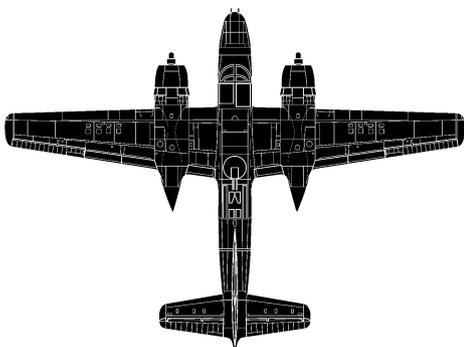


Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

A-26 Invader



The A-26 Invader served America well in three official wars and quite a few unofficial clandestine ones. Fast and able to carry a heavy bomb load, the Invader was easily the best US light bomber of World War II. It was later, though, that it made its bones as one of the best of all time. The Invader went on to serve extensively in Korea and Vietnam, and was also a favorite of CIA-backed forces in small wars around the world.

The Invader was designed to replace the A-20, B-25, and B-26 bombers. It was a major advance, featuring a laminar flow airfoil, electrically operated double-slotted flaps, and two remotely operated power turrets. The “solid-nose” B model could be converted to a “glass nose” C model (and vice versa) just by changing the nose section. It had growing pains, requiring 28 months of post-first-flight development. Still, it entered

combat in 1944 and compiled an admirable record in Europe and Asia. In Korea, the sturdy Invader (now named B-26) saw heavy action, flying 55,000 bomb sorties. It is credited with destroying 38,500 road vehicles, 3,700 railcars, 406 locomotives, and seven aircraft.

As jet powered aircraft became available, the B-26 was taken out of service, only to be recalled to duty in 1960 with the 1st Air Commando Group in Vietnam. It was used in Operation Farm Gate. Then, USAF had some 40 rebuilt into B-26Ks, called “Counter Invader” to highlight the counterinsurgency role. Not long after that, the Invader was redesignated A-26A. The last was withdrawn in 1969, after chalking up successes not only in a world war but also in the hottest conflicts of the Cold War—a claim that can be made for few, if any, other aircraft.

—Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: USAAF A-26B-51-DL Invader—# 44-34323—as it looked in the late 1940s in the Far East.



In Brief

Designed, built by Douglas Aircraft Co. ★ first flight July 10, 1942 ★ crew of three (pilot, nav/bombardier, gunner) ★ two P&W R-2800 engines ★ number built 2,452 ★ **Specific to A-26B:** max speed 355 mph ★ cruise speed 284 mph ★ max range 1,400 miles (loaded) ★ armament (typical), 10 .50 cal. machine guns, up to 16 rockets ★ bomb load, up to 6,000 lb ★ weight (max) 35,000 lb ★ span 70 ft ★ length 50 ft ★ height 18 ft 6 in.

Famous Fliers

Medal of Honor: Capt. John S. Walmsley Jr. (Korean War) **Other notables:** Maj. Gen. Reginald J. Clizbe, Brig. Gen. James D. Kemp, Col. Joseph Kittinger, Lt. Gen. Eugene B. LeBailly, Maj. Gen. William C. Lindley Jr., Maj. Gen. Nils O. Ohman, Brig. Gen. Luther W. Sweetser, Brig. Gen. Virgil L. Zoller.

Interesting Facts

Fastest piston-engine bomber of WWII ★ redesignated B-26 (1948) and re-designated A-26A (1962) ★ last airplane designated “attack-bomber” ★ flew first (June 28, 1950) and last (June 27, 1953) US bombing missions in Korea ★ seen in 1989 Steven Spielberg film “Always” ★ used by Cuban exiles in 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion ★ flown by CIA-backed mercenaries in the Congo in early 1960s ★ operated by 17 foreign air forces ★ SAC RB-26 recce aircraft for two years.



A World War II A-26C on the ramp.