), and 1/Lt Robert Lund (third from left) with other members of the 336th FIS at K-14 in 1953. (credit - Robert Lund)



As with most great men and women of history, stories abound which shed light on the source of their greatness. With this in mind, SabreJet Classics begins a series of anecdotes received from you, our members. Robert E. Lund, of Tequesta, Florida, sent us the following story. We invite other members to send their memories of the great ones they have known.

I was very saddened to learn of the death of General John Roberts (SJC, vol. 7, no. 1). My fond memory of him dates back to 1953 at K-14 when Captain John Roberts was my operations officer, and I was a rookie pilot assigned to the 336th Squadron.

John was leading a training flight over South Korea and I was in the #4 position. Suddenly #2 flamed out at approximately 25,000 feet. His canopy immediately fogged over and there was a slight tinge of panic in his radio transmission. We moved into a loose finger-four formation while John took a position on #2s wing. John got him headed back to the base and had him set up a glide at 160 knots. At 15,000 feet, with John's coaching, #2 attempted an air start and was successful on the first try. John suggested, "to play it safe, let's set up for a simulated flame-out approach in case it quits again."

John followed him through to a perfect landing. He then instructed the rest of us to join up with him for a 360° overhead approach for landing. I responded, "I don't know, sir, I'm at full throttle and can't catch up." John replied, "Perhaps if you retracted your speed brakes, you might gain a little airspeed."

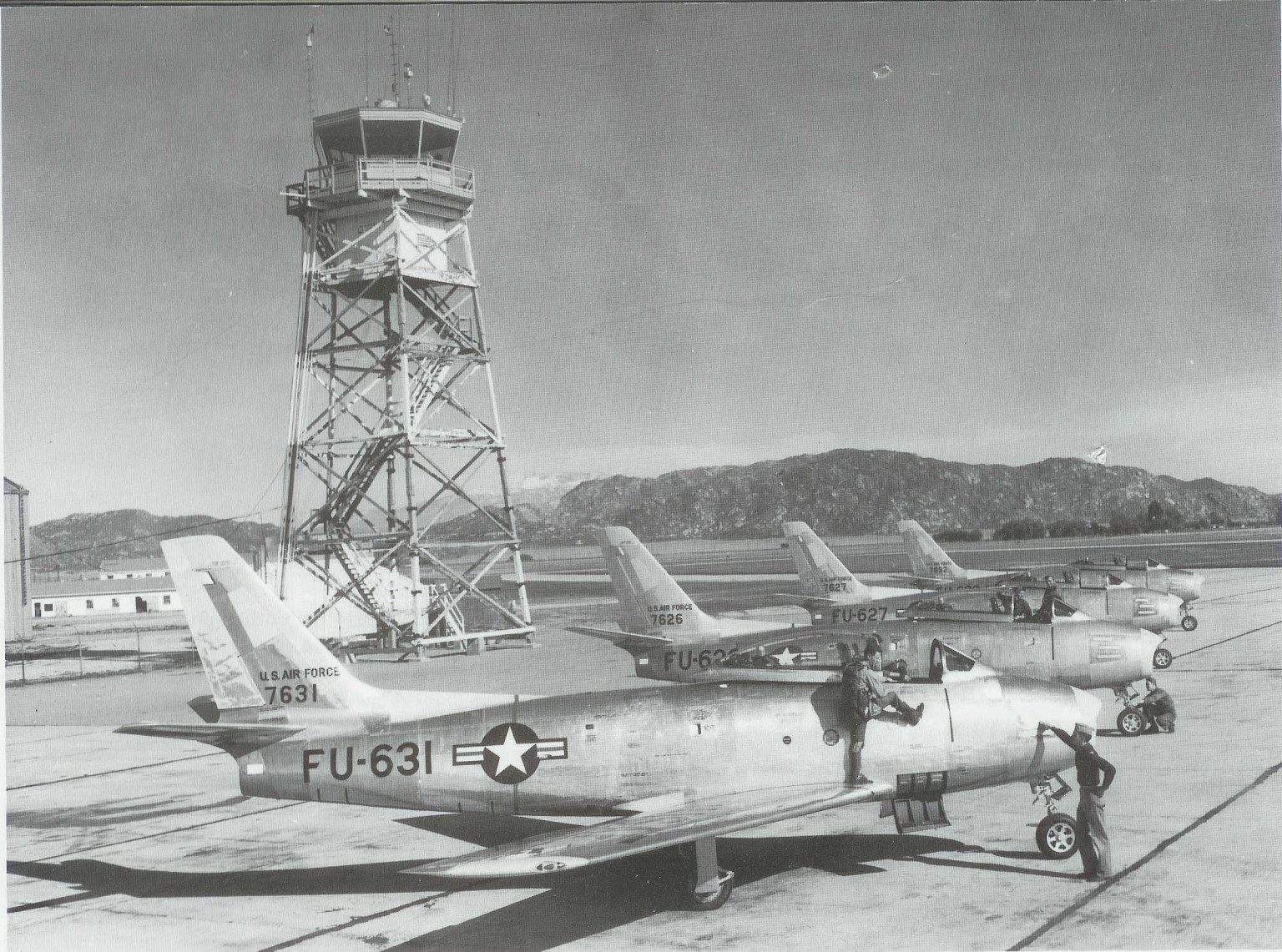
At the debriefing Captain Roberts coyly asked me if I had reported the speed brake malfunction to my crew chief. My response was, "There wasn't anything wrong with the speed brakes, it was my brain that was malfunctioning."

I had the utmost respect for this officer and GENTLEMAN.

Bob Lund
336th FIS, K-14, many years ago

1Lt Robert Lund next to his 336th FIS F-86 showing one kill, one probable, and one damaged. K-14 1953. (credit - Robert Lund)





The first four F-86As were delivered to the 94th Fighter Squadron at March AFB in February 1949. These aircraft were part of the batch of 33 F-86A-1s, all -47 models, and built with the curved unarmored windscreen. Lt.Col. Don Cummings brought several of these aircraft to March Field in early 1949. (credit - NAA via Larry Davis)

The First Sabres Are Delivered

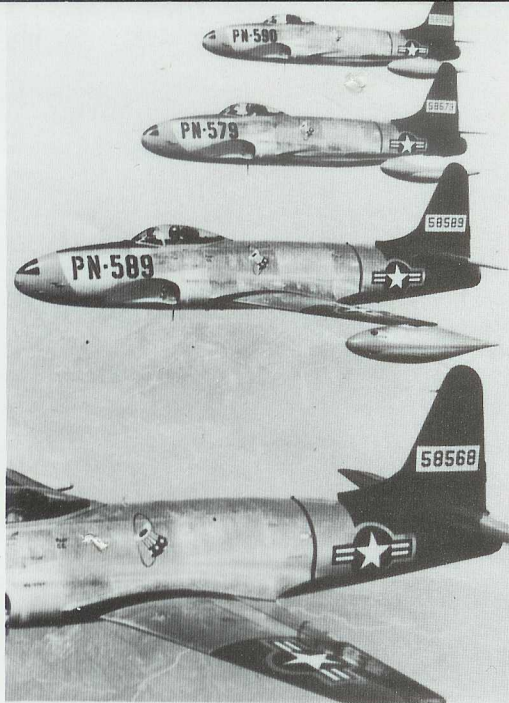
by Donald M. Cummings

I was Squadron Commander of the first P-80 Shooting Star squadron in Europe with the 55th Fighter Group at Giebelstadt AB, Germany. We received thirty P-80As in the Spring of 1946. General Barcus gave them to our squadron as we had the best accident record in the ETO at the time. We flew them until the Spring of 1947 when we ran out of engines. We ferried the remaining P-80s to Bremen using our last four engines.

Because of my P-80 time, I returned to the First Group at March Field only to find that the 94th Squadron already had two lieutenant colonels and four majors assigned. Everyone in the Army Air Force (we were still in the Army at that time) was trying to get assigned to the First Fighter Group, the only jet group at March Field, along with Col. Leon Gray's 12th Reconnaissance Squadron, also flying a variant of the P-80 - the FP-80A. March Field was the home of 12th Air Force Headquarters and considered 'The Country Club of the Air Force'.

In 1949, Lt. Gen. Curtis Lemay decided he wanted March Field for Strategic Air Command. He also convinced Air Force Headquarters that he needed a fighter group assigned to SAC for escort purposes. General Lemay got both March Field and the 1st Fighter Group, just in time for our conversion to the new North American F-86A Sabre. In 1950, the 1st FG was transferred back to Air Defense Command and redesignated a fighter interceptor unit. But between July 1949 and April 1950, the 1st FG was attached to the 22nd Bomb Group!

On the 7th of February 1949, five pilots from the 1st FG went to Muroc Dry Lake AFB (later Edwards AFB) for approximately ten days to check out in the brand new F-86 Sabre, which was still undergoing Air Force acceptance checks. I'm the last of those five pilots still living, but it was certainly one of the highlights of my Air Force career.



A flight of 94th FS F-80B Shooting Stars over California in 1948. The F-80s have the red wingtips and tail signifying a TDY to a cold weather region, probably Ladd AFB, Alaska. The 94th had F-80s from 1947 to February 1949. (credit - USAF via Larry Davis)



Major Donald Cummings, 94th Squadron Operations Officer at March AFB in 1949. (credit - Donald Cummings)

The F-86 was a big improvement over the P-80 Shooting Star. It was the first jet plane that felt like a fighter plane should feel - enough speed, climb, and maneuverability to give you the confidence that you could perform the mission. And it was much easier to fly. I can not recall any portion of the flight envelope in which the Sabre was not better than the Shooting Star.

On 15 February 1949, we went up to Mines Field, now LAX, to accept delivery of the first F-86s. I don't know if I accepted the actual first F-86 or not. But we checked the aircraft out with the people at North American (we had a close relationship with them, including gratuities - the good old days), and flew them straight to March Field. These were still some of the '47 model F-86A-1s with the round windscreen and Mk. 18 gunsight.

I picked up three more aircraft, two on 3 March and a third on 14 March. It was on the 14 March delivery flight that disaster struck. My roommate at the time, Robert 'Knobby' DeLoach, went with me on that trip. I took off first and he followed right behind me. Shortly after becoming airborne, Knobby's Sabre suffered a broken auxiliary drive shaft and he lost all hydraulic power and control of the airplane. Sadly, Knobby did not survive the crash. It was the first F-86 to crash when flown by an Air Force pilot. There would be more from compressor failures, mid-air, and crash landings when the pilot got behind on the power curve. The F-86 was very forgiving except on landing.

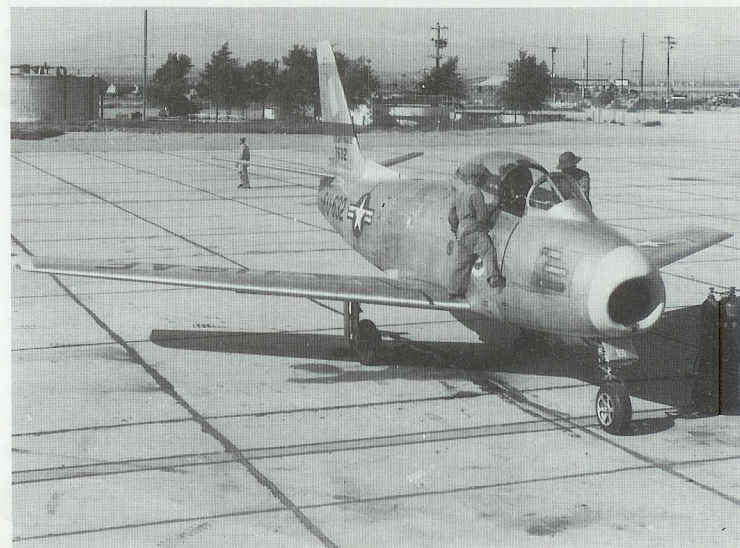
One of the new innovations on the F-86 was the ejector seat. It was a subject often discussed by the Sabre pilots in those early days. Would it actually work? It hadn't as yet been tested in an F-86. While I was with the 1st FG, we had two ejections - another 'first' for the group. One resulted from a mid-air between a pair of F-86s that were making practice firing runs on a B-36. The collision killed one of the Sabre

pilots, and fired the seat of the other pilot straight through the still-closed canopy. He had pieces of plexi-glas embedded in his shoulder, and was very happy that he had been wearing one of the new 'bone dome' helmets.

The other ejection occurred during a crash landing in a rocky river bed. The airplane broke up on impact, folding the wing. Again, the ejection seat actuated on impact and fired the pilot out of the aircraft horizontally! Luckily, the pilot had already fired the canopy off prior to the crash. He broke some bones but lived to file the accident report.

In February 1950, I was selected along with several other reserve officers, for removal from flying status by Defense Secretary Johnson's 'cost reduction' program. Suspended from flying on 29 April 1950, I went to school at Lowry Field on 14 June. Ten days later the Korean War broke out. I thought they might need experienced F-86 combat pilots and went to Operations with my Form 5. They informed me that I couldn't

A 94th FS F-86A-1 on the ramp at Las Vegas AFB in 1949. The first Sabres delivered to March AFB were the A-1s, with the round, unarmored windscreen and quick-opening gun 'doors'. (credit - USAF via Larry Davis)



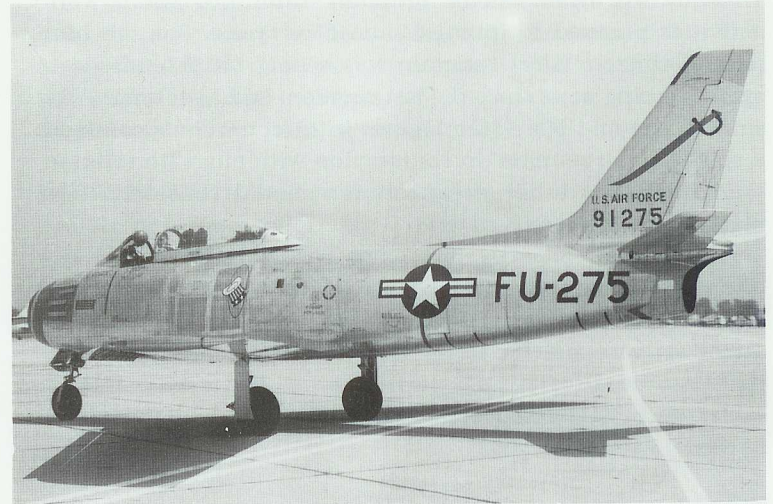


In mid-1949, the 1st Fighter Group was equipped with new F-86A-5 Sabres, which had the V-shaped armored windscreen and a jettisonable canopy. All aircraft were delivered with a pair of 200 gallon ferry tanks. In April 1950, the 1st Group was redesignated a fighter interceptor group and assigned to Air Defense Command. (credit - NAA via Peter Bowers)

An F-86A Sabre assigned to the 94th FIS aerobatic team, "Sabre Dancers", at March AFB in 1950. (credit - USAF via Larry Davis)

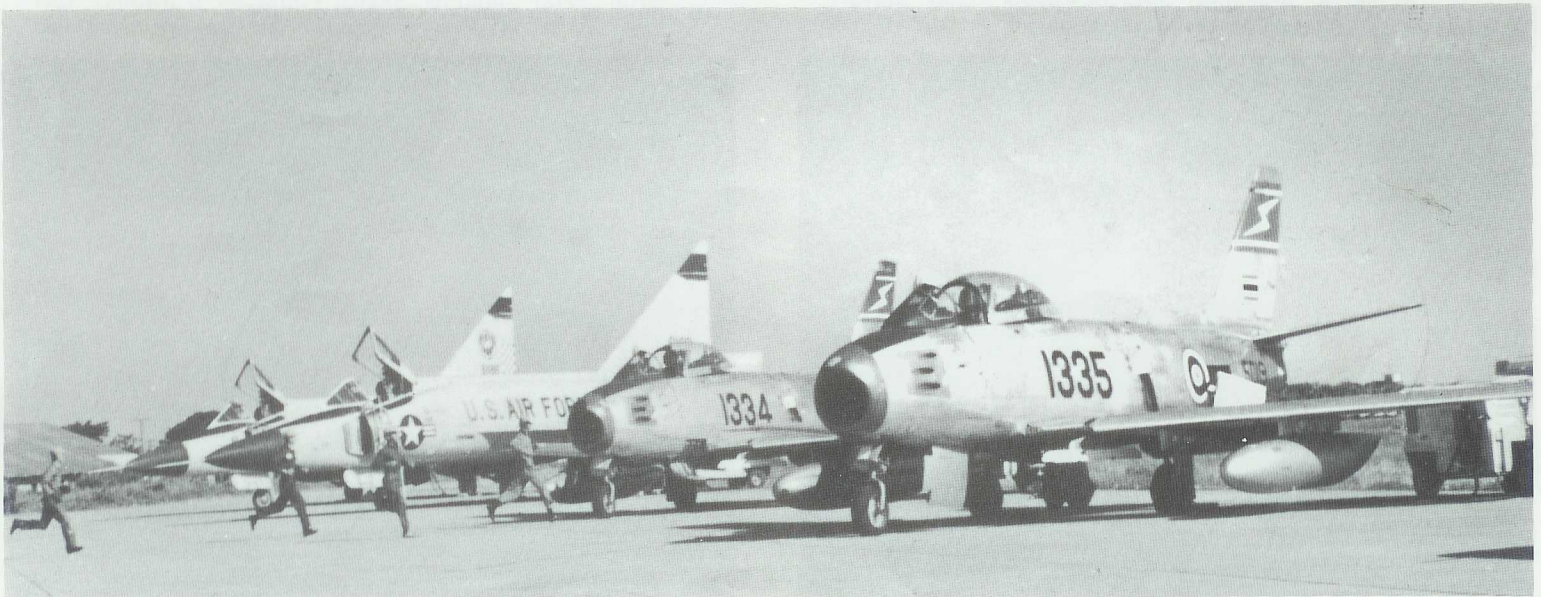
return to flying status while I was in school, but could once I finished school and was assigned to a command. I was assigned to Western Air Defense Force, the primary air defense force in Southern California, flying F-86s. But alas, they calmly told me that my new job didn't require flying and I was turned down on my request to return to flying status. It was the end of my flying career.

I am proud to have flown with the First Fighter Group from April 1947 until March 1950, and I was Operations Officer for the 94th Squadron when I left. It was the 'best of times'.



AROUND THE WORLD IN (THE) F-86 DAYS

Royal Thai Air Force pilots 'scramble' to their waiting F-86F Sabres, which share the ramp with a pair of US Air Force F-102A Delta Daggers from the 509th Fighter Interceptor Squadron in December 1961. The 509th FIS deployed to Don Muang as part of Operation BELL TONE, to bolster the air defense capabilities of the Thai AF. The Royal Thai AF operated 40 F-86F aircraft, into the late 1960s, all of which were equipped to fire the AIM-9 Sidewinder air-to-air missile. (credit - Larry Davis)



After-Action Report - 12th Reunion

by Lon Walter

(all photos courtesy of Dick Merian. Thanks Dick!)

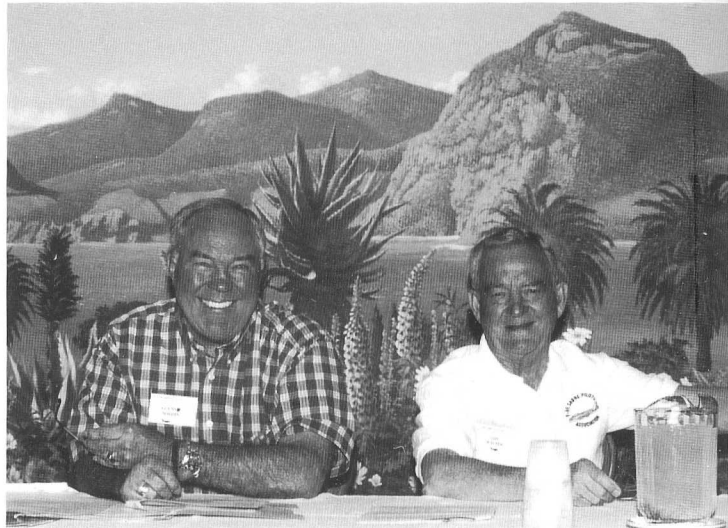
There's a time-honored saying that "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!" In flying terms, "If you've got the airplane trimmed up, don't fiddle with it!" Drawing on past experience, the Las Vegas Sabre pilots, AND spouses, AND helpers, who so successfully have produced reunions in the past, have done it again.

Well over 500 members and guests showed up for the Association's twelfth reunion, held at the Monte Carlo Hotel on 18-22 April 1999. As in previous reunions, there were activities planned to interest almost everyone. But the best part of this (or any) reunion, was seeing old friends once again, sharing news since the last reunion, and re-telling F-86 stories. The mid-50s 336th Fighter Interceptor Squadron held a spirited 'sub-reunion' in conjunction with our 12th reunion - an idea that other organizations should consider when planning future events.

The many tireless volunteers from Vegas made sure that the registration and check-in procedure was expedited. And attendees were directed to the same large hospitality room that had been used for our eleventh reunion. There were lots of tables and chairs, and plenty of bartenders available when needed.

The Sabre Pilots Country Store, located in the hospitality room, offered items of Association apparel, as well as books by or about Sabre pilots. How popular was the Country Store? Mike Freebairn, CO of the Country Store, said that it grossed over \$9000 in sales for your association in the four days of operation!

(l-r) Newly elected President Glenn Nordin, Ginny Hinton, outgoing President Bruce Hinton, and Mary Nordin enjoy themselves at the banquet.

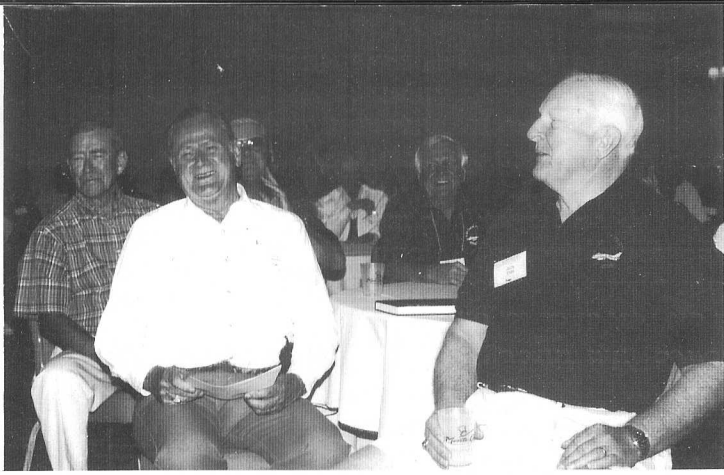


Newly elected President Glenn Nordin and Vice President Lon Walter at the 1999 Business Meeting.

A new and popular addition this year was a reproduction of the famous 'Mach Buster' lapel pin/tie tac, certificate, and decal which were originally presented by North American Aviation to Sabre pilots. Most of our members remembered the pins from the old days - but couldn't remember what happened to theirs. Mike Freebairn gets the credit for acquiring the pins after many folks at the eleventh reunion had asked about them.

The featured speaker at the '99 Banquet was author and former F-100 pilot, J.D. Wtterling. 'JD' spoke about flying the 'Hun in the Vietnam War, politics and policy making, and flying ingeneral. He was well received by all those in attendance. Good Show JD!





'Hoot' Gibson and Jack Fair at the business meeting, one of the few times that Hoot was sitting down.



Ardith and Mike Freebairn away from the Country Store for the banquet. Nice job Mike!

As in previous years, Nellis AFB offered a 'Red Flag' briefing and tour of the threat display buildings for a limited number of attendees. This year the event was over-subscribed (as usual). But thanks to some fast shuffling in the registration line, everyone who signed up made the tour. Two very special trouble-shooters made this possible by recovering tickets which had been allocated to members who didn't show up for the reunion. Kay Styza and Debbie Dvorak have come all the way from Wisconsin for the last four reunions, cheerfully resolving such problems during registration. They join a long list of volunteers to which we are deeply indebted for a smooth operation.

The Association business meeting was held on 21 April and was well attended. Treasurer Rich Geiger reported that our finances are in solid shape. An election of officers for the next two years was held, and Glenn Nordin was chosen as President. Separately, the Board of Directors chose Jerry Johnson as Chairman. Members of the Association voted unanimously to name Dee Harper as "Chairman Emeritus", in honor of his long and faithful service. Names of the other new officers and directors can be found on the inside cover of this issue of SabreJet Classics.

Our renowned Secretary Diane Weiland takes notes at the business meeting. (credit - Larry Davis)



Members enthusiastically supported continuing the Country Store operation at future reunions. The members also voted to hold the next reunion in Las Vegas in the year 2001. The Monte Carlo Hotel was a popular venue for the past reunion as well as this one, and members expressed a desire to return if a satisfactory contract can be negotiated.

WINNERS! There were winners galore at the reunion. (Of course, ALL Sabre pilots are winners!) The Golf Tournament was won by the team of Mike Filliman, Dan Druen, Chuck Stamschor, and Dale Boogie. Beautiful weather prevailed throughout the tournament. The Treasure Hunt in a local shopping mall was very popular, and Ardith Freebairn, who organized the event, made sure that all gifts were recovered and presented at the pool party, some of which were valued at over \$300.

Raffle winners were determined by holders of tickets received during registration. The First Prize was \$500. Second and third prize winners received beautiful signed lithographs of Boots Blesse and Ralph Parr scoring victories in their Sabres. Fourth and fifth prizes were Life Memberships in the

The Air Guard guys had their own table at the banquet. Ben Pollard is the only one with a name tag.

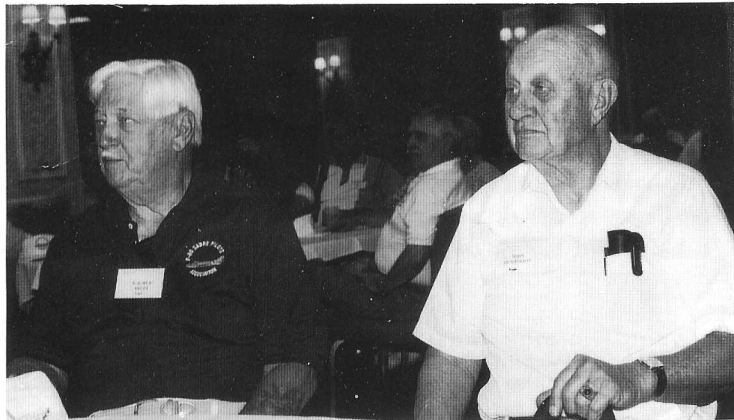




Doris and Lon Walter, sitting with Millie and Bones Marshall at the banquet.

Association; while sixth, seventh, and eighth were cash prizes of \$100 or more. All the raffle prizes were awarded at the pool party, which featured Boyd Coulter's band playing big band music of the 40s, and easy listening music of the 50s and 60s. Dancing and socializing in the moonlight of Las Vegas, were again graced by beautiful weather.

On the final night, the Monte Carlo Hotel provided excellent service, food, and libations for the banquet. (It should be mentioned that the breakfast fare served by the Monte Carlo, was also outstanding.) President Bruce Hinton presided at his last official function, and received a standing ovation from members and guests for his leadership. The featured speaker for the evening was Mr. J.D. Wetterling of Oldsmar, Florida, an

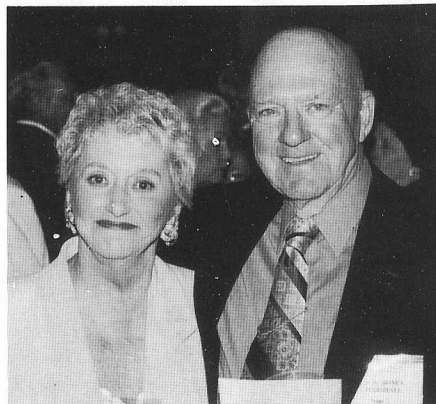


Bud Miles and John Henderson at the business meeting.

The Air Guard was well represented by Steve Szalay and Kai Pederson.



Louise Rankin and Bones Marshall.



Donna and Buster Kincaid represented the RCAF.



Command structure. (l-r) Rich Geiger - Tresurer, Dan Druen - Director, Jerry Johnson - Board Chairman, and Dee Harper - Chairman Emeritus, at the business meeting.

F-100 Super Sabre pilot with 268 missions in Vietnam. JD has written a novel titled "Son Of Thunder", which relates the adventures of a fictional F-100 pilot similar to himself. He has written articles for the Wall Street Journal, the American Legion Magazine, and several other nationally prominent publications. JD spoke in fighter pilot language about the thrills, the sadness, and the privilege shared by all fighter pilots to serve God, Duty, Honor, and Country.

As the evening drew to a close, more than one member was overheard to say "The countdown for Reunion 13 in 2001 has begun."



A happy group of Sabre jocks and their wives at the banquet.

ON MAC'S WING

by Dean Abbott

I graduated with Class 52-F in September 1952, having trained in the T-6 at Greenville AFB, the T-28 at Perrin, and the T-33 at Laredo. My cousin, Earl Wisecarver, also a member of 52-F, went to Bainbridge AFB and Bryan AFB. We got together for the first time when we went through gunnery training at Nellis between October and December 1952.

Training was hectic in those days. The Air Force took in twice as many trainees as they graduated. The attrition rate was high. The purpose was to rush as many trained pilots to Korea as possible to bolster the undermanned units fighting there. A fatality a week was common at Nellis during our training. However, the system worked and the squadrons in Korea finally came up to authorized strength.

I left late in December for assignment to the 51st Fighter Interceptor Wing at Suwon, K-13, about 20 miles south of Seoul. To my pleasant surprise, cousin Earl was assigned there about a week later. We were both assigned to the 39th Squadron, Earl to 'C' Flight, commanded by 1/Lt. Hal Fischer; and I went to 'D' Flight, commanded by 1/Lt. Joe McConnell, 'Mac' to his friends. At that time, Fischer already had three kills, Mac had none.

The beefing up of the wings had one very big consequence for us new guys. The 'Old Hands', who'd arrived a month or so earlier, already had six to ten missions as wingmen before becoming element or flight leaders. Our arrival alleviated the necessity to rush new guys into lead positions. We didn't get to 'lead' either elements or flights until we had flown at least thirty missions as wingmen.

Joe McConnell got his first victory on 14 January 1953. At that time, both Earl and I were going through 'in-country' training at Tsuiki, where they taught us to forget what we had just learned at Nellis, and to do it "our way". It was a lot to digest in two weeks, but we were soon flying missions as wingmen. By the end of March, Hal Fischer was a captain and a double ace with 10 victories. Mac was also a new captain, and had seven kills. Fischer was shot down shortly thereafter and captured. Had he not been shot down, it's possible that he would have been the top American ace of the war.

I was fortunate enough to fly some memorable missions with Mac. On one of them, Mac and I were conserving fuel while CAPing Chodo Island, acting as spares or covering any one of the forty-plus Sabres sweeping the Yalu River for MiGs, that might get into trouble. However, there was no action and the mission headed south for home. In the meantime, Mac's primary hydraulic system failed and he was forced to use the alternate system. The F-86 'Dash-1', i.e. the flight manual,



Captain Joseph P. McConnell, 39th FIS at K-13, 1953 - the top scoring ace in the Korean War. (credit - Dean Abbott)

called for landing immediately. But suddenly, the Chodo radar started calling out MiG flights over Mukden, eighty miles into Manchuria.

Without a word, Mac turned north and we went straight toward Mukden. By the time we arrived, the MiGs had all landed. We made a lazy, time consuming 360° circle above the city. I was doing my best to hold my breath. Nothing happened and I thought, "Good, now let's get OUT of here!" Nope, not yet. Mac called for another big ten minute orbit over Mukden. Still nothing happened. THEN we finally started the long flight back to K-13 with barely enough fuel to make it.

Although that was fun(!!!), my most memorable flight with Mac came on the 18th of May. By that time, he had thirteen kills, and the Migs were very active most of the time. We were experimenting with six-ship flights to counter the MiG tactic of flying long 'trains' of two-ship flights, one behind the other. Our six-shippers didn't last long, proving too unwieldy. But this morning Mac was leading one. It also didn't last long.

'Mac' and his wingman, 1Lt Dean Abbott in one of the more peaceful times at K-13 in 1953. (credit - Dean Abbott)





1Lt Earl Wisecarver was Dean Abbott's cousin, and also assigned to the 39th FIS in 1953. After 'Mac' left in May 1953, Lt Wisecarver was assigned his old airplane, renaming it "Battlin' Bootsie". (credit - Larry Davis)

No. 5 aborted the takeoff roll and 6 stayed behind with him. Now we were four. Then, when we dropped our tanks, No. 3 couldn't get one off, so he and No. 4 headed for home. Mac and I were now an element and continued north to the Yalu.

Shortly after we arrived over the river, two MiGs flew right over us heading north. We turned after them and followed them across the river into China. We were allowed to do that according to the rules of 'hot pursuit' that were in effect. The MiGs were about a half mile in front of us, slightly high - and they knew we were behind them. They were dipping their wings to keep us in sight, and we figured, correctly, that they were calling for help.

We weren't gaining on them at full power so I was surprised when Mac pulled his nose up, which would result in a loss of airspeed. What he was doing was getting off a short burst in an attempt to slow his MiG down. Quite often if you hit them in the tail, their landing gear would come down, making them a sitting duck. To my amazement, Mac scored some hits and his MiG lit up from strikes on the tail. I tried the same thing, getting off a quick burst at the one I was behind, but with no visible success.

At that very moment, the help the MiGs had called for, started showing up. I called a flight of four coming in from 3 o'clock, and another at 9 o'clock. Another flight also came from 9 o'clock and flew right under us. We broke hard right into this flight, as they were better targets than the two we'd originally chased. In the break, I got out in front and one of the MiGs behind us started firing at me. Mac rolled in behind him and quickly shot him off my tail. The MiG pilot ejected. We broke hard right again, and again with me out in front, the same thing happened. Another MiG opened up on me, and again, Mac did a half roll, got behind him, and shot him off my tail.

Somewhere in this melee, as I was calling out MiGs, I said, "My God, there must be thirty of them!" Mac responded, "Yeh, and we've got'em all to ourselves." We were the only two still in action that morning and everyone was listening, including the



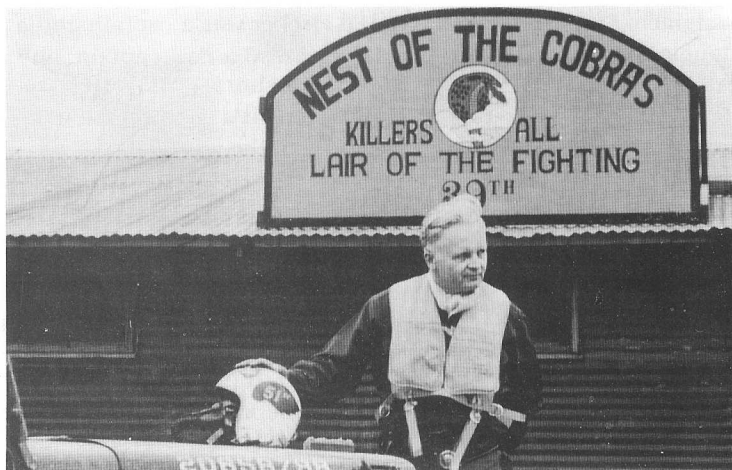
'D' Flight of the 39th FIS in late Spring 1953. (l-r)Duc, Fritz, Gil, and Dean Abbott, standing in front of the 39th FIS operations shack. (credit - Dean Abbott)

Battle Staff back in Combat Ops at K-13. This audacious statement, plus the fact that he had just become a triple ace, gained Mac a lot of notoriety.

From that point on, all we could do was break left and right defensively, trying to work our way back south as best we could. Probably the only reason we weren't shot down was that there were so many of them they got in each others way. We finally made it south of the Yalu, and, thankfully, they didn't follow. Had they done so, we would have been out of fuel quickly, and they could have claimed both of us without firing another round. As it was, we limped back and landed on fumes. But we did make it.

Mac went back up that afternoon and got one more to raise his total to a record 16 MiGs. That was his last combat flight. He was sent back to the States a few days later. Before he left, he recommended me for a Distinguished Flying Cross, which I received, and secured a spot promotion for me to first lieutenant. One of my most prized possessions is an 8x10 picture of the two of us shaking hands. It's autographed, "to my wingman on the roughest one of all."

Lt.Gen. Glenn O. Barcus, commanding 5th AF in Korea, flew missions with the 51st FIW in 1953. His 'wingmen' including 'Mac', George Ruddell, and Bob Baldwin - all aces! (credit - Dean Abbott)





Four 39th Fighter Interceptor Squadron pilots declare who's the victor in a friendly game of horseshoes near the 2 minute alert aircraft at Suwon in 1953. (credit - Dean Abbott)

Joe McConnell was a fine leader. Often, returning from a mission, if fuel allowed, he would let us practice the scissors maneuver on him. Or practice a simulated complete hydraulic failure using only throttle and rudder, so that we could get ourselves back to friendly territory to eject if necessary. His ability to fly that way probably cost him his life the following year. He was stationed at George AFB, and was being 'loaned' to Edwards Flight Test Center for acceptance testing of the F-86H. The people of Apple Valley had built and donated a new home for Joe and his family.

In August 1954, he experienced a complete hydraulic failure in an H, and elected to try and bring the crippled airplane down on the dry lake bed using only throttle and rudder. He almost made it but ground turbulence got him as he was about to land. One wing lifted and he had no way to correct for it. He ejected, but that was before the advent of the zero-launch seat and he didn't make it. Captain Joseph M. 'Mac' McConnell is buried in a spot of honor in the Victorville Cemetery. His

A very tired Joe McConnell walks away from his airplane following his 16th MiG kill, and 3rd one that day - 18 May 1953. (credit - Larry Davis Collection)

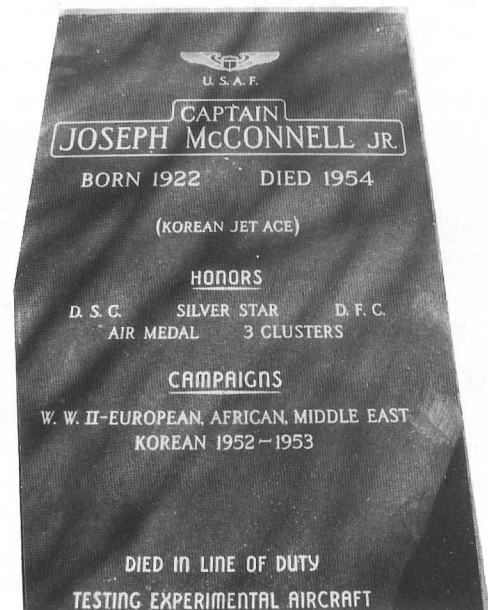


sixteen jet-vs-jet victories have not been surpassed to this day.

His replacement as 'D' Flight commander was a US Marine exchange pilot, Major John Bolt, a 5 victory ace in World War Two with 'Pappy' Boyington's Black Sheep Squadron, VMF-214. Major Bolt would become the only Marine to make ace in Korea, claiming 7 MiGs before the end of the war.

I ended up with exactly 50 missions when the war ended, returning to the States in December. I'd spent enough time in grade as a spot first lieutenant to retain that rank. I was one of the first six pilots to form the nucleus of the 388th Fighter Bomber Wing at Clovis AFB (later Cannon AFB), New Mexico. I later flew a tour in Vietnam, retiring in 1971 at Myrtle Beach AFB, flying the A-7D. Two of my sons followed me into the Air Force as fighter pilots. Lt. Col. Joe Abbott and Major Tom Abbott, are both still in the Air Force. Both flew in Desert Storm. They like to remind me that MY war stories are now history. And, damn it, they are!

Capt. Joseph McConnell was killed testing the F-86H in 1954, and is buried at Victorville. (credit - Dean Abbott)



HOOT'S HOKKAIDO AIR FORCE

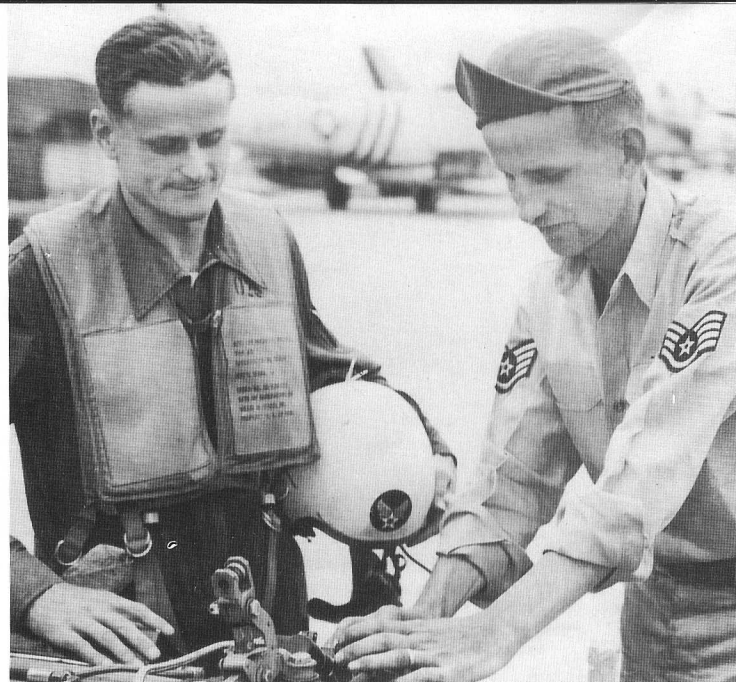
by Lon Walter

OK, now picture this. It's Spring 1951. The war in Korea has stabilized roughly along the 38th Parallel. In the US, a fresh army division is being sent to the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido for final training before going to Korea. Troopships carrying the 45th Infantry Division (Oklahoma National Guard) are about to land at the ports of Muroran, Hakodate, and Otaru. Although there are several USAF radar sites on Hokkaido, there are no aircraft on the island. Chitose AB is in caretaker status, with limited transient capability. The Powers-That-Be (PTB) want to reassure the arriving soldiers that the US Air Force will protect them from the damn commies only 210 miles to the north on Sakhalin Island. If you're the PTB, how are you going to do that, huh?

It would probably be impossible these days, but what they did was send four first lieutenants from the 4th Fighter Interceptor Wing, each flying an F-86A Sabre, from Johnson AB (near Tokyo) to Chitose. This impressive force consisted of Ralph D. 'Hoot' Gibson (335th Squadron), the flight commander; and wingmen A.J. 'Lon' Walter (335th), E.A. 'Scotty' Hanford (336th), and H.C. 'Shack' Skackleford (336th). Their orders were to proceed to Chitose, about 450 miles, and stand by.

When a troopship approached the island, Doll Sugar Flight was notified and would launch two Sabres to intercept the ship and provide low altitude combat air patrol. It was important that the F-86s remain clearly in view of the soldiers on board. When the fighters ran low on fuel, the other two would launch from Chitose and relieve them on station. The first two would return to base for a quick turn-around, and the process was repeated until the ship docked or darkness set in. The idea was to give the American troops the impression they were being protected by large numbers of America's latest front-line fighter. The mission was of such importance that if one of the four Chitose Sabres had mechanical ills, it was flown to Johnson for an immediate replacement. Or Johnson would send a fresh airplane and maintenance help to repair and recover the broken bird.

The small caretaker detachment at Chitose, commanded by Major Molineaux, welcomed the arrival of the Sabres with open arms. They'd been bored stiff and rolled out the red carpet for us. The transient maintenance force was headed by a former F-86 crew chief, who assured Hoot the aircraft would be well



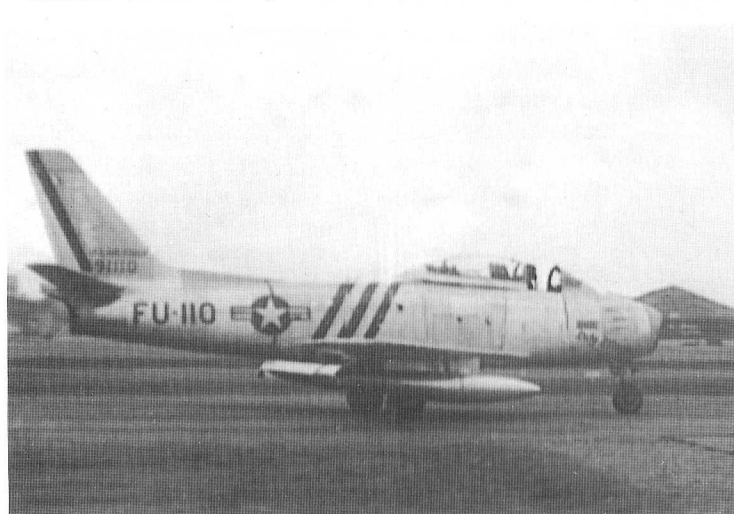
1Lt Ralph D. 'Hoot' Gibson and S/Sgt Joe Holstein at Suwon AB in June 1951. 'Hoot' would become the 3rd ace in the Korean War. (credit - USAF via Larry Davis)

cared for. They were. The pilots were escorted to their quarters, a large three bedroom house with a roaring fireplace, a maid, and a cook. The commander of the Air Police detachment introduced himself by saying that if there was anything the pilots needed, he would do his best to provide it. On-call transportation to and from the flight line (or anywhere else we wanted to go) was provided by the Air Police.

Between 21 April and 28 April 1951, Doll Sugar Flight flew about 96 hours and 84 sorties (see footnote). It was Fighter Pilot's Heaven! Four great airplanes, your own 'private' air base, a mission that required you to show off for ground troops, no additional duties - and we were 450 miles from higher headquarters!

Each day began with a hearty breakfast. Then when the troopship-of-the-day loomed on the horizon, two shiny Sabres would begin a series of passes over the ship, rocking their wings as the troops lined the railings, waving like mad. Some

An F-86A on the ramp at Chitose AB, Japan, one of four 4th FIW Sabres that 'guarded' northern Japan from the Russian hordes in April 1951. (credit - Lon Walter)





A rare photo of Hoot Gibson flying a cargo aircraft - the C-46 carrying the 335th Squadron to Korea. (credit - Lon Walter)

passes were at high speed, followed by a sensational pull up, and often followed by an Immelmann or Cuban Eight. Show time! Other passes were low and slow.

Two missions stand out in my memory. One morning as we approached the ship, there was a very large, four engine aircraft circling overhead. Clearly this Navy PB4Y Privateer (a Navy version of the B-24, with a single tail, very big wings and quite slow) was trying to upstage the Air Force. After easily flying past the PB4Y at a high rate of speed, I pulled up and began setting up on his 6 o'clock for a little fun. It was then that this lieutenant learned a big lesson - when flying a jet fighter, one does NOT try to turn with a large, slow, four engine airplane.

The Privateer pilot must have been a frustrated fighter jock, because he threw that big hulk into a 45° bank, and broke left at about 150 knots. I soon found myself forced to use the Sabre's great speed and power to impress the shipborne audience. I don't know where that PB4Y came from, or where he went, but after a while he must have become convinced that the Air Force was capable of caring for the troopship, and he departed. Of course, there might have been submarines down there...but, naw-w-w.

Another time, our sources told us there would be no ships that day, so Hoot and I flew a training mission. In beautiful clear weather, and in contact with the radar stations at Rumoi and Wakkanai, we proceeded up the west coast of Hokkaido at 40,000 feet - well into the contrail level. Arriving at Wakkanai on the northern tip of the island, Sakhalin (USSR) was clearly visible only 26 miles across the La Perouse Strait. And while we never crossed the mid-point of the strait, we both wondered if Soviet MiGs would scramble to protect their



border. They didn't. Enroute back to Chitose, Hoot took the scenic low level route down the center of Hokkaido. Fighter Pilot's Heaven!

On the eighth day, Doll Sugar Flight bade farewell to its new friends at Chitose and returned to Johnson. The 335th and 336th Squadrons would soon be rotated back to Korea at K-13, where the stakes would be higher. But by keeping the MiGs contained along the Yalu River, the Sabres were still protecting the 45th Division and other UN forces fighting along the 38th Parallel.

(Footnote: The author's Form 5 shows 24 hours flying time and 21 sorties for this period of time. The flight total is estimated by multiplying by four.)

1/Lts Hoot Gibson and Bobbie Smith on the flight line at Suwon in June 1951. (credit - Lon Walter)



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BERLIN CRISIS

SABRE'S RETURN TO EUROPE

by Richard A. Lucas

It's July 1961 when an Air Force advisor to the Massachusetts ANG pops the question during our two week training stint at Otis AFB - "How many of you think you'll still be civilians at Christmas?" We all raised our hands, not knowing that plans were underway for Operation STAIRSTEP just as the Berlin Wall was being built.

Dodging traffic on the Massachusetts Turnpike going home, I was startled to hear a news bulletin that President Kennedy had activated and federalized certain ANG fighter groups. POW! My unit, the 131st TFS, 104th TFG at Barnes MAP was named!

We had gratefully shed our fuel gulping, noise making F-94C Starfires for sleek, low time F-86Hs in late 1957. My checkout in the 'H' came on 4 January 1958. It was love at first flight! By the time of our callup, I had racked up more than 600 hours in that sweet flying machine.

Preparations were swift for our deployment. Rumor was it would be a re-opened 'RED BALL' base in eastern France - Phalsbourg. We immediately began running the C-11 trainer around the clock filling squares for practice approaches at Loring, Goose Bay, Prestwick and Phalsbourg. TACANs were quickly fitted to the Sabres, replacing the ADF. We would be landing at Sondstrom AB, Greenland, where the approach meant flying up a fjord, counting eskimo villages, and after the third village, the runway should be in sight!

TAC Headquarters at Langley was uneasy with the decision to send Guard pilots to Europe on such short notice. In those days, airline pilots were not encouraged to fly with the Guard. The reasoning was that airline pilots often worked weekends when the unit held drills. Many of the Monday through Friday guys flew every Saturday.

A 131st TFS F-86H taxis to the active runway at Barnes MAP, Westfield, MA in 1961. The 131st converted from F-94Cs to F-86Hs in early 1958. (credit - Larry Davis)



Captain Richard Lucas, 131st TFS, at Sondstrom AB, Greenland, 18 July 1962. (credit - Dick Lucas)

Sensing a possible disaster, 9th AF sent its Stan/Eval team headed up by none other than General Walter Sweeny. Were we impressed to be sitting in our briefing room with a 4 star quizzing us on emergency procedures! I think it quickly dawned on the general that we weren't a bunch of fuzzy-cheeked weekend JOPs. Our Group CO had flown P-36s before Pearl Harbor. The Squadron CO had busted trains across Europe. The 'A' Flight leader had flown on Chuck Yeager's wing. We had B-29, F6F, and F4U pilots. Three of us had been B-24 aircraft commanders. The planes from Syracuse and Boston likewise were manned by old heads who stayed with the program because we loved to fly - especially the F-86H!

Launch Day, 28 October 1961. We donned our pooppy suits and GCId up to Loring for an RON. Didn't leave a single bottle of champagne or sparkling wing in the O-Club. Our Wing CO, Brig.Gen. Charles Sweeny, of Nagasaki fame, wrote a personal check for a couple of glasses we pilots may have accidentally broken.

Off to Goose Bay, where the mess hall struggled mightily to feed 75+ hungry pilots. Then a bigger problem arose - SNOW! However, the weather experts decided the upper winds were favorable to make the leg to Sondstrom. But to save fuel, the airplanes were tugged to the runway, engines started on signal and run to full power, a head nod and we rolled down the runway into the white void.

Topping out at 20,000 with Nos. 3 and 4 in position, we settled back for the flight to Sondstrom. There were Duck Butts below, but we knew there wasn't much chance of surviving in the frigid water. But those wonderful GE J73s that we completely trusted, plus the Guard's well known maintenance skills gave us a smooth flight. We often bragged that our senior non-com 'Zebras' had grease under their fingernails, while their Air Force counterparts sat behind desks to supervise.

We normally planned an 'H' cross-country flight at FL 40 to FL 44. This was the altitude where the bird performed at its best. We often looked down from our perches at the early Century series aircraft, most of which had to go into 'burner to get up to where we flew with ease. Those 9,000 lb. J73s were great!

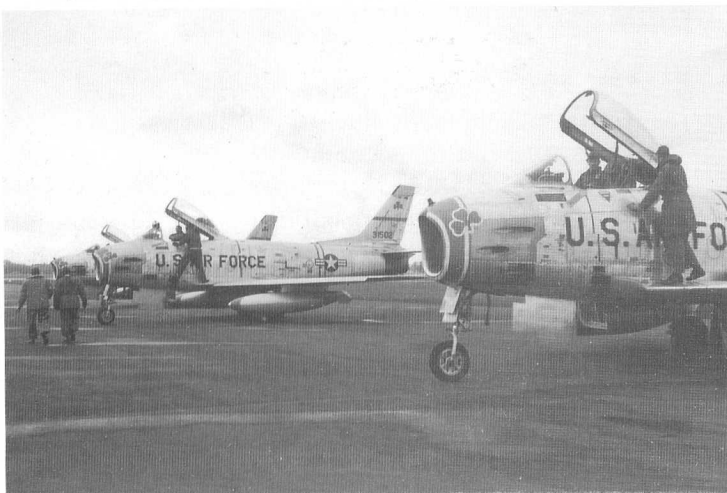


An F-86H from the 131st Tactical Fighter Squadron, Massachusetts ANG, on the ramp at Phalsbourg AB, France during an Open House celebration in 1962. The 131st TFS was equipped with F-86H-1s, which still retained the six .50 caliber machine guns. (credit - Roger Warren)

A night spent at Sondestrom in a cold Danish Army barracks, with an early morning breakfast of powered eggs. Yummm... After we picked the shards of glass out of our flight boots, we headed across the ice cap to Keflavik. We'd been briefed about the free access to the base by Icelanders, and had been warned that their tiny but vocal Communist Party might demonstrate. On shutdown, the flight was greeted by a character with a sign that read *Kennedy's Killers - Go Home*. I was tempted to restart and run up the engine to see how good his grip was on that sign. But discipline held.

We were restricted to the base that night, leaving early the next morning for Prestwick. Someone had thoughtfully placed a TACAN ship between Iceland and Scotland, making us all happy. A quick turn-around at Prestwick, and it was on to our new home at Phalsbourg. We had flown the North Atlantic and put over 75 F-86Hs in place without so much as a blown tire. I recall that the F-84F pilots did about as well. But they had air refueling and visited the Azores enroute. We'd put some 235

Operation STAIR STEP sent three activated Air Guard F-86H squadrons to Phalsbourg AB, France - the 131st TFS at Westerfield, the 138th TFS, New York ANG, and these F-86Hs from the 101st TFS at Boston. The F-86Hs remained at Phalsbourg until August 1962. (credit - Larry Davis)



fighter aircraft into European bases within 30 days of activation - no accidents, no incidents. Pretty good for a bunch of 'part time' fighter pilots.

Then came the culture shock at our re-opened but not yet ready base. My BOQ was fitted with an iron cot and a light bulb dangling on a wire. We were billeted across the base near the hardstands, and routinely rode the Strasbourg buses. After a theater orientation lecture, I made my first flight.

Except for busting out of low ceilings after GCA approaches at Chaumont and Etain, I never saw the ground again. We couldn't get on top of it. But my wingman held on for the entire flight through the European winter murk. Our squadron weather minimum had always been on the conservative side. Now it dropped to 301' on a 7800' downhill (often slushy) NATO runway. We all became sharp on the gauges real fast!

The Sabre had returned to Europe. And as the months rolled by, boy did we love it!

131st TFS 'B' Flight (l-r) 1Lt Ferd Forest, Capt. Bob Reynolds, Capt. Tom Norbury, and Capt. Dick Lucas, Phalsbourg AB 1961. (credit - Dick Lucas)





Col. Dave Graben in the cockpit of one of the Charles Osborn collection of F-86 Sabres. Col. Graben has the honor(!?) of being the first F-105 pilot to be struck by enemy fire during the Vietnam War. Although he never flew the F-86 while in the Air Force, Col. Graben is now current and regularly flies one of the Osborn airplanes at air shows throughout the United States. This airplane, F-86F #52-4731 is painted in the markings of a Sabre assigned to the 71st Fighter Interceptor Squadron based at March AFB in 1950. The Sabre was restored at the American Airlines Maintenance Base at Alliance Airport, TX. Col. Graben's remarks about flying Sabres - "It was a hoot! I wish the guns were installed and I could go to the range and shoot up a cloth panel. Ah, the good old days!" (credit - Dave Graben)



CECIL FOSTER HONORED

Frankenmuth, MI, Armed Forces Day - An F-86E Sabre was unveiled at the 'Michigan's Own' Military and Space Museum in Frankenmuth on 15 May 1999, painted in the markings of two former F-86 aces in Korea - Captains Iven C. Kincheloe, Jr. and Cecil G. Foster. Both pilots flew with the 51st FIG at Suwon.

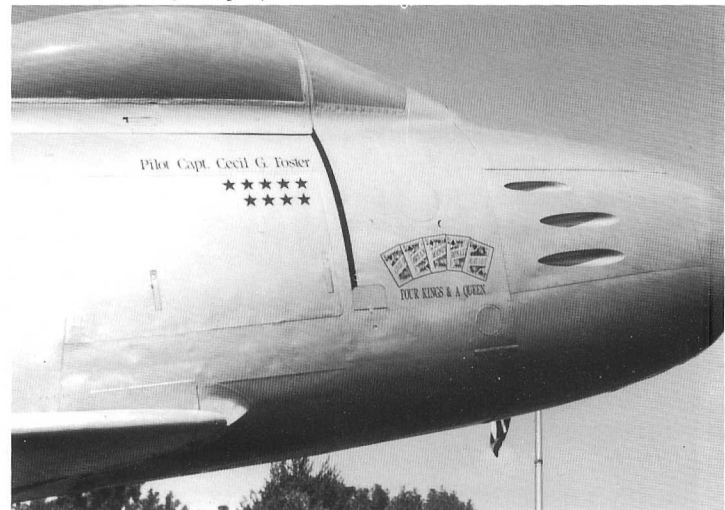
Cecil Foster, a longtime member of the F-86 Sabre Pilots Assn., shot down nine MiG-15s between September 1952 and late January 1953. Assigned to the 16th FIS, Captain Foster became the 23rd Jet Ace in Korea. Captain Kincheloe was the 10th ace, scoring five MiG kills.

The unveiling was attended by some 300 people, including Medal Of Honor recipients Duane Dewey and Robert Simanek, both former US Marines; Colonel Jack Lousma, USMC and Astronaut; and Air Force Lt.Col. Donald 'Digger' O'Dell, who spent 5 1/2 years as a prisoner in North Vietnam.

Foster unveiled the plaque and gave an acceptance speech for both Kincheloe and himself. The celebration continued at a banquet held in his honor at the American Legion Hall. The aircraft was named "Four Kings & A Queen" after Foster's wife and four sons. Congratulations Cecil!



Margaret and Cecil Foster unveil the plaque in front of 'his' F-86E at the Military & Space Museum, Frankenmuth, MI, 15 May 1999. (all photos courtesy of Niki (Foster) Hoyle)



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51st Fighter Interceptor Wing
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Grand Ramada Hotel, Branson, MO.
Contact Robert McNarie, 51st FIWA,
6904 N. Central, Gladstone, MO 64118-
2426,
ph. (816)468-4224.
e-mail at <RCanary690@aol.com>

388th Fighter Bomber Wing
Sept 2-6, 1999, in Colorado Springs.
Contact John W Dawson, 18145 Stone
View Rd., Monument, CO 80132, ph.
(719)481-3986

Pilot Class 53-A
April 5-9th, 2000 in San Antonio, TX.
Contact Ed Fox, 1620 Peach Leaf St.,
Houston, TX 77039,
e-mail <Reunion53A@aol.com>

New General Follows Father's Calling

by Capt. Kim Clowe, USAFE News Service

Ramstein AB, Germany, 6 March 1999 -- Past met present here March 1st when a father helped his daughter pin on her new rank, making her the first Air Force woman to follow in her father's footsteps as a brigadier general.

Brig. Gen. Terry Gabreski, Headquarters USAFE Director of Logistics, received her first star from her father, retired USAF Brig. Gen. Lon Walter, USAFE Commander Gen. John P. Jumper, and her husband, retired USAF Col. Don Gabreski.

"This is a very humbling experience," said General Gabreski, a career maintenance officer who calls southwest Louisiana home.

"There are two primary reasons I stand here today," she explained. "First, as proof of the magnificent opportunities the Air Force offers, and the outstanding people who took the time and effort to help me understand how wonderful an Air Force career can be. Second, the support of my loving and patient family."

"My dad always said the hard things are usually worth doing," she said.

Another figure in military history was among family and friends at the ceremony. Retired Air Force Col. Francis Gabreski, her father-in-law, and America's highest scoring living ace, was in attendance. Gabreski had 28 aerial victories during World War II, and 6.5 more in the Korean War.

"I am completely impressed with her professionalism and her being a team member of the US Air Force -- the greatest in the world," said the retired colonel. "I believe the Air Force is 100 percent better today than when I served."

(The F-86 Sabre Pilots Assn. congratulates General Gabreski on her appointment)



Warning
Before operating speed brakes, be sure aft
fuselage area is clear



WHO IS IT? This pair of F-86A-1s was assigned to the Wright Field Test Center in the early 1950s. The near aircraft has a Day-Glo sunburst on the wings, with Day-Glo scallops on the nose and tail. It is thought that this airplane was part of an aerobatic team made up of test pilots assigned to Wright Field. Anyone with information about this airplane is asked to please contact your *SabreJet Classics* Editor, Larry Davis, 4713 Cleveland Ave. NW, Canton, OH 44709, (330)493-4122 ,or e-mail >SabreClsx@aol.com<.

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