

This Week in PACAF and USAF History
3 – 9 March 2008

3 Mar 1911 Congress passed the first direct appropriation for U.S. military aviation, devoting “not more than \$125,000 . . . for the purchase, maintenance, operation and repair of aeroplanes and other aerial machines” for fiscal year 1912.

5 Mar 1913 The Signal Corps established the 1st Provisional Aero Squadron at Texas City, Texas, to support U.S. troops responding to a revolution in Mexico. Designated a permanent unit in December and currently active as the 1st Reconnaissance Squadron, it is the oldest squadron in the Air Force. The Squadron flew SR-71s from 1966 to 1990 and is currently the U-2 pilot training unit for the Air Force. The Squadron emblem is at right.



6 Mar 1942 The Army Air School for black aviators at Tuskegee, Alabama, graduated the first five black military pilots. George Roberts, Benjamin Davis Jr., Charles BeBow Jr., Mac Ross and Lemuel Custis received the silver wings of Army Air Force pilots. These men were the first of nearly 1000 Tuskegee aviators to complete Army flight training and earn their wings.

Despite the obstacles of racial prejudice, the Tuskegee Airmen built an admirable combat record in World War II. Their courageous service was a major factor in the desegregation of the armed forces after the war. The U.S. Air Force became a separate service in 1947 and was the first service to erase the color line. On July 26, 1948, President Truman's executive order 9981 directed all the armed services to ensure “equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons ... without regard to race, color, religion or national origin.” (See Tuskegee photo at right.)



6 Mar 1944 In its first major raid on the Berlin area, Eighth Air Force sent 658 bombers to strike the German capital. This force dropped 1,600 tons of bombs on the city and suffered a least 69 losses—the highest number of bombers lost in a single day during the war.

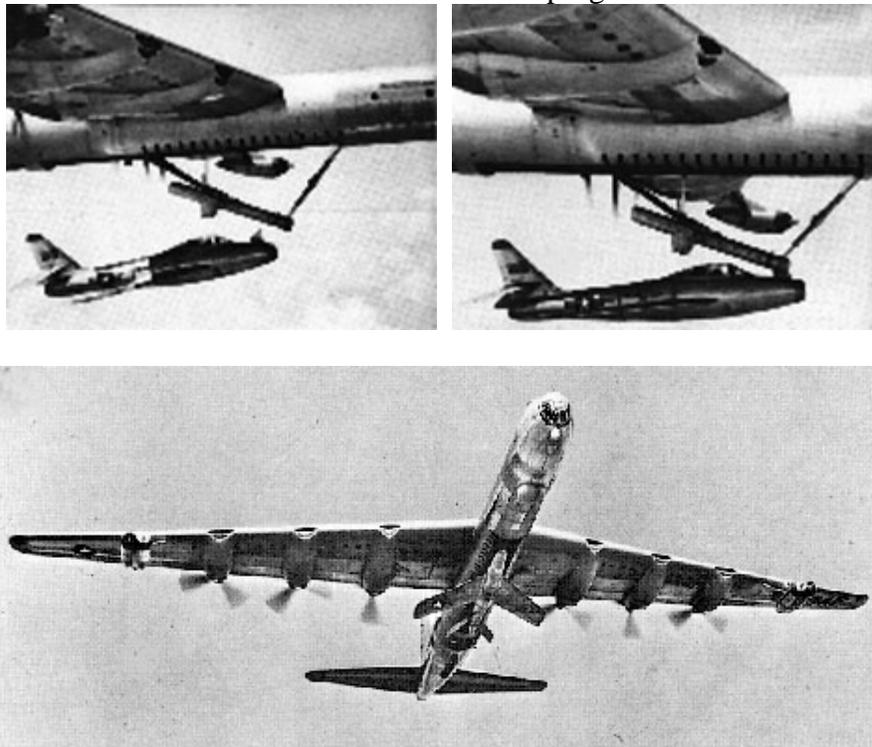


9 Mar 1945 More than 300 B-29s from bases in the Marianas dropped incendiary bombs that destroyed 16 square miles of Tokyo—about a fourth of the city. In terms of immediate loss of life (80,000-100,000), this air raid was the most destructive in history. The attack reflected a shift in U.S. bombardment policy from high-altitude daylight attacks on specific military targets to low-level area bombing at night in order to demoralize the Japanese. (Photo at left donated by *Corbis-Bettmann* to the Japan Society.)

3 Mar 1952 Operation Saturate. In March, FEAF initiated Operation Saturate, a round-the-clock interdiction effort directed against North Korean railroad lines. Fighter-bombers attacked during the day and B-26 bombers at night. The attacks were carried out with intensity through May, and continued periodically thereafter. In the spring of 1952, the increased vulnerability of the B-26 light bomber to communist ground fire provoked a reassessment of the night interdiction campaign.

8 March 1953 F-86 Sabre pilot Joseph McConnell destroys his sixth MiG-15 in aerial combat over Korea. The following month McConnell would down three MiG-15s in one day, becoming the first jet fighter "Triple Ace."

7 Mar 1955 At Great Falls AFB, the USAF formed the 91st Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron to perform a unique mission. During the Korean War, long-range reconnaissance aircraft proved to be highly vulnerable to enemy fighters. In a determined effort to gather intelligence during the Cold War, the 91st used B-36 bombers as mother-ships to carry, launch and recover F-84F reconnaissance aircraft. F-84 pilots boarded their aircraft through the modified B-36 bomb bay. Known as the Fighter-Conveyance (FICON) system, this perilous procedure led to many near-fatal accidents until the U-2 and other measures made the program obsolete. Photos below.



5 Mar 1956 A cargo-laden C-124 Globemaster made a belly landing at Hickam when the pilot apparently forgot to lower his landing gear. "Preliminary investigation indicates the possibility that a crew error may have entered into the accident," an Air Force spokesman said. All 11 crewmen aboard the plane escaped injury.

9 Mar 1959 The 16th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron at Naha AB, Okinawa, became the first squadron in Pacific Air Forces to convert to Convair's F-102 Delta Dagger. The unit, previously equipped with F-86D Sabres, became operationally ready later in September.

4 Mar 1971 4-5 March 1971. In early March, Typhoon Yolling, a tropical storm from the Pacific Ocean, struck Okinawa in the Ryukyu Islands. The Air Force, then using Kadena AB on the island in a training exercise involving the airlift of paratroopers from North Carolina to Korea, launched an immediate relief airlift. On March 4 and 5, two MAC cargo planes delivered 41 tons of equipment from Clark AB in the Philippines to Kadena AB. The cargo included nine trucks, nine trailers, and an ambulance. A huge C-5 Galaxy, then the largest cargo airplane in the world, carried 26 tons of equipment to Kadena from the 437th Mil Airlift Wing of Charleston, South Carolina. A 60th Mil Airlift Wing C-141 Starlifter from Travis AFB, California, flew the other 15 tons from Clark to Kadena. In 1972, the United States and Japan signed a treaty transferring Okinawa and the Ryukyu Islands from the United States to Japan, with the condition that U.S. military bases remain.

5 Mar 1976 An AFSC aircrew, flying a B-52G over White Sands Missile Range, N.Mex., launched the first ALCM. (Photo below right is an ALCM launch from a B-52.)

7 Mar 1983 In the largest B-52 mining exercise to date, 10 B-52D/Gs dropped mines off the South Korean coast in "Team Spirit 83." This exercise included US Navy and Marine minelayers and fighters, SAC and Navy tankers, and South Korean fighters

7 Mar 1996 More than 100 personnel from the Hawaii Air National Guard's 154th Wing deployed from Hickam to Incirlik AB, Turkey, for a thirty-day deployment in support of Operation Provide Comfort II.

4 Mar 2005 The 13th Air Force transferred responsibility for Wake Island to the 15th Airlift Wing. Capt Steve Rose, who had been the Detachment 2 commander at Wake under the 13AF, continued as commander under 15AW.

8 Mar 2006 North Korea was reported to have test-fired two short-range missiles within its borders on Wednesday, even as six-nation talks over its nuclear program remain deadlocked. The missiles were launched in the direction of China, the Japanese news media first reported, citing unidentified defense officials. American officials in Washington confirmed the reports.