



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 23 – 29 March 2015



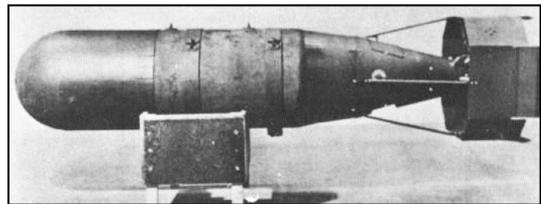
28 March 1942 **Doolittle Raid Planning.** Without knowing the details or objectives of the top secret mission, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek granted final consent for American bombers to land at Chinese airfields. A few days later, Chiang was told that at least twenty-five B-25's would be employed and that he should have fuel and flares ready at the Chinese bases. This was the final piece to be put in place for the Doolittle Raid.



Meanwhile, the B-25 bombers to be used on the raid were receiving final modifications at the Sacramento Air Depot on McClellan Field, California. The modifications to the Doolittle B-25s included replacement of the top secret Norden bombsight with a makeshift aiming sight; removal of the lower gun turret and liaison radio (to lighten the aircraft); and installation of de-icers and anti-icers, steel blast plates, extra fuel tanks, and mock gun barrels in the tail cone. At left, a Doolittle mission "blood chit" used by the Doolittle Raiders to obtain aid from local Chinese after the mission.

25 March 1944 Fifteenth Air Force attacked the Aviso Viaduct in the Brenner Pass, temporarily cutting the main highway between Italy and greater Germany. This raid was the **first Army Air Forces use of radio-guided bombs** – in this case, the VB-1 AZON, the only radio-guided bomb used by the U.S. Army Air Forces during WWII. AZON stood for "azimuth only" – as the bombardier could steer the bomb only to the left or right using the AZON's radio controlled fins.

AZON bombs were used with even better results in the China-Burma-India Theater from late 1944 to August 1945. In Burma, AZONs were used to destroy 27 bridges used by the Japanese to resupply their forces after Allied navies had established tight control of the seas. The AZON (at right) was a crude predecessor of precision-guided munitions developed and used with great success in Vietnam.



24 March 1945 **Operation VARSITY – the Allies cross the Rhine River.** Eighth and Ninth Air Forces launched some 7,000 bombing, transport, reconnaissance, interdiction, and other sorties in support of this offensive. More than 2,000 transports and gliders dropped two Allied divisions across the Rhine near Wesel, Germany in daylight. (At left, C-47s and gliders used in Operation VARSITY.)



Also on this day, nearly 150 B-17s from Fifteenth Air Force, flying from Southern Italy, bombed Berlin for the first time.

26 March 1949 **B-36D maiden flight.** Early versions of the B-36 Peacemaker were equipped with six propeller engines (below left). These aircraft burned fuel at an exorbitant rate and still lacked the required performance. Four jet engines were added to the B-36D model – two each in under-wing pods – making the B-36D the first 10-engine aircraft in the world (below right.)



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23 March 1951 **Operation TOMAHAWK.** In the second airborne operation of the Korean War and the largest to occur in one day, 120 USAF transports dropped 3,400 troops and 220 tons of materiel behind enemy lines at Munsan-ni. The objective was to trap North Korea’s I Corps between the airborne troops and an armored attack across the front, but the enemy forces escaped northwards. Some analysts suspected the plan was leaked to the enemy. Photos below.



Left: Paratroopers of the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team (RCT) headed to a drop zone in Korea on an Air Force C-119 “Flying Boxcar.” Right: The 187th RCT dropping from C-119's to cut off retreating enemy units south of Munsan-ni, Korea on 23 March 1951.

28 March 1964 The second most powerful earthquake in recorded history struck in the area of Anchorage, Alaska. **Operation HELPING HAND** was launched in response to the destruction. By 17 April, USAF cargo aircraft had delivered 1,850 tons of relief equipment and supplies.

28 March 1966 After being inactive since 1957, **Seventh Air Force (7AF) was activated and assigned to PACAF.** Within a few days, 7AF was organized at Tan Son Nhut Airfield, South Vietnam and designated as the air component of Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. From April 1966 through 1973, the command had responsibility for most USAF operations in Vietnam and shared responsibility with Thirteenth Air Force for operations from Thailand as 7/13 AF.



Photo credit: [USAF Police Alumni Association](http://www.usafpolice.org/)



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29 March 1972 **OPERATION LINEBACKER.** North Vietnam began a massive invasion of South Vietnam. In response, the U.S. discarded most of the previous political restrictions on U.S. air power. Military commanders, rather than the White House, selected targets based on operational objectives instead of political considerations. U.S. airpower bombed rail and road



networks and mined harbors to strangle enemy supply shipments while simultaneously attacking enemy forces in the field. The U.S. air strikes were the primary factor in the defeat of the enemy offensive. At left, a KC-135 Stratotanker refuels F-105G Wild Weasels and F-4E fighters.

23 March 1977 **The USAF’s first E-3A Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft** arrived at Tinker AFB, Oklahoma. The E-3’s identification-friend-or-foe (IFF) and jam-resistant radar systems provide a highly detailed picture of the battlespace. At right, an E-3 taking off at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa.



28 March – 15 April 1979 **Three-Mile Island Disaster.** After the Three-Mile Island nuclear power plant failed near Harrisburg, Pa., MAC flew 15 support missions (two C-5s, one C-130, and 12 C-141s). The aircraft delivered a 40,000-pound rawindsonde station (to measure wind speed to calculate radioactivity patterns), lead bricks and shielding, a water filtration unit, and potassium iodine for the cleanup. Later, the aircraft flew out barrels of contaminated water.

24 March – 20 June 1999 **Operation ALLIED FORCE / NOBLE ANVIL.** NATO launched an operation to stop the eviction and genocide of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo by Serbian forces. It was solely an air campaign and NATO’s first combat operation against a sovereign nation. The USAF used B-2s for the first time in combat, and USAF fighters shot down five MiG-29s.

On 26 March, Capt. Jeff “Claw” Hwang, shot down two MiG-29s over Bosnia. This was the



first time a single pilot shot down two different aircraft simultaneously. Hwang engaged two MiG-29s at the same time by using the multi-targeting capability of the F-15C radar when employing AIM-120 Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missiles (AMRAAMs). Capt. Hwang received the 1999 Mackay Trophy. At left, Colonel Hwang on 19 Sep 2014 with the F-15C bearing two victory stars. (Inset, a Serbian MiG-29.)



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27 March 1999 **Operation ALLIED FORCE – F-117 Shootdown.** The Serbians shot down an F-117 in Yugoslavia—the only combat loss of a stealth fighter. The leader of the rescue effort was Capt John A. Cherrey, an A-10 pilot on his first combat mission. Capt Cherrey located the downed F-117 pilot and later received the Silver Star.

After analysis and interviews with Serbian air defense officers, the shootdown of the F-117 was attributed to a combination of factors, including increased Serbian experience with F-117 operations, the U.S. failure to detect the relocation of Serbian air defense systems, Serbian use of long wavelength radars to string together a track of momentary sightings, possible optical guidance of the missile, and a lack of air defense suppression at the time of the shootdown.



General John P. Jumper, USAFE Commander at the time, said “the shootdown was mostly the result of ‘a lucky shot.’ Those limited times of exposure that we know exist” - when the F-117 opens its bomb bay doors, or presents certain angles to a radar - lasted just a little bit too long. We were targeted by a SAM site that we didn't have precisely located.”

27 March 1999 **The “Melissa” computer virus,** a denial-of-service attack, swept across the Internet. Melissa was one of the first e-mail viruses, burdening systems and crippling productivity as servers had to be shut down and cleaned. The creator was arrested and convicted, but he was later paid to help the FBI find other virus writers. U.S. Air Force systems escaped serious damage with the help of an Air Combat Command antivirus program.

26 March 2003 **Operation IRAQI FREEDOM airborne insertion.** Nearly 1,000 U.S. Army soldiers parachuted from C-17s into the Kurdish-controlled area of northern Iraq. This was the **first C-17 insertion of paratroopers into combat.** Photo of C-17 airborne drop at right.



23 March 2011 **The U.S. Air Force Radiation Assessment Team (AFRAT)** flew from Ohio to Yokota AB, Japan on a USAF C-17 to support Operation TOMODACHI disaster relief. The AFRAT (left) provides rapid, global response to all aspects of nuclear and radiological threats, accidents and incidents, delivering radiological risk assessments for contingency and operations planning, consequence management, and site recovery.

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