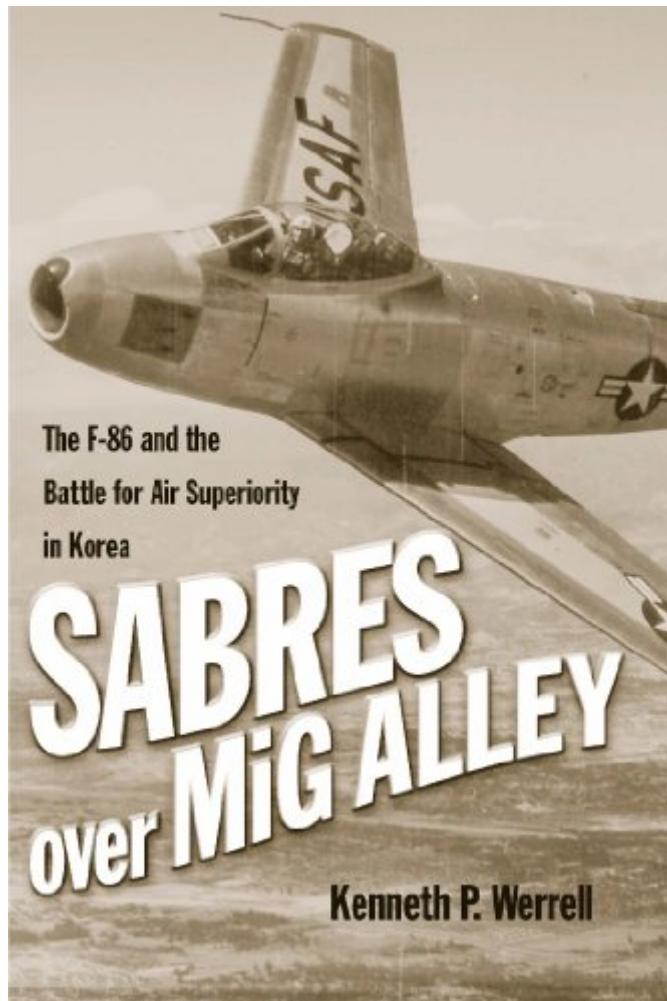


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Sabres Over MiG Alley: The F-86 And The Battle For Air Superiority In Korea



Synopsis

This is the story of the first jet versus jet war, the largest in number of victories and losses, and one of the few military bright spots in the Korean War. It tells how an outnumbered force of F-86 Sabres limited by range and restricted by the rules of engagement, decisively defeated its foe. Based on the latest scholarship, author Kenneth Werrell uses previously untapped sources and interviews with sixty former F-86 pilots to explore new aspects of the subject and shed light on controversies previously neglected. For example, he found much greater violation of the Yalu River than thus far has appeared in the published materials. The F-86 became a legend in "The Forgotten War" because of its performance and beauty, but most of all, because of its record in combat.

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Customer Reviews

Sabres Over MiG Alley by Dr. Kenneth P. Werrell tells the story of the F-86 Sabre against the MiG-15 in the skies over North Korea. However rather than focusing on the men and the combats from unit histories, Mr. Werrell approached this from a slightly different approach; first focusing on the technical development of the Sabre and its technical comparison to the MiG-15, then focusing

on the men in general, finally focusing on the specifics of individual pilots. By looking at the air war this way we get a good feeling for how well the two combatants compared (especially the part where Dr. Werrell tells us about flying the captured MiG-15) with some descriptions of how the individual pilots flew. In going over the non-combat aspects, Dr. Werrell has sections that focus on such things as; Efforts to Improve Performance; Maintenance: Unappreciated but Vital; F-86 Flying Safety; and Friendly Islands and Rescue Service. Btw, in addition to a pretty nice section on individual pilots, there's several small sections on the general air war over Korea. Supporting content wise there are some excellent pictures but no technical drawings or maps showing where the airbases were or where the battle occurred. Given this, how do I rate this book... a more complex answer than one might expect. Technically it's a 5 star book. Dr. Werrell does an outstanding job telling about the development and evolution of the Sabre. The stories of the individual pilots is worthy of 4-4.5 stars, but the general air war over Korea is rather weak and only worthy of 2.5 stars. Given all of this and my personal focus's I can only give this book 4 Stars. I really wanted to give it more than that because of the development history of the Sabre, but I was looking to get more about how the Sabre was used, how engagements developed between Sabres and MiG's and maybe something more on the use of Eastern Block aviators.

The Korean War began with the Americans sending P-51 and P-80 fighters to support the B-29 bombers. It was a surprise to find that they were being met with MIG-15's. The not-quite-ready F-86 was rushed over to meet the challenge, and meet it it did. Overall the American pilots achieved a 8 to 1 kill ratio. (Subsequent information from the Soviet Union says that up against the few Russian pilots that were volunteers to the North Korean Air Force held the Americans to about a one to one ratio.) The plane was obviously a great improvement over what went before, and the training of the pilots significantly better. This book is the story of the F-86's that flew in Korea. It is probably going to remain as the definitive book on the subject. The book depends a lot on conversations with men who flew the planes, and as this was now over fifty years ago, the number of remaining pilots is rapidly declining. This book is the complete history of the Sabers, including the down sides such points as inadequate armaments (six .50 calibers) and friendly fire. It of course also includes the good side, with the story of all the Aces that came out of the war.

It was an interesting book and easy enough to read. Some of the pictures were interesting as well. There was a rather extensive section, at the end, about Korean War POWs that I found informative. I have read previously other books about the Korean War POW account. In this book, I

learned that in the 1990s the N. Koreans had run a spy sub aground on S. Korean shores. They, in true Oriental fashion, only wanted to save face by not having to make a formal apology (to S. Korea) and implied to USA that they would trade some Korean War US POWs that they still held if the US would get S. Korea to forgo any demand for apology. US basically declined and gave N. Korea what they wanted anyway without any progress on POW issue. What a rotten gov't we have. What I was disappointed most about this book was that there was not much of a discussion about the F-86 pilot experience. There were some accounts of F-86 missions but no real description of what it was like in the air as well as on the ground. No pilot descriptions of what it was like to be in the first, and most extensive, jet age combat. No comparison by pilots with both WWII and Korean experience, propeller vs jet aircraft performance. Things like that. I would have thought the author could find some of the remaining Korean War pilots and interview them for the complete experience.

"Sabres over MiG Alley" by Kenneth Werrell, is two books in one - a developmental history of the F-86 Sabre and the personal histories of each of the Aces who flew her. In addition to these two major focus areas, Werrell included a very brief history of the Korean War and description of some of special services, like the Air Sea Rescue unit on Chodo Island. With the breadth of topics, there was some sacrifice in the depth of material. To supplement the history of the air war, I would recommend "The United States Air Force in Korea 1950-1953", by Robert Futrell. Werell offers enough to cover the high points, but doesn't go into much depth. Instead he focused on the real treasure of this book - the personal history of the Aces. Werrell provides outstanding personal histories for American "Double Aces"; "Aces in Two Wars"; and "Aces famous for other things". With the fall of the Iron Curtain, he was also able to include the unprecedented histories of the Russian Aces who flew the MiG-15. With the many books available on the Korean War, none do as well retelling the stories of these Air Force heroes. The book is well researched, and well supported by photos. The readability of the book varies from technical discussions of the development of the F-86, to very readable personal histories. It's a great addition to any aviation enthusiasts library.

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