

Omer Levesque

WWII and Korean War Fighter Ace

<http://www.constable.ca/levesque.htm>

A peculiar situation existed during the Korean Conflict with respect to the air war. Not only were U.N. aircraft prohibited from attacking MiG bases across the Yalu in Manchuria, but MiG-15 pilots were prohibited from attacking U.N. positions from their Manchurian bases. These restrictions were developed to avoid a direct confrontation between American and Chinese forces that could escalate the Korean War into WWII. However, there was no such restriction on MiG pilots if they took off from airfields in North Korea. Consequently, the Communists decided to repair damaged airstrips in North Korea in addition to building new ones in order to take advantage of this situation.

As the MiG airfields neared completion in April and May 1951, B-29s carried out an intensive bombing campaign and destroyed them. During the same period, USAF B-29s cut most of the bridges across the Yalu. However, these WWII propeller-driven bombers became so vulnerable to the modern MiG-15 jet fighters during daylight missions, even with area cover provided by USAF jet fighters, that by late 1951, they began operating only at night.

On March 31, 1951 Omer Levesque was the first Commonwealth pilot to shoot down an enemy MiG 15 jet in Korea. The following, rather dramatic, account is by Mike Minnich published in *Air Classics*:

The bright winter sun dazzled against the cobalt blue sky. Outside the cockpit of Levesque's Sabre, the temperature was - 60 F. At the patrol altitude of 40,000 feet, an oxygen system failure could mean unconsciousness in 30 seconds and death within minutes.

Omer Levesque was getting used to the strange world of high-altitude, high-speed jet combat. Since arriving in Korea in December, he had flown more than 50 combat missions. This day's task was typical. A large formation of American B-29 Superfortress propeller-driven bombers was attacking bridges spanning the infamous Yalu River, the boundary between North Korea and its ally Red China.

Two squadrons of Sabres were assigned as escorts, to protect the bombers from any MiGs that might attempt interceptions from their bases in nearby "neutral" Manchuria. The Sabre formations were weaving, attempting not to outpace the much slower B-29s. Levesque's gaze travelled past the bulge of his tightly fitting oxygen mask to scan the 24 instruments

and dozen indicators that revealed the vital signs of his F-86s operation.

"I was flying as wingman for Maj Ed Fletcher, leader of Red flight," Levesque remembers. "Suddenly the squadron commander called out bandits coming in from the right." We all dropped our auxiliary fuel tanks and Fletcher spotted two more MiGs at nine o'clock—off our left wings and above us a bit."

The two pilots turned sharply towards the pair of enemy fighters, who quickly split up and turned away to evade the pursuing Sabres.

"My MiG pulled up into the sun, probably trying to lose me in the glare," Levesque tells. "That was an old trick the Germans used to like to do—but this day I had dark sunglasses on, and I kept the MiG in sight."

The enemy pilot—many of whom were Russians, although none were ever captured for absolute proof—levelled off, not knowing Levesque had stuck on his tail. The tenacious Canadian quickly adjusted his illuminated gunsight for a deflection shot and banked more steeply to turn inside the MiG. The corkscrewing dogfight had by then carried them down to 17,000 feet. Levesque's right index finger tightened on the control-stick trigger and sent six streams of .50 calibre bullets streaking home.

Lining up the MiG

"I guess I was about 1500 feet away from him," he says. "I hit him with a good long burst, and he snapped over in a violent roll to the right. I must have hit his hydraulic system, because I saw the flap on his left wing drop down alone."

The MiG 15 kept rolling straight into the ground. A flash of red flame and white smoke marked the funeral pyre of plane and pilot.

"I started to pull up, and saw another MiG diving from above me," Levesque says. "I climbed into the sun at full throttle and started doing barrel rolls. The MiG disappeared".

The constricted bands of Levesque's G-suit relaxed their hold around his legs and waist as the G-forces of his sharp pull-up diminished. Without the device, blood rushing from the head in such manoeuvres would cause the pilot to black out.



Soaked with sweat, he noticed that his fuel was approaching “bingo,” the point where 1000 pounds remained—just enough to get him safely back to base at Suwon, South Korea. Turning his F-86 southwards at the fuel-efficient height of 40,000 feet, he could relax a bit. It had taken 10 years and two wars, but Omer Levesque was an ace at last.

In Omer’s words the fight was somewhat different. “I got in a really nice deflection shot but with those six guns firing you lost 30 to 40 knots of speed, which was a hell of a lot! I aimed again and fired another burst and,

all of a sudden, the flaps came down on the MiG. He kept on turning and I followed him down.”

He was nearly blacking out, even with his compression suit helping out. Firing again, he raked the MiG from nose to tail and watched as it rolled end over end into the hills below.

Even after losing the second MiG he wasn’t safe. “I went right through the B-29 formation and they all shot at me! Thank God they missed. I waggled my wings and they stopped firing, but lots of shells had just missed me.”