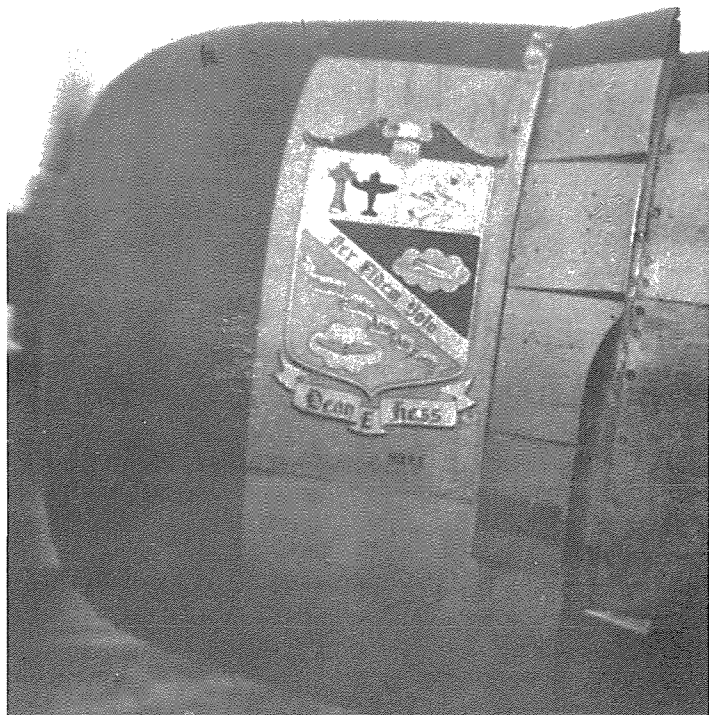




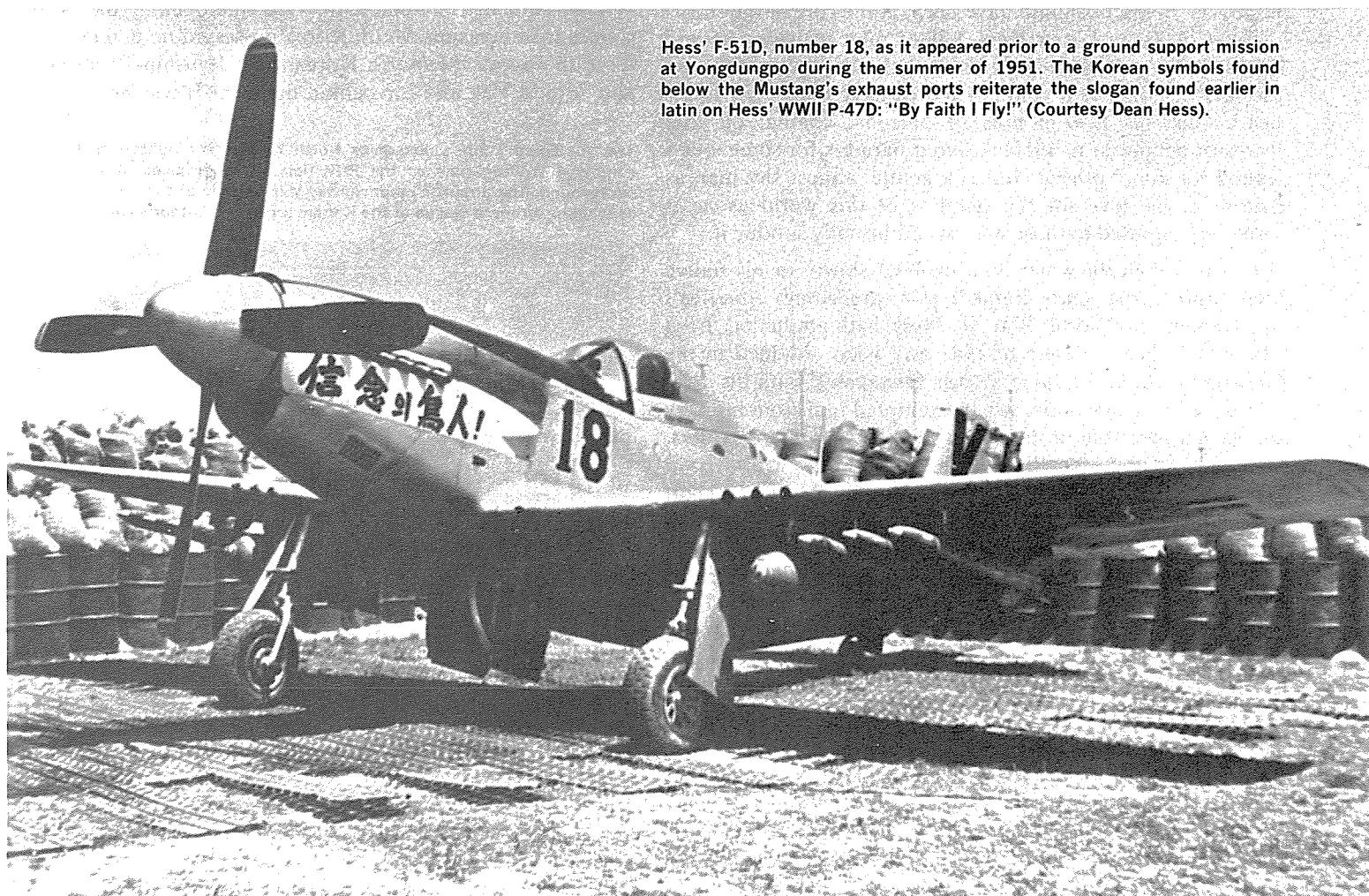
THE MAKING OF BATTLE HYMN

by James H. Farmer

For the remarkable Dean Hess - fighter pilot and minister in two recent wars - the making of the movie "Battle Hymn" came like a blessing - if indeed something of a mixed blessing. The goal of his role as the film's technical advisor was but an extension of his earlier mission in Asia - the welfare of the war orphans of Korea.

The crest sported on the cowling of Dean Hess' WWII, Ninth Air Force P-47D clearly displayed the Latin slogan, "Per Fidem Volo" - "By Faith I Fly." (Courtesy Dean Hess).

"Per Fidem Volo" - "By Faith I Fly"



Hess' F-51D, number 18, as it appeared prior to a ground support mission at Yongdungpo during the summer of 1951. The Korean symbols found below the Mustang's exhaust ports reiterate the slogan found earlier in latin on Hess' WWII P-47D: "By Faith I Fly!" (Courtesy Dean Hess).



Lt. Col. Dean E. Hess in the cockpit of F-51D, number 18, at Yongdungpo airfield near Seoul during the final months of his combat tour in Korea, c. June, 1951.

For Dean Hess the 1956 Universal film biography "Battle Hymn" was a mixed blessing. The cinematic license deemed 'necessary' by Hollywood standards was difficult and at times impossible for him to accept. The plight of the children, the some 900 South Korean war orphans saved in "Operation Kiddy-car" were, or should have been, at the core of the story.

For Col. Dean Elmer Hess, fighter pilot in two wars and concurrently an ordained minister of the Disciples of Christ, the ravished, innocent youth of Korea have been close to his heart since his first months of personal combat on that war-torn peninsula in 1950. A living paradox for some and a legend for many others, Hess is a gentle, almost shy man as sincere in his love for the helpless of this world as he is resolutely opposed to those who would brutally subdue it.

It was a concept which had evolved slowly in his native Ohio during the years immediately preceding America's involvement in World War II. Hess had graduated from Marietta College in June of 1941 and been ordained in the Christian Church the same month. Dissatisfied with his draft board's 4-D classification, which exempted him from military service, and over the protests of his family and church elders, Hess volunteered for flight training with the USAAF in December, 1941 after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Hess later commented: "To me . . . this was a battle between good and evil, and it would be morally wrong for me to say to others, 'I believe in your cause, but you do the killing for me. My conscience won't let me get blood on my own hands'."¹

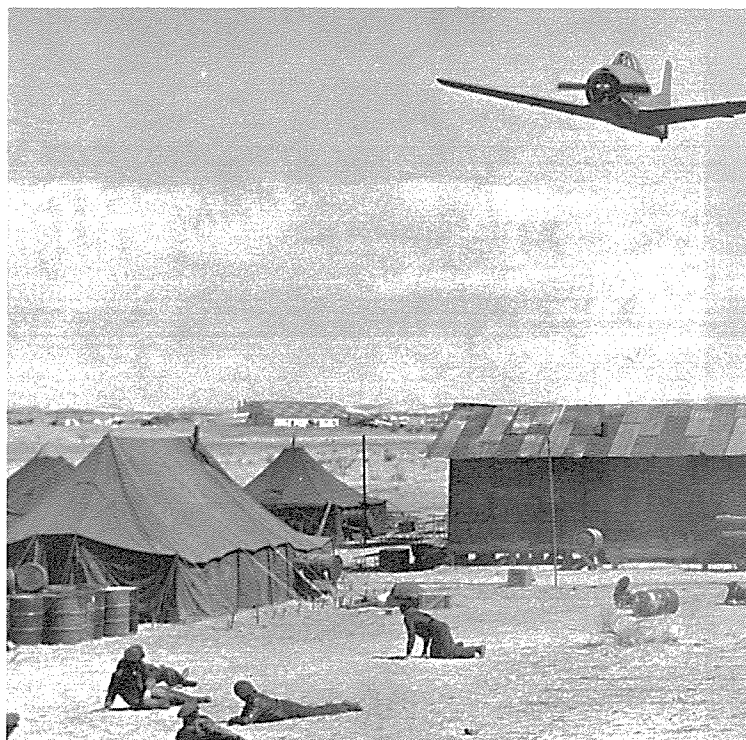
Hess joined the 9th AF's 405th FBG, 511th FBS at St. Dezier, France in October, 1944. The cowl of his P-47 bore the slogan "By Faith I Fly." Referred to by his squadron mates as the "Flying Preacher," a title he never relished, Hess survived nearly a hundred highly dangerous ground support missions to be awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross by war's end. Seeking further education after the war, Hess was within months of completing his doctorate at Ohio State for his planned career as both a teacher and minister when the Air Force again called him to active duty in July, 1948.

As a personnel officer Major Hess toured the country recruiting for the Air Force. By June of 1950, and with the outbreak of the Korean War, he had been rotated to Japan behind yet another desk, as an information and education officer. For Hess, Korea once again represented another struggle between good and evil. Though he had not been in the cockpit of a fighter plane for nearly five years, he requested and was granted "hazardous duty in Korea."

There he found himself suddenly commanding Bout I, a "support" unit of ten American pilots and some one hundred enlisted men to aid the fledgling South Korean Air Force. Officially and nominally this organization evolved into an air-base unit, a housekeeping organization whose primary function is to provide housing and logistic support for a fighting squadron. In fact its main function, even if not so defined, was to train the pilots of the South Korean Air Force or ROK (Republic of Korea).

At the time of Hess' arrival the ROK Air Force consisted of some 60 aircraft, all trainers, and a dozen or so Korean pilots weaned by the Japanese during the recent world war on the nimble Zero fighter. The core of this pitiful lot of aircraft was built around three T-6 "Texans" which could be used as light bombers if the need arose.² This sad state of affairs had come about, despite the repeated pleas of President Syngman Rhee, as a direct result of United States policy which feared any further military build-up would lend credence to the North Korean claims that those "war-mongering capitalists" were deliberately seeking to promote an arms race on the peninsula. Consequently on June 25th, 1950, the opening day of the Communist invasion, South Korea possessed no defensive air force to oppose the North Korean's 62 Ilyushin-10 bombers and 70-odd Yak and Lavochkin fighters.² It was not surpris-

Two Air Force T-28A's posing as North Korean Yak fighters make their simulated strafing runs on the ROK field. Note: Nogales Airport in the background. The airport's main runway was the site of the film's dramatic concluding airborne rescue of the Korean orphans. (Author's collection).

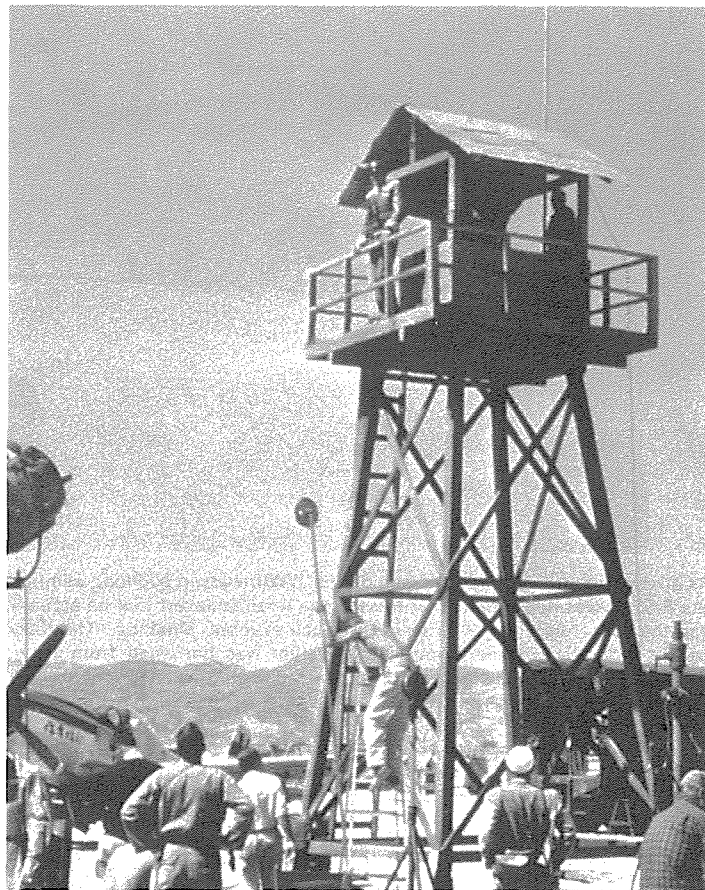


ing therefore on that first day of war to find NKAF (North Korean Air Force) Yak fighters making attacks at will over Kimpo and Seoul Airports. The resulting destruction of a USAF C-54 transport and the damaging of seven ROK trainers underscored the urgent plea made earlier that day by President Rhee for the immediate delivery of ten F-51 Mustangs.

This most recent urging, as channelled through U.S. Ambassador John J. Muccio, would at long last gain a qualified response from the U.S. Far East Air Force. The ten F-51D's acquired at the Itazuke Air Base for the Bout I program had been used for towing targets for several years in Japan and were in "sad mechanical condition."³ Major Hess later commented: "Had not the pressure been on at the time we would probably have declared the 51s noncombat operational."⁴

Having briefly checked out in the F-51 in Japan, the first ROK pilots began arriving at Taegu Field in South Korea in July. Situated halfway between Seoul and Pusan the field bordered a rice paddy and had been little more than a vague path in a bog a few weeks earlier. Thanks in large part to Hess' executive officer, Capt. Mike Bellovin, a born scrounger, desperately needed equipment and supplies were 'requisitioned' from other American depots within the range of the unit's lone "limping" jeep.

The field's ground defense was provided by four batteries of six-quad .50 caliber machine guns. Only one gun of the lot, however, actually worked! As the field was under continual guerilla surveillance the one good gun was regularly rotated through the batteries and test fired in each battery giving the impression, it was hoped, of a well defended field. Typical of the whole operation during those first months of the war was a small mobile radar unit mounted on a trailer which had been set up on a nearby mountain to lend the impression that the field also had 'eyes.' In fact half the parts of this WW II relic were missing and only the antenna rotator worked at all.



With hands on hips and his back to the camera BATTLE HYMN technical advisor Dean Hess looks on as actor Jock Mahoney, in the field's crude control tower prepares to signal the ROK fighters into action. (Courtesy Dean Hess).

In these surroundings Hess and his men began training their first six Korean pilots. "They had a lot of spunk," reported Hess, "but their feeling that they could handle anything that flew received a setback when one of their best pilots, Colonel Lee, made an attack on an enemy tank only four days after our arrival."⁵ Lee, a Pacific war veteran with 23 American planes to his credit, had plowed into his target while attempting a split-S pull-out at low altitude. It was a maneuver which had become second nature for him in the lighter Zero.

Morale among the remaining five ROK pilots fell to a new low. Hess, specifically ignoring an order which forbade Americans from flying ROK aircraft into combat, picked four of his best Koreans and began leading them on combat-training flights over the Red lines. He still refers to these combat missions as "on-the-job training." In flight Hess resorted to various tricks to relax his tense pilots – now possessing a newfound respect for the heavier F-51. "Pretending that flying the Mustang was no strain at all, he would lean back in the cockpit with his hands behind his head and his feet upon the instrument panel, yawning in a bored manner."⁶ At other times in flight he would lay an imaginary pistol over his forearm and pretend to be shooting at his Korean formation-mates in a manner similar to that of the Hollywood cowboys they saw on film in the camp at night.

In time Hess had restored the confidence of the Koreans and was himself again gaining a large number of combat missions in the air. Though the reputation of the ROK unit



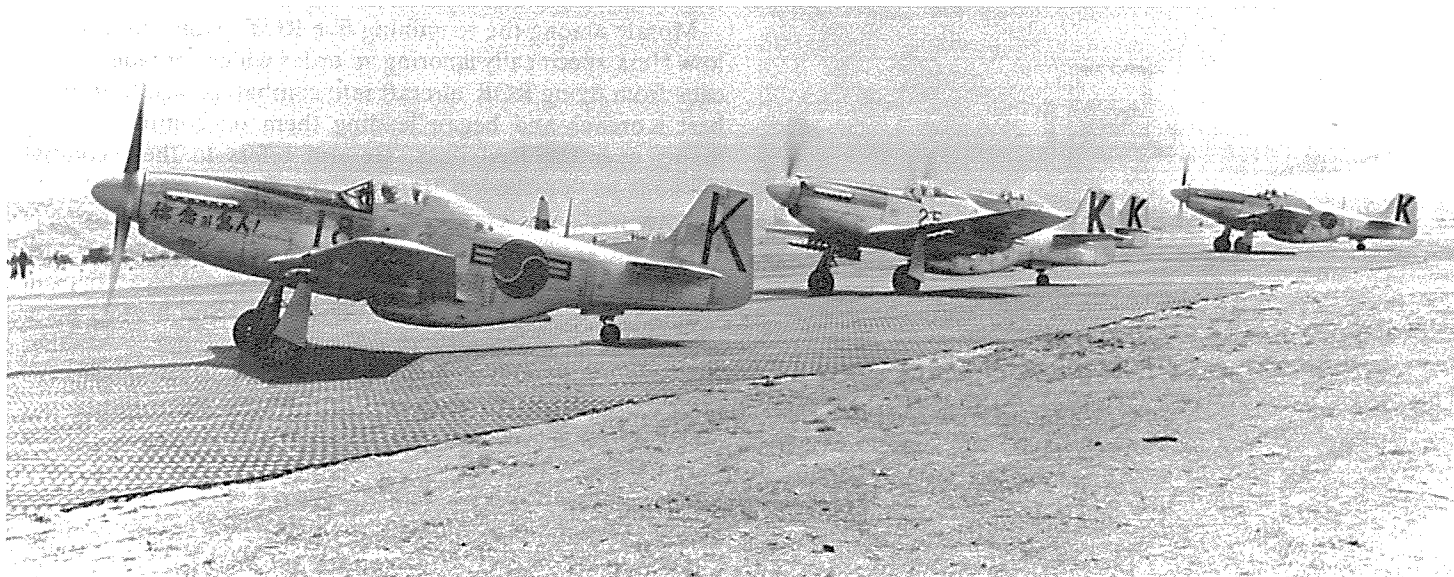


As a naval aircraft ground crewman during WWII, Hudson had long admired the F-51. It was not until he met Hess in the Arizona desert that he actually had the opportunity to get a ride in the much vaunted Mustang. The Navy helmet worn by Hudson throughout the film was borrowed from Hess. Hess had secured the helmet during his final months in Korea from a Skyraider pilot assigned to VA-702 who had made a post-mission emergency landing at his field. Hess reports he traded his own ill-fitting Air Force helmet plus a bottle of bourbon for the much-photographed headgear. (Author's collection).

grew through the months that followed the ebbs and tides of the war itself, the arrival of other higher priority USAF groups turned Hess' unit into a wandering band of gypsies always, it seemed, on the move. Within the six months following their arrival at Taegu's K-2 Field, they had at various times operated from seven other airfields.

It was at the former Japanese airfield of Yongdungpo (K-16) near Seoul in September that Hess began to accumulate his first orphans. Hess continues: "We saw vast numbers of them cast loose . . . they were wandering about everywhere. Suffering from general malnutrition, most were surviving only because it was summertime and they were able to dig

Hess is pictured at the controls of number 18, c. early 1951, leading a flight of ROK Mustangs armed with five inch HVARs into takeoff position for another ground support mission to the north. (Courtesy Roger A. Freeman).



and eat herbs along the riverbanks and in the fields."⁷ Hess and his men found them clustering "like flies" around the base garbage cans. "It was both heartbreaking and nauseating to see these ragged children lean over and dip into the swill with tin cans. Most of them had scabs and skin infections on their faces, inflamed and running eyes."

"For me," observed Hess, "these children became the greatest horror of war, the most damaging blow man can strike against the future, against himself, against God. They were so pitiful that there was only one thing to do – care for them as best we could."⁸

Throwing away his manual of military regulations, Hess and his men set up a big tent with cots on the field for the Korean children. Soon the camp became "infested" with literally hundreds of sick and homeless kids. Having become a hazard to flight operations at the field, Hess helped set up the "Fifth Air Force Orphanage" in downtown Seoul.⁹ The entire 5th AF along with other aid in the form of CARE packages from the United States and the contributions of the families of Hess' pilots back home all went to sustain the operation. The burgeoning orphanage soon had over 1,000 homeless and dying children in its care.

The Communist Chinese had entered the war in mid-October of 1950. By December U.N. lines were rapidly shrinking south toward Seoul and the orphanage. Hess had already seen enough of the Communist treatment of wartime civilians to know that in some way he would have to get them off the peninsula. With the collapse of Seoul imminent and all available transportation in Korea committed to the movement of military personnel and equipment, Hess needed a miracle of no small proportions.

Weighted down with increasing demands for more ground-support strikes against the advancing enemy, Hess, with the help of Chaplain Blaisdell, "laid siege" via telephone to Fifth Air Force headquarters in Japan. Hess and his men were organizing a training field and orphanage housing on the South Korean island of Cheju if only he could find a means of getting the children there. With the Communists entering the northern sectors of the city, Hess moved his sick and bewildered band of children out of the orphanage eventually making their way to Kimpo Air Base on December 20th.



Hess' F-51D, number 18 (in middleground) is seen being rearmed at Yongdungpo Airfield near Seoul after returning from a sortie. Hess

completed more than 60 combat missions in this aircraft. (Courtesy Dean Hess).

There they waited with no firm promise of rescue amid the flames and columns of smoke from the burning drums of gas and oil being destroyed by the retreating U.N. forces.

"The answer to our prayers came like a miracle" – Hess now recalls.¹⁰ Nearly a thousand little heads slowly started turning as the low but steadily growing rumble began to build in the skies to the east. An "electric thrill" surged through the pathetic gathering as the first of 15 C-54s appeared over the field and began circling for a landing. "Operation Kiddycar,"¹¹ as it became known, was on. Air Force General Partridge had enlisted every available four-engined transport still uncommitted in Japan for this eleventh hour evacuation. As the last of the big Skymasters deplaned its precious cargo on Cheju Island, Hess and his F-51 once again returned to the front lines.

By July, 1951 Lt. Col. Dean Hess, that soft-spoken minister from Ohio, had flown 250 combat missions in Korea. Many more, the Air Force felt, than was his fair share. Yet he had come through it all uninjured despite the fact that seven of the ten USAF pilot-instructors originally sent over for the Bout I program had been killed in action. For Hess his good fortune had never been a mystery. His debt and the credit for his remarkable survivability while flying 'through the valley of death' had appeared for the world to see on the cowings of his fighter aircraft through two American wars – "By Faith I Fly."

Before leaving Korea Hess received the Legion of Merit along with the heart-felt thanks of President Rhee and the people of South Korea. His own nation would present him with the Silver Star. Back home Hess and his "Operation

Kiddycar" gained brief nationwide attention as a result of the Harold Martin article "The Pious Killer of Korea" which appeared in the July 21st, 1951 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*. And this, it would appear, was the end of the story, the end of the public's story at any rate for Hess soon found himself once again "flying" another desk in the nation's capitol.

In 1952 Hess decided to stay in the Air Force because he felt that "opposing communism . . . must be the full-time job of at least a few Americans."¹² Further he felt that he could do more for the orphans of Korea by remaining in the service than as a civilian. His mission remained unfinished.

So it was in November of 1954 when Hess was on duty at the Pentagon as Special Assistant to the Deputy Chief of Staff of Personnel, that he met Mrs. On Soon Whang at a reception at the South Korean Embassy in Washington D.C. As Directress of the Orphans' Home of Korea, Mrs. Whang told Hess that the children's needs on Cheju were barely being met by the meager funds made available from the various relief agencies. This was in addition to some \$12,000 Hess had personally been able to collect and send her in the three years since 1951.

Hess continues: "Mrs. Whang made known to me her immediate and long range problems. These were: 1) The roof had collapsed in one section of the old building in which they were housed and the children had to be accommodated in the remaining wing; 2) The provincial governor was threatening to evict Mrs. Whang and the children in order to regain use of the school building, and 3) being on the island 60 miles from the mainland, she was not receiving the support from relief



Dean Hess (left) poses with his film-counterpart Rock Hudson and real-life orphans at the rear of a USAF C-119G during the final days of the filming schedule at Nogales, Arizona. (Courtesy Dean Hess).

agencies as were smaller orphanages near Seoul.

"As I listened to Mrs. Whang, I was compelled to direct her to prepare plans for a new facility near Seoul as soon as possible and that I would secure for her, somehow, the \$60,000 she estimated the new facility would cost. In good faith Mrs. Whang returned to Korea and prepared plans accordingly."¹³

Hess had once again made a commitment of conscience. The children, his children, were no longer waiting in a war-zone on an all but abandoned flight line for a life and death rescue attempt. But the odds appeared equally impossible, if, on the surface at least, less dramatic. In the four years since leaving Korea, Hess had been able to raise no more than \$12,000; yet he was now committed to raising \$60,000 "somehow" in the near future. For the moment the mild-mannered minister from Ohio could do little more than pray and wait.

It was about two months later, some time in January of 1955, that writer Vincent Evans first visited the Pentagon. Evans was looking for story lines and material for new half-hour episodes of the semi-documentary television program about the USAF known as "Flight." The Director of Information, Maj. Gen. Sory Smith, mentioned Hess and his earlier activities in Korea. Interested in the story, Evans offered Hess an unspecified amount for his personal story rights concerning his part in "Operation Kiddy-car." Hess agreed on condition that at the conclusion of the episode, a general appeal would be made for public support in building the new orphanage. He now felt that if somehow the plight of these children were brought to the attention of enough compassionate Americans, a solution would be forthcoming.

Approximately two weeks later Vince Evans phoned Hess from Los Angeles to advise that he and his co-writer, Charles Grayson, had discovered an interest in the subject beyond the scope of a 30 minute television presentation. Rather, it had the potential, they felt, of a feature film. Evans invited Hess to come out to California where they later were to have meetings with representatives from MGM and Warner Bros.

It was in February, 1955 that Hess received a request for a meeting from Mr. Ed Kuhen, a representative of the McGraw-Hill Publishing Company. Kuhen had recently read, for the first time, the Hal Martin article, "The Pious Killer of Korea," appearing in the Post Magazine nearly four years earlier. Kuhen offered Hess an immediate contract for his autobiography. Hess continues: "He (Kuchen) was surprised to learn of the motion picture proposal and after conferring with his superiors assured me there was no conflict, instead one would support the other."¹⁴

It was also in February that Universal Studios finally agreed to do the film under the title of BATTLE HYMN – Hess' favorite piece of music, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Hess began sending in material to Evans and Grayson for the film. At the same time he began working on his autobiography. Hess had few illusions about Hollywood and its way of doing things. For in 1952, while serving at the U.S. Naval Academy as the senior Air Force officer-instructor, he had been assigned temporary duty as technical advisor on the Allied Artists film "Dragonfly Squadron." The story had centered around the senior Air Force officer-instructor, played by actor John Hodiak, and his efforts to train the ROK Air Force during early months of the then on-going Korean War. "It was a very low budget picture," recalls Hess, "strictly fictional, and generally did not give me a good impression of Hollywood operations."¹⁵

From the beginning Evans and Grayson were uneasy about selling the film-going audiences of the mid-1950s on the idea that a man of the cloth, essentially a man of peace, might also be a highly effective combat pilot in time of war. The two vocations simply could not be embodied in the same man at the same time. The resulting screen characterization would be a reformed, if conflict-ridden "Killer Hess." Hess was to be

In this final cut scene from the film Capt. Skidmore (Don DeFore) leads an unauthorized ground strike on a Communist troop convoy. (Author's collection).



portrayed as an aggressive, essentially non-religious WWII fighter pilot who turned to the ministry after the war seeking atonement for the accidental bombing of a wartime German orphanage. Later, feeling he was not really reaching his middle class congregation in the pulpit, he once again joined the Air Force on the eve of the Korean War – where he finally finds himself aiding the orphans of that conflict. So goes the scenario.

While the incident with the German orphanage did in fact occur, the guilt ascribed to Hess was never there to the degree suggested in the film. For Hess, war has long been one of those ‘sometime necessary evils’ ... the lesser of an even greater evil. But the greatest contradiction of fact was of course the film’s suggestion that Hess had become a minister only after the Second World War – the consequence of war guilt. Hess had in fact become a combatant of a prior free-will moral judgment on the part of a practicing minister.

In April of 1955 Hess signed a contract with Universal as technical advisor on the production. Actor Rock Hudson was set to play Hess in the film while the fine character actor, Dan Duryea, would play the unit’s lovable, if fictionalized scrounger, Sergeant Herman. The characterization was inspired by the real life exploits of Capt. Mike Bellovin. Don DeFore would portray another fictionalized pilot who closely parallels a 9th AF pilot Hess flew with in WWII and who was subsequently shot down. Actress Anna Kashfi was set as the principal female lead in the film. Martha Hyer would portray Hess’ wife, Mary.

Douglas Sirk was assigned as the director on the project and Gilbert Kurland as the General Production Manager. In September the two visited Korea, scouting locations for the film. They soon concluded that it would not be feasible to do the shooting there due to the lack of accommodations, facilities and because of the general problems of motion picture logistics. Other locations in California were scouted for the next three months with little success. Then in



ROK Mustangs on the prowl over South Korea during the early 1950s. At one point in their early combat careers a yellow fuselage band was added just aft of the national insignia to help regular Air Force pilots identify the aircraft a ‘friendly.’ Too often in the early months of the war U.S. pilots new to the peninsula would shoot at any aircraft with oriental markings. (Official USAF photo).

December Kurland and Hess settled on the airport at Nogales, Arizona.

“I agreed,” Hess now comments, “that the Nogales site was suitable. The terrain (mountainous) was compatible to that of Korea, (and) Ft. Huachuca was near enough to provide support. In addition to the (Nogales) Airport having one asphalt landing strip, there was sufficient area in the perimeter of the field for a dirt strip to be bulldozed out. The normally clear weather was another factor considered.”¹⁶

The dirt strip to be hewed out near the existing runway would stand in for K-2 at Taegu. The nearby hangars at Nogales would stand in for Kimpo – the site for the reenactment of “Operation Kiddy-car” during the concluding moments of the film.

While the U.S. Army at Ft. Huachuca was called upon to supply the convoy vehicles, tanks and much of the personnel that were to represent the Communist Chinese in the film, the problem of finding an Air Force or Guard unit to provide the 12 F-51D Mustang fighters needed for Hess’ small ROK Air Force was the more critical question. For in the post-Korean War America of 1956 the Mustang had all but been phased out of military service. No longer operational with regular Air Force units, the F-51 was scheduled to be withdrawn from the last handful of Air Guard units still operating the type by year’s end. The assignment went to the pilots and planes¹⁷ of the 182nd Fighter Squadron of the 149th Fighter Group of the Texas ANG based at Kelly AFB. Along with the 167th FG of the West Virginia ANG, they numbered among the very last units still operating the Mustang.





At Los Angeles International Airport Dean Hess greets Mrs. Whang and the 25 South Korean war orphans flown over to appear in his wartime film biography. (Courtesy Dean Hess).

The final revised screenplay was submitted in the first week of March, 1956. As with any venture involving many creative minds with varied backgrounds and motivations, the final script was a compromise, a compilation of concessions and dramatic restructuring which had not always been easy for Hess to accept.

"It was difficult for me to compromise the truth with the license the producer deemed necessary for the production. I was emphatic that the theme be the plight of children in war and Rock Hudson's (i.e. Hess' - author) role be secondary. The writers, producers, director and I had many story conferences with but one serious point of contention. They wanted to establish a mutual 'love interest' between Rock Hudson and Anna Kashfi - I insisted the 'love interest' be with the children and would not accept the impact of a clandestine affair in one particular scene between Rock and Anna. Mr. Edward Muhl, head of west coast productions of Universal International was called in, and resolved the matter straightforwardly by declaring in my favor."¹⁸

LOCATION FILMING BEGINS

On March 7th Hess arrived at Los Angeles International Airport to greet Mrs. Whang and 25 of 'his' children flown over from the Orphans' Home of Korea who would add a note of authenticity by playing themselves in the film.

With Universal's pre-production crews having completed the "Taegu" sets at Nogales in late February and early March, the twelve 182nd F-51D's began arriving on March

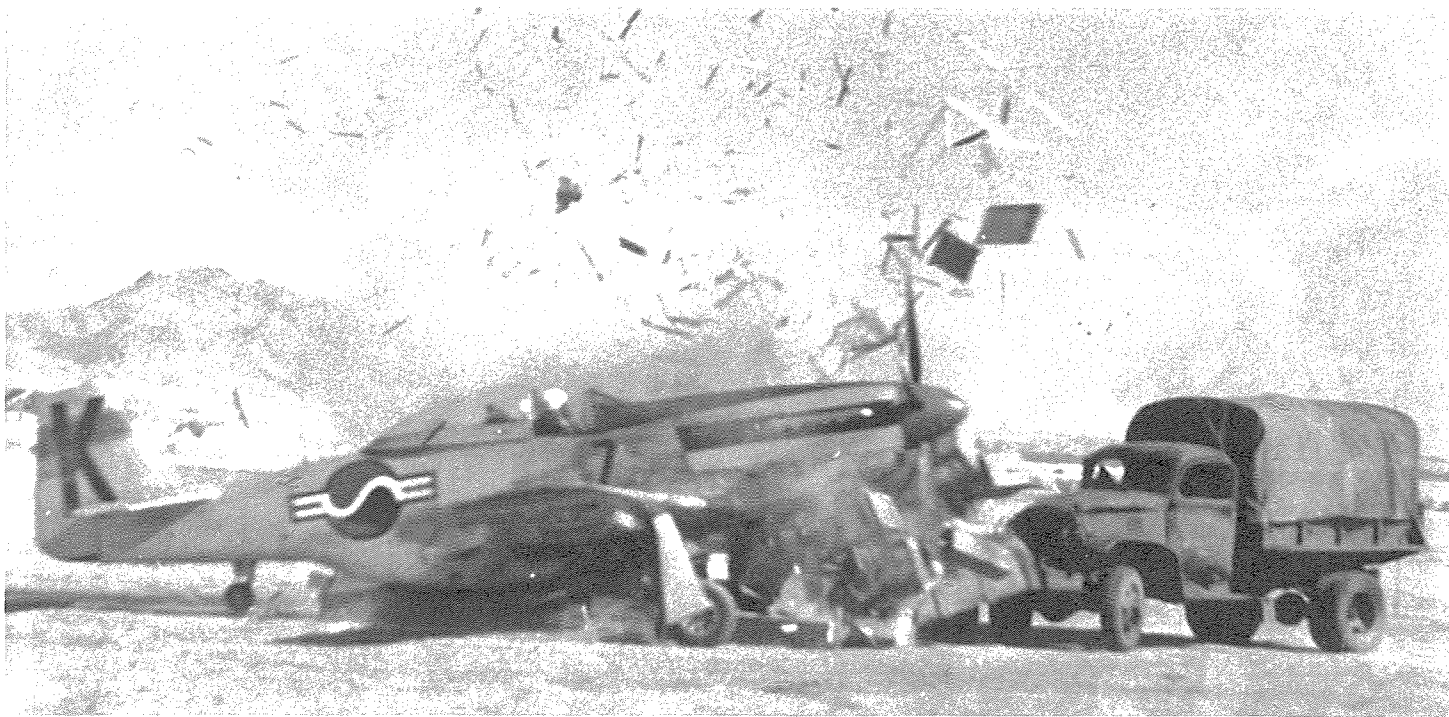
10th.¹⁹ Joining the 182nd on the Nogales flight line were two Air Force reserve T-28A trainers which were to double as Yak fighters in the film and an USAF B-26 and the C-119 support aircraft used by the Thunderbirds aerial demonstration team. The latter two aircraft had been provided by the Secretary of the Air Force's Office of Information and were to be used for the air-to-air camera work in the film. It had been a decision which was "considerably disturbing" to Hess as he felt much of the support could have been professionally provided by good friend Paul Mantz and his famous B-25 cameraship "Smasher." As it was, two Air Force aircraft were required to do the job normally done by Mantz's lone Mitchell. The B-26 was rigged with a forward facing camera mount in its clear plexiglass nose while the C-119's clamshell doors were removed so that the camera crew and cameras could work from the cargo section shooting to the rear and side.

As the various Air Force and Air Guard planes scheduled to appear in the film arrived, they were immediately swarmed over by the Universal paint crews using water-soluble paints and adhesive papers to apply the proper markings. Red spinners, wing and tail stripes found on the 182nd's Mustangs upon arrival at Nogales were the only Guard markings not painted out for the film - perhaps an eye-catching concession to a feature color film.

As the filming got underway, Hess discovered that: "The ANG pilots and crew members were not at all reluctant to play pranks, usually on each other. For one scene Rock was required to run toward his F-51 at the sound of an alert, vault onto the wing and into the cockpit. I demonstrated how he should approach from the front, step onto the tire without breaking his pace vault up and into the seat. He practiced for about 30 minutes and showed considerable agility for all his 6'4". During a lull before the action shot I noticed a couple of crewmen working feverishly around the wheel and only after Rock started his run for the actual 'take' did I notice that they had smeared grease on the tire where his foot would have hit disastrously. The only thing I could think to do was shout 'cut!' - a prerogative which is strictly the director's."²⁰

In another scene appearing in the second half of the film, actor Don DeFore portrays a mortally wounded pilot - the fictitious "Capt. Skidmore" - trying to fly his limping Mustang back to base after a tank strike. Upon landing, the script called for the runaway fighter to upend itself into a pile of empty crates. Hess continues: "The studio personnel, lacking experience with the F-51, requested that I set up the accident scene. Originally, I set myself up to be in the cockpit, however, I was informed by the Inspector General at Davis-Monthan AFB that if I did the scene, it would be considered an accountable accident disregarding the fact that it would be intentional and with a surplus F-51 sent there by USAF Headquarters for that purpose. I yielded the privilege to Ken Slater, the Nogales Airport manager and former F-51 test pilot for the Air Force.

"The accident was carefully planned. The internal wing tanks were filled with water. Five gallons of fuel was left in the fuselage tank. The cockpit was well padded and a real fire crew was standing by since we had it there to cover our flight operations. The crash scene would have been more spectacular as planned but Ken retarded his throttle a bit soon so the F-51 did not have the momentum to go up on its nose and a



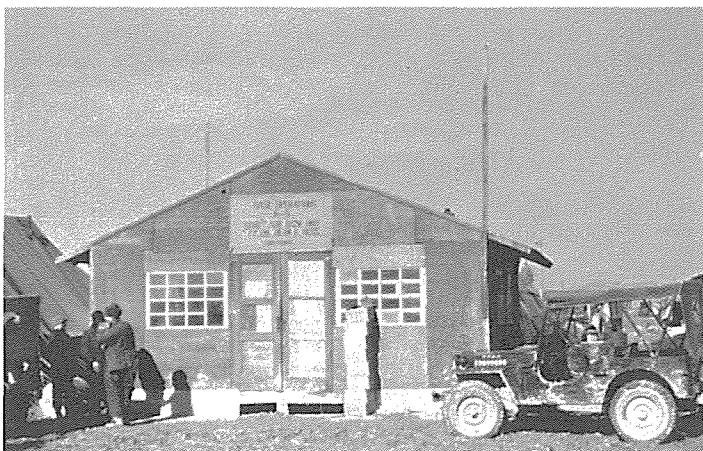
Standing in for actor Don DeFore Nogales Airport Manager Ken Slater slams his surplus F-51 into a pile of empty supply crates on the 'Taegu' set. (149th FG, Texas ANG).

wing tip when he applied sequential full brakes.”²¹

This F-51 which had been purchased by Universal was used as payment for Slater's role in the crash sequence. He reportedly used the damaged Mustang as a source of spares for another F-51 then owned by the airport manager.²²

There were also several minor accidents not in the script. One early incident involved Hess personally. Hess flew 'his' own Mustang in the film much of the time – that is, the F-51 bearing his markings. While being rechecked out on the fighter after several years absence from the cockpit, Hess ran into trouble one morning after his third landing. “I landed on the asphalt runway and my left brake locked completely upon touch down. After a hair raising, seat clutching ride keeping the F-51 from ground looping, the tail came up and I tipped the prop. I later discovered the brake adjustment was improper and the wheel had not been washed down to get rid of the dust and dirt accumulated from the previous day's shooting on the dirt runway.”²³

The 6146th Air Base Unit's Operations and weather facility at Taejon, Korea as it appeared in the late Fall or Winter of 1951. The complex was later destroyed by fire. (Courtesy Dean Hess).



Following this incident camera crews began setting up their equipment by the runway with the hope and expectation that Hess “would do it again” for the cameras!

The film's star, Rock Hudson, developed a “keen feel” for the role according to Hess, especially when the 25 Korean orphans arrived on location. Their unpredictability and charming rascality in the Arizona desert became readily apparent one day at a nearby Nogales motel where the cast and crew stayed during the shooting schedule.

“One Sunday afternoon,” recalls Hess, “the adults were in and around the pool being watched wistfully by the children. I told them it would be perfectly all right for them to join the grown-ups; then I turned my attention elsewhere. The laughter of the adults, shouts of the children and splashing water caused me to turn to discover that they had all divested themselves of their clothes on the spot and were springing in like so many little frogs. Mrs. Whang, who was their escort and guardian, hastily appeared with their under briefs for all, though they did make a fine picture of absolute innocence.”²⁴

Hess and Hudson were frequently seen together during the course of the location schedule and each developed a great deal of personal respect for the other. To Hess' pleasant surprise he found Hudson already quite “knowledgeable of aircraft operations” – gained during World War II in which he served as an aircraft ground crewman with the Navy in the Pacific. Hudson had long admired the F-51, but only from a distance.

Hess recalls: “Rock Hudson was quite enthused about the F-51 s; so, after I cleared it with USAF Headquarters, I put him into the back seat of a converted F-51 and took him up for a flight. His 6'4" frame barely fit into the rear cockpit. After a few loops and rolls I heard him shouting over the sound of the engine. Thinking I had shaken him up inadvertently, I landed only to find out he was voicing his enthusiasm and sense of thrill.”²⁵



This rare photo shows Hudson preparing for a takeoff during a Universal soundstage shot in a driving artificial rain. Jock Mahoney is standing on the wing. Note: studio-style prop blades designed for such soundstage takes.

This particular F-51 rested on Universal's back lot in California until a few years ago when it was sold to a private owner who now operates the restored fighter from Chino Airport in S. California. (Author's collection).

BACK TO THE STUDIO

The location filming at Nogales was wrapped up early in April with the concluding "Operation Kiddycar" sequence reenacted this time with 350 to 400 children (according to the script – short of the nearly one thousand actually airlifted out) and five USAF C-119G's on Nogales' lone asphalt runway. On April 7th the 182nd's F-51's began returning for the last time to their home field near San Antonio. Hess, with the balance of the studio's personnel, returned to California where in May they completed the last of their sound stage and backlot sequences.

On June 15th the 149th FG began phasing out their Mustangs for the veteran Lockheed F-80 Shooting Star. The last F-51 was retired from the unit on the first of December, 1956. However, before the Texas ANG divested itself entirely of its Mustangs, an additional week of second unit work was hurriedly arranged by Universal in July at Ft. Hood, Texas. During the week of July 28th to August 5th, the 182nd provided four of its remaining F-51's for a series of special aerial and ground sequences. On Ft. Hood's tank firing range, the studio wanted among other shots, close up scenes of an "airborne" F-51 firing its arsenal of 50 cal. wing guns, and HVAR rockets, dropping bombs and actuating the landing gear.

For the required close up scenes, Hess got the Army to provide a large crane to hoist the F-51 off the ground and by securing the tail with a long line was able to run the engine up

at slow speed to effect these in-flight close ups.

Preparing for these sequences Hess recalls: "the Army provided a very capable young GI operator. I was pulling his leg at bit when I told him we would lift the F-51 and after starting the engine would cut the line securing the tail. Then as I revved up the engine he was to let out cable and allow the

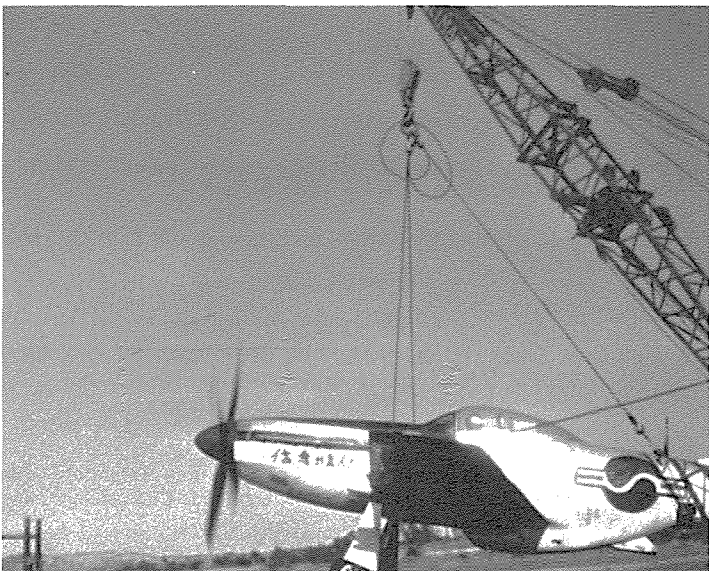
The 182nd FS of the Texas ANG's 149th FG was among the last Air National Guard unit to operate the F-51. By August of 1956 when the final segments of the BATTLE HYMN filming were being completed at Ft. Hood, Texas the 149th was well along in their phased conversion to the F-80. Note: the Air Guard's distinctive red spinners, wing tips and rudder bands were retained for their temporary role as ROK aircraft. (Official 149th FG, Texas ANG).





182nd FS pilots "Pappy" Lyons and Major Neely (center) are flanked by actors Don DeFore and Anna Kashfi on the left and Jock Mahoney in the driver's seat. Portraying the unit's executive officer in the film, actor Jock Mahoney is himself no stranger to a fighter cockpit having flown F4U's with the Marines in WWII. (149th FG, Texas ANG).

At Ft. Hood Universal used a large Army crane to lift an idling F-51 into the air for a series of 2nd unit shots of the aircraft firing its guns and rockets in flight. Note: the shell casings being ejected by the Mustang's active six 50 caliber machine guns above. (Courtesy Dean Hess).



Rock Hudson climbs out of his F-51 cockpit after watching squadron mate, Capt. Skidmore (Don DeFore) make a crash landing on the field. (Courtesy Dean Hess).

crane to turn free on its chassis. We would have in effect, a U-control aircraft just as it was done with models.

"When it came time to lift the F-51 to start shooting I couldn't find the crane operator. After looking around for about 20 minutes I found him hiding behind a large tree determined not to be at the controls when the aircraft started going around. It took me about 20 minutes more to convince him that I was only joshing earlier."²⁶

Additional flying and dogfight sequences (strictly fictional) were also acquired at Ft. Hood. Using the four Mustangs and the two all-gray T-28A "Yaks" for the dogfight sequences, charcoal dust bins installed on each of the respective aircraft supplied the clouds of black 'smoke' traditionally used by Hollywood to signify an aerial 'kill.' Contrary to the film's story line, Hess has in fact never downed another aircraft while in the air.

HOMETOWN PREMIERE

On February 14th, 1957, "Battle Hymn" premiered in Hess' hometown of Marietta, Ohio. The occasion was marked by an overflight of the last active-duty F-51 in the country, which had been retired from the 167th FIS of the West Virginia ANG on January 27th some two weeks before the premiere. The Mustang, s/n 44-74936, then returned to Wright-Patterson AFB where it went on permanent static display.²⁷



The 182nd FS goes to work on an 'enemy' convoy before the cameras in the Arizona desert. Being checked out in a 'Mustang' once again after a long

absence from the cockpit Hess did much of his own flying for the film. (149th FG, Texas ANG).

While the critics received the final release with mixed reviews, the public at large viewed the film and Hess' book with great enthusiasm. For Dean Hess it had all been another fulfillment of a trust, a faith in something beyond himself which had yet to let him down. Hess had never lost sight of what he felt was the REAL purpose of his sudden, virtually overnight public appeal – the orphans of South Korea.

Though Universal had paid little more than \$4,000 for the services of the 25 Korean youngsters, the generous public response generated by the film, book and related television appearances, soon produced the funds Hess had promised Mrs. Whang nearly three years earlier.

And what of the film? Dean Hess today reflects – "Not only the writers, but the director, producer and others could never comprehend the feeling that I have on the subject of war and killing. The personal guilt they worked into the movie just isn't there. I do have regrets for the necessity of war, remorse that I, representing mankind, do not have an alternative and compassion for all who suffer the onslaught of war – including the enemy. What would happen to our Christian principles in the hands of an aggressor that has no sensitivity toward the sanctity of life? Perhaps there will be a better day; until then we will not have the absolute choice of right or wrong. We can only pray for the wisdom to distinguish and choose the lesser of two evils."²⁸

Col. Hess retired from the Air Force in September of 1969. In 1975, after serving five years as a senior high school instructor of history, psychology and economics in his native Ohio, Hess returned to Korea. There he was once again greeted by and became reacquainted with many of his one-time war orphans. Now adults themselves, many have since married and are raising their own young families to whom Hess is proudly identified as "grandfather."

Of his role in Korea, Hess has steadfastly maintained his Christian perspective believing: "that God, in his love and compassion for a bunch of needy orphans, ordained they be relieved of their distress. How privileged and humbled I am to have been the instrument of His work!"

NOTES and REFERENCES

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2. Jackson, Robert, *Air War Over Korea*, London: Ian Allan Ltd., 1973, pg. 13.
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4. Ibid.
5. Hess, Dean E., *Battle Hymn*, New York; McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc.; 1956, pp. 80-84.
6. Martin, p. 87.
7. Hess, pp. 148-149.
8. Ibid.
9. Jorgensen, Daniel B., *Air Force Chaplains, Vol. II (1947-1960)*, Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office; 1961, p. 287. USAF Chaplains Lt. Col. Russell L. Blaisdell and Capt. James Nornille played a key role in the formation of the Fifth Air Force Orphanage in Seoul.
10. Hess, p. 187.
11. The USAF officially referred to this dramatic airlift as "Operation Little Orphan Annie" – so reported Lowell Thomas on his CBS network news broadcast of December 20th, 1950.
12. Hess, p. 245.
13. From the correspondence of Dean E. Hess, to the author, Sept. 7, 1976.
14. Hess correspondence.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. 182nd FS pilots assigned to the filming included: Ira Smith (often flying 44-4960 – Hess' no. 18 in film), Noel Didear, P.D. Straw, Buck Staudt, Harry Disler, Lee Neely, Ira Porter, John Fulton, and Pappy Lyons. F-51D's assigned to the 182nd FS at the time included: 44-4960, 3693, 1453, 3656, 3536 and (only last three digits available) 616, 313, 810, 545, 577, 447, 924, and 350. The following information was supplied to the author from the logs of Lt. Col. Ira Smith and the records of the 149th FG.
18. Hess correspondence.
19. This date is based upon the flight log of Lt. Col. Ira Smith, 149th TFG, Texas ANG.
20. Hess correspondence.
21. Ibid.
22. From the correspondence of Ira Smith, to the author, July 15, 1976.
23. Hess correspondence.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. From the correspondence of Dean E. Hess, to the author, Sept. 10, 1976.
27. Hess, William N., *Fighting Mustang: The Chronicle of The P-51*. New York, Double Day and Co., Inc.; 1970, p. 153.
28. Hess correspondence, Sept. 7, 1976.