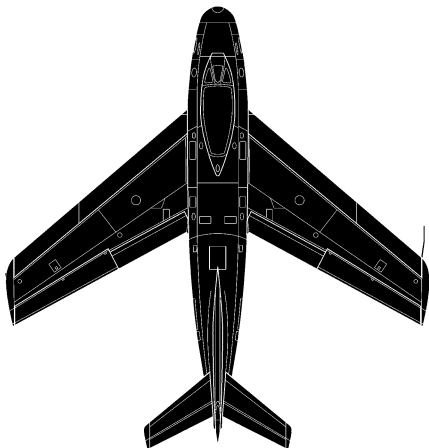


Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

F-86 Sabre



Called the “fighter pilot’s fighter,” USAF’s F-86 was a marriage of US manufacturing technique and German swept-wing research. The hot little North American jet aircraft took over from its P-51 Mustang predecessor to become the top air superiority fighter in the Air Force. Before it was done, it had served as an interceptor, fighter-bomber, nuclear strike fighter, reconnaissance aircraft, and trainer.

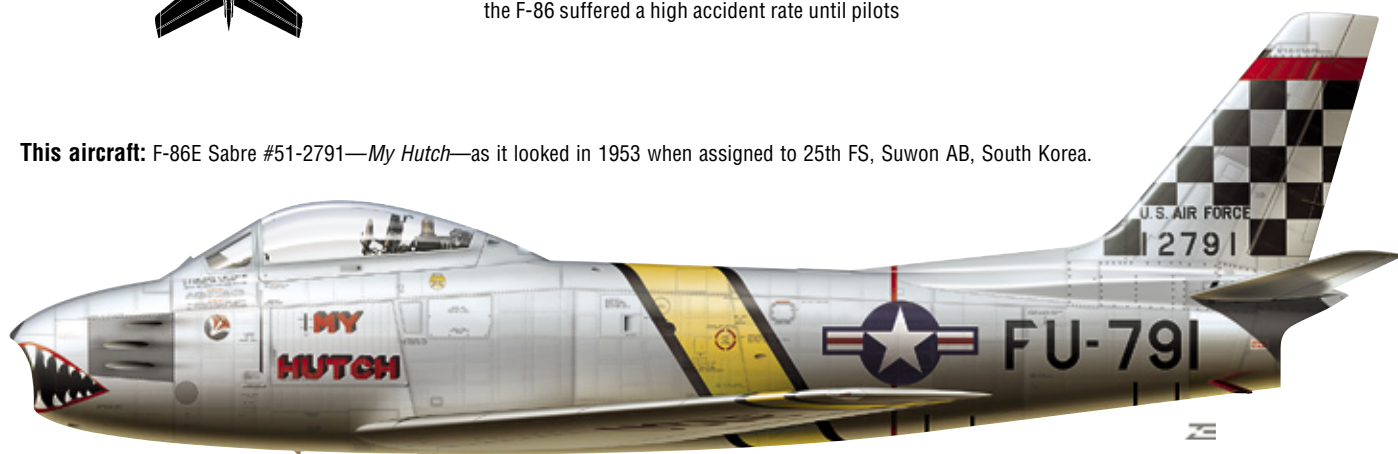
Original plans called for the Sabre to have straight wings like those of the Navy FJ-1 from which it was derived. However, the prototype XP-86 was enhanced with a 35-degree swept wing. It had automatic slats similar to those used on the Messerschmitt Me 262 fighter. The Sabre was capable of supersonic flight in a dive. In fact, the F-86 suffered a high accident rate until pilots

could routinely be given training of a caliber commensurate with the fighter’s performance.

Initial F-86s were assigned as air defense interceptors, a role in which they were deemed indispensable. Then, in November 1950, Soviet-built MiG-15s entered the Korean War. The US quickly sent three squadrons of Sabres as counters. Equal performance and superior piloting allowed the F-86 to establish dominance over Russian pilots flying the MiGs; Sabre pilots established a lopsided kill advantage over their communist opponents. The F-86 went on to serve in 38 air forces around the world.

—Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: F-86E Sabre #51-2791—*My Hutch*—as it looked in 1953 when assigned to 25th FS, Suwon AB, South Korea.



In Brief

Designed by North American Aviation ★ built by NAA, Canadair, Commonwealth, Fiat, Mitsubishi ★ first flight Oct. 1, 1947 ★ crew of one ★ number built 9,860 (USAF, USN, USMC) ★ **Specific to F-86F:** one General Electric J47-GE-27 engine ★ armament six .50 cal machine guns, two 1,000-lb bombs, eight 5-in rockets, napalm ★ max speed 687 mph ★ cruise speed 540 mph ★ max range 1,525 mi ★ weight (loaded) 18,152 lb ★ span 37 ft 1 in ★ length 37 ft 6 in ★ height 14 ft 8 in.

Famous Fliers

Medal of Honor: George Davis (Korea). **Air Force Cross:** Robinson Risner (Vietnam). **Aces:** Joseph McConnell Jr., James Jabara, Manuel Fernandez Jr., George Davis, Royal Baker, Frederick Blesse, Vermont Garrison, Robinson Risner, Francis Gabreski, Harrison Thyng, Charles Cleveland. **Notables:** Edwin Aldrin, Bud Anderson, Bruce Carr, Edwin Chickering, Kenneth Chilstrom, Jacqueline Cochran, Gordon Fullerton, John Glenn, Robert Hoover, Sam Johnson, Iven Kincheloe Jr., Walker Mahurin, Robin Olds, Donald Rodewald, Russell Schlee, Raymond Tolliver, Chuck Yeager.

Interesting Facts

Credited by some as first to break sound barrier ★ first to break 700-mph barrier ★ first to launch a Sidewinder in combat (Taiwan AF model, 1958) ★ led to North American F-100 ★ featured in films “The McConnell Story” (1955), “The Hunters” (1958) ★ flew in SAC, TAC, ADC ★ set world speed records of 670.981 mph (1948), 698.505 mph (1952), and 715.697 mph (1953).



The Sabre was fast and maneuverable.