

# *The Century*

From F-100 to F-106, USAF's legendary "Century Series" of fighters performed a wide range of missions with distinction.



# Series

Photos via Warren E. Thompson

Text by June Lee



*Four F-106 Delta Darts with the Florida Air National Guard's 125th Fighter Group fly in formation. The delta-wing fighters were capable of Mach 2 in operational service, and they served as America's premiere interceptors for nearly three decades.*

**T**he Air Force's "Century Series" of fighters—so called because they ranged from the F-100 to the F-106—marked many firsts for the service: the first supersonic, then double-sonic fighters; the first aircraft conceived as "weapon systems" matching radars, aircraft, and weapons; and the first tactical aircraft designed to carry nuclear weapons. **11** Beginning in the early 1950s, the Air Force experimented with a concept called "zero-length launch." The aircraft was mounted on a trailer and equipped with a rocket pack to get it airborne and up to speed; the rocket was jettisoned once the fighter was moving under its own engine power. This photo was taken at George AFB, Calif., in 1961. **12** An F-100 Super Sabre refuels over Europe in 1961. More than 2,000 F-100s were built between 1953 and 1959—a figure almost incredible given the sparse fighter production lots of today. **13** Front view of an F-100D. **14** This two-seat version, wearing the typical Southeast Asia camouflage scheme, was assigned to the 352nd Tactical Fighter Squadron at Phan Rang AB, South Vietnam, in 1971.



Photo by Robert Terbet

**1**



Photo by Frank Street

**2**



USAF photo

**3**



Photo by John O'Donnell

**4**



USAF photo

111 An F-100 flies chase with an Army "Blue Goose" drone. 121 Originally designed as a long-range escort for bombers, the F-101 Voodoo was modified into a tactical fighter-bomber with nuclear capabilities. Early armed versions included the F-101A and B; the reconnaissance model, RF-101C, distinguished itself in low-level passes over Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis and in Vietnam. This shot is of an F-101B in 1959. Note the deployed speed brakes under the T-tail. 131 An F-101B (right) and F-102 at Tyndall AFB, Fla., in 1960. In front of the F-102 are AIM-4 Falcon missiles; in front of the Voodoo, AIR-2 Genie missiles. The Genie and some versions of the Falcon, which were air-to-air weapons, carried nuclear warheads. 141 Iconic Cold War interceptors, two Voodoos fly in formation. More than 800 F-101s were built.



Photo by Jim Lionberger



Photo by Al Wimer



USAF photo



USAF photo

2



1 Photo by Bruce Gordon



Photo by Bob Donaldson

3



Photo by Bill Winkler

5



Photo by James Cobb

4

**11** An F-102 Delta Dagger assigned to Air Defense Command flies past the eruption of Augustine Volcano in Alaska in 1964. **12** An F-102 takes off from NAS Keflavik, Iceland, during the Cold War. As interceptors, F-102s were positioned at the periphery of North America; this one was assigned to the 57th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron in Iceland. **13** F-102s of the 509th FIS stand alert in South Viet-

nam during September 1964. These Daggars deployed with their standard interceptor gray, but F-102s in theater eventually wore the Southeast Asia camouflage scheme. **14** F-102s from the 64th FIS, assisting the 509th FIS, in a revetment at Da Nang AB, South Vietnam, in 1968. Many would keep the camouflage in Air National Guard service back in the US. Next to the aircraft are the "caskets" bearing

their missile armament. **15** An F-102 pilot from the 64th FIS, Paine Field, Wash., practices refueling before deploying on the long flight to South Vietnam in the mid-1960s. The F-102 was the first USAF aircraft to employ the "area rule," smoothing supersonic aerodynamic performance by using a wasp-waist fuselage. The F-102 employed many radar and electronic firsts, as well.



Photo by Mike Korte

1



USAF photo

2



Photo by Bobby Bedsworth

3

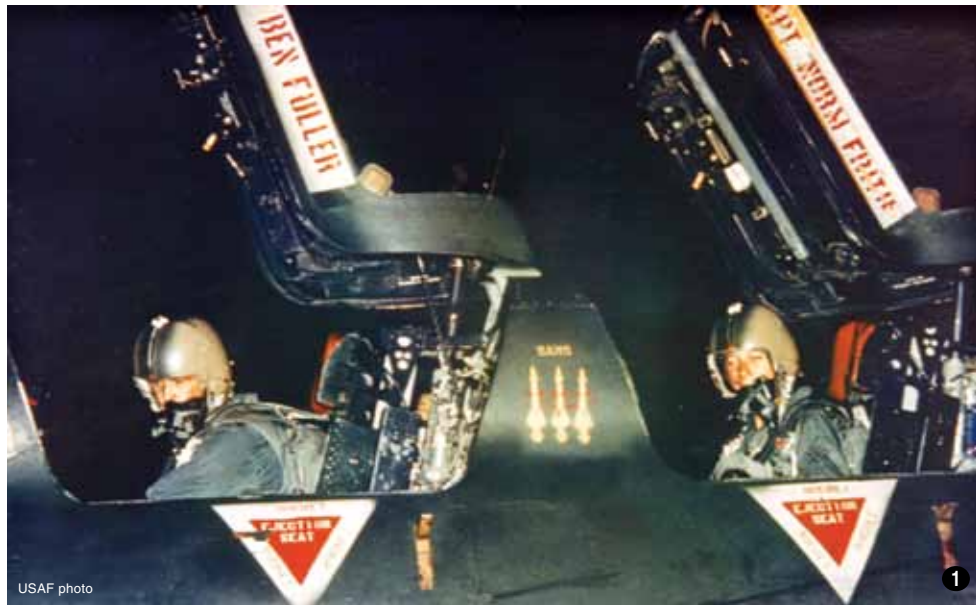


Photo via Howard Johnson

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**1|** An F-104 banks near Luke AFB, Ariz., in 1971. The F-104 was designed for quick-climbing, supersonic air superiority. The “missile with a man in it,” it was sometimes called. The fuselage provided the basis for the U-2 spyplane. **2|** A Starfighter at Taeyan AB, Taiwan, during the Quemoy Crisis in 1958. The US sent aid to Taiwan after communist China shelled its offshore island of Quemoy. **3|** This F-104 photo was taken on the flight line at Udorn AB, Thailand, in 1967. The F-104’s speed and stubby wings made it adept at high-speed, slashing attacks, but it could not turn with an agile opponent. **4|** Lt. Col. Howard Johnson, wearing his “moon suit” helmet and G-suit, steps into the cockpit of an F-104 at George Air Force Base in 1965. Some NF-104 test versions of the Starfighter were used to set time-to-climb records. One such attempt was immortalized in the Oscar-winning film, “The Right Stuff.”

111 The F-105 Thunderchief was meant to be a fighter, but its bomb bay and heavy-weapons-carrying ability, driven by a need to carry nuclear bombs, turned it into a dedicated strike platform in Vietnam. Here, Maj. Ben Fuller and Capt. Norm Frith in a two-seat F-105 complete their 100th mission in April 1967. Note the three SAM kill marks. 121 An F-105 sits on the flight line at Korat AB, Thailand, in January 1973. 131 A crew member works on an AGM-45 Shrike missile on an F-105G. Along with the Standard ARM, also mounted on this wing, the Shrike homed in on enemy radar emitters and was the typical weapon of anti-radar missions. 141 An F-105 from the 80th Tactical Fighter Squadron is shown here operating out of Korat in 1965.



USAF photo



USAF photo



USAF photo



Photo by Robert Pielin



Photo by Frank Street

1



Photo by Dennis Kelsey

2



ANG photo

3



USAF photo

4

*11* F-105s from the 18th Tactical Fighter Wing fly near Okinawa in this 1964 photo. *12* A pair of F-106s fly over the Pacific Northwest. Originally intended as a modification to the F-102, the Dart eventually became different enough to warrant its own designation. *13* An F-106 at Great Falls, Mont., in 1987. *14* An F-106 from the New Jersey Air National Guard's 177th Wing in the 1970s doing what it did best: intercepting a Soviet Tu-95RTs Bear. The Dart was the last Century Series fighter to serve, being retired to drone duty beginning in the early 1980s. Other Century fighters were felled by being too technically ambitious or by changing missions. ■