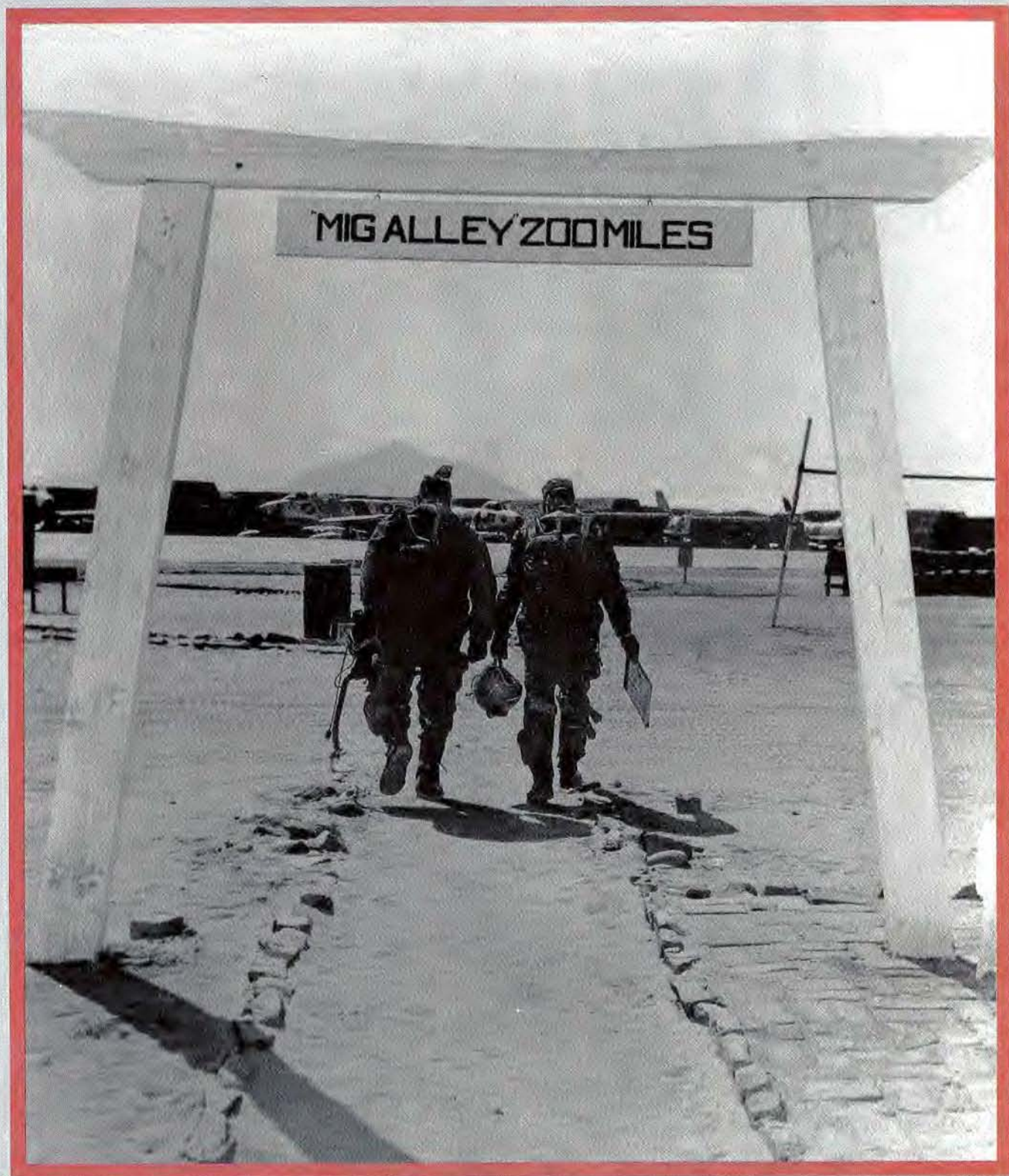


The Air War in Korea



A statistical portrait of USAF in the first hot conflict of the Cold War.

Within minutes of taking off, US airmen could have their RF-80s (right) over MiG Alley (opposite), as the skies over the area between the Yalu and Chongchon Rivers in northwest Korea were known. There the air was thick with MiG-15s piloted by North Korean, Chinese, and (it is now known) Russian pilots.

Below is a C-119 Flying Boxcar at Chinhae AB, South Korea



Photos from the collection of Warren Thompson

NEARLY half a century ago, from June 25, 1950, through July 27, 1953, the newly independent Air Force, in conjunction with other US services and various allies operating under the United Nations banner, halted aggression by North Korea and its Chinese allies.

Data charted in this section are drawn from the comprehensive *US Air Force Statistical Digest, Fiscal Year 1953: Summary of USAF Combat Operations in Korea, June 1950–July 1953*, published in 1954, and the authorized USAF history, *The United States Air Force in Korea, 1950–1953*, published in 1983 by the Office of Air Force History.



Fifth Air Force

- 3d Air Rescue Squadron
- 6th Troop Carrier (Heavy) Squadron
- 7th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 8th Bombardment (Light) Squadron
- 8th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 8th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron
- 9th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 13th Bombardment (Light) Squadron
- 22d Troop Carrier (Heavy) Squadron
- 35th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 36th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 39th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron
- 40th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron
- 41st Fighter-Interceptor Squadron
- 68th Fighter Squadron
- 80th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 339th Fighter Squadron
- 512th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron

Thirteenth Air Force

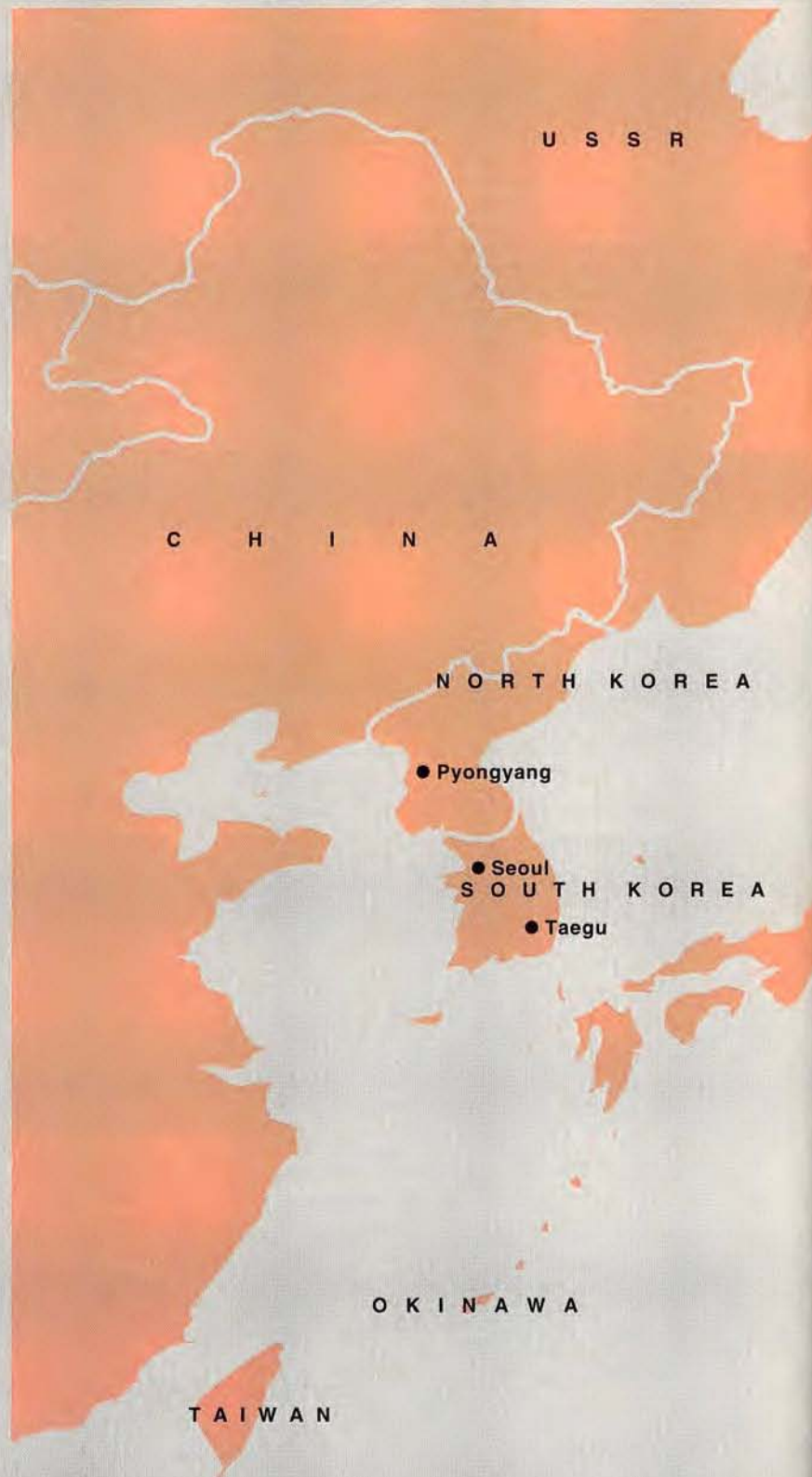
- 2d Air Rescue Squadron
- 12th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 21st Troop Carrier Squadron
- 24th Maintenance Group
- 24th Supply Group
- 44th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 67th Fighter-Bomber Squadron

Twentieth Air Force

- 2d Air Rescue Squadron
- 4th Fighter Squadron
- 16th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron
- 25th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron
- 26th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron
- 28th Bombardment (Medium) Squadron
- 30th Bombardment (Medium) Squadron
- 31st Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron
- 93d Bombardment (Medium) Squadron
- 514th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron

Far East Air Materiel Command

- 13th Maintenance Group
- 13th Supply Group
- 13th Medical Group
- 13th Air Base Group





Fifth Air Force

- 7th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 8th Bombardment (Light) Squadron
- 8th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 12th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 12th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron
- 13th Bombardment (Light) Squadron
- 15th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron
- 16th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron
- 25th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron
- 34th Bombardment (Light) Squadron
- 35th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 36th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 37th Bombardment (Light) Squadron
- 39th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron
- 45th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron
- 67th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 69th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 80th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 90th Bombardment (Light) Squadron
- 95th Bombardment (Light) Squadron
- 310th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 311th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 319th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron
- 334th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron
- 335th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron
- 336th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron
- 417th Engineering Aviation Brigade
- 428th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 429th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 430th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 605th Tactical Control Squadron
- 606th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron
- 607th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron
- 608th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron
- 2157th Air Rescue Squadron
- 6148th Tactical Control Squadron
- 6149th Tactical Control Squadron

Thirteenth Air Force

- 31st Air Rescue Squadron
- 32d Air Rescue Squadron
- 44th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 581st Air Resupply and Communications Wing

Twentieth Air Force

- 4th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron
- 26th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron
- 28th Bombardment (Medium) Squadron
- 30th Bombardment (Medium) Squadron
- 33d Air Rescue Squadron
- 34th Air Rescue Squadron
- 54th Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron
- 79th Air Rescue Squadron
- 93d Bombardment (Medium) Squadron
- 623d Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron
- 624th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron

- 851st Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron
- 852d Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron
- 6319th Air Base Wing

Far East Air Forces Logistics Forces

- 24th Air Depot Wing
- 75th Air Depot Wing
- 6400th Air Depot Wing
- 6418th Air Depot Wing

Japan Air Defense Force

- 3d Air Rescue Group
- 9th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
- 12th Strategic Fighter Wing
- 40th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron
- 41st Fighter-Interceptor Squadron
- 56th Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron
- 68th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron
- 339th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron
- 610th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron
- 611th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron
- 613th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron
- 618th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron
- 620th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron
- 621st Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron
- 847th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron
- 848th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron
- 849th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron
- 850th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron
- 6101st Air Base Wing

315th Air Division

- 6th Troop Carrier (Heavy) Squadron
- 19th Troop Carrier (Medium) Squadron
- 21st Troop Carrier (Heavy) Squadron
- 22d Troop Carrier (Heavy) Squadron
- 34th Troop Carrier (Medium) Squadron
- 43d Troop Carrier (Medium) Squadron
- 50th Troop Carrier (Medium) Squadron
- 61st Troop Carrier (Medium) Squadron
- 62d Troop Carrier (Medium) Squadron
- 344th Troop Carrier (Medium) Squadron
- 815th Troop Carrier (Medium) Squadron
- 816th Troop Carrier (Medium) Squadron
- 817th Troop Carrier (Medium) Squadron
- 6127th Air Terminal Group
- 6461st Troop Carrier (Medium) Squadron

Far East Air Forces Bomber Command (Provisional)

- 28th Bombardment (Medium) Squadron
- 30th Bombardment (Medium) Squadron
- 91st Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron
- 93d Bombardment (Medium) Squadron
- 343d Bombardment (Medium) Squadron
- 344th Bombardment (Medium) Squadron
- 345th Bombardment (Medium) Squadron
- 370th Bombardment (Medium) Squadron
- 371st Bombardment (Medium) Squadron
- 372d Bombardment (Medium) Squadron

USAF Battle Casualties in the Korean Theater

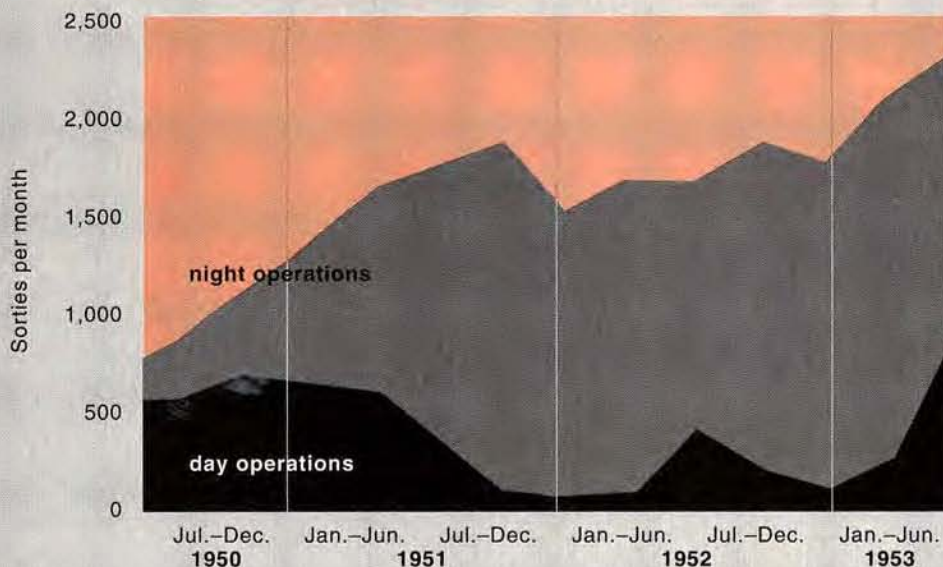
Fiscal Year (July–June)	Killed, Died of Wounds	Wounded, Evacuated	Missing, Captured	Total Casualties
1950–51	423	224	27	674
1951–52	218	102	10	330
1952–53	90	42	23	155
1953–54*	449	—	233	682
Total period	1,180	368	293	1,841

*Casualties resolved after the war were included in this year-category.

Combatant Commands and Their Korean War Casualties

Combatant Command	Killed, Died of Wounds	Wounded, Evacuated	Missing, Captured	Total Casualties
Far East Air Forces	892	289	201	1,382
Strategic Air Command	183	51	64	298
Military Air Transport Service	21	16	1	38
Tactical Air Command	59	4	14	77
Air Defense Command	25	8	13	46
Total period	1,180	368	293	1,841

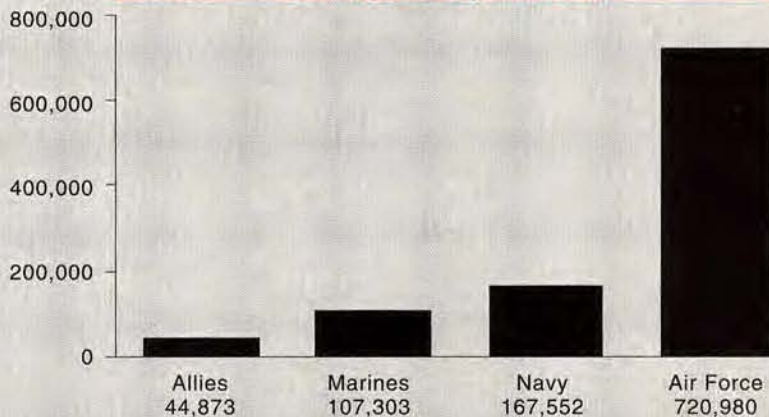
Distribution of B-26 Effort



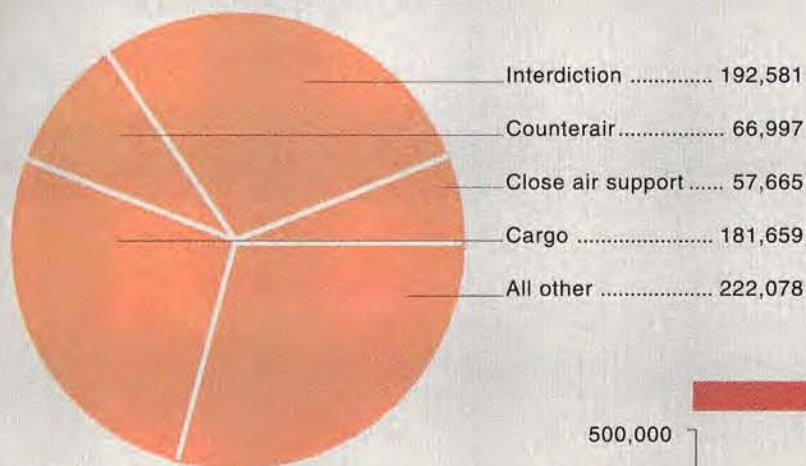
Two B-26 units, USAF's 3d Bombardment Wing and 452d Bombardment Wing, specialized in nighttime intrusion. With the start in mid-1951 of a new railway-interdiction effort (code-named "Strangle"), night interdiction assumed added importance, but the pace of B-26 day operations picked up in the last half of the war.

In the UN air effort, USAF conducted the lion's share of total sorties—720,980, or about seventy percent. Significant numbers also were flown by aviators of the US Navy (167,552 sorties) and the US Marine Corps (107,303 sorties). Another contribution (a total of 44,873 sorties) came from the air forces of friendly or allied nations—South Korea, Australia, South Africa, Thailand, Greece, and Britain.

Total Sorties (1,040,708)



Breakdown of USAF Sorties



Ordnance Tonnages

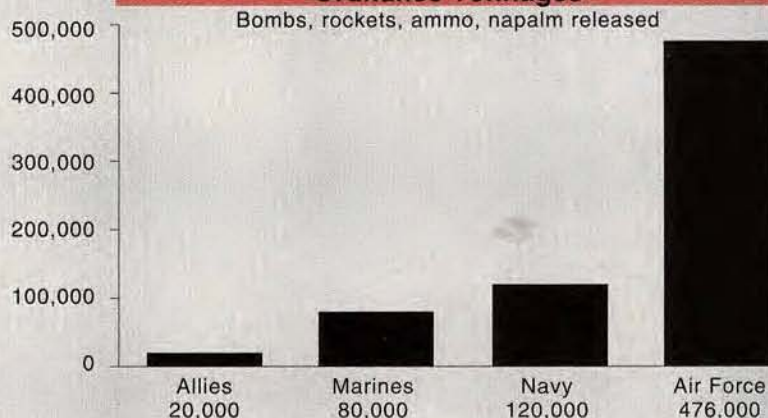


Photo from the collection of Warren Thompson



At the height of its participation in the war, the fledgling US Air Force had more than 46,000 uniformed personnel on the peninsula. USAF airmen suffered almost 2,000 casualties, so returning from a mission in one piece was cause for congratulations, even for Capt. Joseph McConnell, USAF's leading ace of the war.

315th Air Division Combat Cargo Operations, 1950-53

Parameter	Into Korea	Intra Korea	Out of Korea	Intra Japan
Total sorties	65,334	58,573	45,572	40,864
Tons of cargo	296,316	133,755	149,039	100,526
Passengers	906,262	416,686	868,753	413,890
Ton-miles	75,609,000	12,553,000	32,828,000	37,374,000
Personnel-miles	481,338,000	96,911,000	516,352,000	188,766,000

USAF Aircraft Losses on Operational Missions

Cause	1950	1951	1952	1953	Total
Enemy, air-to-air	9	56	60	14	139
Enemy, ground fire	103	229	154	64	550
Enemy, unknown	6	20	31	11	68
Not enemy action	104	186	112	70	472
Unknown, missing	47	102	60	28	237
Total	269	593	417	187	1,466

Enemy Aircraft Destroyed or Damaged

Category	1950	1951	1952	1953	Total
Destroyed, claimed	97	180	383	293	953
Air-to-air	49	175	383	293	900
Air-to-ground	48	5	0	0	53
Destroyed, probable	43	39	60	51	193
Air-to-air	20	37	60	51	168
Air-to-ground	23	2	0	0	25
Damaged	48	313	400	248	1,009
Air-to-air	22	303	400	248	973
Air-to-ground	26	10	0	0	36
Total enemy losses	188	532	843	592	2,155

Airpower put at risk not only Communist aircraft. USAF, Marine aviation, and friendly foreign air forces also claimed to have destroyed 1,327 tanks, 82,920 vehicles, 963 locomotives, 10,407 railway cars, 1,153 bridges, 118,231 buildings, 8,663 gun positions, 8,839 bunkers, 593 barges and boats, sixty-five tunnels, and sixteen oil-storage tanks. The aircrews claimed to have made 28,621 cuts on enemy railroads.

Demoralizing the Enemy

What Did It?

A survey of 825 prisoner-of-war interrogations having specific references to morale revealed that tactical airpower contributed materially to the demoralization of Communist troops. The survey found that the demoralizing effect of tactical air attack ranked second only to discontent about lack of food.

Cause of Low Morale	Percent
Shortage of food	21.4
Tactical aircraft threat	17.9
Lack of training	11.3
Lack of arms and equipment	9.8
Insufficient rest	8.2
Forced induction	6.3
Casualties	6.2
No cause for fighting	4.9
Artillery attack threat	4.7
Desertion	3.3
Harsh treatment by officers	1.6
Lack of replacements	1.5
Inadequate clothing	1.2
All other causes	1.7

Who Destroyed What?

A Comparison of Air and Ground Forces

Communist Force Targets	Killed/Destroyed by Aircraft	Killed/Destroyed by Ground Arms
Troops	47%	53%
Tanks	75%	25%
Trucks	81%	19%
Artillery	72%	28%

Airpower made a great contribution by interdicting hostile troops, weapons, and supplies. Under vulnerable conditions imposed by a lack of air cover and of training in antiaircraft measures, Communist forces found themselves exposed to the fullest shock effect of airpower.

USAF Combat Aircraft on Hand in the Korean Theater, 1950-53

Aircraft Type	July 1950	July 1951	July 1952	July 1953	Average, 37 months
B-26 bomber	79	157	190	194	161
B-29 bomber	87	104	118	117	109
F-51 fighter	190	227	150	65	167
F-80 fighter	528	254	224	152	270
F-82 fighter	37	24	0	0	16
F-84 fighter	0	175	353	410	247
F-86 fighter	0	93	177	439	184
F-94 fighter	0	14	100	82	56
Total	921	1,048	1,312	1,459	1,210

Photo from the collection of Warren Thompson



In Korea, up-to-the-minute fighters like the F-94 fought side by side with World War II holdovers, such as the B-29 (left). On the support side, aircraft as old as the C-47 (which dates from 1935) saw plenty of service.

USAF Support Aircraft on Hand in the Korean Theater, 1950-53

Aircraft Type	July 1950	July 1951	July 1952	July 1953	Average, 37 months
R/WB-26	0	24	30	30	27
R/WB-29	4	38	40	37	36
RF-51	0	7	22	0	18
RF-80	35	36	40	57	39
C-46	41	72	76	73	70
C/VC-47	84	129	134	133	123
C-54	31	64	64	21	47
C-119	0	86	95	104	87
C-124	0	0	13	25	9
Other	273	289	384	375	334
Total	468	745	898	855	790

USAF Personnel in Far East Air Forces

Personnel Category	July 1950	July 1951	July 1952	July 1953
Officer	5,067	11,117	14,178	15,429
Enlisted	39,618	70,232	101,914	114,039
Civilian	9,792	11,200	12,045	11,032
Total	54,477	92,549	128,137	140,500

USAF Uniformed Personnel in Major Forward Operating Locations

Operating Location	June 1950	December 1950	June 1951	December 1951	June 1952	December 1952	June 1953	Final July 1953
Guam	5,698	4,073	4,186	3,972	4,849	6,585	5,416	5,399
Korea	1	10,063	20,908	34,895	42,376	46,388	44,650	43,791
Japan	21,324	34,923	35,059	43,468	46,543	54,418	60,297	60,299
Okinawa	9,339	10,389	8,383	8,913	10,550	9,736	10,520	10,532
Philippines	5,293	5,659	5,097	5,635	5,120	7,369	7,807	8,036
Total	41,655	65,107	73,633	96,883	109,438	124,496	128,690	128,057

Photo from the collection of Warren Thompson



This F-51 is from the 18th Fighter-Bomber Wing, which remains in the region today as the 18th Wing, although it is now stationed at Kadena AB, Japan. Today, Pacific Air Forces has about 35,000 military personnel in the region, compared to Far East Air Forces' 129,000 in five countries in July 1953.

USAF Combat Crew Inventories in the Korean Theater, 1950-53

Aircraft Type	July 1950	July 1951	July 1952	July 1953	Average, 37 months
B-26 bomber	40	105	174	191	144
B-29 bomber	81	86	112	109	101
F-51 fighter	70	122	118	—	121
F-80 fighter	368	349	222	158	268
F-82 fighter	25	29	—	—	18
F-84 fighter	—	217	303	554	263
F-86 fighter	—	121	216	489	203
F-94 fighter	—	16	103	165	66
Total	584	1,045	1,248	1,666	1,184

Total USAF Flying Hours in the Korean War, 1950-53

Aircraft type	1950-51	1951-52	1952-53	Total
Bombers	180,581	185,151	195,444	561,176
Fighters	293,766	300,185	385,120	979,071
Transports	290,360	390,897	318,124	999,381
Other	164,301	185,505	278,678	628,484
All types	929,008	1,061,738	1,177,366	3,168,112



Photo from the collection of Warren Thompson

Wartime Airfields

Country/Location	Fields	Active Runways
Guam	3	5
Iwo Jima	1	1
Japan	41	49
Korea	34	36
Okinawa	8	9
Philippines	1	1
Ryukyus	2	4
Total	90	105

This 452d Bomb Group B-26 suffered major damage to its nose and engines. Though USAF lost more than 1,400 aircraft during the war, only 139 of the losses were caused by enemy air-to-air action.

USAF Fuel Consumption, 1950-53

(gallons)

Aircraft type	1950-51	1951-52	1952-53	Total
Bombers	55,273,000	48,277,000	55,757,000	159,307,000
Fighters	79,357,000	99,273,000	148,111,000	326,741,000
Transports	47,805,000	61,875,000	41,893,000	151,573,000
Other	27,552,000	33,198,000	66,025,000	126,775,000
All types	209,987,000	242,623,000	311,786,000	764,396,000