



U.S. AIR FORCE



This Week in PACAF and USAF History 14-20 April 2008

16 Apr 1916 The **Lafayette Escadrille** was established.

The Lafayette Escadrille was a squadron of the French Air Service during World War I composed largely of American volunteer pilots. The planes, their mechanics, and the uniforms were French, as was the commander, Captain Georges Thenault. The squadron was originally named the *Escadrille Américaine*. For reasons of international diplomacy, the unit was re-named to honor the French military hero who aided the American Army during the American Revolution.



15-16 Apr 1928 WWI aviator and Arctic explorer Carl Benjamin Eielson, together with Australian explorer Hubert Wilkins, achieved the first flight across the Arctic Ocean. The flight from Point Barrow across the top of Greenland to Spitsbergen covered 2,200 miles and took 20 hours. Eielson was decorated with the Distinguished Flying Cross and won the 1928 Harmon Trophy for the greatest American aviation feat of the year. Eielson AFB, Alaska was named after Eielson in 1948.

18 Apr 1942 Col. James H. "Jimmy" Doolittle led 16 B-25s from the aircraft carrier *Hornet* to bomb Tokyo and other sites in the first U.S. air raid on Japan. Although the raid caused only minor damage, it raised U.S. morale and damaged that of the Japanese, and caused the Japanese to divert resources to their defensive perimeter. Early sighting by Japanese ships forced the Doolittle raiders to launch prematurely from the carrier *Hornet*, forcing most of them into crash landings in China. Doolittle earned the Medal of Honor. (See photo of the *Hornet* flight deck at right.)





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Photo # USAF 11462 AC Painting "Death of Admiral Yamamoto"



18 Apr 1943 In P-38 aircraft over Bougainville, 1st Lt. Rex T. Barber and Capt. Thomas G. Lanphier, Jr., intercepted and shot down a Japanese bomber carrying Adm. Isoroku Yamamoto, the Japanese officer who had planned the attacks on Pearl Harbor and Midway. The interception, meticulously planned and executed on the first anniversary of the Doolittle raid, deprived the Japanese of one of their most brilliant naval officers. Maj. John W. Mitchell led the flight of 16 P-38s in which Barber and Lanphier flew.

The painting at left is by Sergeant Vaughn A. Bass, of the 4th Air Force Historical Section, based on information provided by Lieutenant Colonel Thomas G. Lanphier, Jr. It depicts then-Captain Lanphier's P-38 "Lightning" fighter shooting down the "Betty" bomber that was carrying Admiral Yamamoto.

16 Apr 1956 Lockheed unveiled its F-104A Starfighter at Palmdale. General Otto P. Weyland observed, "This is much more than just another fighter, it is a significant and tremendous step forward in our progress in supersonic flight."

19 Apr 1961 Alabama Air National Guard B-26 crew members Riley Shamburger, Wade C. Gray, Pete W. Ray, and Leo F. Baker were killed while flying special-operations missions during the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba.

18 Apr 1962 At Lowry Air Force Base, Colorado, Strategic Air Command declared operational the Air Force's first Titan I unit—the 724th Strategic Missile Squadron. Its nine missiles were the first to be placed in hardened underground silos.

20 Apr 1965 Two years after the first Titan I unit went on alert, Strategic Air Command shipped its last Atlas missile to storage facilities to be used as a launch vehicle in various research and development programs. This completed the phaseout of the first generation of intercontinental ballistic missiles, all of which were liquid-fueled.



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19 Apr 1967 **MEDAL OF HONOR.** Maj Leo K. Thorsness earned a Medal of Honor by protecting a mission to rescue downed airmen in North Vietnam. While flying an F-105 with low fuel, Thorsness shot down one MiG-17, damaged another, and drove off three more. Despite his urgent need for fuel, Major Thorsness elected to recover at a forward operating base, allowing another aircraft in emergency condition to refuel from an aerial tanker. Shortly after this incident,



Thorsness was shot down, captured, and held prisoner until his release on March 4, 1973. (See AF photo of Maj Thorsness and his regular backseater, Capt. Harold Johnson, who flew 93 Wild Weasel missions over North Vietnam. Johnson received the Air Force Cross).

14 Apr 1970 The Minuteman III deployment in North Dakota began when Minot's 91 SMW accepted its first missile. It arrived on board a C-141 in a flight from Hill AFB in the first airlift of an operational Minuteman III.

14 Apr 1972 **BATTLE OF AN LOC.** Through 30 June, C-130s airdropped 4,853 tons in 359 sorties to the besieged garrison at An Loc to prevent a North Vietnamese take over. The C-130s used high-altitude airdrops for the first time to resupply US forces. By the time the road routes to An Loc reopened on 23 July, the C-130s had flown 763 sorties to deliver 10,081 tons of supplies. B-52 attacks provided essential close air support to embattled troops in An Loc.

16 Apr 1973 USAF B-52s resumed bombing against North Vietnamese positions in Laos following reports that communist forces overran a town in the Plaine des Jarres.

15 Apr 1974 Under Congressional pressure, the Air Force began a flyoff between the Fairchild A-10 and the LTV A-7D Corsair at McConnell AFB. The competition lasted through 9 May and clearly showed the A-10 to be a more capable aircraft in the Close Air Support (CAS) mission. The A-10 carried a larger ordnance payload and a more lethal gun—the GAU-8 30mm cannon. The A-10 was judged to be more survivable after being hit by enemy ground fire and its maneuverability made it less vulnerable to air-to-air losses. The pilots felt the A-10s maneuverability would be also be a great asset in providing effective CAS to ground units, especially during limited visibility or low ceiling weather conditions.



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14 Apr 1986 **Operation EL DORADO CANYON.** The US retaliated against Libya for its involvement in terrorism with an airstrike, using 24 F-111s from RAF Lakenheath supported by five EF-111s from RAF Upper Heyford. Navy aircraft also struck Libya from the USS America and USS Coral Sea (14 A-6Es, six A-7s and six F/A-18s). The aircraft successfully hit targets at Benina Airfield, Benghazi Military Barracks, and Aziziyah Barracks in Tripoli. During a long, circuitous flight around France and Spain, the F-111s were air-refueled by 28 KC-10 Extenders and KC-135 Stratotankers, flying out of RAF Fairford and RAF Mildenhall. The tankers refueled the F-111 strike force four times, maintaining radio silence during the entire mission. The US lost one F-111 in the attack. On the return flight to the UK, the tankers refueled the F-111s two more times. (Artwork at right by Ronald Wong.)



19-24 Apr 1993 Units in Alaska participated in the Air Force's first combined exercise with the Russian air force, a search-and-rescue exercise in Siberia.

17 Apr 1999 During Operation ALLIED FORCE, the USAF sent the RQ-1 Predator on its first flights into a combat zone to perform reconnaissance over Serbia.

13 Apr 2003 Due to the proximity of Typhoon Kujira to Guam, all 7th Air Expeditionary Wing B-52s and B-1Bs, together with supporting airmen and equipment, evacuated from Andersen AFB, Guam. By 14 Apr 2003, the 7th AEW recovered its combat readiness even while the bombers were temporarily stationed at Fairchild AFB, WA and Hickam AFB, HI.

16 Apr 2004 **MACKAY TROPHY.** Near Kharbut, Iraq, in near-zero visibility, two USAF HH-60G helicopters were dispatched to rescue a U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook helicopter that had crashed in a sandstorm. The brown-out conditions left the rescue crews' infrared and night vision goggles ineffective, making navigation extremely difficult. Flying through multiple surface-to-air missile attacks, the HH-60s located, rescued and evacuated all five Army crash survivors. For their outstanding actions, the crews earned the Mackay Trophy.

18 Apr 2005 The 535th Airlift Squadron activated at Hickam AFB, HI. The 535 AS crews would fly the C-17A Globemaster IIIs due to arrive at Hickam in early 2006.