

= James Jabara =

James " Jabby " Jabara (10 October 1923 ? 17 November 1966) was the first American (Lebanese American) and United States Air Force jet ace in history . Born in Oklahoma , he lived in Kansas where he enlisted as an aviation cadet at Fort Riley after graduating from high school . Jabara attended four flying schools in Texas before he received his pilot 's wings and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant . Jabara flew two tours of combat duty in Europe during World War II as a North American P @-@ 51 Mustang pilot , and scored 1 @.@ 5 air victories against German aircraft .

Jabara flew his first jet aircraft in 1948 , the USAF Lockheed F @-@ 80 Shooting Star before transitioning to the USAF North American F @-@ 86 Sabre . Jabara used this aircraft to shoot down multiple Soviet @-@ built MiG @-@ 15 jets during the Korean War . He achieved his first confirmed air victory of the war on 3 April 1951 . A month later he scored his fifth and sixth victories , making him the first American jet ace in history . He eventually scored 15 victories , giving him the title of " triple ace " . Jabara was ranked as the second @-@ highest @-@ scoring U.S. ace of the Korean War . He received the Distinguished Service Cross , Silver Star , Distinguished Flying Cross , Air Medal , and the British Distinguished Flying Cross for his accomplishments in combat .

Jabara next held a series of commands at various Air Force bases across the United States . He flew the Lockheed F @-@ 104 Starfighter and later the Convair B @-@ 58 Hustler . In 1966 , while on leave from service in Vietnam , Colonel Jabara was traveling with his family in two cars to their new home when his daughter crashed the car she was driving and he was riding in , killing them both . They were buried together at Arlington National Cemetery . In recognition of his contributions to military aviation , an airport outside of Wichita , Kansas was named in his honor . Each year the United States Air Force Academy alumni association bestows the Jabara Award upon an Academy graduate whose aerospace accomplishments demonstrate superior performance .

= = Early life = =

Jabara was born in Muskogee , Oklahoma , of Lebanese descent ; his father , John , and mother came from Marjayoun , a town in Southern Lebanon .

Jabara joined the Boy Scouts , eventually becoming an Eagle Scout . At an early age , he was set on becoming a pilot , " I used to read articles about [Eddie] Rickenbacker and all these novels you read about air combat , and I guess from the sixth grade it was my ambition to be a fighter pilot . " He worked at his parents ' grocery store and graduated from Wichita North High School in Wichita , Kansas in May 1942 . Standing five feet , five inches (165 cm) tall , Jabara was short for a potential fighter pilot (and was reportedly required to wear corrective eyewear) , but this did not prevent him from immediately enlisting as an aviation cadet of the United States Army Air Corps at Fort Riley , Kansas . In an attempt to improve his eyesight for flying , he ate 20 carrots a day in the mistaken belief that this would improve his vision . After attending four flying schools in Texas , he received his pilot 's wings and a commission as Second Lieutenant at Moore Field , Texas in October 1943 . Jabara with his wife , Nina , had four children : James William (b . 1949) , Carol Ann (b . 1950) , Cathy (b . 1952) , and Jeanne (b . 1957) .

= = World War II = =

During World War II , the Allied forces fought German aircraft across the European Theater . The Allies used several fighter aircraft , including the North American P @-@ 51 Mustang . Jabara was assigned to two tours of combat duty as a P @-@ 51 pilot across Europe . His first tour lasted from January to October 1944 with the 363d Fighter Group of the Ninth Air Force . On his first mission he was assigned to attacking German railroad targets in Belgium . In a March 1944 mission while Jabara was escorting bombers to Germany , a German pilot shot off his canopy . Although he faced below freezing temperatures at the high altitude , he was able to shoot down a German aircraft before returning to base . During one mission , while in formation , he and another P @-@ 51 pilot

collided in midair . They both safely bailed out while the aircraft were destroyed . In another incident , while Jabara engaged a German aircraft , they collided in mid @-@ air , and when both pilots safely floated to the ground , they met and shook hands . When Jabara 's first tour ended , he returned to the United States as an instructor for other pilots . He returned to Europe again for his second tour from February to December 1945 with the 355th Group of the Eighth Air Force . During his European combat (and known then as " the Ceegar Kid " for his penchant for smoking cigars) , Jabara flew 108 combat missions . He was credited with the destruction of one and a half German aircraft in aerial combat (the half considered shared with another pilot) and four on the ground . He received a Distinguished Flying Cross with one Oak Leaf Cluster for his 1 @.@ 5 victories as well as an Air Medal with 18 Oak Leaf Clusters .

After World War II , Jabara considered leaving the military to attend college , but later decided to attend the Tactical Air School at Tyndall Air Force Base , Florida . From 1947 to 1949 he was stationed on Okinawa with the 53d Fighter Group . At Okinawa in 1948 , Jabara flew his first jet aircraft , the Lockheed F @-@ 80 Shooting Star . Reflecting on the transition to jet aircraft , he said " It was entirely different . I was at 10 @,@ 000 feet before I remembered to raise my landing gear It was so quiet and fast I guess that was probably the happiest moment of my life . " Jabara returned to the United States and was assigned as a flight commander , now at the rank of captain , with the 4th Fighter @-@ Interceptor Wing , flying the newly operational North American F @-@ 86 Sabre jet fighter at the New Castle County Airport in Delaware .

= = Korean War = =

Before the start of the Korean War , the Korean Peninsula was split by an American @-@ backed government at the south and a Soviet @-@ backed opposing government at the north . Divided by the 38th Parallel , both the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to maintain the division until a mutual decision was made about the future of the peninsula . On 25 June 1950 , North Korean troops crossed the parallel and attacked several key South Korean targets . As the United States prepared military assistance with the South Koreans , the Soviet Union also helped the North Koreans by training pilots and providing MiG @-@ 15 aircraft . Jabara arrived in Korea on 13 December 1950 with the 334th Fighter @-@ Interceptor Squadron of the 4th Fighter @-@ Interceptor Wing . The squadron was the first F @-@ 86 Sabre unit deployed to the Fifth Air Force to counter the threat by the Soviet MiG @-@ 15s . By 2 January 1951 , he had flown five combat missions in F @-@ 86s and had damaged one MiG @-@ 15 Korean jet fighter in air combat . Jabara achieved his first confirmed victory on 3 April 1951 when 12 F @-@ 86 Sabres took on 12 MiG @-@ 15s in MiG Alley , a region in northwestern North Korea . He was credited with another on 10 April , a third on 12 April , and a fourth on 22 April . Eager to get his fifth victory to be deemed a flying ace , Jabara voluntarily transferred to the 335th Fighter @-@ Interceptor Squadron when the 334th was rotated back to the United States .

On 20 May , two flights of F @-@ 86 Sabres encountered multiple MiG @-@ 15s in MiG Alley , and through radio communications , two additional flights of F @-@ 86 Sabres joined the battle , including Jabara . In preparation for the oncoming battle , Jabara and the other F @-@ 86 Sabre pilots were ordered to jettison their auxiliary fuel tanks to improve their maneuverability . Jabara 's fuel tank failed to separate from his wing , and protocol required he return to base as the aircraft would be impeded by the extra weight and imbalance , and limit his potential to match off with a MiG . However , Jabara decided to continue to the air battle , where he was able to still handle his aircraft well enough to be credited with shooting down two MiG @-@ 15s with .50 caliber machine gun fire . The first was in a group of three MiGs and the other was the last in a six @-@ plane group . Jabara was able to see the first aircraft explode from his gunfire , but he only saw his second victory go into a tailspin as he was avoiding being targeted by another MiG . His fifth and sixth victories made Jabara the first American in history to use jet aircraft to become an ace . The Americans said the 20 @-@ minute air battle had included 36 F @-@ 86 Sabres against nearly 50 MiG @-@ 15s (Russian data shows 30 MiGs) , and the American pilots recorded Jabara 's two victories and another pilot 's " probable " . While returning to base , Jabara 's F @-@ 86 Sabre was

so low on fuel , he turned off the engine and glided towards the base before turning it on prior to landing . Data @-@ matching with Soviet records made available since the end of the Cold War has since shown that only one MiG was lost in the combat , and that Jabara 's jet @-@ versus @-@ jet tally was four at best . Nevertheless , American military forces claimed that Jabara was the first jet @-@ versus @-@ jet ace . Jabara later stated in an interview , " That was my bag for the day , and it made me feel pretty good to know that I was the first jet ace in the history of aerial warfare . " The mission was his 63rd Korean mission of an eventual 163 ; he was awarded a Distinguished Service Cross , the nation 's second @-@ highest decoration .

Against his wishes , Jabara received a stateside leave for a publicity tour . The Jabara family grocery store in Wichita was thronged with people for days , and both he and his father John appeared on local and national radio and television . Wichita mounted one of its most @-@ attended parades in the city 's history . Jabara was even sent on a goodwill tour with his father through the Middle East , and gave a speech in his father 's hometown of Marjayoun , Lebanon . Film newsreels included footage of his aircraft and other accolades included his own song (" That Jabara Bird ") and a ritual rewarding of his Distinguished Service Cross at a Boston baseball game . Jabara returned to the United States in May 1951 for temporary assignment to Air Force Headquarters , Washington , D.C. Two months later he was transferred to the Air Training Command at Scott Air Force Base , Illinois . Upon his request , he returned for another tour of duty overseas , arriving in Korea in January 1953 .

By then a major , on his second tour , Jabara was credited with shooting down nine more MiGs for a total of 15 victories . On 16 May 1953 he recorded his seventh victory , and on 26 May he shot down two additional MiGs for a total of nine for the war . On 10 June , Jabara shot down two more MiGs . Eight days later his flight group encountered four MiGs , and he encountered mechanical problems that nearly caused his aircraft to crash into an elevated hill . After resolving his aircraft 's issues , he returned to the battle and was able to shoot down an already damaged MiG . On 30 June , his first of two missions for the day resulted in one MiG victory . The second mission involved escorting F @-@ 86 Sabre fighter @-@ bombers and he shot down a MiG before he came under heavy fire by other MiGs . In an attempt to evade their attack , he quickly accelerated but his engine flamed out . He maneuvered his aircraft for the ocean for a potential water rescue if he crashed , but he was able to restart the engine and return to base . Jabara recorded his final victory on 15 July . Two days later he flew his last two missions , and although he was eager to find more MiGs in an attempt to tie or surpass Joseph C. McConnell 's 16 air victories , he did not see any opposing aircraft . His 15 victories gave him the title of " triple ace " , and his Korean War victories were all against MiG @-@ 15s . He received a Silver Star , an Oak Leaf Cluster for his Distinguished Service Cross , as well as another Distinguished Flying Cross for his additional air victories . During the Korean War , Jabara was second in American air victories to McConnell , who recorded 16 . The Soviet Union had four other pilots who exceeded or tied Jabara 's victories : Yevgeny Pepelyaev with 22 @-@ 5 , Nikolay V. Sutyagin with 22 , and both Alexandr P. Smortzkow and Lev K. Schukin with 15 .

= = After Korea = =

Jabara returned to the United States in July 1953 , and was assigned as commander of the 4750th Training Squadron at Yuma Air Force Base (later renamed Vincent AFB) , Arizona . By January 1957 Jabara was at Eglin Air Force Base , Florida to join the 3243rd Test Group to test Lockheed F @-@ 104 Starfighters . He was first reassigned to Headquarters of the 32d Air Division at Syracuse , New York , then assumed command of the 337th Fighter @-@ Interceptor Squadron at Westover Air Force Base , Massachusetts . In 1958 , Jabara flew combat missions over Taiwan in the F @-@ 104 Starfighter . From July 1960 to June 1961 , he attended and graduated from the Air War College in Montgomery , Alabama . At Carswell Air Force Base , Texas , Jabara piloted the first supersonic bomber , the Convair B @-@ 58 Hustler as part of the 43d Bomb Wing . Jabara also helped train NATO pilots on the F @-@ 104 Starfighter in July 1964 , when he was stationed at Luke Air Force Base , Arizona and he wrote of the aircraft 's significant technological improvement

over the F @-@ 86 Sabre .

In 1965 , Jabara was given command of the 31st Tactical Fighter Wing at Homestead Air Force Base , Florida . By 1966 Jabara had risen to the rank of colonel ? the youngest at that rank at the time , and he volunteered to fly combat missions for the Vietnam War . He flew his first mission in July 1966 , joining a F @-@ 100 Super Sabre flight group for a bombing run that damaged several buildings held by the Viet Cong in South Vietnam . He returned on leave to Homestead about a week after the mission .

= = Death = =

While traveling to Myrtle Beach , South Carolina , where his family would stay while he returned to combat in Vietnam , Jabara and his 16 @-@ year @-@ old daughter Carol Anne died in a car accident in Delray Beach , Florida , on 17 November 1966 . The Jabara family were in two cars that day , on their way to a new home in South Carolina where his wife Nina and their children ? James Jr . , Carol Anne , Jeanne , and Cathy ? would reside during Jabara 's combat tour . Carol Anne was driving a Volkswagen with her father as a passenger in the back seat . She lost control of the car going through a construction zone , when she initially veered onto a grass median . She swerved back onto the highway but during the rapid turn , she lost control and the vehicle returned to the median where it rolled several times . Jabara sustained head injuries and was pronounced dead on arrival at a Delray hospital , and Carol Anne died two days later . A memorial service was held for Jabara at Homestead Air Force Base with a missing man formation fly @-@ by . Jabara and his daughter were buried together in a single grave at Arlington National Cemetery .

His grandson , 2d Lt Nicholas Jabara , USAF , a 2001 graduate of the United States Air Force Academy , was killed during pilot training in a T @-@ 37 accident at Laughlin AFB , Texas on 31 January 2002 .

= = Legacy = =

An airport just north of Wichita , Kansas , was named the Colonel James Jabara Airport in his honor . Each year since 1968 , the United States Air Force Academy alumni association bestows the Jabara Award upon the Academy graduate whose accomplishments demonstrate superior performance in fields directly involved with aerospace vehicles . The James Jabara Memorial Foundation was founded by a friend of Jabara , and the foundation constructed a statue of him at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs , Colorado in 2004 .

In 1950 , the Air Force Association (AFA) named him " Most Distinguished Aviator of the Year " and in 1957 , was named by AFA as one of 25 U.S. men " who had done the most to promote aviation through the years " . The Kansas Aviation Museum named him to the Kansas Aviation Hall of Fame in 2006 .

= = Awards and decorations = =

During World War II , Colonel Jabara was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross with one Oak Leaf Cluster and the Air Medal with 23 Oak Leaf Clusters . While in Korea he received the Distinguished Service Cross with one Oak Leaf Cluster and another Oak Leaf Cluster for his Distinguished Flying Cross . He was also awarded the Silver Star for two missions flown on 10 and 12 April 1951 , where he shot down two MiGs while defending American bombers . He received the Distinguished Service Cross for shooting down his fifth and sixth MiG victories on 20 May 1951 . Another Silver Star was received in 1953 with an Oak Leaf Cluster . The United Kingdom awarded him the British Distinguished Flying Cross for his accomplishments in combat on 1 December 1955 .