



U.S. AIR FORCE

## This Week in PACAF and USAF History 8-14 September 2008



12-15 September 1918 Brig. Gen. William “Billy” Mitchell commanded Allied air forces during the **first major American offensive of World War I at Saint-Mihiel, France**. This air force supported a plan by General Pershing to remove a dent in Allied lines (see map), capture fortresses to the east, and then invade Germany.

Pershing knew control of the air was necessary, and he gave the job to an airman, Brig. Gen. Billy Mitchell, rather than more senior Army commanders with no aviation experience. Mitchell planned an air campaign that set many precedents for air doctrine and operations. He commanded 1,481 aircraft—at the time the largest air force ever assembled for a single battle. This force consisted of 366 observation airplanes, 323 day bombers, 91 night bombers, and 701 pursuit aircraft. (See photo of bombers below.)

At this time in the history of air warfare, aerial observation and artillery spotting were the first priorities of air units because those missions were crucial for army operations (and aircraft were not sufficiently developed to be decisive as an independent force). So aircraft photographed the front daily to check artillery locations, trench conditions, and other indicators. Long-range sorties were flown deep behind enemy lines to photograph and observe road and rail traffic, check the activity at ammunition dumps, and establish targets for both day and night bombardment. Guiding and observing the effects of artillery fire was hazardous duty for the aircrews because enemy pursuit aircraft could respond and attack. There was also the unseen but ever-present danger of being hit by an artillery shell in flight. Protecting the observation aircraft was also important and took precedence over bombing and strafing.



Despite poor weather, Mitchell’s air forces made a critical contribution to the successful attack on the Saint-Mihiel salient. Pershing’s First Army captured 15,000 enemy troops and more than 250 heavy guns at the cost of 7,000 casualties, and they liberated 200 square miles of French territory. The U.S. attack only faltered when the infantry outran their slow-moving artillery support and food supplies on the muddy roads eastward.

Mitchell’s plans were very detailed. To keep battle preparations secret, the initial air mission was to deny enemy reconnaissance of areas behind the lines at St. Mihiel while airfields and depots were prepared. An extensive radio warning network was set up to report on all air activity. An early form of combat air patrol kept pursuit aircraft airborne over Allied airbases to intercept any enemy observation aircraft.



U.S. AIR FORCE

## This Week in PACAF and USAF History 8-14 September 2008



14 September 1939 Igor Sikorsky made the **first successful helicopter flight**. The first flight was made while his VS-300 prototype was tethered to the ground.

10 September 1942 The Secretary of War formed the **Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS)**. In October, female pilots began ferrying aircraft from production sites to airfields in the U.S. In 1943, all women pilots flying for the Army Air Force were consolidated into another new organization — the Women's Airforce Service Pilots. By the end of the war, WASPs had flown all types of military aircraft, including AT-6, AT-10, AT-11, and BT-13 trainers; C-47, C-54, and C-60 transports; A-25 and A-26 attack aircraft; B-24, B-25, TB-26, and B-29 bombers; P-38, P-40, P-47, and P-51 fighters.



13 September 1943 The 52d Troop Carrier Wing used more than 80 troop transports to drop more than 1,200 paratroopers on the Salerno beachhead in Italy, without losing a single man or airplane, in one of the most successful Allied airborne operations of the war.



14 September 1951 Capt. John S. Walmsley, Jr., USAF (at left), lost his life illuminating an enemy supply train while piloting a searchlight-equipped B-26 Invader in Korea. After stopping the train with bombs, Captain Walmsley repeatedly passed over it to guide other aircraft to the target. His actions earned him the **Medal of Honor**.

8 September 1955 President Eisenhower gave the **ICBM development program** the highest national priority.

9 September 1967 Sgt. Duane D. Hackney (photo at right), a pararescue-man in the Vietnam conflict, received the **Air Force Cross** for bravery, thereby becoming the first living enlisted man to receive the award. For putting his own parachute on the rescued pilot after their helicopter was hit by enemy fire, Hackney received the award, second only to the Medal of Honor. Hackney was the youngest person and the fourth enlisted member to receive the medal. During the Vietnam conflict, his helicopter was shot down five times, and he earned four Distinguished Flying Crosses and 18 Air Medals for single acts of heroism. Hackney continued his distinguished Air Force career until his retirement in 1991 as a chief master sergeant. Hackney was **the most decorated airman in Air Force history**. In 1993, he died of a heart attack in his Pennsylvania home. He was 46 years old.





U.S. AIR FORCE

## This Week in PACAF and USAF History 8-14 September 2008



9 September 1972 Capt. Charles B. DeBellevue (at right), flying as weapon system officer in the backseat of an F-4, earned his fifth and sixth aerial victories, becoming the **leading ace of the Vietnam War and the first non-pilot ace in the United States Air Force**. For this feat, DeBellevue shared the 1972 Mackay Trophy with Captains Richard S. “Steve” Ritchie and Jeffrey S. Feinstein, the other two Air Force aces of the Vietnam War. DeBellevue was also awarded the Air Force Cross for his actions in Southeast Asia and he retired in January 1998 after 30 years of service.



10 September 1974 The last Minuteman I intercontinental ballistic missile was replaced by a Minuteman III. This action completed a modernization program to replace Minuteman I after 11 years of service in SAC.



13 September 1985 The **first antisatellite intercept** test took place when a weapon launched from an F-15 successfully destroyed a satellite orbiting at a speed of 17,500 miles per hour approximately 290 miles above Earth. Major Wilbert D. “Doug” Pearson, Jr., zoom-climbed his F-15 to 80,000 feet and then launched the ASAT. Both the first and second stages fired successfully, and the miniature kinetic kill vehicle separated and homed in on the satellite, destroying it upon impact. See photo at left of ASAT launch from the F-15.

8 September 1990 Marcelite Jordan Harris became the first black woman to hold the grade of brigadier general in the Air Force.

12 September – 18 October 1992 Following **Typhoon Iniki**, which devastated Kauai in the Hawaiian archipelago, Air Mobility Command, Pacific Air Forces, Air Force Reserve, and Air National Guard aircraft and crews airlifted 6,888 tons of relief equipment and supplies to Hawaii. The operation also airlifted more than 12,000 passengers, including evacuees as well as military and civilian relief workers.



**U.S. AIR FORCE**

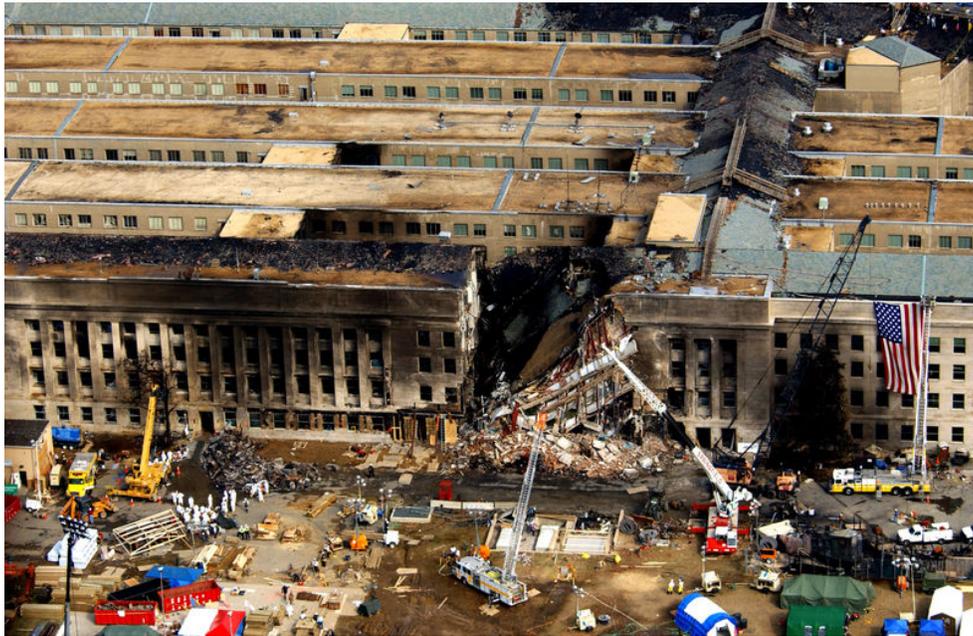
## **This Week in PACAF and USAF History** **8-14 September 2008**



14-30 September 1995 The Air Force airlifted more than 30 tons of medical supplies from Charleston Air Force Base, South Carolina, to Hanoi, Vietnam, marking the first USAF humanitarian-airlift mission to Vietnam since 1975.

11 September 2001 **Terrorists hijacked four commercial passenger aircraft** with the goal of destroying heavily-populated and highly symbolic targets in the United States. Two planes crashed into the twin towers of World Trade Center in New York City. Both towers collapsed within two hours. The third plane crashed into the Pentagon (see photo, below). Passengers and members of the flight crew on the fourth aircraft attempted to retake control of their plane from the hijackers; that plane crashed into a field near the town of Shanksville in rural Pennsylvania. Excluding the 19 hijackers, a confirmed 2,973 people died and another 24 remain listed as missing as a result of these attacks.

As part of America's response, the Global War on Terror began. The Federal Aviation Administration grounded all airliners in the United States for several days. President George W. Bush announced a war on terrorism and initiated homeland-defense efforts, including **Operation NOBLE EAGLE**, which involved combat air patrols within the United States and Guam.



14 September 2006 The CSAF, Gen T. Michael Moseley, selected the name "Reaper" for the new **MQ-9 hunter-killer UAV**. The larger, more powerful version of the MQ-1 Predator was designed to go after time-sensitive targets with 500-pound bombs and Hellfire missiles. (AFNEWS Article, "Reaper Moniker Given to MQ-9 unmanned Aerial Vehicle," 14 Sep 2006)