

North American F-86A #49-1237

August 6, 1955

On the afternoon of August 6, 1955, Capt. George M. Caldwell took off from Salt Lake Municipal Airport, UT, in North American F-86A #49-1237. Capt. Caldwell was with the 191st FIS of the Utah Air National Guard. His mission was to tow an aerial target to the Utah Test and Training Range and meet up with seven other F-86s for air-to-air gunnery practice. After climbing to 20,000 feet, he was approaching the range when an electrical short caused the instrument panel to catch fire. Thick smoke obscured his vision, so he jettisoned the canopy. He was unable to extinguish the rapidly spreading fire, so he ejected from the aircraft. Capt. Caldwell parachuted safely to the ground with minor injuries and walked several miles in the desert heat before he was spotted by a rescue helicopter. Some wreckage of the jet fighter was removed, some was buried, and scattered pieces are still on the surface 70 years later. Special thanks to Craig Fuller for help with finding this crash site. Site visited on 9/20/25



Some of the larger pieces of wreckage



The “NG” from the aircraft’s “ANG” markings is still visible



The “151-” part number prefix means this is an F-86



Part of a flap mechanism



Part of the turbine assembly from the J47 jet engine



Oil pressure gauge from the instrument panel



A turbine blade from the engine



Part of a hinged piece from a control surface



The wreckage is partially buried



Lots of bolts and rivets in this piece



An F-86A similar to #49-1237 on display at the Utah ANG headquarters at Draper, UT



George M. Caldwell was a veteran of World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. He was a flight instructor who flew the P-47, P-51, and F-86. Two years after the accident, he was appointed squadron commander of the 191st FIS. When he retired in 1974 at the rank of colonel, he was director of air operations for the Utah National Guard. He was the personal pilot for three governors of Utah on flights to Washington, D.C. He passed away in 2009 at age 87.