

in action by Jim Mesko

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The cover portrays two B-26C Invaders of the 17th Bomb Group, based at K-9, Pusan Airfield in Korea. In the foreground is "Monie", of the 37th Bomb Squadron, flown by Lt. Robert C. Mikesh. Normally used primarily for night interdiction operations, B-26s were used on various day light missions as well. Both of these aircraft were first used by the 452nd Bomb Group and were assigned to the 17th Group when it replaced the 452nd.

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Military Photo Archives

A special thanks to my parents who have put up with my obsession for this aircraft. To them, and the crews of the A-26, this book is humbly dedicated.

The clean lines of the Invader are graphically shown by this overhead shot. This is one of the early production versions with the revised cockpit hatches. (McDonnell-Douglas)



Introduction

The Douglas A-26 **Invader** was probably one of the most unheralded U. S. aircraft during its years of active service. Overshadowed by more glamorous types, or assigned roles which kept it out of the public view, the **Invader** nevertheless amassed a record the likes of which few other U. S. planes ever have or ever will achieve. One of the few American designs to be developed, evaluated and produced during World War II, it had the distinction of being the only U. S. combat aircraft to serve in that war, the Korean conflict, and in Vietnam. During the Korean "police action" the A-26 carried out the first attacks against North Korean ground targets, and flew the last sortie of the war nearly three and one half years later. One of the mainstays of the French air force in the 1950s, it served both in Algeria and Indochina in support of French Union Forces. Later, it was to be brought out of retirement and reappeared in the skies over Indo-China, this time in support of U. S. operations in that war-torn land.

Closer to home, the **Invader** served in numerous South American countries and played a key role on both sides in the aborted Bay of Pigs operation in 1961. By the late 1970s, most of the B-26s still on active duty have been relegated to second-line duties, and it is just a matter of time until the powerful roar of her twin engines is forever stilled.

The initial Invader, the XA-26, served as the prototype for the later A-26C series. The major differences between the prototype and production aircraft were the

The **Invader** was born as the result of Air Corps specifications calling for a multipurpose attack aircraft capable of doing the jobs of the various light and medium bombers then in service. The end result was a craft with the size and speed of the B-26 Marauder, the firepower and bomb capacity of the B-25 Mitchell, and the maneuverability of its little brother, the A-20 Havoc. Since the A-20 was also a Douglas bird, the A-26 has often been referred to as a hopped up, tougher version of the **Havoc**.

In reality it was far more than that. In meeting the requirements set down, Douglas designer E. H. Heineman designed three prototypes to fit various missions. The three were basically the same aircraft, the main difference being in the nose. For an attack bomber, a clear glass nose was installed, this version being designated the XA-26. In light of combat experience, it was felt that a version with various armament combinations was desirable, and this resulted in the XA-26B. Although initially there were seven possible types of weapons, this was eventually limited to only two basic noses, one with six, the other with eight 50 caliber machine guns. The final version, to fill the night fighter role, was the A-26A fitted with radar and a ventral tray containing four 20 millimeter cannon. Here the Douglas lineage showed, as this gun pack was very similar to the one used on the P-70, the night fighter version of the A-20.

The first test flight of the new plane took place on July 10, 1942 at Douglas's Long Beach facility in southern California before Heineman, his staff and Air Corps representatives. Ben Howard, the famous aviation pioneer, put the ship through her paces.

propeller spinners and the flat-topped canopy which was later changed to a clamshell type. (McDonnell-Douglas)





One version, the XA-26A, was tested for use as a night fighter with four 20 mm cannon in a ventral tray. (Menard via Davis)

Another view of the XA-26A, showing the elongated radar nose. In addition to the ventral guns, four machine guns were carried in a dorsal turret. (McDonnell-Douglas)

The maneuverability, speed, and handling qualities of the **Invader** were evident to all the onlookers as Howard put her through the series of demonstrations.

Following this initial flight test, the new ship was put through an intensive flight program to see what additional modifications were necessary. Aside from a few minor design refinements, however, the aircraft was accepted basically as is. In summing up the test program, the project officer, Colonel V. R. Haugen, was full of praise for the A-26, citing its handling characteristics, basic layout and overall performance.

The **Invader** in its final form encompassed some rather unique features for that time. The fuselage, of semi-monocoque type construction was, for all intents and purposes, square shaped with rounded corners, reinforcement coming from aluminum ribs. Along its entire length tunnels were incorporated which carried various controls, electric and hydraulic lines.

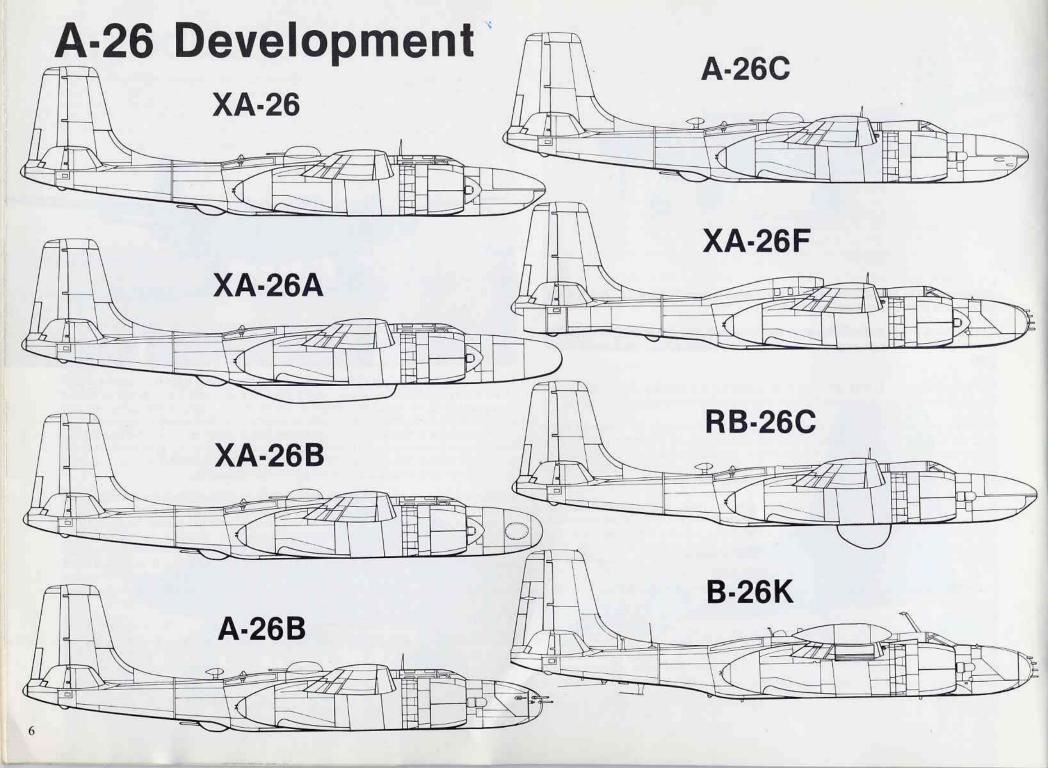
The wings, of two spar construction, were formed from long unspliced spar caps which had integral end fittings. The wings employed a new NACA low drag laminar flow airfoil. Within it, wing panels using chordwise stiffeners provided additional strength, allowing a sizable underwing bomb load to be carried. Among the new features included in the **Invader** were double slotted, electrically operated flaps. These extended outward and downward, giving more lift and drag than the more conventional types. Attached by a linkage system, they were able to be extended further which resulted in a larger slot between the wing and flap. A small deflector was included which directed the air flow toward their top side, the result being an increase in drag.



The two Pratt & Whitney R-2800 engines gave the plane a maximum speed of 360 MPH, nearly 80 MPH faster than the B-25 and B-26, and the engine installation incorporated some unusual design characteristics. Using sheet metal mounts eliminated the maze of wires and pipes inherent in the older welded tube types, thus making repair and maintenance much easier. The engines were interchangeable and fitted so that a complete change would take only an hour. This, along with easy access to the engine when mounted, was a mechanic's dream and, under primitive conditions in a war zone, was a major asset to the plane's serviceability.

As production geared up at the Douglas plants in Long Beach and Tulsa, it was decided to drop development of the night fighter and concentrate on the B and C versions of the **Invader.** Experiments were tried with a variety of frontal firepower arrangements, but eventually the nose was standardized on either 6 or 8 50 caliber machine guns. As new information came in from operational units, additional modifications were incorporated. The major visible change was the new clamshell canopy to replace the flat upward folding type similar to that on the prototypes. This gave added visibility and easier entry to the cockpit, a feature especially liked by the pilots. Besides this, later models had wing hardpoints for bombs, napalm and rockets. In addition, three internally-mounted wing guns were added to each wing.

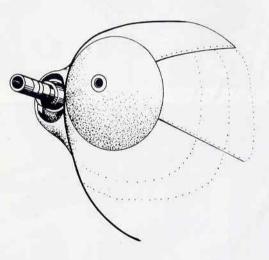
The only major problem which was encountered in introducing the **Invader** to service was a weak nose gear which often collapsed. Through tests and modifications this problem was solved relatively quickly and eventually 2500 of the A-26s were produced. Unfortunately, because of the time needed to retrain crews and ground personnel the plane was slow getting into operations, something which could not be easily speeded up.



The XA-26B, initially equipped with a 75 mm cannon, similar to the B-25G and H. This idea did not gain acceptance and production versions were equipped with either six or eight 50 caliber machine guns. (McDonnell-Douglas)



A production A-26B fitted with the 75 mm cannon. In addition to the four machine guns carried in turrets, two more machine guns or a 37 mm cannon could also be carried in the nose. (McDonnell-Douglas)

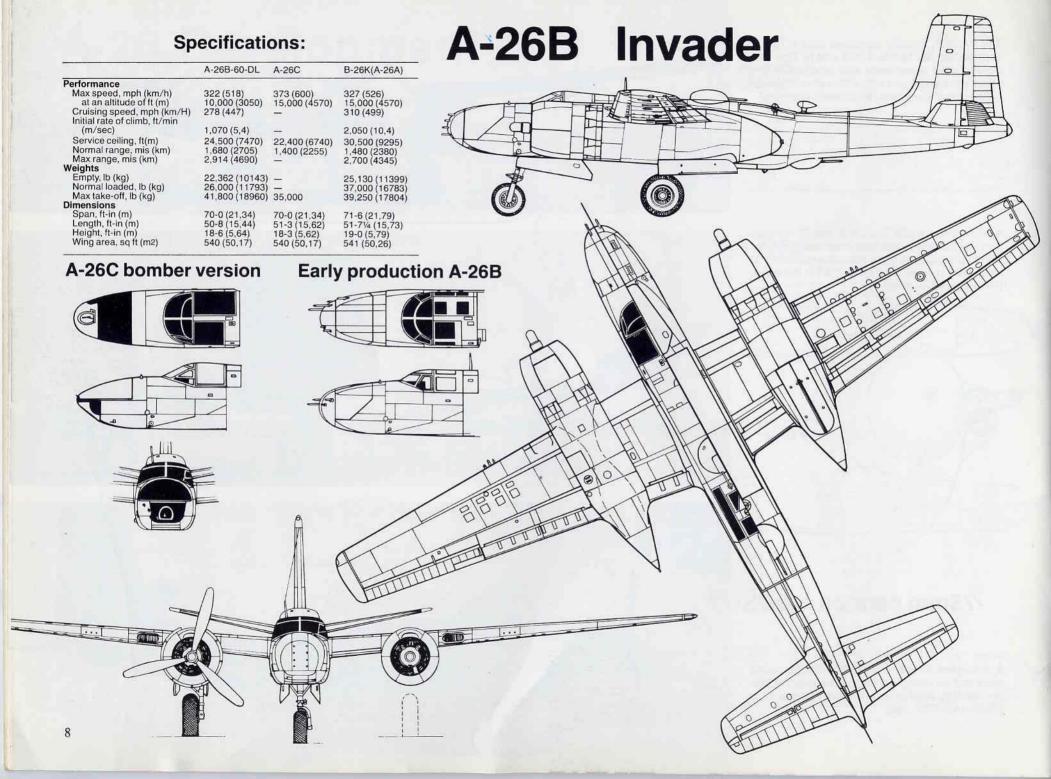


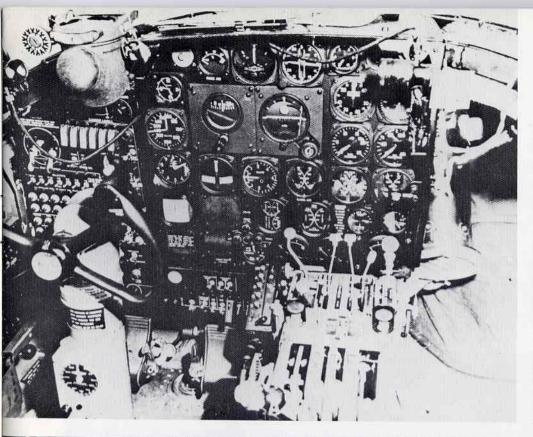
75mm cannon nose

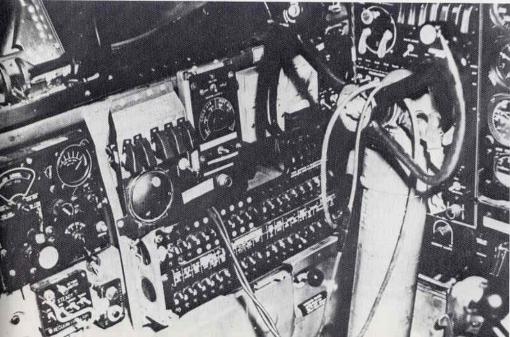
A standard A-26B equipped with six nose guns and an improved cockpit canopy for better visibility and easier crew entry and exit. (McDonnell-Douglas)

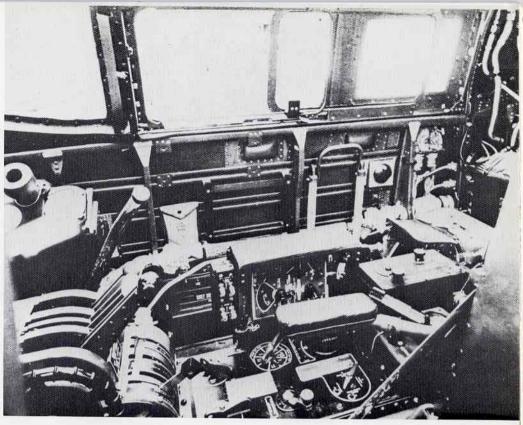






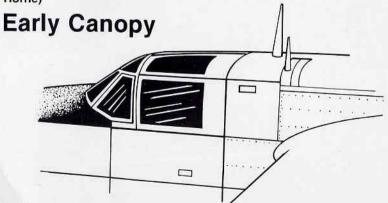




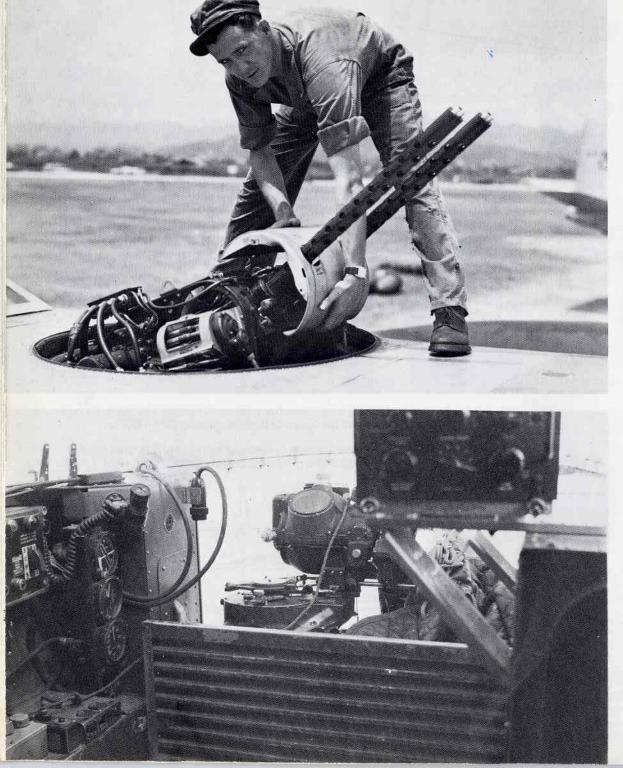


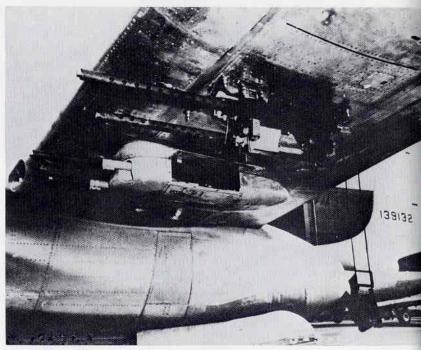
The right side of an early A-26, as evident from the early canopy. Normally a jump seat was provided for either the navigator or flight engineer. (John Horne)

An A-26B cockpit. Normally there was only a single set of controls until the On-Mark conversion or in the TB-26C. The control pedestal is at the lower right. (John Horne)



The left side of an A-26C cockpit, with various auxiliary panels common to all variants. (Military Photo Archives)

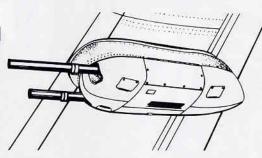




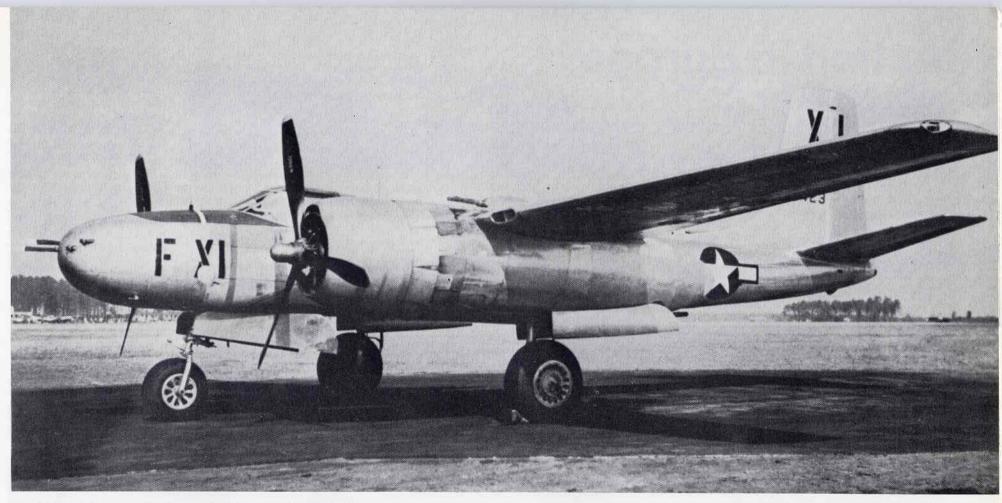
Underwing gun packs were often carried for additional firepower. The guns were belt fed from magazines in the wings. Later, three 50 caliber guns were mounted inside each wing. (John Horne)

Upper 50 caliber machine guns being serviced. The turrets were controlled by a sighting system similar to the one used in the B-29. (USAF)

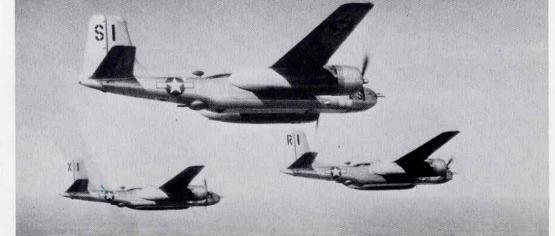
Underwing gun pack 2 .50 mgs



The bombardier's station in the A-26C. Access is through the open hatch at the bottom of the photo. The Norden bombsight is ahead of the raised panel while the device on the end of the cord to the left is the bomb release switch. (Bob Mikesh)



An A-26B at Florence Air Base, late 1944 or early 1945, prior to a training flight. Note how the top turret is trained forward for strafing. (Thomas Brumlik)



A-26Bs in formation over South Carolina prior to being assigned overseas. All appear to be six gun nose versions. The ventral gun turret had an excellent field of fire. (McDonnell-Douglas)

Action in Europe

To test the **Invader** in combat, eighteen planes and crews were attached to the 553rd Squadron of the 386th Bomb Group in the late summer of 1944. The first mission was flown on September 6th, and in eight missions with this group, no A-26s were lost to enemy action. 9th Air Force Headquarters was impressed and indicated its willingness to re-equip its medium and light bomber units with the new aircraft.

The first group to convert fully was the 416th, an A-20 unit. Starting in October, different squadrons stood down for retraining and by mid-November the unit was ready, flying the first group sortie with the **Invader** on November 17. However, because of a lack of A-26Cs the group had only solid nosed A-26Bs and was forced to retain its glassed nosed A-20Js and Ks until sufficient Cs were on hand to fulfill this role. Interestingly, the 416th, on its first A-26 mission, was the only unit to reach its objective, all other 9th Air Force units being stopped by poor weather conditions.

Following on the heels of the 416th was the 409th, another A-20 group which began training on the **Invader** in late November. With the onslaught of the German attack in the Ardennes, both A-26 equipped groups were assigned numerous missions in support of Army units. Despite heavy flak and miserable weather conditions, the crews pressed home bombing and strafing attacks with deadly accuracy and were instrumental in helping to stop the German advance. Losses were surprisingly light considering the conditions, though the A-26 was to suffer numerous nose gear collapses until the bugs were ironed out. As the offensive wound down, other groups were able to convert to the **Invader**. By mid-February the 386th, the original trial unit, had reequipped, followed by the 391st in early April. Both had been Marauder units.

Although German aerial resistance slackened, flak was still a force to be reckoned with, and numerous times accurate German shooting resulted in many an A-26 limping home on one engine or with structural damage. On the rare occasion when German fighters intercepted them, the A-26s were able to hold their own, giving as

much punishment as they received. For example, on March 9th, during a bombing raid on the Wersbaden marshalling yards, 30 Bf 109s attacked a like number of 38th B.G. **Invaders.** Three A-26s failed to return, while the group claimed eight kills though official credit was not given for them.

Of interest was the employment of A-26s in an experimental role in night interdiction and reconnaïssance. Carried out in addition to the more common daylight sorties these missions involved four all-black **Invaders** used as target markers by the 410th B.G. in conjunction with A-20s and B-26s. The A-26s, operating in groups of two, would mark the target after illumination by B-26s. Once this was done, they would remain in the area while A-20s hit the target. On the third mission a German night fighter attempted to thwart the attack but was driven off by the gunner. As far as is known, this was the A-26s only brush with a radar-equipped fighter during the war. Despite good results in the three missions, the 410th was not requested to carry out additional attacks at night and in April it too began to convert to A-26s.

In addition to their bombing and strafing missions a small number of **Invaders** were also used by the 69th Tactical Recon Group. Unusual was the retention of some A-26s with nose armament, unlike the Group's use of glass nosed A-20s. This might have been due to the unavailabilty of the A-26C version rather than any desire to have the solid nose.

As the war neared its conclusion, targets became fewer and fewer. The final 9th Air Force bombing mission was carried out on May 3rd by A-26s of the 386th, 391st, 409th, and 416th using SHORAN. It is possible that this was also the last bomber mission flown in Europe, although this hasn't been officially confirmed. The final results of A-26 operations in Europe were impressive: 11,567 sorties, 67 losses, 7 confirmed kills and 18,054 tons of bombs dropped.

Invaders of the 553rd Bomb Squadron, 386th Bomb Group, being serviced and painted at Great Dunmow, England, September 1944. The two aircraft on the right have received their squadron codes. These A-26s all have the early style cockpit canopy. (USAF)



The 552nd Bomb Squadron at Beaumont, France, May 1945. Notice B-26 Marauders of various units in the background along with a 416th Bomb Group A-26 (the third aircraft back on the left). The A-26 in the foreground has the early cockpit canopy. (USAF)

"Stinky", an A-26 of the 552nd Bomb Squadron, 386th Bomb Group. All the Invaders on this page belong to the 386th. The time is April 1945 at Beaumont, France. (USAF)

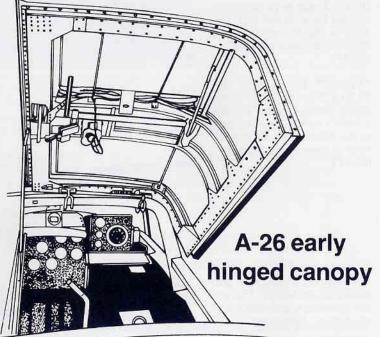
An early model invader of the 386th Bomb Group with gun packs under wings. The entire cowling is painted a medium blue. (Denison)







An A-26C with collapsed landing gear at Beaumont, April 1945. The gear appears to have failed while plane was parked as there is no evidence of props being bent. Notice the early style canopy hatch. (USAF)

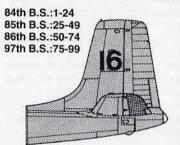


A damaged A-26 at Beaumont, spring 1945. Nose markings are: black '3', red circle, yellow wings outlined in black. The figure is flesh with black clothes. Note the four wing gun packs which, combined with nose and turret guns, total sixteen 50 caliber machine guns. This very heavy armament made the Invader very effective for strafing. (USAF)

An early problem of the A-26 was a penchant for the nose gear to collapse. After readjustments were carried out in the field and service areas, this problem soon disappeared. (USAF)

A-26 Tail Markings in Europe

12th A.F., 47th B.G. (Italy)

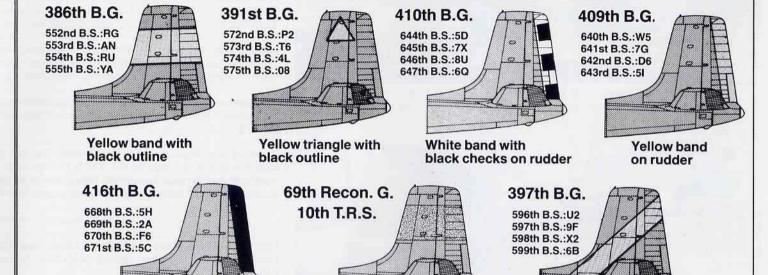


Natural metal with black numbers



Black finish with white numbers

9th A.F. (England & Europe)



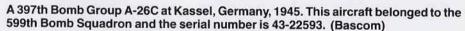
Red band with

black numbers

An A-26B Invader from the 391st Bomb Group at Kassel, Germany, 1945. Note the addition of four gun packs under the wings. (Bascom)

Black band

on rudder



Yellow band with

black outline







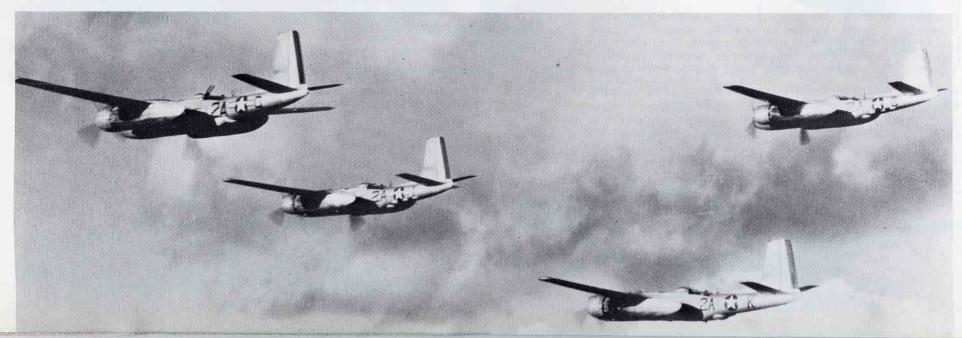


In the early fall of 1944 the 47th Bomb Group of the 12th Air Force began receiving the A-26 at its base in Grosseto, Italy. Equipped with A-20s, the unit took nearly six months until all its squadrons, the 84th, 85th, 86th and 97th, had converted to the new aircraft. While this process was taking place the group continued to fly missions, the A-26s and A-20s teaming up together to hit key installations and German transportation routes. During this period the 47th was engaged in round the clock sorties, particularly against supply routes, and for its effort received the Distinguished Unit Citation. As part of this operation the A-26s were employed in experiments to test the feasibility of ground directed bombing. Units of the 22nd Tactical Air Command, employing an SCR-584 radio setup near Bologna, directed Invaders against German targets in the Po River valley. Initial results were successful and were continued until the end of the war in conjunction with the daylight strikes. Because of these operations the A-26s of the group flew in both natural metal and all black finishes. With the cessation of hostilities in Europe, the 47th was immediately redeployed stateside and began intensive training for combat against the Japanese. However, before the unit was ready to transfer to the Pacific, the atomic bomb brought the war to its climax.

Another example of a nose gear collapse which gave the initial Invaders problems. This aircraft belongs to the 410th Bomb Group but carried no tail markings. (USAF)

Unusual markings decorate this A-26B. The tail stripes and fuselage codes indicate the plane belongs to the 410th Group, 646th Squadron, but the large buzz numbers on the nacelle suggest that this photo may have been taken after the war. Note also that all nose guns and turrets have been removed. (Menard via Davis)

Four Invaders from the 416th Bomb Group head for communication and transportation targets in Germany, spring 1945. They belong to the 669th Bomb Squadron. (USAF)



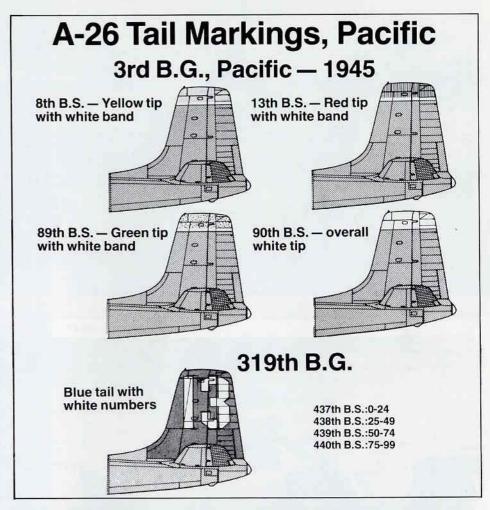
Into the Pacific

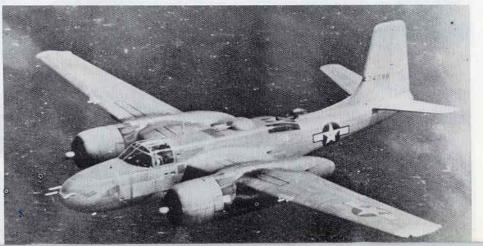
The **Invader's** introduction to the Pacific was anything but auspicious. In July 1944, four A-26s were tested by the 3rd Bomb Group's 13th Squadron, the "Grim Reapers". Particular to their A-20s, the pilots disliked the **Invader's** long, broad nose, and the engine placement which they felt restricted its employment at lower levels. With this in mind, General Kenney, the 5th Air Force commander, requested additional A-20s in lieu of the **Invader** unless changes could be incorporated to make the ship satisfactory for low level work. Because of this it would be nearly a year before the A-26 was taken into action in any great numbers in the Pacific.

The only group of the 5th A.F. to re-equip with the **Invader** was the 3rd B.G., which started the conversion in the early summer of 1945. Though still flying A-20s, the group employed both types in the air offensive against Formosa, striking at port facilities, air fields, gun and troop emplacements, and whatever local industry the Japanese were using to produce war materials. The A-26s had the distinction of flying the final mission against the island, hitting a sugar refinery on July 12th. Following this the 3rd moved to Okinawa in preparation for the air assault on the home islands. Although a few missions were flown, notably against an aircraft factory in Tarumizu, the war ended before operations were in full swing.

Meanwhile, other groups in the U.S. were retraining on the Invader for deployment against the Japanese. The 319th B.G., an old B-26 group from the Mediterranean. began converting to A-26s in March 1945. Grumbling about changing from their old Marauders, the crews soon found that the Invader was a superior aircraft and much to their liking. The conversion process took nearly two months and in May, the group began staging out of Hunter Field, Georgia for the long trek to Okinawa. Stopping at California, Hawaii and various island atolls, the unit arrived at Okinawa in the beginning of July and flew their first mission on July 16th against marshalling yards on Kyushu. Throughout July the group alternated between hitting targets in China and Japan, bombing airfields in the former, while striking harbor and shipping in the latter. Though most of the missions were carried out from medium altitude, the crews flew some low level strikes, using a combination of rockets and bombs. However it was soon learned that if both were done on one pass, debris from the rockets' explosions caused damage as the planes completed their bombing runs; Thus, tactics were revised in light of this finding. The crews continued flying missions even after the first A-bomb was dropped, and were in the vicinity of Nagasaki when it was hit on August 9th. Finally, on the 12th the group stood down after twenty missions, with no losses and only a few damaged aircraft.

A 3rd Bomb Group Invader on its way across the Pacific. This aircraft is over the Kwajalein Atoll. Note the later wing gun installation, three 50 caliber guns mounted internally in each wing leading edge. Most A-26s built with the internal wing guns had the later eight-gun nose armament, though this example retains the earlier six-gun nose. (Watt)







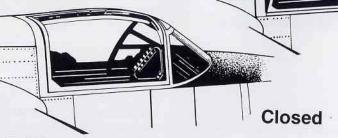




A 319th A-26 being towed out to the flight line prior to a mission. Note the full load of rockets along with permanent wing guns. (Beard)

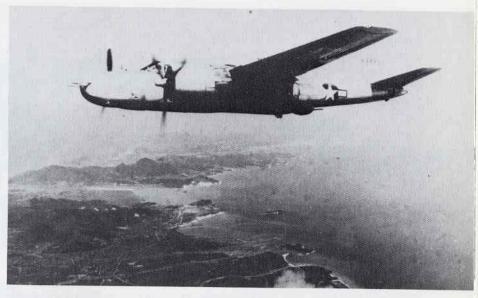
A crashed A-26B of the 3rd Bomb Group, probably in the Philippines. This plane belongs to the 89th Squadron. Unusual is the 8 gunned nose which saw comparatively little service in World War II. The O.D. finish is unusual and seems peculiar to the 3rd. (Vidia)

Later 'clamshell' canopy



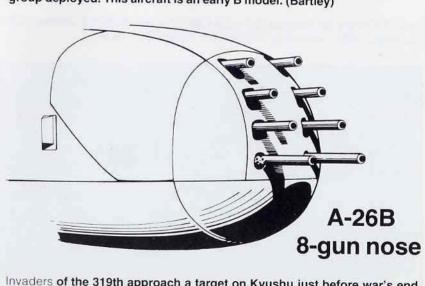
An O.D. Invader of the 3rd Bomb Group shortly after the war at Atsugi air base. This is a late production A-26B with the 8-gun nose and internally mounted wing guns. (Watt)

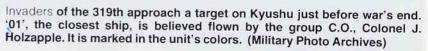




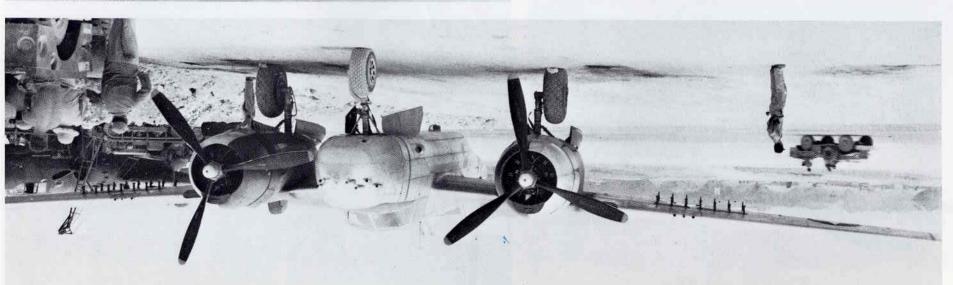
A 319th Bomb Group Invader over Ting Hoa, China, summer 1945. (Military Photo Archives/Corey)

319th tail markings were a blue tail assembly with a white number. However, not all the aircraft were so marked because of the speed with which the group deployed. This aircraft is an early B model. (Bartley)







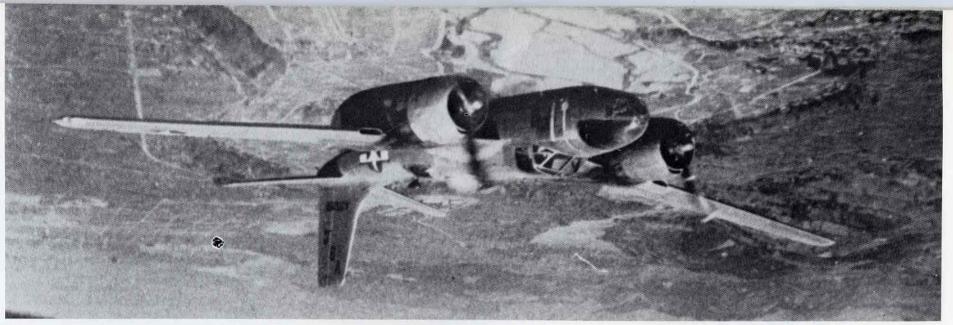




An A-26B Invader of the 48th Bomb Squadron, 41st Bomb Group, on Okinawa, July 1945. This unit was assisted in converting from B-25s to the A-26 by the 319th. (USAF)

"Sweet Pete", from the 319th, rests on the runway at Okinawa after a forced landing. This unit was the first full Invader group in the Pacific. (Beard)

An A-26C of the 5th Bomber Command after the war. Note the unusual tail markings, "VBC", denoting "5th Bomber Command." (Watt)



Post War Service

Following the end of World War II the U.S. made drastic cuts in all branches of the armed services. It was decided that the post war Air Force was to adopt the A-26 as the standard medium bomber, all other light or medium types (A-20, B-25, B-26) being scrapped or given second line duties. With the abolition of the "attack" category by the Air Force in 1947, the A-26 was redesignated B-26. Also because of the new aircraft coming off the production lines, it was decided to re-classify the **Invader** as a light bomber. (in a similiar change the B-29 was reclassified a medium bomber).

Because of the cut backs instituted after the war, many aircraft were withdrawn from active service and preserved in the storage depot at Davis-Monthan. While these cut backs in regular units were going on, it was decided to build up the various Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard units around the U.S. Because of the availability of the A-26, many units were re-equipped with it, including a number of fighter groups (which were redesignated as fighter-bomber units).

Aside from these duties, one group, the 47th, was given the role of developing an effective night capability role. In light of experience gained during the war, along with new equipment being designed, the group devised a number of techniques for pathfinding, illumination of targets, and pinpoint bombing by large formations. Working with radar altimeters, short-range navigation radar (SHORAN) and AN/APQ-3 radar, the unit became quite proficient in this role. Unfortunately (in light of future events), the 47th turned in their B-26s in 1948 for the new jet powered B-45s. With this switch, the Air Force lost the only **Invader** unit which specialized in night operations, a deficiency which would be brought home quite dramatically in just a few short years.



An A-26 being serviced prior to a firing mission at Biggs Field, Texas, April 1947. Fourteen 5 inch rockets, along with the standard bomb load, could be carried for ground support missions. This aircraft is overall black with white around the nose guns — this was probably sealing tape. (USAF)



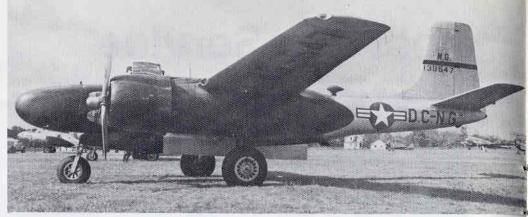
Specially equipped A-26s of the Group fly a practice mission over a gunnery range in Georgia. Large white tail numbers were a hallmark of this night operations unit. (USAF)





A California ANG 115th Fighter Squadron A-26 in May 1950. The sunburst and bear on nose is similar to the the state flag emblem. Note the grayish lead exhaust deposits on the black nacelle. The A-26 was noted for its extensive exhaust stains and deposits which showed up on virtually any color — the black soot stood out equally well on metal nacelles. (Menard via Davis)





An A-26 of the 121st Fighter Squadron, D.C. ANG. The nose color appears to be glossy black, as are the cowlings and nacelles. Note the exhaust streaks on the nacelle. (Menard via Davis)

Invaders of the 47th Bomb Group at the Air Indoctrination Course, Lawson Field, Georgia, prior to a practice mission. Note the old style star and bar insignia, and white cowling markings. (USAF)

A Nebraska ANG Invader of the 173rd Fighter Squadron, May 1950. The tail and wingtip stripes may be red, white and blue. Note the gray exhaust streaks on the black nacelle. (Menard via Davis)

An early model A-26 of the Pennsylvania ANG, possibly from the 112th Fighter Squadron. Many of these ANG invaders were later recalled and sent to Korea, but early canopy styles like this were nearly useless because of aircrew difficulty in bailing out. (Menard via Davis)



XA-26 F

Despite the **Invader's** high speed, it was decided to attempt to increase it further by the addition of a jet engine. This project, originated at Wright Field in Ohio, involved taking a standard production A-26 and installing a General Electric I-16 jet engine in the rear fuselage.

Basically, the upper deck aft of the bomb bay was stripped of its lower turret and radio gear and fitted to hold the jet engine. A single hatch was installed which allowed for easy removal of this engine, resulting in a trial change of only ten minutes. A 125 gallon fuel tank was installed above the bomb bay, necessitating the removal of the upper turret, but the increase in speed was felt to warrant the removal of both turrets. An intake was provided over the top turret position while the exhaust tail pipe ran back through the fuselage and out the tail. Aside from the actual engine installation the only significant change was the substituting of a pair of four bladed Hamilton Standard props to improve take-off and climb characteristics. With a few controls for the new engine, the modified **Invader**, designated XA-26F, was ready for testing.

With the amount of fuel carried for the jet engine it was estimated that the I-16 could boost the speed of the bomber to over 400 MPH for a period of 25 minutes. After initial flight trials a long range test of the practicality of the aircraft was scheduled. On June 20, 1946, the XA-26F took off from Wright Field and flew to St. Louis and back at an average speed of 413 MPH with 2200 pound load, setting a new world's speed record. However, because of the new generation of jet bombers being developed it was decided not to pursue this project any further and no more aircraft were modified, the sole example being kept as a test aircraft until the early 1950s.



The XA-26F in flight without the propeller spinners. From the post-1947 U.S.A.F. markings on plane, it is evident that this version was being used in the late 1940s. (Don Vidra)

The single XA-26F in November 1945 at the Douglas Plant in Santa Monica. The aircraft is equipped with four bladed props and spinners. Note the fuselage changes necessitated by the intake and exhaust for the jet engine. (McDonnell-Douglas)



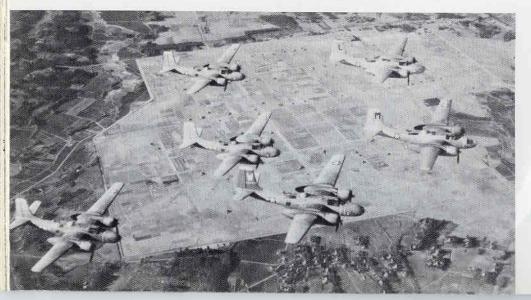
Invaders over Korea

The quiet Sunday of June 25, 1950 was suddenly interrupted by North Korea's massive attack across the 38th Parallel, ushering in over three years of bloody warfare. At that time, the only **Invader** unit in the Far East was the 3rd Bomb Group based in Japan. Composed of only two squadrons because of budget cuts, the unit was immediately pressed into action, providing air cover for the freighter evacuating American dependents from the war-torn country. While this was going on, plans were readied for the first bombing missions of the war. Weather forced cancellation of the first two, but on June 28th B-26s carried out the first offensive missions of the war, striking transportation and rail targets around the 38th Parallel. Because of persistent enemy air opposition, orders were sent out to hit the North Korean airfields and at dusk on July 29th, the 3rd hit the field at Pyongyang, destroying 25 aircraft on the ground and shooting down an intercepting Yak-3. This was the first mission carried out north of the 38th Parallel and was the beginning of the massive air offensive against the North.

A B-26 of the 3rd B.G. on armed reconnaissance over North Korea carrying a variety of weaponry. Rockets and napalm are carried on wing hardpoints while the bomb bay is loaded with general purpose bombs. (USAF)

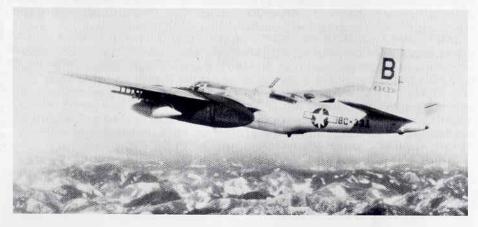
3rd Bomb Group Invaders drop 500 pound bombs on enemy positions in North Korea. Notice how the turrets are trained upward in case of attacks by enemy fighters. (USAF)

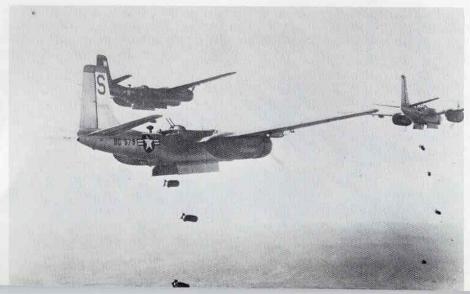
3rd Bomb Group A-26s (now redesignated B-26) on a training mission at the outbreak of the Korean War. The different colors for the serial numbers are unusual, although colored tail codes were used for squadrons. (USAF)

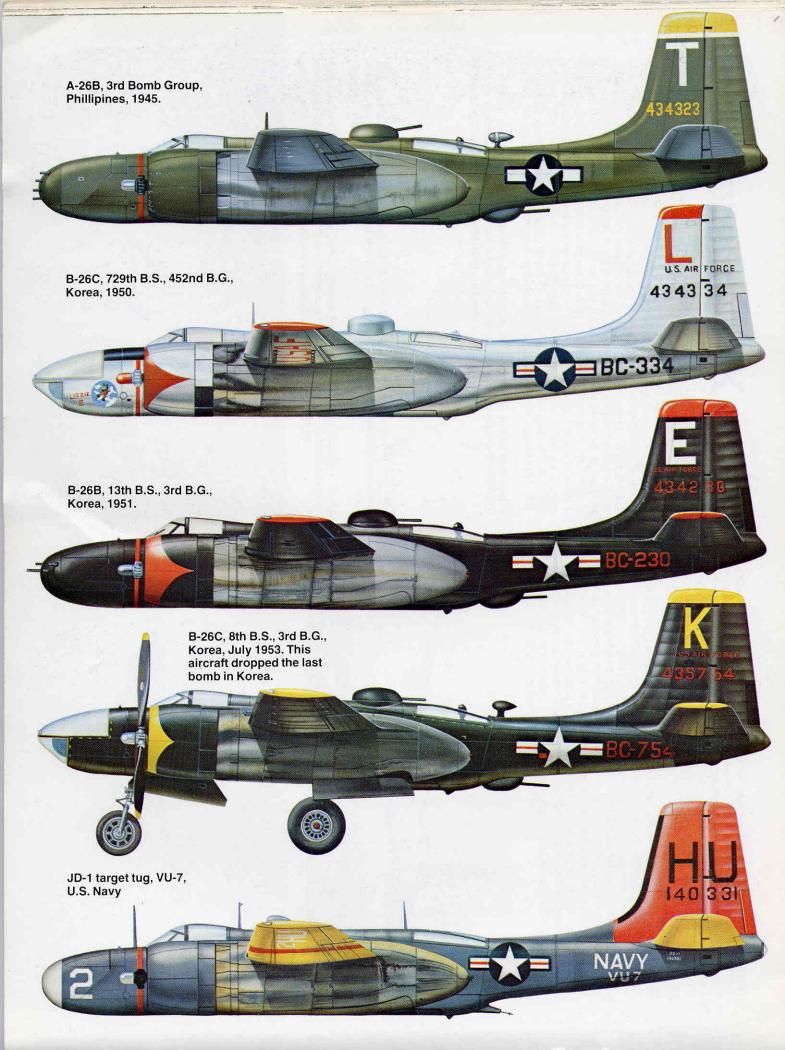


Throughout that bitter summer, the B-26s carried out numerous sorties against targets both north and south of the border. In particular they were very effective in the close-support role because of their loitering ability and load capacity. Most of the aircraft were the solid nosed Bs, and their massive 14 gun armament was extremely effective in strafing North Korean road traffic, particularly in conjunction with rockets and napalm.

As conditions began to stabilize on the ground around the Pusan perimeter, the **Invaders** were sent against supply routes to choke off enemy reinforcements and material. Roads, railways, bridges, and transportation were all hit with devastating results, causing a severe logistics problem for the North Koreans. As the need arose, the B-26s were shifted to combat numerous communist attacks against the perimeter itself. At these early stages, the attempts at night bombing were haphazard because of a shortage of night bombing equipment. Unless visual contact could be made either by moonlight or flares, the aircrews were extremely hard-pressed to seriously interfere with the enemy's movements, which were now being carried on more and more at night because of daytime losses.









"Intruders" in Korea

With the 1st Marine Division's successful assault on Inchon, the tempo of air operations increased dramatically. The B-26s roamed up and down the peninsula, isolating the bridgehead area and attacking retreating enemy troops in the south. Working with flare carrying B-29s, the 3rd B.G. hit enemy targets at night, particularly the rail and road networks, causing tremendous losses in men and materiel. As the ground forces pushed north across the Parallel, the **Invaders** were called in to support the advance, again proving ideal because of their range and load carrying ability.

In October, a new group arrived to bolster the air effort. The 452nd Bomb Group, a Reserve unit from California, arrived and began carrying out operations almost immediately. One of its units, the 731st B.S., was assigned to the 3rd B.G., bringing it to full strength. Later, in May 1952, in what amounted to a paper transfer, the 452nd became the 17th, with the 452nd being returned to the Reserves. However all equipment and personnel remained in Korea until the war's end.

With the advent of Chinese intervention the front lines took a series of "see-saw" flops back and forth until it finally stabilized along the 38th Parallel. Now began perhaps the most difficult period of air operations for the B-26 in Korea: night interdiction. With the front fairly stable, it was decided to employ the two **Invader** groups in night operations to prevent enemy troops and supplies from being built up enough to enable them to go on an all-out offensive.

Throughout the war, the inability to come up with a way to carry out effective night operations was one of the 5th Air Force's main problems. Though the 47th B.G. had done much work with night bombing after World War II, it was no longer flying B-26s and much of its equipment was in storage. Taking pilots who had flown with the 47th, the 3rd began experimenting with different methods. Lacking radar altimeters, blind bombing radar or SHORAN gear, the crews tried flares and moonlight missions. At first they met with success, especially since the enemy truck drivers and train crews did not turn off their lights. However, this soon was standard practice and bombing results dropped. With their move to Korea proper in 1951, the two groups divided the targets between them. The 3rd, based at Kusan, took western Korea while the 452nd, at Pusan, had the eastern portion. With the arrival of more A-26C versions, operations improved because of the bombardier's position, but illumination still was a problem on moonless nights. Experiments were tried with searchlights mounted under the wings with some success, particularly by Captain John Walmsey of the 3rd B.G. in an attack on a large convoy. A few nights after this, he hit a train, and when his ammunition was expended, continued to illuminate it for his wingman. Exposed to intense ground fire, he continued on and was shot down. For this action he was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. However, because of problems with the lights they were subsequently discarded shortly thereafter.

As additional equipment became available, the B-26s were able to operate under radar guidance and undertook blind bombing. Their efficiency increased correspondingly but the night interdiction effort still left much to be desired. Added to this, a shortage of trained crews and aircraft made operations even more difficult, but the two groups continued to operate at maximum effort throughout the war. On occasion they were called upon to provide flak and searchlight suppression for the B-29s but

normally they continued their work at night along with a reduced daylight assignment. On occasion the **Invaders** ran into enemy fighters and took some losses but were able to claim a few piston engine kills and a number of Mig probables. In June 1951, a B-26 piloted by Captain Dick Heyman of the 3rd B.G. managed to corner a "Bedcheck Charlie" Po-2 north of Seoul and dropped him in flames. But for most of their missions, the **Invaders** main enemies were the flak, the weather, and the terrain.

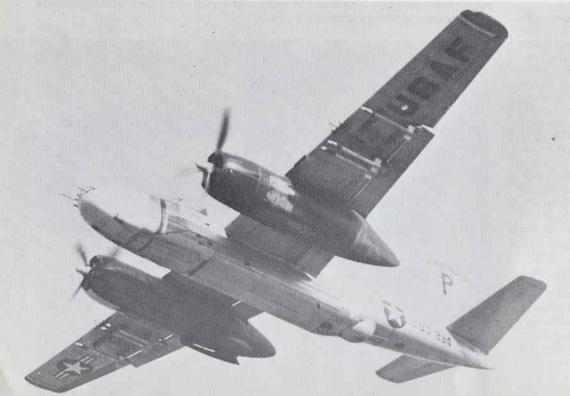
In addition to these missions, RB-26s were employed to provide photo reconnaissance and damage assessment for the intelligence officers. The 67th Tactical Recon Wing eventually was established to coordinate all recon work. A small number of RB-26s were also used to help provide data for weather forecasting, these crews ranging far out over the Yellow Sea to give meteorologists the needed advance information to provide weather briefings prior to missions.

Finally, after a little over three years, the respective sides in the conflict agreed to an armistice which would bring an end to the bloody war. With the truce scheduled to take effect at 22:01 hours on July 27, 1953 the last few hours prior to this saw a massive air effort against enemy air fields and positions north of the truce line. Fittingly, the last bombing mission of the war was carried out by a B-26 of the 3rd B.G., which had flown the first offensive sortie three years before. As the truce time approached a lone RB-26 of the 67th T.R.W. headed south from the final reconnaissance sortie over North Korea. At 22:00 hours the plane crossed the 38th Parallel. The **Invader's** service in Korea was over.

A black 3 B.G. B-26 on a training mission over Korea. Because of the constant rotation of crews stateside, training was a vital part of a new crew's familiarization process prior to being sent into combat. (USAF)



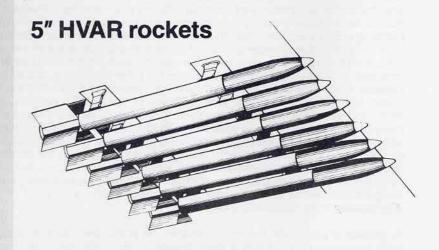






A B-26C on jacks while being serviced. During overhauls, planes were jacked up in order to test the landing gear retraction systems. This particular plane belonged to the C.O. of the 729th B.S., Colonel Art Rehm. (Sox)

B-26Cs being readied for shipment to Korea at Hill AFB, October 1950. Large numbers of Invaders were mothballed at Hill after 1945, and many were reworked for use in Korea. B-29s in the background are going through the same process. (USAF)



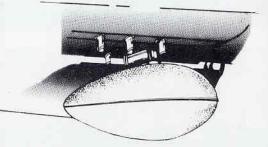
A B-26B with partial ordnance load going out on mission. This plane has just taken off, probably from Iwakuni, Japan. The gray exhaust streaks show up especially well on this Invader. (USAF)



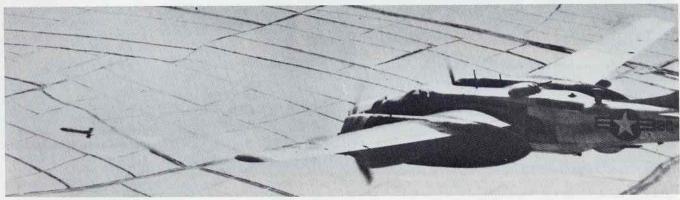
A 5th Air Force B-26C returns from a strike, June 1951. Note the dust raised as the Invader taxies, one of the hazards facing crews which operated from fields in Korea. (USAF)

Three rockets head for North Korean targets, possibly enemy tanks. Rockets and napalm were the best means of destroying Russian built T-34s. This plane is from the 452nd B.G. (USAF)

Drop tank on wing shackle

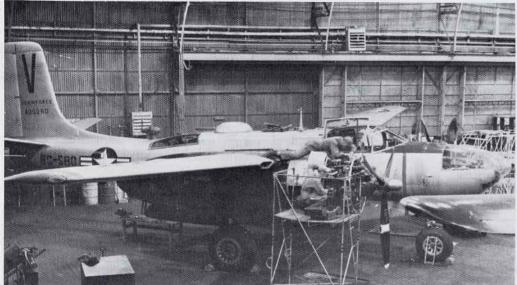


A 452nd B.G. Invader unloads 500 pounders on targets in North Korea. Once the bomb run is complete, the plane will drop down to the deck and use napalm and machine guns on targets of opportunity. (USAF)











"Sweet Susie", a B-26B of the 452nd B.G., runs up her engines just before a mission. Note that black paint covers three- fourths of the left engine cowling, and the entire nacelle. (Silva via Davis)

(Above left) A B-26B having engine maintenance performed in January, 1952. Tents provide protection for personnel in the subarctic climate of Korea's winter. (USAF)

The rigors of constant action required periodic overhaul at FEACOM facilities in Japan. Planes were completely reworked before being shipped back to units in Korea. This B-26C is overall natural metal, with black nacelles to minimize the heavy exhaust stains. (USAF)

Loading Invaders of the 3rd B.G. prior to an attack on Chinese positions. Note the unusual anti-glare panel on the nose, and the nacelles painted black and yellow. Again, light grey lead deposits from the exhausts have covered the black paint on the nacelles. (USAF)









This B-26's main gear struck a snow bank on the side of the runway, collapsing the nose gear, which then caused the nose to shear off. Because of this danger, the navigator/bombardier rode in the cockpit during take-offs and landings. (Mikesh)

(Above left) B-26Cs of the 17th B.G. line the runway prior to a mission. A 500 pound bomb is carried under the wing of the nearest plane while M1A2 fragmentation clusters wait to be loaded in the bomb bay. Six 28 lb. bombs make up each cluster.

The 17th B.G. dispersal area at Pusan East (K-9). Notice the variety of colors used in tail markings down the flight line. The runway is in rather poor condition, the usual state of paved runways in the harsh Korean winters and summers. (USAF)



A mixture of B-26Bs and the Cs await nightfall when they will go out on intruder missions over North Korea. The closest aircraft has the prop warning stripes carried down onto the nose gear doors. Of interest is the use of 55 gallon drums for revetment walls. (USAF)

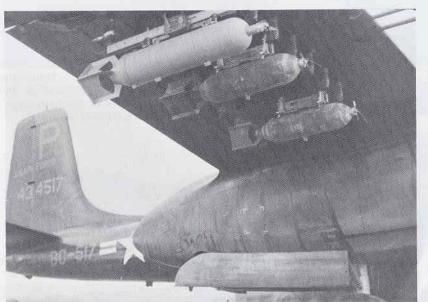


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An RB-26 of the 12th T.R.S. at Taegu, 1951. Note the unusual placement of buzz numbers on the nose, the exhaust stains on the near nacelle, and the extensive paint chipping on the wing and tail leading edges. (Ballweg)

A 3rd B.G. B-26, seen during a night test-firing of the guns. Note the overall faded flat black paint, with a freshly painted replacement nose section, non-matching cowlings, and the heavy grey exhaust streaks on the near nacelle. From the pattern of tracers and muzzle flashes, this plane's 6 gun nose has had extra guns added in the center panel, and these are firing — the original 6 guns are not. (USAF)

A photoflash and two 260 lb. fragmentation bombs are hung under the wing of "Monie" prior to a night mission. (Mikesh)

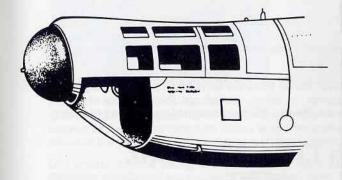


"Monie", a B-26C of the 17thB.G., and the subject of the 1/72 Airfix Invader kit. The pilot is Bob Mikesh, author and curator at the Smithsonian's National Air & Space Museum. (Mikesh)



Invaders of the 452nd B.G. return from a low level sweep over North Korea. Gunners scan behind in case Mig-15s attempt to jump them. The closest machine is badly faded flat black, while the others are natural metal. (USAF)

B-26C "Pathfinder" nose conversion



A B-26C, probably from the 13th B.S. Of interest is the unique nose design, which is similar to the nacelle decoration. (Collect Air Photos)

An unusual nose modification on a B-26. This device was a special radar unit for "pathfinder" night bombing missions. (E.J. Wells, Jr.; Menard via Davis)

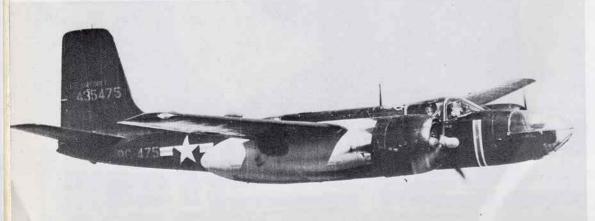














"Typhoon", a 12th T.R.S. RB-26 at Taegu, 1951. The buzz number is red. (Ballweg)

An RB-26C of the 67th Tactical Recon. Wing at Kimpo (K-14) airfield, 1953. Unlike other Invader units, it does not appear that the 67th used any tail colors or markings for identification. Note the RAAF Meteor in the background. (Davis)

"Dragon Lady", another RB-26 from the 67th, sits on the runway after returning from a mission. Invaders carried out the majority of night tactical reconnaissance. The last official mission of the war was flown by an RB-26. (USAF)

12th T.R.S., 67th T.R.W.



An RB-26 of the 67th T.R.W. In many cases, the turrets were removed because night recon activities did not require them. The engine nacelles here are extremely stained from lead exhaust deposits. (McDonnell-Douglas)









Nose art made a come-back in Korea, as can be seen by these examples of 17th B.G. aircraft photographed in Japan during the war. These attractive "mascots" served as morale boosters to crews who flew some of the most dangerous missions of the Korean conflict — low-level night interdiction. (E.J. Wells, Jr.)

500 pound bombs being loaded on wing hard points of a 17th B.G. Invader. Primitive conditions are evident in the background. The star on the prop hub is an unusual marking. (USAF)





"Dixie D", a glass nosed Invader of the 452nd B.G., with the bomb load laid out in front. P.S.P. runways were quite a common feature at Korean airfields. (Silva via Davis)

"Miss Jean", an Invader of the 17th B.G., being serviced at K-9 in the summer of 1953. The hardstand is formed from perforated steel matting (P.S.P.), which was sometimes paved with asphalt. (Keating)



Indochina Invaders

The second largest user of the B-26 was the French Air Force. Since the initial fighting against the Viet Minh in 1946, the French had been progressively drawn into an ever bloodier and expanding war throughout the Indochina peninsula. Until the U.S. involvement in Korea, the American government had shied away from providing the French with relatively modern aircraft, instead selling worn or obsolete planes. Korea changed that. With U.S. forces fighting communist troops, fresh aid was provided for the French. Among the aircraft supplied one of the most important was the **Invader**. Up to the arrival of B-26s, the French Air Force had used old Ju-52s as their main bomber, except for a few Mosquitos used briefly in the late 1940s. With the **Invader** they could now field a relatively modern bomber force to mount more effective aerial assaults against the Vietminh. First used at Vin-Yen in early 1951, the **Invader's** heavy fire power decimated enemy forces and was instrumental in defeating General Giap's first major offensive.

Until the end of the war, 120 **Invaders** were sent to the French, including both B and C versions, along with a few RB-26s for reconnaisance. To suit their needs the French often modified the planes with gun packs, wing guns on Bs or deletion of the ventral turret. For strafing, the top turret was locked forward and used by the pilot along with the wing and nose guns. The French crews liked the **Invader** for its range, firepower, and handling characteristics and, until the end, this aircraft was one of the best weapons used to provide support for the ground forces. Many of the B-26s were ex-U.S.A.F. planes from Korea, reconditioned in Japan, then flown by U.S. crews to Hanoi. With the end of hostilities most of the **Invaders** were returned to the U.S. though a few were kept on strength for training purposes.

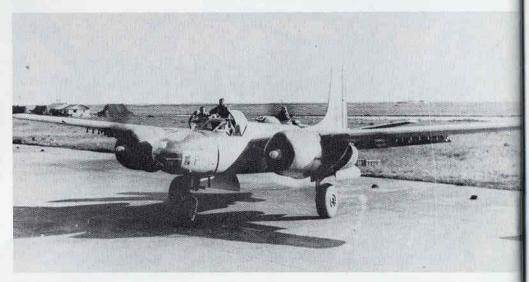
A B-26 being readied for flight at the Mitsubishi aircraft plant, Komaki, Japan. From here it will be ferried by U.S. aircrews to French Indochina. (USAF)





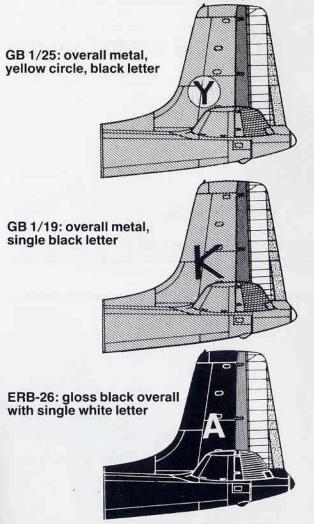
A B-26C of BG 1/25 "Tunisie" at Cat Bi airfield in Haiphong, 1952. Note the faired over gun ports in the nose. (Cuny)

A B-26C of BG 1/25 runs up prior to a mission over Tonkin from Cat Bi, 1952. Notice how the rear turret has been locked forward for strafing. (Cuny)



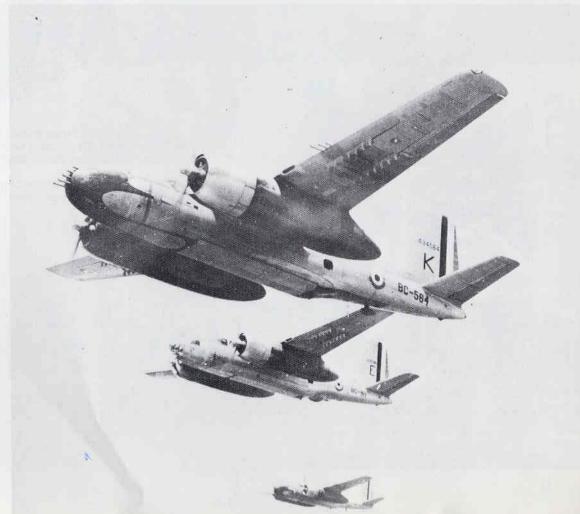
A B-26B of BG 1/19 "Gascogne" on a mission over central Vietnam, 1953, during "Operation Picardie". (Cuny)

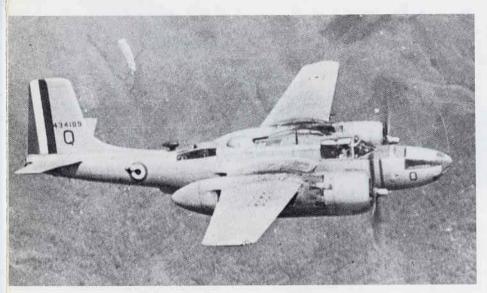
French A-26 Tail Markings, Indochina



A formation of 2 B-26Bs and a B-26C of GB 1/19 during "Operation Picardie", 1953. The scalloped design continues beyond the bomb bay almost to the buzz numbers. Many of the B-26s had the ventral turrets removed, even when the dorsal turret was retained. (Cuny)

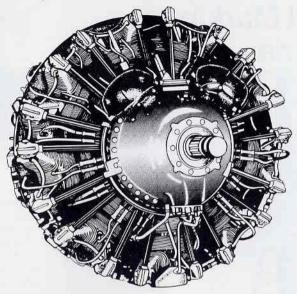








A GB 1/9 B-26C over central Vietnam, 1954. This plane shows the typical appearance of French Invaders in Indochina. (Cuny)



P&W R-2800 engine

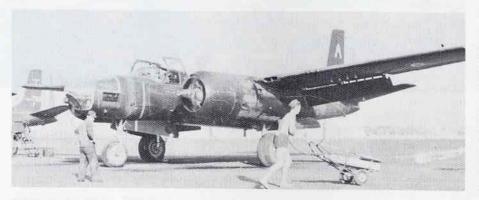
U.S. Air Force personnel work on a B-26C at a French air base in Indochina, 1954. They are part of a group of technicians sent to aid overworked French mechanics during the Battle of Dien Bien Phu. (USAF)

An RB-26C of "Armagnac", ERB 26, 1954. From the terrain in the background, the airfield is probably in northern Tonkin. (Cuny)



Algeria and beyond

As the French withdrew from Southwest Asia, another insurrection erupted in their North African colony of Algeria. As it intensified, the French Air Force found they again needed a bomber force like that used in Indochina. Appeals to the U.S. brought more B-26s in late 1956, and these were soon bombing and strafing rebel forces. Used constantly in both day and night operations, the B-26s again provided effective support for the embattled ground forces. Unlike the Vietminh, the rebels did not have many antiaircraft weapons aside from machine guns, and losses were relatively light. Following the end of hostilities in 1962 the remaining B-26s were used as night fighters, high speed transports and field hacks. The last ones were stricken from active service in the mid-1960s.





FO

B-26Cs, possibly of GB 2/9I, over Oran, with Mers-el-Kebir harbor in the background. (Cuny)

(Top left) An 'Armagnac' RB-26 runs up prior to a mission, possibly in Algeria, early 1960s. (Cuny)

An RB-26C of ERP 1/32 'Armagnac' over Algeria, early 1960s. (Cuny)







A B-26 used as a V.I.P. transport, 1953. This plane is yellow overall with a blue cheat line outlined in white, and black nacelles. (Menard via Davis)

A B-26C used as a radar trainer at Bordeaux airport, during the mid 1960s. The unit is unknown. The finish is overall black. (Cuny)

In the early 1960s, GC 2/6 "Normandie-Niemen" flew modified B-26Bs in the night fighter role. Ex-Meteor NF XI radar, AI Mk X, was fitted in the nose while the gondola armament was retained. (Cuny)

The Late 1950s

Following Korea, the **Invader** entered the twilight of her career, gradually being put out to pasture. The Air Force had already begun the task of selecting a replacement for the old warrior, now over ten years old. Eventually it was decided to replace the B-26 with an American version of the British Canberra (the Martin B-57) to fulfill both the light bomber and night intruder role. Unfortunately, because adequate equipment was not forthcoming until late in the Vietnam war, the B-57 labored under many of the same handicaps as did the B-26 in the intruder role.

The first B-57s began replacing the **Invader** in late 1953, and by the mid-1950s most B-26 units had completed the conversion to the new aircraft. The B-26s were either given second line duties, ferried out to the military storage depot at Davis-Monthan and cocooned in case of future needs, or supplied to other countries under military aid pacts. For those aircraft lucky enough to stay in operation, a multitude of assignments awaited them. Many were modified for use as target towing planes and assigned to fighter units, and a few were even supplied to the Navy and designated JD-1. Others became fast V.I.P. transports, sporting plush interiors for their high ranking passengers' comfort. A few were modified into electronics warfare test beds, carrying sensitive radar and ECM gear for evaluation of its effectiveness. A small number were fitted as Firebee drone launchers and used in conjunction with gunnery meets and test programs. Last, just as after World War Two, large numbers were supplied to the Air Force Reserves and Air National Guard to build up these units. But gradually these jobs were taken over by newer aircraft, and by the early 1960s the B-26 had all but disappeared from service with the Air Force. Most now sat silently in the warm sun in Arizona, awaiting the cutter's torch.

B-26Cs outfitted to carry Firebee target drones at a "William Tell" competition. Once launched, the drones were controlled from the ground. (USAF)



A Navy Invader (JD-1) of VC-2 based at NAS Quonset Point, June 1959. The Navy used these colorfully-marked aircraft for target towing purposes.(Picciani Aircraft Slides)

An Air Force target-towing B-26 from the 6th Target Towing Squadron, Clark Field, P.I., 1957. The aircraft is natural metal with yellow cowling, tail and wing tips, with black nacelles. (Horne)







Acre upon acre of Invaders at Davis-Monthan. By the beginning of 1960, the Air Force was in the process of phasing out the B-26 or giving some to foreign

A B-26B fitted with a special radar mount in the nose, in the mid-1950s, possibly from the 363rd T.R.W. (Collect Air Photos)

governments. Events halfway around the world would bring a Phoenix-like respite for some of the aircraft pictured here. (Air Force Museum)

An RB-26C of the 11th T.R.S. based at Clark Field in the Phillippines, 1957, just prior to being mothballed. Anti-glare paint is carried over onto bombardier's clear glass. (Horne)





Foreign Service

France, though the largest foreign user of the **Invader**, was but one of a number of countries to which the A-26/B-26 was supplied. Initially the R.A.F. acquired two A-26s for testing in 1944, prior to taking a larger number into service, but subsequently this order was changed and even these two were returned in 1945. Aside from France, this was the only European country to have any formal association with the **Invader**.

The greatest number of countries to use the B-26 were the Central and South American nations of the western hemisphere. Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru all at one time had **Invaders** in service, their respective strengths varying anywhere from 6 to 30 aircraft. Most received their aircraft in the mid-50s, and as late as 1977, a few B-26s were still in service. Some of these aircraft were modified to B-26K standards during periodic overhauls but were never redesignated as such. Aside from these countries, B-26s were also used in clandestine operations against Haiti and by Cuban rebels in the 1962 Bay of Pigs invasion. This was the only instance where B-26s fought against one another, a number of Cuban **Invaders** being shot down or destroyed on the ground by the rebel forces during the course of the battle.

In Africa the Congolese Republic (now Zaire) and Biafran forces used B-26s briefly in the late 1960s. A secret attempt was made to smuggle **Invaders** to Portugal for use in Angola but this was stopped by the U.S. and subsequently the few **Invaders** ferried over never became operational.

Some other countries to receive B-26s included Turkey, where they were used mainly for target towing, and Saudi Arabia, which acquired nine in 1955. However, it appears these never became operational because of the lack of qualified crews. In the Far East **Invaders** were used by Indonesia in the early 1960s but were later replaced by Russian IL-28's. Mention will be made later of service by Vietnam and Laos.

Because of their good performance, large numbers of B-26s were purchased for a multitude of tasks, ranging from borate bombers to plush executive transports. Many were modified by local contractors but the L. B. Smith Company and On-Mark Engineering did almost a complete rebuilding of the aircraft on a production line basis, resulting in a variety of business and executive versions. Most of these civilian Invaders are still in service and should be until the early 1980s.

A B-26B in the markings of the Indonesian Air Force (A.U.R.I.) prior to being ferried overseas. In 1960 the A.U.R.I. acquired the Invaders to supplement their B-25s. (Collect Air Photos)





A Nationalist Chinese Invader in the mid-1950s prior to shipment to Taiwan. Although it may be overall black, dark green has also been suggested as a possible color for this aircraft. (Collect Air Photos)

A Brazilian B-26B at Davis Monthan, May 1967. As of 1976, 15 Invaders were still listed as operational in Brazil. (Picciani Aircraft Slides)



A civilian Invader modified by On-Mark Inc. to a fast executive transport. The colors are gloss white with a gray bottom and red and blue trim. (Dotson)



Southeast Asia

Following the French withdrawal from Indochina in 1954, the U.S. stepped in with advisors and military aid to the fledgling South Vietnamese government. As time progressed, the communist forces left behind in South Vietnam became increasingly active, and by the early 1960s the Saigon government faced a full-scale guerrilla war. To counter this threat, more U.S. personnel were dispatched along with additional equipment, including Air Force units to provide air support for the ground troops. Under the auspices of the "Farm Gate Program" RB-26s were one of the types committed, four aircraft arriving at Bien Hoa in December 1961.

Despite the increased U.S. support, however, the communist forces (Viet Cong) continued to grow in size. Late in 1962 the Air Force was requested to provide B-26s to augment the T-28s flying support missions, a squadron being dispatched in December, one year after the first **Invaders** had been sent into action.

Throughout 1963, the B-26s (in Vietnamese markings but with U.S. crews) flew continuously in support of ARVN ground units. Because of their speed, firepower, range and loitering ability, the B-26s were most effective, often being the only aircraft capable of providing continuous air support because of the distances involved. However, problems soon arose when, in August 1963, the wing of an **Invader** broke off, resulting in the loss of the crew. Because of this, it was decided to put the B-26s under flight restrictions to avoid undue wing stress, but with the loss of another aircraft under similar conditions in February 1964 all B-26s were grounded.

Although this setback caused the withdrawal of all Invaders from Vietnam, the Air Force had realized how ill-equipped it was to handle the support operations in the ever increasing ground war in Southeast Asia, particularly night interdiction of the Ho Chi Minh trail. Subsequently, it was decided to modify low flying time B-26s into an effective counter-insurgency weapon. The On-Mark Engineering Company of Van Nuvs. California had been extensively involved in reconditioning B-26s for custom executive transports and was selected to modify a B-26 to the YB-26K configuration. as this new version was to be designated. The modifications involved were extensive. The wings were rebuilt and strengthened, while the fuselage was remanufactured and had the twin turrets removed. The tail assembly area was enlarged while new Pratt and Whitney R-2800-103W engines with reversible propellers and feathering controls were installed. Dual controls were provided in the cockpit, along with newer avionics and additional fuel stowage, including wingtip tanks. In the YB-26K, eight underwing hardpoints were installed, along with six wing guns in addition to the eight nose guns. The wing guns were later deleted on service models. At first, a number of glass nosed versions were also modified, but eventually the solid nose became the standardized type. The prototype was first flown in January 1963 and after extensive tests, including combat evaluation in the Congo, the Air Force ordered the aircraft into production in November of that year. The first operational version was flying in May 1964, and eventually 41 B-26Ks, including the prototypes, were delivered

Only two operational units flew the modified **Invader**, redesignated A-26A. Stateside, the 603rd Special Operations Squadron was the training unit for crews on their way to the war zone. Although at first a variety of color schemes had been tried, eventually a

three-tone scheme with black undersides was standardized. The 603rd's aircraft could be identified by the white tail code "IF". In Southeast Asia, the A-26s were operated by the 609th SOS, flying their first missions in 1966 out of Nakhon Phanom (NKP), Thailand. After initial evaluations, it was decided to use the A-26s in the night interdiction role. Operating over Laos, Cambodia and North Vietnam, the **Invaders** hit everything from troops to supply concentrations, but specialized in "truck busting" on the Ho Chi Minh trail. Under the callsign "Nimrod", the **Invaders** dodged through the mountainous terrain to blast North Vietnamese road traffic much as they had done fifteen years earlier over Korea. Carrying over 6000 pounds of napalm, H.E. bombs, or fragment clusters, in addition to 1600 rounds apiece for the 50 caliber guns, the A-26s went out night after night in an attempt to close down the supply routes to the South. But as in Korea, the wily enemy was difficult to stop even though huge losses were inflicted. Along with the other aircraft involved, the A-26 was able to hinder, but never completely stop, the traffic flow. Ironically, the **Invaders** often teamed up with the B-57s, their replacement from the 1950s, along with A-1s, T-28s, and F-4s.

Aside from these missions, the 609th gave a great deal of support to the Laotian forces under General Vang Pao, hitting North Vietnamese troops and tanks on the Plain of Jars. On occasion, they even became involved with Russian-built An-2 **Colt** transports and there was at least one encounter with a Mig-17. Rumors abound of other equally "interesting" missions and perhaps someday when restrictions are lifted, the full story of the A-26 over that strife-torn land will be told.

Eventually attrition and lack of adequate spare parts forced the cessation of flight operations in late 1969 and the 609th stood down. From evidence it appears some A-26s were left in Thailand and given to the now disbanded Laotian Air Force. The remaining aircraft were ferried back to Davis-Monthan but this time there was no reprieve for the old warriors. A few were put on static display, but most were stripped of their useable gear and cut up for scrap. All that is left now is a legacy of outstanding service and the fond memories of the crews they so faithfully served.

A U.S. Air Force RB-26 at Bien Hoa air base, South Vietnam, Sept. 1962. Vietnamese national insignia are carried instead of U.S. markings. (USAF)



A B-26 over the Mekong Delta in support of ARVN paratroopers. Again, South Vietnamese markings are carried. Note the faired over turret opening, and overall metal finish with black nacelles. (USAF)



A B-26B armed with rocket pods and napalm tanks, seen parked at Bien Hoa. Except for the cowling flaps, the nacelles are painted black. (USAF)



The prototype YB-26K, #635634, at On-Mark Engineering's ramp in Van Nuys, 1963. Production aircraft had the spinners and wing guns deleted. (Byers)





A YB-26K uses a JATO pack at TAC's Special Air Warfare Center at Hulburt Field, Florida. (USAF)

The first production B-26K at Edwards AFB with fuel tanks, napalm bombs and rocket pods under wings. (USAF)





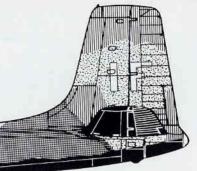
An Invader in flight near Albrook AFB, Panama Canal Zone. Production aircraft had R-2800-52W engines substituted for the original R-2800-103Ws. (USAF)

This B-26K is in an experimental blue-gray scheme at Albrook AFB. After trying this and an emerald green scheme, the Air Force decided to use the standard three-tone color scheme then in use in Vietnam. (USAF)

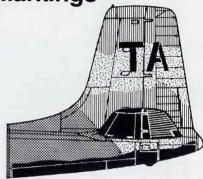




Southeast Asia Tail Markings



603rd S.O.S., U.S. training



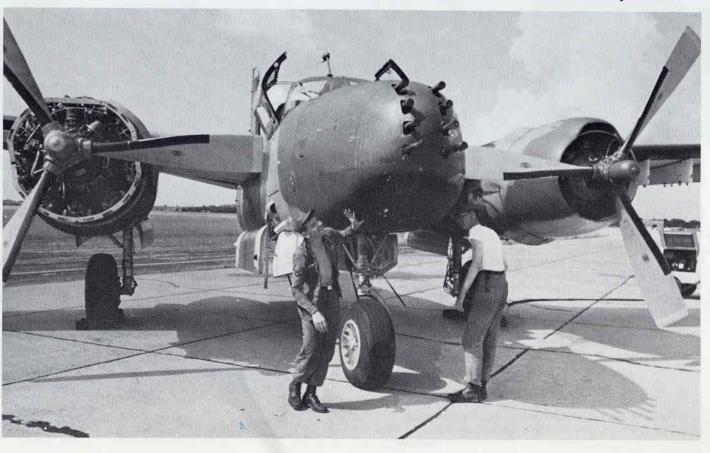
609th S.O.S., SE Asia operations

Training in the U.S. was conducted by the 603rd S.O.S., identified by the white "IF" on the tail. Unusual is the gray on the tip tanks used with this aircraft's black undersides. (Picciani Air Slides)

B-26 nose gear



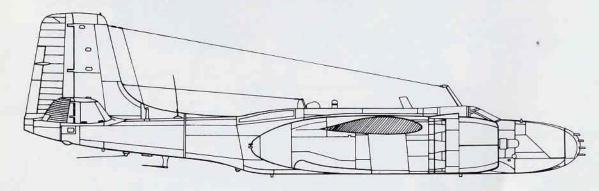
An Invader of the 603rd at Hulburt Field in early 1967. This plane still has the original gray undersides. Later most stateside and all Asian A-26s were painted black on the bottom. (Buyers)







A-26A (B-26K) Antenna Installations

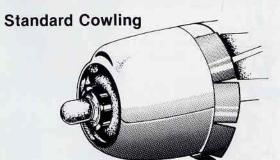




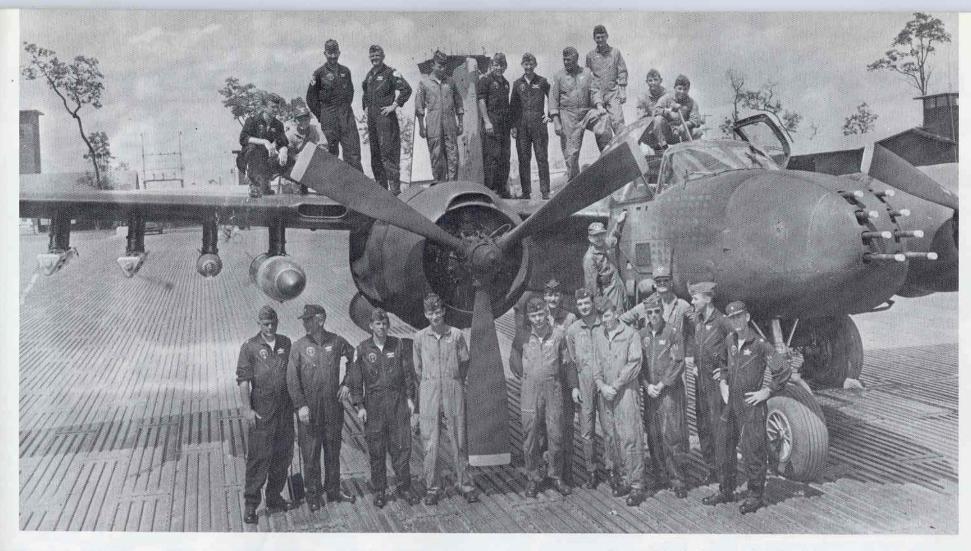
An A-26 in flight over Thailand. Note absence of national insignia. The 609th S.O.S. was originally designated 606th Aero Commando Squadron. (USAF)

(Above left) An A-26 in Thailand, May 1967. Note that only the serial number is on the vertical tail. Later in the war, the code "TA" was carried by the planes in the 609th. (USAF)

Fully loaded with bombs, rocket pods and napalm, this Invader awaits nightfall for a mission against the Ho Chi Minh Trail. (USAF)









Crews of the 609th pose with a loaded Invader. Of special interest are the truck "kills" under the cockpit and above the bomb bay. The caps on the guns are to keep out moisture. (USAF)

A-26s in storage at Davis-Monthan in the early 1970s, prior to being scrapped. The nearest one, TA 671, is now on display at Florence, South Carolina, an old A-26 training base in World War II. (Dotson)

