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Operations

KOREAN AIR WAR

THOUGH the Korean air war lacks something of being a full scale two-way air war, what enemy air activity there has been has served to point up many advantages as well as points for improvement in our own air operations and tactics. The intermittent flurries of enemy activity further point up basic flight tactics of the Reds.

A potpourri of air operations is found in a recent unofficial report from three Navy fliers working with an Air Force fighter interceptor group near Suwon.

As the Reds were basing an estimated 60 MIG–15's at adjacent Antung, this particular area afforded the opportunity for a selective war between the highly touted MIG's and the UN's F–86 *Sabre*.

"The enemy until lately has been flying standard four-ship divisions with excellent air discipline. Upon initial contact the division usually splits into sections with one section pulling up in a climbing turn and one section diving and turning away in the opposite direction. This enemy maneuver is designed to lure the friendly flight into following either of the enemy sections at which time the other enemy section reverses its maneuver and comes in behind the friendly flight. This often-used enemy maneuver is easily countered by our six-plane flight, described in detail elsewhere in this article. At other times, the enemy flight explodes in all directions, then each friendly section leader picks a single and goes in for the kill.

"The enemy pilots individually are very good and are much better tacticians than those first encountered in December," the letter continues. "Only very recently have they started using a six-plane division, flying the same 'finger tip' formation. They use altitude and speed to great advantage by virtue of the Yalu 'foul line' and their own ground controllers. The first pass by the enemy, if sighted in time, usually ends up head-on as all friendly flights immediately turn into the attack while attempting to drop tanks and accelerate. The scrap then degenerates into an individual dog fight characterized by the very high speeds and the immense air space involved."

The Navy airmen reported they were very pleased with the performance of the F–86 even though it seems to be slightly inferior to the MIG–15 in all respects above 30,000 feet.

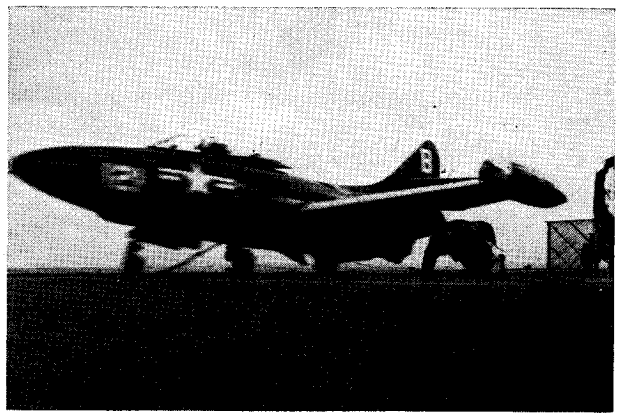
The *Sabre* was reported as having excellent acceleration characteristics at 15,000 to 20,000 feet.

The Navy airmen expressed the opinion that the present concept of fighter escort requires a fighter capable of meeting a very high performance interceptor on an equal basis and still be capable of tremendous endurance.

Escorts.—Escort work so far with this Air Force group has consisted of covering either a single RB–45 jet photo recon ship or boxes of B–29's. This presents two different problems with a satisfactory solution immediately available for neither.

The B–45 operates at between 38,000 and 40,000 feet at a relatively high speed (0.80 Mach). It is generally covered by three four-plane flights, one flight maintaining position high and abeam each side and the other flight high and approximately a mile astern. The F–86 is unable to weave effectively over the B–45 at this altitude since time on station is materially reduced by increased fuel consumption. It also is doubtful that the weave would be practical at this altitude because of the tremendous air space involved.

The MIG's attack from high astern with large speed



Catapult *transforms a Panther jet into a blur of speed and power as the F9F is launched from a carrier for a strike against Communist forces in North Korea. Panthers have held the line against MIGs*

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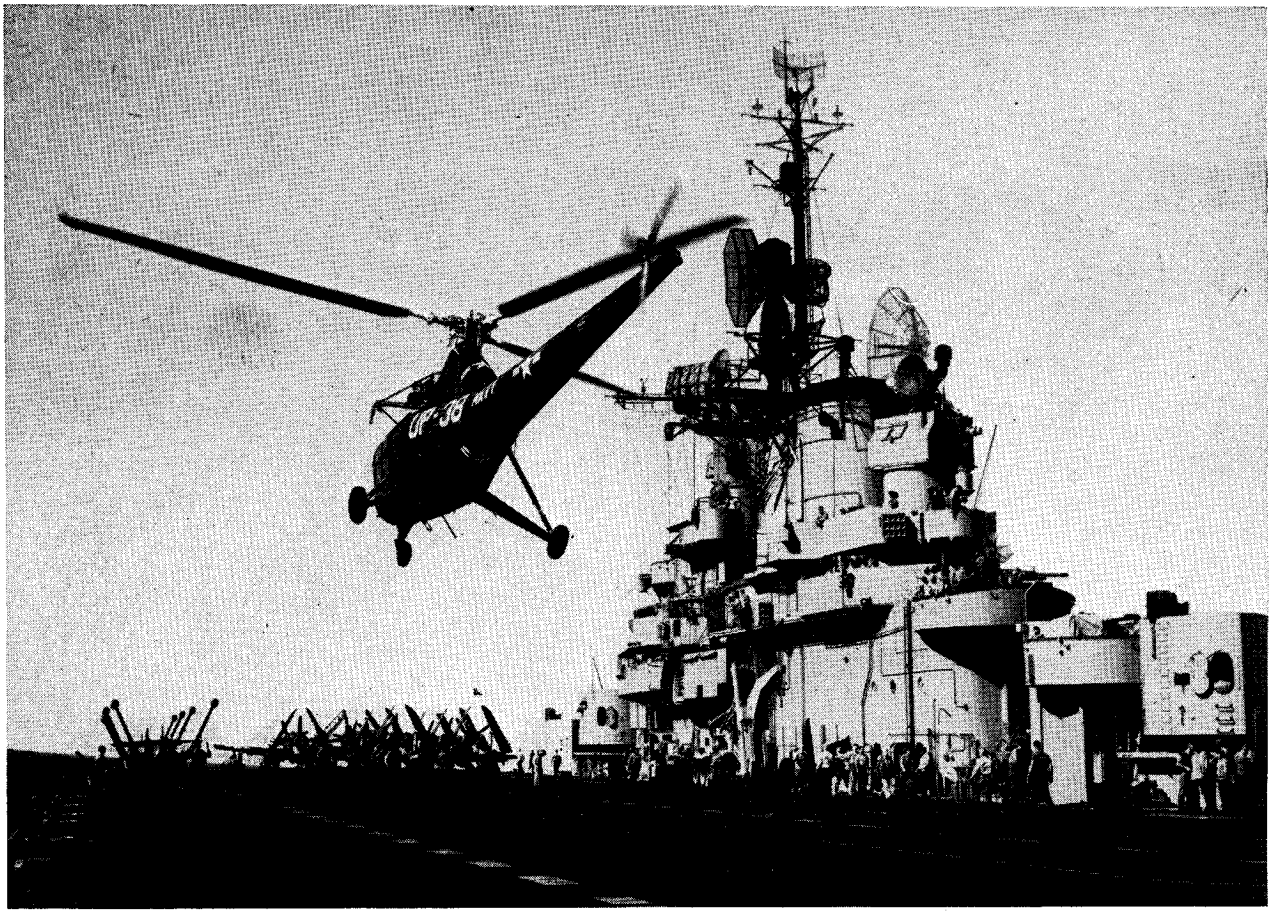

***Whirlybird** lands on flight deck of the Boxer after an air-sea rescue mission for which the rotary wing aircraft have become so famous in the Korean War. Both over land and sea the helicopter has proved its value*

differentials and in some instances have made firing runs on the B–45 before the *Sabres* could drop their tanks and accelerate to combat speed. So far, however, no B–45's have been lost while escorted by F–86's.

Escorting the B–29 is an even greater problem. They usually fly between 15,000 and 20,000 feet and have a tendency to straggle, thereby aggravating the problem. A section weave has been most successful, but it definitely is not the final answer. The *Sabre* again is handicapped by the lack of endurance and must fly at reduced power to conserve fuel. Consequently the speed differential in the MIG's first attack pass is very great and it is virtually impossible to counter runs once they have been initiated despite the excellent acceleration characteristics of the *Sabre*.

CAP's.—Combat air patrols in "MIG Alley" usually have consisted of 24 to 36 aircraft in 6-plane divisions. The divisions consist of three 2-ship sections, with sections flying almost line abreast. The wing men usually are about 500 feet from the section leader with about 800 feet between sections. (Distances vary with altitude due to the change in turning radius.) This formation is almost identical with the old Navy ABC and the Navy fliers believe it is the ideal setup for CAP's and fighter sweeps. It was thought much easier to maneuver two six-ship divisions effectively at high altitudes than three four-ship divisions. Because of this maneuvering ease, more two-ship sections—which is the basic striking element—can be brought against the enemy. This formation is considered extremely strong both offensively and defensively and is superior to two four-ship divisions.

Desired improvements included a request for a better aircraft weapon. Eight of the aircraft in this group were equipped with the A1–C radar ranging gun sight which was well liked by the pilots.

These comments were the unofficial opinions of this group up to the time of the report, 9 June 1951.

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