



U.S. AIR FORCE

## This Week in PACAF and USAF History 19-25 May 2008



22 May 1906 The U.S. Patent Office issued a patent on the **Wright brothers'** airplane-control system. Comprised of innovative elevators, rudders, and "wing-warping" (differential twisting of curved wings—the forerunner to ailerons), this system achieved stable control in all three axes – roll, pitch and yaw.

The Wrights had applied for the patent in the spring of 1903. Even after their successes at Kitty Hawk, they were determined not to fly in public until they had received the protection of a patent and had signed contracts for the sale of their machine. By 1909, the Wright Company was turning out four planes a month and sold the world's first military airplane to the Army. The brothers also launched patent suits against Glenn Curtiss and other airplane builders who were using their control system without permission.

19 May 1908 Lt. Thomas E. Selfridge flew an airplane called the *White Wing*, designed by F. W. "Casey" Baldwin, thus becoming the **first Army officer to solo** in an airplane. It was Dr. Alexander Graham Bell's second Aerial Experiment Association plane, and it had hinged ailerons controlled by wires attached to the pilot's harness. When the plane's wings tipped one way, the pilot leaned the other way, pulling the flaps, and leveling the plane.

19 May 1918 **Raoul G. Lufbery**, who earned 17 aerial victories in World War I, lost his life in combat.

Born in France, Lufbery (right) became an American citizen, graduated from Nieuport school in France and was assigned to the Escadrille Americaine on May 24, 1916. Part of Lufbery's success could be attributed to his skill as a mechanic. He hand-loaded his own machine gun rounds into their drums to check for any slight imperfections that might cause his gun to jam. After transferring to the American Expeditionary Forces, he passed much of his knowledge of aerial warfare to fledgling American fighter pilots such as Eddie Rickenbacker.



Courtesy of the Airmen Memorial Museum

19 May 1919 MSgt. Ralph W. Bottriell became the first member of the Army to jump from an airplane with a backpack-type **parachute**. MSgt Bottriell (at left) designed, developed and tested the first free-fall parachute, later receiving the Distinguished Flying Cross for his life-saving work.



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21 May 1927 **Medal of Honor.** Charles Lindbergh, a 25-year-old Captain in the Missouri National Guard's 110th Observation Squadron, made the first nonstop solo flight across the Atlantic. (See photos of Lindbergh and his plane *Spirit of St. Louis*, below).



Lindbergh was pursuing the \$25,000 *Orteig Prize* offered to the pilot of the first successful nonstop flight between New York and Paris. His financing included \$2,000 of his own savings. Six well-known aviators had already died attempting to win the prize when Lindbergh took off. Lindbergh set a 3,609-mile record for straight-line distance in his 33-hour 39-minute flight. He faced many challenges, such as flying blind through fog for several hours, flying as low as 10 feet above the wave tops to avoid storms and icing, and navigating only by a magnetic compass, his airspeed indicator, the stars (when visible) and dead reckoning. Upon landing in Paris, Lindbergh immediately became an international hero and American celebrity. President Coolidge later presented Lindbergh with the Medal of Honor.

20 May - 20 September 1951 **Operation STRANGLE**, a massive air interdiction campaign in Korea, was carried out by the Far East Air Forces (FEAF), Task Force 77 and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW).

20 May 1951 Capt James Jabara, flying an F-86 Sabre from the 334th Fighter Interceptor Squadron, became the **world's first jet ace**. On this date, he shot down his fifth and sixth MiG-15s in the Korean War.

Eleven days later, Capt Jabara reported to USAF Chief of Staff General Hoyt S. Vandenberg in his office, and met with Captain Eddie Rickenbacker, the leading American Fighter "Ace" of World War I (photo at right).



22 May 1951 Paving was completed on a project for widening of Hickam's Taxiway "Charlie," and the combined Hickam-Honolulu Airport runway was formally opened to traffic. Runway 8-26 then became the longest airstrip (13,100 feet) in the Hawaiian Islands.

25 May 1953 George Welch, North American test pilot, flew the prototype **YF-100 Super Sabre** for the first time, taking off and landing at the Air Force Flight Test Center, Edwards Air Force Base, California. He broke Mach 1 during the flight. The F-100 was an unsolicited, company-funded North American project to improve on the F-86 Sabre, and this maiden flight was made seven months ahead of schedule.

On 21 May 1957 (50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lindbergh's flight), Maj Robinson Risner flew Lindbergh's transatlantic route in an F-100 in 6 hours 40 minutes (compared to 33 1/2 hours).



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21 May 1956 **OPERATION REDWING—CHEROKEE SHOT.** A B-52B made America's first air drop of a thermonuclear device – a 3.8 megaton bomb dropped from 50,000 feet and exploding at 5,000 feet over Bikini Atoll. The purpose was not only to gather weapon effects data but also to demonstrate an airdrop capability in answer to a Soviet airdrop in 1955.



The intended ground zero was directly over Namu Island, but the flight crew mistook an observation facility on a different island for their targeting beacon and the weapon delivery was four miles off target. As a result, nearly all of the weapons effects data was lost. (Photo at left is several seconds after detonation.)

25 May 1959 Air Defense Command accepted its first **F-106 Delta Dart** (photo at right). Originally an advanced derivative of the F-102 Delta Dagger, this “Ultimate Interceptor” became a new design series in its own right. The major change was a fuselage shaped to reduce transonic shock waves that bleed away power and produce “wave drag.” The innovation allowed the “Six” to reach its original design speed of Mach 1.2.



21-22 May 1960 **Hawaiian Tsunami.** On May 21 and 22, tremendous earthquakes in Chile produced seismic sea waves that raced across the Pacific Ocean at more than 400 mph. Sixteen hours later, four waves pounded the east coast of the island of Hawaii, 6,800 miles away from the epicenter. Ignoring warnings, many Hilo-area residents had stayed in their homes near the bay, where up to 61 people died and hundreds were left homeless. By the end of May, the 1502d Air Transport Wing from Hickam AFB airlifted more than 12 tons of emergency equipment and supplies to Hilo. The wing's 50th Air Transport Squadron flew C-124 Globemaster II airplanes for the relief operation, delivering a generator, refrigerator, vans, clothing, and food.

On 23 May, the Air Force began one of its largest humanitarian airlifts to relieve the earthquake victims in Chile. Within a month, cargo aircraft had delivered more than 1,000 tons of relief equipment and supplies from bases in the United States, some 4,500 miles away from the stricken region. The airlift was called Operation AMIGOS.

21 May 1976 **Super Typhoon Pamela** hit Guam with 150 mph winds and 27 inches of rain in a 24-hour period, flooding the island and tearing apart most buildings. Despite preparations, the typhoon killed at least five people, injured 500 and deprived thousands of their homes. Andersen AFB suffered the same level of destruction. For 14 hours the base could not communicate with the outside world. Its runways, flooded and buried under scattered debris, were closed. Through 9 June, MAC supervised the airlift of more than 2,652 tons of cargo to Guam in seven C-141s, six C-5s, and one C-130.



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22 May 1990 23rd Air Force was redesignated as **Air Force Special Operations Command**, the USAF component of U.S. Special Operations Command.

23 May 2000 The first production-model **T-6A Texan II** aircraft arrived at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas. Designed as a dedicated training aircraft with jet-like handling, the T-6A replaces both the Air Force T-37 and the Navy T-34, which had been in service for 38 and 23 years respectively. The T-6A offers better performance and significant improvements in training effectiveness, safety, cockpit accommodations and operational capabilities. (Photo at right)



22 May 2002 The **X-45A unmanned combat air vehicle (UCAV)** flew for the first time at Edwards Air Force Base, California. It was the first unmanned aircraft designed for combat operations in an extremely hostile environment (such as suppression of enemy air defenses). The X-45A is a swept-wing, stealthy design of composite construction, with two internal weapons bays, hardpoints for auxiliary fuel tanks or additional weapons, an internally mounted turbofan engine, and fully retracting landing gear. (See photos below.)



Photo credit above: Jim Ross / NASA

