

# The F-86 Sabre

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Taking advantage of German research done during World War II, American engineers made the F-86 the US Air Force's first swept-wing jet fighter, with the initial production aircraft flying in May 1948. The F-86A, designed as a day fighter, was 37 feet, six inches long and 14 feet, eight inches high, with a

wingspan of 37 feet, one inch. The Sabre weighed in at 13,791 pounds (fully loaded), mounting six .50-caliber machine guns and capable of carrying 2,000 pounds of bombs or eight rockets. Powered by a General Electric J-47 engine that delivered 5,200 pounds of thrust, it cruised at 540 mph with a top speed of 685 mph. The F-86 had a ceiling of 49,000 feet and a range of 1,200 miles. As a fighter, it was a very stable gun platform, and its canopy gave an unobstructed, all-around view. Some 3,854 of the A, E, and F models were produced, as well as many thousands more for other countries.

The F-86 is indelibly linked with the Korean War. In November 1950, Russian MiG-15s in Chinese markings

appeared south of the Yalu River. They completely overmatched the US F-80C jets, as well as F-51 and F-82 propeller fighters then in-country. The 4th Fighter Interceptor Wing (FIW), flying F-86As, hurriedly deployed to South Korea and began operations from Kimpo Airfield in December. First contacts showed that the MiGs had better speed and agility at high altitudes but that they were no match for F-86s flown by veteran US pilots.

The Chinese offensive forced the F-86s back to Japan, out of range of "MiG Alley"—the area of northwest Korea south of the Yalu. With the subsequent retreat of the Chinese, the F-86s returned with a vengeance. Capt James Jabara shot down two MiGs on 20 May 1951, becoming the first-ever jet "ace," with a score of six.

In July 1951, the 4th FIW transitioned to F-86Es, and the 51st FIW exchanged its F-80s for F-86Es late that year. By summer of 1952, the F-86F had arrived in-theater, and, with the "six-three" wing-conversion kit, it could match the MiG for high-altitude speed and maneuverability. February 1953 saw the 8th and 18th Fighter Bomber Wings transition to F-86Fs as well.

By the end of the war, in July 1953, Sabres had downed 792 MiGs while losing only 78 of their own. This 10-to-one ratio has enshrined the F-86 as one of America's top fighters.



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