



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



U.S. AIR FORCE

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.

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.

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."

3 April 1967 Paul W. Airey was installed as 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, was captured and became a prisoner of war from July 1944 to May 1945. Chief Airey spent much of his career as a first sergeant, and was selected when the Air Force searched for "the best qualified and most impressive individual" in the Service to be the first CMSAF. Read his biography [here](#).

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.





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31 March 1975 **Consolidation of military airlift.** One of the "lessons learned" during the Vietnam War was the large duplication of airlift effort between Military Airlift Command (MAC), Tactical Air Command (TAC), and PACAF. In December 1974, the Air Force had consolidated TAC's airlift resources with those of MAC, which became the single airlift manager. On 31 March 1975, the USAF's overseas tactical airlift resources in PACAF, USAFE, and the Alaskan Air Command were also transferred to MAC. However, during the Air Force reorganization of 1992, most CONUS-based tactical airlift was redistributed to Air Combat Command (ACC), while overseas tactical airlift was reassigned to PACAF and USAFE. (At right, a C-130 delivers a pallet of supplies to ground forces in a forward area of South Vietnam via the low altitude parachute extraction system (LAPES).)



4 April – 16 Sep 1975 **South Vietnam evacuation.** As enemy forces took over South Vietnam, 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 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.





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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.

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, Operation PROVIDE COMFORT relief supplies and a C-130 aircraft ready for the next mission to aid the Kurds.



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](#).



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