



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in PACAF and USAF History **28 July – 3 August 2008**



2 August 1909 The Army accepted its first airplane from the Wright brothers after the aircraft met or surpassed all specifications in flight tests at Fort Myer, Virginia. The Army paid the Wrights the contract price of \$25,000 plus \$5,000 for speed in excess of 40 miles per hour.

29 July 1921 Hoping to demonstrate the vulnerability of Atlantic seaboard cities to air attack, Brig. Gen. William “Billy” Mitchell led 19 bombers in a mock raid against New York City, after which he concluded that his target had been theoretically destroyed. He used this raid to support his argument that the Army and its aviation arm should assume responsibility for defense of the nation’s coastlines.

28 July 1943 **MEDAL OF HONOR.** During a bombing mission in Europe, numerous enemy fighters attacked and severely damaged Flight Officer John C. Morgan’s B-17. A cannon shell totally shattered the windscreen and split the pilot’s skull open, leaving him in a crazed condition. Morgan, as copilot, tried to fly the plane, while struggling with the pilot to keep him from flying the bomber. He continued the flight and for two hours flew in formation with one hand at the controls and the other holding off the pilot until the navigator came in to provide relief. For completing the bombing mission and safely returning to England, Morgan received the Medal of Honor. (Morgan’s feat formed the basis of a scene in the movie “Twelve O’Clock High.”) Morgan volunteered for more missions, including the first raid on Berlin on 6 March 1944. He was shot down that day and was a POW in Luft Stalag 1 for the rest of the war. Morgan passed away in 1991. (Photo at right.) See <http://www.327th.org/Morgan%20MOH.htm>.



1 August 1943 **Operation TIDAL WAVE.** In this operation, 177 B-24 Liberators out of Libya used low-level routes to drop 311 tons of bombs on oil refineries in Ploesti, Rumania. The oil



Photo Courtesy ASAF Museum

refinery complex in Ploesti was Nazi Germany’s most important source of petroleum products. This was the first large-scale, minimum-altitude attack against a strongly defended target, and the longest major bombing mission undertaken to date. Fifty-four of the 177 B-24s were lost, and four Medals of Honor were awarded to aircrew members in the raid. (Photo at left shows B-24s over the smoke of Ploesti.)



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3 August 1944 The Far East Air Forces (FEAF), predecessor of the Pacific Air Forces, was officially activated at Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, with Lt. Gen. George C. Kenney as FEAF's first commander. FEAF personnel assigned totaled 173,620 (19,779 officers, 153,841 enlisted). (Fifty Years in Defense of the Nation)

31 July 1945 General MacArthur assumed responsibility for the command of U.S. forces on the Ryukyu Islands. Air defense units were included in the assumption and Seventh Air Force found itself in control of several Marine tactical units. With the defeat of the Japanese forces on Okinawa, FEAF began strikes against the main islands of Japan in preparation for the invasion of Kyushu, a portion of Operation DOWNFALL known as OLYMPIC, scheduled for November. CORONET, the other part of the twofold Operation DOWNFALL, covered the invasion of the main island, Honshu.

30 July 1948 North American Aviation delivered the Air Force's first operational jet bomber—the B-45A Tornado. Later it became the first USAF aircraft to carry a tactical nuclear bomb.

3 August 1950 General Stratemeyer ordered the Fifth Air Force to destroy and maintain the destruction of key transportation facilities between the 37th and 38th parallels. In general terms, he charged the Fifth Air Force to interdict all lines of enemy transportation across this belt.

31 July 1957 The Distant Early Warning Line, a string of radar installations extending across the Canadian Arctic to warn of impending aircraft attacks, was declared fully operational.

1 August 1958 The U.S. conducted its first **rocket-launched nuclear test**, choosing Johnston Island as the launch site. Code-named Teak Redstone, a live W-39 nuclear warhead was launched to measure the effects of high altitude nuclear explosions in order to design warheads for the Nike-Zeus anti-ballistic missile system. The Redstone rocket carried the 3.8 megaton warhead to an altitude of 77.8km (48.3 miles). According to the Honolulu Advertiser, the "flash awakened and terrified so many people — "many were emotionally disturbed by the phenomenon," Gov. William Quinn told military commanders — that advance notice was given for the next blast 11 days later. (See photo of blast as viewed from Honolulu, courtesy of the Honolulu Advertiser archives, at right).





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1 August 1960 The 43d Bomb Wing at Carswell Air Force Base, Texas, accepted the first



operational **B-58 Hustler** medium bomber. The first U.S. supersonic bomber, the delta-wing aircraft could fly at twice the speed of sound and could be refueled in flight. However, the B-58 was expensive, difficult to fly and had limited range and payload. When the advent of surface-to-air missiles forced bombers to low altitude, the Hustler lost its supersonic speed and its range was further reduced. By the 1970s, the B-58 had been retired in favor of the FB-111. (B-58 photo at right.)

1 August 1968 Headquarters Air Force Reserve was organized at Robins Air Force Base, Georgia, replacing Continental Air Command as manager of Air Reserve resources. At the same time, the Air Reserve Personnel Center at Denver, Colorado, was established as a separate operating agency.

29 July 1969 The Air Force Missile Development Center at Holloman AFB directed the first AGM-69 Short Range Attack Missile (SRAM) launch. A B-52H flying over the White Sands Missile Range launched the missile. On 1 August 1972, the first B-52 SRAM wing activated on schedule at Loring AFB.

Originally, the SRAM's primary mission was to improve the survivability of the SAC manned bomber force by neutralizing surface-to-air missile defenses. The mission was later expanded to include the destruction of selected strategic targets. The photo at right shows six SRAMs on their rotary launcher.



29 July 1970 Col Vere Short, a C-141 pilot, attained 25,000 accident-free flying hours, the most military flying time by anyone on active duty.

29 July 1974 SECDEF James R. Schlesinger directed the consolidation of all military airlift under one manager. As a result, the USAF became the single manager for all armed services.



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3 August 1981 USAF air-traffic controllers began to man U.S. airport facilities, replacing striking federal civilian personnel. This action allowed commercial airlines to continue service despite the illegal but widespread strike.

2 August 1994 Two B-52 Stratofortresses of the 2nd Bombardment Wing on a show-of-force mission to Kuwait set a world record circumnavigating Earth. The 47-hour flight took five aerial refuelings and delivered 54 bombs to a range near the Iraqi border on the fourth anniversary of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. (B-52 from the 2nd Bomb Wing below.)



29 July 1995 Air Combat Command activated the 11th Reconnaissance Squadron at Nellis AFB, Nevada. This was the first unit of unmanned aerial vehicles (Predators – photo at right), reflecting the Air Force's increasing reliance on unmanned aircraft in combat-support roles.

The Predator system was designed in response to a DoD requirement to provide persistent intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance information to the warfighter. In April 1996, the SECDEF selected the USAF as the operating service for the Predator system. The armed reconnaissance role was added in 2002.

