



This Week in USAF and PACAF History

27 April – 3 May 2015



U.S. AIR FORCE

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.

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.

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.



1 May 1943 Staff Sergeant Maynard H. “Snuffy” Smith, a B-17 gunner on his very first combat mission, earned the **first Medal of Honor awarded to an enlisted airman.** At left, Secretary of War Henry Stimson is presenting the award to Smith. When Stimson landed at his base to present the award, Smith had to be recalled from Kitchen Patrol (KP) duty that he had been assigned for disciplinary reasons. (More on Smith’s life [here](#).)

On that first mission, Smith’s aircraft was badly damaged by German fighters and anti-aircraft artillery. Fires on the aircraft were fed by the fuel supply and burned so hot that they melted holes in the airframe and the ammunition stores started exploding. Although several other crewmembers had already bailed out, Smith stayed onboard. For 90 minutes, Smith fired at enemy fighters, threw ammunition out of the aircraft, fought the fires and gave first aid to the wounded. His fire-fighting resources were quickly used up, so he wrapped himself in clothing and put out flames by hand. The B-17 aircraft, hit by over 3,500 bullets and pieces of shrapnel, broke in two after it touched down in England. (At right, SSgt Smith at a B-17 gun station.)





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1 May 1945 **Operation CHOWHOUND.** Eighth Air Force sent nearly 400 B-17s from England on a mercy mission to drop nearly 700 tons of food to starving civilians in German-occupied Holland. The Germans approved this flight and promised not to shoot down the bombers if they flew along specified routes so as not to observe German troop positions. Eighth Air Force and RAF bombers flew five more missions and delivered nearly 7,900 tons of food.

2 May 1957 **The USAF accepted its first F-101A Voodoo.** The post-World War II



requirement for a long-range bomber escort drove the initial development of the Voodoo, which originally was designed to have a large fuel/weapons pod similar to the B-58 Hustler. With the advent of jet bombers such as the B-52, SAC lost interest in the F-101. The Voodoo (left) was used as an air defense interceptor, reconnaissance platform and low-altitude nuclear fighter-bomber. This aircraft was also a precursor to the F-4 Phantom.

1 May 1960 **U-2 Shoot-down.** A U-2 flying out of Pakistan on a secret CIA/USAF flight over the Soviet Union was shot down by a salvo of fourteen SA-2 missiles. The U-2 pilot, a former Air Force Captain named Francis Gary Powers, was unable to employ the U-2's self-destruct mechanism before his capture, and the wreckage was recovered by the Russians (photo at right). Among other items, they found the aircraft's camera with its film and Powers' survival pack. When President Eisenhower refused to apologize publicly for the incident, Soviet Premier Khrushchev cancelled a summit meeting. Although interrogated and harassed by Soviet Secret Police teams, Powers refused all attempts to give sensitive information or be exploited for propaganda purposes. After 21 months in captivity, Powers and a detained American student were exchanged for a captured Soviet agent. This incident worsened Soviet relations with both the U.S. and Pakistan, and accelerated the U.S. satellite reconnaissance program.



Powers was awarded the CIA Intelligence Star for Valor in 1965. He left the CIA and flew the U-2 for Lockheed. At left, Lockheed designer Kelly Johnson talks with Gary Powers in front of a U-2. In 1970, Powers became a pilot-reporter for Los Angeles radio and television stations until he died in a helicopter crash in 1977. A faulty fuel gauge caused Powers to run out of fuel and, attempting to crash land on a sports field, he banked at the last moment to avoid youths on the ground.



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On 1 May 2000, Francis Gary Powers was posthumously awarded the National Defense Service Medal, Prisoner of War Medal, Distinguished Flying Cross and the CIA Director's Award for Extreme Fidelity and Courage.

In 2012, Gary Powers was also awarded the Silver Star for heroism. Powers' family was on hand to receive the award from the Air Force Chief of Staff.

3 May 1960 General Curtis LeMay, Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force, announced the approval of a **single tanker force** managed by Strategic Air Command. The concept was part of LeMay's vision to enable the USAF jet bomber force to reach distant targets and return.



Components of the concept included the KC-135 jet tanker, a rigid tanker boom for a more stable and rapid transfer of fuel, and single-point refueling of all the fuel tanks on receiving aircraft. In the *Boeing* photo at left, the first production KC-135A Stratotanker refuels a B-52C.

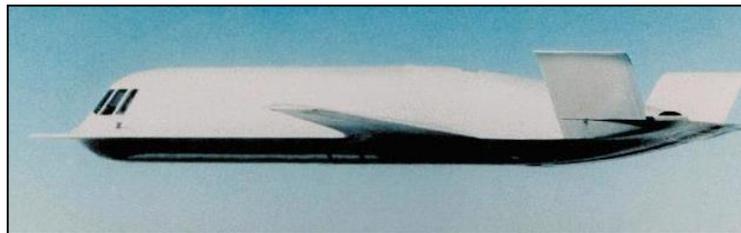
3 May 1961 **The first launch of an ICBM from an underground silo** was conducted at Vandenberg AFB, California with the launch of a Titan I. ICBMs with cryogenic (very cold)



liquid fuels and oxidizers had to stand empty and then be fueled just prior to launch. New fuels and oxidizers could be stored in the missiles, allowing rapid launch directly out of silos. Introduction of solid fuel systems in the late 1960s made this even easier. Underground silos also made ICBMs easier to maintain and more survivable in an enemy first strike.



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 to produce the B-2 Spirit bomber.





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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.



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