

[Updated] Former F-106 pilot explains why the Delta Dart – although fast and agile – was never used in Vietnam

By **Dario Leone**

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The Delta Dart

The [F-106 Delta Dart](#) all-weather interceptor was developed from the [Convair F-102 Delta Dagger](#). Originally designated F-102B, it was redesignated F-106 because it had extensive structural changes and a more powerful engine.

The first F-106A flew on Dec. 26, 1956, and deliveries to the Air Force began in July 1959. Production ended in late 1960 after 277 F-106As and 63 F-106Bs had been built.

The F-106 was the primary all-weather interceptor aircraft of the US Air Force (USAF) from the 1960s through to the 1980s.

'I flew F-106s in Alaska, Korea, and in the USA. I flew F-100's in Vietnam,' [Bruce Gordon](#), former F-106 pilot, says [on Quora](#). 'The F-106 COULD outmaneuver most other fighters, had better radar — and the AIM-4 Falcon was given a bad name by [Robin Olds](#). I totally disagree with Robin's assessment — the problem was not the AIM-4, but the F-4 which didn't have the computer system to launch it properly.'

The F-106 was never used in Vietnam. Why is that?

Even though the Delta Dart was faster and more agile than [the F-4 Phantom II](#) it was never deployed in Vietnam.

Gordon explains;

'Two basic reasons the F-106 wasn't used in Vietnam: 1. It didn't carry bombs, and most of our missions were bombing. 2. [MiGs wouldn't come up to fight](#) if the odds weren't in their favor.

'The F-106 was best at high altitudes, about 40,000 feet. We could have flown over North Vietnam all day and the MiGs wouldn't have come up to fight. The MiGs would go after the bomb-laden strike force, which was usually around 5,000 to 10,000 feet, where the F-106s radar wasn't good because of ground clutter. At low altitudes the F-106s light wing loading wasn't such an advantage and the MiGs would have an advantage.

'The F-106 did not have a radar warning receiver. However, the RWRs at the time were basic, giving the pilot a place to look for the incoming SAM. Then he would out-maneuver the SAM. This was pretty difficult at low altitudes (below 20,000 feet) because there was little time to see the SAM smoke trail. If the F-106 was flying over North Vietnam at 40,000 feet, it would have a lot more time to see the SAM and plan a maneuver. The SA-2 SAM had small wings and went several times the speed of sound, so its turning radius was wide.

Needed for defense of the US and South Korea

'The F-106 had a big delta wing with a rather light wing loading, so it would probably have had little trouble out-turning the SAM. The SAM left a big smoke trail, so it was easy to see. Even without a RWR, the F-106 pilot would have a lot more time to see the SAMs coming up and plan the turn to avoid it. However, the MiGs probably wouldn't come up to fight, either, so there was no reason for the F-106 to be out there anyway...'

Gordon concludes;

'[The F-106s were few in number](#) and were needed for defense of the USA and South Korea. We didn't have enough of them to be practical for Vietnam. Even if we had, it was the wrong war for the F-106 because of the above problems.'

Update: John Osbourn, a reader of The Aviation Geek Club, brought to our attention that the F-106 was never used in Vietnam also because: "One- this fighter had received a bulged canopy, in the late 60's, as a part of "Project Six Shooter", and Two: This same project also added the M61A-1 Vulcan gun to the fighter in a neat weapons bay installation, replacing the AIR-2A Genie rocket system, plus, with the bulged canopy, the SIX's pilot would've seen the MiG on his six, and broke hard right, or left. Also the fighter wasn't equipped with chaff, and flare dispensers, as well, so that's the other reason why the air force never used the SIX in Vietnam."
Photo credit: U.S. Air Force

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Dario Leone is an aviation, defense and military writer. He is the Founder and Editor of "The Aviation Geek Club" one of the world's most read military aviation blogs. His writing has appeared in The National Interest and other news media. He has reported from Europe and flown Super Puma and Cougar helicopters with the Swiss Air Force.

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