

# SABREJET CLASSICS

*A Publication of the F-86 Sabre Pilots Association*

Volume 23, Number 3

Fall 2016



► Inside: 2017 Reunion info & Registration update, It Never Happened!, an RF-86 story, Navy F9F pilot gets 4 MiGs, more!

## SabreJet Classics

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## SabreJet Classics

Volume 23, Number 3 • Fall 2016

### Contents

|                  |                                                               |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 .....          | The President's Notebook                                      |
| 4 .....          | E-mail Addresses<br>from the editor                           |
| 5 .....          | Folded Wings                                                  |
| 6 .....          | Fire! Bail Out!<br>by Michael Collins                         |
| 8 .....          | Flame Out Over Cape Cod<br>by Robert V. Thompson              |
| 10 .....         | An Unbelievable Dog Fight<br>by Royce E. Williams, USAN (Ret) |
| 14 .....         | It Never Happened, pt. 1<br>by Bill Semonin                   |
| 33 .....         | The Avon Sabre<br>by R.J. Bomball, RAAF (Ret)                 |
| 35 .....         | This 'n That                                                  |
| Back Cover ..... | What Is It?                                                   |

### Front Cover:

An RF-86F from the 15th TRS at Komaki AB, Japan in 1954.  
15th TRS RF-86Fs flew Top Secret spy flights over Red China and Eastern Russia in the late 1950s.  
(credit - Bill Semonin)

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## The President's notebook

Getting this Fall issue to you "On Time" has been a real challenge for Larry Davis,  
but you will fully enjoy it as it is "Loaded."

Being the Fall issue, it directly relates to the Autumn season which sort of relates to the Autumn of our Association. Autumn is nature's change of year from the hot summer, in many places of the world to the transition of beautiful country side colors, cooler temperatures and football. In a way, our Association, "The Best Fighter Pilots Association in the World" is approaching the end of our autumn years of camaraderie and friendship joined with having flown the best jet day fighter ever built.

With the emotion conveyed above, our Autumn Season will come to an end next April 2017 when we meet for the last time at "Reunion 21" at the Gold Coast Hotel in Las Vegas. Those emotions will be high as we gather to experience a reunion that will be "The Best of the Best." With the Boards decision to stand-down the Association while we still have a fair sum of money in our kitty, we can afford to slash the reunion costs to all our members who attend. These reduced prices would be considered a fantasy anywhere else in the country. We encourage all of you fighter pilots who are physically and financially able to get on-board, bring as many family members and friends to join you at this momentous event. Also, bring your energy pills to keep your airspeed up for a packed three days of activity.

Now, as you focus on every word of this great magazine Larry has provided us for over twenty years, enjoy it and treasure it. Further, I have expanded our reunion daily activities a bit, especially day two. So far, registration wise, many of you gents have not signed up for the "Guys and Dolls" luncheon. Attending it will not conflict with our "Nellis Day" event. Read Sandy Vee's (Dolly Parton impersonator) shortened bio. You really don't want to miss her performance. That goes as well for Wes Winter's tremendous return performance that evening. Between these two performances, you will be fortunate enough to see Las Vegas entertainment at its best with a sit down chicken cordon Bleu meal for lunch with Sandy and a buffet dinner with Wes. Here is a chance to re-live "Old Las Vegas lounge and dinner shows that no longer exist.

Now, on to some more exciting portions of what Larry has provided us: A great story of a role much kept secret about the RF-86 recce bird and the men who flew her. Did you know or ever hear of F-86s flying at nearly 60,000 feet? I hadn't - read on. Then there is an unbelievable story of Navy Captain

ret. Royce Williams, flying straight wing F9F-5 Panthers off the Oriskany just south of Vladivostok, Russia in November of 1952. Hang on to your chairs on this one. The Navy, to this day, sticks to the original political cover story it used during the time to deny what really happened as these seven MIGs flew out of Russia. Afterwards, Royce flew a follow-on F-86 exchange tour at Nellis's Fighter Weapons School and he is a life member of our Association. He plans on attending the reunion.

Getting close to closing, I have two more items. In the previous issue of the Classics on page 12, it shows a photo of a MIG-15 being lowered into place at the Planes of Fame Air Museum where the Korean War Memorial under construction. Hopefully, by now the memorial would be completed, but like so many projects these days, the money doesn't come in as hoped to get the F-86 up on it's pedestal. Their project has stalled out for a while till more funding can be obtained. Personal donations of any size specified for their Korean War Memorial would be greatly appreciated.

Lastly, I have some bad news and some good news. The bad news is during the late June early July time frame Bob Hoover (94 years old) was hospitalized for serious heart and lung problems. Fortunately, they were able to restore Bob's heart to it's normal rhythm. The good news. Bob recovered well enough and actually was flown to Oshkosh 2016 to be greeted by a huge following. With that said, as I write this column, Bob is back in the hospital trying to get excessive water off his lungs. Not as serious as before, but at his age, very tenuous. With all that, Bob is having to deal with the loss of, Colleen, his lovely wife for 70 years this past winter. Bob has been and is still chronicled as a Living Legend. To all of you, keep sending your thoughts and prayers to continue to keep R.A. "Bob" Hoover a Living Legend.

Cheers to all.

**God Bless America! God Bless Our Troops!  
God Bless Sabre Pilots!**

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from the **Editor**



Hello again guys! Once again I will inform you of the impending shutdown of the F-86 Sabre Pilots Association, which will of course include the closing down of your favorite magazine SabreJet Classics.

I will be very sad on both accounts. Over the years I have been able to touch base with all you guys, either at the reunions or via mail and/or email. And you have been very gracious in my demands, needs, and the many questions that I have asked of you.

Some of which had nothing to do with F-86s. Many of you helped with other projects and other aircraft for books and/or articles that I was writing for other publications. And for that I am most grateful. You helped make all my books successful.

But now it close to "Last Call". We still have one more exciting issue to go after this one. We have to since we split Bill Simonin's tale of flying the RF-86 over 'somewhere'. There will be another issue just prior to the reunion.

Speaking of which, don't forget that this will be the last reunion. So you need to make plans to be there. It sounds like it will be the best of all the reunions. With a real F-86F and a 'not quite the real thing' Dolly Parton, what could possibly be better?

Hope to see everyone there. Let's make this reunion the biggest as well as the best.

Larry Davis  
*editor*

F-86 SABRE PILOTS ASSOCIATION  
**21<sup>ST</sup> REUNION**

★ *The Last Hurrah!* ★

We will hold out last reunion on April 23, 24, and 25, 2017,  
at the Gold Coast Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas. We look forward to seeing every  
member at this reunion. When the lights go out, it will be the last time.  
The information and registration form is in this issue of Sabrejet Classics.

**Folded Wings**

Don V. Cunningham ~ July 31st, 2016

Robert F. Dorr ~ June 12th, 2016

Roger D. Fortney ~ October 18th, 2015

Cecil G. Foster ~ July 5th, 2016

Wallis T. Hearon ~ August 24th, 2015

Janeral "Jan" LaFayette Holley ~ May 30th, 2016

John D. Winters ~ November 8th, 2009

Frank M. Satterfield ~ May 5th, 2016

William A. Schauer, Jr ~ April 17th, 2016

Clyde R. Shoop ~ September 9th, 2015

Kenneth S. Shealy ~ September 17th, 2016

John J. Simpson ~ December 30th, 2015

Paul C. Turner ~ December 19th, 2015



In loving  
*Memory* **ROBERT A. "BOB" HOOVER**  
~ October 25th, 2016 ~



The F-86 Sabre Pilots Association lost a great friend on October 25th, 2016, when Robert A. Hoover, know to everyone as Bob. Bob Hoover's flying career began during World War 2, and spanned every decade after, flying both for the military and civilian companies. Although a civilian, Hoover flew many combat mission in Korea in the F-86 demonstrating the aircraft to the pilots in Korea. For most of the late 1900s, Hoover flew many air shows in various aircraft types, thrilling the crowds at each event. The FAA grounded him in the early 1990s due to medical issues, but it was restored until he retired from flying 1999. Jimmie Doolittle once described him as "the greatest stick and rudder man who ever lived. Bob Hoover passed away at the age of 94.

# Fire! Bailout!

By Michael Collins



*One Saturday afternoon in the summer of 1956, I took off from Chambley AB in Northeastern France, to support a NATO exercise at nearby Chaumont. Low level all the way, weather perfect, likewise F-86F 52-5244, just humming along.*

Panels were laid out on the edge of a wooded area, my job to coordinate their ID and location with several helicopters loitering in the area. All this interrupted by a muffled explosion and my wingman yelling "on fire, fire, bail out, bail out", perhaps not a perfect quote but close enough. Anyway, at around 1500' and not going very fast, I really wanted some altitude but did not think it a good idea to floorboard it. So I gingerly added some power and pulled up to perhaps the magnificent height of 4500'-5000', near stall. Still no fire lights, but increasing smoke in the cockpit – definitely adios time. All manual in those days, bend over before jettisoning the canopy to avoid getting decapitated, sit erect, no time to mess with anything but pulling the left armrest to lock harness and right trigger to – boom!

Ass over teakettle, lost helmet (chin strap?), undid seat belt and oxygen hose, kicked free and pulled rip cord. Abrupt jerk, felt like I was being propelled skyward as chute filled.

O.K. except a bunch of small holes in the chute, hoped they didn't get any bigger (caused by friction, as packed layers of nylon slid over one another, the parachute folks told me later). Also it is raining hundreds of small pieces of paper, fluttering down all around me. These are from my book of approach charts for European airbases, which I have laboriously updated only yesterday, several hours work. Here I am, having destroyed a nice F-86, and perhaps my own little pink body when I hit the ground, yet mostly I am pissed about having to update my approach charts, again!

A helicopter gets to me almost immediately and we are off to the base hospital at Chaumont AB. I am deposited in the courtyard of this primitive facility, I wave my thanks to the departing helicopter and I head for the nearest door. I feel fine but regulations require that I have a physical check up. Door locked, no one around (it's the weekend), try another door, dark corridor, light at the end, left turn to a desk and a nurse, where I present my case: "Need to see the flight surgeon."

"No, no, big crash, surgeon gone."

"Yes, I am cause of crash."

"No, no, surgeon out, in ambulance looking for crash site."

"Can you call him?"

"No, no, big crash!"

After a couple of hours bumping around in a small truck converted to an ambulance, the surgeon appears, I am declared all in one piece, and I hop into the back seat of a T-33 sent to take me home. At Chambley I head straight for the Officer's Club to limber up for the post-flight debrief, but a lot more important, to be greeted, as I had



▲ Michael Collins as a member of the 72nd FBS at Chambley (USAF photo)

continued on page 7



▲ Pat Finnegan and Michael Collins on their wedding day, 1957 (Family Collection)

hoped, by my girlfriend Pat Finnegan whom I married a year later and with whom I spent the next 57 wonderful years.

P.S. The problem was that one drop tank was not properly connected to the fuselage tank. A leak developed at that fitting, in a compartment just aft of the cockpit that also housed the UHF radio. Fumes from the leak were ignited by the spark of changing radio channels. The fire was forward of the engine forward fire warning light sensor, so I was lucky to have a fire-yelling wingman and didn't try to make it to a landing at Chaumont.



▲ Michael Collins in his F-86 (Family Collection)



▲ The Smithsonian Air and Space Museum has graciously provided the F-86 Sabre Pilots Association with a replica of the F-86/Mig engraving that is currently on display with the Sabre Pilots Association panel at the Udvar-Hazy Center Wall of Honor at Dulles International Airport. Your Association is donating this engraving to be placed on display in front of Waxman Hall at the Weapons School at Nellis AFB. Prior to delivery, the engraving was "short-stopped" for a display at Falcons Landing, a military retirement community in Northern Virginia, on the occasion of the Air Force's 69th anniversary celebration. Shown are three Sabre pilots who reside there, (from L to R) Col. Glenn Carus, L/Gen Earl Brown, and L/Gen Arnold Braswell.

# Flame Out Over Cape Cod

By Robert V. Thompson



Having completed my two years of obligated duty with the Army Military Police at Fort Dix, NJ in June 1955, and always expanding my interest in aviation by frequent visits to the New Jersey ANG at McGuire AFB, right next door to the 716th MP Bn. Rather than join the Army National Guard or Reserves, I transferred my commission to the 141st TFS, NJANG, for the explicit purpose of being sent to pilot training with the Air Force ANG. I entered pilot training at Moore AFB in Mission, TX, and due to being a 1st Lt. I was Class Commander.

After primary at Moore flying the T-34 and T-28, I was sent to Laredo, TX for single engine jet training, again as class leader with the understanding that upon completion of T-33 training I would go to Williams AFB, AZ, for 4 months transition into the F-86. The NJANG was flying the E model at the time. Sometime during my last months at Laredo, the agreement to fund the transition and gunnery training was lost. Upon graduation in class 57J, I returned to McGuire to do my transition. In June of 1957, the NJANG went to Otis AFB, MA, for their annual summer camp. And now with about 28 hours in the F-86E, I too went. I was still on active duty and hoped to get some air to air gunnery training while at Otis.

On 6 June, 1957, I was scheduled to fly a dry air to air gunnery mission with Capt. Robert Osborne, a Korean veteran and Asst. Flt Commander. While flying my 4th pass on the tow plane, a T-33 was in the restricted area southeast of Martha's Vineyard. As I flew Past the target and tow ship, I added power and rolled into a climbing right bank to go back 'on the perch' for my next pass. Capt. Osborne was flying hot on the mission, and had just called "Number One is in!"

At that time I realized it had gotten VERY QUIET in the aircraft. Looking down at the instruments I realized my RPM was winding down. I had flamed out! Rolling wings level and lowering the nose to maintain air speed, I called "Number Two has a flame out!" Sitting there trying realize this was happening to me as I maintained a NE heading, Capt. Osborne called "Say again Two!". I replied "Roger, Two has flamed out." Osborne told me to maintain my heading and establish a best gliding air speed – the exact speed escapes me now. Soon I was aware of Osborne's Sabre on my left wing and he proceeded to talk me through the air restart procedure. "Nothing!", I called. He then instructed me to "Drop your tanks." Which I did. We were still several miles off shore and south of Cape Cod, east of Martha's Vineyard. We tried another air start to no avail and Osborne

*continued on page 9*



▲ A New Jersey Air National Guard F-86E on the ramp at McGuire AFB, NJ, home of the New Jersey ANG. As F-86Es came home from Korea, many went to Air Guard squadrons in the US. (credit – Peter Bowers)



▲ This very colorful F-86F was flown by the Safety Officer of Air Training Command at Nellis AFB in the late 1950s. There is still some confusion over the colors. Was the nose, tail, wingtips, and underwing tanks painted dark blue or dark green. All we know for sure is that it is an F-86F. (credit – David menard collection)

told me "OK, use the emergency fuel system and try another air start."

Once again Capt. Osborne talked me through the air start using the emergency fuel system, reminding to use very small and slow throttle movement when you do. As I completed the air start once again, this time on emergence fuel, I heard a Whoomp! Immediately Capt. Osborne screamed "Shut it down! Shut it down!" I didn't know it at the time but he told me later that when I pushed the ignition button on the air start, a ball o fire erupted from the tailpipe about 25 feet long and remained until I shut the emergency fuel system down.

As we were now about 8-10 miles south of the Cape, and something like 25-28 miles SSE of Otis, he instructed me to set up a flame-out pattern to land. I of course, had done numerous SFOs while transitioning to the 86. But due to the distance I had glided to up to this point, I entered the flame-out pattern on the downwind leg at 'Mid Key'. As we changed to the tower frequency I could hear several flights checking in for takeoff. Knowing that they would all be without drop tanks for the air to air missions we were concentrating on at the time, I heard the tower instruct those flights to "Hold short of the runway. We have an emergency in progress!"

It was rather strange to me knowing that everyone was talking about me as I flew downwind, turned base leg, and called "Low key." I've forgotten what out call sign was at the time. I touched down about 1000 feet on the N/S runway, landing to the south. I let the aircraft roll out and at a taxiway I cleared the runway and stopped, opened the canopy and began to unstrap as numerous emergency vehicles pulled up close to me. I had no symptoms of stress, and no excitement at all as I climbed down from the airplane with the aircraft log in my hand. As soon as my feet touched the concrete I went weak, knees trembling and a weakness set in. I had to support myself on the left wing.

General Donald Strait, a WW2 ace and CO of the NJANG, pulled up and getting out of his vehicle, walked over to me and remarked, "That was a hell of a job Tommy. Very nice work!" As he patted me on the back. I was suddenly aware that those flights that had been held from departing for me, were now roaring past on takeoff. That evening, while all the pilots were in our favorite watering hole in Falmouth, I was not able to buy one drink for myself as I told and retold the story many time. I remained with the 141st and the NJANG for the next 16 years, retiring as a major in June 1973, and retiring as a Senior Captain with US Air in 1991.



# An Unbelievable Dog Fight

## "ONE NAVY PANTHER ~VS~ SEVEN MIG-15s"



▲ Capt. Royce E. Williams, USN Ret.  
Credit - C.J. Machado

*CAPT. Royce E. Williams, USN (ret.) commenced his Naval training career as a V5 Aviation Cadet in 1943. He went on to fly Hellcats, Corsairs and Bearcats before the Korean War. When that war was in full bloom, Royce wrangled a checkout in the F-9-5 Panther. Eventually, he deployed with VF 781 squadron on-board the USS Oriskany and part of Task Force 77 to North Korean waters where this incredible story takes place. Following the Korean War, Oct. 1954, Royce was assigned an exchange tour at the USAF Fighter Weapons School at Nellis AFB flying the F-86E/ F/H until April 1956. Royce had a long and varied Naval fighter pilot career as squadron commander of naval fighter units flying F-8 Crusaders and F-4 Phantoms including two Vietnam deployments as CAG on-board the USS Kittyhawk. His follow-on senior assignments included U.S. Navy Director of MIA/POW matters, Deputy Chief Command Center CINPAC, Chief of Staff COMFAIRWESTPAC, Assistant Chief Of Staff Ops COMTRAPAC San Diego. CAPT. Williams retired in 1980, but was recalled in 1981 as Convoy Commodore of Training Task Force transiting from the West Coast to Hawaii.*

The memories of the Korean War are indelibly imprinted in our minds as pilots of the most famous jet fighter of that war, the F-86 Sabre. The Sabre and its aggressively trained fighter pilots were responsible for over 700 victories against mostly the touted Russian MiG-15s. There were victories credited by pilots of other fighter aircraft such as the, F-80, F-84, F9F Panther and even the propeller driven F4U Corsair, F-51, F-82 Twin Mustang, and the AD Skyraider. However, those were very few and only one attained ace status and that was Navy pilot, Gary Bordelone in an F4U Corsair with five victories. Among those few victories, LT Royce E. Williams, scored four victories that was kept a national secret for fifty years. Other than the political reasons for keeping this particular air battle results secret was the fact that this Naval Aviator downed four MiG-15s in one aerial engagement. That was more than any other UN fighter pilot shot down during one engagement in that war. Furthermore, that pilot was flying a Navy F9F-5 straight wing Panther, essentially alone, against seven vastly superior dog fighting Mig-15s. The following story is presented in our SabreJet Classics magazine, not only because of its nearly unbelievable events and outcome, is because the pilot, Captain Royce W. Williams US Navy retired, is a life member of our Association. He flew the F-86E, F and H as a Navy exchange instructor pilot at the USAF Fighter Weapons School at Nellis AFB October 1954 to April 1956. The following story you are about to read was written by Homeland Magazine Photo-Journalist, C.J. Machado and published in Homeland magazine issue January 2016. Enjoy the read, tighten your seat belts and hang on to your chair.

For the first time in history, Soviet pilots secretly flew against UN and U.S. forces. In an exhausting 35 minute dogfight against 7 Soviet MiGs, LT Williams became the only American Aviator to single-handedly shoot down 4 Russian MiGs in a single sortie. A record that most likely will never be broken. His heroic actions were kept classified for nearly fifty years. Post-Cold War, the Russian government confirmed the loss of the 4 MiG-15s and disclosed the names of the four pilots he shot down: Captain Belyakov, Captain Vandalov, Lieutenant Pakhomkin and Lieutenant Tarshinov. This is the account of LT Williams's heroic actions that are yet to be reviewed for the full honor and recognition he earned so many years ago.

continued on page 11

On November 18th, 1952, the U.S.S. Oriskany launched a Combat Air Patrol (CAP) into the blustery skies above the Sea of Japan. The Patrol was in the midst of a blizzard, where the cloud cover was at 400 feet and the visibility was terribly low. Division Leader, Lieutenant Claire Elwood and his wingman LTJG John Middletown with Section Leader, LT Royce Williams and his wingman LTJG David Rowlands served as CAP that day. Soon after the CAP was launched, the Combat Information Center (CIC) reported multiple bogies approaching inbound, 80 miles north of Task Force 77.



▲ F9F-5 Panther, USS Midway, San Diego

The Combat Air Patrol finally broke through the clouds of the howling snowstorm at around 12,000 feet. As they advanced upward, Section Leader, LT Williams spotted seven contrails well above 50,000 feet. The Bogies were quickly identified and reported as MiG-15s. Moments later, the Flight Leader, reported a fuel pump warning light. The CIC ordered LT Elwood and his wingman, LTJG Middleton to return to CAP duty directly above the U.S.S. Oriskany. The defense of Task Force 77 was in the hands of LT Williams who took the Lead and LTJG Rowlands as his wingman. Although, the two F9F-5 Panthers were outnumbered and out classed on maneuverability and acceleration, they boldly continued the pursuit against the 7 MiGs. As the MiGs came over them, they reversed,

presumably heading back to their base at Vladivostok. LT Williams continued to track and climb to 26,000 feet, when suddenly, the MiGs split into two groups to corner the F9Fs. One group of four MiGs came straight in firing from the 10 o'clock position, as the other 3 MiGs circled around to bracket them. LT Williams turned sharply into the enemy and the 4 MiGs over, shot, missing their targets. When they passed, LT Williams pulled a hard left turn and kicked in the rudder to get his sight on the number four MiG. After a short burst of fire, the MiG went down. His wingman, LTJG Rowlands, followed the plane as it dropped out of formation, leaving LT Williams alone against 6 Soviet adversaries. Complete Chaos ensued... LT Williams was in the fight of his life, working at every moment to keep the MiGs off his tail. He utilized every Guns Defense possible as he reversed and jinked against the far superior aircraft, attempting to stay clear and keep the MiGs from locking down on his six o'clock position.

1 Down, 6 to Go! LT Williams immediately chased after the three remaining MiGs from the group, trying to maneuver with them. His Panther was no match to the Soviet MiGs far superior speed and rate of climb as they easily zoomed away. One MiG turned around, pointing back at him and quickly disappeared into the bright sun. Williams immediately noticed the other two MiGs had already made their turn and they were coming right at him in a diving attack. LT Williams swiftly turned into them as they fired out of range. As the lead MiG approached 2,000 feet, he quickly broke away to avoid the opposing fire. The other MiG followed right behind the lead, which gave Williams the opportunity to get him into his sights. He fired at the enemy until he disappeared underneath his wings. It was a presumed hit, since Williams didn't have the luxury to follow for confirmation.

5 Left! "Then the Fight was on. They were no longer in formation. They were flying to position themselves to attack me one at a time," Williams recalls. The opposing MiGs were determined to down the sole Grumman Panther. One of the MiGs came back around and LT Williams reversed to put his gun sights on him. As the MiG turned, he was able to fire at him. The blast was so abrupt, Lt. Williams had to maneuver violently to avoid swallowing the exploding MiG parts.

3 Down! "There was a lot of maneuvering, some shooting and mostly dodging going on," remembers Williams. During the 35 minute dog-fight, the MiGs would over shoot and occasionally they did not climb, which gave Williams the opportunity to track

continued on page 12

and fire at them. While LT Williams was tracking a smoking MiG to finish him off, he looked back and saw another MiG coming in. He put in a lot of rudder and kicked the airplane over to give the opposition a tough shot. LT Williams's luck was finally running out and the MiG hit him with a burst of fire from his 37mm cannon. He was hit in the wing section and accessory section of the Pratt and Whitney Jet engine. The relentless MiG came back around and settled on his tail to ensure the kill. LT Williams had to use both hands on the stick to maneuver properly, because he had lost two of his 3 controls, the ailerons and the rudder. The elevator still worked perfectly, so he could only porpoise using his elevator to pull up and push over hard, similar to a pitch and tuck maneuver. He could see the bullets fly by him as the attacker shot away at him. Out of ammo and riddled with holes, LT Williams headed back home as he took to the cloud cover and they lost sight of each other in the snow storm.

Carrier Bound, Crash Course: LT Williams came out of the clouds at about 400 feet. At that point, he was flying too low to eject safely and the freezing waters of the Sea of Japan would have taken him within 15 minutes in his immersion suit. As the Panther drew closer for a troubled landing, the destroyers escorting Task Force 77, opened friendly fire on LT Williams mistaking him for an enemy aircraft. "Fortunately, I was low enough that they didn't have a chance to really aim, so nobody hit me," Williams explained. His Panther would stall below 170 knots, so he was forced to come in at about 200 miles an hour for an inevitable crash landing. His immediate focus was to keep control of the aircraft and use alternate backup systems to lower the landing gear and tail hook. The U.S.S. Oriskany's Commanding Officer, Captain Courtney Shands was alerted and adjusted the carrier away from the wind to try and compensate for the F9F's out-of-control speed and inability to maneuver properly. Incredibly, LT Williams was able to land without crashing, which was much attributed to the sturdy construction of the Grumman aircraft. Miraculously, LT Williams was unscathed and confided, "I had God on my side." On the flight deck, the plane captain rushed to congratulate the young Lieutenant. The badly damaged aircraft became an immediate specimen of interest. 263 perforations were circled and counted, ranging from a foot wide to minor cuts in the fuselage. The Grumman F9F-5 Panther that fought so valiantly was irrevocably damaged and they pushed it over the side into the ocean, to its final resting place.

LT Williams headed to the Ready Room for debriefing, however the Intelligence Officer delayed the investigation, because he wanted to wait for the Flight Leader. In the meantime, the tension grew higher due to pressure from Washington, awaiting a full report on the incident. "They already knew there was some sort of rumble with the Soviets and they wanted the answers, right now!" Williams affirmed. The Intelligence Officer caved to Washington and sent out a "phony" report based upon the very limited information he received and the lack of details and understanding of the engagement. Williams was credited with a kill and a probable-damaged, LTJG Middleton was credited with a kill and William's wingman, Dave Rowlands was given a probable.

A week later, the U.S.S. Oriskany arrived in Yokosuka, Japan where LT Williams was ordered to see Vice Admiral Robert P. Briscoe, Commander Naval Forces Far East. Admiral Briscoe informed the Lieutenant that the United States has a new capability called the NSA, National Security Agency. They were covertly aboard the U.S.S. Helena, right off Vladivostok on their first



▲ Lt. Williams Inspecting Battle Damage  
Credit - C.J. Machado

mission. The NSA told Admiral Briscoe to tell that young man that he got at least three. They were able to follow the MiGs from take-off until the remnant MiGs came back. Admiral Briscoe warned Williams to never speak of the incident for fear of escalating the Korean conflict into World War III.

A month later, Admiral J.J. Clark and LT Williams met with President-elect Eisenhower in Seoul, Korea. Eisenhower specifically requested a debriefing with LT Williams to discuss "our planes versus theirs." The bold pilot found himself surrounded by Generals Omar Bradley and Mark Clark, Admiral Arthur Radford, the Secretary of Defense and many other dignitaries. Eisenhower took Williams by the elbow and led him to a nice, comfortable, over-stuffed chair. Then he sat at the edge of the chair and wrapped his arm around the young hero. "Well, young man, before we get down to business, don't you think we ought to have drink?" Eisenhower encouraged. "Yes, Sir," Williams agreed. "Well, we have bourbon and scotch, water and soda. My son John is the bartender. What would you like?" I said, "Bourbon and water, please." The President nudged, "We have awfully good scotch son." "Well Sir, I prefer bourbon and water." The President insisted, "Young man, we have great, great scotch." "Well Sir, the truth is I prefer bourbon and water." "Lieutenant! We've got the world's finest scotch," the President demanded. Williams said, "Mr. President, I drink bourbon and water." The President reluctantly conceded and turned to his son, "John, give him a bourbon and water." "Needless to say, I learned quickly from my experience. I should have taken the scotch. So, in honor of Ike, the next time I had the opportunity, I ordered scotch and it prevails to this day," Williams admitted with a great big grin.

Captain E. Royce Williams, USN Retired, flew over 220 missions mainly in Korea and Vietnam. He served our country for over thirty years and retired in 1980. Williams has not yet received the full recognition for his acts of valor that he gave in defense of our great nation over 63 years ago.



▲ "Baby Doll", an F9F-5 Panther assigned to VF-781 aboard USS Oriskany in the Sea of Japan during 1952. The F9F-5 was armed with four 20mm cannon. The majority of the F9F missions were interdiction, but once in awhile they flew Combat Air Patrol and met the vaunted MiG-15s. (credit - Larry Davis collection)

# *It Never Happened!*

## *The Story of One Spook Pilot*

By William J. Semonin



It all began one afternoon when Bob Taylor and I were called to the Commanders office for a briefing which we knew nothing about.

Rudy Anderson spoke in a low voice with a dead serious expression on his face. This was out of character for Rudy as he always had a big smile with a very friendly voice as he talked with any of the other pilots in the Squadron, or with anyone for that matter.

My first thought was that Bob and I were in some sort of trouble and were there to be warned about our continued Rat Racing that he and I had been doing during the last few missions. We had been scheduled together quite a bit lately and after our assigned targets we would go canopy to canopy during defensive combat maneuvers which we both were very competitive. Bob would always come out on top and we had many post flight conversations about each detail of the engagement in the pilot's ready room following each flight.

It was Rudy's tone of voice that made it obvious that things were not routine. Rudy went on to say.

I have been asked to discuss with you a matter which must be kept to only those of us here in this room. Your Top Secret clearances have just come back approved and you are now cleared to be made aware of a situation that is classified Top Secret. In fact, it's a higher clearance than Top Secret and you will understand what that is when we discuss this in further detail.

What I am about to discuss with you is a mission which is of vital importance to the Air Force and our Nation. It is one which only a very select few people know about and following this meeting you will treat this conversation as, "It Never Happened". No one outside of the persons here in the room will ever discuss this subject in any situation where this subject could be compromised....no one! Other pilots and officers are not to be part of any conversation on this subject. Only you are to be aware of this information.

Wow, I thought to myself, what in the hell is he talking about. Bob did not say a word and I just listened with what



◀ Bill Simonen  
In Korea during 1952.  
(credit - Bill Simonen)

must have been a blank look on my face.

With what seemed to be an even more serious tone Rudy continued. Your participation in this program is purely voluntary. The mission which we are about to tell you is not without risks. In fact it could be very hazardous and you could be placed in a life threaten position which could cost you your life. You do not have to do this. This is not an order of any sort. It is entirely up to you to agree to participate in this operation. You can think about this for a moment before you give me your answer.

If you do not elect to be part of this classified mission nothing more will ever be said and this meeting will be treated as "It Never Happened". No one will ever know of your choice. You must treat this information as Top Secret, and it must not go beyond this room. What you hear here or see here, you leave here.

I looked over at Bob and we stared into each others eyes as if to see what the other was thinking. There was no expression that gave me any indication of his feelings.

I paused for what seemed a long time but was only seconds and said. Count me in. With that Bob said, me too, and we were on our way.

It was as a knife had cut the fog. From that point on Rudy's face popped into a big grin as if he also was glad to get to that point in the conversation. He said, then I take it that you both agree to take part in the program understanding the potential risks involved.

We both said, yes.

Good, Rudy responded. You have been chosen to be part of the "Spook Program" and you will become known as Spook Pilots as you are assigned missions. The term Spook is also classified as Top Secret and never to be used except in the company of those who you know are Spook Pilots and others involved in the program.

We were still not sure just what this was all about until now when Rudy said that we would be flying high altitude missions over Russia, China, and North Korea to photograph airfields and other facilities to gather intelligence not otherwise available to the United States.

My immediate reaction was, now I understand why this whole thing was so classified. The President must know about this and give his personal approval for such a potential political disaster if one of us ever gets shot down.

The next hour was spent discussing the many questions about the program. How many times have we done this? Has anyone ever been caught? Do the Russians or Chinese know we are doing this? Who determines what targets are assigned. And, what seemed like another thousand questions in a rapid fire motion.

We were both excited, anxious and if the truth be know.... scared as to what may be the outcome when the time came for us to fly one of these Spook Missions.

We all walked back to the pilot's ready room with out speaking a word. Thinking that we can never discuss this matter with anyone unless assigned on a mission was some what over whelming. My mind was running at Mach 1 as to how my feelings would be after I had time to settle down and digest this in my own thoughts. It was a lonely feeling to try to make since out of it all not being able to share my knowledge of this important mission which I never will be able to tell anyone about, including my own family.

Back in the ready room everything was normal. Everyone was reliving their missions and expanding on every detail

of their individual flight. It was what we all did while going about our day to day training as a reconnaissance pilot. Now there is another element to this mission of gathering intelligence, but this one will have to be treated as if "It Never Happened".

At this point I wondered what truth there is in the Reconnaissance Pilot motto. "Alone, Unarmed, and Unafraid".

My first night at home was the toughest as I knew I could only discuss this with myself. There were a lot of thoughts that raced through my mind and the most lasting impression was my reflection back to when it all began as a young boy.

It was a warm summer day in Louisville Ky. in 1942. I was 12 years old at the time. World War II was in full swing and the United States was heavily into training for the upcoming battle with Germany and Japan. The war news was on the radio every night and I would listen to each event in the news and keep track of the action as it happened on a map.

My attention would be drawn to the sky every day when the roar of an airplane engine could be heard. Bowman Field was only about 5 miles from my house and it was the training field for Army glider pilots during the war. There was always some kind of aviation activity going on when the weather was good.

C-47's towing 3 gliders, sometime 2, maybe only 1 and there were many towing no gliders at all. These had dropped their gilders and were returning to the Field to pick up more. There was some type of air activity going on all the time. I knew a little about what was going on because my Mother was a part time volunteer and worked in the control tower on the weekends at Bowman Field.

My interest in flying came from building model airplanes prior to the war. I was not able to keep up this interest after the war first started as the model airplane kits I would buy, mostly came from Japan, and they were no longer available with the war going on. I would build as many of the different type airplanes that were made in kits, fly them until they always crashed beyond repair, and start over. When they were no longer airworthy I would set them on fire or put a firecracker in them and pretend they were an enemy plane shot down in flames. My pilots were always in glory. I even kept score of the enemy planes that I knocked out of the sky. I am glad that I was in charge of an imagination.

As I look back, I thought about the Spook Missions that would be in my future and I hoped that I would always be able be as successful as I was with my pretend air combat

war when I was 12. I was good then, and I was determined to be just as good now.

It seemed that I was mature for my age at that time as there was not lot of men left in the neighborhood. Most of the young men from 19 and older had either volunteered for their military of choice or had been drafted into the Army. I had a full time paper route that took me throughout the neighborhood and from my route I knew which men had gone into the service and those that were too old or in a defense job.

I was also aware of the service banners that hung in each window. I knew all of these people from my paper route. Many with multiple stars and much to my disheartening I was there when that dreaded telegram arrived with the message, missing in action, or in some cases, killed in action.

I wondered what the people back home would do if for some reason I did not get back, or maybe be killed also. How would I be remembered for an event that never happened? Surely they would tell my wife and family something other than I distinguished myself by extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight. Typical Air Force language, I can see it now, the effectiveness and courage exhibited by Lieutenant Semonin in accomplishment of this mission, under extremely hazardous flight conditions, ably to demonstrated his outstanding proficiency and steadfast devotion to duty. In the performance of this special mission of vital significance to the United States, he has reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force. Yeah, but who would know what that accomplishment was, "It Never Happened". That was the last time I ever thought about it again.

I had plenty of odd jobs cutting grass or digging victory gardens for the mothers and wives who were left behind. Most of the older men were Air Raid Wardens and were actively into that activity as air raid siren would sound alerts on a weekly basis. They were out making sure all lights were out, or curtains were drawn and lights out during a night alert.

My only experience with any type of military organization was my activity in the Cub Scouts and later the Boy Scouts. It was not until later in 1945 when I went to Male High School and joined the ROTC that I had any further contact with the military. World War II had just ended and I did not make it to 18 to be able to go into the military, but I had this sensed that I wanted to be involved in flying some way. I could not put my finger on it but there was that inner feeling to just do it.

When I went on to college at the University of Kentucky in 1948 I did not hesitate when I joined the Air Force ROTC. I was in the Engineering College at UK and was in the Aircraft Maintenance program training to be an Aircraft Maintenance Officer and be commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Air Force upon graduation. I would have to serve 4 years on active duty which I viewed as an opportunity in that I had never had any chance to travel outside of Louisville in my childhood.

Then came the Korean War and I was exempt from the draft while I was in the ROTC program and would become an Officer upon graduation. I was supposed to graduate in 1952, however, I did not graduate until February 1953 because I changed my engineering major from Architectural Engineering to Industrial Engineering and I had to take a lot of required classes in the College of Commerce for that degree.

While still taking my required ROTC classes in 1952 my destiny changed when the Commandant of the ROTC program came into one of my aircraft maintenance classes and stated that the University of Kentucky ROTC program had not had any ROTC graduates go into pilot training and he was looking for anyone that was interested to raise their hand. Well, without any thought I found my hand was up and I wondered, "is this really what I want to do?" I did not lower my hand and I looked around the room to see if there was anyone else that had their hand up. Sure enough, Joe Haycraft, who I only had a casual acquaintance with, had his hand in the air also.

From there, we took our physicals, went to Camp Kilmer in New Jersey to be inducted into the Air Force as 2nd Lieutenants, and were off to Primary Pilot Training at Bartow Florida in February 1953.

This was the beginning of my flying career as I had never been in an airplane in my life until then. My instructor was Mr. Moore, a soft spoken, person who demanded perfection from his students in every respect and I credit my flying skills to his making me aware that in the flying business there is only one way to fly an airplane. And that is to, "never violate the principles of flight", if you want to live to see the next day. His method of teaching has remained with me through out my flying career, and I often thought back to him as what would Mr. Moore do in this situation when I got into a critical experience for the first time. He truly has saved my life on several occasions.

My first flight was in a Piper Cub known as a Super Cub. The Air Force designated them as a PA-18, but they were a Cub with a 100 horse power engine. I soloed after only 8 hours,

and that was the first thrill that I have experienced as an Air Force pilot. After 25 hours in the PA-18 we went on to transition in the T-6. Flying in Mr. Moore's style now began in earnest. There was only one way to fly an airplane, he often said, and that was the right way...his way if you were going to graduate. In aerobatics, formation or instruments he would demonstrate how to do it then expected you to do it exactly as he showed you and not accept anything but perfection. I have always considered myself as an above average pilot thanks to his passing on his skills to me.

My only claim to fame while flying the T-6 was when I received the highest rating on an instrument check ride ever given by that check pilot. Thanks again, to Mr. Moore's teaching. As, his insisting on perfection, played an important part in times when faced with landing in zero-zero conditions or other similar situations.

Following graduation I went on to Basic Pilot Training at Bryan Texas. The first training was in the T-28, an airplane built by Mc Donald Aviation. The T-28, is a propeller driven airplane that was designed to have similar flight characteristics as the F-86, which they also built. The F-86 was considered the primary air-to-air fighter for that time and the T-28 was to be used as a trainer for those checking out in the F-86. It was a fun airplane to fly and easy transition into the T-33 after about 30 hours of flying.

The T-33 was the first jet that I had flown. 1st Lt. Morrison was my instructor, who was much like Mr. Moore is personality but not as demanding. Much of the training was like that experienced in Primary Pilot Training except it was in a jet type aircraft. Applying those skills learned from Mr. Moore made it relative easy to learn flying a jet. Following the required training into jets I graduated and received my wings then on to Advanced Pilot Training.

Each student had the choice to select Advanced Pilot Training in single engine fighters or multi-engine type aircraft that would lead to bombers, transport or cargo type aircraft. Our instructors would have a part to say in our selection as he would have an input as to his opinion of which type aircraft we would be best suited to fly. I elected to apply for day fighters and was selected to go to Advanced Pilot Training at Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas Nevada. Others elected to go to fighter bombers at Luke Air Force Base.

In just a little over a year in primary and basic pilot training I was off to check out in the F-86 Saber. Four months of intensive training from instructors just back from Mig-Alley in Korea was an experience in itself. Checking out in a bent wing type jet, with no duel time prior to the first ride, was an event that I will never forget. A thrill of a life time, with the

program built to make "Every Man-a-Tiger", rolling over, on your first flight, in a split-s from 40,000 ft. with full throttle to exceed the speed of sound was something that is hard to describe unless you have done it.

I can't remember much about that flight, except that after I landed the procedure was to open the canopy on touch down while holding the nose wheel up to get maximum aerodynamic breaking only to have the canopy brace hook the visor on my helmet as the canopy slid back pulling my head straight up looking at the sky and not the runway. You talk about a quick recovery, when I got out of the airplane I kissed the side of the fuselage, and thanked it for the ride. I must have flown the thing but it was like having a tiger by the tail.

There were many similar experiences during that time when everything was for the first time and you had to do it with the training you had or you would not make it. The accident rate was about one aircraft accident per week, some made it and some didn't. It was a real test as to who you are and can you be the best you can be as a fighter pilot. From that point after graduation how well you survive is up to you. That school made you into a fighter pilot that could take on the best the enemy had to offer and come out a winner. You left there with the attitude that you can't wait to be tested... let's get it on.

Selection of your next assignment to a combat unit was up to the Air Force no one had much of a choice. The majority of assignments were to the 4th Tactical Fighter Wing at Osan Korea (K55). That was my initial order to go the 4th TFW, however, things changed as there were three assignments to the 15th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron at Komaki Air Base in Nagoya Japan. These went to three bachelors who wanted to go to Korea because as a bachelor the tour of duty in Korea was one year and in Japan it was for three years. They came to myself, Jimmie Simmons and Tom Hagler and asked if we would trade as we were married and with the assignment for three years in Japan we could bring our wife and family. That sounded like a good idea and after checking and finding out that the 15th was flying F-86 and F-80 type aircraft we agreed if they could get the orders changed we would trade.

I don't know how they did it but we were off to Japan to the 15TRS only to find out that the 15th was flying F-86's, RF-86's and RF-80's, that was the beginning of my career as a reconnaissance pilot which turned out to be my career path for the 22 years I spent in the Air Force and Air National Guard.

When we reported to the Commanding Officer Maj. (Red)

21st F-86 Sabre Pilots  
Association Reunion • April 23, 24 & 25, 2017

Gold Coast Hotel Casino, Las Vegas Nevada

The 21st and "FINAL" F-86 Sabre Pilots Association reunion will be held again at the Gold Coast Hotel/Casino in Las Vegas. Register early and avoid the rush. If you have to cancel please contact J.R. Alley at 702-363-9880 email alleyoop3@cox.net, Jerry Johnson at 702-458-7863 e-mail jerdot56@cox.net, or Pat Hughes at 702-870-4600 email hugpat@aol.com. You may cancel up to 10:00AM PST Saturday April 22th, 2017 and get a full refund. No refunds after that time unless due to a medical situation.

Making and canceling of room reservations is your responsibility. You can book your room reservation by calling the Gold Coast Hotel (888) 402-6278 or on-line, <http://goldcoastcasino.com/groups>. Identify yourself as a member of the "F-86 Sabre Pilots Association" and group code "AAIRF86". Cut-off date for room reservations using our guaranteed group discount, \$44 per day for premium rooms, \$36 per day for the Deluxe rooms, is March 20, 2017. After that date, rooms may cost more.

Being our final reunion, the Association has agreed to cut in half the registration fee and reduce all food and activity fees considerably. As an example: our banquet dinner cost for a combination "Filet and Chicken Breast" including gratuity and tax is \$56.00 per plate. Your cost is \$25.00. That does not include the wine we provide at each table. There will be pay-as-you-go bars. For our listening and dancing pleasure, Las Vegas's famous pianist and singer, Wes Winters who performed for us in 2015, has agreed to again perform for us after our dinner buffet on Monday evening. We are working on another tremendous entertainer for our Guys and Dolls luncheon as well as other guest speakers that will be of great interest to us. Additionally, the Super Sabre Society will be back at the Gold Coast with their reunion following ours as was the case prior to 2015.

The Planes of Fame Air Museum, Chino California, has agreed to fly their F-86F to Las Vegas for our second day, Monday, activities. The location, yet to be determined, will be at Nellis AFB or Henderson Airport. That day's activities are still in the planning and approval stage. Updates will be posted on our web site, [sabre-pilots.org](http://sabre-pilots.org) and in our next issues of our Sabre Jet Classics to published in the Summer and Fall of 2017.

Sign-in starts 10 AM Sunday April 23th, followed by a Cocktail Party 5PM to 7:00 PM or longer. For other events see the registration form.

Our business meeting to be conducted after our breakfast brunch on Tuesday, 25 April will be relatively short as our prime area of discussion will be the presentation of the Stand Down procedures of our Association.

Our banquet night guest speaker will not be our usual Nellis AFB Warfare Commander, but will be a speaker that we feel will be more appropriate for our final reunion.



REGISTRATION FORM  
F-86 SABRE PILOTS ASSOCIATION  
TWENTY FIRST REUNION, April 23, 24, & 25, 2017  
GOLD COAST HOTEL & CASINO, LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

LAST NAME \_\_\_\_\_ FIRST NAME \_\_\_\_\_ MI \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_  
ZIP \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_  
SPOUSE/GUEST, (FIRST & LAST) \_\_\_\_\_

| EVENT                                                                     | FEE     | NO. IN PARTY | TOTALS          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------------|-----------------|
| <b>SUNDAY, APRIL 23, 2017:</b>                                            |         |              |                 |
| REGISTRATION: Starts at 10 AM MEMBER/SPOUSE/GUEST                         | \$25.00 | x _____      | = \$ _____      |
| RAFFLE TICKETS (6 for \$5)                                                | \$5.00  | x _____      | = \$ _____      |
| COCKTAIL PARTY (5PM to 7PM)<br>Hors D' Oeuvres & Cash Bar                 | \$10.00 | x _____      | = \$ _____      |
| <b>MONDAY, APRIL 24, 2017:</b>                                            |         |              |                 |
| NELLIS DAY<br>Buses Depart at 7:30AM east entrance Gold Coast Hotel       | \$15.00 | x _____      | = \$ _____      |
| Guys and Dolls Luncheon ( 12:30PM – 3PM)                                  | \$15.00 | x _____      | = \$ _____      |
| BUFFET Dinner (7PM TO 10PM) cash bar                                      | \$20.00 | x _____      | = \$ _____      |
| <b>TUESDAY, APRIL 25, 2017:</b>                                           |         |              |                 |
| BREAKFAST BUFFET: (9AM TO 11AM)                                           | \$16.00 | x _____      | = \$ _____      |
| BANQUET (6:30PM to 10pm) cash bar<br>Petite Filet Mignon & Chicken Breast | \$25.00 | x _____      | = \$ _____      |
| <b>REUNION FEES - TOTAL</b>                                               |         |              | <b>\$ _____</b> |

**MAKE YOUR TRAVEL AND ROOM RESERVATIONS EARLY.** Call the GOLD COAST room Reservations @ 1-888 402-6278 or web site <http://www.goldcoastcasino.com/groups>. Identify yourself with the F-86 Sabre Pilots Association and use GROUP CODE "AAIRF86" to receive the Premium \$44 room rate (Deluxe room rate - \$36.00) except Friday and Saturday nights. All reservations must be received by the GOLD COAST by Wednesday MARCH 20, 2017. Mail completed form and check to:  
F-86 Sabre Pilots Association  
P.O. Box 34423  
Las Vegas, NV 89133-4423

# Reunion 21

## MAINEVENTS

### 1. Sunday 23 April ( 5PM to 7PM)

Registration day and Cocktail Party

### 2. Monday 24 April (0830AM – 1130AM)

Nellis Day featuring Planes of Fame Air Museum's F-86F flown by California Aviation Hall of Famer, Steve Hinton. We will be presenting Nellis AFB with a major gift in memory of our Association. It was engraved in stainless steel by the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum and it will be inlaid in stone.



### 3. Monday 24 April (1230PM to 3PM)

Guys and Dolls luncheon featuring Sandy Vee Anderson, famed Dolly Parton impersonator

*Sandy Anderson traded in singing "9 to 5" when she began her award-winning tribute to Dolly Parton a decade ago. The Las Vegas –based entertainer has even performed a duet with Dolly herself – the two of them charming fans at Dollywood and a sassy version of "Anything You Can Do I Can do Better." She has portrayed Dolly with the world-famous Legends in Concert show at such illustrious venues as the Imperial Palace and Harrah's in Las Vegas, The Grand Palace in Branson, Atlantic City, Biloxi and legends Theater in Myrtle Beach, SC. Sandy Truly becomes Dolly when she performs. Her glamorous costumes and wigs create a striking visual resemblance to the Country Music icon and her singing voice is a dead-ringer for Dolly's; setting the stage for a very memorable performance. She even includes the trademark Dolly comedy routine, which begins with, "it costs a lot of money to look this cheap." But her proudest moment was when Dolly Parton herself said of her impersonators in an "Q Magazine" interview, "... the best one is Sandy Anderson, she even fools my family.*



### 4. Monday 24 April (7PM to 10PM)

Buffet Dinner followed by return engagement of Las Vegas and world known pianist, singer and entertainer Wes Winters

*One of the most popular and most versatile musical entertainers in Vegas is the award-winning Wes Winters. Wes has been entertaining professionally over 30 years. Not only has he performed extensively throughout the United States, but in countries abroad including Ireland, Hungary, Austria, Italy, France, Spain and more.. He does not read music and plays strictly "by ear." He conceived, wrote, produced and starred in "A Musical Tribute to Liberace" at the world-renowned Liberace Museum, followed by a Las Vegas Strip engagement at Planet Hollywood in 2008. Winters is not an impersonator or look-a-like, but a "sound-a-like the moment his fingers hit the keys" according to several reviewers. With the ability to go from Jerry Lee Lewis to Barry Manilow, Big Band to Country, Andrew Lloyd Webber to Rachmaninoff, and most points in between, Winters has attained a very large and loyal following.*



### 5. Tuesday 25 April (9AM to 11AM)

Breakfast buffet followed by our Association business meeting. Immediately after business meeting Col. USAF ret. Gail Peck former commander of the "Secret MIG Squadron" will give us his presentation followed by his book signing for those interested in purchasing.

### 6. Tuesday April 25 (630PM to 10PM)

Final banquet night dinner featuring many honored guests and our own special guest speaker.



Morrison we found out that pilots had been requested by the 5th Air Force, the Air Force Command in the Far East, to be assigned to the 15th TRS as the F-86 was relatively new to the 15th and they wanted someone with F-86 Advanced Pilot Training in the F-86 to help introduce F-86 fighter tactics to the unit. I was not sure just what that meant until a later meeting with Maj. Morrison to talk to us as to what our roll would be with the 15th. The 15th "Cotton Pickers" were a photo reconnaissance unit and most of the current pilots were graduates from Shaw Air Force Base the reconnaissance school then flying the RF-80 and were experienced recon pilots but had little experience in the F-86 or fighter tactics.

Our roll was to learn photo reconnaissance techniques from the recon pilots to become a qualified reconnaissance pilot and then in turn teach them what we learned from the fighter experience at Nellis. His instructions were not to place our self in an instructor roll, but rather play a low key roll, to show as you go, because as he suggested, reconnaissance pilots are a breed of their own and are proud of what they do and would not like someone with no recon back ground coming in and telling them what to do or how to do it. That was very good advice as I learned with time. These guys are good and the old saying that a "reconnaissance pilot is a fighter pilot with brains" is something I had to learn just what that meant. It took awhile for that to sink in as I thought I was the best from the indoctrination of "Every Man a Tiger" only to find out being a reconnaissance pilot was much more than that. I guess that's why their motto is "Alone, Unarmed and Unafraid".

Red, you never called him by that name in public, was very specific as to what he would like us to bring to the unit in regards to the fighter experience. He knew that the recon pilots were excellent in reconnaissance but wanted us to expose them more to Defensive Combat Maneuvers (DCM). He also wanted us to demonstrate high altitude tactical formation as we learned at Nellis to show how to stay in tactical formation with 100% full throttle as the fighters used in Mig Alley.

I did not recognize all of what he asking at the time. He wanted us to accomplish this while flying with the other recon pilots as just another pilot while flying with them. This was somewhat of a problem because when we would show them how, or in some cases tell them how, to do a certain maneuver they would take it as a criticism and would become defensive in their attitude toward us. This changed over time as we would ask for their help on recon matters and they were excellent in following your doing it with them rather than telling them how to do it. Learning was a two way street, we had much to learn about the RF-86 and what value this aircraft had in collecting photo intelligence.

There were two versions of the RF-86, the Haymaker which had two split 40" vertical cameras and one 6" vertical camera. The 40" split vertical cameras were mounted either side of the air intake and the camera were slightly tilted to each side so the camera on the right would take a picture to the left and the camera on left would take a picture to the right. When viewed on the light table the two 9" X 9" negatives of each camera placed side by side would have a 10% overlap of the two and become a "9 X 18" for viewing purposes. These cameras were used for photographing targets from high altitudes and due to their focal length did not cover a large area of the ground target. The 6" vertical camera was operated along with the split 40" cameras and would cover a large area and would be used by the photo interpreter to orientate the pictures taken by the split verticals. Each type camera would be set separately to take a picture as the aircraft moves forward to provide a 60% overlap from one picture to the next and become a strip of pictures as the aircraft moves over the target. With pictures taken by the 40" split verticals from an altitude of 40,000' the negatives placed side by side would cover an average one runway airfield with an average ramp with the 60% forward overlap it would require about 7 to 9 pictures in the strip to cover the targeted airfield. The higher the altitude the more ground coverage you could obtain.

To use these cameras required a very precise technique to align the aircraft over the target. The RF-86 did not have a viewfinder to help you line up on the target. If you were photographing an airfield you would enter the path to the target about ten miles out from an airfield, at a 45 degree angle to the runway. Similar to entering initial for landing, making your turn to fly down the runway or center the aircraft to the middle of the target if the airfield had a large ramp and facilities. Once on the runway heading it would require the aircraft to be banked 90 degrees in one direction then immediately 90 degrees in the opposite direction so as to align the aircraft directly down the runway then repeat this rocking to determine wind drift, there is always some wind at that altitude. You would have to crab into the wind to kill the drift. Sometimes it would require banking in the same direction to establish the correct crab for the aircraft to proceed over the target. This rocking of the aircraft from left to right or right to left was absolutely necessary to determine if you are on course. It would take looking to both sides to make sure you were over the target then straight and level while over the target with both cameras taking pictures in a strip of pictures that would cover the length of the runway. The higher up you go the harder it is to stay straight down the runway....it's not easy. The Ashtray was the aircraft used for all the Spook missions while the 15th was based at Komaki Japan. As a note, the Haymaker was not supposed to be allowed in Korea due to the armistice agreement at



▲ 15th TRS pilots and ground crew in front of one of the RF-86F Haymaker aircraft at Komaki AB, Japan in late 1953. The two pilots are (L) Jack Wense and © Bill Simonen. Note the four underwing fuel tanks used on the 'spook missions'. (credit – Bill Simonen)

the end of the Korean war in 1953 which stated that no new aircraft would be sent to Korea.

The other version of the RF-86 was the Ashtray which had a 36" camera mounted over the air intake in the nose pointing forward and angled slightly down to be able to take a forward oblique photograph.. The Ashtray was fairly simple to learn to use. You could take a variety of targets from any altitude, mostly low altitude, flying straight into a target looking out the front windscreen and when the target passed under the nose out of sight you would manually operate the camera taking one forward looking picture. The idea was to place the target in the lower one third of the picture and this technique always worked. The targets were mostly single targets such as a bridge, ship, a dam or certain things which intelligence could be gained. The only high altitude use of the Ashtray was to take a photograph going straight down to a target located along coast lines where the three mile limit of international waters were concerned. You would fly into the coast at high altitude and just short of the three mile limit do a split-s and take the picture going straight down just as the target passes under the nose then pull out at low altitude

going the opposite direction. I often wondered what this would look like to an enemy radar operator tracking your position. One minute you would be going in one direction then in another going in the opposite direction. Maybe you would just stop if you pulled out low enough. The Ashtray was not used in later flights over denied territory, however, could have been used in very early missions while stationed in Korea.

The 15th also had some F-86 fighter versions assigned to it initially that was to be used for escorting the RF-86 as a wingman to protect the flight in the event it was attacked by enemy aircraft. However, this was not a good idea in the eyes of the reconnaissance pilot. The wingman was to be the eyes for the flight while the leader was making a photo run and having a fighter which was thought to be used to protect the leader was of no value. The wingman would never leave the leader exposed while going after an enemy aircraft so what good is the fighter type aircraft used in a reconnaissance situation. Recon pilots fly as a team and it was much better to have another RF-86 as a wingman that could be used in the event of a camera failure for back up. The recon pilot's

best defense is to see and avoid not to engage the enemy. There are times when it is best to just tuck your tail and run like hell. That's why a good wingman needs good eyes and can keep his head on a swivel.

As time went on the two experiences seemed to merge and we all gained from the experiences. On each flight any guy or flight was fair game and there was a lot of rat-racing going on. If you couldn't find someone to jump you just broke up the flight and went head to head. Everyone got better at DCM and high altitude formation and the after each flight conversations turned into learning sessions without formal instruction. It took awhile to point things out like angle off and proper lead on a fighter pass and just because your behind another guy dose not always mean your able to shoot down the guy in front. This provoked a lot of discussion as to which defensive maneuver was best to get out of trouble. There were a lot of arguments at times but the message was getting across and some of the recon guys got good, even better than us.

High altitude tactical formation was much easier. Just climb to altitude at full throttle and make a few turns and see who is still in formation. After a few tries using the proper cut off angle and knowing when to cross under to keep in formation and keep the same speed in case the leader rolls out at the worst time is just doing it and learning from your mistakes. It's hard to tell a guy that in a 90 degree turn you may have to cross in front of the leader when you need to match your speed to his at all times. You just have to do it to learn. While at Nellis that was required at all times, even in a flight of four, or you got a pink slip. In the recon business it is just as important because the leader is concentrating on the target to take the photograph or navigate and it's up to the wingman to keep the flight clear of any threat.

After one of these heated post flight debates with Bob Taylor as to who got who, Rudy Anderson walked into the room and said for Bob and I to report to the Commanders office....that's when it all began to make sense as to what we were training for.

On our way to the briefing we ran all sorts of things through our minds. Bob usually came out on top in most of these hassles and he was concerned about being too aggressive. He was a Captain and was supposed to set an example not going around wiping every ones butt. I never spoke to him as Sir so I thought I might be in trouble for that. At this point we had no idea what was about to happen. There was never any suggestion that this sort of thing was going on in the 15th. Some of these guys we were going around and around with all the time with no indication of the Spook Mission. We did not know who was who and never did know who the

other Spook guys were until the Symposium in Washington after the mission was declassified.

Bob and I knew each other and John Shinn who flew as back up on some of our missions. And of course, we knew Rudy Anderson was a Spook Mission pilot. We guessed that Maj. Morrison was in the loop but we were afraid to ask. There was one other meeting with Rudy to brief us on how a mission was to be conducted and what was expected of us when the time came. From then on we kept a bug out bag in our locker in the event the time came.

Not much was ever said from that point on. Rudy Anderson had been transferred back to the United States. One Friday afternoon Walt McCarthy called Bob, myself and John Shinn aside and said we were invited to the party this afternoon and the game was on. That was the first time that I knew that John Shinn was in on the Spook missions. Bob was to lead and I was to fly his wing and John Shinn was to fly back up for this mission. I was not sure what Walt's roll was for these missions, no one said. I guess he could be another Spook pilot or maybe just a contact person. I did not ask and I don't remember any further discussion about his position.

Most of these Spook missions were flown over the weekend, as it was not unusual that we and other pilots were assigned to missions in Japan where we would have to stage out of some other Japanese Base to get the targets that were assigned in Japan or Okinawa. These were flown on the week ends. There were other deployments to other bases such as Taiwan China that we would leave and be gone over the weekend. Of course someone on the flight line would have to support the start of a mission, so starting on a Friday did not raise any suspicions from the ground personnel.

I had advised my wife that if I did not show up at home some evening, for her not to think much about it, as I would be home as soon as I could and do not say or ask questions about it to anyone. Jimmie Simmons and I lived next to each other in Nagoya and he would be sent out on weekends from time to time also. I had gone on weekend missions before and had been sent to Korea at Soul K-14 to stand alert in the RF-80. That's another very interesting story to tell.

That was the last of what was usual, from that point on we shifted into the Top Secrete mode. Bob and I were briefed by Rudy as to what to do and what to expect so we got together with John in private to plan the flight to Osan K-55 as we had been instructed to join the party. Being invited to the a party in Osan was the telephone language to set the missions in progress. We knew what to do once we got an invitation. We did not know who we were to meet on the ground only they told us that we would be met at the airplane on landing



◀ Luke Young in the cockpit of another 15th TRS RF-86F at Komaki AB, Japan, in 1954. Note the painted on gun ports on the nose. Haymaker RF-86Fs could be distinguished by the large camera bulges on the gun bay doors. (credit - Bill Simonen)

after we taxied in. We were told that they would find us. That made sense as we were the only two RF-86's on the ramp. All the other F-86's belong to the 4th Fighter Wing that were stationed at K-55. No one paid any attention to us unless they had ever seen or heard of an RF-86 and could see the bubbles that housed the camera on each side other fuselage.

We were to file no flight plan and to maintain radio silence throughout the entire flight, including taxiing on the ground. It was just like we were stealing the air planes from the ramp and no one knew where we were going. We did not know how the tower personnel were aware of our departure at Komaki and on arrival at K-55. We just taxied to and from the runway and no one ever said a word to us while we were on the ground and taking off.

Bob was assigned as the leader, rank has it's privileges I thought, although I had led many flights with him in the past when flying local missions. We had flown a lot together and knew each other very well in the air so when it came time to fly together I was very lucky to have him in the lead. He was the best and I felt comfortable with his abilities in the lead. I had flown with John on a number of occasions and I was pleased to have a guy like him along. John was a no nonsense kind of guy, down to earth, an excellent pilot from the reconnaissance school and a person you could count on if things got tough.

In our preflight briefing we briefed on all of the visual singles that we would use with John and that we would test

our radios to make sure they were working. We used our squadron operational channel to check our radios and each of us would click our mike button with no verbal transmission. Lead would click his mike once then two would click his mike twice and three would answer with three clicks, all of this with no voice contact by anyone. From there on we would switch to the channel appropriate as to where we were at the time. Such as ground control, tower, and then use our operational channel in flight. As we progressed in flight we would switched to the appropriate channel. This was all done with visual hand signals. The weather was clear all the way so that was not a problem.

All went well, our fuel was working out as planned with the 200 gallon external tanks we had on board. Upon landing the tower made no radio contact but did give us a green light to acknowledge our landing. Ground control did the same. Someone there in the tower must have known the rules of the game for they went along with the radio silence throughout the entire time we were there.

Upon taxiing into the parking area, which was away from any transient aircraft parking and next to the other F-86's on the ramp, we were met by ground personnel in uniform and one person in civilian cloths driving a USAF vehicle. The ground crew said hello and asked if we had any right up on the aircraft. They were cordial and straight forward with no conversation, strictly professional. They went about their business as usual. I do not know who they were or where they came from. It was obvious they had been briefed as we

continued on page 25

were to ask no questions. This group of guys had to play an important part in the preparation for the flight the next day. We had to do some things that are not normally done for a regular flight. This flight was for real and required special attention.

We all got into his vehicle and were off to a building in a closed room with a table and a couple of chairs where we could spread out a map. It was time to see what we were going to do and where we were going.

This civilian was, with out a doubt, someone of knowledge about what is going on and had the authority to get done what was necessary. He did not give us his name and only ask our first names so he could address us when necessary. Bob and I came up with the name for this guy....."The Spook Guy". Actually we changed it later to the "Osan Spook Guy" because we determined that there was another Spook Guy at Yokota so he became the "Yokota Spook Guy". We never used this term in front of either of them as some things were better left unsaid around these guys as you never knew who they were. He could have been a General for all we knew.

There was no superfluous conversation only what was necessary to get the job done. His first remarks were to state his appreciation for what we are doing and offered

any assistance if requested. From there he got down to briefing the mission and giving us the targets that we were to photograph. He had a map for each of us and gave us the coordinates of two airfields that he said he thought were there but was not absolutely sure. He said that was what we were going to try to find out and confirm then photograph them. The maps were of a very large scale of China and we requested if we could get a smaller scale map so we could plan in more detail. He said that unfortunately that was the only map that he had and it was not likely we could go to base operations and find a map of China. His intelligence people had given him the only information they had and we had to make do with that. The maps were of such a large scale it was not going to be a lot of help in navigating with ground features. There was the coast line of course but not much to navigate by other than some large rivers and towns which were of some help so we had to look for ground features to navigate by. You could tell by the date on the map that the maps were obviously old and not very current. We could plot the coordinates which he said he thought they would be within a 50 mile radius of being correct, but it was up to us to plan for that error. After plotting the location of these two targets we decided to go after the one that was the further away first then get the second one on the way home. When we calculated the distance we quickly came to realize that fuel was going to be the main issue.



▲ Luke Young's RF-86F Haymaker Sabre ready for the next mission at Komaki in 1954. Destination - who knows? (credit - Bill Simonen)

continued on page 26

We decided that each of us should plan the flight separately. This way we could match our calculations without any influence on the other and see how close each of our calculations would come regarding fuel. From that point it was all about plotting headings, distance to the targets and turning points. From there we could calculate how much fuel we needed and how many and what type external tanks would be required. I think we all knew it was going to take four drop tanks and punching them off as they empty. That we could plan later, but now we had to see how much fuel we would burn by dropping the tanks as we go and cruise climb to altitude. Our plan was to be at least at 45 to 47,000 thousand feet by the time we reached the coast line, drop the last tanks over water then cruise climb up to 50,000 thousand feet by the time we reached the first target. Then climb to 53,000 thousand feet at the second target on the way out. If the Chinese had detected us on radar on the way in or deep in their territory they could not intercept us at that altitude on the way out.

After we finished calculating our fuel both Bob and I came to within 300 pounds fuel remaining with each other at 50,000 thousand feet back over K-55. I calculated we would get back with 600 pounds and Bob figured 300 pounds. After discussing our calculations we found that Bob had allowed 100 pounds at each target to get lined up with the runway if necessary, and an extra 100 pounds to carry the drop tanks a little past empty to make sure we got all the fuel out of them. We felt that we could make that work as we had previously thought about how to get down from that altitude with enough fuel to make a normal 360 overhead approach and landing. We had tried this once on a practice mission in Japan one day together and it worked well.

We would reduce the power to idle and open the speed brakes at 50,000 thousand feet or above and never change the power all the way to touchdown. There was one catch in this plan and that was the camera heater blankets that keep the cameras warm to prevent condensation from forming in the camera or on the film had to work properly to avoid damage to the cameras or film. We had never had any heater failures or problems with this in the past, so we thought it was worth the risk to be able to make this work.

We would keep our airspeed at or above 450 to 500 knots on the way down and use the speed brakes as required to glide onto initial at about 420 knots so as to dissipate our airspeed to 360 knots at the break which is the normal airspeed for a normal 360 degree overhead approach. From the break it is a normal landing and we would only burn about 100 pounds of fuel with this procedure. That would be enough for one closed pattern if required. On a clear day this will work, so we decided to go with this plan. I think John was

not as sure as Bob and I were, but he went along with us as he was to be the airborne spare and may not have to be faced with this situation.

We finished our planning and discussed what we would do in the event the runway headings were not favorable as we approached the targets. Hopefully we could line up with the runway without making many large turns. Worst case would be that we had to do a 360 degree turn for some reason over the first target. If we had to go over the airfield at an undesirable angle and not get all the target in the pass our plan for that would be to spread out our formation some so that Bob would take one side of the target and I would take the other side, thus between the both of us we could get all the intelligence from two aircraft. That was the plan for both targets in the event that this is what was required. We did not want to have to go back later and do it over again if we could avoid it. We further discussed these ideas and plans together later in much more detail so as to make sure each one of us knew exactly what the other was doing at any given time. This plan was not fixed where it could not be adjusted as we go along. We knew it would be a plan as you go situation with the same results in mind....mostly get home safe.

We gave the "Osan Spook Guy" the need for four drop tanks, two 200's and two 120's and we would be gone about three hours. He was OK with that and advised us that the Air Force would not acknowledge our being on this mission and that if anything happened they would never admit that it happened. Only that we were on a weather reconnaissance mission and must have gotten lost or off course. That is what we were to say in the event it was necessary. I thought at the time that this would not be a good excuse if caught 400 miles over China on a clear day. I don't think the Chinese would have bought that excuse, especially if they found any wreckage of the airplane and realized it was a RF-86 with cameras and maybe film they could process. That however, was the story and we would follow their instructions if necessary.

It might be interesting to note that this was the same story that was used by Gary Powers when he was shot down over Russia on a U-2 spy mission. He said he was on a weather reconnaissance mission but he was never believed by the Russians either, as noted in his trial as a spy. We were also told that if a military aircraft piloted by a military pilot was caught in this situation it was considered to be an act of war and if a civilian was caught he was considered to be a spy. That was why future U-2 missions were flown by the CIA with civilian pilots. I'm not sure why we needed to know that at the time except that I figured that if we were caught we may have started World War III....or something like

continued on page 27



▲ The ground crew of "Miss Toadie-Chan" pose at Komaki AB in 1955. All the RF-86 aircraft, whether A model or F model, were painted to simulate the fighter Sabres of the 4th FIW. (credit - Bill Simonen)

that, Who knows. I have never figured that out.

The flight was scheduled to begin early on Saturday morning as there was a lot to do prior to starting a spook mission. After the spook mission was complete we still had to fly the film back to Yokota Air Base in Japan for the film to be processed and photo interpreters review the film to see if we need to be debriefed by them.

The day began by towing the aircraft to the end of the runway so as to be in a position to take off without taxiing which would burn fuel. We would go to the aircraft and do a walk around inspection then start the engine and go through the run up and takeoff procedure at the end of the runway. When we were ready to launch the mission we could again start the engine and taxi onto the runway without any delay to conserve fuel.

Before the run up we had the option to rat up the tailpipe if we wanted. The F-86 J-47 engine would run at a maximum tailpipe temperature of 690 degrees. The GE tech representative was a good friend of most of the pilots and it

was his thought that the 690 degree limit was conservative and the engine could run at 710 degrees without any harm. That extra temperature meant extra thrust and extra thrust meant more speed or a higher altitude. That was a good idea to most of us on these missions. We could put a rat, which is a small section of rectangular metal the same radius as the tailpipe, or a mouse, which is half the size of a rat. They would bolt into the inside of the tailpipe at the very end to reduce, ever so slightly, the area for the exhaust gas which would increase the tailpipe temperature. A lot of our high altitude training missions at Nellis was using full throttle. This is what was required in the air war over Mig-Alley. We also practiced this on a regular basis at Komaki, so we didn't feel that this would be a problem.

After the run up checked out OK and we were satisfied with the tailpipe temperature the ground crew would top off the fuel tanks and pack the forward fuel tank. The 86 had two fuselage tanks one forward and one aft tank. The forward fuel filler nozzle was in the top side of the fuel tank and the aft fuel filler nozzle was in the top of the fuel tank. Fuel was fed to the engine from the forward fuel tank and fuel was

continued on page 28

transferred from the aft tank to the forward tank by a fuel pump located between the two tanks. There was a fuel pump transfer test switch located in the nose wheel well that could be used to test the pump and could be used to transfer fuel from the aft tank to the forward tank to pack the forward tank with fuel above the nozzle in the forward tank. This meant getting more fuel in the forward tank than the tank would normally hold. Then the ground crew would top off the aft tank with the filler nozzle in the top. By doing this an extra amount of fuel could be loaded on the aircraft which could not be done by normal refueling. This was known as packing the tanks, and any additional fuel that we could get would give us more range or extra fuel to use.

With the aircraft now ready to go it was time to get on with the mission. Four F-86 fighters had been taxied in position to stand strip alert the entire time we were in the air to be used if the situation required their help. I'm not sure what these guys were thinking while watching all this preparation with the RF-86's going on across the ramp but they also remained radio silent, so someone must have given them the same instructions as we had.

Our three aircraft were lined up in the position as we were to fly. Bob was in the middle and I was on the left with John on the right. When we started the engines the aircraft were already in take off configuration and all we had to do is roll out on the runway and go to full power and take off. The tower must have been aware of our ready to go time as they kept the runway clear so we could make a rolling take off whenever we were ready. There was not much traffic at that time of day on a Saturday with the operating units assigned there not flying on the weekends, so that did not present a problem.

Every thing we did was with visual signals as we were right next to each other and when we were ready to go we would give Bob a thumbs up and he would respond with the rotating finger to start engines. Once the engines were started and all gages looked good we would close the canopy which was the signal to begin our taxi out onto the runway and into position. Throttles would be advance to full throttle and with an immediate head nod to release breaks and begin a three ship formation take off.

Once airborne we began a left turn on course to our first heading into China. Shortly after take off we would turn on all cameras to make sure they were working properly and that the camera doors would be open. On the RF-86 there are camera doors for each camera located in the bottom of the fuselage to prevent water or dirt from being thrown up onto the cameras by the nose wheel getting the camera lenses wet or dirty during taxiing or take off. I would check Bob's

doors, John would check mine and if both were open we would then run off about ten to fifteen frames of film using the counter and manual switch on the stick. This was done to check the camera operation and counter and run enough film off each camera to allow for extra film on the front end of each roll and at the end of each roll. This was done so that if there would be any exposure of the film or damage to the film when the film was down loaded and or processed there would be adequate film available so as to not lose pictures of first or last target. This was a normal procedure for any mission as a precaution to protect the beginning and ending film on the roll for a damage situation. With only two targets assigned there was plenty of film available so taking this extra amount of film would not be a problem. This is a, "I would rather be safe than sorry", kind of thinking.

John was to stay with us until the tanks had been dropped and came off clean which would be just short of the coast line. If you didn't jettison the tanks just right they had a tendency to roll out and take off the pitot tube. The best way to get a clean drop, even with the stuka style fins which were designed to prevent this, was to stick the nose down a little and pick up enough extra speed to pull back on the stick to load a little G force while jettisoning the tanks so the aircraft would pull away from the tanks as they came off. Hopefully both tanks will come off clean, and you had to do this for both the 200 gal. tanks, which would be emptied first, then the 120's as they went dry. In our case on this mission both Bob's and my tanks came off clean.

Our next concern was the contrails. We had been briefed that the contrail level would be between 35 and 40,000 feet which would be right at the Chinese coastline. We were not allowed to proceed into denied territory if we were marking by pulling any contrails for obvious reasons. As we climbed through around 32,000 feet we began marking but by the time we reached 37,000 feet we were in the clear again. That was a moment of relief and a good sign that things were working in our favor.

With both tanks gone we were now clean, still at full throttle, and approaching the Chinese coastline and it was time for John to head back home and then just the two of us were on our way in. It was now time for me to spread out in a wider tactical formation an move to a more line abreast position where be both could see each others tail more easily. We had found out earlier by working with our own radar site back in Japan that the radar signature would be less to the ground radar stations when flying line abreast and spread out rather than in the typical back slightly and out just far enough to read the large tail numbers on the tail as taught at Nellis. We did not know why, but that is what they said.

As we cross into the Chinese territory a strange feeling came over me as I knew we were not supposed to be there and I felt like we were now in a really exposed situation that was for real. It was kind of like flying a single engine airplane alone over water at night. All of sudden you can hear all sorts of noise inside the aircraft that you didn't hear before, but they were always there. The engine hum became almost non existent and you could only hear the little things that you never paid any attention too on a normal flight. Even the attitude gyro seemed to make a lot of noise. This was a state of mind I'm sure but for some strange reason any small change in sound got your attention. As I said, it's like flying over water at night, a weird feeling. You had to do it to appreciate what I am trying to describe. That feeling passed quickly as it was now time to getting back to the mission and doing the job you were sent there to do.

Usually the best side for the wingman to fly is the side opposite from which there might be a threat. In our case there was no known threat of interception, and the intelligence people did not know where any fighters might be. That is why we were going after these two targets. To find out what type Migs the Chinese Air Force might have, or bombers for that matter. We assumed that they had Mig-15's as that was our experience when we engaged what we thought were Chinese or Russian pilots over Mig Alley in Korea. We knew the Mig-15 could not get much above 45,000 feet and we were now approaching 47,000 feet climbing to 50,000 feet. We felt fairly safe that even if they knew we were there they could not get up to us to make any type of gunnery pass. The Mig-15 did not carry enough fuel to get in a long chase with us and still recover back at their home base.

Our biggest concern was that if they knew we were there on the way in they could launch and wait to get us on the way out if we were in range. We were cruising at about .95 mach and still climbing. We learned from other flights that if you dropped the nose down slightly and picked up a little extra airspeed that you could drop about an inch of flaps and the aircraft would kind of go up on a step and plain out like in a boat. Then the F-86 would kind of jump up and gain a little more mach to .96 or .97 as you burn fuel and cruised climbed on up beyond 50,000 feet.

At that altitude on this clear day with the visibility what seemed like forever we could see maybe 75 to 100 miles ahead. After awhile the first target was now in sight and it looked like we were in luck with the runway heading aligned so we could make about a 40 degree left turn to fly down the runway. No 360 degree turn would be required here and the thought of our fuel flashed in my mind. After checking my fuel with what we were consuming I felt like we were on track according to our planned fuel. I hoped Bob had the

same amount that I had but there was no way to tell at this point. Now that I had determined that we would be making a left turn into the target I would slide over to the right wing in the turn. We would be making large left turn back towards the second target after coming off of this first target, so there would not be a problem staying in formation in the turns.

Bob and I discussed the idea that if all looked good according to plan that I would slide into a trail position in the turn or a position were I could photograph the same target. With nothing in sight that might be a threat I decided it would be nice to have two film strips of this target. When Bob began rocking his wings to get lined up on the runway I thought this was a good time for me to get lined up also. I didn't feel we would be exposed for long as we were only going to be over this target for about a minute where we both had to fly straight and level over the airfield. There was some right drift which required a couple of 90 degree rolls to the left to stay lined up with the runway. Other than that, all I needed to do was to hold what I had, cameras on, and another look behind to see if we were still clear. Once passed the target, cameras off, I started a left turn to get inside of Bob to get back into the correct wing position. With the long turn and by keeping our airspeed matched, it required me to pass directly under Bob and to move out to a position on Bob's right wing in the line abreast formation for the next leg.

What a great feeling to have when you know that you got one down and one to go. My confidence went up by about two notches and I thought things were going good when I suddenly realized that there was this low grinding noise that I don't remember hearing. Like a new buzz sound that was strange and one that I could not identify. I check all the gages and every one look normal. The hydraulic gage is used for both the primary and utility hydraulic systems. There is a switch that allows you to switch between the two systems to read each systems hydraulic pressure. It is customary to keep the gage set to the primary hydraulic system, as the F-86 flight controls are all hydraulic and if you lose hydraulic pressure on the primary hydraulic system the flight controls will lock up solid. It's a good idea to be able to read the primary hydraulic pressure at a glance so that's why you keep it set to show the primary system. That pressure looked normal around 2700 lbs.

The utility hydraulic system operates the landing gear, speed brakes, aircraft brakes and the nose wheel steering. It will automatically switch over and power the primary system in the event of hydraulic system failure on the primary system when the primary system drops below 700 to 900 lbs. The utility system will back up the primary system, but the primary system will not back up the utility system. If the utility system fails you will not have any of the items it powers.

With this new sound I thought that I should switch the gage to the utility system and check the hydraulic pressure on that system. You usually only do this prior to landing to make sure it is working because that system operates items needed for landing. I flipped the switch and “bingo” the hydraulic pressure read zero. Now I realized that this strange sound must be coming from the utility system hydraulic pump. I switched back to the primary system to make sure it might not be the gage but found the primary system pressure to read normal. I concluded that the gage is working and I must have lost the utility hydraulic system for sure.

The next question that ran through my mind now was what to do about it. If we had been on a regular training mission in Japan the correct thing to do is to advise the leader and try to get down as soon as possible. This situation was anything but regular. I was bound to radio silence and there was nothing that Bob could do anyway so I decided to press on with what I had and deal with it later when we got out of China and closer to home. There was nothing that I could do about it either so I switched the hydraulic pressure selector switch back to the primary system so I didn't have to look at the zero utility system pressure.

I tried to put this situation out of my mind and made myself get back to the mission at hand. I will deal with it later. We had completed our turn to the course heading for the second target. By now we had burned a little more fuel and continued our slow cruise climb to above 50,000 feet. Our indicated airspeed reduces lower as we climb higher and we were indicating something less than 240 knots IAS by this time. This is not a big deal as our mach moved up just to around .97 at this altitude. The best thing is that the higher up you go the less fuel you burn per hour. With our planned fuel at arrival back at K-55 in the 300 lb. range any fuel we could save made things that much better.

All the while this was going on I did continue to keep my head on a swivel to make sure we were not being visited by any of our Chinese friends. It's funny that I refer to them as our friends. I guess this comes from the fact that I had spent time with some of the Nationalist Chinese Air Force guys on a deployment to Taiwan Air Base and got to appreciate their flying abilities and history through the years. Some of those guys had as much as 10,000 hours of flying time and been flying for 25 years. I just wondered if any of these Chinese pilots that might be trying to get at us might have that kind of experience...I hope not, but, now is not the time to think about that. I'm confident that if we had to go one-on-one we would come out on top in the fight. The only problem is that we would not have enough fuel to get back home, so the best thing to do is keep on climbing so they could never get up to us. I don't think that even a Mig-17 could reach us now.

The weather still remained as clear as it was on the way in. We were approaching the point where we should be able to pick up the second target on the horizon in about 10 minutes. Our fuel was starting to pick up a little above what we planned. I could still hear that low grinding noise which was distraction to say the least. I don't ever remember a hydraulic pump catching on fire but that thought went through my mind.

I really didn't like the idea of having to punch out of this thing. With the weather so clear with no clouds in sight I didn't think the Chinese would buy this lost on a weather reconnaissance mission bit. Especially, if they found my map or flight plan card, which I have strapped to my leg on my knee board. They have the targets plotted and both have our planned headings, check points and fuel for each leg of the flight plan. I could see it now, some Chinese interrogator holding my map in front of my face and in his broken Chinese English saying. “How you explain this, fly boy” Or even worse, have my helmet with the black and yellow checker board painted on the top and Cotton pickers with the 15th Tac on each side. Or my black and yellow checker board scarf. Each squadron has their own markings and I'm sure that they know that the 15th Cotton pickers had black and yellow checker board markings which belonged to a photo reconnaissance unit. That was well known from the Korean War days when the 15th was flying RF-80's with those markings. The RF-86 that we were now flying has the 5th Air Force yellow stripes like all the other F-86 fighters. It's strange the things that go through your mind at times.... enough of that.

We were flying line abreast as briefed at about .96 mach and I was on the right wing. I hoped we would only have to make a small turn to the left to get lined up on the second target which would allow me to slide under on the crossover to the left wing to keep our speeds matched. I knew that Bob would not be reducing any power so a slight turn would be good. My eyes were scanning the sky about level with the horizon or below. After rotating my head on a 360 degree look about every 30 seconds I began to feel a strain in my neck from all the checking 6 that I was doing.

I still was not been able to pick up that second target yet, which by calculating the time and distance from our first target, I thought we should be able to see it by now. I moved my map so I could take a look at it and scan for any threats at the same time. I remembered there was a river which we should be able to see for a check point for our position. After I took a closer look at the ground and what was on the map as a river I could now see it and it was not much of a river, nothing like the Mississippi, which I guess I had fixed in my mind to look for. There was not enough good references on

the map that matched well with land marks or terrain on the ground.

Still no target, the sun angle was different than when we approached the first target. Maybe that is what is making it harder to see or the thought flashed through my mind, what if the coordinates that we were given were not exactly correct or the damn airfield may not even be there at all. There is always the chance that we could be off course. We have primarily been using dead-reckoning....using heading, time and distance since our last check point, for navigation. We couldn't be lost, recon pilots may be temporarily dislocated, but never lost.

Bob made about a 5 degree turn to our left, Maybe he has picked up the target.

This small turn to the left with me on the right flying line of abreast has put me a little behind the line abreast position that I wanted to fly. I called on my training at Nellis. Flying at the same speed in formation with 100 percent power the only way to get back into position is to lower the nose a little and pick up a little more speed and then you can catch up, but will be about 200 feet lower than the leader. By using the small extra speed you can bleed off this extra speed by climbing back into position, which I am now able to do.

“Tally Ho”, there is the second target. Bob must have had it in sight. This air field was harder to see as the color of the runway was gray more than the usual white concrete that we saw at the last target. Maybe it is asphalt, but it did not seem black enough for that. The airfield and surrounding base just seemed to blend into the terrain more than I had expected.

We were in luck again with regard to the heading of the runway as our current heading made for a perfect line up for about a 60 degree turn to the left to be lined up with the runway. This also gave us a straight shot for the coast, as it was only going to be about a 10 degree turn to the right after we left the target. With this large turn to the left to get lined up with the runway I was going to have to start my cross over, really under, right away and may even have to cross in front of Bob before we completed the turn. I tried to figure this out in my mind so I also could line up on the target. We were a little closer to the target than I liked but there was nothing I could do about that. I just had to plan my position the best I could. The most important thing was to keep our airspeed matched so when we rolled out I would not fall behind.

Bob was starting his turn onto the runway heading so I began an immediate turn to get to the inside of the turn as soon as possible. That way I had a little cushion to play with. As it turned out by playing the turn I wound up in trail

about the time we started across the target. After another quick look around while Bob was rocking his wings to get lined up on the target I did the same to make sure I was lined up also. I was slightly to the right, but there was no time to correct that, which was going to put me more over the ramp than the runway. I thought this would not be a problem because we were interested about what was on the ramp and the facilities anyway.

As we left the target Bob made right turn toward home and by playing the turn I wound up on the left wing a little closer than I wanted. My first thought was to check 6 o'clock as I moved out some to get back into the correct tactical formation. As I moved out it was a good time to check my fuel and found that I was about 200 pounds ahead of planned which was good but we had lost a little altitude during all the turn and rocking looking for the target. This put us a little below the 53,000 feet we were flying before we started our photo run so I expected Bob would be trying to get that back by cruise climbing back to or higher than we were.

We would be entering a critical time when we would be most vulnerable as we approached the coast. This is when we could be intercepted if they knew we were there and they had fighters stationed within range to put on station to intercept us. We were not worried about the target we just went over because if any fighters had come from there we would have seen them by now. If they were trying to catch us from behind they would have never made it because of our speed and altitude. My main concern was any threat ahead of us so my concentration was more to twelve o'clock rather than six o'clock. Really, more like seven o'clock through five o'clock. We had about fifteen minutes until we would be able to pick up the coast.

All of a sudden I realized that things seem strangely quiet for some reason. Just the opposite of when the buzz or hum started, just the change gets your attention. My first thought was that I may have gotten the utility hydraulic pressure back. I flipped the hydraulic gage switch from the primary system to the utility system. “Zip”, still zero, so much for that. At least I would not have to be reminded about this situation, for the time being, by having to hear the failed hydraulic pump noise. I guess there could be a leak in a hydraulic line on the utility system. I'll get Bob to check that out later closer to home.

This eased my anxiety some about having to leave this bird and being picked up by the Chinese. At least my chances of getting to the coast looked a lot better in case the worst happened. Why, for some reason, your thoughts ramble around like that I can't explain. Again if I were caught, I wish I had not had to commit to memory the electrical

diagram of the Mark-4 nuclear weapon that we were trained to deliver in the F-86 at Nellis. We even practiced the LABS (Low Altitude Bombing System) delivery method by toss bombing practice bombs. Why we had to memorize the electrical diagram and be tested on it, by putting it down on paper, I never understood. The idea was that in the event of a nuclear war we may have to launch from a forward base and if something went wrong with the bomb at that base there would be no maintenance personnel there to fix it. We would have the electrical diagram in our mind, if we could even remember it, and could diagnose the problem and fix it. The only thing on the Mark-4 that was electrical was the tail-fin that retracted for take off and ground operation. You would lower it in flight prior to launching the bomb. The only problem was that we didn't have any test equipment to figure out what was wrong or any tools to fix it with. Anyway, from some of the Chinese brain washing techniques we learned that they used during the Korean War made me think that I just as soon not have known that information.

That thought flashed through my mind, however, it was time to get back to the business at hand. I'm sure that with the targets behind us Bob's attention was now keeping his head on the swivel also looking for any sign of Chinese interceptors just as I was. Navigation was not much of an issue at this point as we were flying a heading and keeping an eye on our fuel. When we got out to sea we probably would be able to pick up the ADF radio at K-55 and home in on that when we got closer. With the visibility this good we could begin to pick up the coast line at a distance. Now if we did not see any fighters we would be home free. We were back up above 53,000 feet again and still around .96 mach so things were looking pretty good as the coast got closer. You could sort of feel a sign of relief, but it was still too early to feel comfortable.

As we approached the coast, we were now about thirty to fifty miles inland, my search for and any threat concentrated more to the nine o'clock, six o'clock and three o'clock positions. I didn't think there would be much of a chance anything would be coming from straight ahead and I thought Bob would be looking in that direction. Once again the unexpected took a hold of me and I got a thrush of adrenalin. Not from a sighting of any boggy, but as I looked off to the right or south, as we were flying, on the horizon, I saw what looked like an airfield. My first thought was to take a

good look around and check for any aircraft then went back to taking a closer look at what I thought was an airfield.

This object was way off in the distance, maybe about 50 to 75 miles and about 10 to 15 miles back into the coast. It was stark white, like new concrete would look against a green background of a terrain covered with a lot of green rice fields. This thing was long and wider than the average runway with the runway oriented straight out to the coast. It had to be an airfield, there was nothing else that I have seen that would look like this other than an airfield. I had been into Kadena AB on Okinawa and their runway is 500 feet wide and it looked a lot like that but this one was a long way away and it was hard to tell for sure.

After I came to the conclusion that it must be an airfield, my recollection from our briefing was, there was no mention of any airfield in that location. I came to the conclusion that this must be a new airfield that we did not know that was in existence. I made my mind up that when we got a little closer to the coast and the angle was just right, 90 degree off, I was going to rock up the right wing and try to get a picture of this thing with the 6 inch vertical, using it as an oblique camera. If I did it just right, with luck, maybe I could get it in one of the split verticals also as they would take at the same time by using the manual switch on the stick. In fact I was going to do this three times, one just prior to what I judged to be perfect, one at perfect when I hoped I would be in a 90 degree line to the target, and one after I passed the ideal point. I have done this before and got good results.

When I got to what I thought was the correct angle for the first shot I rocked up the right wing and positioned the aircraft where I felt the camera would get the target. When I rolled out I was still looking toward the target and with Bob to my right I could keep him in sight while doing this maneuver. With no surprise, I saw Bob do the same thing. I smiled as I knew he had seen the same thing as I did and was attempting the same maneuver to get a picture. I finished my other two attempts and noticed Bob too was doing the same.

This was an unexpected bit of excitement that followed a tense day. Our hard part of the mission was about to be over and I hoped we could call it a success, at least we were going to get out of China successfully. We only needed good pictures to give us the intelligence we went after.

# The Avon Sabre - An Australian Perspective

Air Vice-Marshal(Ret'd) R.J. Bomball, AO, AFC



*The F86 entered RAAF service in 1954.*

*Built under licence in Australia and powered by the Rolls-Royce Avon engine,*

*there were substantial differences to its*

*American cousin: a larger intake and*

*two 30 mil Aden cannon being two of*

*the major changes. Early models were*

*prone to compressor stalling above*

*30,000ft, a problem rectified with later*

*model engines. Some early fatalities*

*occurred with taller pilots being struck*

*by the canopy as its front bow dished*

*downwards during the ejection cycle.*

*Once this problem was diagnosed, the*

*system was changed to effect ejection*

*through the canopy which was first*

*shattered by a bolt firing. Despite these*

*early problems the aircraft operated very*

*successfully in the RAAF until 1971.*

My association with the Sabre began in May 1958 with a conversion course at the RAAF equivalent of Nellis - RAAF Base Williamtown on the East coast about 70 miles North of Sydney. Assignment to 77 Squadron followed, an exciting time as rumours were flying about possible deployment to Malaya of two squadrons on or about the end that year. In the event this did occur with No 3 Sqn deploying in November and 77 Sqn following in February 1959, Operation Sabre Ferry Phases 1 and 2.

Sabre Ferry was an interesting experience involving six legs of 2-2 ½ hours each: Sydney-Townsville, Townsville-Darwin, Darwin-Biak, Indonesia, Biak-Guiuan, Philippines, Guiuan-Labuan, Sabah, and Labuan-Butterworth, Malaya. Navigation over the long stretches of water was assisted by RAAF P3 Orions determining medium level winds - probably more of a comfort than any real use!

The role in Malaya was to support the British ground forces in their operations against the communist insurgents during the Malayan Emergency. Up until our arrival, this role had been undertaken by RAAF Canberra bombers, the equivalent of the USAF B57s. The British had long realised that the Emergency was a war of hearts and minds and had painstakingly worked at driving the insurgents back toward the Thai border by securing the Malay villages as safe refuges by night and escorting the villagers out to work the rubber plantations by day, gradually denying more and more of the country to the insurgents and denying any opportunity to inflict terror. As an aside, some 50 years later, notwithstanding British and Australian involvement again in Afghanistan, it took the Coalition close to ten years to re-develop a similar strategy!

The air element of the campaign involved classic close air support of ground troops operating covertly in the jungle to locate insurgent camps. Once located, air support would be called in to bomb relative to smoke markers dropped by a British Auster aircraft, the aim being to either destroy and/or panic the insurgents to break cover and expose themselves to ground fire, a big ask in thick jungle.

Some time passed following our arrival before the operational planners could be convinced that dive bombing from Sabres was a better option than level bombing from Canberras. Finally, in August 1959 we undertook our first strike. However, the steadily increasing success of the British strategy coupled with the need to share the strike opportunities between the Canberra squadron and two Sabre squadrons meant that our involvement was less than we would have liked.



The campaign progressed so well that our last strike occurred less than a year later in June 1960 and was memorable as it involved no weapons due to the proximity of the insurgents to civilian settlement. The 'strike' force involved eight Sabres at high level, their job being to lay sonic booms on the target area at the appointed time. A further eight were to simulate strafing at low level accompanied by recordings of bombing and strafing broadcast by the Auster Mark aircraft. At the appointed time all hell broke loose and the insurgents were panicked as planned, running toward a ground force of highly disciplined Gurkha troops led by a British officer. Unfortunately, the Brit officer's gun jammed and the Gurkhas didn't dare fire without his lead, thus allowing the terrorists to melt unharmed into the jungle. Nevertheless, it was a very interesting example of what can be achieved with some lateral thinking, albeit in somewhat unique circumstances.

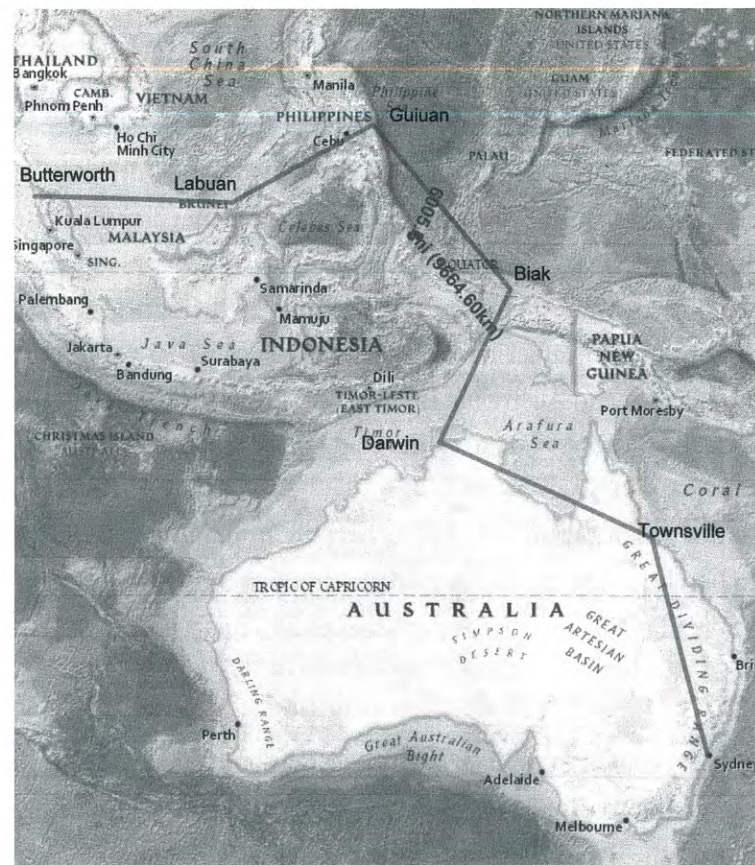
The Malayan Emergency is often overlooked as one of the most successful post WW2 anti-terrorist campaigns. On August 1st 1960 an 'End-of-Emergency' flypast involving 24 Sabres took place over Kuala Lumpur. My personal involvement in Malaya ended in December of that year. However, Sabres continued to operate in the region being involved during the 1960s in Confrontation between Indonesia and Malaysia, and at Ubon,



▲ R.J. Bomball, RAAF, in the late 1950's when No. 77 Squadron deployed to Malaya. (credit – R.J. Bomball)

Thailand during the Vietnam War, although no actual combat took place. Wikipedia has a more detailed account of these and other RAAF Sabre operations. Ironically, some RAAF Sabres were later gifted to both Indonesia and Malaysia.

Following several years of flying instructing I renewed my Sabre connection briefly in 1965 to undertake the RAAF equivalent of the Fighter Weapons Instructors' Course preparatory to converting to the Mirage 111, the eventual Sabre replacement. I thought that was the last of my Sabre involvement but some 28 years later in 1993 at my final pre-retirement parade as Commandant of the RAAF's Tri-service Defence Force Academy, I was surprised by a flypast of the one remaining F86 that continues to fly in Australia to this day. A great finale to a fondly remembered association that began in my formative years as a fighter pilot.



▲ Map that took 77 Squadron to Butterworth AB, Malaya. (credit – R.J. Bomball)

## this n' that



**THE D's Have it!** A pair of F-86Ds and one of "the other guys" finish off volume 23-3. (*upper*) This is actually an F-86L, the upgraded F-86D with the longer span wing and SAGE equipment. It is assigned to the 83rd FIS at Hamilton AFB. (*middle*) An F-86D with the Sabre Knights aerobatic team, the 'officially' designated aerobatic team of Air defense Command. (*lower*) With the story of the RF-86Fs stationed at Komaki AB, we thought you'd appreciate a shot of the other reconnaissance unit in Korea. VMCJ-1 flew the F2H-2P Photo Banshee out of Pohang, Korea in 1953. However, the film was still developed by crews of the 67th TRW at Kimpo. (credit – Sabrejet Classics)



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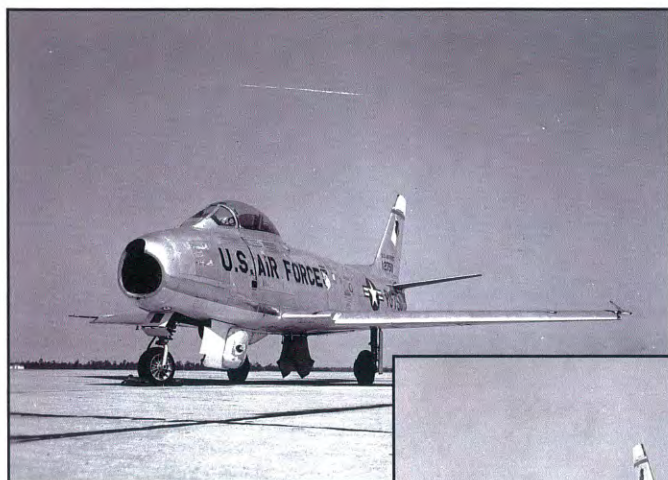
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### ◀ **WHAT IS IT? LAST CHANCE!**

OK guys, this is the only "What Is It? Subject airplane that has NEVER been identified. No one, including your editor, has ever figured out what this airplane was used for. It is F-86E, serial number 51-275, and was assigned to Air Research & Development Command at Wright Field. That's all we know. The strange thing is that under the nose behind the gear well, is a large fairing that extends onto the nose gear door. What it was used for,

no one has EVER come forward with an answer or even a guess. Anyone knowing anything about this Sabre, contact Editor,

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