

The Air War in Korea: A Russian Perspective



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This nice fly-by highlights the design similarities and the differences between the MiG-15 and F-86. The photograph was taken at a Planes of Fame, Chino, Calif., display in 2002. (Photographer Ray Rice from the C.H. Hamilton collection)

In June 1950, I did my service in Mig-15s at Moscow. Suddenly, Commander of the Moscow PVO, General-Colonel K. Moskalenko, brought us a top-secret order about a new, unknown conflict in the Far East. Urgently, an alarm was declared! By night we took a very long and very secret train to the unknown Far East. Far Eastern weather was very bad, tropical with heavy downpours. I had not seen this in all my life! It was ghastly! Many ducks were swimming on our future airfield. A new alarm for our unknown war was starting for us. First we operated from Mukdan airbase, and after a few days our 18th Aircraft Regiment was flown to Andun airbase.

Our first flight was the whole regiment and staff: 24 Mig-15s in three groups, eight in each group. We had an order that in-flight radio communication was prohibited. Be silent! We dressed in Chinese uniforms and our aircraft were marked with Chinese markings. It was to have been a very top secret action, but for us it was especially bad because our orders were: "In combat speak only Korean." We spoke only a Korean vocabulary (specialized for combat flying).

Our attitude towards American pilots were complicated. During WWII, both the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. were allied opposite Hitler. In the Korean War, both Soviet and American pilots were not seen as enemies - we were only opponents. Our principle in the air was, "competition with whomever," but we

were soon sorry for our first losses. Many of our friends perished in Korea.

American pilots attacking North Korea had two special objectives: First of all was the bridge across the Yalu river, and secondly the Andun power station that supplied North Korea with electricity. American attack and bomber aircraft were armed with napalm bombs and ordinary bombs as well. Our Russian pilots guarded these two objectives with great success.

Our first victory in the air was by pilot Akatov who shot down an F-86 *Sabre*. But soon after this Akatov died in the hospital. He only had one victory. My friend Valentin Filimonov also perished, two F-86s attacked his Mig-15.

Our opinions about Soviet and American aircraft. Mig-15 very good but we had a major problem with it. The engine of the Mig-15 abruptly stalled during very sharp turns, alas! This was also the opinion of Russian pilots Vladimir Voistinnykh and Peter Chourkin. F-80 *Shooting Star*, not good, F-84 *Thunderjet* only average. F-86 *Sabre* a great, good aircraft (gold aircraft) and American pilots were very good!

One day Gloster *Meteors* of the Royal Australian Air Force attacked us. It was good, fat target for us! My friend, Oskin, and I attacked and we wiped out five Gloster *Meteors* in only one fight!

But time was flying by day after day. At night we also attacked B-29 *Superfortresses*, big American bombers. While



The Gloster Mk. 8 Meteor of the Royal Australian Air Force entered the Korean War in early 1951. The Meteor had an outstanding rate of climb and lethal armament of four 20 mm cannons but was much more effective as a ground support fighter-bomber. (AAHS Photo)



The straight-wing Republic F-84 Thunderjet was no match for the MiG-15 in aerial combat but did carry the war to the North Korean and Chinese forces as a fighter-bomber ground support aircraft. (AAHS Photo)

flying, I heard over the radio "Groups of B-29s ahead of you." I lowered my Mig-15, my heart was pounding and soon I saw some B-29s and many fighters around them. The American pilots increased their speed and flew north. I attacked and wiped out two B-29s and one F-86 with my aircraft's cannon and machine guns. Over the radio I heard, "Alexandr, how are you getting on?" I cried out furiously, "Victory is great!!" That day our regiment shot down five B-29s. Our victory that day!

Day after day...and soon, unforeseen, the war was over for us. On my last flight of the Korean War my division commander said to me, "Orders: Attack some F-86s and after this you shall return to the U.S.S.R." I replied, "Well!" During my last engagement I attacked an F-86, but was wounded in the leg and flown immediately back to the U.S.S.R. The unknown war was finished for us, but many good friends had perished in Korea and were buried in Port Arthur.



from *KOMSOMOL*, June 4, 1990

Left: U.N. Air Forces in Korea were shocked by the introduction of the Russian MiG-15 to the air war over Korea in November 1950. (AAHS photo)

Below: The North American F-86 Sabre came to the Korean War in late 1950. The 4th Fighter Interceptor Wing was the first F-86 unit to score kills on the MiG-15. This beautifully restored example was seen at the EAA Fly-in July 2002. (Photo Rich Kolasa)

