

Sabre Jet Classics



Volume 17, Number 1

SPRING 2009



*Inside: 17th Reunion Report,
Sq/Ldr Graham Hulse, 120th FIS Tigers,
Perrin Memories, More!*

A publication of the F-86 Sabre Pilots Association

SabreJet Classics

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Contents

- 3.....President's Notebook
Folded Wings
- 4.....from the editor
list of e-mail addresses
- 5.....to the editor
- 6.....Folded Wings,
Ralph D. "Hoot" Gibson
- 8.....17th Sabre Pilots Union
- 9.....Sabre Memories
- 10.....Sq/Ldr Graham Hulse,
DFC, RAF, MIA
by Houston Tuel
- 12.....This 'n That
Who Is It?
Project ARROW Update
- 15.....120th FIS "Tigers"
Colorado Air Guard
by Stephen Pahs
- 17Perrin Pilots At Foster
by Harold Wade
- 19.....Sabre Reunions
Book Review
- back cover.....Who Is It?

(front cover) Sabre Dawgs from the 355th FIG line the ramp at McGhee Tyson AFB near Knoxville, TN in 1956. The near aircraft (red/white checks) is from the 469th FIS, while the rest are from the 354th FIS. (credit - Ron Picciani)

SabreJet Classics

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the president's notebook

This will be my last note to you as President of the F-86 Sabre Pilots Association. Providing approval by the membership, on 31 March 2009, J.R. Alley will take over as President after the 2009 Reunion. John Martin will take over as Treasurer from Dick Geiger.

JR and I have been working together for the last year and one half. I will become Vice President. This should provide for a smoother transition than we have had in the past. It has been MY pleasure to serve this great organization for the past 8 years and I would like to thank everyone that has helped me along the way.

Larry Davis, Editor of the SabreJet Classics, has a free hand to write, edit, and publish the magazine, and he has produced excellent publications three times a year. In my opinion, the SabreJet Classics magazine is the glue that holds this organization together. Thank you Larry for your outstanding work.

Bill Weiger volunteered to set up and run our web site SABRE-PILOTS.ORG. If you have a computer and haven't visited the web site, you really should. It's outstanding!

Chairman of the Board Dan Druen has been a great help in providing assistance and guidance when needed. I have taken advantage of his guidance several times and appreciated his help very much.

Our Treasurer Richard Geiger has controlled the Association finances and taxes and kept them in great shape. Thanks Dick!

Vice nPresident Bob Smith is the type of man every president needs. When you ask Bob to do a task or project, you don't have to ask how it's going. It just gets done. I like that.

Flight Line Store manager Jack Seaman has been a great help in sending out orders and keeping the inventory straight.

Data POrcessing Manager Polly Winesett has done a superb job of maintaining the data base and providing address labels for the magazine and membership roster.

Last but certainly not least, all the members of the Board of Directors: Glen Carus, Sam Hollenbeck, Pat Hughes, Robert Matasick, Robert Slater, Lloyd Ulrich, and Lon Walters. Thanks to all of you. It's been great working with you.

In the past year we have lost a lot of good members. The ones I will miss the most are Dee Harper and Hoot Gibson.

As of 27 January, we have 159 registered for the Reunion. I was hoping for another 400 members and guests to attend, but that was a bit overly ambitious considering the economy and travel costs. I hope to see you this year because I am not sure how many more reunions we will have.

Check 6

Jerry R. Johnson
President

FOLDED WINGS

Ralph E. Banks, February 2nd, 2007
Gordon C. Baskett, May 24th, 2008
Edward G. Baxter, February 28th, 2009
Merle A. Bechthold, August 2008
Thomas W.C. Birge, January 29th, 2009
Robert R. Brackett, October 9th, 2008
Robert J. Burns, July 12th, 2006
Burton Field, July 26th 2007
Micahael G. Filliman, January 30th, 2009
Roger D. Ide, October 29th, 2008
Robert N. Johnson, June 3rd, 2008
Edward E. Nowogroski, June 17th, 2007
Edward E. Seaman, September 8th, 2008
Donald 'Dusty' Showen, 2009
Verlin B. Tranter, December 9th, 2008
Clarence L. Shivers, 2006

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from the editor

Greetings Gang! Welcome to vol. 17-13. It's only been a few short weeks since I attended the 16th Reunion and I'm already looking forward to the next one. It will again be at the Gold Coast Hotel/Casino in Las Vegas from 10 April through 12 April 2011. And it will also again be tied together with the Super Sabre Society Reunion which starts on 12 April and ends the 14th in the same hotel. Make your plans now.

Back to our 16th Reunion. It was as usual a top notch affair which should be a credit to the guys in Las Vegas for putting it together. One guy in particular was my good friend and our soon-to-be ex-President, Jerry Johnson. I have had the extreme pleasure of working with and for Jerry Johnson for the past 6 years.

He has been a true leader in every sense of the word. Whenever the magazine had a problem he worked diligently to get it solved. And we had our share of problems. Not the least of which was the delay of issue 16-2 last summer. It wasn't Jerry's fault, nor was it the fault of anyone on this end. It was a Postal Department problem.

When I got a call from Jerry several weeks after we had gone to press that no one had received their magazine, it got things in motion. On my end I had to track down what had happened. Turns out that the Post Office had made a change in how the magazine was handled, then a second change was instituted before the first change had went into effect.

As it goes, the magazine goes straight from the printer to a mail house who puts the addresses on each issue and sorts them by zip code. It's then sent to the Canton, OH main post office. Voila - within a couple of weeks everyone is reading their magazine. However, not this time.

Seems the Canton Post Office no longer processed our magazine, they forwarded it to Cleveland - where it sat in a warehouse for a couple of weeks! Then they changed it again and the magazines were forwarded to Pittsburg, where they again languished in a warehouse until someone had time to handle them. It took almost 8 weeks to actually get them into the mail to you!

When we asked why, they explained it had to do with a lack of 'bar coding' on our part. We never needed bar codes before but we did now. I immediately notified Jerry Johnson of the problem. He touched base with Polly Winesett, our computer whiz, and they worked out the details of bar coding with the mailing house here in Canton. Bing, bang boom, and vol 16-3 was in the mail right on time.

That's the kind of President Jerry Johnson has been. Even though we were thousands of miles apart, he got it handled. I have enjoyed every day of working with Jerry - and look forward to another two years. I know that JR Alley will also be a great President but I'll still miss working with Jerry Johnson. Thanks Jerry for all your patience and good thoughts. You kept your cool although you probably wanted to wring my neck.

Larry Davis
editor

Who was that masked man? This photo was taken at Nellis Fighter Gunnery School in 1954. The four illustrious pilots are (standing) John Koerschner & Milt Benson; (kneeling) are our illustrious President Jerry Johnson & Jan Holley. Looks like Jerry is again in deep thought. (credit - Milt Benson)

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letters to the editor

Do not forget that we have a new post office box which is as follows:

**PO Box 34423,
Las Vegas, NV 89133-34423**

re: **Who Is It?, vol. 16-3**

Dave Menard writes

It's painted in the white band up on the fin - 4925th Test Group(Atomic) These folks worked on the delivery methods for various nuclear weapons and over half of the people that served in that unit have cancer problems.

They would fly their aircraft through the clouds generated by the detonations at Yucca Flats, then come back to home plate to get them washed off. The GIs doing same wore normal fatigues and rubber boots to keep their feet dry. No haz-mat suits, no respirators, no gloves, no nothing. I have seen photos of them washing a B-29 off using garden hoses.

This is the 8th F-86H-1 built by North American Aviation. All the H-1s were armed with six .50 caliber machine guns. Initially, the H-1 also had the 6-3 'hard wing' with fences but the standard wing span. This airplane has retained the 6-3 'Hard Wing' with fences but now has the extended wingtips. (credit - Larry Davis collection)



re: **Who Is It? vol 16-3**

I received a number of notes and emails that the aircraft in question was NOT an F-86H but an F-86F, all with the same notation - "It has six .50 caliber machine guns, the H had four 20mm cannons. Guess what guys? The first 113 F-86H-1 aircraft built at Columbus were all armed with six .50 caliber machine guns and had the 6-3 extended wing with fences. During the H-5 production, the wing was changed to a extended 6-3 wing with leading edge slats. And beginning with the F-86H-5, four M39 20mm cannon were installed in place of the machine gun armament.

Beginning with the F-86H-5, the airplanes were armed with four M39 20mm cannons. This jet is the 4th H-5 built and has had the 6-3 'hard wing' leading edge replaced with the slatted leading edge but with the extended wingtips. (credit - Larry Davis collection)



folded wings

Ralph D. "Hoot" Gibson

January 2nd, 2009

On January 2nd, 2009, America and the F-86 Sabre Pilots Association lost one of its most famous and well-liked members, when Ralph D. "Hoot" Gibson suddenly passed away following a disastrous fall while selling real estate in Tucson, AZ. He was 84 and will be missed by everyone.

"Hoot" joined the Army Air Force in 1943, graduating from flight school in 1944. Following a tour in Japan flying P-51s, and Armament System School, he was assigned to the 56th FG at Selfridge flying P-80 Shooting Stars.

In 1950, the 56th Transitioned into F-86 Sabres and "Hoot" was lucky enough to be one of the pilots that delivered new F-86As to the veteran 4th Fighter Interceptor Group in November 1950 when that group was transferred to Korea to fight the MiG jets. He talked his way into joining the 4th and went with the unit to Korea.

Assigned to the 335th Squadron based at Suwon, South Korea, "Hoot" scored a 'probable' on 20 May 1951. On 18 June 1951, he scored his first victory, or actually two, when he shot down a pair of MiG-15s near the Yalu River. On 9 September 1951, he scored his 5th victory, making him the third Jet Ace in Korea, after which he was sent home.

Following a good will tour, (now) Captain Gibson rejoined the 63rd FIS at Oscoda AFB, Michigan where he married Donna, his wife of 53 years. In 1954, he was assigned to the 36th Fighter Wing at Bitburg, Germany, where he transitioned into the F-100 Super Sabre. His next stop was back in the United States, at Nellis AFB.

It was at Nellis that he achieved even more fame than being an 'ace'. While commanding the 21st Fighter Training Squadron at Nellis, Hoot became infatuated with the



Capt. Ralph D. "Hoot" Gibson, September 1951.
(credit - USAF)

Thunderbirds Air Demonstration Team. In March 1961, he wrangled an assignment to the famous team, not just as a team pilot. Major Ralph "Hoot" Gibson was Team Leader, and remained so for two years. His comments regarding his time in the Thunderbirds, (very proudly) "Once a Thunderbird, always a Thunderbird!"

The Gibson's next went to USAFE Headquarters where "Hoot" was Chief of the Tactical Fighter Branch. In December 1967, Colonel Gibson went back to war, when he was assigned as Squadron Commander of the 433rd TFS at Ubon, flying 105 combat missions over North Vietnam. In 1974, Colonel Gibson retired from the US Air Force and moved to Tucson AZ, where he opened his own real estate company. He is survived by his wife Donna.

(editor - I met 'Hoot' at the 1997 reunion of the F-86 Sabre Pilots Association. He was a grand gentleman and a lot of fun. He spent many hours with me talking about Korea and flying the F-86. I always looked forward to reuniting with him at every reunion. I will miss him greatly.)

11 July 1951, 1Lt. "Hoot" Gibson changes his score while his wingman, 1Lt. Larry Layton, holds the scoreboard at Suwon AB, South Korea. "Hoot" scored 2 MiG kills on this day, 18 June 1951. (credit - USAF)





Stars & Stripes September 1951 after Dick Becker and 'Hoot' made "Ace". (credit - Larry Davis collection)



Lt. Ralph 'Hoot' Gibson on the ramp at K-13 during the Summer of 1951. (credit - Leo Fournier)



Lt. Ralph 'Hoot' Gibson chats with T/Sgt Joe Holstein just prior to the mission on which 'Hoot' scored 2 MiG kills, 18 June 1951. Both men were from the same hometown, Mt Carmel, Illinois. (credit - USAF)

Lt. 'Hoot' Gibson in the right seat of the 4th FIW C-46 that took the 335th FIS back to Korea in early 1951. He just loved to fly! (credit - Larry Davis collection)



17th Sabre Pilots Reunion

After-Action Report

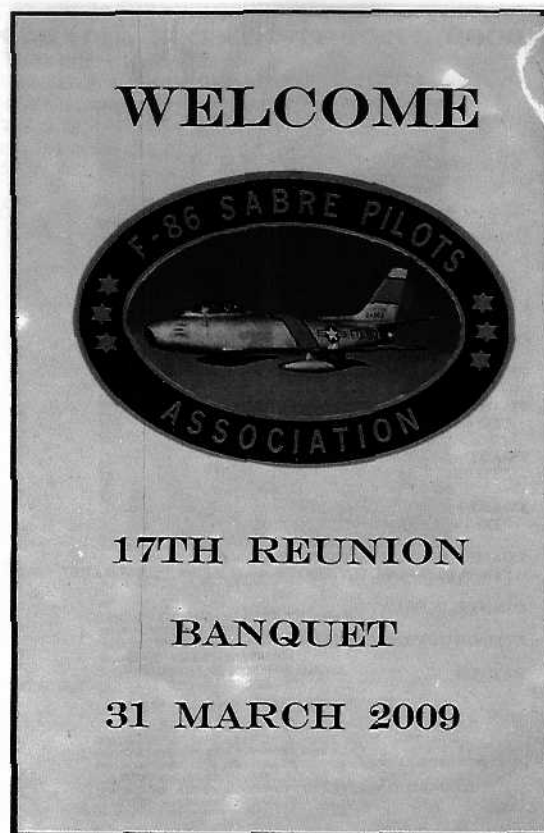
The 17th Reunion of the F-86 Sabre Pilots Association was held March 28th, 29th, and 31st at the Gold Coast Hotel/Casino. The 17th Reunion was significant for many things, not the least of which was the change of location. Because of many complaints from the members about rising costs and slipping service, our Association made the decision to move to the Gold Coast, located next door to the Rio in Las Vegas.

The decision turned out to be god one. The cost per member was down significantly, and the food quality was up. Located off the Strip about 3/4 mile, the Gold Coast offered exactly what we needed - comfortable rooms at a decent price, several classy restaurants including the renowned Cortez Room, and many large rooms to use for the banquet and hospitality rooms. These were really needed on Tuesday when the F-100 Super Sabre Society invaded and took over the hallway for their reunion.

Our reunion opened on Sunday the 28th and everything went smoothly - as usual. The hospitality room was complete with a cash bar. No 'freebie' tokens this year but no one seemed to mind. The Flight Line Store was in the same room and was doing a booming business from beginning to end. Which was good as this was the final year for Flight Line Store sales. At the end of the 17th Reunion, the Store was closed forever. There were bargains galore, some things were 50% off, and there were even a few 'freebies'. A cocktail party was held Sunday evening and everyone went to their rooms 'happy'.

On Monday morning, the buses were waiting to take many of the members to the Red Flag briefing. Everyone that went said it was the best briefing that they'd been to. Thanks to the guys at Nellis for a great show. The Ladies Luncheon featured a talent and fashion show. It was held next to the Hospitality Room and I saw more than one male member sneaking a peek through the doors. A delicious Buffet meal finished off the evening.

While other members were at Red Flag, the Board of Directors held their meeting. Several important topics were discussed including the naming of a new Chairman as Dan Druen had expressed his desire to step down. Dan was not present due to illness. Pat Hughes was asked and accepted the role of Director. Lloyd Ulrich and Bob Slater also stepped down from the Board. The new Board will be Glen Carus, Sam Hollenbeck, Robert Matasick, and Lon Walter, with Director Pat Hughes at the top.



Dick Geiger gave the Association financial report, which was very sound indeed, and he also stepped down. John Martin will take over as Treasurer. It was reiterated that closing the Flight Line Store was for the good of the Association and it was accepted by all. The meeting adjourned at 11am.

Tuesday was the final day of the 17th Reunion. As the members made their way up the escalator to the 9am Brunch, they were greeted by loud and boisterous voices - the F-100 Society had taken up residence in the hall. The Brunch was served promptly at 9am and was a feast to behold. A guard on the door kept the F-100 guys at bay.

A very important Membership Meeting opened promptly at 11am. Members were told of the changes in the Board of Directors, and a new slate of Association officers was voted into effect. The new President is J.R. Alley, who has over 1500 hours in the F-86 with Flight System Inc.. Jerry Johnson will remain, taking the position of Vice President. The new Treasurer is John Martin.

Details of the closing of the Flight Line Store were discussed and it was mentioned that all remaining sales items would be donated to charity once the Association logo has been removed. SabreJet Classics editor, Larry Davis, explained what the problems were that had occurred in the last 6 months, most of which were due to cold weather in Ohio and a fiasco with the US Post Office.

Glen Carus reported that space is still available on the Sabre Pilots panels that will greet anyone

visiting the Udvar-Hazy portion of the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum. He also asked that anyone wanting his name on one of the panels, contact him after the meeting, and informed Jerry Johnson that some 70 members had requested information about it. The meeting adjourned at 11:40 am.

The banquet was held beginning at 6:30 pm. Everyone agreed that it was by far, the best food that we'd had at any banquet anywhere. And there was a band playing throughout to top it all off. Our Guest Speaker was Major General Stephen L. Hoog, Commander of the Air Warfare Center at Nellis. He gave a rousing and often comical speech to the members and guests about the status of our Air Force and the men and women that are serving our country. Jerry Johnson presented Major General Hoog with a model of the F-86 bearing his name.

With that, the banquet and thus, the 17th Reunion broke up. The band played for several more hours and everyone went home happy. The last thing heard was "See you in 2011 at the 18th Reunion!"



Major General Stephen L. Hoog, Commander Air Warfare Center, Nellis AFB. (credit - USAF)

Sabre Memories - In 1955, the men of the Yuma AFB ADC Training Center Operations Squadron won the base championship basketball competition. The team was led by Maj. James Jabara. The team consisted of (lower L-R) Robert Duchene, the son of one of the players, the 1st Sgt., and Maj. Jabara. (back row L-R) Ralph Parr, Jack Barrett, Robert Diaz, Lee Vosberg, Ken Tallman, and Howard Fredricks. Not pictured were Norman Smedes and David Gray. (credit - Howard Fredricks)



Sq/Ldr Graham Hulse **DFC, RAF, MIA**

by Houston Tuel

Flight Lieutenant Graham Hulse arrived at Kimpo in September 1952. He was on loan from the RAF to the USAF for two years to gain experience in the F-86 Sabre. During World War 2 Hulse was a Sgt Pilot in no. 122 and no. 81 Squadron in 1942-43, flying combat over Europe against the Luftwaffe, then transferred to no. 93 Squadron in the Far East. When he was shot down in Spring 1944, evading capture, he had 2 confirmed victories, plus a 3rd that he scored in April 1945 with no. 213 Squadron after being promoted to Flight Lieutenant.

Houston Tuel - "A tall blonde, affable veteran of the Battle of Britain, he rapidly became one of our most admired and respected pilots. We listened intently to his accounts of his combat missions in defense of Britain, often told with self-deprecating humor. His skill as a story teller was legendary.

Shortly after his arrival at Kimpo, he was promoted to Squadron Leader, the RAF equivalent of major, and made commander of 'C' Flight in the 336th Squadron. Members of his flight practically idolized him. He made it very clear that he was just as interested in the success of the junior members of his flight as he was in his own personal success, sharing opportunities with them that they might not have had with a different flight commander.

As he neared the end of his tour in Korea, he opted to forego an extension beyond the usual 100 missions because he wanted to be home in England in time for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. He almost made it.

Sq/Ldr Graham Hulse writes a letter home in his quarters at Kimpo AB, S. Korea during 1952. (credit - Bob Ingalls)



Bob Ingalls (L) and Squadron Leader Graham Hulse at K-14 in 1952. Sq/Ldr Hulse was an RAF exchange pilot serving with the 336th FIS at Kimpo. Sq/Ldr Hulse was credited with 3 MiGs shot down in Korea to go with the 3 victories he had in World War 2. (credit - Bob Ingalls)

On 13 March 1953, he took off on his 95th mission. Nearing the Yalu River, Hulse saw a MiG and attacked it, closing on him rapidly from behind. He fired, scoring numerous hits. The MiG began smoking profusely and decelerated, probably because of engine damage. Apparently believing the MiG had been rendered harmless, Hulse passed him on the right then made a sharp left turn, crossing directly in front of the MiG at a very close range. With what had to be a very lucky deflection shot, the MiG pilot fired his 37mm cannon, blowing several feet off of Hulse's left wing.

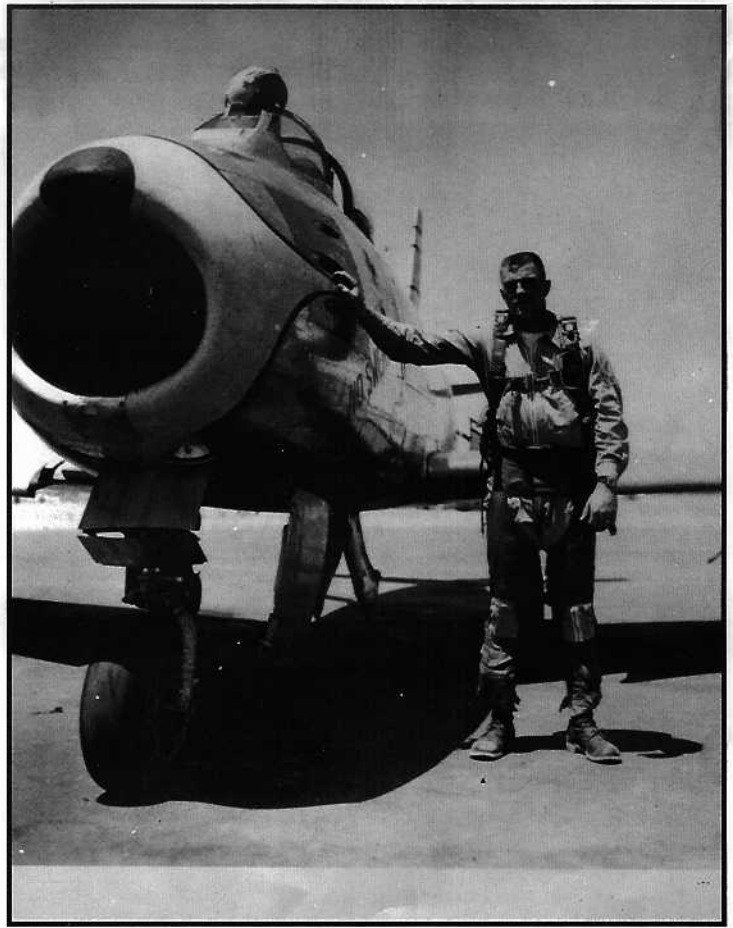
Hulse's wingman, Major Eugene Sommerich, had started firing at the MiG after Hulse broke off. His gun camera film dramatically recorded what happened subsequently.

The intelligence people were not overly generous in sharing what they knew with those of us at squadron level. So much of what we heard later had the credibility of rumors. That said, Hulse was seen to eject over the peninsula code-named 'Long Dong', and was reportedly seen on the ground alive both that day and the next.

The following day, the weather was non-operational and remained so for the next two weeks, at the end of which a massive but futile rescue operation was attempted. To the best of my knowledge, Sq/Ldr Graham Hulse, DFC, RAF, is still listed as Missing In Action."

Sq/Ldr Hulse was officially credited with 3 air to air victories over MiG-15 jet fighters, including a .5 credit for the MiG that eventually also shot him down.

ODE TO THE 45TH FIGHTER & SIDI SLIMANE





Two 331st FIS pilots and a gorgeous lady. Willard Gordon is on the right, but the other pilot and the lady are unknown. Help! (credit - Willard Gordon)



"Hangover" is another unidentified F-86D, possibly from the 357th FIS. Help! (credit - Larry Davis collection)



This patch is believed to be that of the original Geiger Tigers when they were the 520th FIS. Can anyone confirm this? (credit - Marty Isham)

A very interesting photo supposedly taken on Guam when the 41st FIS deployed there in 1954. Tail markings are yellow and black, and does NOT jibe with any known 41st FIS markings. Help! (credit - Larry Davis collection)





Phil Janney flew this F-86D with the 39th FIS at Komaki AB, Japan in 1957. The name of #244 is "Man From LaMancha". The flightline shot is at Komaki showing the typical markings of the 39th FIS in 1957. (credit - Edison P. Janney)



Advanced Fighter Training Class 57-C at Perrin AFB, Texas. (credit - Larry Davis collection)

Project ARROW Update - This is one of the reasons for the Project ARROW research - the confusion over the markings. This F-86D was photographed at McGhee Tyson (same as the front cover), and is supposed to be from the 354th FIS. However, the 354th colors were said to be green and white while the markings on this color shot are obviously either very dark blue or black & white. Need to hear from anyone that was in the 354th FIS in the mid-1950s to verify the squadron colors. (credit - Ron Picciani)





Initially, the 120th FIS, Colorado ANG, converted from F-80Cs to F-86E day fighters. This is the Minute Men team from the 120th FIS in some very special F-86 day fighters - F-86F-2 ex-GUNVAL Sabres originally armed experimentally with 20mm cannon and tested in Korea. The Minute Men flew these aircraft until 1959. (credit - Tom Hail)

The 120th FIS, "TIGERS" COLORADO AIR GUARD

by Stephen Pahs

During World War 2, Buckley Field, near Aurora, CO, was an auxilliary field for Lowry Army Air Field. It was named for Lt. John Buckley, a Colorado National Guard pilot killed in France on 17 September 1918. In August 1946, the Colorado ANG acquired space thereon as tenants. It was the first dedicated ANG base in the United States.

Early in 1956, the squadron replaced their ageing F-80Cs (flown 1953 to 1956), with F-86Es, then to F-86Ds in 1958. These rejects were soon appropriately called "Dogs". We soon realized the new mission signalled the end of 'fun flying' - no more dog fights, acrobatics, uncoordinated flights, etc.

The F-86D Tech Order said that it was capable of supersonic flight. I tried it with burner in level flight - NO GO! It took an afterburner climb from Takeoff to as high as it would climb, a roll over into a Split-S, and straight down in full burner. BANG! It worked! But a short time later the Dog would back out of supersonic.

Apparently, the powers-that-be sensed our feeling about the F-86D. One Sunday during our weekend training, Bob Hoover just happened to drop by. He picked a Dog from the flight line for a demo flight. As is his usual demo, after Take-off and gear-up, he did a perfect and very smooth roll!!!!. Showing us that the D was indeed an good airplane.

The D had an interesting innovation for a fighter aircraft - an Auto-pilot. But upon engaging same, there was a 50-50 chance it would decide that straight and level was really upside down!

We went on Alert status with Air Defense Command. Pilots stood 5 minute Runway Alert for 14 hours a day, 15

in conjunction with Early Warning GCI sites, Pairs of pilots were scheduled for 'alert' 5-10 days each month. Active duty was on a voluntary schedule.

I checked out in the D in 1958 and transitioned to the F-86L in 1960. The time in Ls was short however as we changed airplanes and missions, to a tactical mission in F-100Cs.. Now that was a fighter!

Interesting sidelights. One of the pilots was delagated to bring an F-86D back from IRAN. Several miles west of Denver, over one of the huge national forests, i.e. no cities or even farms, he decided to do some acrobatics. No one would see him, right? WRONG! The Wing CO and Ops Officer were bow-hunting for deer in that very same area. A call to Base Operations quickly gave our hero a name.

"A" Flight, 120th FIS at summer field training in June 1960. (L-R) Capt Monroe Mathews, Lt Thomas Fleming, Capt. Dale Frey, Lt Barry Layton, Capt. Steve Pahs, Lt Harry Parker,





120th FIS F-86D on the ramp at Buckley ANG Base, near Aurora, CO, in 1958. Buckley ANG Base was named for Lt. John Buckley, a Colorado Guard pilot killed in France in 1918. Buckley was originally an auxilliary field of Lowry AFB. (credit - Stephen Pahs)

Meanwhile back at the air patch. During an early morning practice intercept mission out of Wendover, Utah, a T-Bird was towing the DELMAR (radar target) on a low level course across the sunrise. The lead interceptor reported a target blip on his radar screen. His wingman, the Safety Observer, verified he was tracking the 'drone' and signaled - "Cleared to fire!" The T-33 crew immediately saw 24 inert 2.75 inch rockets coming directly at them! Unable to evade the attack, they flew straight and level, assuming the fetal position and prayed. The rockets all missed.

We did have one fatality. Lt Chuck Foster was on a night low-level practice intercept over Eastern Colorado. After radar 'Lock-on' to the bogie, he put his face into the scope hood, flying the aircraft using the gyro horizon on the scope. But apparently the gyro was failing. In following it, he rolled the bird over and flew into the ground. His wingman was yelling at him but to no avail.

History has proven that no communist aircraft were ever allowed to penetrate Colorado airspace!

A 120th FIS F-86L at Buckley ANG Base in 1960. Note the DayGlo markings on the nose and aft fuselage and wingtips, applied during late 1958 to all USAF aircraft operating within the United States. (credit - Harrison Rued)



PERRIN PILOTS AT FOSTER

by Harold Wade

During the late 1950s, Perrin AFB had a rocket detachment at Foster AFB, TX. The instructors in both training squadrons went down there for a week during summer to requalify for air-to-air rocketry in the D.

We used the Matagordo Range, out over the Gulf. The notoriously short flight duration of the Dawg was even shorter as our birds had no drop tanks installed. Returning to base we got in a lot of practice coasting into parking spots and checking the accuracy of the fuel gauges. The engine always died when the indicator read 0.

Those of us that flew the Dawg didn't get to shoot at any MiGs but we sometimes had a little excitement. One afternoon at Foster, I pulled into the arming area with a full load of 24 rockets in the pod, pointed the aircraft away from the ramp and runway and the armament guy disappeared under the bird.

The canopy was open and my hands were out of the cockpit while he made stray voltage checks and snapped the igniter arms onto the rocket motors. This was a very tense time because if a rocket was going to fire accidentally, this was the time for it. We were already slightly less than welcome at Foster since someone in our detachment had let a rocket loose on the ramp.

A very loud BOOM! shook me and the bird. For a moment I figured something on my bird had exploded. But there was no smoke or fire and the engine was running just fine. Then, BOOM! - it happened again. I looked around and saw a flight of F-100s had passed behind me and taken the runway. Lead and his wingman had created the first BOOM! as they started



Lt Harold Wade, 3555th CCTW (Interceptor), Perrin AFB 1958. (credit - Harold Wade)

their takeoff roll. Then nos. 3 and 4 rolled a few seconds behind them. If anyone doesn't think the F-100 had a hard lighting burner, try sitting a few feet behind them when they light up!

I got my heart back in my chest where it belonged and headed for the range where a T-Bird with a 6x20 rag was to rendezvous with four of us. I was #2 in the string. About the time I turned on the final attack vector, the guy in front of me shot the rag off the tow cable. So with nothing to shoot at, I turned back toward Foster. While crossing over Matagordo, I was still pulling circuit breakers and resetting armament switches since I still had a full load of rockets.

Lt Harold Wade stands near the "River Kwai" next to the ramp at Foster AFB, TX in June 1958. The aircraft on the ramp are from the Perrin AFB Rocketry Team. (credit - Harold Wade)





Several pilots from the 3555th CCTW watch as two of their mates get ready to launch at Yuma AFB for the annual rocketry competition in 1956. Perrin Instructor Pilots were required to qualify at Yuma and stand alert at Foster during the mid-1950s. (credit - NAA)

WHAM! I felt the pod slam down and at first thought it had parted company with the aircraft over an inhabited area. Wow! two coronaries in one day! What if that thing hit somebody? Who'd believe I hadn't hit the jet-tison switch?

Then I realized the aircraft was acting as if it had a little extra drag. Hmmmmm, maybe I still had the pod attached. But at that point I was afraid to touch any

controls that might affect the pod. I'd never lost one but I knew guys that had for no apparent reason. I got up enough courage to hit the manual "Up" switch. The sweat factor decreased considerably when I felt the 'clunk' of the pod come up and lock into the proper position.

That was one of the few times I got back on the ground with fuel to spare and didn't have to coast into a parking spot.

An F-86L from the 3555th CCTW(Interceptor) on the line at Perrin AFB in 1959. The 3555th began receiving F-86L advanced Sabre interceptors equipped with the SAGE system, in March 1957. Day-Glo markings were applied in 1958 for better visibility. (credit - Larry Davis collection)



Plan Now! The 18th Reunion of the F-86 Sabre Pilots Association will take place April 10/11/12, 2011 at the Gold Coast Hotel/Casino, Las Vegas. See you there!

If you have a unit reunion slated in the future, feel free to contact the Editor, SabreJet Classics, 6475 Chesham Dr NE, Canton, OH 44721, or email sabreclsx@aol.com with the details. We will run an ad in each issue of SabreJet Classics until the reunion.

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Contact Bob Renner email afbobr@aol.com; or
Jim Sidebottom, email sidebottoj@hotmail.com

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WHO IS IT? Can anyone identify this F-86H and the unit and/or mission that it flew? It is another of the early F-86H-1s armed with machine guns instead of cannons. Obviously an air show photo, it was taken at Amarillo AFB, TX in May 1956. Just aft of the "U.S." is some nose art of Sylvester the cat, with the words "Puddy Tat". The name above the cat is not legible. Anyone with further information about this F-86H-1 is asked to CONTACT Editor, SabreJet Classics, 6475 Chesham Dr NE, Canton, OH 44721, ph. (330)493-4122, or email sabreclsx@aol.com

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