

A History of NASIC

NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE INTELLIGENCE CENTER

WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE, OHIO

Former Soviet MiG-23 on Display

Contributing author Rob Young, NASIC Historian

Beginning in 2000, visitors to the United States Air Force Museum (now the National Museum of the US Air Force) could view something that few of them had ever seen: an original Soviet Air Force fighter aircraft. The MiG-23MLD/FLOGGER K was initially displayed outside the museum. It represents a significant contribution to the Museum's MiG collection, which also includes examples of a MiG-15bis, MiG-17F, MiG-19S, and MiG-21F-13. The former Soviet Union manufactured the first three aircraft, yet other countries—such as North Korea, Egypt, and Poland—actually operated them. Czechoslovakia built and operated the Museum's MiG-21. The unusual addition of a Soviet MiG-23MLD was the result of a chain of events that could only happen in a post-Cold War environment.

In 1992, a Russian unit sold MiG-23MLD “White 44” to a company in Finland for display purposes, only. A US citizen from Florida bought the jet from the Finnish company and imported it into the country, apparently hoping to fly the aircraft in air shows. Unfortunately for him, he brought the aircraft's Gsh-23L 23-mm cannon into the country illegally, and consequently lost both the gun and aircraft to the US government after the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms seized them. The Foreign Materiel Exploitation Facility of the National Air Intelligence Center (NAIC) became the fighter's home until 1998, when the Center notified the Air Force Museum that the FLOGGER would become available for transfer to its collection.

The museum's talented restoration personnel, utilizing expertise from NAIC, restored the aircraft to excellent condition over a period of months. Some detail parts had to be manufactured by hand, other parts came from NAIC. The paint scheme and stenciling needed to be redone and the much worn main gear tires were replaced with brand new MiG-29 tires that NAIC provided.

Museum visitors who view the MiG-23MLD see the most advanced version of the FLOGGER. It features a different IFF (identification, friend or foe) system, a more advanced missile capability (AA-11/ARCHER can be carried on the belly), and a distinctive notch cut in the leading edge of the wing to improve flight characteristics. The variable geometry wings have sweep settings of 16, 45, and 72 degrees. Designed as a point defense fighter, the FLOGGER offers a powerful radar, an infrared search and track system, a selection of radar and infrared guided weapons, and tremendous speed (Mach 2.35) to counter its adversaries.

Keen observers also note how rough the fit and finish of the aircraft is, especially compared with the United States Air Force aircraft that surround it in the display. However, the Russian aircraft is smooth where it needs to be. The MiG is functional, not pretty. The ability to compare and contrast US and foreign systems represents one of the many priceless capabilities offered by the National Museum of the US Air Force.



The MiG-23MLD in front of the US Air Force Museum's restoration facility



“White 44” served with the Soviet Air Force in Estonia before coming to the United States.