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# F-86 Sabre Vs MiG-15: Korea 1950-53 (Duel)



## Synopsis

As the routed North Korean People's Army (NKPA) withdrew into the mountainous reaches of their country and the People's Republic of China (PRC) funneled in its massive infantry formations in preparation for a momentous counter-offensive in the last months of 1950, both lacked adequate air power to challenge US and UN air supremacy over both the battlefields and the logistics channels from China into North Korea. Reluctantly, Josef Stalin agreed to provide the requisite air cover, introducing the superior swept-wing MiG-15 to counter the American's straight-wing F-80 jets and to repel the United States Air Force (USAF) B-29 bomber formations that were interdicting the PRC's flow of troops and supplies into North Korea. This in turn prompted the USAF, against its conventional wisdom of retaining its first-line air-defence fighters to face Soviet air forces across the 'Iron Curtain' in Europe, to deploy its very best - the F-86A Sabre - to counter this threat. Thus began a two-and-a-half-year struggle in the skies over a corner of North Korea known as "MiG Alley." In this period, the unrelenting campaign for aerial superiority witnessed the introduction of successive models of these two revolutionary jets - the MiG-15bis, the F-86E, and eventually the F-86F - into combat. It also saw the transition of operational leadership on the communist side from the Soviet "volunteers" to the newly formed Chinese PLAAF air divisions, and witnessed the re-introduction of the NKPAF, with its "just trained" MiG-15 units, into the air-combat arena. This meticulously researched study not only provides technical descriptions of the two types and their improved variants, complete with a "fighter pilot's assessment" of these aircraft, but also chronicles the entire scope of their aerial duel in "MiG Alley" by employing the recollections of the surviving combatants - including Russian, Chinese, and North Korean pilots - who participated.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The Osprey Duel series "F-86 Sabre vs. MiG-15" should be a double treat for fans and students of modern combat aviation. This book features some excellent insights into the air war over the Korean Peninsula 1950-1953, and a highly readable technical comparison of the relative merits of the U.S.-built Sabre jet fighter and its principal opponent, the Russian-built MiG-15. "F-86 vs MiG-15" offers a lot of information in a relatively short (80 page) book, with an introduction, a chronology of the air war, and a discussion of the development of the two aircraft. The text provides an explanation of the strategic situation on the Korean Peninsula before getting into the heart of the narrative, the head-to-head combat between aircraft and pilots. The authors, Douglas Dildy and Warren Thompson, took the trouble to do a reasonably nuanced statistical comparison to sum up the results of the "duel" between the F-86 and the MiG-15. The narrative benefits from access to recent Soviet memoires and archives, and is enhanced by an interesting collection of photographs, diagrams, maps and illustrations. Several of the illustrations put the reader in the cockpits of the two aircraft, while several diagrams explain common aerial tactics used by each side. "F-86 vs MiG-15" is an interesting read and a worthwhile look back at the Korean War; highly recommended.

This is another in the "Duel" series by Osprey Publishing. The format is straightforward--the two parties to a duel (whatever that might be) are described and compared. The actual duel is described. Finally, an analysis of the results of the duel. This slender volume focuses on the conflict between the F-86 Sabre (jet) and the MIG-15 over the skies of Korea (and China) during the Korean War. The basic actors: the North Korean Air Force (its propeller driven aircraft essentially out of the war very quickly), the US Air Force (featuring some golden oldies like the P-51 Mustang and B-29 bombers at the outset), the Soviet air resources, and the Chinese air force (known officially as the People's Liberation Army Air Force). Over the course of the war, the fighters used evolved, until the key fighters were all high performance jet aircraft. Early versions of the F-86 and MIG-15 had shortcomings, and both planes evolved pretty rapidly. The volume proceeds from an introduction to air power as the Korean war developed, design and development of the two aircraft, technical specifications of the planes (and see the dials and other elements in the cockpit of the F-86 on page 59!), the combatants (including training levels of the different air forces), and combat. It is interesting to read of the tactics of the various pilots. One bottom line? The number of fighters shot down by the

various actors. The book makes clear that there is a lot of error in the official "kill figures." Indeed, it is sobering how inaccurate such figures appear to be. However, despite how one measures things, the F-86 outperformed the MIG (much of this because of better training among American and Soviet pilots, compared with Chinese and North Korean pilots). All in all, a very useful volume on the first large scale jet fighter air war.

I have always enjoyed this series by Osprey and this book does not disappoint. While it doesn't go into great detail about the jets like the Vanguard Series or cover all the Aces like Aircraft of the Aces series I find these books more satisfying. It was interesting to read more about the Soviet Air Force involvement during the early part of the conflict, which is hardly ever covered by the other books,

A special love for anyone who loves aerial combat is the duel that occurred between Mig-15's and F-86 Sabres; it captures something special... When I saw this book I had to get it to see how it compared to others I'd read. Being an Osprey Duel book means there's limited space to deliver the message and I try to factor that into my ratings (I rarely give Osprey books a 1 or a 5. The times I have though they've more than earned them). This one follows the typical Osprey Duel standard; a quick description, tell about the combatants (material and people), the situation, and then assess things. Something that was interesting with this one was the factoring in the Russian contribution (usually it's mentioned but not discussed heavily. For the size of this book they did a great job assessing the Russian contribution to the Korean air war). Other interesting factors include the assessment on the different aircraft and the end results, all worthy contributions. Unfortunately two weaknesses in the book were the extensive use of acronyms and the pilot combat section was not as strong as I was hoping for (I believe this was because there was so much out there that it became difficult to decide what to add. Because of the weaknesses I'd call this one a 3.5 star book that I'm rounding up to 4 because it, not a bad book to have in your library but if I wanted to read on Sabres I'd rather have *Sabres Over MIG Alley: The F-86 and the Battle for Air Superiority in Korea* as my reference piece.

This book covers aircraft design and performance, air combat tactics, and summaries kills and the general campaign. If you are looking for detailed air-to-air combat descriptions there is not much of that in the book. I learned a lot, not having read much on the air war in Korea. The take home message was that US pilots increasingly outperformed the communists (russian, chinese, north koreans) as the campaign developed because of aircraft upgrades, training, and improved tactics.

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