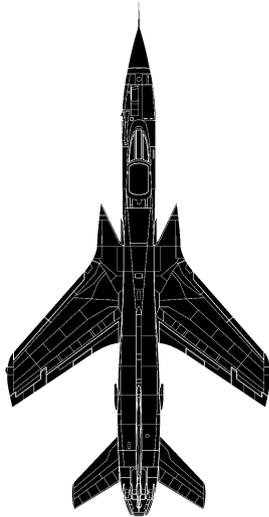


Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

F-105 Thunderchief



The rugged, supersonic F-105 Thunderchief carried out three-fourths of US strikes against heavily defended North Vietnamese targets, and it paid the price in heavy losses. This Republic fighter-bomber, known to all as the “Thud,” suffered more than 350 losses in Vietnam, one of the highest loss rates ever sustained by a US combat aircraft. The aircraft had been developed to meet Air Force requirements for a supersonic, single-seat fighter-bomber able to deliver heavy loads of conventional bombs and rockets as well as nuclear bombs at high speeds over great distances. The F-105 was the heaviest US single-engine, single-seat fighter ever.

The first F-105 was delivered to the Air Force in 1958. It had all-metal 45-degree swept wings and tail plane, forward swept air intakes, and a ventral fin added for greater stability, while the original fuselage was modified into its distinctive “Coke bottle” design. The F-105D featured advanced automatic navigation and weapon delivery systems and had an internal bomb bay suitable for nuclear weapons. On their heroic Vietnam War forays,

Thud pilots used externally mounted bombs and missiles. The Thud retained a Vulcan cannon, and pilots used it to achieve 27 MiG kills.

F-105Ds bore the brunt of the Rolling Thunder campaign (1965-68) to bomb targets in North Vietnam. The F-105F replaced the F-100F in the now-famous “Wild Weasel” radar-suppression mission. The later G models were optimized for the Wild Weasel role. The F-105 Wild Weasels carried both the AGM-78 Standard ARM and the AGM-45 Shrike anti-radiation missiles. Despite the huge size of the airplane, Thunderchiefs consistently shot down enemy fighters. In all, F-105s dropped a whopping 202,596 tons of bombs. The Thud continued in active duty service until 1980 and in Reserve service until 1984.

—Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: F-105G #63-8266—*White Lightning*—as it looked in 1972 when assigned to 388th Tactical Fighter Wing at Korat RTAB, Thailand.



In Brief

Designed, built by Republic Aviation ★ first flight Oct. 22, 1955
★ crew one or two ★ number built (USAF) 833 ★ one Pratt & Whitney J75-P-19W turbojet engine ★ **Specific to F-105D:** armament one 20 mm M61 Vulcan gun; up to four Sidewinder AIM-9B; nine LAU-3/A or 18/A rocket pods; two ECM pods ★ max load 14,000 lb ★ max speed 1,390 mph ★ cruise speed 600 mph ★ max range 1,840 mi ★ weight (loaded) 52,546 lb ★ span 34 ft 11 in ★ length 64 ft 5 in ★ height 19 ft 8 in.

Famous Fliers

Medal of Honor: Merlyn Dethlefsen, Leo Thorsness (Vietnam War). **Air Force Cross:** 40+ airmen, including Jack Broughton, Fred Cherry, James Kasler, James McInerney Jr., Karl Richter, Robinson Risner. **Notables:** Charles Horner, later the “air boss” of Desert Storm; Joseph Moore, record-setting 1,216 mph over 100 km course; Ed Rasimus, author of *When Thunder Rolled*.

Interesting Facts

Nicknamed (partial list) “Thud,” “Lead Sled,” “Super Hog,” “Iron Butterfly,” “Squash Bomber,” and “Ultra Hog” ★ used briefly (six shows in 1964) by the Thunderbirds ★ equipped the first full USAF squadron flying only supersonic strike aircraft ★ grounded 10 times, most often for in-flight fires ★ destroyed North Vietnam’s Paul Doumer Bridge in a famous Aug. 2, 1967 attack.



F-105s thunder across the sky at Hill AFB, Utah.