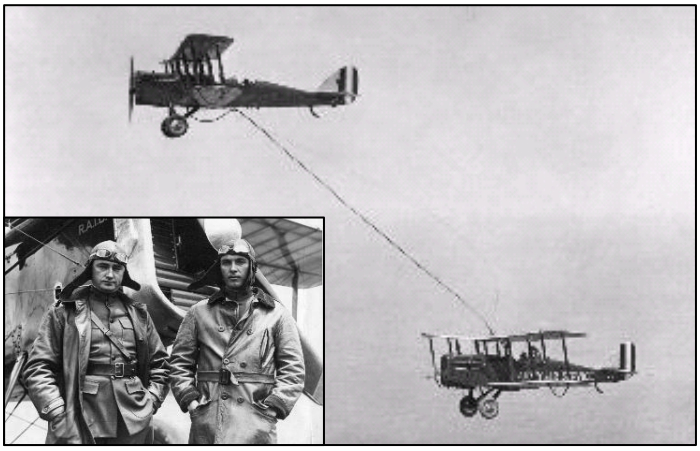
This Week in PACAF and USAF History
23-29 June 2008



27 June 1923 Lts Lowell H. Smith and John P. Richter made the Army Air Service's **first aerial refueling** between two aircraft over San Diego, while setting world refueled speed records for 2,500 and 3,000 kilometers. Their DH-4B received two hose refuelings from a DH-4B flown by Lts Virgil Hine and Frank Seifert. (See photo at right; inset photo is Smith and Richter.) This and later tests of air refueling developed an eventual capability to increase the range, payload and endurance of military flights.

28-29 June 1927 The **first successful trans-Pacific flight (mainland to Hawaii) was** made by Lt. Albert Hegenberger and Lt. Lester Maitland flying an Atlantic Fokker C-2 trimotor named "Bird of Paradise," specially modified at Wright Field for this flight. The flight took 25 hours and 50 minutes and covered 2,407 miles, ending at Wheeler Field, Oahu. Although this was the greatest distance ever flown over open sea up to that time, the real significance of the flight was the high degree of navigational accuracy employed to find such a "pinpoint" destination in the vast Pacific. It marked the beginning of an era in Air Corps application of new methods, equipment, and training in dead reckoning and celestial navigation. (See photo of "Bird of Paradise" at Wheeler Field, 1927 – note security forces on horseback).

See: http://test.hawaii.gov/hawaiiaviation/hawaii-aviation-pioneers/lt-albert-f-hegenberger-1

28 June 1934 Boeing Aircraft Company received a contract for the design of the XB–15, the first four-engine monoplane bomber (photo at left). Features of the XB-15 were later combined with the Boeing 247 transport to develop the **B–17 Flying Fortress**. This bomber development program filled a specific Army Air Corps requirement for a bomber to reinforce AAC units and perform coastal defense in the strategic triangle of that day: Hawaii, Panama, and Alaska.

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26 June 1948 The USAF launched "**Operation Vittles**," also known as the **Berlin Airlift** in response to a Soviet blockade on June 24 of rail and road lines into West Berlin. C-47 and C-54 aircraft and personnel of the Pacific Division, Military Air Transport Service (MATS), deployed from Hickam to Germany in support of Operation Vittles, which delivered 2.3 million tons of cargo to West Berlin between June 1948 and July 1949. This airlift delivered enough coal and food to sustain the city indefinitely and became the largest humanitarian airlift in history.

26June 1948 The 7th Bomb Group received the Air Force's first operational **B–36 Peacemaker** heavy bomber. With a length of 160 feet and wings spanning 230 feet, the Peacemaker was the world's largest warplane and is still the largest bomber ever built. The huge six-engine bomber was designed in 1941 when it appeared England might fall to Germany and the U.S. would need a trans-Atlantic bomber in a war against the Nazis. (Photo below is a B-36 next to a B-29.)

25 June 1950 **The Korean War.** At 0400 hours, Communist North Korea launched a sudden, all-out attack against the Republic of Korea. A Hickam-based MATS C-54G parked at Kimpo Airport (just west of Seoul) was destroyed by North Korean fighters and was the first American aircraft lost in the Korean conflict. The UN Security Council passed a resolution calling for the withdrawal of North Korean forces from South Korea, and Fifth Air Force prepared to airlift U.S. citizens out of Seoul, the South Korean capital. C–54, C–47, and C–46 transport aircraft from the 374th Troop Carrier Wing and Headquarters Far East Air Forces began airlifting hundreds of evacuees from Seoul and Suwon Airfields to Japan. They were escorted by F–82s, F–80 jet fighters, and B–26 light bombers. On the same day, an F–82 Twin Mustang pilot, 1st Lt. William G. Hudson, earned the first aerial victory credit of the Korean War when he shot down a North Korean Yak–11 that was attacking a South Korean airfield near Seoul. Five other USAF pilots also shot down enemy airplanes.

28 June 1950 **Korean War.** North Korean forces streamed south and occupied Seoul, the South Korean capital, and nearby Kimpo Airfield. FEAF launched its first successful airstrike as more than 20 B-26s from the 3 BG bombed the Munsan rail yards near the 38th parallel and the rail and road traffic between Seoul and North Korean border. One B-26 was lost to enemy fire.

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29 June 1950 Korean War. President Truman authorized General MacArthur to dispatch air forces against targets in North Korea. General MacArthur directed General Stratemeyer to concentrate air attacks on the Han River bridges and North Korean troops massing north of the river. B-26s attacked the bridges, and Fifth Air Force F-80s patrolled the Han River area. F-82s, using jettisonable fuel tanks, attacked with napalm for the first time. The 35 FBS and 80 FBS shot down five North Korean airplanes that were attacking Suwon Airfield, while eight B-29s from the 19th BG attacked enemy-held Kimpo Airfield and the Seoul railroad station, reportedly killing a large number of enemy troops. (Photo at right is a B-29 bombing mission during the Korean War.) As the B-29s turned toward Kadena AB, enemy aircraft attacked the formation, enabling B-29 gunners to shoot down an enemy airplane for the first time. Later that day, the 3rd BG launched 18 B-26s to attack Heijo Airfield near Pyongyang, North Korea, claiming up to 25 enemy aircraft destroyed on the ground.

23-24 June 1952 Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps aircraft in coordinated attacks virtually destroyed all the **hydroelectric power plants of North Korea**. The two-day operation, involving over 1,200 sorties, was the largest single air effort since World War II.

26 June 1954 **Operation WOUNDED WARRIOR.** After the defeat of French forces at Dien Bien Phu, North Vietnam, FEAF and MATS aircraft airlifted 509 wounded **French Foreign Legion veterans** from Vietnam to Paris and to French Foreign Legion Headquarters in Algeria. The 14,000-mile airlift had to follow an eastern route through Japan, Hawaii and the U.S. for political reasons. The operation concluded on July 17.

29 June 1955 The Boeing Aircraft Company delivered the first **B–52 Stratofortress** to enter USAF operational service to the 93d Bombardment Wing at Castle Air Force Base, California. The B–52 continues to be an important part of the Air Force's strategic bomber inventory.

28 June 1957 The first **KC–135 Stratotanker**, assigned to the 93d Air Refueling Squadron, arrived at Castle AFB, California. The jet tanker could cruise at the same speed as jet bombers while refueling, drastically reducing the time for in-flight refueling missions. The photo above is a KC-135 refueling a B-52.

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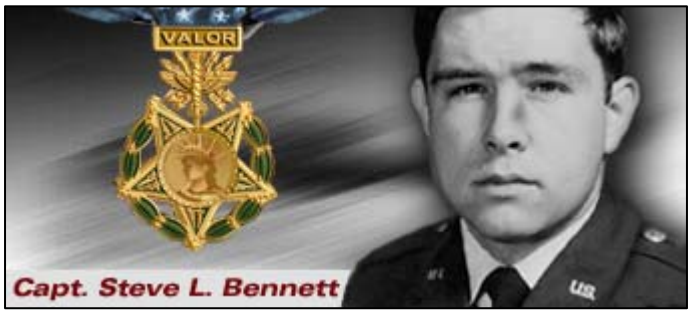
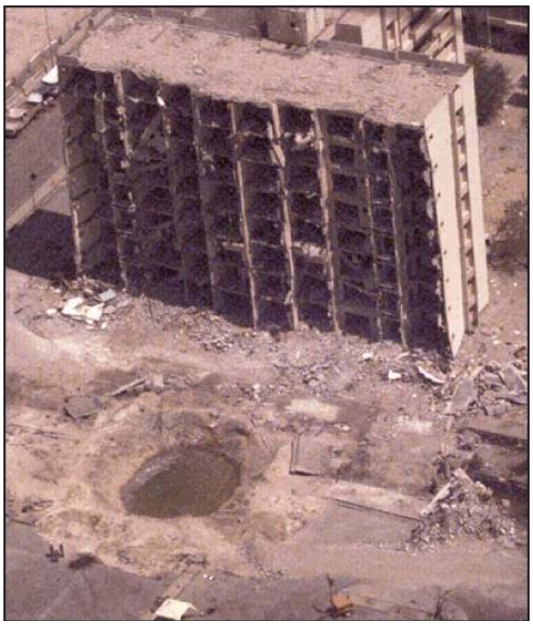
26 June 1972 The Air Force unveiled the F-15 air superiority fighter in ceremonies at the McDonnell Douglas facility in St. Louis. Arguably the world's most successful fighter program, the F-15 has an excellent radar and supporting avionics, a very reliable airframe and superb maneuverability. The F-15 may have been the first aircraft with "hands-on-throttle-and-stick" (HOTAS), a human-machine interface concept which puts key controls on the throttle and control stick and thus immediately accessible to the pilots' fingers. The combination of HOTAS and the heads-up display (HUD) allows the pilot to focus outside the cockpit while operating weapons and other systems.

29 June 1972 **MEDAL OF HONOR.** Capt Steven L. Bennett, a forward air controller, and his observer found enemy troops attacking a friendly unit. Bennet strafed the enemy forces until they retreated. A surface-to-air missile hit and crippled his OV-10 Bronco and shredded his observer's parachute. The structural weakness of the OV-10 was well-known to aircrews. Back-seaters had survived OV-10 ditchings, but no pilot ever had. Despite this knowledge, Bennet decided to ditch the aircraft rather than bailout and leave his observer to die in the back seat. Capt Bennet was killed in the ditching, but his observer survived. For his heroic sacrifice, Bennett received the Medal of Honor posthumously.



25 June 1996 **Khobar Towers.** Terrorists detonated a truck bomb outside the fence surrounding a housing facility near King Abdul-Aziz Air Base, Saudi Arabia. The blast killed 19 Air Force personnel and injured 300 others. As a result of the bombing, most USAF personnel in Saudi Arabia were moved to more remote sites that were easier to defend.

Force protection measures at the facility were primarily concerned with a bomb penetrating the building, as happened at the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983. Concrete barriers surrounded the fence around the Khobar Towers, but there were few lights, and no surveillance cameras, sensors, or alarms were in use. While U.S. Air Force Security Police overlooking the perimeter from the roof of the building identified the attack in progress and alerted many occupants to the threat, evacuation was incomplete when the bomb exploded. The perpetrators escaped. (Photo at right.)



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