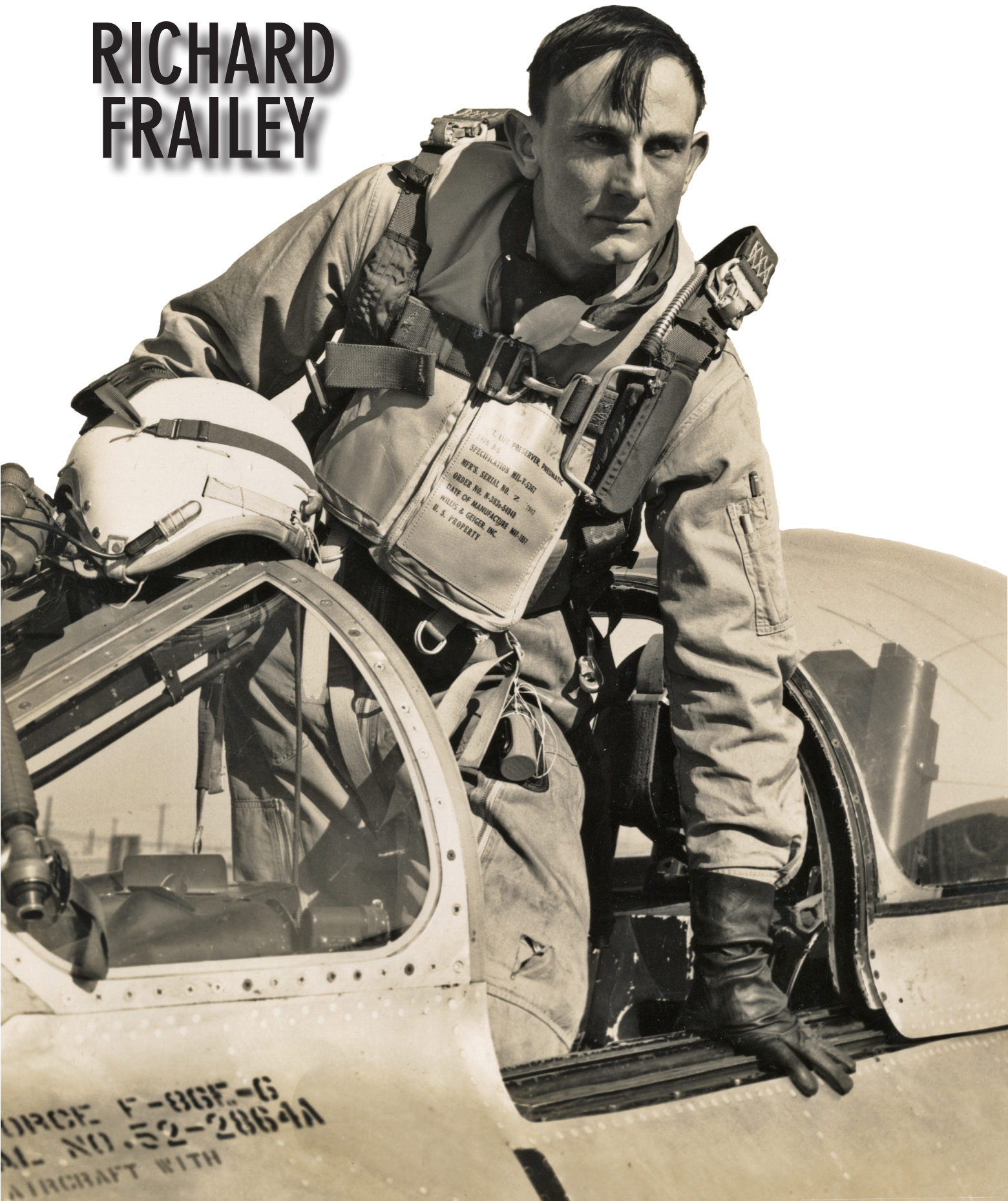


RICHARD FRAILEY



THE AIR WAR OVER KOREA

High above the Yalu River at 500 mph, four U.S. Air Force F-86F Sabre jets were heading home from a hunting expedition. It was June 15, 1953, the thirty-sixth month of the Korean War.

The American pilots had hoped to ambush a cluster of MiG-15s, the Soviet-built jets flown by the Chinese and North Koreans. When First Lieutenant Richard L. Frailey spotted a jet some 3,000 feet behind, he figured it was another southbound friend, not foe.

A burst of machine-gun fire riddled his left wing; another slammed .50-caliber

shells into the engine. The slug that shattered the canopy also took out the instrument panel. Frailey struggled to maintain altitude as his crippled plane began streaming smoke. It didn't enter his mind that his sixty-fourth mission over North Korea might be his last.

When it was clear he had to eject, what rankled was that he was going to lose the new Canon camera he had acquired on leave in Japan a few months earlier. Just then, a voice in his headset shouted: "Screw the camera! I'll buy you a new one."

It was not for nothing that they called him "Fearless Frailey." Surrounded by swashbuckling aces and West Pointers like future astronaut Buzz Aldrin, the ROTC graduate from Tooele, Utah, seemed unperturbable in combat. He was everything you could hope for in a wingman, the cool hand who has your back in a high-speed dogfight.

"The F-86 was a piece of cake—a great airplane," Frailey remembers, his good eye brightening at the memories. The swept-wing fighter was the embodiment of jet-age aviation. Back home, a



Frailey, right, with fellow pilots outside group headquarters at Kimpo. *Frailey collection*



F-86's at Kimpo Air Base in 1951. U.S. Air Force photo

lot of 10-year-olds were busy building balsa-wood Sabre jets to swoop around their bedrooms.

Only 26, Frailey was already in his second war. He'd been a teenage sailor as World War II wound down. A flight jacket suited him better than bell bottoms. Tall and slim, Frailey had an eagle's beak—a permanent souvenir from getting kicked by a horse—a chiseled chin, exceptional eye-hand coordination and a droll sense of humor. The pilots of the 4th Fighter-Interceptor Wing toasted their victories with boozy choruses of "Save a Fighter Pilot's Ass!," a ditty Frailey can still recite by heart.

Frailey's squadron, the 334th, was based at K-14, an air base at Kimpo near beleaguered Seoul. Between De-

ember of 1952 and the summer of '53, Frailey prowled "MiG Alley" along the Yalu, 225 miles north, often crossing into China. There was a MiG base at Antung, just across the river. If you could "bounce" a flight of MiGs just as they were taking off, so much the better.

On many missions Frailey flew wing to a legendary fighter pilot. Jim Jabara didn't look like a Central Casting top gun. He was short and swarthy, the cigar-chomping son of Lebanese immigrants. Dueling with the Luftwaffe during World War II, "Jabby" was a tiger in the cockpit of the P-51 Mustang, the last great propeller warbird. When Jabara shot down his fifth MiG over North Korea in the spring of 1951 with an F-86 he became the first American ace of the jet age. Before it was over, thanks in no small part to squadron mates like Frailey, Jabara had 10 more victories, a chest full of medals and a song celebrating his exploits as "The Ceegar Kid," a triple ace. Few, however, have ever heard the whole story of the day Jabara and Frailey had a rendezvous with ignominy. The Air Force certainly tried to cover it up.

Happily, 2017 finds Frailey alive and well at 90 in Tumwater—still fearless after all these years. And he knows the whole truth about war: It's madness.

RICHARD LEROY FRAILEY'S American ancestors, mostly Germanic Pennsylvanians, served under General Washington in the Continental Army. In Philadelphia, they became carpenters, butchers and shopkeepers. Frailey's father, born in 1900, moved to Kansas to take up farming and married a school teacher whose Swedish parents were Wyoming

homesteaders. Bill and Josephine Frailey had second thoughts about agriculture even before the Dust Bowl wiped out practically everyone on a hundred-million acres from Cheyenne to Amarillo. Meanwhile, to the Frailey clan's everlasting chagrin, oil was discovered back East on land once owned by the family.

Richard, the second of the Fraileys' two sons, was born in the spring of 1927 in the Tooele Valley, 35 miles southwest of Salt Lake City. Richard's father had landed a decent job as a miner, then ascended to foreman at a smelter. World War II brought a military ordnance depot and even more jobs to the area.

Richard and his brother, Bill III, two years older, rode to and from school on a sometimes obstinate horse called Old Paint. The Frailey place featured a windmill Richard liked to climb, all the better to survey the snow-capped Rockies in the distance. "Sometimes airplanes would come over, and I imagined it was Lindbergh up there—'The Lone Eagle.' I'd shout, 'Lindy! Lindy!' When my dad caught me doing that one day it was the first time he ever struck me. He kicked me in the butt and said there'd be no more



UTAH SAILOR LIKES HOLLYWOOD

As a swabbie during World War II, Frailey visited the Hollywood canteen and won a \$25 war bond, presented by starlet Shirley Hunter. This photo appeared in his hometown paper, *The Salt Lake Tribune*.

of that because it could suddenly swing with the wind and knock me right off." Frailey confesses to doing "a lot of silly things" growing up, notably concocting a quart of nitroglycerin in the basement. He found the formula in a book at the public library and acquired the ingredients at the drugstore. "It was important to keep it cold, so I had it sitting in a bucket of ice and kept stirring it. It finally dawned on me this might be mega-something, even for me. So I took it up a canyon and detonated it with a .22. There was a big boom! That's the stupidest thing I ever did." A mischievous smile betrays that it was also terrific fun. Frailey's adventures in chemistry included the darkroom. He became editor of the high school yearbook and took many of its snapshots, also working part-time at the Army depot.

Faced with the draft right out of high school, Frailey heeded his brother's warning that Army food was "terrible" and joined the Navy. After boot camp,

he shipped out for Pearl Harbor, spent some uneventful time on Midway, and at war's end visited the Hollywood Canteen, a famous club for servicemen. Fireman Second Class Frailey got his photo on the front page of *The Salt Lake Tribune* when he won a \$25 war bond and a hug from a starlet volunteering as a canteen hostess.

Discharged in 1946, Frailey enrolled at Utah State University on the GI Bill.

Midway through college, a young woman who was as smart as she was pretty entered his life. Jacqueline "Jackie" Lamoreux, whose father was the mayor of Elma, Washington, had a degree in sociology from Whitman College. She was visiting a college chum from Utah when she met Richard on a blind date and accepted his fraternity pin a week later. He made her laugh, and radiated confidence. Richard knew within an hour that he'd met the love of his life. They were married in Elma on December 21, 1949. Now it's 67 years and counting.



As a sailor during World War II.
Frailey collection

FRAILEY COMPLETED the coursework for an engineering degree in three years. In June of 1951 he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force through the ROTC program. He soon qualified for basic flight training, soloing over Florida orange groves in the classic single-engine AT-6 trainer, first produced in the 1930s. "It was a ground-looping S.O.B.!" Frailey remembers with a laugh. "Then I was selected for advanced flight school at Williams Air Force Base in Arizona and went from a puddle-jumper to the F-80, the Lockheed 'Shooting Star.' It was the first jet fighter that had its engine right in the fuselage." The pilot now really was a jet jockey. "I was too green to realize I was in something really hot, but it didn't bother me a bit. I really enjoyed flying that thing."

Next stop was Nellis AFB on the outskirts of Las Vegas—and the promise of something even hotter, a state-of-the-art, \$220,000 airplane.* The F-86 Sabre was North American Aviation's answer to the Soviet Union's own formidable swept-wing fighter jet, the Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-15.

Frailey's instructor at Nellis was Captain Robert T. Latshaw, just back from Korea, where he had become the war's fourteenth F-86 ace. Latshaw, a handsome 27-year-old with a dashing mustache, offered his students a memorably succinct first lecture: "The thing I got out of Korea was my ass, and I hope you do the same!"

Frailey vividly remembers the day of his final flight test, the instrument check, when "who shows up but Latshaw." They taxied out in a tandem-seat T-33 jet trainer. Frai-

* Roughly \$3 million in 2016 dollars. The Air Force version of the latest Lockheed Martin F-35A "Lightning II" fighter jet is estimated at \$85 million per unit.

ley went “under the hood” in the back seat. He was expected to fly the plane on instruments alone beneath the blacked-out rear canopy.

Latshaw parked at the end of the runway. “You’ve got it!” he said.

“So there I was, just flying on the bubble. But I could feel his feet on the controls, keeping it straight.”

Twenty minutes passed. “Now pop the hood,” Latshaw said.

Frailey looked around and did a double take. “We were at the bottom of the Grand Canyon, flying along at low altitude at about 250. I looked up and saw the tops of the canyon peaks. And I’m down here buzzing along in the back seat doing pretty good—amazed but not flustered even though I’m thinking, ‘Holy shit.’ ”

“You can’t make this next turn. It’s too steep,” Latshaw said. “I’ll take it now.” The ace pulled up the nose, deftly executed a rollover and ordered, “Take me home.”

“What about the instrument check?”

“You had it.”

If Latshaw got a guy who panicked—and several did when they looked up and saw the tops of those mountains—he flunked.

As they climbed out of the trainer, Latshaw shook Frailey’s hand. He had passed. “So now I’m on my way to F-86s and ‘glory.’ ” He had no idea what he was getting into.

Frailey arrived in Korea just before Christmas, 1952.



Frailey, center, the barracks’ handyman, wields a hammer at Kimpo. *Frailey collection*

THE 334th FIGHTER-INTERCEPTOR Squadron operated out of a former World War II Japanese Air Base with rudimentary barracks from the same era. The dirt runway at Kimpo was covered with planked perforated steel.

Frailey was handy with a hammer. He set about building compartments so he and his hooch-mates would have a place to stow their belongings. When he heard where the others had gone to college, he felt like the hick from the sticks. “Here’s the competition,” Frailey says, producing a photo from a shelf. “This guy, Niemann, was West Point. This guy, Mulrone, went to MIT. He was the joy of the bunch. And here’s old ROTC-sie Dick!” Bob Niemann became his closest friend. “In the spring of ’53, he was shot down,” Frailey remembers too clearly. “We thought he was dead. Bad news. Then we heard he’d been

wounded and captured. Another friend spent years trying to find out where he went. We think Niemann was taken into Manchuria. They figure he disappeared into Russia. The word was that he refused to talk about our missions, so they must have tortured him to death.

“I didn’t fully realize at first the type of people I was associated with. Not every fighter guy in the Air Force got to go to Korea. I didn’t grasp what a privilege that was—what an experience it was. There weren’t all that many of us there.” But after the exaltation and adrenalin of a victory, the “glory” part was short-lived, especially when someone never made it back. Losing a great guy like Niemann cast a pall. Stress is different from fear. “You know what gets me?” Frailey says. “On all these pictures—and I can show you a whole bunch more—everybody’s grinnin’. Well, I’ve also got some showing where I’m sweating. And I’m not smiling! I’d land and be soaked in sweat. That’s an hour and 45 minutes, often in life-or-death aerial combat. The speeds you go; the evasive maneuvers; the G’s you pull—six or seven G’s in a turn. We’re talking about the force of gravity on the human body under high acceleration. The G-suits we wore to keep you from blacking out squeezed the hell out of you.”

When Frailey talks about flying, he often says “aeroplane” instead of “airplane.” Maybe it’s his way of saying that in his day the machines were different—jets, to be sure, but still only 35 years removed from the day the Red Baron lost a duel with a Sopwith Camel.

The greenhorns got one welcome-to-Korea flight before they went to war for



F-86 ace “Jabby” Jabara, cigar in mouth, demonstrates a combat maneuver as Frailey, center, and others look on. *Frailey collection*

real. “We flew up north about 40 miles, and the experienced guy would do a lot of wild maneuvers, like flying upside down. He’d say you’d better stay on his wing in the pattern. Or else it was goodbye. That was your introduction,” Frailey says. “After that, we went north. You were always in a group. Guys who were your friends. Guys you trusted. And with guys like Jim Jabara, if you screwed it up you’d be there one day and gone the next.”

Jabara, who stood out from the other pilots “almost as much as if he really had been a knight of yore on a quest for the Grail,” quickly saw that he could trust Frailey. The witty beanpole from Utah was an instinctive, first-rate pilot with steady nerves. “My eyesight was also exceptional,” Frailey remembers. “Now I can’t hardly see you. Back then, Jabara and other staff guys wanted

to fly with me because I could see so far and wide. And, remember, the war we were fighting was the last one ever fought with conventional weapons. Everything after that was rockets." In Korea there were no heat-seeking missiles, just machine-guns and cannons aimed by human beings. In many ways it was like a cowboy movie shootout, in this case an "Eastern." Get the drop on the other guy and aim for his heart.

"Jabara was the ultimate warrior when it came to going to the sound of the guns without orders," retired Lieutenant General William E. Brown Jr., who flew 125 combat missions in Korea, remembered at a forum in 2006. "If you're with him in a bar fight, he's looking for a guy to punch—but if you're not careful, he might, in his excitement, punch you."

FRANCIS "GABBY" GABRESKI, the top propeller-plane ace in the European Theater during World War II, was thrilled when he got his chance to fly the Sabre jet in combat as deputy wing commander at Kimpo. "The F-86 was a fighter pilot's airplane in every way," he recalled.

It was fast, climbed well, and was very responsive to the controls. The cockpit was placed out in front of the leading edge of the wings, so the pilot had to swivel his head way around even to see the wings. It made you feel as if you were flying a rocket with no wings at all.

Early in the war, the F-86 and MiG-15 were closely matched. But the latest model Sabre jet Frailey flew was more maneuverable and faster. That was especially so in a



Frailey, third from left, front row, and fellow pilots pose with one of their Sabre jets. *Frailey collection*

full-throttle dive, when an F-86F could bang through the sound barrier. While the lighter MiG-15 could out-climb and out-turn the F-86 above 25,000 feet, the high-altitude performance gap was closing. Moreover, the MiG was flimsier and harder to fly, with a high-speed shimmy. Equipped with three cannons, the MiG ostensibly had greater firepower. But if you nailed one in the rear fuselage with your six rapid-fire .50-caliber machine-guns “that guy was going down,” Frailey says. The Americans were also confident they were the better pilots, especially in comparison to the North Koreans and Chinese. The F-86 vs. MiG-15 “kill ratio” is hotly debated to this day. Both sides over-claimed victories. Estimates of the U.S. Air Force’s superiority range from a highly suspect 14 to 1 to 1.4 to 1 when the adversaries were the Soviet Union’s top pilots. Against inexperienced foes it was strictly no contest. All things considered, the Sabre jet jockeys convincingly won their war.

If Frailey always seemed to fly faster, it was partly because he had a friend on the ground and a “rat” in his tail. “I really had a bubble on everybody else in that squadron,” the old fighter pilot says, smiling at the memory. The maintenance officer was one of his high school pals from Utah. “To make an aeroplane go faster you install a ‘rat’—a device that changes the temperature of the gas coming out. If you don’t do it right it will burn the engine up. If I had a rat in the tail I had an edge on everybody else. Every F-86 I flew was the best one available that day. Nobody could get away from me. I flew with a lot of big wheels who were full-throttle all the time. But I always kept up with them.”

As for the glory, the rules of engagement were clear: the leader of the formation—old-hands like Jabara—called the shots. Warrior to the core, guns blazing, “he’d grind ’em right down to the ground with me whistling along behind him,” Frailey remembers.

Frailey’s turn finally came on May 26, 1953. Jabara, Frailey and two squadron mates were sweeping MiG Alley when 16 MiG-15s zoomed across the Yalu. Jabara jettisoned his 200-gallon drop tanks and led the way as the outmanned F-86s plunged into the enemy hive. The surprised MiG pilots “scattered and hurried back across the river.”

“We spotted two more MiGs, and Jabara shot ’em down. Bam! Bam!” Frailey caught his breath and glanced to his right. He was stunned to discover “a damn MiG right there—25 feet away! His cockpit was fogged up. I watched the pilot move his hand back and forth, trying to wipe a place to see out. Finally he got a spot open in the windscreen and looked over at me. He was wearing a leather helmet. Probably couldn’t believe his eyes, having mistaken me for his flight leader. Jabara had just finished shooting down this guy’s partner.

“I got a guy who thinks I’m his mother,” Frailey radioed Jabara. “What do I do?”

“Shoot the sonofabitch!”

Frailey was taken aback. “Jabara had never said that to anybody. But that one was mine. We got tremendous publicity on that incident. It was ‘Four MiGs in four minutes.’ Jabara got two, which brought his total to nine; I got one and the other guy in the flight got one.” Frailey can’t say for sure, but he suspects the pilot of the MiG he shot down was a



America's first jet ace, James "Jabby" Jabara, left, briefs squadron mates at Kimpo Air Base before a mission. Frailey, his wingman, is at his side. *Frailey collection*

Russian, not Chinese or Korean.*

Frailey can't remember what he paid for the spiffy new 35mm Canon camera he acquired in Japan on leave. Probably something like 40 bucks, which qualified as expensive. There was plenty of gun-camera footage of MiG-15s in flight, but Frailey hoped to become the first American pilot to get a still photo of the Soviet-built fighter in flight. And if it showed a Russian at the controls so much the better.

FRAILEY AND JABARA were back at it, on separate missions into Manchuria three weeks after their victories, even though the U.N. Command—anxious to avoid World War III—had standing orders that F-86 pilots were not to cross the Chinese border. Armistice talks were under way at Panmunjom, including tentative agreements on the repatriation of prisoners of

* Besides supplying the North Koreans and Chinese with the formidable MiG-15, the Soviet Union sent expert pilots to help train the Chinese Air Force, which was short on capable pilots. In 1951, as the war escalated, Stalin authorized Soviet pilots to fly missions in MiGs with Chinese and North Korean markings. Fifty-two Soviet MiG-15 pilots became aces in Korea, although a lot of "over-claiming" was suspected. Jabara's victories included at least one MiG flown by a Soviet pilot.

war. Stalin had died in March. Dwight D. Eisenhower, America's new president, wanted the war over. So did Moscow.

"It was a court martial offense to cross the border, even though that's where our adversaries were based," Frailey remembers. "The MiGs would swarm across the Yalu after us, yet we weren't supposed to chase them back across. But we did it every day. Jabara sure didn't care. One guy—who shall go nameless—had his wing man fly over the MiG base at Antung. He would come roaring down from Mach 1, pull it out in the nick of time and fly right down their runway. That would get their attention! Meantime, his leader's up there waitin'. Pretty quick there's all these ants running out for the planes. The drill was you don't shoot 'em with their gear down. Wait until they get in the air. . . . I think one guy who crossed the border got court martialed and sent home when a new commander wanted to make some noise."

What happened to Frailey and Jabara on June 15, 1953, made some noise inside the F-86 squadrons. It's one of the quirkiest, near-tragic stories of the Korean War—one the general public never heard, for reasons you'll soon understand. In fact, few military aviation aficionados have heard Frailey's first-hand account. He believes "somebody was looking out" for him that day:

"We were heading home from China when I saw aeroplanes behind me. I knew they were F-86s—certainly not MiGs. Suddenly, wham, that sucker opened fire! Some say it was eight bursts, others nine. At least three hit me."

The .50-caliber bullet that shattered the canopy whizzed between Frailey's right arm and chest before smashing the instrument panel.

That sucker was Jabara. He had mistaken Frailey for a MiG.

"Jabara's formation had made a wider swing and came out behind us. So when he looked ahead and saw all those contrails from planes that had just left China he figured it was MiGs." At first, Frailey didn't realize who was trying to kill him.

"Cease fire! Cease fire!" came the frantic cries over the radio from the other pilots in Frailey's flight. "We've got friendlies firing at Sabres!"*

Ironically, Frailey was flying Jabara's airplane. A brand new F-86 had arrived and Jabara took it.

"Now things are really getting hot," Frailey remembers, shaking his head. "No instruments, so I'm flying the thing with the trim tabs. Another guy in my formation says, 'You'd better go now, Dick. Looks like you're going to blow up.'"

Frailey groused that he was going to lose his new camera, which was strapped across his chest.

"Screw the camera!" Jabara, beside himself, shouted over the radio. "I'll buy you a new one."

* One account claims Frailey screamed, "Jabara, you're shooting at me!" Frailey says he had no idea at the moment it was Jabara shooting at him.

As the cockpit filled with smoke, “I was losing altitude. It wouldn’t fly. It was pretty toasty in there, and I couldn’t see a damn thing. To get out of that thing was no easy matter. You’re supposed to have all your belts tightened first. Then your shoulder straps. Then you turn a lever that blows the canopy. Then you have to blow the seat. I’m doing all that by feel.”

Jolted by the ejection, Frailey struggled free of the seat and found himself in a sickening free fall. “I finally found the D-Ring for the parachute and popped it. I hardly swang by the straps before I hit the water. The chute came down over my head and I couldn’t find my one-man dinghy. When I untangled myself, my life vest wasn’t working because it had a bullet hole through it. Chinese guys on the shore were popping away at me at the mouth of the Yalu River.

“But I’ll be damned, as soon as I got myself straightened out and looked up, there’s an Air Force SA-16 Albatross amphibious aircraft coming at me. I can’t believe it. It plops down on the Yalu and taxis up beside me. A big guy from the rescue squadron gave me a smile, stuck his hand down, grabbed mine and just jerked my ass right out of the river! They had ‘jet bottles’ on that thing to make quick takeoffs. The Albatross pilot punched the number and that thing took off like a goosed goose. Boy, up and away to home!”

The crew stripped off his clothes and wrapped him in a blanket. The pilot came back and asked for his sidearm, a .45. “They must have thought ‘Fearless Frailey’ might hit the ground shootin’ at the bastard who shot him down,” Frailey muses.

When the rescue plane touched down at Kimpo, Frailey was unloaded on a stretcher. The guy carrying one end stumbled. Frailey slid out from under the blanket and “landed, buck naked, on the tarmac with about 50 people looking on.” He picked himself up, and with as much dignity as he could muster pulled the blanket around him. “F*** it,” he muttered, “I’ll walk!”

Jabara, hugely relieved and contrite, all but weeping, rushed up and gave Frailey a hug.

The next day, they watched the gun-camera film of the incident and commiserated. “Obviously, I looked like a MiG to him,” Frailey says. “In a war, things like that happen. It was a natural error. We shouldn’t have been where we were. There were several other friendly-fire incidents over MiG Alley, some documented by gun-camera footage, but the brass kept them quiet. And in my case they certainly weren’t going to embarrass a celebrated war hero like Jabara or the Air Force, or reveal we’d been flying inside China.” But there was no keeping the lid on the news among the F-86 pilots in Korea. The story “spread like wildfire,” Frailey says. “Everyone knew who the hell I was and what had happened.”*

* The story took on a new twist decades later when Soviet documents revealed that a Russian ace flying a MiG-15 had seen the incident unfold. Dimitrii Vasilyevich Yermakov claimed he shot down Frailey—allegedly killing him in the process—and went on to collect a \$1,500 bonus from the Soviet government. Frailey got a bang out that one, but told friends, “Give me a break! Is that all I’m worth?”

You're probably wondering about the camera. Frailey salvaged it from a cold dip in the Yalu. The aerial reconnaissance guys back at the base took it apart and dried it out. "But they left tool marks all over it. I never used it again. That camera flew one mission."

JABARA SCORED two more victories, the last—No. 15—on July 15. Frailey had contributed to at least three more kills, while someone took credit for one that was rightfully his.

Jabara took Frailey aside. "This war's about over," he said. "You want to go home? We'll go home together."

Absolutely.

"The wing commander gave me two letters," Frailey remembers. "One said, 'You're not to discuss this shutdown with anybody.' The second was addressed to a colonel at the Pentagon. After I took some leave in Elma with Jackie and her folks, I reported to the Pentagon and presented my letter. The colonel read it carefully, shook his head and said, 'What the hell did you do, Frailey?' Basically the letter said, 'Give this guy anything he wants.'"

Jabara went on to command several squadrons stateside. He helped shake out the new F-104 and the Air Force's first supersonic bomber, rising to full colonel.

Frailey didn't get anything he wanted, but "good things" kept happening because he was a superb, analytical pilot. The younger guys looked up to him; the old-hands knew he'd paid his dues. The ROTC graduate received a regular Air Force commission. One day, when he flew into a base commanded by Jabara, he was met by a staff car. "Jabara took me home. His wife fixed us a nice meal. Then she left the room and we got drunk. That was the last time we ever talked about what had happened in Korea."



Frailey, sixth from right, back row, with the 83rd Fighter Interceptor Squadron at Hamilton AFB, California, in 1958. *Frailey collection*

RICHARD FRAILEY FLEW with the Air Defense Command, the Tactical Air Command and the Strategic Air Command, a feat few Air Force pilots have achieved. He won a spot promotion to major as a member of a select crew flying the B-47 bomber, graduated from the Air Command and Staff College and, in his spare time, nearly completed coursework for an MBA.

He flew 24-hour missions with SAC on Cold-War airborne alert out of Offutt, Nebraska. "The most apprehension I ever had in a plane was flying a B-52 with four atomic bombs on board, refueling the damn thing in mid-air and trying to keep the speed constant," Richard remembers. That tour of duty

was "murder" for the family, Jackie says. "He'd come dragging home and immediately go to bed. I had to keep the cat quiet because it was Siamese and it had a loud meow."

By Vietnam, Frailey was a lieutenant colonel, flying hairy, low-altitude B-52 missions into the heart of darkness, the jungles aflame from napalm. He helped develop strategic bombing plans, wrote manuals and worked with the CIA on target information relayed to the Pentagon. "My morale was going downhill fast because a lot of my friends had been shot down and sent to the 'Hanoi Hilton,' (the infamous POW compound). They lost 15 of my B-52s during that period."

Frailey's performance evaluation for 1968-69 recommended his immediate promotion to colonel. The lieutenant general who headed SAC's 3rd Air Division, added his endorsement, writing, "I'm thoroughly familiar with Frailey's performance. . . . As a matter of fact, in this day of everybody 'outstanding,' I suspect he's probably been under-rated; he's one of the really good ones. Very definitely should make full colonel and he can handle it now."

Frailey squints at the document. The fine print lists a slew of decorations, including the Air Medal with three oak leaf clusters, the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Force Commendation Medal. "I had a hell of a career," he says, a bit wistfully at what might have been had he stayed in the service. He hadn't lost his nerve. It was just time to go. "I didn't like telling other people how to go kill more people when they didn't let you win. It ruined my day."

The loss of Jim Jabara, the youngest colonel in the Air Force, ruined a lot of days. Jabara commanded a Tactical Fighter Wing in Florida and volunteered for combat missions in Vietnam. In the fall of 1966, he was heading to South Carolina with his family, riding in



Frailey receives the Distinguished Flying Cross in 1959.
Frailey collection

a Volkswagen with his teenage daughter, when she lost control in a construction zone. Following in another car, Jabara's wife and two more children watched, horrified, as the VW barrel-rolled several times. Jabby was DOA at the nearest hospital. Carol Anne Jabara, 16, succumbed two days later. They were buried together at Arlington National Cemetery near the grave of John F. Kennedy.

"Terrible," is all Frailey can say, though a half-century has passed. The triple ace who flew hundreds of combat missions in three wars died at 43 on the Florida Turnpike. "Heroes die young," a university professor in Wichita, Jabara's home town, observed. "We do not remember him as an old man telling of distant exploits, but as a young man in the midst of them."

Now that he's an old man, some distant exploits seem clearer to Frailey, others unfathomable. He laments that in Korea the politicians and generals handcuffed the Air Force from taking the war to China, despite the fact that 200,000 Communist Chinese troops swarmed across the border and nearly annihilated our GI's and Marines at the Chosin Reservoir. Douglas MacArthur's brilliance at Inchon was offset by his hubris, which got him fired by Harry Truman. Otherwise, Frailey says, we might have unified the Korean peninsula. "Now look at what we got: We've got that idiot kid ruling North Korea, starving his people and threatening to launch missiles. Before long he'll have nuclear warheads!"

THE FRAILEYS retired to Thurston County in 1970. Richard and Jackie checked off more ski slopes from their bucket list. They boated in Alaska, owned a share in a gold mine at Dawson and started a candle-making business in their kitchen and garage. Before long, Evergreen Candles had seven employees, a factory in Lacey and orders from J.C. Penney, Hallmark and Harrods, the famous department store in London. Making candles might seem like an unlikely retirement occupation for an old fighter pilot, but there's an artistic side to Fearless Frailey. His most popular candles featured daisies and butterflies that glow from within when illuminated. Frailey likes that, and when he's in the middle of a great story, he's like that. Old ROTC-sie Dick's good eye—a pastel blue-gray—brightened and he broke into a boyish grin the day we handed him a stunning scale model of his old plane.

There's a cutout of a big butterfly above the Fraileys' garage door; the Stars and Stripes fly from



Richard and Jackie at a formal event on Guam in 1965. *Frailey collection*

a pole. Richard and Jackie live in a spotless house along a quiet street in the hills above Tumwater. A visitor admires an oil painting of a wintry mountain scene and remarks that it must be the Cascades. “It’s North Korea,” says Frailey. “That’s what the hills and peaks along the mouth of the Yalu look like when they’re covered with snow.” Around the bend of the river the Koreans call “Amnok” is the place where he could have died at 26. When you say “Korean War” most people think of stark, black-and-white newsreel footage, but in the winter the north is ruggedly beautiful—at least from the air. Told that an old Marine in Hoquiam—one of the “Chosin Few”—remembers how they cheered every time an F-86 flew over, Frailey says he can’t fathom how those guys survived 35-below zero temperatures.

The VA granted Frailey a 100 percent disability for his exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam. (“Agent Orange is kinda like a bullet,” he says. “It may be gone but the hole is still there.”) Then, to his befuddled anger, they scaled it back to 70 percent. A stroke a few years ago left him with a mostly useless left eye, but spared his facile mind. The rest of his lean, 90-year-old frame is also pretty much intact, albeit creaky. He still has his sense of humor—and the mayor’s daughter. “What I’ve learned from life is that you need to keep a positive attitude, and your partner is king. Jackie was always there, never complaining. I’ve had a fascinating life: Three wars, four kids and an original wife.”

John C. Hughes



Frailey with a scale model of the very plane he flew on the day he was shot down. *John Hughes photo*