



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Month in USAF and PACAF History April



1 April 1935 **The prototype of the North American AT-6 Texan first flew.** One of the most widely used aircraft in history, the AT-6 advanced trainer was known as the “Pilot Maker” because the U.S. Army Air Forces used it extensively in flying schools. Of the 15,495 Texans built from 1938 to 1945, over 10,000 went to the AAF while the others went to the Navy and over 30 Allied nations. British “Battle of Britain” pilots trained in AT-6s that were pushed across the Canadian border to comply with neutrality laws. When war broke out in Korea in 1950, T-6s flew missions spotting enemy troops and guns and marking them for attack by fighter-bombers.



1 April 1952 **Korean War aerial victories.** F-86 Sabre pilots of the Fifth Air Force destroyed ten MiGs while losing one F-86. [Colonel Francis S. Gabreski](#), USAF, Commander of the 51st Fighter Interceptor Wing, destroyed a MiG to become the eighth jet ace of the Korean War.

On 7 December 1941, Gabreski was on Oahu pushing airworthy aircraft away from flames and explosions after the Japanese attack. He was one of the few P-36 pilots to get airborne over Oahu on that day. Gabreski scored 28 kills in the European theater of World War II – the most of any U.S. pilot fighting the Luftwaffe. In the Korean War, Colonel Gabreski scored 6.5 kills and was one of only seven pilots to become an ace in two wars.



Colonel Gabreski on wingmen in the U.S. Air Force:

The wingman is absolutely indispensable. I look after the wingman. The wingman looks after me. It's another set of eyes protecting you. That's the defensive part. Offensively, it gives you a lot more firepower. We work together. We fight together. The wingman knows what his responsibilities are, and knows what mine are. Wars are not won by individuals. They're won by teams."

1 April 1977 **Training against MiGs.** The 4477th Test and Evaluation Flight was activated at the Tonopah Test Range in Nevada. This secret Air Force aggressor unit later grew to be a squadron and flew Soviet MiGs in more than 15,000 sorties against U.S. Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps pilots in a program code-named **Constant Peg**. At left, two F-5s fly with a MiG-17 and a MiG-21. The unit was inactivated on 15 July 1990.



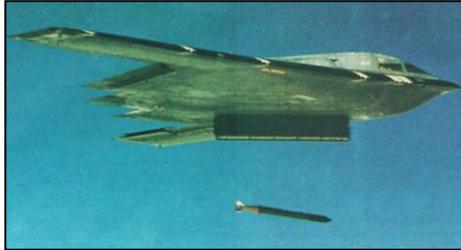


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1 April 1997 **B-2 “stealth” bombers became operational** at Whiteman AFB, Missouri, where



six of the aircraft were initially based to serve with the 509th Bomb Wing. General Richard Hawley, Commander of ACC, announced the initial operational capability of the 509th’s B-2s after they successfully tested Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAMs) and GPS-Aided Munitions (GAMs). At left, a B-2 releases a 5,000-pound GAM-113. See the USAF B-2 [Fact Sheet](#).

3 April 1939 President Roosevelt signed the **National Defense Act of 1940**, which expanded the Army Air Corps to more than 48,000 personnel, a \$300 million budget, and 6,000 airplanes. The Act also made history by authorizing the Army Air Corps to train African-American pilots.

3 April 1967 CMSgt [Paul W. Airey](#) became the **First Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force (CMSAF)**. During World War II, Airey was a radio operator and gunner on B-24 bombers and is credited with 28 combat missions in Europe. He had to bail out of his flak-damaged aircraft and was a prisoner of war from July 1944 to May 1945. After spending much of his career as a first sergeant, Chief Airey was selected when the Air Force searched for "the best qualified and most impressive individual" to be the first CMSAF.



The CMSAF serves as the personal adviser to the Chief of Staff and the Secretary of the Air Force on all issues regarding the welfare, readiness, morale, and proper utilization and progress of the enlisted force.

4 April – 16 Sep 1975 **South Vietnam evacuation.** As South Vietnam fell to the communists, more than 130,000 refugees fled by sea and air. The Vietnamese refugee airlift, the largest aerial



evacuation in history, included a series of overlapping operations: Babylift, New Life, Frequent Wind, and New Arrivals. The USAF, working with the Navy and contractors, flew more than 50,000 refugees from Southeast Asia to islands in the Pacific and eventually to new homes in the U.S. Aircraft involved included C-141s, C-130s, CH-53s, HH-53s and C-9s. At left, a C-141 crewmember cares for a South Vietnamese infant during the evacuation operations. ([Historynet.com](#) photo at left provided by Ms. Kathy Manney.)

On 4 April 1975, a C-5 crash landed near Saigon while flying the first mission of **Operation BABYLIFT**. It had just taken off from Tan Son Nhut AB in Saigon to carry South Vietnamese children and their escorts to Clark AB. Only 176 of the 314 passengers survived the crash. Capt Mary Klinker, a flight nurse, became the last U.S. servicewoman to die in the Vietnam War. The C-5 pilot and copilot, Captains Dennis Traynor and





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Tilford Harp, received the Air Force Cross for extraordinary heroism. Although they had no functioning aircraft controls except one aileron and the engines, the two pilots landed the C-5 in a rice paddy, saving many lives. First Lt Regina Aune, a flight nurse on the C-5, ignored a broken leg, foot and vertebra to help evacuate children from the wreckage. Aune is credited with saving between 80 and 149 children. She became the first woman to receive the Cheney Award.

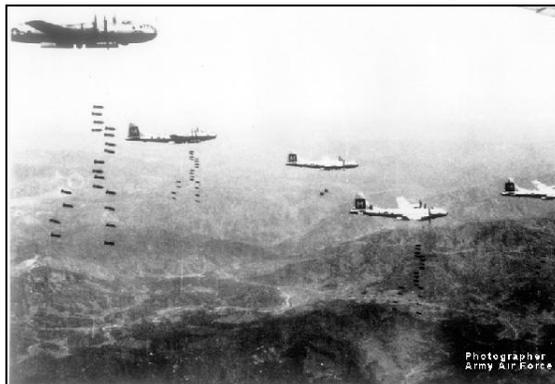
Despite this tragedy, Operation BABYLIFT was a success as C-141s and commercial planes moved 1,794 orphans from South Vietnam and Thailand to the United States from 4 April to 9 May 1975. At right, infant evacuees are prepared for takeoff.

5-6 April 1986 **Osan fuel explosion.** A tank of jet fuel exploded at Osan Air Base in South Korea. Four USAF C-141 Starlifters and one H-3 Jolly Green Giant helicopter from the 63rd Military Airlift Wing delivered fire suppressant foam and evacuated burn victims.

5 April – 15 July 1991 **Operation PROVIDE COMFORT.** Military Airlift Command units flew more than 7,000 tons of supplies to help more than a million Kurdish rebels who had fled their homes in Iraq after Iraqi forces threatened to exterminate them. U.S. Air Force crews flew C-5, C-141 and C-130 aircraft to northern Iraq, southeastern Turkey, and western Iran in bringing aid to the Kurdish refugees. The operation later provided aerial protection for a security zone in northern Iraq so that the Kurds could return to their homes. On 1 January 1997, Operation PROVIDE COMFORT was replaced by Operation NORTHERN WATCH, which enforced a no-fly zone forbidden to Iraqi aircraft. In turn, that operation was ended with the launch of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM on 19 March 2003. At right, relief supplies and a C-130 aircraft are ready for the next mission to aid the Kurds.



7 Apr 1945 Twentieth Air Force launched the **first fighter-escorted B-29 raid on Japan.** The capture of Iwo Jima in February and March provided a base within fighter range of Japan and made such raids possible. Photos below from the 506th Fighter Group [website](#).





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7 Apr – 13 May 1972 **Operation CONSTANT GUARD I.** USAF deployments helped stop a full-scale North Vietnamese invasion of the South. On 7 April, the first of 200 aircraft left their CONUS bases to fly to Southeast Asia. The units were then in position to support the Operation LINEBACKER I aerial interdiction campaign against North Vietnam's Easter offensive.

8 Apr 1942 **"Flying the Hump."** A strategic objective of Allied forces in World War II was to supply Chinese forces fighting Japan. The Allies used an overland supply route that ran from India through Burma to China, but this route was cut by the Japanese in early 1942. On 8 April, a pair of DC-3s transported gasoline and lubricating oil over the Himalaya Mountains – from eastern India to southern China – to begin World War II's largest airlift operation. Huge numbers of DC-3s were later purchased as C-47 Skytrains (left) – modified with cargo doors, hoist attachments, stronger floors and other upgrades.



On one of the earliest missions, eight airplanes carried fuel and oil to service the B-25 bombers of the Doolittle Raid. From December, 1942 through the close of the operation in November 1945, the airlift delivered nearly 740,000 tons of cargo. Over half of this total was transported during the last eight months of the war. (Cockpit photo at right from *LIFE* magazine).



9 Apr 1967 Through 14 April, the 315th Air Division began the largest tactical unit move in the Vietnam War. In 351 sorties, **C-130s airlifted the entire 196th Light Infantry Brigade**, including 3,500 people and 4,000 tons of equipment, 375 miles from Tay Ninh to Chu Lai.

9 Apr 1997 The **F-22 roll-out ceremony** was held at Marietta, Georgia after many years of development. Originally known as the "Advanced Tactical Fighter," the aircraft had completed a ten-year development and validation phase highlighted by the 1990 flight of a prototype model. Low rate initial production began in 2001 and full rate production in 2005.



The F-22 Raptor is an exponential leap in warfighting capabilities. Its combination of stealth, supersonic cruise, maneuverability and integrated avionics allows an F-22 pilot to kill air-to-air threats before being detected. The F-22 also has a significant capability to attack surface targets. This capability will be enhanced in the future with an upgraded radar and carriage of up to eight small diameter bombs. See the Air Force F-22 Fact Sheet [here](#).



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10 Apr 1967 **Operation POKER DICE.** Strategic Air Command sent three B-52 bombers to U-Tapao, Thailand. Later that same day, the U-Tapao B-52s flew their first bombing mission in the Vietnam War. B-52 combat sorties out of U-Tapao averaged three hours in duration as compared to twelve hours for Guam-based aircraft. The photo at right shows a B-52 and KC-135 at U-Tapao. The KC-135 in the photo (S/N 62-3531) is still flying with the 121st Air Refueling Wing, Ohio ANG.



10 Apr 1994 Two F-16s struck a Bosnian Serb command post near Gorazde, Serbia after Bosnian Serbs attacked UN personnel. This was the **first close air support mission of Operation DENY FLIGHT** and the **first aerial bombing in NATO's history.**

11 Apr 1942 The Curtiss-Wright Company unveiled its **first production C-46 Commando.** The C-46 eventually became the largest and heaviest twin-engined aircraft used by the U.S. Army Air Forces (AAF). Due to its load capacity and high-altitude performance, the AAF primarily used it in the Pacific region where it was an important factor in the success of the "Hump" airlift over the Himalayas.

11 Apr 1944 **MEDAL OF HONOR.** On 7 Dec 1941, Edward Michael was an AAF aircraft mechanic strafed at Wheeler Field. By 1944, Lt. Michael was a B-17 pilot flying in Europe.



On a mission on 11 Apr 1944, enemy fighters riddled Michael's plane with shells. Fire in the bomb bay made an explosion possible at any moment, but the emergency bomb release did not work. Lt. Michael, badly wounded in his right leg, ordered a bail-out. Seven of the ten-man crew left the aircraft as the two pilots held it steady, but the bombardier's parachute was damaged. Michael, co-pilot Frank Westberg, and Bombardier John Lieber each refused to take one of the last good parachutes, so all three stayed with the aircraft. Lieber found a way to manually release the weapons. The pilots dodged enemy fighters as they flew down through a cloud deck, but they broke out into enemy ground fire. Lieber tended Michael's wounds as Westberg and Michael took turns flying back to England at treetop level. The situation was grim as they approached an airfield in England: the landing gear, flaps, altimeter and airspeed indicator did not work, the ball turret guns and bomb bay doors were jammed downward – in short, the aircraft threatened to break apart on landing. Michael told the other two men to bail out with the remaining chutes, but again they refused. Despite his wounds and the nearly impossible situation, Lt. Michael miraculously belly-landed the B-17, saving the lives of the other crewmembers. Photos and more at this [website](#).





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11 Apr 1966 **MEDAL OF HONOR / AIR FORCE CROSS.** [A1C William Pitsenbarger](#) (right), a pararescue jumper in Vietnam, hoisted nine soldiers to safety aboard a HH-43 Huskie and then remained behind to treat the wounded amid heavy mortar and sniper fire. Despite his own wounds, he kept treating wounded soldiers until he was killed. Pitsenbarger was the first airman to receive the Air Force Cross posthumously, and his award was later upgraded to the Medal of Honor.



12 Apr 1975 **Operation EAGLE PULL.** On 6 April 1975, the U.S. had begun the aerial evacuation of Phnom Penh, Cambodia, which was surrounded by Khmer Rouge forces. By 11 April, some 875 Cambodians had flown to Thailand aboard USAF C-130s. On 12 April, USAF and USMC helicopters, with escorts from USAF fighters and gunships, evacuated 287 people in the final airlift from Phnom Penh. The city fell to communist forces on 17 April.

14 April 1972 **BATTLE OF AN LOC.** Through 30 June, C-130s airdropped 4,853 tons in 359 sorties to the besieged garrison at An Loc to help prevent a North Vietnamese take over. After losing five aircraft to enemy ground fire, C-130s used high-altitude airdrops for the first time. Flying above the lethal range of enemy anti-aircraft fire, the airdrop effort suffered no further losses. Improvements to the parachute opening mechanisms and payload cushioning helped achieve a 90% effectiveness rate. When the road routes to An Loc reopened on 23 July, the C-130s had flown 763 sorties to deliver 10,081 tons of supplies. B-52 attacks provided essential close air support to embattled troops in An Loc.



16 April 1973 **USAF B-52 bombers resumed attacks against North Vietnamese positions in Laos** following reports that communist forces overran a town in the Plaine des Jarres.

14 April 1986 **Operation EL DORADO CANYON.** The U.S. retaliated against Libya for its involvement in terrorism with an airstrike. F-111s flew from RAF Lakenheath to conduct their attacks, supported by five EF-111s from RAF Upper Heyford. Navy aircraft struck Libya from the USS America and USS Coral Sea (14 A-6Es, six A-7s and 12 F/A-18s). The strike aircraft successfully hit targets at Benina Airfield, Benghazi Military Barracks, and Aziziyah Barracks in Tripoli. During a long, circuitous flight around France and Spain, the F-111s were air-refueled by 28 KC-10 and KC-135 tankers, flying out of RAF Fairford and RAF Mildenhall. The tankers refueled the F-111 strike force four times each way, maintaining radio silence during the entire mission. The US lost one F-111 in the attack. On the return flight to the UK, the tankers refueled the F-111s two more times. Read the Air Force Historical Studies [fact sheet](#).





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15 April 1953 An enemy air raid on Cho-do Island killed two U.S. soldiers. **Since that night sixty-two years ago, no U.S. servicemen have died in air raids by enemy forces.**

This raid was one of many night harassment missions flown by the North Koreans in propeller-driven light aircraft. Called “Bed-Check Charlie” raids by U.S. forces, these asymmetrical attacks eluded U.S. air defenses by flying at night and low enough to blend into the ground clutter on radar scopes. The enemy used Soviet Po-2 biplanes, La-11 fighters and Yak-18 trainers – aircraft that were too maneuverable and too slow to be engaged by jet interceptors. On the night of 16-17 June, about 15 of these aircraft flew what has been called the most successful North Korean air raid of the war – destroying over five million gallons of fuel at Inchon.



Robert Futrell’s book *The United States Air Force in Korea, 1950-1953* describes Fifth Air Force’s efforts to counter these North Korean air raids (see pages 662-666). One successful tactic was to borrow four old F4U-5N Corsairs (left) and their U.S. Navy pilots from Task Force 77 to intercept the Bed-Check Charlies. This action produced the Navy’s only ace of the Korean War, [Lt. Guy Bordelon](#). The North Korean air attacks decreased after Fifth Air Force found and bombed the Bed-Check Charlie airfield.



15 April 1974 **CAS Fly-Off.** Under Congressional pressure, the Air Force began a fly-off between the Fairchild A-10 and the LTV A-7D Corsair. The fly-off showed the A-10 to be more capable in the close air support (CAS) mission. The A-10 carried a larger payload and a more lethal gun—the GAU-8 30mm cannon. The A-10 was judged more survivable after being hit by ground fire and its maneuverability made it less vulnerable to air-to-air losses and more effective in providing CAS to ground units – especially during limited visibility or low-ceiling weather conditions. The A-10 was named the “[Thunderbolt II](#)” after the P-47 of World War II, but it is commonly known by the nickname “Warthog.”



16 April 1916 **The Lafayette Escadrille was established** as a squadron of mostly American volunteer pilots flying and fighting for the French Air Service during World War I. The planes, mechanics, and the pilot uniforms were French, as was the commander, Captain Georges Thenault. The squadron was originally named the *Escadrille Americaine*. For reasons of international diplomacy, the unit was re-named to honor the French military hero who aided the American Army during the American Revolution.





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16 April 2004 **MACKAY TROPHY.** Near Kharbut, Iraq, two USAF HH-60G helicopters were dispatched to rescue the crew of a U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook helicopter that had crashed in a sandstorm. The brown-out conditions left the rescue crews' infrared and night vision goggles ineffective. Flying through multiple surface-to-air missile attacks, the HH-60s flew visual approaches to locate, rescue and evacuate all five Army survivors. For their outstanding actions, the HH-60G aircrews earned the Mackay Trophy. (See file photos below – HH-60Gs at left; brown-out conditions in southwest Asia at right.) Read a USAF article on the mission [here](#).



17 April 1999 During Operation ALLIED FORCE, the **RQ-1 Predator (left) made its first flight into a combat zone.** The Predator performed reconnaissance over Serbia.

18 Apr 1942 **Doolittle Raid.** Colonel James H. “Jimmy” Doolittle led 16 B-25s from the aircraft carrier *Hornet* to bomb Tokyo and other sites in the first U.S. air raid on Japan. Although damage was minor, the raid lifted U.S. morale, caused the Japanese to divert resources to their defensive perimeter, and was a factor in their decision to send their carrier fleet to its disaster at Midway.

Early sighting by Japanese ships forced the Doolittle raiders to launch prematurely from the carrier *Hornet*. Most of them had to crash land in China after the raid. Doolittle thought he would be court-martialed on his return, but instead was awarded the Medal of Honor.



On 15 April 2015, the Doolittle Raiders received the Congressional Gold Medal in the United States Capitol building. At left, Lt. Col. Richard Cole, Jimmy Doolittle's copilot on the mission, stands at Doolittle's grave site at Arlington National ceremony. Cole and Staff Sgt. David J. Thatcher are the only surviving Doolittle Raiders. (Photo credit: Melina Mara/*The Washington Post*)



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18 April 1943 **Yamamoto Shootdown.** P-38G pilots flew to Bougainville Island and intercepted Japanese aircraft carrying the party of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto. 1st Lt. Rex T. Barber and Capt. Thomas G. Lanphier, Jr., shot down the transports while other P-38Gs engaged the escorting Zero fighters. The interception, meticulously planned and executed on the first anniversary of the Doolittle raid, deprived the Japanese of one of their most brilliant naval officers. Major John W. Mitchell led the flight of 16 P-38Gs in which Barber and Lanphier flew.



19 April 1967 Major Leo K. Thorsness earned the **Medal of Honor** and his backseater, Capt. Harold Johnson earned the **Air Force Cross** by protecting a mission to rescue downed airmen in North Vietnam. Flying an F-105 Wild Weasel, Johnson guided Thorsness in the destruction of two enemy surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites. Now low on fuel, they remained in the area to engage enemy fighters. Thorsness shot down a MiG-17, damaged another and drove off three more. The pair then recovered at a forward base to allow another aircraft low on fuel to refuel from an aerial tanker. Shortly after this incident, Thorsness and Johnson were shot down, captured, and held prisoner until 4 March 1973.



21 Apr 1948 **KEY WEST AGREEMENT.** The SECDEF issued a memo to his Secretaries with a paper defining the functions of the services and the JCS. It was the first delineation of functions drawn up after the National Security Act of 1947. The Air Force received primary responsibility for the air defense of America and the strategic nuclear bombing mission. **WHAT DID NOT HAPPEN:** The Air Force did not get carrier-based aircraft, which were retained by the Navy for naval campaigns. Since aircraft that attack ships can also attack targets on land, the agreement did not prevent a significant Air Force-Navy airpower rivalry. **WHAT DID HAPPEN:** Army and Marine Corps air capabilities were limited relative to the Air Force and the Navy. With little faith that other services would provide robust air support, the Army developed its own "air force" in the form of attack helicopters while the Marine Corps ultimately preserved its independent air wings. An effective, systematic concept for airpower unity of command was developed only after the Goldwater-Nichols DoD Reorganization Act of 1986 and the creation of the Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC) concept.

22 Apr 1953 **New fighter mission in Korea.** Shortages of the fighter-bombers that had been performing armed reconnaissance of enemy lines of communication led the Fifth Air Force to assign the mission to the F-86 Sabres of the 4th and 51st Fighter Interceptor Wings (FIWs). In the photo at right, a 1954 flight of F-86 Sabres from the 51 FIW is led by the Wing Commander, Colonel Benjamin O. Davis.





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23 Apr 1965 The first operational **C-141 Starlifter** was delivered to Travis AFB, California.



Capable of crossing any ocean nonstop at more than 500 miles per hour, the Starlifter could transport up to 68,500 pounds of payload, including 154 troops, 123 paratroopers, or a combination of troops and supplies. The C-141 replaced slower, piston-engined cargo planes in both strategic and tactical airlift missions, and it provided critical support to U.S. forces in Vietnam and Southwest Asia. The photo at left is from the cover page of Lockheed's C-141 [Roll-Out Brochure](#).

23 Apr 2001 An **RQ-4A Global Hawk** remotely piloted aircraft completed the first nonstop trans-Pacific flight by an unmanned air vehicle. The aircraft flew from the Air Force Flight Test Center at Edwards AFB, California to Edinburgh, Australia, covering some 7,500 miles in about 23 hours. The flight demonstrated the Global Hawk's high-altitude, long-range capabilities. See the USAF [RQ-4 Fact Sheet](#). (RQ-4 photo at right.)



24 Apr 1980 **Operation EAGLE CLAW**. More than 50 American hostages were captives of militant Iranians at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. A complex rescue plan was prepared. USAF special operations C-130s were to insert Army Rangers at a site in central Iran ("Desert One") and later at an airfield near Tehran. Navy RH-53 helicopters flown by Marine pilots were to follow the C-130s to Desert One, get refueled by the C-130s and then fly the Rangers to a hide site near Tehran. CIA agents were to truck the Rangers to the embassy for the rescue and then move the Rangers and hostages to a nearby soccer stadium.



The helicopters would fly everyone from the stadium to the secured airfield, where the helicopters would be destroyed and USAF C-141 transports would fly all personnel out of Iran. Air Force AC-130 gunships were to provide close air support for the rescue, helicopter extraction and the seizure of the airfield. Navy fighters were to cover the withdrawal of the C-141s.

On 24 April 1980, the attempt to rescue the hostages was aborted after night-time sandstorms and mechanical difficulties reduced the number of RH-53 helicopters to an insufficient force. As U.S. forces prepared to withdraw, an RH-53 collided with a C-130 on the dark, windy landing site in Iran, killing eight servicemen. The entire force was then extracted on the C-130s.

Colonel James Kyle, USAF, Desert One on-scene commander, from his book *The Guts to Try*:



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“The C-130 crews and combat controllers had not failed in any part of the operation and had a right to be proud of what they accomplished,” Kyle said. “They inserted the rescue team into Iran on schedule, set up the refueling zone, and gassed up the helicopters when they finally arrived. Then, when things went sour, they saved the day with an emergency evacuation by some incredibly skillful flying. They had gotten the forces out of Iran to fight another day — a fact they can always look back on with pride.”



Air Force servicemembers of the 8th Special Operations Squadron killed in Operation EAGLE CLAW were (left to right): Capt. Richard Bakke, Tech. Sgt. Joel Mayo, Capt. Lyn McIntosh, Capt. Hal Lewis and Capt. Charles McMillan. See the [USAF article](#).

25-26 Apr 1944 Second Lieutenant Carter Harman of the 1st Air Commando Group (standing at left in the photo) made the **first U.S. Army Air Forces combat rescue by helicopter**.

In late April 1944, a 1st Air Commando L-1 aircraft crash-landed deep behind Japanese lines in Burma. Three wounded British soldiers were aboard. Lt. Harman flew his Sikorsky YR-4B helicopter from his base in India on a circuitous 500-mile route to avoid Japanese forces. He had to stop for fuel every 100 miles at landing zones cut out of the Burma jungles by allied ground commandos. Harman flew to a clearing near the crash site. Partly due to the heat and humidity, Harman’s helicopter could carry only one passenger at a time. Harman picked up the first British soldier and took him to an emergency strip prepared by British commandos on a sand-bar 10 miles away. After retrieving the second soldier, an overheated engine forced him to stop flying for the rest of the day and remain at the sandbar overnight. Harman made two more trips on the next day to complete the rescue, and was later awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.





This Week in USAF and PACAF History
30 March – 5 April 2015



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26 Apr 1966 **The Navy leaves MAC.** As recommended by the Air Force and the Navy, the SECDEF discontinued Navy participation in the Military Airlift Command (MAC). The Army's Air Transportation Command and the Naval Air Transport Service had joined under the Military Air Transport Service (MATS) in 1948 and assigned to the newly independent U.S. Air Force. MAC replaced MATS on 1 Jan 1966, and Navy units still flew with MAC until 26 April.

26 Apr 1966 **First MiG-21 kill.** An F-4C crew used Sidewinder missiles to shoot down a MiG-21 over North Vietnam. Major Paul J. Gilmore and 1Lt William T. Smith of the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing were escorting F-105 Thunderchiefs near Hanoi when the MiGs attacked.



28 Apr 2003 **End of Operation SOUTHERN WATCH.** Coinciding with the end of the enforcement of the no-fly zone in southern Iraq, the Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) at Prince Sultan AB, Saudi Arabia, moved to Al Udeid AB, Qatar. This CAOC had responsibility for all air operations in Southwest Asia. On 29 April, at a joint news conference in Riyadh, SECDEF Donald Rumsfeld and Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz announced the withdrawal of all U.S. combat forces from Saudi Arabia – ending 12 years of continuous American presence. At right, an F-15 Eagle on a SOUTHERN WATCH mission takes off from Prince Sultan AB, Saudi Arabia.



Operation NORTHERN WATCH, based at Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, ended on 1 May 2003.

29 Apr 1918 **Lt. Edward V. Rickenbacker**, who would later become the leading U.S. ace of



World War I, **scored his first kill.** Some facts about the “**Ace of Aces**” – Rickenbacker’s father died when he was still a boy. A few years later, Eddie got a job road-testing cars, which led him into auto racing and to his original nickname “Fast Eddie” (he preferred “Rick”). At the start of World War I, he changed his name from the Germanic “Reichenbacher” to “Rickenbacker.” He traveled to England in 1916 to develop an English racing car, and was closely monitored by counter-intelligence agents.



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Rickenbacker was already a Sergeant in the Army when the U.S. entered the war. He wanted to fly and suggested the Army man a combat flying unit with racing drivers, but the Army refused his request and made him General John Pershing's driver. After repairing a car carrying Colonel Billy Mitchell, Rickenbacker got his wish to transfer to an aviation unit. However, he was made an engineering officer and could practice flying only during his free time. His superiors finally allowed him to get his wings after he proved that he had a qualified replacement. Rickenbacker was commissioned and eventually scored 26 aerial victories. He was awarded the **Medal of Honor** and eight Distinguished Service Crosses and commanded the famed 94th "Hat in the Ring" Squadron. Click [here](#) for more on Rickenbacker's amazing life.

30 Apr 1908 **First Air National Guard unit.** Aviation enthusiasts in the 1st Company, Signal Corps, New York National Guard, organized an "aeronautical corps" to learn ballooning—the earliest known involvement of guardsmen in aviation. Organized that year into the 1st Aero Squadron, the unit was federalized for service in 1916 as the 102nd Rescue Squadron, New York Air National Guard (ANG). The 102nd is recognized as the oldest of all official ANG units.



30 Apr 1996 The Air Force revealed the **Tacit Blue** aircraft secretly used during 1982-1985 to validate a number of innovative stealth technology advances. Tacit Blue (left and below) furnished much of the technology used in the B-2 Spirit bomber.

