



**U.S. AIR FORCE**



**This Week in PACAF and USAF History  
17-23 March 2008**

19 Mar 1910 At Montgomery, Alabama, Orville Wright opened the first Wright Flying School on a site that later became Maxwell Air Force Base.

21 Mar 1912 Lt. Frank P. Lahm flew Signal Corps No. 7, a Wright Model B aircraft, at Fort William McKinley in the Philippine Islands—the first flight of an airplane at an overseas base.

21 Mar 1916 The French air service authorized formation of the Escadrille Americaine, later known as the Lafayette Escadrille. Composed of pilots from the United States, many of whom later served in U.S. air units, this French unit trained Americans in aerial combat.

22 Mar 1941 The Air Corps announced the formation of its first-ever black combat unit, the 99th Pursuit Squadron. The unit was to include 47 officers and 429 enlisted men; ground crews trained at Chanute Army Air Field, Ill., while pilots trained at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.

19 Mar 1944 **Operation STRANGLE begins.** In the European theater of World War II, Allied progress north through Italy was blocked by a deadly concentration of German defenses called the Gustav Line. To reach Rome, the Allies tried to go around these defenses with an amphibious landing at Anzio, but this attack also bogged down into a stalemate. The Mediterranean Allied Air Forces (MAAF) drafted a plan calling for thousands of strategic and tactical aircraft to attack every enemy rail route and starve the German army of supplies.



Operation STRANGLE differed from earlier air campaigns as the MAAF simultaneously targeted whole systems of bridges, yards, tunnels, and even open stretches of track. The Germans worked hard to repair the damage and tried using trucks to keep supplies moving, but their transport system capacity was reduced from 80,000 to 4,000 tons per day delivered to the front. However, with a lack of Allied progress on the ground, the

static battlefield permitted the Germans to maintain their forces in central Italy by strict rationing, foraging for food, and moving supplies and reinforcements after dark.

When rested and refitted Allied armies assaulted the Gustav Line on May 12<sup>th</sup>, they enjoyed the support of Allied air forces striking both the front and rear enemy areas. American and British ground forces finally breached the Gustav Line and forced the Germans to retreat. On the evening of June 4, 1944, American patrols entered Rome.

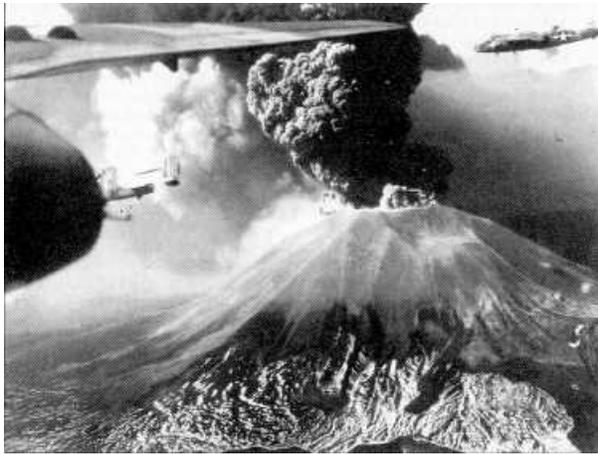


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20 Mar 1944 On the day after Operation STRANGLE began, Mount Vesuvius erupted and buried the Pompeii airdrome, the base of the 340th Bomb Group conducting operations against German forces. Lava cinders destroyed or damaged some 88 B-25s in one of the worst single losses of aircraft in the war.



18 Mar 1945 Approximately 1,250 U.S. bombers escorted by 670 fighters dropped 3,000 tons of bombs on Berlin's transportation and industrial areas. In numbers of bombers, this daylight attack was the largest of the war.

24 Mar 1945 Eighth and Ninth Air Forces launched some 7,000 bombing, transport, reconnaissance, interdiction, close air support, and other sorties in support of Operation VARSITY, the Allied crossing of the Rhine River. More than 2,000 transports and gliders of IX Troop Carrier Command dropped two Allied airborne divisions on the other side of the Rhine near Wesel, Germany in daylight.

21 Mar 1946 Tactical Air Command was activated, Continental Air Forces was redesignated Strategic Air Command, and Air Defense Command was established.

22 Mar 1946 Douglas built America's first rocket to escape earth's atmosphere. It reached 50 miles in altitude.

17 Mar 1947 The North American XB-45—the first Army Air Forces multiengine jet bomber—flew for the first time. Four Allison J35 engines powered the aircraft.



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19 Mar 1947 The **Hawaii Air National Guard** received its first aircraft, a B-26C (#433). By the end of the fiscal year, nine more aircraft had been added to the inventory: two AT-6s, four B-26s, one C-46 and two L-5s. (Photo of a Hawaii ANG B-26 crew and aircraft at right.)



23 Mar 1950 Opening ceremonies for the new Airmen's Swimming Pool at Hickam included participation by Ester Williams, a Hollywood movie star. The following day, the new Hickam Theater was opened with ceremonies including a free showing of the movie "Twelve O'clock High" for all military personnel and their dependents.

23 Mar 1951 **Operation TOMAHAWK.** In the Korean War's second airborne operation and the largest to occur in one day, 120 USAF transports dropped more than 3,400 troops and 220 tons of materiel behind enemy lines at Munsan-ni, Korea. The operation attempted to catch the North Korean I Corps between the airborne troops and an armored attack across the front, but the enemy forces escaped northwards. Some believe the operation plan was leaked to the enemy.

18 Mar 1953 The 130-ton Japanese ship Ryosho Maru, with 38 crew members aboard, ran aground in heavy seas, coming to rest on rocks near the coast of Tori Shima, a small island west of Okinawa. An F-80 from Okinawa spotted the wreckage and contacted air rescue units at Kadena AB. Within an hour, an SA-16 flying boat from the 33d Air Rescue Sqdn dropped food, water, and first aid supplies to the shipwreck survivors on the island. A 33d ARS H-19 helicopter carried most victims from Tori Shima by hoist to the deck of a waiting Army ship, despite rough seas and high winds. When hydraulic problems grounded the first helicopter, a second H-19 evacuated the remaining survivors to Kadena, saving 31 of 38 Ryosho Maru shipwreck victims (the remainder perished).



17 Mar 1961 Northrop delivered the first T-38 Talon jet trainer to ATC at Randolph AFB. Since its introduction, it is estimated that some 50,000 military pilots have trained on this aircraft. The USAF remains one of the few armed forces using dedicated supersonic final trainers. Upgrades and modifications should extend the T-38 service life to 2020.



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21 Mar 1962 In a USAF test of the B-58's escape capsule, the first survivor of a supersonic ejection was punched out of his aircraft at 35,000 feet flying at 870 mph. He landed unharmed seven minutes and 49 seconds later.

This survivor was a black bear named "Yogi." About two weeks later, Yogi was one-upped by another bear named Big John. The plane carrying Big John was flying at an altitude of 45,000 feet at more than 1,000 miles per hour when Big John punched out. Ten minutes later, he too landed safely. Both bears were sedated and slept through the ejections and descents.



23 Mar 1977 Tactical Air Command's first E-3A Sentry aircraft arrived at Tinker Air Force Base, Oklahoma. The Sentry, the Air Force's first airborne warning and control system aircraft, carried a large rotating radar disk above its fuselage.

17 Mar 1981 McDonnell Douglas Aircraft Company delivered the first KC-10A Extender tanker/cargo aircraft to Strategic Air Command. Substantially larger than the KC-135 tanker/cargo aircraft, the Extender not only could carry more fuel and cargo, but also could refuel more types of aircraft, including other KC-10s.

24 Mar 1992 The US signed the **Open Skies Treaty** along with 24 other nations. The treaty permitted unarmed aerial reconnaissance flights over any member country.

24 Mar - 20 Jun 1999 **Operation ALLIED FORCE / NOBLE ANVIL**. To prevent the forced eviction and genocide of ethnic Albanians living in Kosovo, NATO launched this operation against Yugoslavia. It was exclusively an air campaign and NATO's first combat operation against a sovereign nation. The U.S. named its part of the Operation NOBLE ANVIL. Additionally, the USAF used the B-2 for the first time in combat, while F-15 pilots shot down two MiG-29s on the first day of combat.