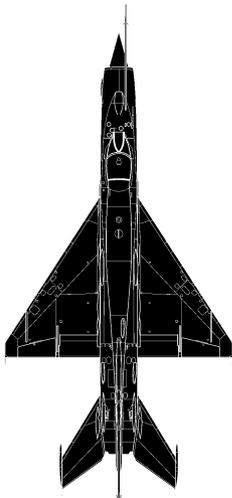


MiG-21 Fishbed



The Soviet-designed MiG-21—NATO code name Fishbed—is the most-produced supersonic jet aircraft in aviation history and the first Soviet aircraft to successfully combine fighter and interceptor traits. Created by Mikoyan-Gurevich Design Bureau in the 1950s, it is best known as an effective and tenacious foe of the F-4 Phantom during the Vietnam War. It probably has flown in more wars than any other fighter.

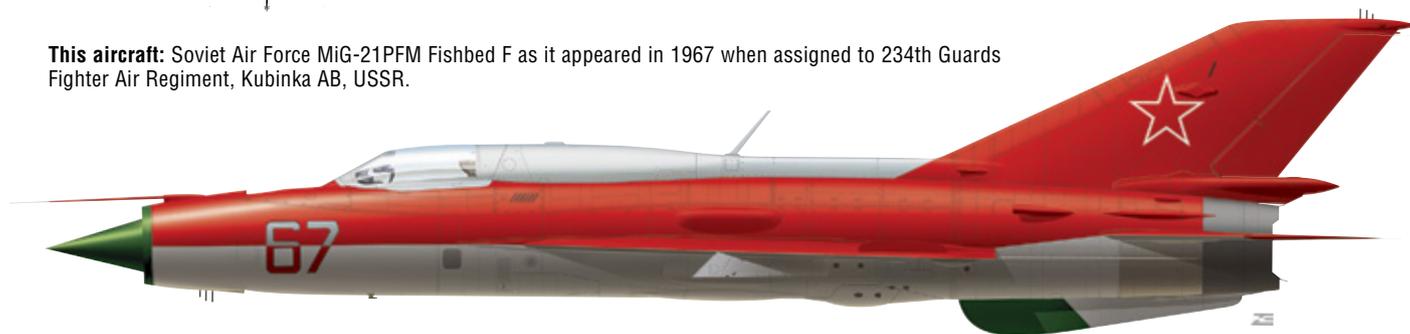
From the outset, the MiG-21 has been a small, fast, and agile lightweight fighter, achieving Mach 2 with a low-power turbojet engine. Its delta wing has a 57-degree sweep angle on the leading edge. The early MiG-21 was hampered by a short range, but later variants acquired more fuel capacity, along with heavier armament and

better avionics. They have also been fitted with a more powerful engine. Simple, inexpensive to buy and maintain, and easy to fly, the MiG-21 was widely exported and continues to be upgraded and used in several countries.

The effectiveness of the speedy MiG-21, in the hands of skilled North Vietnamese pilots, came as a shock to US F-4 pilots in the skies over Southeast Asia. It would attack in swarms, coming at the F-4s from different directions, then abruptly break off to escape. The little fighter's success was eventually overcome, late in the Vietnam War, by greatly improved US pilot training and better rules of engagement.

—Robert S. Dudley with Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: Soviet Air Force MiG-21PFM Fishbed F as it appeared in 1967 when assigned to 234th Guards Fighter Air Regiment, Kubinka AB, USSR.



In Brief

Designed, built by Mikoyan-Gurevich OKB ★ first flight Feb. 14, 1956 ★ number built 11,496 (USSR, 10,645; Czechoslovakia, 194; India, 657) plus undetermined number in China ★ **Specific to MiG-21PFM Fishbed F:** one Tumansky R-11F2S-300 turbojet engine ★ armament one external GSh-23 cannon, up to 3,300 lb of missiles or rockets ★ max speed 1,386 mph ★ cruise speed 550 mph ★ max range 1,035 mi ★ weight (loaded) 20,010 lb ★ span 23 ft 6 in ★ length 40 ft 4 in ★ height 13 ft 6 in ★ service ceiling 62,000 ft.

Famous Fliers

Aces: North Vietnam Nguyen Van Coc (7 kills), Nguyen Doc Soat (5), Vu Ngoc Dinh (5); Syria Muhammad Mansour (5), Bassam Hamshu (5), Adeeb el-Gar (5). **Notables:** Munir Redfa (Iraqi defector who in 1966 flew MiG-21 to Israel); Abdul Qadar Al-Termanini (Syrian pilot who in 1976 defected with MiG-21 to Iraq); Danny Shapira (Israeli test pilot who flew piloted MiG-21); Ayesha Farooq (Pakistan's first war-ready female fighter pilot). **Selected wars:** Vietnam War (flown by North Vietnam); Iran-Iraq War (Iraq); Angolan Civil War (Cuban pilots); Balkan Wars (Serbia); 1967 Mideast War (Egypt, Syria, Iraq); 1971 Indo-Pakistani War (India); 1973 Mideast War (Egypt, Syria, Iraq); 1982 Lebanon War (Syria).

Interesting Facts

Used by North Vietnam in “one pass, then haul ass” attack strategy ★ prompted US Navy to create Topgun and USAF to start Red Flag ★ in December 1972, scored first-ever air combat kill of a B-52 bomber, over Hanoi ★ nicknamed “Balalaika” and “Pencil,” due to shape, also “Blue Bandit” ★ flown by more than 60 nations on four continents ★ still in service some 60 years after first flight ★ suffered early design defect that shifted center of gravity to rear whenever two-thirds of fuel used ★ examined in 1968 by US, which used a MiG-21 captured by Israel.



A Romanian MiG-21 takes off from a Camp Turzii, Romania, runway.

USAF photo by S/A Benjamin Wilson