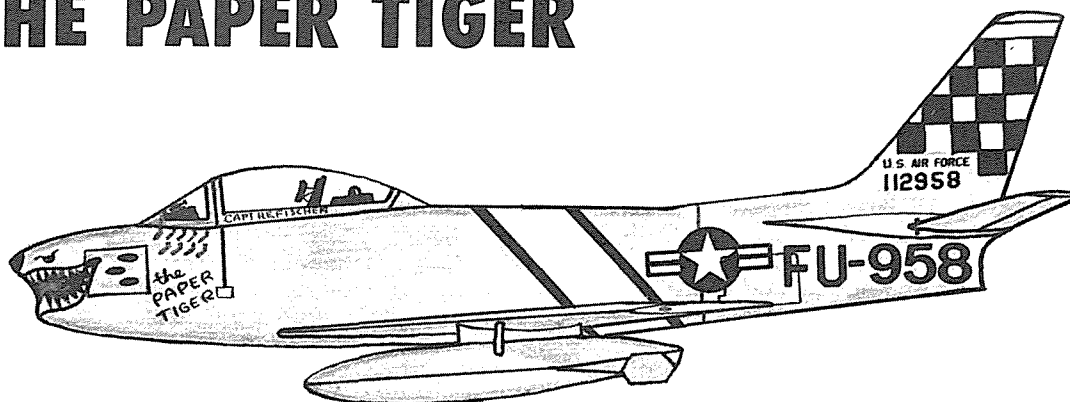


THE PAPER TIGER



of MIG ALLEY

By M/Sgt MERLE C. OLMSTED, USAF (Ret)

Editor's note: The distinguished Eric Sevareid commented, in a 1953 CBS broadcast, upon the great mystery of the Korean War — why did American men fight so hard, so long, and so well in this kind of war. Said he:

"The answer lies deep in the heart and tissues of American life . . . it has to do with the sense of belonging to a team, with the honor of upholding it, the shame of letting it down. But it also has to do with their implicit, unreasoned belief in their country, and their natural belief in themselves as individual men upon the earth."

The communist aggression in Korea in the early 1950's ultimately cost the lives or serious injury of close to half a million free world soldiers, marines, sailors and airmen. Uncounted civilians and vast numbers of communist soldiery also died in the expansionist ambitions of the North Koreans and the Chinese. Today, 15 years later, yesterday's enemy is still today's enemy and the Korean Peninsula continues to live under the imminent threat of war.

The North Korean attack on the Republic of South Korea on 25th June 1950, caught the United States armed forces in a weakened condition similar to what it had been in 1941. Although the USAF was in a slightly better condition then it had been in the dreary days of Pearl Harbor, it was still suffering from the doldrums of the big let-down after WW 2.

The Far East Air Force (FEAF), which was to supply most of the air requirements for three years of war, had been an occupation force based mostly in Japan, Okinawa, and the Philippines. (The Japan-based 5th Air Force was the largest and would bear the main brunt.) Although no one had forgotten that Pearl Harbor had happened on a Sunday morning, life was good in FEAF, and the press of alerts and day to day duty did not prevent its officers, men and their families from enjoying the pleasures available both on and off base.

Nevertheless, FEAF was too weak for any major operation and General Stratemyer later commented; "The troop basis which FEAF had at the start of the Korean war was totally inadequate for anything other than a limited air defense of Japan, Okinawa, and the Philippines."

The good life changed for many FEAF personnel in that Spring of 1950 when the United Nations moved to stop the North Korean aggression with force. In the end the effort of the USAF tipped the balance and was the decisive force which staved off defeat and brought the war to a stalemated armistice in July 1953. (See box)

This is the story of one of those young men of the decisive force. His name is Harold E. Fischer, Jr., and he is part of that select group of 11 fighter pilots who destroyed ten or more communist aircraft in air combat during the first big air war involving large numbers of opposing turbine-engined aircraft.

Hal Fischer was born and grew up in the atmosphere of small town Iowa, and was 18 years of age when he graduated from high school in Burt, Iowa. Like thousands of his countrymen in the mid-year of WW 2 he immediately joined the service, choosing the U.S. Navy, which he entered as an aviation cadet. However, the war ended before his graduation. Discharged in July 1945, he returned to college at Iowa State University. At the end of the Spring term in 1948 he enlisted in the U.S. Army, was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant, and in June 1949 he transferred to the USAF.

His training days followed the normal pattern of an embryo military pilot: Randolph Field for primary and basic, advanced at Williams AFB, and thence to Nellis AFB, Nevada, the final step for fighter pilots.

When Fischer graduated from Nellis in the Spring of 1951, the communist aggression in far away Korea had been badly battered, but the final outcome was by no means certain. The future of newly graduated fighter jockeys was clear though, and in April, he went out to the Far East. It would be more than four years before he came home again.

His first operational assignment was with an old line regular Air Force fighter outfit, the 8th Fighter Bomber Group. The 8th had been activated at historic Langley Field, Virginia in 1932 and had gone out to the Pacific to fight the Japanese aggressor in 1941. (It was still there 27 years later). When Hal Fischer joined the "Headhunters" (a name they had bestowed upon themselves during WW2) of the 80th Fighter Bomber Squadron in March 1951, they were flying F-80Cs out of Itazuke, Japan.

During the nine months and 100-plus missions of his tour with the 80th, Fischer became a proficient fighter/bomber pilot and managed to avoid the worst hazard of that occupation — being shot down by ground fire. His F-80, which he named KISMET (Fate) was hit only once, and strangely enough, his most vivid memory of the period concerns a nightmare mission takeoff from Taegu Airfield.

In common with most Korean airfields at that time, Taegu had only one runway and this of PSP (pierced steel plank). Although still in use today PSP never did make a good runway but was acceptable if nothing else was available.

The 8th Group was still flying out of Itazuke because there were no fields for them in Korea, but on 1 May 1951 the 8th staged into the 51st Fighter Group's battered field at Taegu for a long mission to Sinanju, on the Chongchon River, north of the North Korean capitol of Pyongyang.

To speed up launch time and save fuel during formup, it was planned that the 51st Group F-80s would take off to

the south, while the 8th Group waited on that end of the runway to take off to the north as soon as the last 51st bird had cleared the runway.

Because they were carrying a heavy load of bombs, the 51st was slated to use Jet Assisted Take Off while the 8th, carrying only rockets, was to takeoff without JATO. Unfortunately, the day was hot, dry, dusty, and still. With little wind, the JATO smoke from the first F-80s hung over the runway like a cloud, forcing the following pilots to plunge blindly into the smoke, adding their own JATO smoke to the pall.

Several pilots, not knowing if they would make it or not, and fearing the worst, jettisoned their tip tanks and ordnance onto the runway. One F-80 aborted the takeoff in the smoke, causing a following Shooting Star to collide with it. Another pilot inadvertently fired his JATO while awaiting takeoff and demolished the nearby GCA shack despite the use of brakes and stopcocked engine.

When the turn came for the 8th to plunge northward

THE SABRE IN KOREA

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An account of the Sabre's part in the Korean war must include a general survey of the air power situation at the time. *When North Korean forces invaded South Korea on 25th June 1950, the USAF was actually at the lowest point in its strength since 1941.*

Of the USAF's 48 Wings, 20 were fighter, three heavy bomber, 12 medium bomber, one light bomber, six reconnaissance and six troop carrier Wings. They were supported by 27 Air National Guard and 20 Air Reserve Wings, part-time organizations with older fighter, light bomber and transport aircraft.

First-line jet fighter inventory included 419 F-86A's, 605 slower but longer-range Republic F-84's, and 817 Lockheed F-80's at the end of June 1950. Three under-strength all-weather fighter Wings used propeller-driven North American F-82 two-seaters, of which 205 were on hand, and had the first nine Lockheed F-94A jet two-seaters. Older fighters of the Air Guard and in storage included 1,804 North American F-51 and 1,349 Republic F-47 propeller-driven veterans, with 216 more obsolete F-80A models. Prototypes and miscellaneous aircraft brought the 1950 total to 5,488 fighters, of which about two-thirds were obsolete.

The part of the USAF that would fight the Korean air war was the Far East Air Force, or "FEAF," whose combat units in June 1950 included five F-80C jet Wings, three F-82 all-weather Squadrons, two B-26 light bomber Squadrons, an RF-80A tactical reconnaissance Squadron and an RB-29 photo-reconnaissance Squadron. These were stationed in Japan, Okinawa and the Philippines, and were backed up by a B-29 Wing on Guam. Combat aircraft possessed by the operational units consisted of 365 F-80's, 32 F-82's, 26 B-26's, 22 B-29's, 25 RF-80A's, six RB-29's and 24 WB-29's.

It was the appearance of the MiG's that prompted the USAF to send Sabres to Korea. On 8th November the 4th Fighter-Interceptor Wing with F-86A Sabres and the 27th Fighter-Escort Wing with Republic F-84E Thunderjets were ordered to make ready to move to Korea.

The 27th had been SAC's only escort Wing for medium

bombers, formerly using F-82E Twin Mustangs before the F-84E jet arrived. Wartime experience was to show that the F-84E's 613 m.p.h. was insufficient to provide B-29's with security against MiG's, and the 27th found its primary mission was to be close-support fighter-bombing.

Sabres of the 4th Wing commenced flying from their home airport at Wilmington, Delaware, on 11th November to San Diego, California. There, at the North Island Naval Air Station, most aircraft were embarked aboard the escort carrier *Cape Esperance*, and the rest aboard a tanker. The *Cape Esperance* left San Diego on 29th November and the 4th Wing was at Yokosuka in Japan by 13th December. While the rear echelon was established at Johnson Air Base west of Tokyo, Wing commander George F. Smith took an advance detachment to Kimpo, where it made its first orientation flight on 13th December.

An entirely new kind of war began when the UN and Communist delegations opened their truce talks at Kaesong on 10th July 1951. The purpose of the first year's war had been the unification of Korea. The UN had learned that they could not unify Korea by force in the face of Chinese intervention, and would have to settle for their original aim of having saved South Korea from invasion. Failure of the Chinese offensives had evidently convinced the Communists that their enemies could not be driven from Korea by war, at least not under prevailing conditions.

During the lengthy negotiations at the truce table, each side's fighting forces would be trying to hurt the other enough to make him accept the desired terms of ending the war. On the ground, there was to be no major change during the next two years of the line which lay roughly diagonally across the 38th parallel, established in June 1951. This line was the geographical expression of a balance between the superior manpower of the Communists and the superior air power of the UN. The replacement of General MacArthur as UN Commander by General Ridgeway expressed the policy of keeping "the United States out of war" with China and Russia, restoring peace, and repelling aggression.

With a near stalemate on the ground, it would be the role of air power to attack the enemy's will to make war, and bring about a favourable settlement. With growing Chinese air strength, there was an evident enemy capability to use the air weapon against the UN in the same manner

**From *The North American Sabre* by Ray Wagner, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc. 1963. A.A.H.S. Member Raymond Wagner is also author of *America's Combat Planes*, (Garden City: Hanover House, 1960), the second edition of which has been recently printed, December 1968.

into the smoke and debris, confidence was at a new low. The first pair off made it OK but jettisoned their external tanks and rockets. Fischer and his element leader staggered airborne with external stores still in place, but were so surprised to make it, they forgot about gear retraction until too late to take their proper place in the formation — or what was left of it!

The mission itself was anti-climactic. The large force of F-80s, F-84s, and Mustangs sustained no loss to ground fire, and the MiGs from Manchuria did not interfere. The only damage to the attackers was that sustained in the chaotic takeoff and the mad scramble of fuel-low F-80s to get back to Taegu.

By December of 1951, Lt. Fischer had completed 105 missions with the 8th Fighter Bomber Group, and was assigned the necessary but un-fighter-pilot-like job of personnel officer at FEAF Headquarters in Tokyo. He remained at this until the early Fall of 1952, by which time the office job had begun to pall. In September Hal Fischer re-

as that which had been used to punish the Communist forces.

American intelligence reports estimated the Chinese Air Force to have, in June 1951, 1,050 Russian-built combat aircraft, of which 445 were MiG-15 jets, the remainder were World War II propeller-driven veterans like the La-9 single-seaters, Il-10 ground attack two-seaters and Tu-2 twin-engine light bombers. About two-thirds of these aircraft were based in Manchuria, so that if the Chinese could succeed in training efficient pilots, they could present a real threat to UN air forces in Korea.

Moreover the Communists steadily increased their air forces throughout the next year until in June 1952 they had 22 air divisions, each approximately equivalent to a USAF Wing, with 75 aircraft plus reserves. This would provide over 1,800 aircraft, including some 1,000 MiG's. There were also the Soviet Russian air forces in Asia to be considered, although presumably these could not be used except in an all-out war, bringing the whole USAF down on Russia.

First 8th Wing Sabre mission was a MiG Alley sweep on 8th April, and on 13th April a Red troop concentration on the Haeju peninsula suffered the 8th Wing's first ground attack. Succeeding missions were to cost the Wing twelve F-86F-30's by the end of the war, including nine to enemy *flak*. The FEAF now had five jet fighter-bomber Wings with which to harass Communist targets; two with F-86F-30 Sabres and three with F-84G Thunderjets. Although the latter type was slightly superior in range, the Sabre proved tactically suitable for bombing work and its superior ability to survive made it more desirable in any area infested with enemy jets.

The two Sabre fighter Wings found an increasing number of opponents, some MiG's using drop tanks to come fairly close to the front line. Still they maintained their superiority over their enemies, destroying thirty-four MiG's in March for the loss of three F-86F's. In April the number of Sabre sorties rose to a new record of 5,346, against only 1,622 MiG sorties. Yet those enemy pilots that did fight lost 27 MiG's for four F-86's, plus a fifth Sabre shot down by *flak*. Two of the lost F-86F's were being flown by 51st Wing aces; Capt. Harold E. Fischer was captured on Chinese territory, and Capt. Joseph McConnell ejected over the Yellow Sea and was rescued by helicopter.

turned to Korea on a voluntary second combat tour. He had requested duty with an F-86 unit and was assigned to the 39th Fighter Interceptor Squadron at Suwon (K-13).

The 39th was a case-hardened gypsy outfit that had been fighting for a long time. Its parent wing was the 35th Fighter Interceptor Wing, out of Yokota, Japan. The 35th was flying F-80Cs when FEAF's 5th Air Force began combat operations in June 1950, but because of the very poor airfields in Korea, it was apparent that jet fighters could not operate there. The distance from Japanese airfields to the combat areas was too great for effective support, so FEAF looked to its storage areas for P-51s, which did have the range and the ability to operate from Korean fields. The ensuing scramble to re-equip with the venerable Mustang rapidly exhausted the few remaining in the Far East.

In July 1950 the U.S.S. BOXER arrived with 145 ex-ANG P-51s and in August the 39th made the retrogressive step back to Mustangs. On the 8th it moved to Pohang (K-3) to join its sister squadron, the 40th, but remained less than a week because of communist ground pressure and did not return to Pohang until the 3rd of October when the communist threat had been blunted. The 39th and 40th were off again in October, this time in company with No. 77 Squadron RAAF, to Yonpo, North Korea (K-23).

This move was part of the mass deployment of 5th Air Force Mustang squadrons into North Korea. None stayed long because of the Chinese intervention late in a freezing cold November. Two weeks at Yonpo was enough and on 3 December the Mustangs, their pilots, and the weary ground crews evacuated back to the south, to Pusan East this time.

By April 1951, the communists had been driven north far enough so that the 35th Wing could base 24 P-51s at Seoul's battered municipal airport. The rapidly dwindling stock of Mustangs convinced the 5th Air Force that steps should be taken to conserve them. Late in May the 35th Wing Hdqtrs and the 40th Squadron moved back to Japan to the less dangerous air defence mission. The 39th Squadron, however, was left behind in the mud of Korea when its parent headed back to the good life in Japan.

An orphan now, the 39th soon found itself a part of the 18th Fighter Bomber Wing at Chinhae (K-10) with a forward operating base at Hoengsong. From here it fought its deteriorating P-51s for another year before going to yet another parent wing, the 51st Fighter Interceptor. The 51st was slated for transition to the North American F-86 Sabre, superb successor to the P-51.

By the time 1st Lt. Harold E. Fischer reported to Suwon in September 1952 the 39th had become a respectable outfit, its gypsy days with wornout aircraft behind it. In the interval since 1 June when the 39th had gone operational with F-86Es, its pilots had shot down nine MiG-15s, and flown over 1200 sorties, most of them in the new F-86F. Although the Squadron had initially received E models, it almost immediately began to return these to the 16th and 25th Squadrons (The 51st Wing's other units) and accept brand new F-86Fs. It was in fact, three pilots of the 39th who scored the first victories for the higher performance F model on the 4th of July, 1952. (Captain Ray Staudte, and Lts. Frank Keller and Francis Humphrey were the first to score with the F, likewise the first F-86 victories for the 39th.)

Being an F-80 pilot, Fischer went through the standard 51st Wing training program which included 5 days at the F-86 Mobile Training Detachment in Japan, a T-33 indoctrination ride, 16 hours of ground training, and then a series of F-86 flights ending in an easy combat mission. Newly assigned pilots were thus considered combat ready and took their place on the operations board.

The armistice talks at Panmunjon had just been recessed by the chief United Nations negotiator. The communists



Captain Harold E. Fischer Jr and "The Paper Tiger" on 22 March, 1953. This was an F-86F-10-NA, serial number 51-12958. Nine victories are shown here in the form of red silhouetted MiGs. The tiger teeth are not a 39th sqdn marking, but were Fischer's individual markings. (Photo-USAF number 83430 A.C.)

had nothing to offer but propaganda and President Truman directed the talks to cease until such time as the communists had something concrete to offer. The Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the UN Commander, General Mark Clark, to, in the meantime, "maintain unrelenting military pressure on the enemy, particularly through air action."

For the two Sabre-equipped 4th and 51st Wings this meant much the same pattern as they had been performing. Their mission was simple — with roughly 150 F-86s they were to maintain air superiority over the 1000 plus MiG-15s which the communist alliance had based in Manchuria, mostly at the big Antung airfield complex. UN aircraft were strictly forbidden, for political reasons, from crossing the Yalu River into Chinese air space, though many did, both inadvertently and otherwise.

The operations of both Wings consisted primarily of fighter sweeps along the Yalu in the northwest corner of Korea, in an area which came to be known as "MiG Alley."

Although the MiGs sometimes came south in very large numbers, the F-86s normally operated in flights of four airplanes each, with flights taking off about 5 minutes apart. This allowed more area to be covered by the few F-86s and yet the flights were close enough for mutual support in case of contact with the MiGs. There was continual variation in these tactics, but most missions operated in this

general manner.

Thus the only fighter in the United Nations forces capable of slugging it out with the high-performance Russian MiG formed a screen behind which other more vulnerable UN aircraft could operate relatively unmolested. To the everlasting credit of the 4th and 51st Fighter Wings, they accomplished this task with great success.

Lt. Fischer flew no missions in September, but by the end of October he had logged eleven. The 39th Squadron history comments that during the month of October the MiGs showed one of their declines in aggressiveness, and when engaged, usually used their superior climb performance to evade. During one of these October missions (probably his sixth) Fischer did get a change to fire on a MiG, and getting some strikes, claimed a "damaged."

Other 39 Squadron pilots managed to shoot down six MiGs during the month, but the Squadron lost Lt. Thomas Casserly III in a landing accident. Casserly is one of the many unknown heroes of the Korean war, a man who well deserves a second look because of his heroic actions on a March day in 1952.

Born in New Jersey, Thomas Casserly was 22 years old when he graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1950. In January 1952 he was assigned to 5th Air Force and joined the 39th Squadron flying P-51s. On March 2nd the 39th's Putt-Putt-Willie flight was on a typical ground-attack mission and had just crossed the bomb line into enemy territory when the number two man, Lt. Harry Rushing, developed engine trouble and turned out to sea toward friendly islands off the coast. His engine soon caught fire and he bailed out, drifting south and landing in the water off the Han Estuary. Rescue Center advised there would be a 30-minute delay before a chopper could be on the scene. With the wind dragging Rushing and his chute toward a sand bar Tom Casserly took the only action he could to assist his friend — he belied his Mustang onto the sand bar and began searching the water for Harry Rushing. After 15 minutes he could endure the cold water no longer and returned to his nearly submerged P-51, where the rescue helicopter picked him up. Lt. Rushing was never found.

Casserly's action was viewed with displeasure in Squadron and Group command because of the loss of the P-51 and the risk to himself with but little chance of helping Rushing. However, his courage was recognized, and he was recommended for the Silver Star and the DFC.

On the 1st of October 1952, while Hal Fischer waited at the end of the runway to takeoff, Tom Casserly returned from a mission, flying F-86E, 50-626. Experiencing control difficulties he requested a straight-in approach, but the



Lt. Thomas F. Casserly III in June 1952, about the time the 39th joined the 51st Wing and went operational on F-86s. A graduate of the U. S. Military Academy, Casserly was killed in a crash on 1 October, 1952. (Photo-USAF number 81874 A.C.)

RANKING JET ACES OF THE KOREAN WAR¹

Name	Enemy Aircraft Destroyed—	
	WW II	Air-to-Air Korea
Capt. Joseph McConnell, Jr., USAF	—	16
Maj. James Jabara, USAF	3-5	15
Capt. Manuel J. Fernandez, USAF	—	14-5
Maj. George A. Davis, Jr., USAF	7	14
Col. Royal N. Baker, USAF	3-5	13
Maj. Frederick C. Blesse, USAF	—	10
1st Lieut. Harold E. Fischer, USAF	—	10

Sabre went quickly beyond human control. Casserly impacted 3000 feet short of the runway. A brave man died in the wreckage.

In early November an event occurred of considerable importance to Hal Fischer and Sgt. Gerald Larkowski. On the 5th a new F-86F-10-NA arrived, assigned to the 39th. Serial number 51-12958, it had come from the modification center in Japan where its automatic slats had been removed and a new solid leading edge installed on the wings. Sgt. Larkowski was assigned as Crew Chief and Hal Fischer became the proud pilot of the new "bird." Having read a book in which the Chinese described the United States as a "Paper Tiger," Fischer thought it would be an appropriate name and so THE PAPER TIGER it became. It carried the name on its left side until the day it smashed into a Chinese field some five months later.

The day that a fighter pilot yearns, trains, and exists for, finally came. On the 26th of November 1952 Fischer was flying number two position in a Sabre flight patrolling near the town of Kanggye, some 20 miles south of the Yalu River. Low on fuel and ready to turn for home, the flight suddenly found itself in a sky full of MiGs.

Aching for a solid crack at one of the hot Russian-built fighters, Fischer called a bounce as two MiGs passed under him headed north, then turned onto their course and slowed to allow the MiGs to overtake him. Although there was a standard operating procedure which called for never letting airspeed drop below Mach .85 Fischer gambled that he would be able to accelerate fast enough to catch the two enemy aircraft. The two MiGs soon appeared below and under his nose, still on course and travelling fast. The Sabre, now under full throttle again, accelerated too slowly to catch up. The MiGs were over 1000 yards ahead and beyond the range of the A-4 radar gunsight when Fischer eased the nose up and fired two bursts without much hope of any hits.

He was amazed to see the MiG wingman start a descending turn to the left. Seizing the opportunity he dived after. His element leader-turned-wingman was no longer in sight. Alone now, he fired an occasional burst at the MiG as he overhauled it. At about 2000 feet the enemy leveled off and began a gradual climb, allowing Fischer to hit it heavily from close range, causing a fire in the enemy's engine.

Closing rapidly he rolled around the doomed fighter to dissipate airspeed, and as he rolled level with it was amazed to find the canopy and pilot missing! Sometime during the long chase the communist pilot had ejected leaving Fischer to chase a derelict aircraft. With no one to confirm his kill, he made a run on the burning wreckage to record it on his gun camera film and then climbed full bore for altitude and home.

The game was not yet over though, as whom should he come upon at about 20,000 feet but the communist pilot, riding comfortably in his ribbon-type parachute. Seeing a chance to further verify his kill, he fired a burst to one side of the pilot to record it on film. As he circled he had a good look at the enemy pilot, heavily dressed in fur. Fischer left him there, probably swearing at the American pilot whom he thought had tried to gun him down when in reality he had only had his picture taken.

It was two days before Christmas, 1952 that Fischer scored again in a "ratrace" just north of the Chongchon River. In this case the MiG that he had bounced tried a series of loops in an attempt to shake the checktailed Sabre. Throughout these gyrations Fischer fired short bursts at every opportunity without much hope of hits. Just over the Yalu River the MiG straightened out and the pilot abandoned his aircraft, apparently without being hit.

By now it was obvious that THE PAPER TIGER had real teeth. Lt. Fischer scored again three days before New

Year's and twice more in January, on the 23rd and the 24th.

The high-placed tailplane of the MiG-15 appeared to be a weak point in the aircraft's structure, and pilots of the 51st Wing had discussed the possibility of ramming a MiG in event of failure of their guns. (There was considerable trouble with the M-3 guns throughout 1952, although Fischer never had more than one or two malfunction.)

It was felt that if the MiG's tailplane could be hit with the Sabre's wing, it would destroy the MiG and leave the F-86 flyable.

These academic Officers Club discussions suddenly became a real possibility on one of these missions late in December 1952. Fischer had dived in behind a MiG, getting strikes on the fuselage and tail, but as he closed in the F-86 hit the MiG's wash, the jolt being great enough to smash his binoculars against the stick. In addition the guns now refused to fire and the gunsight was dead. Closing very fast on the decelerating MiG, Fischer thought of that big weak tail and drove THE PAPER TIGER toward it. The wing missed the MiG's tail. As he rolled around the communist fighter to reduce airspeed, he had time to turn on the gun switch (which had been turned off by the recent jolt).

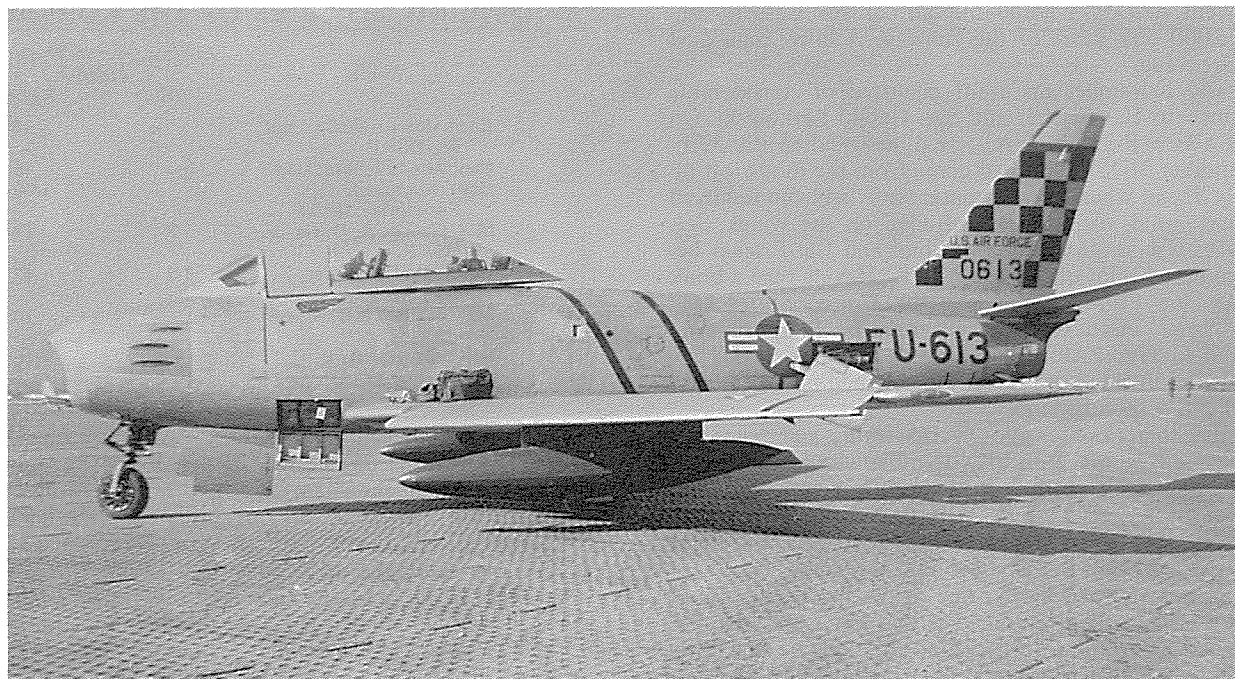
With power off and speed brakes out, he fired again into the now derelict MiG, but was still unable to remain behind and slid ahead of it, seeing the pilot in the cockpit and a large number 341 on its side. The now burning MiG smashed into a hillside with its pilot still aboard.

Two 51st Wing pilots became aces on the 24th of January. Captain Dolphin D. Overton III became the 24th jet ace of the Korean war on that date, and Lt. Harold Fischer became the 25th when he hit a MiG at long range, slowing it enough to close in and finish it off. The MiG's canopy and seat ejection equipment had apparently been damaged and the pilot did not escape.

The Sui-ho hydro-electric plant on the Yalu River had been bombed and put out of operation the preceding June by Navy and Air Force fighter bombers, but was back in partial operation by September. It was bombed again, this time by high flying B-29s. As they again began repairs the Reds apparently expected more high altitude B-29 attacks as 5th Air Force photo interpreters passed on the word that there was little light flak around the plant, but a heavy concentration of the big guns. Taking advantage of the situation 5th Air Force laid on a strike by F-84s of the 474th Fighter Bomber Wing for 15 February in order to nullify the repair work. Since the site was very close to the Chinese airfields, over 80 F-86s were provided to screen the Thunderjets while they carried out their attack.

The MiGs did not interfere and the few light AA guns were ineffective as the F-84s placed their 1000 pound bombs on the target and escaped without loss.

As part of the screening force, Harold Fischer had his best day, shooting down two MiGs. As usual, the battle developed suddenly and Fischer found himself flying line-



F-86E, 50-613 of the 51st Fighter Interceptor Wing. Black and white checks on fin. (Photo — Olmsted Collection)

abreast with a MiG, and only a few hundred feet away. What followed is best told in his own words:

"In the best tradition of Mannock, Udet, Bishop, Nungesser and the heroes of WW1, the situation of the dog-fight was created. Immediately both of us started to scissor, each trying to get on the other's tail by turning into and then away from each other. The flight paths of both our aircraft resembled an interlacing pattern. For a few moments, the situation was static with neither side having the advantage, then I took a calculated risk. One of the things a pilot should not do, theoretically, was to drop his speed brakes for this would reduce his speed, since speed could always be converted into altitude and the one that had the altitude had the advantage. But this situation could go on longer than I liked since there were so many other aircraft in the area. Dropping the speed brakes for a short period of time, my airplane fell behind the MiG. Seeing that the advantage was on my side, the MiG headed for the border, just a few miles away. His aircraft was causing heavy contrails to form immediately and I was 600 feet behind. The contrails were so heavy that when I pulled up to shoot, my canopy would enter his contrails. The radar gunsight was working marvelously and the first burst of a few seconds caused his aircraft to light up from almost wing tip to wing tip. It seemed that every round found its mark. Before I had a chance to fire again, the canopy came by and then the pilot. My wingman verified the kill immediately for number one of the day.

"As soon as I saw the pilot was bailing out I called my wingman and asked him if he saw it. Replying in the affirmative, I looked over to see his position. He was off to my left and slightly higher, looking at him and the MiGs in front of us, I saw him fire and the right wing root of the MiG sparked with an excellent hit. It was his first mission deep into enemy territory and it was already a success. Before he had a chance to press his advantage he called on me to break since I had a MiG on my tail and ready to fire. Looking over my shoulder, a shiver of fear coursed through my frame. There about 1500 feet out at about seven o'clock position was a single MiG. I recalled the tales of the professionals that flew alone. Rolling up and over, I pulled as

many Gs inverted as I could without stalling the aircraft and losing my airspeed. Then doing a split "S," I called again, although it was hard for me to talk, with the force of the Gs pressing my body to the seat, I asked if he was still there. My wingman replied stating that he wasn't nearby but that he had lost me and was headed home. Checking my tail, I took up course for the front lines.

"Looking above, I saw a lone airplane heading to the south, which I assumed was my lost wingman. He was following instructions, if lost to get out of the area, fast. Behind him was another airplane which was about 3,000 feet directly astern of him. It was another single MiG that was evidently out to avenge the aircraft lost and damaged in this particular fracas. Now it became the hunted stalking the hunter as I took up position behind the MiG, also about 3,000 feet back. Calling the F-86 pilot, I told him of the MiG behind, that he should level off, build up his airspeed and run for it. He acknowledged and I saw his airplane ease down, and with it the MiG fighter. Telling the pilot I would tell him when to turn as I initiated my attack on the MiG, and also assuring him that there was little danger since the range was great. Knowing the MiG pilot would have to turn, I was in an excellent position for my attack, although for the moment out of range.

"Nearing the Chongchon River, my range had decreased and looking back, I saw that I was also being followed at a long distance. It was easy to determine attackers and attacked since our airplanes were now in the heavy contrail area. Squeezing off a few bursts, the MiG in front of me finally became aware of my aircraft behind him, or possibly one of the other communist pilots warned him by radio. He began a turn to the left and I fell in behind in a turn to decrease the distance between our two airplanes. The MiG pilot tried their successful tactic of zooming but in a turn this was not as successful as usual and I ended up 30 feet behind him almost in a full stall. The MiG in front of me was a beautiful silver color, and it looked as if it was just off the assembly line from a Russian factory. At this range, I could not miss and squeezed the trigger of the .50 calibers. The burst hit directly behind the cockpit and caused it to light up in an encircling glare of light. He immediately snapped into a spin and there was nothing to do but spin with him. Both of us went into the spin at

38,000 feet and, squeezing off a burst in the spin, I was able to register another hit on the wing tip. His was a spin that continued all the way to the ground. (Kill confirmed by another 51st Wing pilot)

"As soon as the second hit registered, I pulled out of the spin and looked around. From my left, there was the MiG that had been following me and attempting to do the same thing that I had done to his compatriot. In this case, his position was not as good as mine had been. Turning into him, he slid on by and I again turned so that I was behind him. His speed was too great and he pulled away rapidly. When our speeds stabilized, he was out of normal range at about 4,000 feet. Other kills had been made at this altitude and at this distance, so I concentrated on firing at the fleeing MiG. By this time, my wing man was calling that he was getting low on fuel so I told him to hold on a moment more and I squeezed off a burst. The MiG was in heavy contrails which deceived me into thinking that I was getting hits and perhaps he was on fire but he continued on his merry way. Calling my wing man to leave, I fired all my ammunition at the MiG and finally left him as he crossed over into Manchuria. Both sides retired to lick their wounds."

Rapidly becoming one of the high scorers in the Sabre outfits, Fischer was promoted to Captain in February, 1953, and took command of Charlie (C) Flight of the 39th Squadron. He scored again on the 16th of February, and shot down still another MiG on the 25th of the month.

Sharing the skies of North Korea on that latter date was another man who was to be an important part of Fischer's life in the very near future. His name was Lt. Col. Edwin Heller, Deputy Commander of the 51st Fighter Interceptor Wing.

It was late in the patrol, and low on fuel and flying high, Fischer's element spotted a lone aircraft far below. Hoping it was a MiG the two F-86s began a full power dive. Drawing closer they saw puffs of smoke from the aircraft's cannon, which identified it as a MiG-15. In sight now also was an F-86 at which the MiG was firing. Fischer opened fire at long range in hopes of distracting the enemy pilot, and the MiG did in fact, turn away, allowing Fischer to close in and shoot it down.

It was too late to save the F-86 however, which had been hit, and its pilot, Edwin Heller ejected, to become a prisoner of the Chinese.

The 10th and last confirmed victory came on 21 March 1953. There would be two more, but they remain unconfirmed to this day.

Captain Fischer was on his 175th combat mission on the 7th day of April 1953. Other than the 4th Group's Colonel Royal Baker, his score of 10 and that of Pete Fernandez, also of the 4th, with whom he was tied, was the highest in the 5th Air Force. Two more would tie him with Col. Baker and when Charlie Flight engaged a group of MiGs over the Yalu, Fischer bored in on an element of MiGs hoping to get both. Hits all along the fuselage of the first one destroyed its engine and Fischer slid in behind the MiG wingman, opening fire at close range. The concentration of fire from the six M-3 guns at such close range began to tear the enemy aircraft apart, and Fischer pulled up to avoid the wreckage — but too late.

The official USAF History of the Korean War says that Capt. Fischer was shot down by MiG interceptors. However, he saw no enemy aircraft behind him, felt no hits, and heard no gunfire. He is sure today that his engine, which stopped abruptly, was destroyed by the MiG debris which the big J-47 ingested.

With a dead engine and smoke in the cockpit, there was little choice. Hal Fischer "punched" out of his stricken PAPER TIGER and found, to his horror, that his gently

swinging chute was letting him down north of the Yalu River — in China!

It was late afternoon when he landed on the side of a small hill in communist China. Although his first thought was to get across the Yalu to the dubious "safety" of North Korea, he was immediately captured by a group of Chinese farmers who led him to a nearby farmhouse. There they argued among themselves about what to do with him. Taking advantage of their confusion and hoping they would think he was a Russian, he simply walked out the door and down the road. It might have worked but for the fact that he met a Chinese soldier who recognized him instantly as an American, and he began what was to be two years of communist imprisonment.

No recital of bare facts can describe the ordeal of a westerner who becomes the prisoner of an Asian communist nation and no attempt will be made to do so here. Captain Fischer told his own story in a graphic manner in the 27 June 1955 issue of Life magazine.

For most of those two years, he was imprisoned at Mukden, China. Besides himself there were four other fighter pilots who had been captured on Chinese soil, plus the crew of a B-29. The other fighter pilots were: Lt. Col. Edwin C. Heller (the victim moments before of the MiG which became Fischer's 9th victory); Squadron Leader Andrew Mackenzie, RCAF; Lt. Roland Parks, all of whom were 51st Fighter Wing pilots, and Lt. Lyle Cameron, a Thunderjet pilot from the 49th Fighter Bomber Wing.

Fischer escaped once in the winter of 1954/55, and tried to gain access to a large Chinese airfield, hoping to steal an airplane, but the field was too well guarded. Attempting next to just walk out of China, he finally had to surrender when, in his already weak condition, he could endure the cold no longer.

The armistice in Korea finally become effective in July 1953, shortly after Fischer parachuted into China. All prisoners held by both sides were supposedly released that summer and fall. However, the communists, as usual, had failed to live up to their agreements, and it was May, 1955, before the three American fighter pilots were taken to Peking for trial. S/L MacKenzie was released in the Fall of 1954. There they were convicted of "intruding in Chinese territorial air and undermining the peaceful life of our people." Their sentence was that they be "deported" — the sweetest word they had ever heard.

They were released at Hong Kong on 31 May 1955 and their ordeal was over. Soon after, the B-29 crew, which had undergone similar subhuman treatment, was released.

The author was privileged to meet Colonel Fischer at the annual meeting of the Fighter Aces Assn. in Dallas in 1968. He remains in the Air Force today and is presently attending The Massachusetts Institute of Technology where he is studying International Affairs, a subject with which he has had some first hand experience.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Merle C. Olmsted's recent previous article was "Memories of the 86th Fighter Group" in the Spring 1969 JOURNAL. Others have been "The Life and Times of the 357th Fighter Group" (Summer 1956, P. 43); "Army Airship Operations at Langley Field, 1919-1922" (Winter 1960, P. 293); "The Era of the Martin Bomber" (Winter 1962, P. 187); "Langley Field, 1917-1945" (Spring 1965, P. 3); and "Turbo-Supercharger Development" (Summer 1967). His 357th Fighter Group subject was expanded and will soon be published as *The Yoxford Boys* by Aero Publishers. Merle was born and raised in Iowa, enlisted in the Army Air Force in 1942, retired from USAF in 1965 as MSgt.