



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in PACAF and USAF History **26 May – 1 June 2008**



30 May 1912 At the age of 45, **Wilbur Wright** died of typhoid fever at Dayton Ohio. He was exhausted after a long series of patent infringement suits against other airplane builders, particularly Glen Curtiss.

27 May 1913 **First Military Aviator's Badge**. Under General Order No. 39, Army officers who qualified as military aviators were to receive a Military Aviator's Certificate and badge (24 officers qualified at the time). The badge was originally made in 14-karat gold (see photo at right). In August, 1917, the military aviator badge in silver was introduced.



31 May 1915 The **German Zeppelin LZ-38** dropped bombs on London for the first time. About 150 small bombs set approximately 41 fires that killed seven people and injured 35. Other bombing raids on London and Paris followed. The airships approached their targets silently at night at altitudes above the ceilings of British and French fighters. But higher-flying aircraft were built and armed with incendiary ammunition that set the hydrogen-filled zeppelins afire. Several zeppelins were also lost because of bad

weather, and 17 were shot down because they could not climb as fast as the fighters. The crews also suffered from cold and oxygen deprivation when they maintained flight above 10,000 feet.

31 May 1935 Hawaii's newest airfield, now known as **Hickam AFB**, was officially dedicated and named in honor of Lt Col Horace Meek Hickam, a distinguished aviation pioneer who was killed in an aircraft accident on 5 November 1934 at Fort Crockett in Galveston, Texas.

29 May 1941 The Army Air Corps created the Ferrying Command to fly aircraft from U.S. factories to Canada and to Atlantic ports for delivery to Great Britain. By 7 Dec 1941, the command had delivered about 1,350 planes. On 20 June 1942, the Ferrying Command became the **Air Transport Command** with world-wide responsibility for ferrying aircraft; transporting personnel, materiel and mail and for maintaining air route facilities outside of the United States.

29 May 1941 Headquarters, Alaska Defense Command activated the Air Field Forces, Alaska Defense Command, with the responsibility of overseeing the training, planning and executing air defense operations in Alaska. The ADC order also established Elmendorf Field (also known as Alaska Air Base) as the maintenance and repair center for Alaska.



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26 May 1942 The Northrop prototype for the **P-61 Black Widow**, the first U.S. aircraft designed as a radar-equipped night fighter, made its first flight at Hawthorne, California, with test pilot Vance Breese at the controls. The P-61 was originally designed to meet the urgent need for a high-altitude, high-speed aircraft to intercept Luftwaffe bombers attacking London. The requirement was for a fighter to patrol continuously over the city throughout the night, carrying multiple gun turrets and an early, heavy airborne radar unit. P-61 photo at right.



31 May 1945 The last of 18,188 **B-24 Liberators** was delivered to the USAAF. This bomber was produced in larger numbers than any other U.S. aircraft and employed on more fronts than any other Allied or enemy bomber in World War II. Consolidated was originally asked to produce the B-17 under license, but submitted its own design for a more capable bomber. The placement of the B-24's fuel tanks throughout the upper fuselage and its lightweight construction optimized assembly line production (photo at left) and increased range and payload, but made the aircraft more difficult to fly and more vulnerable to battle damage.

1 June 1948 The Air Force Air Transport Command and the Navy Air Transport Service merged into a new organization, the Military Air Transport Service.

31 May 1951 **Operation STRANGLE.** Far East Air Forces (FEAF) launched an attempt to paralyze enemy transportation between the 39th parallel and the front lines in Korea. By late July, FEAF knew the interdiction of North Korean supply and communication lines, while substantial, had failed to isolate North Korean forces. In late December, however, General Weyland announced that the STRANGLE operations had shattered the North Korean rail-transportation net. The bombing effort destroyed or damaged 40,000 trucks and prevented a Red Chinese buildup for future offensive operations.



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26 May 1956 First flight of Republic's F-105B Thunderchief. Exactly two years later, Gen O. P. Weyland accepted TAC's first production F-105B at Republic's Farmingdale plant in Long Island. The F-105B was the biggest single-seat, single-engine combat aircraft in history. The photo at right shows F-105s next to two Navy A-4s. Originally designed for high-speed low-altitude penetration carrying a single nuclear bomb in its large internal bomb bay, the F-105 was the primary strike bomber of the Vietnam War, typically carrying a cargo of eight 750-pound bombs. Over 20,000 Thunderchief sorties were flown, with 382 aircraft lost (nearly half of the 833 produced) including 62 operational casualties. During the war, the two-seat F-105F and F-105G Wild Weasel variants became the first dedicated Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses (SEAD) platforms.



31 May 1967 **Mackay Trophy.** A KC-135 Stratotanker from the 902nd Air Refueling Squadron carried out a spectacular series of emergency refuelings that saved six fuel-starved Navy aircraft. As reported in Air Force magazine:

“A crew consisting of aircraft commander Maj. John H. Casteel, copilot Capt. Richard L. Trail, navigator Capt. Dean L. Hoar, and boom operator MSgt. Nathan C. Campbell was assigned a refueling track over the Gulf of Tonkin. Soon after they had established their track, Major Casteel's crew was alerted to refuel a pair of Air Force F-104 fighters on a support mission north of the DMZ. While refueling the F-104s, Casteel was informed that two Navy KA-3 tankers, desperately short of fuel, were on the way to his tanker. Both KA-3s had fuel they could transfer but could not use themselves. After receiving a partial load, the F-104s stayed with Casteel's KC-135 to defend it against possible MiG attacks while it refueled the Navy aircraft.

The first Navy tanker took on a minimum of fuel then broke off to allow the second KA-3 to hook up. At this point, two Navy F-8s were vectored to the KC-135 for emergency refueling. One F-8 was so low on fuel that the pilot could not wait for the second KA-3 to complete refueling. The Navy pilot hooked up to the KA-3 that still was taking on fuel from the KC-135. That is believed to have been the first trilevel refueling ever. While the dual transfer was in progress, the first KA-3 passed fuel to the second F-8, and then returned to the KC-135 to complete its own refueling.

This joint-service operation was still in progress when two Navy F-4s with bingo fuel were vectored to the KC-135 for emergency service. While waiting for the F-4s to appear, Casteel's crew gave the two Air Force F-104s another shot of fuel, then transferred enough to the Navy F-4s to get them to their carrier.



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After this series of 10 refuelings, the KC-135 did not have enough fuel to return to its base in Thailand. It headed for an alternate in South Vietnam while refueling the two F-104s a third time to provide enough fuel to get them to their base.”

Casteel's crew all received Distinguished Flying Crosses for the action, and they were subsequently awarded the Mackay Trophy. Source: <http://www.airforce-magazine.com/MagazineArchive/Pages/1996/January%201996/0196valor.aspx>.

1 June 1992 In a **major reorganization**, the Air Force inactivated Strategic Air Command, Tactical Air Command, and Military Airlift Command; it then activated Air Combat Command and Air Mobility Command. Air Combat Command received SAC's bombers and missiles and TAC's fighters, while Air Mobility Command inherited MAC's transports and SAC's tankers. Air Force Space Command assumed management responsibility for the Air Force Satellite Communications System, formerly managed by Strategic Air Command.

The Department of Defense activated United States Strategic Command, which assumed wartime responsibility for U.S. nuclear forces and their long-range delivery systems. The last commander of Strategic Air Command, Gen. George L. Butler, USAF, became the first commander of United States Strategic Command.

On July 1, the Air Force continued its reorganization with the inactivations of Air Force Logistics Command and Air Force Systems Command; it then activated Air Force Materiel Command to replace them.

27 May 1996 The Air Force named the nation's newest B-2 stealth bomber "The Spirit of Hawaii" at a ceremony held at Hickam AFB. (See photo of DV's at ceremony below; from the left: ACC Commander Gen. Richard E. Hawley, Sen. Dan Inouye, Sen. Dan Akaka, CINCPACFLT Adm. Joseph W. Prueher, COMPACAF Gen. John G. Lorber and Ken Kresa, president of Northrop Grumman Corp.).



31 May 1996 The USAF awarded C-17 multi-year contracts to McDonnell-Douglas and Pratt & Whitney for 80 C-17 Globemaster III aircraft and engines. The contracts, valued at \$16.2 billion, were the longest and the largest multi-year contracts ever entered into by the government to date. That acquisition gave the USAF 120 C-17s and enabled the retirement of C-141s from the active USAF inventory.

1 June 2005 The "General George C. Kenney Headquarters (Provisional)", Hickam AFB, HI, was activated and attached to HQ PACAF. On the same day, the Thirteenth Air Force, Hickam AFB, HI, was attached to Kenney Headquarters.