

Lockheed XP-80/YP-80/P-80/F-80 Shooting Star

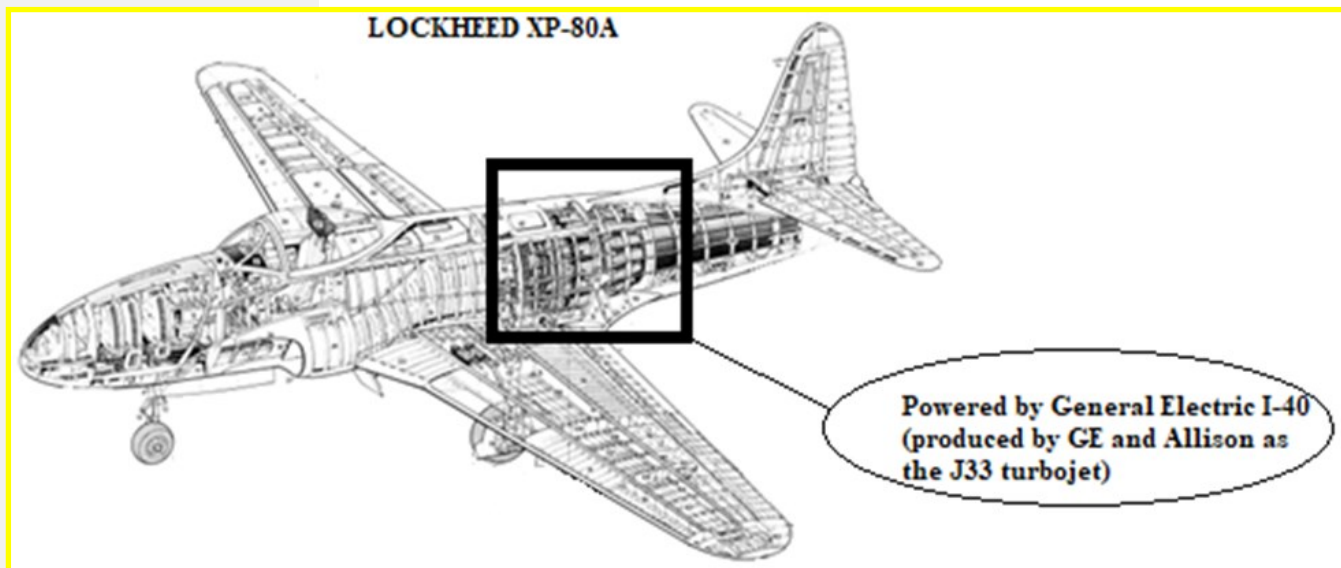
By: Jack Waid

January 2026 marks the 82nd anniversary of the XP-80's first flight. On 8 January 1944, at Muroc Army Airfield (later Edwards Air Force Base), Lockheed's chief engineering test pilot, Milo Burcham, took the prototype Model L-140 (the Army Air Forces XP-80), for its maiden flight. The XP-80 later became the first jet fighter used operationally by the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF).

Air Materiel Command's (antecedent of AFMC) Wright Field Research and Development Division tasked Lockheed to design the aircraft and in 1943, Lockheed designed and built the XP-80 in 143 days. The Air Force dubbed the aircraft the 'Shooting Star' in honor of its unparalleled speed, its bullet-shaped fuselage, flush rivets and smooth skin, designed with straight wings.



Lockheed XP-80, 44-83020 (Smithsonian)



HISTORY

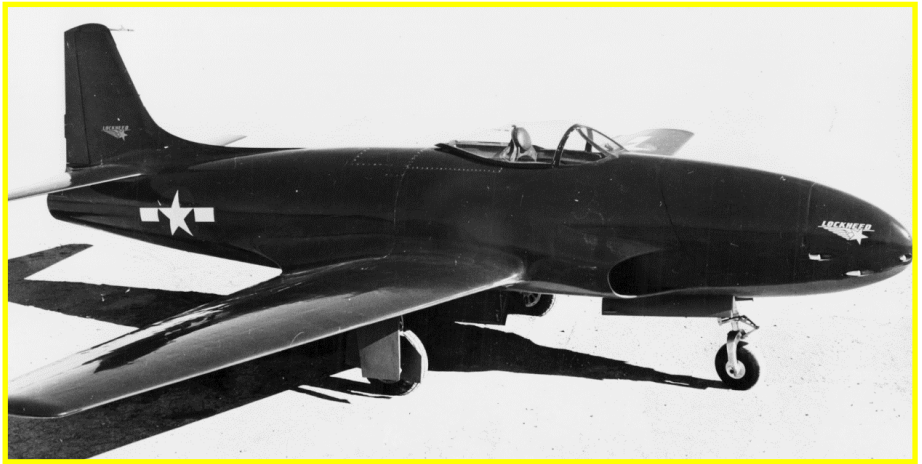
IN TWO

Specs: Length: 32 ft 9 in, Height: 11 ft 4 in, Wing Span: 38 ft, Weight: empty: 7,225 lbs, loaded: 9,600 lbs. Powered by General Electric I-40 (produced by GE and Allison as the J33 turbojet).

Performance: maximum speed: 600 mph, Mach .76 (P-80A 558 mph at sea level and 492 mph at 40,000 ft), Range: 1,200 miles, service ceiling: 46,000 ft, thrust/weight: 0.43.

Armament: six air cooled Brown-ing .50-caliber AN-M2 ma-chine guns, it was unusual for a prototype to have weapons and in the nose of the aircraft.

Length, wing span, weight, speed, etc. changed over time with different variants.



The highly polished Dark Green and Light Gull Gray Lockheed XP-80 prototype parked at Muroc Dry Lake, 1944 (Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Co.)

America's first successful turbojet-powered combat aircraft helped usher in the jet age for the United States. Additionally, a variant became the first turbojet-powered aircraft to exceed 500 mph in level flight. This variant, designated the XP-80A, was designed for a larger American-made jet engine, the General Electric I-40/J33 engine.

During WWII, between January and March 1945, two American pre-production Lockheed YP-80A fighters saw limited service in Italy. Both test and operational pilots flew the YP-80As however, civilians maintained them. The P-80 saw no actual combat during WWII; however, the jet saw extended combat service during the Korean conflict. The Air Force later replaced the F-80 with the swept-wing F-86 Sabre.



Operational P/F-80's carrying colorful tail flash are parked on the ramp and are ready for their next mission.



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