

# RED DEVILS OVER THE YALU

A Chronicle of Soviet Aerial Operations  
in the Korean War 1950–53

IGOR SEIDOV

Translated and edited by Stuart Britton



The Korean War (1950-1953) was the first – and only – full-scale air war in the jet age. It was in the skies of North Korea where Soviet and American pilots came together in fierce aerial clashes. The best pilots of the opposing systems, the most powerful air forces, and the most up-to-date aircraft in the world in this period of history came together in pitched air battles. The analysis of the air war showed that the powerful United States Air Force and its allies were unable to achieve complete superiority in the air and were unable to fulfil all the tasks they'd been given. Soviet pilots and Soviet jet fighters, which were in no way inferior to their opponents and in certain respects were even superior to them, was the reason for this. The combat experience and new tactical aerial combat tactics, which were tested for the first time in the skies of Korea, have been eagerly studied and applied by modern air forces around the world today.

This book fully discusses the Soviet participation in the Korean War and presents a view of this war from the opposite side, which is still not well known in the West from the multitude of publications by Western historians. The reason for this, of course, is the fact that Soviet records pertaining to the Korean War were for a long time highly classified, since Soviet air units were fighting in the skies of North Korea “incognito”, so to speak or even more so to write about this was strictly forbidden in the Soviet Union right up to its ultimate collapse. The given work is in essence the first major work in the post-Soviet era. First published in a small edition in Russian in 1998, it was republished in Russia in 2007. For the first time, the Western reader can become acquainted with the most detailed and informative work existing on the course of the air war from the Soviet side, now in English language. The work rests primarily on the recollections of veterans of this war on the so-called ‘Red’ side – Soviet fighter pilots, who took direct part in this war on the side of North Korea. Their stories have been supplemented with an enormous amount of archival documents, as well as the work of Western historians. The author presents a literal day-by-day chronicle of the aerial combats and combat work of Soviet fighter regiments in the period between 1950 and 1953, and dedicates this work to all the men on both sides who fought and died in the Korean air war.

Igor Ataevich Seidov was born in 1960 in the city of Ashkhabad, in today's Independent Republic of Turkmenistan. In 1983, having graduated from a specialized technical college, he went to work as an engineer for a television company in Ashkhabad, but after moving to Russia in 2001, for a television company in Maikop. At the end of the 1980s, the author became fascinated with aviation history, and in particular the participation of the Soviet Air Force and Soviet Air Defense Force in the Korean War. In 1992, he began his literary work, and has since published more than 20 articles in a variety of Russian, Ukrainian, Czech and Spanish aviation journals. In 1998 he published his first book on the Korean air war, *Krasnye d'iavoly na 38-I paralleli* [Red Devils on the 38th Parallel] with the assistance of the veteran Soviet fighter pilot A.A. German. The book came out in a second, revised edition in 2007. In 2006, the author co-authored with Iurii Sutiagin a biography of the top Soviet ace in the war Nikolai Vasil'evich Sutiagin, an edited version of which was published in English by Pen & Sword in 2009. In 2010, the Russian publisher Russkie Vitiazi published his latest work, *Sovetskie acy koreiskoi voiny* [Soviet aces of the Korean War]. Today he continues to live and work in the city of Maikop.

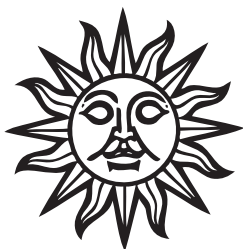
Stuart Britton is a freelance translator residing in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He has been responsible for making available in the English language a growing list of historical titles by the "new wave" of Russian historians, who have access to previously classified archival records and who write more objectively about the Red Army's campaigns and battles on the Eastern Front of the Second World War. These titles include Valeriy Zamulin's award-winning book *Demolishing the Myth* (Helion, 2011), Lev Lopukhovskiy's highly praised work, *The Viaz'ma Catastrophe, 1941* (Helion, 2013), and Rostislav Aliev's study of the heroic stand by the defenders of the Brest Fortress, *The Siege of Brest 1941* (Pen & Sword, 2013). In addition, Mr. Britton has translated several memoirs by Red Army veterans, such as Petr Mikhin's *Guns Against the Reich* (Pen and Sword, 2010), Joseph Pilyushin's *Red Sniper on the Eastern Front* (Pen and Sword, 2010) and Vasiliy Krysov's *Panzer Destroyer* (Pen and Sword, 2010). Upcoming titles include a biography of Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky by Boris Sokolov, to be published by Helion.

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**Igor Seidov**

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**Helion & Company**

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Front cover: The image depicts the clash between the 16th FIS's 2nd Lt. Edwin E. Aldrin flying F-86E-10-51-2778 and the MiG-15 of Sr. Lt. Lev Kolesnikov of the 224th IAP above the Supung hydroelectrical station on 14 May 1953.  
(© Sergei Vakhrushev)

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# List of abbreviations

AD	Aviation Division
AP	Aviation Regiment
BAD	Bomber Aviation Division
BG	Bombardment Group
BS	Bombardment Squadron
CPV	Chinese People's Volunteer Army
FBS	Fighter-bomber Squadron
FBG	Fighter-bomber Group
FBW	Fighter-bomber Wing
FEAF	Far East Air Forces
FEG	Fighter Escort Group
FIG	Fighter-Interceptor Group
FEW	Fighter Escort Wing
FIW	Fighter Interceptor Wing
GCI	Ground Control Intercept
GIAD	Guards Fighter Aviation Division
GIAP	Guards Fighter Aviation Regiment
IAB	Fighter Aviation Brigade
IAD	Fighter Aviation Division
IAK	Fighter Aviation Corps
IAP	Fighter Aviation Regiment
KPAAF	Korean People's Army Air Force
MTAP	Torpedo Aviation Regiment
NIAP	Night Fighter Aviation Regiment
NKPA	North Korean People's Army
PARM	Mobile Aviation Repair Shop
PDRK	People's Democratic Republic of Korea
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army Air Force
PRC	People's Republic of China
PVO	Air Defense Forces
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAF	Royal Air Force
RO	Radar Operator
ROK	Republic of Korea
RS	Reconnaissance Squadron
SAC	Strategic Air Command
ShAD	Attack Aviation Division
ShAP	Attack Aviation Regiment

SmAK	Composite Aviation Corps
SRS	Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron
TRS	Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron
TRW	Tactical Reconnaissance Wing
UAA	Unified Air Army
UchAP	Training Aviation Regiment
USAF	United States Air Force
USAFFE	United States Army Forces in the Far East
USNAF	US Navy Air Force
VA	US Navy Attack Squadron
VF	US Navy Fighter Squadron



# Editor's note

For the first time, author Igor Seidov has raised the curtain that has long concealed Soviet air operations in the Korean War. Using now de-classified Soviet-era documents and interviews with Soviet pilots that flew the missions, he provides a detailed description of the 64th Fighter Aviation Corps [IAK] staging from its bases in Manchuria to contest the airspace over North Korea. Seidov offers a daily chronicle of the missions and combats conducted by the Soviet pilots, often employing first-person accounts from the pilots themselves.

Seidov does not shy away from controversy and undoubtedly some of the things he writes will raise a few hackles. As Robert F Dorr, Jon Lake and Warren Thomspon write in *Korea War Aces* (Osprey Publishing, 1995), "The ... years that have elapsed since the end of the war have allowed the traditional accounts to become entrenched, such that the version of events written by the USAF at the height of the Cold War is widely regarded as the truth."

One such long-established "truth" was the myth that the F-86 Sabre achieved an 8:1 or even great kill ratio in its favor over the MiG-15. Many of the U.S. Sabre victories came against the inexperienced Chinese and North Korean MiG pilots. Even so, since the war, the number of USAF MiG-15 claims has been steadily revised downwards, while its admitted losses of F-86s have slowly increased. Seidov offers new totals and ratios, which further challenge long-held beliefs, but he is passing along the official 64th IAK records on this matter.

To his credit, Seidov, when working with the Soviet victory claims, does attempt to cross-check many of them with American loss records, and in places, he casts doubts on the Soviet victory claims. He was ably aided in this work by Diego Fernando Zampini, who has devoted close study to American victory and loss records. At the same time, however, Seidov challenges many American victory claims, and notes that often none of the Soviet fighter regiments had any losses on a day when American pilots put in several victory claims – and this before the Chinese began flying regular missions.

This points to an issue common to all air wars since the First World War – the tendency for victory totals to be inflated. During wars, every air force wants to cast the best possible light on its men and machines to the public back home, a desire that dovetails nicely with the pilots' natural tendency to file erroneous victory claims. In the hurly-burly of aerial dogfights, pilots rarely have the luxury to observe what happens ultimately to an aircraft they have hit with machine-gun or cannon fire. Unless the pilot bails out, a wing comes off or the aircraft explodes, the stricken plane, often trailing smoke, will go into a steep, even spinning dive toward the earth. The pilot will file a victory claim, but quite often the pilot of the stricken plane is able to regain control of his aircraft and nurse it back to base. On the basis of pilots' claims, and photographic evidence in later wars, a victory will often be recorded in such cases. However, in defense of them, if an enemy airplane is put of action by combat damage, isn't this also a victory of sorts?

This process of inflating victory totals happened in the Korean War as well, and in fact, certain flight characteristics of the MiG-15 and the F-86 may have exacerbated the problem. Certain MiG-15s (and which ones couldn't be known until each was individually flight tested) exhibited flight instability at speeds close to the red line, which the Russians called a *valezhka* – the MiG would abruptly flip over and often go into a violent, sometimes fatal spin. Naturally, any pursuing, firing Sabre pilot might put in a victory claim, if he observed hits immediately prior to the MiG's plunge. But such an event was the result of the *valezhka*, not enemy fire. Meanwhile, the standard escape tactic by an F-86 Sabre pilot was to throw his jet into a steep dive, knowing that the lighter MiG-15 wouldn't be able to stay with the Sabre. Again, a Soviet pilot could sometimes misconstrue this tactic as a sign that his cannon fire had inflicted fatal damage to the Sabre. But time and again, F-86 pilots returned home, often with gaping holes in their wing surfaces, fuselage or tail fin.

To their credit, the Soviet air force command, as Seidov notes, did take steps to tighten its victory credentials, insisting wreckage of the downed UN aircraft be located and retrieved to confirm the victory. Since all the aerial combats took place over enemy territory once the lines on the ground stabilized near the 38th Parallel, the U.S. side couldn't implement such a measure, so its victory credentials inevitably remained looser. In addition, the USAF regularly attributed losses of aircraft to enemy anti-aircraft fire or even recorded them as non-combat operational losses, when Seidov shows that it was clearly an attacking MiG-15 that inflicted the fatal damage.

Thus, the reader is advised to take any victory claims in this or any other Korean air war book with a grain of salt, unless the victory can be match to a loss recorded on the opposing side. Scholars, including Igor Seidov and Diego Zampini, are busily revising the victory and loss records and this work is still ongoing, even 50 years after the war.

Seidov also casts surprising and convincing light on the extent to which US and UN fighter pilots ignored the prohibition against crossing the Yalu River. American pilots interviewed since the war have acknowledge that this happened. For example, one unidentified pilot stated, "There were a lot of airplanes shot down in Korea by guys who ... [did] not necessarily play by the rules."<sup>1</sup> 2nd Lieutenant William F. Schrimsher recalled one mission: "We were well north of the Yalu, which was a real no-no, but we did it on a fairly regular basis ..."<sup>2</sup> Now, using Soviet records and pilots' and crews' testimony, Seidov shows that American F-86s regularly circled above the mouth of the Yalu River, waiting for MiGs to take off or come in for a landing, when they would be "easy pickings". According to Soviet documents, this became a widely used tactic; Seidov shows that many of the Soviet air combat losses came in this way, and argues that the Soviet command failed to take quick steps to counter it.

Seidov strongly criticizes the Soviet system of rotating entire fighter regiments and divisions into and out of the combat theater, contrary to the US system of rotating individual pilots. As each fighter regiment left the theater, it took with it all the accumulated combat experience that was not passed on to the incoming regiments. As Seidov shows, each new fighter regiment took combat losses on its first few missions due to their inexperience. He also criticizes the political decision that was taken by the Soviet leadership to deploy Soviet Air Defense fighter regiments to Manchuria, the pilots of which had not been trained for high-speed, maneuvering fighter combat.

In this book, Seidov also discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the aircraft flown by the opposing sides in combat, the men who flew them, and the tactics they used in Korea. His discussion is balanced and thoughtful, though some of his conclusions may be surprising. All in all, *Red Devils over MiG Alley* is not the final word on the air war in Korea, but it is a substantial contribution to our understanding of it.

Stuart Britton

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Kenneth P. Werrell, *Sabres over MiG Alley* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2005), p. 132.
- 2 Warren Thompson, *F-86 Sabre Aces of the 4th Fighter Wing* (Osprey Publishing, 2006), p. 76.

# Translator's note

One of the greatest challenges I faced as translator of Igor Seidov's latest book on the Korean air was once again the identification and proper transliteration of the numerous North Korean and Chinese towns and villages mentioned in the text. The Cyrillic transliteration often differs markedly from the English transliteration, and the latter has also changed the spelling of many place names since the Korean War. For example, the major Soviet air base was known as Antung by the US Air Force in Korea, but today the accepted transliteration is Andong. I quickly learned that the Soviets during the Korean War used maps they had captured from the Japanese, so the Cyrillic transliterations are those of the Japanese transliterations of the way they pronounced the names of these places. You can imagine the difficulty this posed to this translator! The result, I'm afraid, is a bit of a mish-mash of different English transliterations, reflecting the underlying changing North Korean and South Korean Romanizations. However, I adopted a consistent English transliteration for each place and individual, in order to minimize confusion.

Another problem was identifying a proper transliteration for many of the Chinese and North Korean pilots mentioned in the text. A few of the Chinese pilots were celebrated aces, so identifying them was not difficult. The same couldn't be said about their wingmen and other pilots who soldiered through the war without achieving ace status. As for the North Korean air force, little is still known about it and the pilots who flew for it in the Korean War. Identifying them presented particular difficulties.

I couldn't have achieved even a satisfactory result in my transliteration of these place names and the identification of these pilots without the invaluable contribution of two men, who deserve special mention. I would like to express my deep appreciation to Joe L. Brennan, a researcher focusing on Korean War air combat, who helped me identify many of the North Korean places and North Korean pilots from the English transliteration of the Cyrillic and offered me suitable transliterations of their names. His own deep knowledge of the Korean Air War was immensely helpful to me. I would also like to mention Zhou Wei, a Chinese translator with good knowledge of English, who resides in the People's Republic of China, and who helped me identify many of the Chinese pilots mentioned in the text.

Finally, it was also sometimes difficult identifying an American, British or other UN pilot from the Cyrillic – direct transliteration does not often give the proper spelling. To identify these men, I used the invaluable Department of Defense Korean War Aircraft Loss Database, available on-line at [www.dtic.mil/dpmo/korea/reports/air](http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/korea/reports/air), and the Air Combat Information Group's Korean War Database of U.S. Air-to Air Victories during the Korean War, compiled by Diego Fernando Zampini, Saso Knez and Joe L. Brennan, which is available at [www.acig.org](http://www.acig.org).

Obviously, I could not have accomplished this translation without the Internet, e-mail, and the help mentioned above. Of course, I take full responsibility for any mistakes in the translation.

# Introduction and acknowledgements

This book is as if a look from the other side, from the north of the 38th Parallel, since until quite recently one could learn about this war only from the other side – south of the 38th Parallel. After the end of the Korean War, a multitude of books and publications in the periodical literature appeared in the West about the air war. Much of the information about it was one-sided and for the most part not objective – they glorified their own air forces and their “best in the world” pilots, while understating their own losses and inflating their victory totals.

Reading it, you begin to wonder – can the authors themselves really believe what they are writing? After all, it is plainly embarrassing to state that only 110 aircraft were lost in air-to-air combat in the course of a three-year major air war – even to the uninformed reader, it is clear that this cannot be true. It is understandable that these were the only figures available for Western historians, since all the data on victories and losses in this war came from the bowels of the US military organization. The Western scholars simply didn't have access to any other records. It was simply not to the advantage of the US War Department to publish accurate data on their losses in the war (just as it was disadvantageous for the Soviet Ministry of Defense in its time to do the same); the prestige of their air forces among the taxpayers, who supported the “best air force in the world” with large amounts of tax dollars, would have declined. Concealing their losses in air-to-air combats with MiGs, the Fifth Air Force's staff officers in order to polish any rough edges conceived a hardly new system for understating their real losses in aerial combats: the Americans attributed a portion of those that aircraft that failed to return from missions to enemy ground fire, while damaged aircraft that did return were frequently later written off as a non-combat loss. Take for example just the data on losses of the F-86 Sabre, which has been widely praised in Western sources as the best fighter of the war: of the 224 F-86 Sabres lost according to American data, only 110 were lost due to enemy action – less than half. The remaining losses did not result from enemy action (if so, then from what?); they either “went missing”, were lost in flight incidents, or were written off for other reasons. Isn't the figure for non-combat losses suspiciously high? To this it must be added that everyone in the West writes in one voice that the training of the American pilot was on the very highest level; tyros with just 30-50 hours of flight time in jets didn't serve in the war, as they did in the case of the 64th IAK [*istrebitel'nyi aviatsionnyi korpus*, or Fighter Aviation Corps]. But if that is the case, why were the non-combat losses so high? All the answers to these questions, and accurate data regarding who, when and why they didn't return from a combat mission, are in the military archives of the United States and in those of the other countries that participated in this war on the side of the UN coalition; however, to this day they have not yet been fully released to the public. It is known until recent times there were secret documents about this war even in the

United States. It is possible that they have since been de-classified, as they have been in Russia, but we don't yet know about them.

Reading and studying the foreign publications, one becomes increasingly convinced that all these works echo one another, that the very same data are transferred from one work to the next without questioning, which resulted in a one-sided view of this conflict. Using the fact that the given subject was for a long time kept totally classified in the Soviet Union, where nothing could be written about it, Western historians and journalists all these years wrote about the role of their own air forces in this war in glowing words, belittling everything connected with the participation of the Communist bloc's air force, knowing that there could be no refutation.

I wanted to look into this: Was everything just as the Western authors assert? For almost eight years, my colleagues and I gathered data on this war across the entire country of what was once known as the USSR, and interviewed those veterans of the 64th IAK that we could locate. In addition, information from personnel documents (flight books) and the personal archives of some of the veterans were compiled, and with the active assistance of Leonid Krylov, I managed to obtain archival materials on the 64th IAK from the Ministry of Defense's Central Archive, as well as from other de-classified sources. Everything we uncovered was poured into the given work on the air war in Korea.

I started with only archival records, but sprinkled the text with abundant excerpts from the tales of the Korean War pilot veterans themselves. In essence, they themselves are telling the story of how they fought in the skies of Korea; the author's only contribution was to gather all the material together, systematically go through it, eliminate any inaccuracies as far as possible, and produce an analysis of the participation of the Soviet Air Force in this war as a balance to all those works that downplayed the combat achievements of our pilots in the Korean War, 1950-1953. This is essentially the first major work that responsibly talks about the role of the Soviet Air Force in this war.

I hope that the given work will compensate for the bitterness of oblivion and injustice to the veterans of the war in Korea, who for many years have lived without any of the benefits owed to veterans of military combat operations, who have hidden their decorations and waited for a time when they would be remembered and given what is owed to them. That time has come!

The given book does not pretend to be a complete and all-encompassing work on the role of aviation in the Korean War – “blank spots” continue to exist in the histories of those countries that participated in the war in Korea. There is still no accurate and complete information about all of the PLAAF's [People's Liberation Army Air Force] units that served in the UAA [Unified Air Army], nor is there complete information about the North Korean KPAAF [Korean People's Army Air Force] throughout the war. I would like to see accurate and complete data on losses from the American side in this war (about their victories, the Americans have already said everything that could be said); here one cannot get by with aggregate data alone.

Thus I hope this book will provide a fresh impetus to new work on this subject. Much painstaking research work remains to be done!

In conclusion, I would like to thank everyone who actively assisted me in the work on this book, especially L.E. Krylov, A.V. Kotlovovskiy, A.A. German, A.V. Stankov. I would particularly like to thank those veterans who took the time to answer our



questions and share their stories: B.S. Abakumov, V.N. Aleksandrov, E.G. Aseev, F.G. Afanas'ev, G.N. Berelidze, Iu.B. Borisov, V.R. Bondarenko, A.Z. Bordun, N.E. Vorob'ev, I.P. Vakhrushev, A.P. Gogolev, I.A. Grechishko, G.Kh. D'iachenko, D.V. Ermakov, M.P. Zhbanov, N.M. Zameskin, S.A. Il'iashenko, A.A. Kaliuzhny, V.I. Koliadin, V.G. Kazakov, V.F. Korochkin, L.P. Kolesnikov, G.A. Lobov, V.N. Lapygin, P.S. Milaushkin, A.S. Minin, V.G. Monakhov, P.V. Minevrin, A.N. Nikolaev, G.U. Okhai, N.K. Odintsov, E.G. Pepeliaev, M.S. Ponomarev, G.M. Pivovarenko, A.I. Perekrest, L.I. Rusakov, D.A. Samoilov, M.N. Obodnikov, Iu.N. Sutiagin, V.M. Seliverstrov, V.G. Sevast'ianov, V.P. Sazhin, G.T. Fokin, S.A. Fedorets, G.I. Khar'kovsky, N.P. Chistiakov, N.K. Shelamonov, N.I. Shkodin, P.F. Shevelev, I.I. Shashva, V.I. Shoitov, L.K. Shchukin, G.G. Iukhimenko, and many, many others. Without your active assistance, this book could never have been written!

# The beginning of the war in the skies of Korea

Before the start of combat operations, the North Korean People's Army [NKPA] was equipped with approximately 150 combat, transportation and training aircraft. Although the *Polish Military Encyclopedia* puts the numerical strength of the KPAAF at 239 aircraft, including 172 Il-10 ground attack aircraft, this figure is plainly too high.<sup>1</sup> Closer to the truth are the data published in the book *Istoriia vozduzhnykh vojn*, which gives the following figures: the KPAAF numbered 120 combat aircraft, including 40 Yak-9U and Yak-9P fighters, 70 Il-10s, and 10 Po-2 combat-trainers (this total does not include Li-2 transport aircraft).<sup>2</sup> The French journal *Le Fana de l'Aviation* gives slightly higher figures for the North Korean air force before the war: a total of 162 aircraft, including 62 Il-10s, 70 Yak-9 and La-9 fighters, eight Po-2 trainers and 22 transport planes. The People's Democratic Republic of Korea [PDRK] Navy had several Soviet-manufactured MBR-2 flying boats.

According to American estimates, the KPAAF had 132 combat aircraft, including 70 Yak-3, Yak-7B, Yak-9 and La-7 fighters, plus 62 Il-10 attack aircraft. However, Soviet military advisers before the war give precise figures for the KPAAF's numerical strength and organization: the 55th AD [Aviation Division], consisting of the 56th IAP [Fighter Aviation Regiment] with 79 Yak-9s, the 57th ShAP [Attack Aviation Regiment] with 93 Il-10s, the 58th UchAP [Training Aviation Regiment] with 67 training and liaison aircraft, plus two aviation technical battalions to service the regiments, for a total of 239 aircraft and 2,829 personnel. The aircraft were concentrated on airfields located around Pyongyang. Most of the North Korean pilots and technicians had been trained between 1946 and 1950 in the Soviet Union, China, and within North Korea.

General Van Len commanded the KPAAF; his Soviet adviser was Colonel Petrachev. By the middle of 1950, one composite aviation division was officially under their command, but its complement of aircraft was much larger than the typical Soviet aviation division. All of the KPAAF's pilots had undergone training in the Soviet Union in 1949-1950.

The South Korean Air Force was small (according to American records) and had just 20 aircraft, most of which were just T-6 Texan training aircraft. To be sure, at the moment of the PDRK's invasion, several United States Air Force [USAF] C-54 and DC-4 transport aircraft were located on airbases around the Republic of Korea [ROK], which were serving the American military contingent in South Korea.

The units of the USAF, which were operating in Korea, were organizationally under the Far East Air Forces [FEAF], commanded by Lieutenant General George E. Stratemeyer. At the start of the war, FEAF had the following composition: the Fifth Air

Force, based in Japan, had the 3rd and 38th Medium Bombardment Groups [BG], the 8th Fighter-bomber Wing [FBW], the 35th Fighter Interceptor Wing [FIW], the 49th FBW, the 347th (All Weather) Fighter Group, the separate 4th (All Weather) Fighter and 6th Fighter Squadrons, the 512th Reconnaissance Squadron [RS], and the 374th Airlift Wing. The Fifth Air Force was a powerful air army consisting of more than 1,200 combat aircraft. As of 31 May 1950, this number included 42 F-82 Twin Mustang and 47 F-51 Mustang fighters, 504 F-80 Shooting Star jet fighter-bombers, 73 B-26 Invader light bombers and 27 B-29 Superfortress heavy bombers. Non-combat aircraft at its disposal included 48 reconnaissance planes of various types, 147 C-47, C-54, C-119 and other transport aircraft, as well as 282 liaison aircraft, consisting primarily of T-6 Texans and L-4 Piper Cubs. These numbers do not include the USNAF [US Navy Air Force, staging from aircraft carriers of the US Seventh Fleet, which had 118 F4U Corsair fighters, AD-1 Skyraider attack aircraft and F9F Panther jet attack aircraft. All of this air power could take off from their bases at any minute and begin combat operations on behalf of South Korea.

In addition to the Fifth Air Force in Japan, air units from other US air armies were activated for combat operations over the territory of the PDRK. The Twentieth Air Force, based on the island of Okinawa, had under its command the 51st FIW and the 31st SRS [Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron]. The Thirteenth Air Force, which was located in the Philippine Islands, included the 18th FBW and the 419th Fighter Squadron. In the Marianna Islands, there were the 19th BG, the 21st Separate Airlift Squadron, and the 514th RS.

FEAF Headquarters, which was located in Tokyo, had direct operational control over the UN air units. All the tactical aviation (fighters, fighter-bombers, light bombers, reconnaissance and transport aircraft) in the Korean theater of operations was subordinate to the Fifth Air Force. As the war progressed, formations from other US air forces, as well as from the United States itself (including from the National Guard and the Reserve) were mobilized to serve under the Fifth Air Force command. Strategic aviation (bombers and reconnaissance) came under the command of a specially-created Provisional FEAF Bomber Command. Not all of the aforementioned units and formations took part in combat operations in Korea; however, numerous aviation units, which had not previously been under FEAF, arrived in the theater of combat operations.

As for the air forces of the People's Republic of China [PRC] and the Soviet Union, which might have been able to participate in the initial stage of this conflict, actually there was not a single combat-capable aviation unit on the territory of the PRC before the Korean War. The armed forces of the PRC were not even able to repel the raids of the small Chinese Nationalist Air Force from the island of Taiwan on mainland China – the PRC had no aviation units of its own, while its anti-aircraft guns were outdated and few in numbers. Thus the PRC government appealed to the Soviet Union for assistance in creating modern and combat-ready air force and air defense units for the People's Liberation Army (PLA). For this purpose, in March 1950 the 106th Fighter Aviation Division [IAD] of the Soviet Air Defense Forces arrived in China, consisting of two fighter aviation regiments (one flying La-9 piston-engine fighters, the other MiG-15 jet fighters) and one composite aviation regiment equipped with Il-10 ground attack aircraft and Tu-2 high-speed bombers. Soviet aviation units not only trained the PLAFAF pilots and technical personnel, but also flew combat missions to cover Shanghai's industrial

and civilian targets against attacks by the Chinese Nationalist Air Force. This Soviet aviation division was the only Soviet air unit on PRC territory prior to the start of combat operations in Korea.

We'll note that on the Liaodong Peninsula, which was being leased to the Soviet Union by the PRC government, the Soviets had the 83rd SmAK [*smeshannyyi aviat-sionnyi korpus*, or composite aviation corps], commanded by Hero of the Soviet Union Lieutenant General Iu.D. Rykachev. This air corps had two fighter aviation divisions [IAD], two bomber aviation divisions [BAD], and one attack aviation division [*shturmovaia aviatsionnaia diviziia*, or ShAD]. Two Soviet naval aviation regiments were also based here, one a fighter regiment and the other a torpedo regiment. All of the units of the 83rd SmAK were equipped with piston-engine aircraft only.

In the Soviet Maritime District near the border with China and the PDRK, the powerful 54th Separate Far Eastern Air Army was based, which was in its strength fully comparable to the USAF's Fifth Air Force. However, before the start of combat operations in Korea, this Soviet air army did not have any jet aircraft.

That was the correlation of combat aviation strength of the contending sides as of 25 June 1950 – the date when the PDRK launched its invasion of South Korea. We'll now turn to a chronicle of events during the first months of the war.

## THE START OF THE WAR IN THE SKIES OF KOREA

On the morning of 25 June 1950, the USAF's 374th Transport Airlift Wing took off for the Far East with the assignment to evacuate members and their families of the American military and diplomatic missions from Seoul. F-80 and F-82 fighters, stationed on bases in Japan, escorted the transport planes and patrolled over the area of evacuation.

Pilots of the KPAAF were the first to initiate combat operations that afternoon at 1315, when two Yak-9 fighters conducted an airstrike against the South Korean airfield at Seoul, while at 1700 six Yak-9 fighters delivered one of the most effective raids of first days of the war upon the bases at Kimpo and Seoul, destroying between 7 and 10 enemy aircraft at Seoul alone. On this day the North Korean pilots opened their victory score in this war: pilots of the KPAAF's 56th IAP destroyed an American C-54 transport plane of the 374th Airlift Wing on the airfield at Kimpo. For all practical purposes, the entire South Korean Air Force was destroyed in the course of the first few days of the war on the Seoul, Kimpo and Suwon airfields.

However, already on 26 June at 0145, the USAF openly initiated combat operations in Korea. F-82 fighters from the 68th (All Weather) Fighter Squadron took off from their airbase at Itazuke (Japan) in order to conduct combat missions in the Inchon area. According to their reports, on one of the first missions in the new area of operations, the Twin Mustangs of the 68th Fighter Squadron intercepted La-7 fighters (more likely these were Yak-11 combat trainers). The flight commander Lt. William G. Hudson ordered his wing man to drop his attached fuel tanks and to attack the enemy aircraft. The Korean pilots responded by opening fire from extremely long range. The Americans also scored no hits. The first combat encounter of Americans and North Koreans thus ended without results.

The first aerial combat in this war that ended with results took place on 27 June. According to the American version, five North Korean Yak-9 fighters attempted to attack American C-54 transports, which were carrying evacuees from Seoul, but they were

intercepted by five F-82s; the Americans claimed three victories in the resulting combat. The USAF's first victory was attained by the crew of F-82G (No. 46-383), consisting of the pilot 1st Lieutenant William G. Hudson and his radar operator (RO) Lt. Carl Fraser, when they downed a Yak-9B in the area of Kimpo; two more were shot down by their comrades from the 68th and 339th Fighter Squadrons. The Americans acknowledged damage to one of their aircraft in this action.

On this same day, but a bit later, pilots of the 35th FBS, flying F-80C jet fighters, distinguished themselves by driving off an attack by nine Il-10 ground attack aircraft on the Kimpo Air Base. They shot down four and damaged a fifth Il-10, which was unable to return to its base. In this battle, 1st Lieutenant Robert E. Wayne, who downed two of the North Korean attackers, and Captain Raymond E. Schillereff and 1st Lieutenant Robert H. Dewald, who claimed one victory each, had success. However, the North Korean pilots still managed to attack the airbase, and destroyed one C-54 of the 374th Transport Airlift Wing as it was taking off, as well as seven American-made T-6 Texan South Korean trainer aircraft (not recognized by the Americans officially).

To this day also goes the first loss of an aircraft in this war that is officially recognized by the Americans. A transport C-54D was shot up by Yak-9 fighters over Korea and had to conduct a forced landing in Japan at Fukuoka. The plane was written-off, but there were no injuries among the crew.

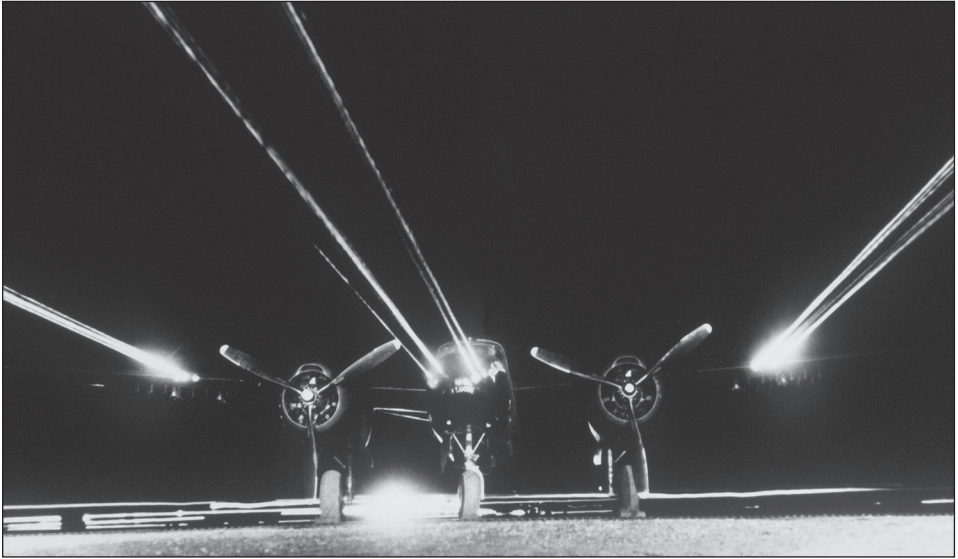
On the next day, 28 June, for the first time American B-26 Invader bombers from the 3rd BW appeared above Korea, which conducted an attack upon the Munsan railroad hub. To be sure, the attack proved costly to the Americans, since the squadron of Invaders suffered substantial losses from North Korean anti-aircraft fire: one B-26 (No.44-34238), having been damaged over the target fell into the Yellow Sea near Chin-do Island. Two more Invaders suffered serious damage: one B-26 (No.44-34478), having been badly hit by anti-aircraft fire, fell into the sea on its way back to Ashiya; the other B-26 (No.44-34379) made a forced landing at Suwon, but the crew had to burn the damaged airplane to prevent its seizure by the enemy.

After lunch, a group of B-29 bombers attacked the rail center in Seoul, as well as the bridge across the Han River. This also marked their debut in the skies of Korea.

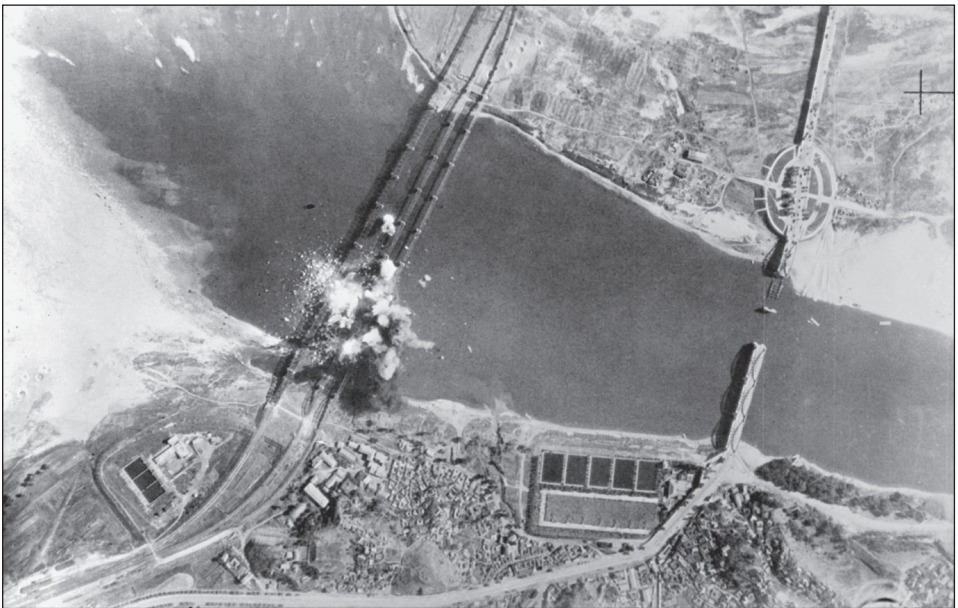
In response to these attacks by the USAF, four KPAAF Yak-9s attacked Suwon, and at 1830 another six Yaks struck this city's airfield. The NKPA command announced that as a result of these attacks, approximately ten enemy aircraft were destroyed at the Suwon Air Base, without any losses on its own side. In addition, on this day pilots of the KPAAF repulsed an attack by four American bombers on Pyongyang and shot down one of them – the future Hero of the PDRK Lieutenant Ri Tong Tong Gyu added another victory to his total. The US Fifth Air Force command acknowledged the loss of two of its aircraft on 28 June, and damage to four more.

According to an announcement by the NKPA's high command, the KPAAF conducted more than 10 raids south of Seoul on 27 and 28 June. On 27 June, it struck a railroad bridge, a military train, the Anyang rail station, military storage depots and other enemy targets along the road between Seoul and Suwon. On 28 June, the North Koreans claim that a flight of North Korean fighters tangled with four enemy bombers in the area of Kumchon and Kyejong, which were heading for Pyongyang. As a result, one bomber was shot down and the others turned back. This same flight then attacked the Suwon Air Base and destroyed two enemy four-engine aircraft and three other enemy planes





US Fifth Air Force, Korea – this USAF B-26 light bomber of the 3rd Bomb Wing has its 14 forward-firing .50 caliber machine guns tested prior to a night mission against enemy targets in North Korea. (Smithsonian National Air & Space Museum)



Airview of bombs dropped by U.S. Air Force, exploding on three parallel railroad bridges across Han River, southwest of Seoul, former capitol of Republic of Korea. Bridges were bombed early in war to delay advance of invading North Korean troops. (Smithsonian National Air & Space Museum)



on the ground. A second flight of North Korean aircraft, which also participated in this raid, shot down an enemy four-engine aircraft that was attempting to take off from this airfield. Moreover, two more enemy four-engine aircraft and three enemy light bombers were destroyed on the ground at the Suwon Air Base.<sup>3</sup>

On 29 June both sides exchanged attacks against airfields: the KPAAF conducted six air raids over the course of the day. In the morning, North Korean aircraft again bombed and strafed the Kimpo Air Base. An American fighter patrol hindered the attack. Shooting Stars from the 35th and 80th FBS of the 8th FBW reported downing five of the North Korean attackers. Lieutenants William Norris and Roy Marsh claimed a La-7 (most likely a misidentification of a Yak-11) and an Il-10 in this action.

In the course of the second raid of this day, now targeting Suwon, North Korean aircraft destroyed an American C-54 on the ground (which has not been acknowledged officially by the Americans), burned an F-82G (No.46-364), and inflicted serious damage against the airfield's terminal. On this same day, the 68th FS lost another F-82G, which for some unknown reason fell into the sea near Fukuoka; its pilot safely bailed out.

On this occasion, the airfield's air defenses were more successful; F-51 Mustang and F-80 Shooting Star fighters from the 8th and 35th FBS, which took off in response to an air raid alarm, shot down four North Korean ground attack planes and one North Korean fighter in aerial combat above Suwon without suffering any losses in return, while Gen. MacArthur watched from the ground. The Mustang pilots, who were making their debut in Korea, particularly distinguished themselves in this action, downing three Il-10s and one Yak-9; an F-80 pilot shot down the other North Korean Il-10.

In response to these North Korean attacks, on this same day a group of eight B-29 bombers from the 19th BG struck the Kimpo airfield, which was now in North Korean possession. According to the pilots' debriefings, the enemy suffered significant personnel losses. While returning to their base at Kadena, the B-29s came under fighter attack, as a result of which the gunners aboard the bombers claimed their first two victories in this war.

Meanwhile, at 1615, 18 B-26 bombers from the 3rd BG attacked the North Korean K-19 airfield at Haeju in the vicinity of Pyongyang, and according to American records destroyed 25 enemy aircraft on the ground. During this raid, the Invaders were jumped by a group of North Korean Yak-9s. While repulsing this attack, a machine-gunner on one of the Invaders, Staff Sergeant Nyle S. Mickly downed one of the fighters. But the Yaks also seriously damaged one of the B-26 Invaders (No.44-34277), and it fell into the sea before it could reach its base in Iwakuni (Japan). In addition, on 29 June North Korean ground attack aircraft struck the port at Inchon and sank 11 light enemy ships docked there, and also attacked the Inchon railroad station.

On the last day of June, the KPAAF launched more attacks on the Suwon Air Base and, according to an announcement by the command of the Korean People's Army, destroyed two four-engine enemy aircraft and seven fighters. The American pilots 1st Lieutenants John B. Thomas and Charles A. Wurster of the 36th FBS, flying F-80 jets, distinguished themselves by downing one Yak-9 each. The Americans acknowledged the loss of one F-80 and one C-54 on this day. In the North Korean press there was an article about the combat of two Yak-9s, flown by the pilots Ri Tong Gyu and his wingman Thae Kuk Song, against eight U.S. fighters. Noticing that four F-80s were diving on his wingman, Ri Tong Gyu rushed to his assistance, even though another four F-80s were attacking his fighter. Ri Tong Gyu saved his wingman, downing one of the Shooting



Four crew members of the 19th Bomb Group, an Okinawa-based veteran unit of the Far East Air Forces Bomber Command, 1950.  
(Smithsonian National Air & Space Museum)

Stars that had jumped Thae Kuk Song, but Ri's own Yak was damaged by an attack from behind of another F-80, which riddled his plane's fuel tank and forced him to bail out. Within a day he had already returned to action. After Ri's Yak went down, his wingman Thae Kuk Song nevertheless finished off the attacking F-80. So according to this version this combat ended with the score 2:1 in the North Koreans' favor, not the 2:0 score in their favor that the Americans continue to claim to this very day.

The Americans do recognize the loss of one F-80C (No.49-603) from 8th FBG's 36th FBS, flown by 1st Lieutenant Edwin T. Johnson, but according to their version, it was shot down by anti-aircraft guns 2 miles northeast of Suwon (Johnson bailed out and was rescued). Considering that at this time the Shooting Stars were acting as pure fighters, and not as ground attack aircraft, as well as the irrepressible desire of the Americans to write off the majority of their losses as attributable to impersonal "ground fire", the Korean story doesn't seem so unlikely. Moreover, the pilots of the 36th FBS did duel with Yaks precisely in the vicinity of Suwon. This indirectly attests to the recognition of their opponents' skill by the American pilots. It is possible to understand the Americans; it would have been scandalous to acknowledge the loss of an up-to-date jet fighter in a head-to-head battle against an outdated piston engine fighter flown by a North Korean pilot.

There was one more aerial combat on this day which took place in the area of Kaesong. In it, the North Korean pilots shot down one B-26.

In connection with the advance of North Korean forces, the evacuation of the Suwon Air Base began. The American aircraft transferred to the K-10 Air Base at Chinhae, situated 11 miles east of Pusan. During the next attack by North Korean fighters, one C-54D (No.42-72468) of the 374th Troop Carrier Wing's 22nd Troop Carrier Squadron went down while climbing after takeoff and crashed and burned directly on the airbase, carrying away the lives of 23 crew members and passengers. Another C-54D of the same unit, which was also apparently damaged by the attacking fighters, crashed on the approach to Pusan. In addition on this day, two L-5 artillery spotter aircraft from the South Korean Air Force's 1st Squadron were shot down by North Korean anti-aircraft fire.

At the end of June 1950, the No. 77 Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Squadron arrived in Korea. It was subordinated to the USAF's Fifth Air Force.

The results of the first week of the war in the air were as follows:

- a. The actions of the KPAAF were well-prepared and well-organized, which led to its superiority in the air in the initial stage of combat operations. As a result of the planned and thoroughly prepared airstrikes against the South Korean network of airfields, almost the entire South Korean Air Force was destroyed on the ground – altogether 16 aircraft (eight L-4 Pipers, five L-5 Stinsons and three T-6 Texans). In addition, approximately 10 USAF aircraft were destroyed on the same South Korean airbases.
- b. Aerial combat was of a limited nature and conducted primarily against the USAF, which was covering the South Korean airfields, from which American diplomatic personnel were being evacuated. The USAF at this time concentrated upon driving off attacks by the North Korean Air Force on these airbases and conducted no large-scale operations against North Korea prior to 29 June, when the USAF began launching attacks against targets on the territory of the PDRK.
- c. The losses of the two sides over the first week of combat were as follows: in addition to the complete destruction of the South Korean Air Force, the USAF command acknowledged the loss of 12 aircraft on the ground and in the air, although according to the data of the opposing side, the losses of the USAF were twice as large. The losses of the KPAAF amounted to 14 aircraft: 8 Il-10 ground attack aircraft and 6 Yak-9 fighters.

The Americans officially break down their losses for various reasons over the first six days of aerial combat in June 1950 as three C-54s, five B-26s, three F-82s and one F-80. Half of these losses were due to the KPAAF. Yet the Americans officially recognize the loss of only three aircraft in aerial combat against the North Koreans. Meanwhile, according to the accounts of American pilots, the North Koreans lost 21 aircraft in aerial combat and another 25 on the ground.

## THE USAF REIGNS SUPREME IN THE SKIES OF KOREA

At dawn on 3 July 1950, 16 Firefly bombers and nine Seafire fighters were launched from the British aircraft carrier HMS *Triumph* and at 0815 struck the airbase at Haeju,

destroying hangars and other facilities, and returned to the *Triumph* without any losses. On the same day, the American aircraft carrier *Valley Forge* launched 16 F4U Corsairs and 12 A-1 Skyraider attack aircraft of the USNAF's VF-54 and VA-55 Squadrons. These strike aircraft were covered by eight F9F-2 Panther jet fighters from the same carrier's VF-51. Their assignment was to hit the Pyongyang Air Base.

The first to appear above the airfield were the Panthers, which pounced upon an element of Yak-9 fighters as it was taking off in response to the attack and shot both fighters down, while the second flight of Panthers attacked a hardstand where enemy aircraft were parked and set fire to one transport airplane on the ground. In a second pass over the airfield, the Panthers destroyed two more aircraft on the ground. The arriving Corsairs and Skyraiders completed the destruction of the airfield, destroying several more aircraft parked on it, three hangars, a fuel depot and almost all of the base's remaining facilities. The entire group returned to their carrier without losses. On this mission, the US Navy pilots achieved their first aerial victory: VF-51's Lt. (jg) Leonard Plog in his Panther shot down one Yak-9 over the Pyongyang Air Base.

On 4 July, aircraft of the US Navy again struck various targets in North Korea, destroying several railroad bridges and more than a dozen locomotives. This time, the fire of the North Korean anti-aircraft guns was more accurate – four VA-55 Skyraiders received damage, and one of them while making its landing on the *Valley Forge* leaped over the arresting cables at high speed and crashed into aircraft parked on the deck in front of it. One Skyraider and two Corsairs were totally demolished, and six more aircraft received heavy damage.

The KPAAF on 3 July also operated actively and continued to bomb and strafe retreating enemy troops between Seoul and Suwon and also attacked the airfield at Suwon. In aerial combat on this day, the North Korean pilots shot down one enemy aircraft.

In the first week of July 1950, the Headquarters of the US Fifth Air Force boastfully declared that they had achieved their goal, and that the Korean People's Army Air Force had been destroyed. So the surprise of the American command was all the stronger, when during an operation at Taejon (7-21 July 1950), North Korean pilots again appeared over the battlefield and inflicted substantial losses on enemy ground troops and bomber units. In this battle, the forces of the United States Army suffered their first major defeat.

On 7 July, the NKPA launched an offensive in the direction of Taejon, which ended on 20 July with the capture of the city. An unpleasant "surprise" for the American command was the active participation of the North Korean Air Force, which the American generals had already "buried". On 7 July, North Korean pilots shot down two airplanes in aerial combats, and on 9 July, they claimed two American fighters. According to the American command, over the period of fighting between 25 June and 11 July, the USAF lost 20 aircraft. This number does not include five C-54 transport aircraft and one RAAF F-51, which were all lost for unknown reasons.

Over the period between 7 July and 20 July, the North Korean fighter squadrons under the commands of Kim Ki Ok, Ri Mun Sun and Ri Tong Gyu shot down 10 enemy aircraft, including a B-29 bomber downed by a North Korean Yak-9U on 12 July. In connection with this, the Presidium of the PDRK's Supreme People's Soviet on 23 July 1950 awarded the KPAAF's 56th IAP the Guards title for its successful combat actions in the operation at Taejon, so it became the 56th GIAP [Guards Fighter Aviation Regiment].

North Korean pilots had particularly good results in combats between 12 and 17 July. For example, in one action on 12 July in the region of Chochiwon against 20 US fighters, the KPAAF's 56th IAP shot down three American planes – two B-26s and one fighter, without any losses to itself. On 13 July, two North Korean pilots, Kim Ki Ok and Ri Mun Sun attacked 10 enemy aircraft in the area of Pyongtaek and downed three of them, after which they safely returned to base. In addition on this day, a North Korean Yak-9 shot down an American L-5 artillery spotter: the crew consisting of 1st Lieutenant Bill Dussell and observer 2nd Lieutenant Don Bazzurro were adjusting artillery fire onto targets in and around Taejon. Their plane was patrolling at an altitude of 2,000 feet right behind enemy lines. Suddenly it was jumped by a North Korean Yak-9, but Dussell managed to evade the first attack by diving to extremely low altitude. On the second firing pass, the Yak pilot didn't miss and with a burst shattered a wing of the aircraft, after which Dussell lost control of it. The plane came down behind enemy lines. The American pilots were lucky. The crash had left Dussell unconscious, but alive, while Bazzurro managed to pull himself out of the wreckage despite a broken leg. With the help of a 12-year-old boy, Bazzurro made it back to UN territory and sent a patrol to evacuate Dussell.

On the following day, North Korean Yak-9s clashed with eight F-80s. Pilot Ri Tong Gyu shot down one Shooting Star, but his aircraft was also fatally struck and he had to take to the silk. His wingman Thae Kuk Song was also shot down in this battle. The KPAAF pilots had tangled with pilots of the 35th FBS. Major Vincent Cardarell and Captain Wayne Redcliff each received credit for one Yak-9.

On 5 July, a pair of Yak-9s attacked four B-26s above Taejon. According to American records, one B-26 was damaged in this action, which made a forced belly landing on the runway of the Taejon Air Base. According to an announcement by the NKPA command, there were six American B-26s in this clash, and two of them were shot down.

In connection with the sharp increase in the KPAAF's activity, the commander of the United States Army Forces in the Far East [USAFEF] General MacArthur was compelled to demand a major air offensive to suppress the KPAAF. The offensive began with the bombing of the Kimpo Air Base on 15 July. Airstrikes by the USNAF and the Royal Air Force [RAF] against the network of airbases in Korea continued for five days. On 20 July, the conclusion of this operation was announced.

Despite enemy air superiority, the North Korean pilots continued to offer resistance to the USAF. For example, on 16 July Americans launched bombing strikes against targets in and around Seoul, which were intercepted by fighters of the 56th IAP. Two American planes were shot down. Pilots of the KPAAF shot down another two American aircraft in aerial combat on 18 July, and also attacked an enemy column of 100 vehicles in the Taegu area, destroying around 60 of them.

Over four days of the operation (between 15 and 18 July), American pilots scored only one victory, when on 17 July Captain Francis Clarke of the 35th FBS downed one Yak-9 in his F-80 jet. Their luck changed on 19 July, when pilots of the USAF 8th FBG destroyed 17 enemy aircraft in aerial combat. Pilots of this Group's 36th FBS did particularly well by downing eight enemy aircraft. Pilots of the 8th FBS in their F-80s did them one better by claiming nine victories on this day. However, the NKPA command announced that on 19 July, pilots of the first Hero of the PDRK Kim Ki Ok's squadron alone shot down five American aircraft. The American command acknowledged the loss of two F-80s from the 36th FBS in combats with the Yak-9s, as well as the loss of



two B-29 bombers – one of which struggled back to Kadena Air Base and crashed upon landing. The heated action continued on 20 July, when North Korean pilots downed two more enemy aircraft south of Taejon, while pilots of the 8th FBG claimed two Yak-9s.

On the whole, the KPAAF operated successfully in the Taejon operation, despite the numerical and qualitative superiority of the USAF in the air. On 17 July 1950, twelve NKPA combatants were the first in the PDRK to be awarded the high title of Hero of the People's Democratic Republic of Korea. Among their number were the North Korean aces Kim Ki Ok, Ri Tong Gyu and Ri Mun Sun, who together shot down more than 20 American aircraft. For example, Ri Tong Gyu during June-July 1950 personally downed eight American airplanes, including one B-29, while his regimental comrade Kim Ki Ok scored 10 victories over this same period, including one B-29.

## AN UNEQUAL CONTEST

The NKPA's offensive operations directed toward Taegu, begun on 20 July, continued until 20 August. The NKPA was forced to conduct this offensive without the support of its own aviation, since the American airstrikes against the airfields of the PDRK, as well as aerial combat losses, forced the NKPA command to withdraw its badly damaged air units to bases near the Manchurian border for regrouping and refitting. Thus in August 1950, the KPAAF made only rare appearances in the skies of South Korea. Two more aerial combats took place before the end of July, in which American pilots shot down two North Korean aircraft. On 24 July, a pilot of the 8th FBG, Lieutenant Colonel William Samuels, shot down an Il-10, while on the next day Lieutenant Colonel L. Harold Prince of the 8th FBS claimed another victory.

In August 1950, the USAF completely ruled the skies of Korea. According to an order issued by the American command, the USAF and USNAF undertook the systematic bombing of administrative-political centers and industrial targets throughout the PDRK, hoping to spread fear among the population and to break the North Korean people's will to resist.

Already by 31 July, the chiefs of staff of the USAF had prepared a list of 53 targets on the territory of the PDRK subject to destruction. The list started with the port of Wonsan, the capital city of Pyongyang, and the cities of Hamhung and Chongjin. To assist with this objective, formations of the Strategic Air Command (SAC), equipped with B-29 and B-50 bombers, were mobilized.

At the start of the Korean War, only one bomber group was activated to support the combat operations in Korea – the 19th BG, which transferred from the island of Guam to Okinawa for this purpose. However, this proved to be insufficient, and at the beginning of July 1950 two more groups from SAC, the 98th and 307th BG, moved into the theater of operations. The two groups of B-29s (the 19th and 307th) operated from Kadena Air Base on the island of Okinawa, while the 98th BG was based at Yokota Air Base near Tokyo.

From the beginning of July and until 25 September 1950, B-29 bombers conducted around 4,000 combat sorties (3,159 according to other data) and dropped 30,000 metric tons of bombs on targets in North Korea. During these attacks, according to the American historian George Stewart, a total of four B-29s were lost, with three of them falling victim to North Korean fighters.



In addition to the SAC bombardment groups, which operated against targets deep within North Korea, American piston-engine and tactical aviation actively conducted airstrikes in support of the ground forces. In this period the American command of the Fifth Air Force initiated an operation under the code name “Interdiction”, the main task of which was to isolate the NKPA, deprive it of key supplies, and fragment it into isolated units. The Americans targeted roads and railroads, bridges, ferries, fords, tunnels, supply depots, reserve positions, and both moving and stationary transportation vehicles. General MacArthur issued the order, “Stop everything that is moving. Cause everything that is motionless to move. Any male person should be viewed as a legitimate target.” The primary weapon of this aerial offensive was the Fifth Air Force’s fighter-bomber force, which was equipped with piston-engine F-51D Mustang and F-80 Shooting Star jet fighter-bombers.

At the start of the war in Korea, the USAF had a total of 30 F-51D Mustangs, which were located in storage in Japan. Ten of them were immediately handed over to the South Korean Air Force with the same number of pilot-instructors. The remaining 20 Mustangs were used to form the temporary 51st Squadron, which began combat operations in Korea on 15 July 1950 from the Taegu Air Base in South Korea. In addition, approximately 20 more F-51Ds were partially equipping the 35th, 36th and 8th Squadrons, though the majority of these squadrons’ planes consisted of the F-80 Shooting Star. Soon the 35th and 36th Squadrons were combined to form the 8th Fighter-bomber Group, which began combat operations on 29 June 1950 from the Ashiya Air Base in Japan.

From the very start of combat, B-26 Invader light attack bombers of the 3rd BG (consisting of the 8th and 13th BS), which was based in Iwakuni, Japan, began to operate against target in the enemy’s shallow rear. After winning air superiority, many units of the Fifth Air Force switched to operate against ground targets, since there quickly appeared an acute need by ground units of the U.S. and Republic of Korea [ROK] armies for direct air support on the battlefield, especially during the retreat in July 1950.

However, the force available to the Fifth Air Force at the start of Operation Interdiction was plainly inadequate. Since the B-29 groups required F-80s to escort them through enemy airspace, the 347th All-Weather Fighter Group, consisting of the 68th and 339th Squadrons, which were equipped with all-weather, piston-engine F-82G Twin Mustang fighters, was redirected to work against ground targets. Soon the 347th All-Weather Fighter Group was reinforced with another F-82 squadron – the 4th Separate Squadron. The entire group of Twin Mustangs operated from the Itazuke Air Base in Japan.

This was still not enough, though, in order to carry out MacArthur’s strict order to destroy everything that was moving. On 5 July 1950, the aircraft carrier *Boxer* departed the United States, with 145 F-51 Mustangs on board.

At the end of July 1950, No. 77 Squadron of the Royal Australian Air Force [RAAF], equipped with 26 F-51D Mustangs, began to operate over the battlefields in Korea from the Pohang Air Base. Deep aerial reconnaissance was conducted by the SAC’s 31st Reconnaissance Squadron, which was equipped with RB-29 and RB-50 airplanes, as well as later with the RB-45 Tornado reconnaissance jet. Reconnaissance over the battlefield and in the enemy’s shallow rear was conducted by reconnaissance RF-80As of the 8th TRS [Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron] and reconnaissance RF-51s of the 45th TRS. The aerial armada of the USAF also included more than 100 F-80 jet fighter-bombers of the 8th, 51st and 18th FBG.

Of course, the numerically weak air force of the PDRK could not oppose this armada, and in August 1950 it only made sporadic appearances in the sky. Thus, on 3 August Mustangs from the 18th FBG's 67th Squadron intercepted and shot down two Yak-9s; credit for the victories went to Captains Edward Hellend and Howard Price. On 10 August, Major Arnold "Moon" Mullins of the same 67th Squadron spotted and attacked a field airstrip in his Mustang and destroyed three Yak-9 fighters on the ground. The Americans had no other encounters in the air with the enemy in the month of August.

The only successful sortie by North Korean pilots was on 22 August, when two Yak-9Us bombed the British destroyer H.M.S. *Comus* just off the eastern shore of Korea and seriously damaged it. However, the NKPA command announced that on this day, its air force had sunk two enemy ships. According to it, one group of North Korean planes sank a U.S.-built South Korean minesweeper, while two attack planes sank an American torpedo boat between the islands of Muchang and Kado near the mouth of the Yalu River. Pilots Ri Ra Sun and Yang Chae Hung delivered the fatal strikes and safely returned to base.

After re-equipping their thinned air units with new aircraft that had arrived from the USSR, the KPAAF began flying missions again, and on 1 September alone, fighters of the 56th GIAP shot down three enemy planes in aerial combat over Taegu – including one F-51 and one L-4 of the South Korean Air Force. On 9 September, defending Siniuju and Pyongyang from B-29 attacks, North Korean pilots declared that they had shot down four enemy bombers. The American acknowledged the loss of two of their B-29s from the 19th and 92nd BG.

The Americans, sensing the renewed activity of the KPAAF, immediately struck their airbases again. The USNAF and air units of the participating UN countries also played an active role in suppressing the enemy air force, as well as in supporting their own ground troops.

Prior to 1 August, the American Seventh Fleet in the area of Korea had only one aircraft carrier, the *Valley Forge*, but a second aircraft carrier, *Philippine Sea*, arrived at the beginning of August, as well as two small escort carriers, *Sicily* and *Badoeng Strait*, two days later. Already from 3 August 1950, piston-engine aircraft from these aircraft carriers began combat sorties in the Pusan area. They conducted more than 1,000 combat sorties prior to 14 September. On 15 September 1950, the Americans made an amphibious landing at Inchon on the Yellow Sea coast, and another landing at Samchok from the Sea of Japan – both in the rear of the NKPA. Already by 18 September, the invading force had seized Inchon and Kimpo. By 28 September, Seoul was firmly in their grasp, and then Suwon as well.

Caught by surprise by this powerful assault from the sea, air units of the NKPA hastily fled north, deep into the interior of North Korea. However, this didn't take place successfully everywhere: at the Kimpo Air Base, the Americans seized several intact North Korean aircraft. The North Koreans had destroyed most of their airplanes before retreating, but hadn't had time to get to three of them, and these became trophies for the Americans. The two Il-10s and one Yak-9T were soon disassembled and shipped back to the United States.

Even before the invasion, pilots of the 8th FBS in their F-80s had attacked one of the airfields, and Lt. Colonel Harold Prince had destroyed three Yak-9 fighters on the ground. In September 1950 there were two more aerial combats, but given their overwhelming

superiority in the air, victory went to the American pilots: on 28 September 1950, 1st Lieutenant Ralph Hall of the 35th FBS, flying a Mustang, shot down one Yak-9, though it is true that pilots of the 56th GIAP also downed one F-51 from the 39th FBS in return. On 30 September, Captain Ernest Fokelberg of the 8th FBS, flying an F-80 Shooting Star, shot down two enemy aircraft.

However, despite the UN air force's evident superiority in the air, the North Korean pilots were still able to offer resistance to the enemy, even though their numbers were small. For example, on 1 September 1950, a North Korean Yak-9 shot down an L-4 observation aircraft from the South Korean Air Force's 1st Squadron. The crew of this plane, 1st Lieutenant Cheon Bong-Sik and 1st Lieutenant Sin Jeong-Hyeon, were both killed. There are also records that show that on 9 September, a B-29 bomber (No. 44-62084) of the 92nd BG's 395th BS was shot down by the KPAAF. Some of the crew was killed, while the remainder was taken prisoner by the North Koreans. Finally, on 28 September an F-51D from the 18th FBW's 39th FBS was shot down by Yak-9 fighters; its pilot, Donald L. Pitchford, was killed. Thus, the North Korean Air Force was still able to inflict rare, but painful blows to the enemy, which speaks to the fact that the KPAAF was still alive!

After the U.S. Marines' landing at Inchon, the NKPA was compelled to retreat from the southern regions of the peninsula. Then American and South Korean troops, pursuing the retreating North Korean units, invaded the territory of the PDRK. On 14 October, Wonsan was occupied. Pyongyang fell on 20 October 1950. By 24 October, separate units of the UN forces were approaching the Korean-Chinese border, and on 26 October, they captured Hungnam. After taking Pyongyang, MacArthur loudly declared that the war was over.

In September-October 1950, the KPAAF was deprived of many of its bases and was simply demoralized. It made only rare appearances in the air. For example, in the middle of October it launched several airstrikes against enemy troops in the Kimpo, Kaesong, Seoul and Inchon areas, and on 27 October bombed an enemy column in the Anju region. By the middle of October, the KPAAF had only one remaining operational airbase – the Sinuiju Air Base on the border with China, which was subjected to continuous attacks by the USAF. The KPAAF suffered heavy losses on the ground. There were no aerial battles at all in October 1950.

In October 1950, despite the courage of the North Korean pilots, the first stage of the air war in the skies of Korea ended with the complete defeat of the PDRK's air force. The destruction of the KPAAF by the USAF and USNAF in the air and on the ground at the very start of the war adversely affected the pace of the North Korean offensive. In the course of the first month of the war, the KPAAF had suffered continual attrition at the hands of American aviation in aerial combats and on airfields. According to American estimates, of the 150 combat aircraft available to the KPAAF at the start of the war, there remained only 18 by the end of August, which could undertake only sporadic, harassing attacks on Seoul. According to Soviet data, by 21 August 1950, the KPAAF had 21 combat aircraft, of which 20 were ground attack aircraft and the other a fighter. Given such a situation, it was impossible to count upon offering resistance to the USAF. In the NKPA's anti-aircraft artillery units, there were no more than 80 37mm and 85mm anti-aircraft guns, which could not cover even the most important targets, either at the front or in the rear.

The complete superiority of the enemy air force in the air deprived the NKPA of the possibility to conduct a regrouping of its forces and also severely complicated the delivery of supplies to the front.

The second stage of the air war began on 1 November 1950. Experienced pilots of the Soviet Air Force in jet MiG-15s began preparing to make their entrance into it.

## THE PREPARATIONS OF THE SOVIET AIR FORCE FOR COMBAT OPERATIONS IN KOREA

In view of the collapsing NKPA and the headlong advance of the UN forces into North Korea after the Inchon landing, at the beginning of October 1950 the North Korean leader Kim Il Sung appealed to the PRC for assistance. The leadership of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee, headed by Mao Zedong, made the swift decision to send Chinese troops into Korea, because the combat operations were approaching the Chinese border. Indeed, its leadership had no confidence that the American forces would stop there, because political leaders in the United States had issued too many threat against the PRC.

Peng Dehuai became the commander of the so-called Chinese People's Volunteer Army (CPV). Intensive preparations of three Chinese armies for crossing the Yalu River to launch combat operations in Korea began on 4 October 1950. Simultaneously, the PRC leadership turned to the USSR for support in the form of air cover for the CPV forces on the territory of North Korea, since neither the PRC nor the PDRK had the necessary quantity of combat aircraft to carry out this combat mission. For all practical purposes, the KPAAF had been wiped out, while the People's Liberation Army Air Force [PLAAF] was still in its infancy. Moreover, neither the KPAAF nor the PLAAF had any jet aircraft or experienced flight personnel. However, on 10 October, the Soviet side informed the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee that it was impossible at the given time to send Soviet air units to support CPV forces in Korea, as had been previously agreed upon, because it hadn't had time to prepare well for the operation.

Despite the refusal of the Soviet side to support the CPV forces from the air, the Chinese leadership nevertheless decided to introduce its forces into Korea. On 19 October 1950 at 2000, CPV armies crossed the Yalu River in three places and entered North Korean territory.

The problem at the time was that by October 1950, there were in fact several Soviet aviation divisions on Chinese territory, which were training Chinese pilots for the PLAAF. However, only one of them was equipped with jet fighters – the 151st GIAD, which consisted of three Guards aviation regiments and had arrived in China at the end of summer in 1950.

So it was the 151st GIAD with its 28th, 72nd and 139th GIAP and its airbase security battalions that became the first Soviet aviation unit to enter the war in Korea. By 11 August 1950, it had assembled on the Mukden, Liaoyang and Anshan complex of airfields, where it began to carry out the tasks of providing air cover over military and civilian sites of northeast China and the forces of the PLA's 13th Army Group, and retraining Chinese fighter pilots to fly the MiG-15 jet fighter. Before departing for Manchuria, all the Soviet markings on the MiGs had been removed, and upon their arrival in China, all the personnel were issued Chinese military uniforms.

When combat operations had started in Korea, the 5th GIAD of the Moscow District PVO [*protivo vozduшной oborony*, or Air Defense Forces], which was commanded by Colonel Ivan Viacheslav Belov, had been alerted. This fighter division consisted of the 28th GIAP (commanded by Colonel A. Ia. Sapozhnikov) and the 72nd GIAP (commanded by Lt. Colonel A. I. Volkov). At the beginning of July 1950, the division was reinforced with one more fighter regiment, the 139th GIAP (commanded by Lt. Colonel D. G. Zorin). The division was hastily loaded upon trains and sent in secrecy to China. When crossing the Soviet-Chinese border, the technicians and other military personnel of the 5th GIAD donned Chinese military uniforms, and upon their arrival on 10 August in Mukden (present day Shenyang), all their personal documents were taken away and replaced by new Chinese-language documents that indicated they were Chinese volunteers. The 5th GIAD also received a new designation as the 151st GIAD. After the MiG-15 jets (with the RD-45A engine) were reassembled on Mukden's North and Northwest Air Bases, the division's regiments were dispersed on the three airfields of northeast China – Mukden, Liaoyang and Anshan.

By October 1950, the pilots of this division with part of their strength were covering industrial sites in northeast China and conducting daily combat patrols, while the remaining pilots, who had experience in flight instruction, were training Chinese pilots in Mukden. The group of Soviet instructors had available for this purpose several Yak-11 trainers and four Yak-17 jet trainers. The Chinese trainees first learned to handle these before taking a seat in the MiG-15 combat jet.



Major General of Aviation I.V.  
Belov, the first commander of the  
64th IAK.



In addition to the military advisers, who were assisting officers of the NKPA in the planning and preparation of combat operations at the front, and training cadres on PDRK territory, a significant number of Soviet air force military specialists were preparing the pilots of the North Korean aviation divisions and pilots of the PRC for combat operations against the Americans. This task was successfully carried out. In the last four months of 1950 alone, the leading flight and technical personnel of the 151st GIAD, which had been assigned as instructors, retrained 93 pilots and 357 technicians on the MiG-15bis. The services of our compatriots were duly recognized by the enemy, with which the Soviet pilots dueled in the air for approximately three years. By the end of the Korean War, China, which had not possessed any jet aircraft before the start of the war, now had an air force inferior only to those of the United States and the Soviet Union.

Regiments of the 151st GIAD, having wrapped up their instruction work (only 8-10 of the pilot-instructors remained in Mukden), were shifted closer to the border with Korea. By 1 November 1950, the division was prepared for combat operations in the skies of Korea. But the question asks itself: Why could the Soviet Air Force, which was in no way inferior to the USAF, allot only one of its aviation divisions against the entire US Fifth Air Force? Simply put, in the autumn of 1950, the Soviet Air Force could not provide adequate cover to both the industrial sites in northeast China and the CPV offensive in Korea because it lacked sufficient strength.

The broader situation in the Far East and particularly in the Soviet Maritime District was very tense – the Cold War was in full swing! Dozens of USAF and USNAF reconnaissance planes were prowling along the Soviet borders, often violating it, and there were frequent and group incursions into Soviet airspace by American aircraft. Thus, in order to guard our entire boundary in the Far East, more than one air army was necessary: the 54th Separate Air Army was covering the Maritime District, the 2nd Air Army PVO was responsible for the Khabarovsk District, the 27th Air Army was protecting the Sakhalin Islands, and so forth.

However, at the start of the Korean War, these air armies did not have a single jet aircraft. The regiments of these air armies' divisions were equipped with piston-engine aircraft of the types La-7, La-9, Yak-3, Yak-9, P-63 Kingcobra (from the American Lend-Lease program), Il-10, Tu-2, Pe-2, Il-4, A-20 Boston and others. Naturally, it would have been senseless to send these air units into the furnace of a war, where the USAF was making wide use of jet aircraft, since this likely would have meant heavy losses to our side. Indeed, the bitter lesson that the KPAAF had received from the jet aircraft of the USAF in the recent fighting spoke for itself.

In August 1950, only the 52nd Air Army's MiG-equipped 303rd IAD, which had been covering Moscow, arrived in the Maritime District. However, even it could not be sent into China, because it had received a strict order to focus on quickly retraining the units of the 54th Separate Air Army on jets and to cover the eastern borders of the USSR. The situation in this area was extremely tense: the border was troubled, experiencing constant violations and provocations from the American aircraft.

Two incidents in particular that occurred shortly before the introduction of CPV forces into Korea sorely tested the patience of the Soviet side. On 4 September 1950, not far from the Soviet naval base in Port Arthur, a Soviet A-20 reconnaissance aircraft of the Pacific Ocean Fleet's 36th MTAP [*minno-torpednyi aviatsionnyi polk*, or torpedo aviation regiment) was attacked over the Yellow Sea by 11 F4U Corsairs from VF-53 (from the carrier

*Valley Forge*). The Soviet aircraft was on a training flight and was attacked and shot down by US Navy fighters without any justification – all three members of the crew perished.

A little more than a month later, on 8 October 1950 in the Maritime District, deep within Soviet territory and 100 kilometers from the Soviet-Korean border, at 1617 local time, two USAF F-80 fighters that had penetrated Soviet airspace in the vicinity of Lake Khanko attacked the Soviet Sukhaia Rechka military airbase, where the Kingcobra-equipped 821st IAP was based at the time. The regiment was preparing to conduct planned training exercises in the given Maritime area. The two American jet fighter-bombers unexpectedly appeared from behind a low range of hills, and having made a climbing turn over the airfield, dove upon some loaded and fueled parked aircraft that were on standby status, and attacked them with all their onboard weapons. The attack was so unexpected that no one understood who was attacking or why. Then the regiment command made an unwise decision and refused to launch readied aircraft to intercept the intruders. The regiment commander believed that this would lead to greater losses and casualties.

As a result, the pair of F-80s without any interference, having sealed the Soviet airfield, conducted two attacks upon the parked Kingcobras before slipping away with impunity into North Korean airspace. Fortunately, there were no casualties, not even any wounded. However, eight of the 821st IAP's aircraft were damaged, but only one of them had to be written-off. The remaining seven Kingcobras were quickly made serviceable.

In connection with this incident, a vigorous protest was delivered to the American side, but the Americans only expressed regret over it. They viewed the matter as a case of misunderstanding. As they explained it, two young pilots of the USAF 49th FBG had mistakenly crossed into Soviet airspace, misperceived the Soviet airfield as a North Korean one, and attacked it.

Of course, this was all simply a diplomatic smoke screen. In reality, the incident was a deliberate provocation on the part of the United States, because the weather on this day was clear with an unlimited ceiling, and it was impossible to become disoriented. In addition, the parked aircraft were clearly marked with Soviet recognition symbols and the approach route of the F-80s indicated a well-planned operation.

The cited incidents only sharpened the already tense situation on the border with Korea, which had drawn additional Soviet ground and air units to the area (five Soviet motorized divisions were ready to be sent to Korea). In addition, the incidents nudged the Soviet leadership to take more decisive steps with respect to rendering assistance to the PDRK. A flood of Soviet weapons poured into the Far East and into China as well, including the new aviation jet equipment – MiG-15 fighters.

Already in the second half of October 1950, four jet-equipped Soviet IAD arrived in China: the 328th IAD (with the 126th IAP and the 57th and 137th GIAP, as well as the separate 180th GIAP from the 15th GIAD, which became part of the newly created 20th IAD that was strengthening Beijing's air defenses), the 17th IAD (with the 28th and 445th IAP), and the 144th IAD PVO (consisting of the 383rd and 439th IAP). Each regiment was equipped with 30-32 MiG-9, one or two Yak-17 trainers, one Yak-11 and one Po-2. The main assignment of these Soviet aviation divisions was to retrain Chinese and North Korean pilots to fly jet aircraft. The primary combat aircraft in the cited aviation divisions was the MiG-9 fighter, which was already by this time too outdated to take on the jets of the US Fifth Air Force in battle. The Soviet pilots of these newly arrived aviation divisions began training the flight personnel of our allies already in October.



In October 1950, a new Soviet IAD, which received the designation 50th IAD, began to form up on the Liaodong Peninsula. It was organized on the basis of two regiments with experienced pilots, and was armed with MiG-15 jets that had just arrived in Liaodong. Colonel A.I. Khalutin was in charge of forming the division. This division was created especially for participation in combat operations in the skies of Korea.

In addition, in October 1950 the 186th ShAD from the Zabaikal Military District's 45th Air Army was sent to China. It had been necessary to form on its basis an attack aviation division consisting of two regiments with 30 Il-10 attack aircraft in each, plus an additional separate attack regiment.

In the month of November 1950, two more Soviet aviation divisions arrived in the PRC. These were the 297th IAD with its subordinate 304th and 401st IAP (equipped with La-11s), and the 162nd BAD, on the basis of which the PLAAF 8th BAD was to be formed (consisting of the 838th and 970th BAP, each with 30 Tu-2 high-speed bombers) and sent to Mukden by 10 November. In addition, several dozen Soviet instructors arrived in China to teach in the flight schools of the PRC and the PDRK.

Finally, at the end of summer 1950, at the insistence of the North Koreans, Stalin offered a compromise to Pyongyang and sent a telegram with the following contents to Comrade Shtykov at the Soviet Embassy in North Korea:

To Comrade SHTYKOV, for Comrade KIM IL SUNG.

I received your telegram about the preparation of pilot cadres with a delay due to technical problems.

According to the opinion of our military leaders, it is most expedient to solve this problem in the following manner:

1. Organize the preparation of 200-300 pilots from among the ranks of Korean students on the territory of MANCHURIA at the already operational flight school in YANGTZE. Soviet instructors will be sent for this supplementary contingent of trainees.
2. The preparation of pilots for two jet fighter regiments can be organized by one of our MiG-15 divisions, which is located in MANCHURIA. After the training of the pilots, our MiG-15 airplanes will be turned over to the North Koreans for this complement.

As concerns the preparation of pilots for one bomber aviation regiment, it will be more convenient to train them in our Korean school in the Maritime District. The equipment, Tu-2 aircraft, will also be turned over to the bomber regiment.

3. We are in agreement to accept another 120 men into our Korean flight school located in the Maritime for the training of their aviation technicians and ground attack pilots.
4. It will be better for the Korean pilots to receive flying practice there, where they will be trained, that is to say in MANCHURIA and with us in the Maritime District.

In the case of your agreement with these proposals, our military command will be given the corresponding orders.

Fyn Si [Stalin]

Naturally, in the Soviet leadership no one could disagree with Stalin and of course all of these directives, which were spelled out in the given code message under the contrived Chinese family name of Fyn Si, were immediately accepted by the leadership and implemented straight away.

The Korean flight school, which Stalin mentioned in the coded message to Comrade Shtykov, was located near Khorol' in the Maritime District. Colonel (in reserve) Vasilii Nikolaevich Sinkevich, a former instructor of the Amavir Military Aviation School for Pilots, trained the North Korean pilots in this school. Here is what he recalls of those distant events:

In the summer of 1950 I was an instructor at the Amavir Military Aviation School for Pilots, with the rank of senior lieutenant. Somewhere around July-August 1950 a group of 12-14 instructors was selected in the Amavir aviation school. From our training aviation regiment, I and Senior Lieutenant Valerii Ivanovich Gumenlikov wound up in this group. A captain was appointed as the group's senior in command, an Ossete by nationality, whose name, alas, I've already forgotten. We were all training specialists for the Yak-3 and Yak-9.

They took us across the entire country aboard a train to the Maritime [District] at the end of summer 1950, and we set up operations around the city of Khorol'. Soon several dozen Koreans arrived, who we were supposed to train to fly Yak-3 fighters. Several training aviation squadrons were created, each with three instructors, who were also the flight commanders. The commanders of the aviation squadrons and their deputies were also from among the Soviet instructors.

We trained the Koreans in the Yak-3 and dual cockpit Yak-7 fighters. Each squadron had its own airfield and operated autonomously, that is to say, without communication with the other training squadrons. All the Yak-3s were without identification markings and in the standard light green color.

I was a flight commander in one of the training squadrons, and it fell to me to train four Korean cadets: Kim Shi Bom, Pak Tae Il, Kim Im Chan and Pak Dae Du. The arriving students already had some flying experience, since recently they had completed something like one of our aviation clubs. They were all young fellows, 18-19 years of age, but none of them yet had any combat experience against the Americans.

Frequently the commander of the KPAAF came by the aviation school; he was a former pilot in the Japanese air force, who after the end of the Second World War flew from South Korea to North Korea and who enjoyed the enormous respect of the North Korean pilots. He came to check on the preparation of his subordinates. The weakest pilots were kicked out of the training squadron and sent to a training squadron that prepared pilots on the Po-2, and they learned to drop bombs from this airplane.

In my flight, the cadet Kim Shi Bom, who was an excellent shot, particularly stood out. On one flight to practice firing at a towed target sleeve, he almost shot down my airplane, which was towing the sleeve, because he was distracted by his attack upon the target. We taught the Koreans not only piloting skills, but also their combat application. During the entire time of training, we never had a single breakdown or crash.

As a result, by the beginning of 1951 after five months of training, we had fully prepared the entire group of Korean pilots and handed them over to the KPAAF. On this occasion, a large banquet was organized in the school, after which all the Korean pilots were assembled and shipped off to China. All the Yak-3 airplanes remained at the aviation school.

After we had prepared almost an entire regiment of Korean pilots, all the instructors were sent to various flight schools in the USSR, and we were forbidden to talk about what we'd been doing in the Maritime District. After our departure, a different group of instructors from the Amavir Military Aviation School for Pilots arrived in the Maritime and took our place. I myself returned to the Amavir school, where I continued to train our cadets.

Simultaneously, young Chinese pilots, who had recently completed training in PRC aviation schools were also preparing for combat in the Korean skies with the Soviet pilots. Here's how the former commander of the PLAAF, Hero of the People's Republic of China Wang Hai, who fought in the Korean War and became an ace, describes the training of the Chinese pilots for aerial combat above Korea in his memoirs:

... For the rendering of assistance to Korea, which had become enveloped in the flames of war, and for ensuring the security of our Motherland, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and Chairman Mao Zedong in response to a request of the Korean Workers' Party and the government of the PDRK announced a policy of "War of resistance to American aggression and the rendering of assistance to the Korean people", created the Chinese People's Volunteer Army under the deputy commander of the PLA Peng Dehuai, which crossed the Yalu River and, entering into war together with the heroic Korean People's Army, delivered a blow to the American aggressors.

The people of all of China participated in the movement "We will defend the Motherland!" The young PLAAF, which declared its burning desire to take part in the war, also actively responded to the call of the Party and the State. At the time, the central government of China, experiencing an acute shortage of resources for resolving the most various tasks, expended them for the purchase of aircraft and the construction of air bases. Then all the peoples of the country began to collect money to purchase airplanes.

Because of the changes that were taking place in the global arena, the PLA shifted its efforts from preparing for the liberation of Taiwan to participation in the "War of resistance against American aggression". Urgent measures were taken in the air force as well, which accelerated the formation of new units. After the 4th SmAB was formed, on 1 October 1950 the 3rd IAB [fighter aviation brigade] was being formed in Shenyang, consisting of the 7th, 8th and 9th IAP. The 209th Separate Infantry Division and its 625th, 626th and 627th Infantry Regiments provided the bulk of the cadres of this brigade. The commandant of the 5th Aviation School Fang Ziyi was placed in command of the 3rd IAB, while the former commander of the 209th Infantry Division Gao Houliang became its political commissar.

In the last ten days of October 1950, 88 graduates of the 4th, 5th and 6th Flight Schools arrived and embarked upon intensive training. The 4th SmAB, which had

arrived here from Shanghai, on 28 October, was reformed as the 4th IAB; Fang Ziyi became its commander, while the commander of the 4th SmAB's 10th Regiment Xia Boshiung temporarily took command of the 3rd IAB. The former commissar of the 4th SmAB Li Shian became the commissar of the 3rd IAB. At this time at the decision of the Central Military Council, the table of organization for an air force aviation brigade was changed from three regiments to two regiments. The 10th IAP and the 12th IAP (the former 7th IAP of the 4th IAB) joined the 3rd IAB. The 8th IAP of the 3rd IAB became the 7th IAP.

On 31 October at the instruction of Chairman Mao, the brigades were renamed as divisions, while at the same time the indication of whether it belonged to fighter aviation or bomber aviation was dropped. Accordingly, the 3rd and 4th IAB became the air force's 3rd and 4th Aviation Divisions [AD].

On 25 November, the 2nd AD was formed in Shanghai, with most of its personnel coming from the Eastern China Military District. The 11th AP, which had previously been part of the 4th SmAB, provided the basis for the new aviation division, while at the same time its identification changed to the 4th AP. From personnel of the 208th Separate Infantry Division's 624th Infantry Regiment, the second regiment of the 2nd AD was formed, which received designation as the 6th AP. Liu Shanben was appointed commander of the 2nd AD, and his commissar was Zhang Baichun.

After the formation of these units and formations, with the assistance of Soviet aviators, flying and combat training were urgently initiated. Since the 3rd AD lacked experienced pilots, I and several other former pilots of the 4th SmAB's 10th and 11th AP carried out our duties as squadron commanders and leaders of the regimental flight until the end of 1959. I was appointed commander of the 1st Aviation Squadron of the 3rd AD's 9th AP.

The command of the 3rd AD had rich combat experience. Both the commander of the division Xia Boxun and Yang Bin, who soon replaced the former in this post, as well as the political commissar Gao Houliang, were long-time veterans of the Chinese Red Army who had taken part in its Long March. The first two men during the war against Japan had been flight instructors in aviation units in the province of Xinjiang. The deputy commander of the division, Ji Tingxie, the chief of staff Wang Fuhua, the chief of the political department Luo Ping all participated in the war against Japan as members of the 8th Army. They all had long years of service, had seen much, knew a lot, and possessed high moral-political qualities and combat experience. Therefore, the units under their command, which had only been formed several months previously, displayed energy and demonstrated high combat spirits.

A strong leadership staff in the regiments had also been selected. Other than one pilot, all the others had come from the infantry. In my 9th Regiment, the commander Han Jinbiao, the commissar Wang Jikui, the deputy commander Lin Hu (he was a pilot and my classmate at the old aviation school in northeastern China), the deputy political commissar Zhou Zongchang, and the chief of staff Jiang Wenhua – all came to the air force from the infantry. They were all combat-hardened, and had command experience and leadership in battle.

In our squadron, most of the pilots came from the infantry. The commissar Xu Shunian had been serving in the 8th Army since 1938 and was the personal

bodyguard of the commander Zhu De and General Wang Zhen, who later became a political worker. He'd never studied aviation, but he had experience that he'd gained in the 8th Army, knew people, and managed well with ideological work. Deputy squadron commander Zhou Fengxing, flight commander Zhang Zi (who later became squadron commander) and the pilots Jiao Jingwen, Liu Delin, Ma Baotang, Feng Quanmin, Yan Junwu, Tian She, Ma Lianyu, as well as flight commander Sun Shenlu, who arrived from the 2nd Aviation Squadron – all had passed through the school of combat in the infantry and were later sent to flight schools. They were all distinguished by their businesslike natures, high senses of responsibility, organizational skills and personal discipline. They were not afraid to sacrifice their lives, and were brave and resolute. Despite their youth, they were all mature men. I, a squadron commander, was also one of the pilots; we lived together from day to day, trained together, felt like brothers and together created a strong combat collective.

I arrived in the 9th Aviation Regiment at a time of the most intense training. The commander rose at 5 o'clock in the morning each day, in order to prepare the flights. At the very first stage, Soviet combat pilots helped us organize the training, preparing us individually according to their qualifications. They worked with us with enthusiasm, and we studied conscientiously, so that we mastered very quickly the complex of steps necessary to organize flights. Subsequently we independently conducted the planning and carrying out of flight and combat training.

The higher command gave the task to accelerate the flight training, to master the equipment and technology, and to enter combat as soon as possible. Our preparations were divided into two stages. In the first three months, we finished work on flight basics, primarily practicing take-offs, landings, flight navigation, and flying in pairs; we studied the zone of operations, rehearsed individual aerial combat techniques, and conducted mock combats with a wingman against a solitary target, high altitude flights with a wingman, and combats involving an entire flight. Then over the next two months we finished our work on combat techniques, primarily by learning to intercept in pairs and in full flights, and flying as a flight, in two flights, and in full regimental formations. We practiced dogfight techniques against individual targets, photoreconnaissance of ground targets, and conducted high-altitude practice missions in two-flight formations. Pilots who learned to master their weapons and how to squeeze every bit of their aircraft's performance characteristics in combat, despite temperatures of -20 or -30C. were promoted and became trainers themselves. Even on China's traditional spring holiday they didn't rest, but flew as usual. The ground crews also rose early each morning and turned in late, scrupulously serving and checking the aircraft and ensuring the pilot's safety. The regular personnel at every level were continually at the airfield, in collectives, directing the training, revealing and resolving problems, and ensuring a successful course of training.

Thanks to the combined efforts, the plan of training was successfully implemented; on average each pilot had 56 hours and 53 minutes of flight time, with a maximum of 73 hours and 50 minutes, and a minimum of 44 hours and 57 minutes. In a short period of time, the techniques of piloting and the combat use of the MiG-15 fighter were mastered.

On 25 April 1951, the division joined the combat roster of the PLAAF.

To Wang Hai's narrative, it is necessary to add that those Soviet pilots who prepared the Chinese pilots of the 3rd IAD for combat in the Korean sky were from the Soviet 151st GIAD, which was the first to arrive in the PRC in the middle of August 1950. The former commander of the 72nd GIAP Lieutenant Colonel Alekandr Ivanovich Volkov spoke in more detail in his memoirs about the training of the Chinese pilots:

As the commander of the 72nd GIAP, I arrived in China as part of the 151st GIAD at the beginning of August 1950. Our Guards aviation division had been sent to China with an important assignment: to create a Chinese air force, that is to say, to retrain the Chinese pilots to fly MiG-15s, after which we were to turn over the jets and all the support facilities to them. The division was based on former Japanese airfields with asphalt runways. My 72nd GIAP was in Anshan, the 28th GIAP was in Mukden (Shenyang), while the 139th GIAP was in Liaoyang. The cited air bases were unsuitable for MiGs, so the local Chinese leadership headed by Gao Han decided to construct new concrete runways as quickly as possible, which was in fact accomplished in a remarkably short time – 28 days, plus another two weeks for bringing in the necessary building supplies by rail.

Already in September we were able to begin retraining those Chinese pilots who had 30 hours of flight time in Yak-11s. A unified group of pilot-instructors was created under the command of the assistant division commander for aerial gunnery, Colonel Vladimir Borisovich Provorikhin. This group of instructors began training Chinese pilots in Yak-17U trainers and to prepare them for solo flights in MiG-15s. By the start of November 1950, the training was basically completed, and the 4th IAD of the People's Liberation Army Air Force began to form from the trained pilots at the Liaoyang airfield – the first Chinese air force division with a two-regiment table of organization to fly jets.

By the middle of November, the formation of this division was finished. Fang Ziyi was appointed to command the division. He was an experienced commander with extensive combat experience in the army, who had completed our flight school in Urumqi (Xinjiang) in 1942. Most of the division's command and flight staff consisted of pilots who had arrived from Shanghai's PVO, and who'd flown our piston-engine La-9 fighters, as well as aircraft from other countries (these were the pilots of the 10th IAP). One of these men, for example, was the regiment commander, Zhao Dahai. He'd flown to the mainland in a B-26 together with several other pilots. We retrained them in MiG-15 jets together with some young pilots, who'd graduated from flight schools in Yak-11s.

At this time, the 151st GIAD was used to form the basis of a new aviation corps and was split into two divisions, both consisting of two regiments. The 28th and 72nd GIAP remained in the 151st IAD, while the 139th GIAP and the new 67th IAP, which soon departed to join Qingdao's PVO, became part of the newly formed 28th IAD.

I was among a group of 15 men who were appointed as advisers to the PLAAF's 4th IAD. Heroes of the Soviet Union Nikolai Stroikov and Viktor Borobkov, who became advisers to the regiment commanders of the 4th IAD, were also in this group. Lieutenant Colonel Doroshenko was the chief of staff in our group, which included 10 men who were technical or rear staff officers. On 20 November we

transferred to Liaoyang and began to hammer together and further improve the units of the division.

It must be said right here that our small group did an enormous amount of work in a very short time, in order to train our subordinates to direct and command their units and elements, as well as to perfect the piloting techniques of the fliers, both alone and in a group, and in elements, flights and the entire squadron.

Approximately in March 1951, the division command reported to the PLAAF on the division's readiness to become part of the Chinese People's Volunteers. Party meetings were held, and then a full meeting, where the decision to join the ranks of the People's Volunteers was voted upon. At this time, Marshal Zhu De visited the division together with a large delegation of members of China's People's Assembly, who observed flight operations and were personally convinced that China now had its own jet pilots.

In the second half of March 1951, we moved to the forward airfield at Andong [Antung], where I.N. Kozhedub's aviation division was already based, and began to prepare for combat operations.

As already mentioned above, by the end of 1950 the pilot-instructors of the 151st GIAD had prepared almost 100 Chinese pilots on jet equipment; these men provided the skeleton staff of the newly created Chinese 3rd and 4th IAD. Then another group of Soviet advisors from the 151st IAD were sent to these divisions in order to conduct additional training and to assist the commanders of these Chinese IAD, which in April 1951 became part of the UAA [Unified Air Army] and began combat operations in the skies of the PDRK. Simultaneously with the flight school for pilots that had been established in Khorol', another aviation specialist school was created in the city of Vozzhaevka in Amur Oblast in order to train flight navigators for the KPAAF.

## SOVIET PILOTS ENTER THE FIGHTING

The entry of armies of the Chinese People's Volunteers into combat operations on 19 October 1950 slowed the offensive of the U.S. and its allies deep within North Korean territory, but by 24 October, the front lines in places were now within 60-70 kilometers of the Chinese border. In the regions of Chosan and Unsan, forward American elements even reached the Yalu River, which marked the border between North Korea and Manchuria. However, on 25 October, forces of the NKPA and CPV launched a counteroffensive, which continued until 5 November and hurled UN forces away from the Yalu by 50-60 kilometers in the direction of Anju. The Soviet pilots of one aviation division, the 151st IAD, participated in this counteroffensive. To be honest, the combat task that was given to the Guards aviation division was of a purely defensive nature: not to cover the very front lines and the attacking NKPA and CPV troops, but instead to defend critical targets in the PDRK, which were being subjected to numerous attacks by the USAF. First and foremost, the 151st IAD was to protect the strategically important bridge across the Yalu not far from Andong, as well as Andong itself, in which there were supplies and CPV units, which were using this bridge to move into North Korea. The Soviet pilots were categorically forbidden to cross the Yalu River or to fly over the Yellow Sea's Korea Bay, in order



to avoid becoming prisoners. The point is that the US Seventh Fleet and their allies reigned supreme in the Yellow Sea, while dozens of enemy diversionary-espionage groups were operating in the front line zone, which would have been delighted to capture a downed Soviet pilot.

The Soviet pilots entered the fighting incognito, since officially the Soviet Union was not involved in the war in Korea. Thus the first Soviet pilots wore CPV uniforms, had no personal documents that would have revealed their identities, and moreover they were ordered to use only Korean commands when in the air. For this purpose, in the course of a week they learned a couple of dozen Korean phrases that were necessary for conducting battle. To be honest, the latter ban against speaking Russian in battle didn't last long; once in action, the Soviet pilots quickly forgot the Korean phrases and communicated in Russian, more than once saving their life in battle by doing so.

By the end of October, the 151st IAD was dispersed among three airfields – the 72nd GIAP had remained at the Mukden-North Air Base; the 28th GIAP had flown to the Anshan airfield; and the 139th GIAP was stationed at Liaoyang. In the last ten days of October, Soviet pilots in their MiGs, equipped with external fuel tanks because their airfields were distant from the area of operations, began to conduct patrols along the Chinese-Korean border without violating the border itself. Our pilots were familiarizing themselves with the area of combat operations and simultaneously protecting PRC airspace and Andong itself, because the American pilots were frequently intruding into Chinese airspace and bombing Chinese towns and villages, including Andong. However, there was still no order to cross the border and enter combat over North Korea.

However, on 1 November 1950, just such an order arrived. In connection with the distance of their airfield complex from the area of combat operations, all the combat sorties were carried out in the Andong-Siniuju area, which also happened to be close to the front lines at the time. This is where the first clashes between Soviet and American pilots took place. At the time, units of the US Fifth Air Force were actively operating in the Siniuju-Singisiu region. American F-51 attack aircraft and F-80 fighter-bombers were particularly active in the given region – and thus it was with them that the first encounters with the Soviet pilots took place.

Early on the morning of 1 November 1950, several MiG-15 flights from the 72nd and 28th GIAP took off at an order from the division command post to patrol the border with the PDRK. Equipped with external fuel tanks, the MiG pilots for the first time were given authorization to cross over the Yalu into North Korean air space and to conduct free hunts in search of US aircraft.

Pilots of the 28th GIAP were the first to encounter the enemy. In the vicinity of Naamsi-dong, six MiG-15s spotted and attacked four F-51s, but with a sharp maneuver the Mustangs evaded the attack and departed the area at tree-top level. In essence there was no combat, because the enemy declined it.

The first combat occurred after lunch at 1250, when five MiGs under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union Major N. V. Stroikov, the commander of the 1st Squadron, were patrolling the Andong area. Captain I. A. Guts's lead element spotted three F-51s. Attacking from above, they opened fire on the enemy formation. Apparently damaged, one of the Mustangs broke formation and began to flee in a dive. The remaining pair of Mustangs went into a left-hand turn, but upon leveling out they were jumped by a different pair of MiGs, and in this attack Lieutenant Fedor Chizh succeeded in downing

one of the F-51s from short range. Thus the Soviet pilots opened the scoring in this war, having shot down the first USAF aircraft in the skies of North Korea. The downed F-51 was from the 35th FBG's 39th Squadron – its pilot was killed.

On this same day at 1412, four MiG-15s led by the 72nd GIAP's 2nd Squadron commander Major A.Z. Bordun took off on a combat assignment for the Andong area. Major A.Z. Bordun, Senior Lieutenant A.I. Sukhov, and Lieutenants S.F. Khomich and D. Esiunin were piloting the MiGs on this mission. Having patrolled above Andong for 25 minutes and without having encountered any enemy aircraft, the flight received the order to return to base. Lieutenant Esiunin had already been forced to return, since his MiG had no external fuel tanks and was running low on fuel.

As they were turning back, Lieutenant Khomich saw 10 F-80 jets below them, flying in column formation: four F-80s were in the lead, followed by two F-80s at an interval of 500-800 meters, with the other four F-80s bringing up the rear at the same interval. Receiving the permission to attack from the leader, Lieutenant Khomich alone attacked the leading foursome of Shooting Stars and shot down one of them from short range, before climbing steeply away. The trailing four F-80s attempted to attack him, but their formation was jumped by Bordun's element in turn. Breaking off its attack, the F-80 flight fled the area. Our pilots made no effort to pursue them, because fuel was running low. One F-80 from the 51st FBG's 16th Squadron was destroyed – its pilot went missing-in-action.

Thus in the course of the first air-to-air battle between jet fighters of the contending sides, in which three MiG-15s took on 10 F-80s, the Soviet pilots emerged victorious. For his victory, Guards Lieutenant Semen Fedorovich Khomich was awarded the Order of the Red Banner.

The pilots of the 28th GIAP were unlucky on this day, because the group that had taken off from this regiment on a combat assignment never encountered enemy aircraft, either failing to spot them or because the American aircraft had avoided battle, while the Soviet pilots were forbidden to cross the front lines. Thus the first day of their war ended successfully for the pilots of the 151st IAD. Two victories had been scored, and one more US aircraft was probably damaged, without any loss on the Soviet side. According to the latest publications in the American press, on 1 November 1950 the USAF lost two F-80s and one F-51, not including seven aircraft of other types.

The first aerial combats in the skies of Korea also exposed the first difficulties. The distance of the Soviet air bases from the area of operations reduced the time available to the Soviet pilots to search for and engage enemy targets. The first combats had accordingly been brief. There was only a limited number of external fuel tanks in the division's supply stocks (their production was centered back in the Soviet Maritime District), thus the Soviet pilots had to conduct missions in small groups, and not always with external fuel tanks.

Moreover, a psychological factor weighed upon the Soviet pilots: after all, they had never before met American pilots in battle, and didn't know their combat tactics, attitudes and skill. The fact that the Americans had been our allies during World War II dampened the fighting spirit of the pilots, especially after witnessing the first human losses.

The Soviet pilots knew about the tactical and technical characteristics of the enemy aircraft only by hearsay, while only combat itself might show how these aircraft could perform in battle. On 1 November, the Soviet pilots engaged Mustangs from the 18th and 35th FBG, which they encountered repeatedly in the subsequent November battles.

In the first week of November, the Soviet pilots conducted combat patrols over the Sinuiju-Singisiu area, covering the strategically important bridge near Sinuiju, the airfield there, and the roads over which supplies were flowing in a continuous stream to the NKPA and CPV forces. However, the enemy air force, alarmed by the first encounter with the MiG jets, sharply curtailed its activity in the area of their operations, and upon spotting approaching MiGs, evaded combat and departed. Thus until 6 November the pilots of the 151st GIAD had only several scrapes with enemy aircraft that had no results.

However on 6 November 1950, the Mustangs of the 8th and 18th FBG renewed their operations in the 151st GIAD's area of responsibility, as a result of which several aerial clashes took place with them. The pilots of the 151st GIAD on this day conducted several combat missions, but only one of them was crowned with success: after lunch, a flight of pilots from the 72nd GIAP dueled with a flight of F-51s, and Senior Lieutenant N. K. Kuznetsov in one head-on attack shot down one of the Mustangs from the 18th FBG's 39th Squadron, killing the pilot.

The next day of combat, 7 November, was more intense for the Soviet pilots. On this day, pilots of the 28th GIAP also opened their combat score. The successful pilot was the deputy regiment commander and Hero of the Soviet Union Major V.I. Koliadin. At 1406, he took off for the area of Singisiu at the head of four MiGs, and at 1435 at an altitude of 6,500 meters, having spotted up to 15 Mustangs, he opened fire on the tail-end flight. When climbing out of this firing pass, Koliadin encountered four more F-51s. He attacked and fired upon it, forcing the enemy aircraft to turn away. At 1438 Koliadin observed a new group of Mustangs, consisting of 20 planes in an echelon formation. After maneuvering into position, he dove upon the second flight of this group from above and behind and opened fire at a range of 500 meters, registering strikes upon



Hero of the Soviet Union Colonel V.I. Koliadin, commander of the 28th GIAP (a postwar photograph).

one target that sent it plummeting earthward. After this our pilots broke off the battle because they were running low on fuel and returned to base. In this action, other pilots of Koliadin's fight also fired upon the Mustangs, and the leader of the second element Captain N.G. Pronin presumably downed a second Mustang, but the regiment only credited Major Koliadin with a victory.

On this same day, pilots of Major A.I. Guts's flight from the 72nd GIAP also distinguished themselves: at 1326, Captain Guts's flight encountered four F-51 in the area of Singisiu, and in a swift action the leader of the second element Senior Lieutenant A.E. Sanin shot down one F-51, while the others were driven away from the defended target.

The American acknowledged that there was a combat between four F-51s from the 36th FBS and four MiG-15s, but declared that the Mustangs suffered no losses. Another four-plane flight of Mustangs, this one from the 12th FBS, encountered four MiGs in the area of the Yalu, and Major Ken Karson supposedly shot down one of the Mig-15s in combat. However it is reliably known that on 7 November, the pilots of the 151st GIAD not only had no losses, but also suffered no damage to their aircraft in the action. The Americans on this day also lost two F-80 Shooting Stars from the 8th FBS, which after a battle with MiGs, ran out of fuel on their way back to base, and the pilots of these two F-80s had to abandon their aircraft.

The intensity of combat and the number of aircraft involved from both sides increased with every passing day. In connection with this it was decided to augment the Soviet air presence in the area of combat operations. This required an organizational overhaul and triggered a shuffling in command.

As mentioned in Lieutenant Colonel Volkov's testimony above, it was decided to organize a separate fighter aviation corps on the basis of the 151st GIAD. At the beginning of November, the 139th GIAP was withdrawn from the 151st GIAD and contributed personnel and equipment in order to create a new aviation regiment, designated the 67th IAP; its commander became Hero of the Soviet Union Major N.F. Pasko. On 1 November 1950, in response to an order from the USSR's War Minister dated 18 October 1950, the 28th IAD was formed at the Liaoyang Air Base to take command of the 139th and 67th IAP. The former deputy commander of the 151st GIAD, twice Hero of the Soviet Union Colonel Aleksei Vasil'evich Aleliukhin, became the commander of the newly-formed 28th IAD.

On 20 November 1950, the 50th IAD, which also had two fighter regiments (the 29th and the 177th), arrived at the Anshan Air Base from Shanghai. Together with the 151st GIAD and new 28th IAD, it was made subordinate to the newly created 64th IAK [*istrebitel'nyi aviatsionnyi korpus*, or fighter aviation corps]. The former commander of the 151st IAD Major General Ivan Vasil'evich Belov assumed command of the corps. Colonel A.Ia. Sapozhnikov, the former commander of the 28th GIAP, took Belov's place in command of the 151st GIAD. The Guards aviation division also now had a two-regiment table of organization, consisting of the 28th GIAP, whose commander was Hero of the Soviet Union Lieutenant Colonel Viktor Ivanovich Koliadin, and the 72nd GIAP, the commander of which remained as before Lieutenant Colonel Aleksandr Ivanovich Volkov.

The forming of the new aviation grouping was completed on 27 November 1950. On that date, the 28th, 50th and 151st IAD were all unified under the command of the 64th IAK.



Remains of Boeing B-29A-50-BN Superfortress 44-61813. The aircraft was converted to the F-13A Photo Recon configuration. Severely damaged by MiGs, it crash landed at Johnson AB, Japan November 9 1950. (US Air Force)

These three Soviet fighter divisions of the new 64th IAK were all equipped with MiG-15s. The three aviation divisions together numbered 844 officers, 1,153 sergeants and 1,274 soldiers. The command of the new fighter corps was set up in Mukden, while its subordinate fighter divisions were based on the airfields of the Chinese cities Mukden, Anshan and Andong. The combat task of the 64th IAK was formulated by the Soviet military command and expressed as follows: to cover the crossings over the Yalu River, the hydroelectric stations on the river and the airfields in the area of Andong, and the North Korean supply arteries as far as the line Pyongyang – Wonsan. In conjunction with the fighter defense, the anti-aircraft defense was to prevent bombing attacks by the enemy air force on targets in northeast China along the Mukden axis.

The Soviet government made careful efforts to conceal its participation in the war from the West. Therefore in the course of the fighting, Soviet combatants were usually located distant from the front lines, while the 64th IAK's fighters were restricted by the Yellow Sea coast and the no-fly line between Pyongyang and Wonsan. Soviet pilots were strictly forbidden to wander beyond this limited area. The Soviet air units and anti-aircraft defense emplacements in China and North Korea also observed camouflage and concealment measures, carrying out their combat assignments in the uniform of the Chinese People's Volunteer Army.

As we have seen, pilots of the 151st GIAD were the first to enter combat on the morning of 1 November 1950. Because of the organizational changes discussed above, the 28th IAD didn't embark upon combat operations until 5 November, and at that only



with the single 139th GIAP stationed in Liaoyang. The pilots of the 67th IAP entered the fighting a little later. However, until 8 November the pilots of this division on their patrol flights only rarely encountered American planes; more often, the enemy simply avoided combat.

The day 8 November marked a significant change: the enemy began the day with active air operations, launching a series of strikes on several important targets in the PDRK with large groups of F-51 attack aircraft, covered by F-80 jets. The first to take off to repulse the attacks were eight MiG-15s, led by the commander of the 72nd IAP's 3rd Squadron Major V.P. Afonin. In the area of Andong they spotted four F-51s on a meeting course. Major Afonin immediately downed one of the F-51s in a head-on pass, while the other Mustangs scattered in different directions. As it was pulling out of the attack, Afonin's flight was attacked by eight F-80s on a head-on course, which were covering the Mustangs. Another four Shooting Stars were diving to join the fray. In the head-on pass with the eight F-80s, an external fuel tank on Senior Lieutenant A.E. Sanin's MiG was hit, but he safely made it back to Mukden in his jet.

Senior Lieutenant Kharitonov's 2nd Flight, which was flying above Afonin's flight when the action started, was also attacked by 10 F-80s, and then closed with four Shooting Stars in a head-on pass, but these brief engagements ended with no results and our pilots returned to their base.

The Americans believed that one of the departing MiG-15s had been downed and credited it to the 16th Squadron's 1st Lieutenant Russell Brown, the first official victory of USAF pilots over MiG-15 jets. However, as it turned out, 1st Lieutenant Brown had only lightly damaged A. E. Sanin's jet, and the very next day he took off on another mission in it. Thus, the Americans' "first victory" over the MiG-15 didn't in fact happen!

Major Afonin's group landed in Mukden at 0938, just as eight more MiGs of the 139th IAP's 3rd Squadron, under the command of squadron commander Captain M. Pakhomov, were taking off in Liaoyang for a combat assignment. When flying to the patrol area, Captain L.D. Shchegolov and his wingman became separated from the rest of the flight. Accelerating to close up with it again, Shchegolov spotted three F-51s that were attacking his wingman, who had moved in front of him. Shchegolov immediately moved to counter the Mustangs on a meeting course, and in the head-on pass shot down one F-51 with two bursts – the burning F-51 fell in the Andong area, which was confirmed by his wingman Senior Lieutenant P.M. Kustov and the auxiliary command post in this area.

At 1133, another flight of eight MiGs from the 28th GIAP, headed by Captain A.I. Akimov, took off on a combat mission. In the Andong area, the flight spotted one group of F-51s and fired upon it, then came across a second group of four F-51s. Attacking it, Captain Akimov shot down one of them, while the others evaded and escaped. A final group of eight MiGs from the 28th GIAP took off at 1343 and encountered six F-51s during its patrol, but the brief action ended with no results.

The pilots of the 64th IAK on 8 November had again dueled with Mustangs from the 18th FBG, and they had achieved three victories. The Americans, in addition to Brown's "victory", claimed an additional "probable": four F-51s of the 35th Squadron had tangled with four MiGs near the Yalu River, and supposedly 1st Lieutenant Harris Boys downed one of the Soviet jets. However, it is known reliably that on 8 November 1950, the 64th IAK had no losses.

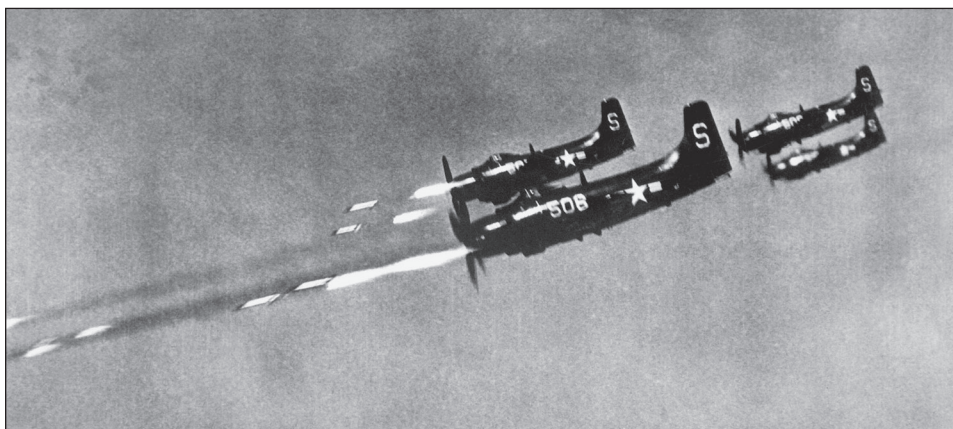
The hottest days for the pilots of the 64th IAK were 9 and 10 November 1950, when through the joint efforts of the pilots from both divisions, several massed attacks against bridges across the Yalu in the areas of Andong and Singisiu were repulsed. Several dogfights developed with the participation of 50-60 aircraft from both sides. These two days of aerial combat became the most productive in terms of the number of achieved aerial victories.

At first on the morning of 9 November at 0900, seven MiGs from the 139th GIAP, under the command of the chief of the Regiment's aerial gunnery service Captain V. P. Bochkov, took off to intercept an attack by USNAF piston-engine fighter-bombers. In the area of the Andong bridge, the Soviet pilots spotted a large formation of enemy piston-engine aircraft that were attempting to destroy this strategically vital target. Corsairs and Skyraiders from the aircraft carrier *Philippine Sea's* 11th Air Group were targeting the bridge. The attack formation included eight AD-2 from Squadron VA-115, approximately 20 F4U Corsairs from VF-113 and VF-114, which were being covered from above by two flights of eight F9F Panther jets each from VF-111 and VF-112.

It was with these American fighters and fighter-bombers that the pilots of the 139th GIAP collided above the bridge across the Yalu. In essence, this was the baptism of fire for the pilots of the 1st Squadron of this Guards regiment; in their combat ardor, they plunged into the thick of the enemy aircraft, and a wild melee erupted. The 1st Squadron commander Captain M.F. Grachev and the overall group leader Captain V.B. Bochkov themselves became caught up in the action, and in the heat of battle, failed to direct the combat or their subordinates. Thus the squadron formation disintegrated into isolated elements and solitary aircraft – each caught up in its own battle and failing to provide cover to each other. Despite these mistakes, the Soviet pilots fought bravely against superior enemy numbers, and in the swirling action, the enemy fighter-bombers were unable to release their bombs on the bridge with any accuracy. In this battle, the squadron commander Captain Grachev fought heroically on his own, and according to the testimony of other participants, personally shot down two or three American aircraft. Group commander Captain Bochkov also downed one Skyraider. After the significant losses at the hands of the MiGs, the attack aircraft began to flee the area – just when the covering Panther flights pounced on the scattered MiGs from above. One flight of four Panthers under the command of Captain W.T. Amen, the commanding officer of VF-111, managed to catch a solitary MiG in a pincer movement and shot it up from their 20mm guns at point-blank range. Thus, the first Soviet pilot-internationalist Captain Mikhail Fedorovich Grachev was killed in this battle. This was the first combat loss of the 64th IAK and simultaneously the first genuine officially confirmed victory of US pilots (and US Navy pilots) over an enemy jet in the form of a MiG-15 fighter.

The other pilots of the 139th GIAP were also attacked by the Panthers, but exploiting the MiG's superiority, they successfully countered these attacks and turned the tables on the Panthers. As a result one of them was shot down by Lieutenant N.I. Sannikov, and the remaining began to exit the battle. However during their departure, one flight of F9F-2 was unexpectedly attacked from below by Senior Lieutenant A.I. Stulov, who shot up one of the F9F-2 from point-blank range. Here is how Aleksandr Ivanovich Stulov recalls this combat almost 55 years later:





US Navy Skyraiders from the USS *Valley Forge* fire 5-inch wing rockets at North Korean communist field positions, October 24, 1950. (US Navy)



A US Navy AD-3 dive bomber pulls out of a dive after dropping a 2000 lb bomb on the Korean side of a bridge crossing the Yalu River at Sinuiju, into Manchuria. Note anti-aircraft gun emplacement on both sides of the river. November 15, 1950. (US Navy)

Then the next patrol of 9 November 1950 took place. The 1st Squadron with a complement of 8 or 10 aircraft took off at an alert signal. The squadron was being commanded by either Grachev or the regiment's new navigator Bochkov – I can't say exactly. It was 160 kilometers from the air base to Andong. The enemy air force was targeting the railroad bridge linking the territory of China with that of North Korea. For this purpose they used B-29 bombers, piston-engine Thunderbolt attack aircraft [more likely the AD-4 Skyraider], and twin fuselage aircraft named the Black Widow [more likely the F-82 Twin Mustang]. They had the top cover of Shooting Star jet fighters. I was Grachev's wingman; I can no longer name the other pilots on the mission – I've simply can't recall them after so many years. With all our aircraft, we went after the attack aircraft that were bombing the bridge, but they were at low altitudes that aren't very advantageous for jet fighters. A complete "fur ball" resulted and it was impossible to distinguish where your planes were and where the enemy planes were, or who was attacking whom. Moreover, these piston-engine aircraft were more maneuverable than ours and evaded out from under our attacks. It was impossible for us to steepen the angle of our dives, since we were right above the ground. In these conditions all of our aircraft scattered and we lost all coordination, not because we wanted this, but because of the situation that had developed. I, for example, attacked a Black Widow [again, more likely a Twin Mustang], but it spotted me before I could close within firing range and with a sharp, diving turn passed below me. Reversing, it then gave a wild burst at my aircraft. I went after a Thunderbolt [Skyraider], but it also didn't allow me to close within firing range. However, we carried out our task: we had disrupted the attack on the bridge.

When there were no longer any aircraft over the bridge, I started to climb to regain altitude and spotted four Shooting Stars in a compact formation, on a northward heading. I set out in pursuit of them, having first taking a look around me. Within 3 or 4 minutes, I had closed with them, making sure I stayed behind and below them so that they couldn't see me. Then, when I had drawn within 50 meters, I took careful aim and fired a short burst with everything I had. However, it happened that I encountered some turbulence in their slipstream just as I fired, which threw off my aim, and the burst went wide of the lead aircraft. I had been just a split second late in opening fire. The left-hand wingman broke left into a descending turn. There was nothing left for me to do than to follow him, cutting off his turn, and I fired a couple of more bursts at him. It looked like I had fatally stricken his plane, so I climbed away and took a quick look around, but the other three aircraft were nowhere in sight. I went into a shallow dive and headed back to base at high speed, because I didn't have much fuel left.

This was the first, and I would say, disorganized dogfight, which no one was directing in the air or from the ground. From my point of view, it would have been better for the first flight to attack in pairs and for the second flight to provide cover; then, when the first flight had pulled out of its attacking pass, to swap roles and to use the radio.

All of our aircraft returned to base one by one, except for Grachev's MiG. All the pilots were worried about him, but I suffered even more, because I knew him better than anyone else, both as a comrade and as a pilot. For about a week, no one

knew what had happened with him. Then Captain Rudokovsky, the squadron's adjutant appeared, and delivered a small paper-wrapped bundle that weighed about 2 kilograms. It held all that remained of Grachev. The command decided to send me to Port Arthur for the burial of the remains, and gave me two sergeants to assist me. I pressed Rudokovsky to tell me everything he knew. He told me that they had located the place of our aircraft's crash, inside Chinese territory approximately 15-20 kilometers from the Korean border. He added that American jets had shot him down, and that there had been four of them. As I supposed, after the initial action against the piston-engine attack aircraft, he had relaxed and become less vigilant, which the enemy exploited, and having closed upon him from behind unnoticed, riddled his aircraft, after which his aircraft plunged to the ground.

Lieutenant Samuil Kumonaev shot down one more Panther in this scrap. It had been attacking his wingman, Senior Lieutenant M.I. Bolodin.

Thus the Soviet pilots in this action knocked down five or six US aircraft, but the regiment was credited with only two: one F9F-2 and one AD-2. Captain M.F. Grachev's supposed victories went uncounted, since he had been fighting alone, while his gun camera film burned up together with the aircraft. Therefore credit for any of his victories didn't go to the regiment, or else they were attributed to anti-aircraft gunners, who were also protecting this bridge and took part in repelling the attack. The command of the USNAF in Korea recognized the loss of only one of its F9F-2 Panthers from VF-51, the pilot of which was rescued. However, there are data that show that three Corsairs were lost at the beginning of November in combat actions, but the Americans still haven't released information about the exact dates when they were lost.

The losses of the 139th GIAP in this battle might have been even greater, since they had fought without any organization or cohesion. However, the pilots were bailed out by the combat experience that they had acquired in the Great Patriotic War and the MiG-15's superior performance.

A little later, just after 1000, six MiGs from the 72nd GIAP under the command of Major A.Z. Bordun took off for the Singisiu area. Once in the area, they spotted a single B-29 bomber being escorted by 16 F-80s. Senior Lieutenant A. Rodionov tied up the covering fighters in combat, while Bordun's element attacked the B-29 in turn. First to attack the bomber (an RB-29 reconnaissance aircraft No.44-61813 from the 91st SRS [Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron]) was the wingman Lieutenant A.M. Dymchenko, who fired at the B-29 at a range of 100 meters out to 800 meters, and then again at 400 meters. Next Major Bordun made a firing pass and opened up on the Superfortress from a range of 300-400 meters. The flashes of shells striking the B-29 were visible, which left the bombers's two left engines burning. Lieutenant Dymchenko attacked again and finished off the B-29; the bomber erupted in flames and its gunners were no longer firing at Dymchenko's MiG, and soon the burning B-29 fell into some clouds.

Senior Lieutenant Rodionov's flight also successfully engaged the two flights of covering F-80s, preventing them coming to the aid of the B-29, and presumably downed one Shooting Star. True, it wasn't credited to the regiment. We had no losses in this action.

Some time later, groups of MiGs from the 28th, 72nd and 139th GIAP took off at intervals of time to repulse an enemy raid in the Andong – Singisiu area, because

the enemy attack lasted until 1453. In this period of time, several more clashes with American aircraft took place. For example, in the afternoon four MiGs of the 72nd GIAP under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union Major N.V. Stroikov took off on a mission to the Singisiu area. Over the target they encountered four F-80 Shooting Stars and engaged them in battle. In the course of the scrap, the element of Major N.V. Stroikov and Captain V.N. Kaznacheev so successfully attacked a pair of F-80s, that when the Shooting Stars maneuvered to evade the attack, they collided and fell in fragments to the ground. They were credited to the score of Stroikov and Kaznacheev. The remaining F-80s immediately departed without carrying out their assignment.

Thus, on 9 November the pilots of the 64th IAK tallied up to seven victories. Two F-80s, three F9F-2s, one AD-2 and one B-29 were downed, with only one loss in return.

According to American records, two downed MiG-15s were registered on this day: one (Captain Grachev's) was credited to Lt. Colonel Emmon of VF-111, while one more went to a gunner aboard the RB-29, Sgt. Kerry Lewin of the 91st Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron. However, it is reliably known that in the battle with the RB-29, none of the MiGs were even damaged, so on this occasion as well, the Americans were hasty in claiming a victory. On the other hand, according to American information, the RB-29 that had been damaged by Bordun and Dymchenko actually managed to struggle back to its base in Japan, where it crashed when making a forced landing, and five of its crew perished.

On 10 November 1950, at 0908 at a call from the auxiliary command post, eight MiGs under the command of Captain S.I. Korobov, the 28th GIAP's 3rd Squadron commander, sortied from the Mukden-North Air Base. Korobov was leading the attack flight, while Senior Lieutenant Pronin's covering flight was staggered to the left, about 800 meters behind and 1,500 meters above. On the approach to the assigned area, Korobov received an order from the auxiliary command post to go to the assistance of Major A.Z. Bordun's group, which was involved in a dogfight 15-20 kilometers south of Andong. Reaching the combat area at an altitude of 6,000 meters, at 0930 they spotted four groups of enemy aircraft inbound from the Yellow Sea at an altitude of 5,000 meters. The first and second groups consisted of four F-51 Mustangs each, while the third group had six F-51s. Four F-80s were covering the Mustangs. Korobov maneuvered into position and with his flight attacked the first group from above and behind at a target aspect angle of 0/4.<sup>4</sup> They pulled out of the attack at an angle and climbed toward the sun. In this attack, Captain S.I. Korobov shot down one F-51 and the formation broke apart. Startled, two of the other Mustangs collided in the air – one plummeted to the earth, while the other, damaged, limped away from the combat area.

As noted by the auxiliary command post's order, at 0908 six more MiGs under the command of Major A.Z. Bordun from the 72nd GIAP had left Mukden to repel an enemy air strike in the region of Andong. As Bordun's group was conducting a left-hand turn over the target area, Senior Lieutenant A.M. Dymchenko caught sight of one B-29 bomber at an altitude of 4,000 meters, and reported this over the radio. At the leader's command, the group began to close in for an attack. At this moment, a second B-29 was spotted, which having dropped its bombs, began to head toward the Yellow Sea in a right-hand turn. During the attempt to attack the first B-29, Bordun's group was jumped by two flights of four F-80 Shooting Stars each from above and behind, to the right and the left. Pulling out from under the attack in a chandelle to the left, Major Bordun



attacked one of the F-80 flights from behind at a target angle of  $1/4$ , and shot down one of the F-80s at a range of 600 meters. At this point, three more flights of F-80s, with eight fighters in each, were approaching the battle, and the first attempted to attack Dubrovin's element, but it evaded and in turn attacked eight F-80s on a meeting course, opening fire at 1,000 meters. Soon the group at Bordun's order exited the battle in a dive. The enemy made no attempt to pursue. At the authorization of the auxiliary command post, the group returned to base.

At 1026, eight more MiGs from the 139th GIAP's 2nd Squadron scrambled from the Liaoyang Air Base at an order from the 28th IAD command post to intercept another enemy attack group. Under the command of Major G.I. Khar'kovsky, at 1044 the group was approaching the Andong area at an altitude of 6,500 meters. At an order from the auxiliary command post, the group descended to 5,000 meters, and out in front of them, 16 kilometers away in an area east of Singisiu, they caught the glints of seven B-29 bombers, flying in a compact formation of a column of flights, being escorted by four F-51s. Having spotted the approaching MiGs, the bombers began a turn to the left. Leading the attack flight, Major Khar'kovsky and his wingman Lieutenant Iu.I. Akimov attacked the two trailing B-29s from below and behind, angling in from the left and the right. After the first aimed burst, the B-29 targeted by Khar'kovsky began to lag behind the rest of its formation. Khar'kovsky attacked it again from below and to the right, as a result of which the B-29 spouted flames. Burning, it fell in an area 25 kilometers north-east of Andong, which was confirmed by the auxiliary command post in Andong, other pilots in the group, and gun camera footage.

Lieutenant Akimov, who had attacked the other B-29, opened fire at it from a range of 600 meters and noticed that the tracers were passing behind the tail of the bomber. He ceased fire, shifted his MiG slightly to adjust his aim, and opened fire again. This time he saw his shells striking the center of the B-29. Before pulling out of the attack, Akimov noted fragments from the stricken B-29 falling away from the bomber. After the attack he formed up again with his leader. He began a repeat attack and caught sight of the bomber that had been attacked by Khar'kovsky falling away with its left wing on fire. After his second attack, Akimov watched his target, emitting smoke, fall away. Lieutenant Akimov received victory credit for this B-29, which was confirmed by the commander of the covering group Senior Lieutenant A.A. Zhdanovich, Major Khar'kovsky and gun camera footage.

Zhdanovich's flight attacked the remaining five B-29s from above and behind at great range, after which two of the B-29s fell back from the rest of the dwindling formation and descended into some clouds. The remaining three B-29s escaped beyond the Soviet no-fly line, so there was no pursuit. The pilots of Zhdanovich's flight couldn't observe what happened to the two B-29s because of the poor visibility and the great range.

During the battle, the four F-51 escort fighters tried to get behind the leader of the second element of the attack group Senior Lieutenant Kapranov. His wingman Lieutenant I.I. Kakurin drove off the enemy attack, after which the Mustangs left the combat area. According to Kakurin's after-action report, these were F-82 Twin Mustangs, and that when repelling their attack on Kapranov, he had fatally damaged one of them, but he received no confirmation for this victory.

At 1053, with no enemy aircraft remaining in the area, Major Khar'kovsky gathered his group at a command from the auxiliary command post in Andong and returned to

his home base without any losses. As a result of the fighting on 10 November, the pilots of the 64th IAK repelled several enemy attack groups, including the attack of the seven B-29s from the 307th BG on Uiju, and downed five enemy aircraft: two B-29s, two F-51s and one F-80. In the day's actions, the 64th IAK had no losses; only Lieutenant Kakurin's MiG received any damage, a bullet hole through his fuel tank, but he safely returned to base. The Americans acknowledge the loss of two Mustangs on this day and only one B-29.

On 11 November 1950, the 64th IAK had only one aerial engagement, but it was sufficiently bitter. At 1400 at a call from the Andong auxiliary command post, four MiGs led by the commander of the 28th GIAP Major Koliadin took off from the Anshan Air Base. In the area of Andong, at 1424 Koliadin's flight was attacked from above and behind by a group of 20 F-80s. In order to evade the attack, Koliadin banked sharply into a climbing left-hand turn. In doing so, the combat formation came apart, and the further combat was conducted in separate elements. Koliadin's wingman Captain Akimov drove off the attack on his leader and downed one of the F-80s, when he noticed that the wingman of the second element Senior Lieutenant M.P. Nasonov had not followed Koliadin in his climbing turn, but had continued flying straight ahead. Koliadin and the leader of the second element, the commander of the 2nd Squadron Hero of the Soviet Union Major V.D. Borovkov, having evaded the initial enemy attack, urgently ordered over the radio: "No. 23, you have enemy on your tail, break away!" Nasonov gave no indication that he heard the warning and continued a level turn to the left at an angle of about 30 degrees, but at this moment an F-80 opened fire at him from a range of 50 meters. Nasonov's MiG began to fall in a controlled, left-hand spiral. Borovkov went to the aid of his wingman Senior Lieutenant Nasonov, dropped onto the tail of the attacking F-80 element, and closing the range from 500 to 200 meters, shot down one of the Shooting Stars from behind. At this point Borovkov was jumped by a different pair of F-80s, and he was forced to cease his effort to cover his wingman. Attempting to make a crash landing at the airfield in Andong, which was still under construction, Senior Lieutenant M.P. Nasonov crashed and was killed.

The remaining three Soviet pilots separated from the enemy and successfully returned to Anshan. According to V.D. Borovkov, during this flight they had spotted an enemy forward airfield, where Mustangs were being stationed, and even conducted an attack on enemy aircraft that were taking off from the strip, in which he claimed that one or two enemy aircraft were destroyed. However, this author has not been able to locate any document that would confirm this claim. The American side acknowledged the loss of one F-80 and damage to a second F-80, both from the 49th FBG's 8th FBS.

On 12 November 1950, the pilots of the 151st GIAD essentially conducted the final aerial battles in the year 1950. The enemy again undertook several attacks on bridges across the Yalu with the forces of the USNAF's piston-engine aircraft and units of the Strategic Air Command. Eight MiGs led by Captain S.I. Korobov was the first to scramble to intercept an inbound enemy air strike. However, six of the MiGs immediately returned to base because they couldn't raise their landing gear. Captain Korobov's remaining element continued the mission and soon encountered 10 B-29s and six F-80s. Korobov attacked the bombers, but he himself was attacked by two of the escort fighters and only shook loose of them with difficulty. He then returned to base.

At 0905, the last combat of 1950 for the pilots of the 151st GIAD took place. It involved eight MiG-15s of the 28th GIAP. The leader Major V.D. Borovkov was engaging



12 F-80s in the Andong area. At the same time, between 0838 and 0948, six MiGs from the 72nd GIAP were dueling with six B-29s and 16 F-80s in the same area. In this action, Major Boldun's group scored no victories, but it did cause the enemy aircraft to turn back without completing its mission. After exiting the battle, Senior Lieutenant V.M. Dubrovin's element was directed by ground control toward a pair of piston-engine fighters. Maneuvering into attack position, they opened fire on them from a range of 800 meters, but observed no results from the firing. On this day, one South Korean T-6 failed to return from its reconnaissance flight; perhaps it had crashed as a result of an encounter with MiG-15s?

A little later, eight MiGs of the 139th GIAP's 1st Squadron, under the command of Captain B.V. Bochkov, lifted off a runway on the Liaoyang Air Base, tasked with defending Siniuju against an enemy air attack. At 0905 in the area south of Andong, at a command from the auxiliary command post they were directed to intercept a large group of enemy aircraft, consisting of 20 USNAF F9F-2 Panthers and AD-1 Skyraiders flying at an altitude of 8,000 meters in four-plane formations echeloned in altitude. The first to attack the enemy was Captain B.V. Bochkov's flight, which targeted a flight of four AD-1s. At this time, the wingman of the second element in Bochkov's flight Senior Lieutenant N.A. Kolesnichenko noticed four Panthers below them moving onto the tail of Senior Lieutenant A.I. Stuchkov's MiG; Kolesnichenko banked to the right and at a range of 250 meters attacked the enemy leader and downed him with two short bursts. The enemy's burning airplane fell in the vicinity of Andong, which was confirmed by the group's pilots, gun camera footage, and the auxiliary command post in Andong.

Captain Bochkov with his wingman Senior Lieutenant L.D. Shchegolev attacked the right-hand wingman in the formation of AD-1s and fired two bursts at him, after which the Skyraider snap rolled and plunged toward the ground. Bochkov overtook and passed the attacked enemy group at high speed, and didn't observe the fall of the stricken enemy aircraft, but other pilots confirmed that the AD-1 struck the ground.

In the course of the battle Lieutenant S. Kumonaev's engine flamed out and he landed at the Andong airfield. Due to fuel exhaustion, Lieutenant N.I. Sannikov and Lieutenant P.M. Kustov were also forced to land at Andong. On 14 November, all three pilots flew back to their base in Liaoyang. As a result of this action, only one downed enemy F9F-2 was confirmed; Captain Bochkov didn't receive credit for his probable victory over the AD-1. The Americans acknowledged the loss of both planes, but two days later, they also announced, of course, that the MiGs had nothing to do with either loss.

On 14 November 1950, the US Strategic Air Command undertook several attacks on Siniuju with B-29 bombers from the 19th and 307th BG. At 1040, eight MiGs from the 139th GIAP's 1st Squadron under the command of Major G.I. Khar'kovsky took off to intercept one enemy air raid. Guided by the auxiliary command post, our pilots soon spotted 20 B-29 bombers in a column of flights, covered by up to 20 F-80s. The enemy formations were approaching on a meeting course.

As the enemy aircraft neared Singisui, Khar'kovsky with his flight conducted the first attack against two groups of B-29s from below and to the right. Khar'kovsky and his wingman Lieutenant Iu.I. Akimov opened fire from a range of 600-800 meters at the group leader and another B-29 trailing to the leader's left. As a result, the bomber attacked by Khar'kovsky burst into flames, dropped its left wing, and Lieutenant Akimov watched as it fell to the earth. After the first attack, the second element, consisting of

Senior Lieutenant A.I. Kapranov and I.I. Kakurin attacked a following group of B-29s. However, they observed no results from their firing pass. With a left-hand turn they pulled out the attack and headed to the assembly point.

After the first attack from below, Khar'kovsky and Akimov climbed to the left, came around, and then dove on the bombers again and attacked the third group of B-29s from below and behind. Suddenly Khar'kovsky was jumped by an F-80; catching a glimpse of the American fighter angling toward him, Khar'kovsky broke off his attack into a climbing turn toward the sun. Gaining altitude in a left-hand turn and with the sun now at his back, he made another firing pass and attacked the fourth group of B-29s from above, behind and to the right. As a result, the extreme bomber on the left of the formation caught fire and fell off sharply to the left. Lieutenant Akimov, following his leader, saw the burning, falling bomber. However, at this moment Akimov himself was attacked by an F-80, and he would have been in a very tight situation, had not six MiGs from the 67th IAP under the command of Captain V.I. Sokolov suddenly shown up and hurried to his assistance. Captain Sokolov's flight had engaged the cover fighters, and it was he who had seen Akimov's precarious situation and went to bail him out of it. He dropped onto the tail of the pursuing F-80 and shot it down, while the rescued Akimov exited the fight and returned to base. The pilots of Khar'kovsky group watched as Sokolov's victim burst into flames and spun wildly out of control toward the earth.

Archival documents of the division state that Captain V.I. Sokolov was leading the group of aircraft from the 28th IAD's 67th IAP, and he received credit for the only F-80 that was shot down in this action. However, surviving veterans who participated in this action recall that the commander of the 67th IAP's 3rd Squadron, Captain M. Pakhomov, was leading the 67th IAP's group that day. Alas, there are other such inconsistencies between the recollections of veterans and the regimental documents ...

Senior Lieutenant N.I. Podgorny of the 67th IAP's 1st Squadron achieved the final victory in this clash. He had taken off from the Liaoyang Air Base together with his wingman Senior Lieutenant S.S. Kuprik a little after Captain Pakhomov's flight. When he approached the combat area, he spotted a group of B-29s that were flying without cover. Banking sharply around, he attacked the formation of Superfortresses. With the abrupt maneuver, Senior Lieutenant Kuprik lost his leader and returned to base alone. At this time Podgorny attacked one of the "boxes" of B-29s, and from short range shot down the tail-end B-29; it fell to the earth in flames. Podgorny, pulling out of his first attack, swung back around and made another attack on the three B-29s. This time he managed only to damage one of the bombers, but his MiG also came under the fire of the bombers' gunners and took hits – one bullet struck the oxygen cylinder, causing it to explode and damage his MiG's nose cowling, blocking the pilot's forward vision. Reducing his speed, Podgorny exited the battle and with difficulty made it back to his base, where he safely landed his MiG (the plane was restored to service in three days). Senior Sergeant Richard W. Fisher, a gunner aboard one of the B-29s from the 307th BG's 371st Squadron, received credit for downing Podgorny's MiG, but as we have seen, he only damaged it and it returned safely to base.

As a result of the aerial clash on 14 November 1950, pilots of the 64th IAK shot down five and damaged several more American aircraft. Pilots of the 139th GIAP claimed three enemy aircraft, and all three B-29s were credited to Major G.I. Khar'kovsky, for which he was awarded the Order of Lenin. Pilots of the 67th IAP shot down the other