



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 8 – 14 June 2015



14 June 1912 After training at the Army Air School in the Philippines, Corporal Vernon Burge became the Army's [first enlisted pilot](#).

10 June 1943 The RAF and the USAAF launched the **Combined Bomber Offensive** against Germany. Eighth Air Force struck industrial targets by day and the RAF attacked cities by night. The objective was to destroy the Germans' ability and will to continue the war. Three days later, in a raid on Kiel, Eighth Air Force lost 26 of 60 bombers, indicating the need for fighter escorts.



B-24s on a bombing mission

A similar bombing campaign in the Pacific was not possible until the summer of 1944, when U.S. forces captured the Marianas Islands and built B-29 air bases within range of Japan.



B-17 formation

11 June 1943 After a month of aerial bombardment, some 11,000 Italian troops on the island of Pantelleria, between Italy and Tunisia, surrendered to the Allies. It was the **first large defended area to fall to air power**, and helped the Allies to move north from Africa to Sicily and Italy.

8 June 1953 The **USAF Thunderbirds performed for the first time** at Luke AFB, Arizona. The team was named partly for the legendary Thunderbird of Native American folklore – an awesome creature that shook the earth with the thunder of its great wings.

The Thunderbird team of pilots and maintainers was carefully selected from officer and enlisted ranks. The first Thunderbird aircraft was the F-84G Thunderjet (at right). The left and right wings were flown by twin brothers – Captains [Charles C. "Buck" Pattillo](#) and [Cuthbert A. "Bill" Pattillo](#) – both of whom later flew combat missions in Vietnam and retired as general officers. Major General Charles Pattillo was Vice Commander of PACAF in 1975.



11 June 1957 **The U.S. Air Force's first U-2 reconnaissance aircraft** was delivered to Laughlin Air Force Base, Texas. The U-2 (below) could fly 10-hour missions at exceptionally high altitudes. Designed and built in complete secrecy, the U-2's glider-like wings allowed flight above 55,000 feet (over 70,000 feet for later models). The world learned of the U-2's existence on 1 May 1960 when a U-2 flying on a joint CIA-USAF mission was shot down by a Russian surface-to-air missile over Soviet territory. In October of 1962, U-2 photos of Soviet missiles in Cuba led to a major international crisis. See the USAF [U-2 Fact Sheet](#).





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9 June 1964 **First KC-135 Support for Vietnam Combat Operations.** Four KC-135s from Clark AB, Philippines, refueled eight F-100s from Da Nang on an attack against anti-aircraft batteries in northern Laos. PACAF RF-101Cs and KB-50J tankers also supported the strike.

10 June 1969 **Project MISTY BRONCO.** Beginning in April, this project tested the effectiveness of armed [OV-10 Bronco](#) aircraft as a USAF strike presence readily available to support ground forces. The concept was successful, and arming of all OV-10s was authorized on 10 June 1969. At right, an OV-10 firing rockets on a training range.



8 June – 2 July 1991 The **eruption of Mount Pinatubo** in the Philippines, the second largest terrestrial eruption in the 20th century, buried Clark Air Base and two other U.S. military bases in volcanic ash. **Operation FIERY VIGIL** became the largest evacuation operation since the fall of South Vietnam in 1975. Some 15,000 people were evacuated from the Clark area – most of them prior to the major eruption on 15 June. The eruption was a major factor in the closure of Clark Air Base, the oldest and largest USAF overseas base. The photos below show an eruption plume (left) and a part of Clark Air Base some weeks after the ash fall (right).



14 June 1993 The [C-17 Globemaster III](#) arrived at its first operational wing, the 437th Airlift Wing at Charleston AFB, South Carolina. Capable of delivering outsized cargo to a tactical environment, the C-17 increased the USAF's airlift capability into small airfields, eliminating the need to shift cargo from larger to smaller transports. In 1994, the Collier Trophy was awarded to the team that designed, produced and placed into service the C-17 Globemaster III ... "the most versatile airlift aircraft in aviation history." In 1999, the C-17's performance was "one of the great success stories" of Operation ALLIED FORCE. See the related article below.





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11 June 1996 **Joint STARS**. ACC acquired its first E-8 Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (Joint STARS) aircraft. The E-8 (below), capable of providing detailed information on ground targets, had been tested during Operations DESERT STORM and JOINT ENDEAVOR. JSTARS evolved from Army and Air Force programs to detect, locate, track and target enemy armor for attack beyond the forward battle area. See the USAF Fact Sheet on [Joint STARS](#).



10 June 1999 **The Operation ALLIED FORCE air campaign forced** Serbia to withdraw their forces from Kosovo. Ethnic Albanians returned to Kosovo along with NATO peacekeepers.

When this air campaign began on 24 March 1999, political restrictions on targets, meager air forces and poor weather led to disappointing results and continued Serb intransigence. Noted military historian John Keegan, a long-time critic of airpower, said that "airpower simply does not seem to be working."

After a 23 April summit, NATO employed a more robust air component. The target set was



F-117 stealth fighter-bomber

expanded to include more Serb military forces as well as military-industrial plants, lines of communication, petroleum resources, electrical grids, and command and control facilities. USAF combat forces developed effective flex tactics for striking Serb forces as soon as they were located by reconnaissance assets. When Serbia capitulated to NATO cease-fire terms, Keegan stated that **ALLIED FORCE** was the **first war in history won by air power alone**.

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