

# A History of NASIC

NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE INTELLIGENCE CENTER

WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE, OHIO

## 1967 Soviet Air Show: Naming the Planes

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The Soviet Union was a very secretive society. Nothing was public knowledge unless the Communist Party wanted it to be public knowledge. Those matters that it did want to reveal were often made public in grandiose propaganda events. Typical of these events were the annual May Day parades of military might in Red Square and the less frequent shows of military aircraft. The air shows seemed to be set on a 6-year cycle, previous shows having been staged at Tushino Airport in 1955 and 1961. The 9 July 1967 show at Domodedovo Airport was the most spectacular of all, with five all-new aircraft and four major revisions to existing aircraft being shown. Foreign diplomatic delegations were invited and given prime viewing locations.

In 1967, I was assigned as a major in the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), having completed 5 years as a flight test engineer at Wright-Patterson and 6 years as an aircraft performance analyst at the Air Technical Intelligence Center (ATIC), later the Foreign Technology Division (FTD). Here is an inside story of some events that took place in the hours after the Soviet air show was over.

The US air attaché in Moscow gathered up all the many rolls of film that he and others of the US delegation had shot during the show, and caught the first plane out of Moscow, arriving at Dulles International Airport late in the evening of 9 July. I met him there and we traveled directly to Dayton International Airport, where a

staff car was waiting. An hour later, the films were in the developing “soup” at FTD. A full staff was available and a blizzard of black-and-white photo prints was coming out of the dryer in less than an hour. I joined several FTD engineers to get the first “gee whiz” looks, and then set about the first business at hand—assigning names to the Soviet aircraft.

The custom of assigning names to enemy aircraft started in the war against Japan, when little was known about the Japanese nomenclature for their aircraft. Informal names went into common use, such as Zero, Frank, and Betty. This system worked and was suited to the Cold War situation with the very secretive Soviet Union. All that was needed was to formalize the system. Five Free World nations—the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—agreed to form the Air Standardization Coordinating Committee (ASCC).

First, the ASCC made some rules. Fighters would be given names beginning with the letter “F.” Bomber names would begin with “B,” cargo planes with “C,” helicopters with “H,” seaplanes with “M,” etc. Propeller-driven planes would have one-syllable names, and jets would have two-syllable names. Proposed names were considered in advance, and approved lists of candidate names were circulated, ready to be assigned when the need arose. A major factor in approving names was assuring that the names could be pronounced by speakers



*The Ye-155s fighters fly for the world at the Domodedovo Air Show in July 1967. The name FOXBAT came from this sighting.*



of all conceivable languages, and would have no political, religious, scatological, or other offensive connotations. Ordinarily, evidence of each new aircraft would be discussed and consensus reached before the next name on the list would be assigned. In 1967, however, things turned out slightly different.

Before departing the DIA, I had tucked a 3 × 5 card in my shirt pocket. It was a hand-written list of all the approved ASCC names. Within 10 minutes of having a complete set of 5 × 7 prints, we picked one typical shot of each new aircraft. Meaningful glances were exchanged as we tacitly agreed to break the ASCC rules. Wink-wink, nudge-nudge. Al Gangl said, "So name them." I took each one and wrote a name from my list on the back of each photo. More sets of photos were assembled and the names copied on the backs. Then a cool head at FTD rushed off to spread the news in a message that listed the assigned names with a brief word description. I suppose none of the original marked-up photos has survived, nor could a copy of that predawn message be found. Here is what I recall as being the substance of the message that went out to all ASCC members and a host of NATO allies.



*The Ye-155P-5 at Domodedovo became the MiG-25/FOXBAT.*

Date: 10 July 1967 about 0300 EDT

Subject: Soviet Aircraft shown 9 July at Domodedovo

A number of new and modified aircraft were displayed at subject air show. They have been tentatively named as follows.

**FOXBAT:** Large twin-engine MiG fighter. Four examples in various configurations shown.

**FLOGGER:** Medium-sized, single-engine, swing-wing MiG fighter.

**FREEHAND:** Small Yakovlev VTOL fighter using vectored thrust jet propulsion.

**FLAGON:** Twin-engine Sukhoi fighter with side inlets and conical radome.

**FAITHLESS:** STOL MiG fighter using vertically mounted direct-lift jet engines behind cockpit.

**FITTER B:** Swing wing version of Sukhoi FITTER.

**FIREBAR C:** Variant of FIREBAR with new conical radome.

**FISHBED STOL:** Variant of FISHBED with vertically mounted direct-lift engines behind cockpit.

**FLAGON STOL:** Variant of FLAGON with vertically mounted direct-lift engines behind cockpit.

By noon, everybody who had reason to discuss the air show aircraft was using the preemptively assigned names without confusion or misunderstanding. It should be noted that the Soviet air show announcer said that the large twin-jet aircraft (FOXBAT) were interceptors from the MiG Design Bureau. One had a conspicuous number 25 painted on the nose. Nevertheless, Washington powerbrokers continued for months to call it the MiG-23, and convinced each other that it would become a tactical fighter-bomber.

As a footnote to history, I will confess to some personal caprice in assigning the names. Yes, I did use the first five names from the approved list for the all-new fighters. I did take the liberty of picking up the photos so the names fit my whims. FOXBAT was used for the plane that I perceived as having the most mystical capabilities; already, there was controversy over its mission and capabilities. FLOGGER was a natural for a plane with moving wings. FREEHAND seemed to fit a plane that was not bound to fixed bases. FAITHLESS just looked like a loser to me (and so it was). And FLAGON just had to take what was left.