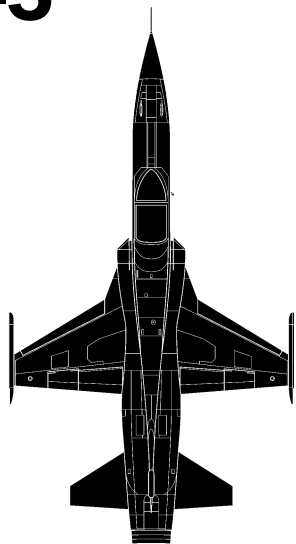


Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

F-5



The F-5 rose from humble beginnings to become the world's most widely used light fighter. In 1955, Northrop launched the program as a private venture aimed at the Navy. The Navy passed, but the company created a superb export fighter—supersonic and capable yet inexpensive and easy to fly. The US chose it for distribution to allies via the Military Assistance Program. The rest is history. Some 2,600 were built, and they served in three dozen or so of the world's air arms.

The original F-5A, dubbed Freedom Fighter, appeared in the early 1960s. It was a clean, all-metal, twin-engine type. Wings had a 24-degree sweepback on the leading edge and nearly straight trailing edge. Soon, Northrop produced an improved variant, the F-5E Tiger II. It had more powerful engines, greater fuel capacity, and—notably—an air-to-air radar. (F-5As had none.) The first and second generation F-5s proved a good fit with

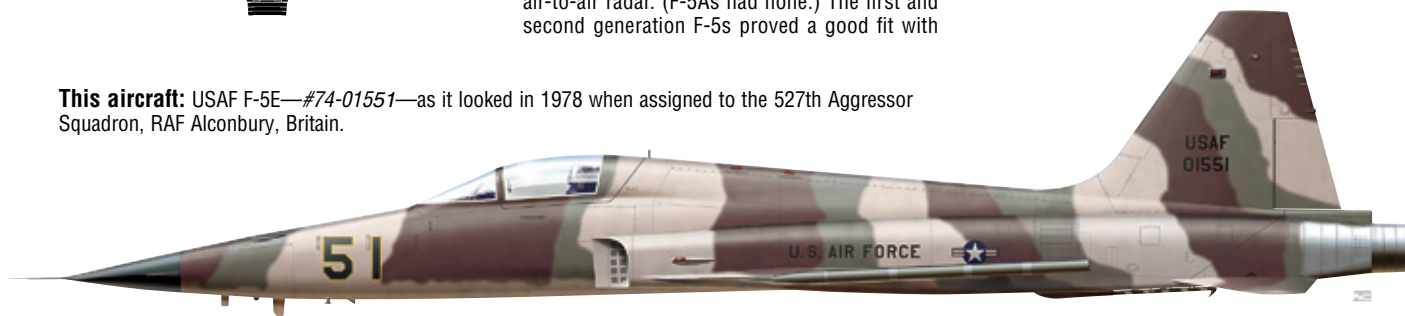
the ground-support and aerial combat missions of allies and for US training purposes.

In 1964, the first F-5s arrived at USAF's Tactical Air Command, which used them to train foreign pilots slated to fly F-5s. In 1965, USAF "borrowed" 12 and modified them for a combat trial—"Skoshi Tiger"—in Vietnam. These later formed the short-lived 10th Fighter Commando Squadron. It was USAF's only use of the F-5 in combat.

The Tiger II gained fame as an "aggressor" aircraft at the USAF Fighter Weapons School, and the Navy and Marine Corps used them as adversary aircraft, too. Hundreds of them remain in service in air arms around the world.

—Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: USAF F-5E—#74-01551—as it looked in 1978 when assigned to the 527th Aggressor Squadron, RAF Alconbury, Britain.



A four-flight of F-5s banks into a turn.

In Brief

Designed by Northrop ★ built by Northrop, Canadair, CASA, Korea Air, Swiss Federal Aircraft ★ first flight July 30, 1959 ★ crew of one or two (trainer) ★ number built 2,647 ★ **Specific to F-5A:** two GE J85-13 turbojet engines ★ max speed 925 mph ★ cruise speed 575 mph ★ max range 1,100 mi ★ armament two 20 mm cannons, two AIM-9 missiles ★ max load 5,500 lb of ordnance ★ weight (max) 20,576 lb ★ span 25 ft 10 in ★ length 47 ft 2 in ★ height 13 ft 6 in. **Specific to F-5E:** two GE J85-21 turbojets ★ max speed 1,082 mph ★ cruise speed 646 mph ★ max range 1,300 mi ★ armament two 20 mm cannons, two AIM-9 missiles ★ max load 7,000 lb ★ weight (max) 24,722 lb ★ span 26 ft 8 in ★ length 47 ft 4 in ★ height 13 ft 4 in.

Famous Fliers

US Notables: Joseph Baggett, Frank Emory, John Corley, Wilbur Creech, Gary Dana, David Dreifuss, Aubrey Edinburgh, Roy Holbrook, Alfred Hopkins, Arthur Powell, Robert Terbert, Jim Thar, Robert Titus, Chuck Yeager. **Foreign:** Yadollah Javaddpour (Iranian ace—Iran-Iraq War), Nguyen Cao Ky (Air Chief of Staff and Prime Minister, South Vietnam). **Test Pilots:** Roy Martin, Paul Metz, Jim Sandberg.

Interesting Facts

Compiled perfect production record: Every F-5 met cost, schedule, and performance requirement ★ exceeded speed of sound on first flight ★ nicknamed "Tinkertoy" ★ captured by North Vietnam and flown against communist Cambodia (1975) and China (1979) ★ shown in films "Apocalypse Now" (dropping napalm), "Top Gun" (as fictional "MiG-28"), "Hot Shots" (as Iraqi fighter) ★ flew 2.75 million accident-free miles in first year ★ led to YF-17, basis of F/A-18 Hornet ★ used engine built for B-52-borne Quail decoy.