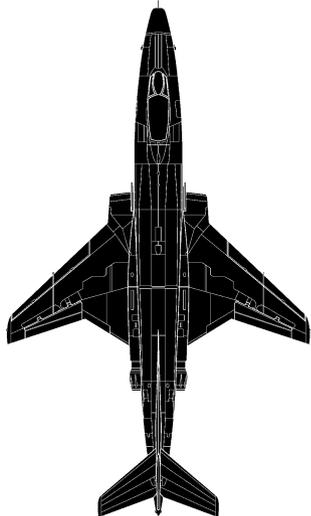


Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

F/RF-101 Voodoo



The sleek and powerful F/RF-101 Voodoo fighter was the first production airplane capable of achieving a speed of 1,000 mph in level flight. It was also the heaviest single-seat fighter USAF had ever accepted to that point. The RF version became the world's first supersonic reconnaissance aircraft, and it made a name for itself in combat missions over North Vietnam and during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

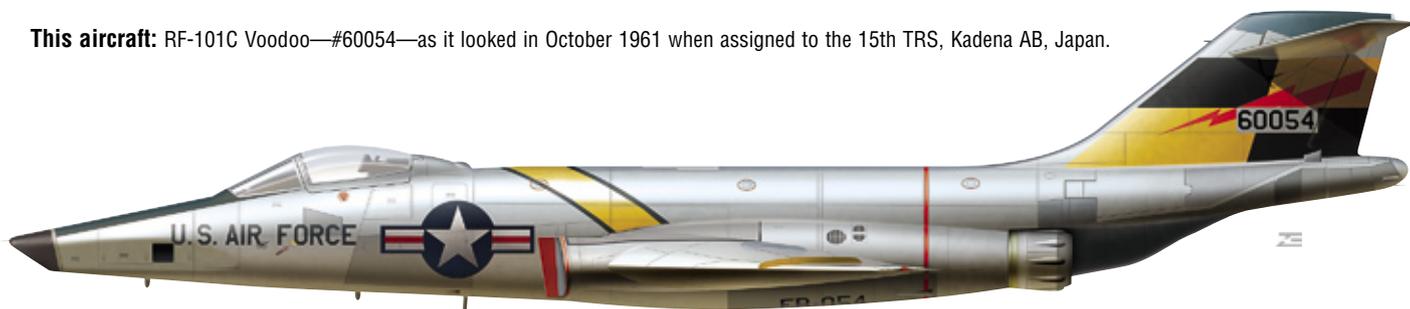
The McDonnell aircraft had several significant versions. These include the F-101A fighter-bomber, F-101B long-range interceptor, and RF-101A/C photoreconnaissance variant. All traced their origins to the short-lived 1946 McDonnell XF-88, developed as a "penetration fighter" to escort Strategic Air Command B-36 bombers. That concept was dropped but was revived in the early 1950s. The second generation, dubbed "Voodoo," was enlarged and equipped with more powerful engines, and eventually saw service in multiple

roles. In October 1959, eight RF-101As were sold to Taiwan, which used them to overfly mainland China. For the US, reconnaissance Voodoos played a key role in the Cuban Missile Crisis. On Oct. 23, 1962, the 363rd Tactical Reconnaissance Wing's RF-101A and RF-101C aircraft confirmed the Soviet missile buildup in Cuba; 15 pilots were awarded Distinguished Flying Crosses for their work. The RF-101C was the only version to see action in Vietnam. Their flights began in 1961. With demand for photoreconnaissance growing, USAF based Voodoos in Thailand as well as Vietnam. On Feb. 8, 1965, RF-101Cs serving as Pathfinders led the first US strike (by F-100s) on North Vietnam.

The Voodoo's fighter-bomber and reconnaissance roles eventually were taken over by the F-4 Phantom II. It often is viewed as an important evolutionary step toward the Phantom, which replicated its upswept aft fuselage and dual crew.

—Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: RF-101C Voodoo—#60054—as it looked in October 1961 when assigned to the 15th TRS, Kadena AB, Japan.



A flight of F-101B Voodoo interceptors.

In Brief

Designed, built by McDonnell Aircraft ★ first flight Sept. 29, 1954
★ crew of one or two ★ number built 807 ★ **Specific to F-101B:** two PW J57-P-55 turbojet engines ★ armament two AIM-4D air-to-air missiles, two AIR-2A Genie nuclear missiles ★ max speed 1,094 mph ★ cruise speed 546 mph ★ max range 1,754 mi ★ weight (loaded) 52,400 lb ★ span 39 ft 8 in ★ length 71 ft 1 in ★ height 18 ft.

Famous Fliers

Notables: Robin Olds (Air Force Cross, ace), James R. Brickel (Silver Star), Charles E. Shelton (Vietnam KIA), Lonnie R. Moore (Korean War ace, killed in F-101 test), John R. Lasater, Fred Mellor, George L. Monahan Jr. **Record Setters:** Adrian Drew (1957, absolute speed); Robert Sweet (1957, speed westbound coast-to-coast); Gustav Klatt (1957, speed eastbound coast-to-coast); George A. Edwards (1959, speed over closed course).

Interesting Facts

Nicknamed "One-Oh-Wonder" and "Longbird" ★ reached Vietnam in October 1961, first USAF jet aircraft to arrive ★ led first USAF attack on North Vietnam (Feb. 8, 1965) ★ achieved best first-year safety record of any USAF jet fighter ★ downed 30 times in Vietnam ★ had nuclear capability in B and C models ★ operated by Taiwan and Canada.