



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 27 October – 2 November 2008



1 November 1915 Capt. Raynal Cawthorne Bolling organized and took command of the Aviation Detachment, 1st Battalion, Signal Corps New York National Guard, recognized as the **first genuine National Guard aviation unit**. Later renamed the First Aero Company, unit got little support from the War Department and had to rent and then purchase its own aircraft with donated funds in order to train. Captain Bolling had great difficulty obtaining funds for spare parts and recruiting expert mechanics. Instead, his unit had to rely entirely on paid civilians to maintain its aircraft. The unit was called into federal service in July, 1916 during the border crisis with Mexico, but it never left New York and was released from federal service in November. These experiences convinced Bolling that military aviation could only be developed under the auspices of the regular Army. Because of his recommendations, the War Department decided not to mobilize Guard air units during World War I. Instead, individual Guard volunteers provided a major pool of Army aviators, even though they had to leave the Guard and enter the Signal Corps Reserve if they wanted to fly in the war.



Bolling (left) was a Harvard graduate, famed corporate lawyer, wrote a Bill for Congress for aircraft manufacturing, and even led a commission to Europe to evaluate aircraft production. He gave all this up to serve on the front lines of World War I as an Air Service officer, and he was the first high-ranking U.S. officer to be killed in combat in World War I. While scouting locations for his Air Service aircraft during the second Somme offensive, Colonel Bolling and his driver were ambushed by German troops near the front lines. Colonel Bolling pulled his pistol and shot a German officer before being struck down by the enemy fire.

Bolling Air Force Base is named in his honor.

27 October 1919 A board led by the director of the Air Service, Maj. Gen. Charles T. Menoher (right), released a report that **rejected Congressional proposals for an independent air force**. The Army had appointed Menoher, commander on the Rainbow Division in World War I, as chief of the Air Service over World War I aviation commanders Billy Mitchell and Benjamin Foulois. Mitchell then began campaigning for an air force in the forum of public opinion, while Foulois lobbied Congress. Menoher asked the War Department to silence Mitchell, but that did not happen. Menoher resigned in October, 1921 and was replaced by Maj. Gen. Mason Patrick.



30 October 1919 Personnel at Dayton, Ohio tested a **reversible-pitch propeller** that allowed an aircraft to slow down and stop more rapidly when landing on short runways.

1 November 1920 A Field Officers School opened at Langley Field, Virginia, under Major Thomas DeWitt Milling. Later known as the Air Service Tactical School and, later still, the **Air Corps Tactical School**, it taught students the tactical employment of aviation and became the most important source of Army air doctrine between the world wars.



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1 November 1940 The Air Corps activated the **Hawaiian Air Force**, later redesignated Seventh Air Force, at Fort Shafter under the Army's Hawaiian Department. Its mission was air defense of the Hawaiian Islands. At the time of the 7 December 1941 attack, it was equipped with two pursuit groups at Wheeler Field (P-36s and P-40s), two bombardment groups at Hickam Field (B-17s and B-18s), and some additional transports, observation planes and A-20 light bombers.

27 Oct 1941 **Administrative reorganization of the Hawaiian Air Force** separated combat and service functions for the first time. After this, wing commanders controlled their tactical units, while separately-designated base commanders managed all non-tactical units. Later, a single Air Force Base Command was put in charge of all air bases engaged in servicing combat units.

28 October 1941 The **Philippine Department Air Force** (predecessor to the Fifth Air Force) at Nichols Field, Philippines Islands was redesignated as the **Far East Air Force**. At the time of the 7 December 1941 attack, it was equipped with one pursuit group (mostly P-40s), one heavy bombardment group (B-17s) and a few observation planes. Operational strength Far East Air Force consisted of 81 P-40s and 35 B-17s.

2 Nov 1943 The **Fifth Air Force attacked Japanese shipping and installations at Rabaul** to protect the U.S. invasion of Bougainville.

Three B-25 Groups and an escort of 70 P-38s sank three Japanese destroyers, eight merchant ships, and destroyed 80 enemy aircraft. During this action, Major Raymond Wilkins won a posthumous **Medal of Honor**. Major Wilkins led his B-25 squadron in the attack on 2 November and put his own airplane in the position of greatest risk. Smoke forced the squadron to alter their approach through concentrated fire, increasing the danger of Major Wilkins' position. His airplane was hit almost immediately, and though he could have



withdrawn, he held fast, strafed some small harbor vessels and then put a 1,000 pound bomb squarely amidships of an enemy destroyer, causing the vessel to explode. Although his aircraft was seriously damaged, he stayed on course and scored a direct hit on a Japanese transport which engulfed the ship in flames. Bombs expended, he began to withdraw his squadron when he saw a heavy cruiser barring their path. Wilkins went in for a strafing run to neutralize the cruiser's guns and attract its fire, and his aircraft suffered more damage. To avoid swerving into his wing planes he had to turn so as to expose the belly and full wing surfaces of his plane to enemy fire, which brought him down. (Photo above shows B-25s attacking Japanese shipping at Rabaul.)



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27 October 1944 The **first US Army aircraft to be stationed in the Philippines since 1942** landed on the Tacloban airstrip. The 34 P-38s of the 9th Fighter Squadron refueled at once and before days end shot down four enemy aircraft.

Between 27 October and 31 December, the Japanese flew almost 1,050 sorties over Leyte. Pilots from the **5th Fighter Command shot down 314 confirmed aircraft** and received credit for 45 probables, yet suffered only 16 losses. On 29 October, the 49th FG scored its 500th victory.

1-2 Nov 1952 The 3rd Bombardment Wing flew its 20,000th night sortie of the Korean War.



27 October 1954 Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., became the **first black general officer** in the Air Force (photo at left).

Benjamin O. Davis was born in December 1912 in Washington, D.C., the son of an Army officer who later became the Army's first African-American brigadier general. Davis was the first African-American to graduate from West Point in the 20th century (Class of 1935). Because he was black, he was officially "silenced" by all cadets--no one spoke to him for four years except on official business; he roomed alone and he had no friends. After graduation, Davis served in the infantry and taught military science at Tuskegee until May 1941 when he transferred to the Air Corps. He earned his wings in March 1942. Davis advanced rapidly and assumed command of the 332d Fighter Group, the "Tuskegee Airmen"—the first fighter group that included black pilots. During World War II he and his men flew P-40s and P-51s in combat. Davis himself earned the Silver Star.

After military segregation ended in 1948, Davis attended Air War College, served in the Pentagon, and commanded the fighter wing at Suwon during the Korean War. After that, Davis was assigned as Vice Commander of 13th Air Force and Commander of Air Task Force 13 (Provisional) at Taipei, Taiwan. In two years Davis built a formidable defensive air force from scratch to deter Communist China from launching an air or sea attack on Taiwan. More assignments followed, including command of 13th Air Force during the Vietnam War. Davis retired from the service as a Lieutenant General on Feb. 1, 1970, and was advanced to General on Dec. 9, 1998 by President Bill Clinton. General Davis died July 4, 2002 in Washington D.C.



27 October 1955 The Glenn L. Martin Aircraft Company received an USAF research and development contract for the Titan ICBM.

31 October 1959 The first nuclear-equipped Atlas went on alert at Vandenberg AFB.



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27 Oct 1962 **Cuban Missile Crisis/First Air Force Cross.** Major Rudolf Anderson, Jr., flying a U-2 reconnaissance mission over Cuba, was shot down by an SA-2. Anderson died when shrapnel decompressed his pressure suit at high altitude. He received the first Air Force Cross posthumously by direction of President John F. Kennedy. (By regulation, the Bronze Star was then the highest combat decoration that could be made for Cold War action.)

The various options facing the United States during the Cuban Missile Crisis all required indisputable proof of the Soviet missiles in Cuba to our allies in NATO and the Americas. The photographs provided by Major Anderson and other Air Force pilots “rallied worldwide support behind the U.S. refusal to allow Soviet nuclear-armed missiles in the western hemisphere. Without that support, the Cuban Missile Crisis might have had a different, perhaps catastrophic, outcome for the world.” (*Air Force Magazine*, Dec 1995.)



On this same day, Strategic Air Command placed the first ten Minuteman I intercontinental ballistic missiles on alert in hardened silos at Malmstrom AFB, Montana.

The next day, Soviet Premier Khrushchev agreed to recall Russian ships enroute to Cuba and withdraw the missiles if the United States agreed not to invade the island.

2-14 November 1962 **Operation LONG SKIP.** India asked the U.S. for help after Communist Chinese forces invaded. MATS dispatched 48 C-135 missions to deliver over 1000 tons of equipment, small arms, and ammunition. The Chinese later withdrew.

29 October 1963 General Curtis LeMay, CSAF, congratulated the 18 TFW at Kadena AB for its **record conversion from F-100 to F-105 aircraft under combat conditions** and for passing the subsequent operational readiness inspection.

1 November 1964 During early morning darkness, the **Viet Cong attacked Bien Hoa Air Base** with mortars. Four American died and 30 were wounded. The attack also destroyed seven and damaged 18 USAF and South Vietnamese aircraft. The Joint Chiefs of Staff and Ambassador Maxwell Taylor called for retaliatory bombing against North Vietnam. President Lyndon Johnson, however, concerned that the presidential election was only two days away, did nothing except to order the replacement of the destroyed and damaged aircraft. On this date four years later, Johnson announced a complete halt to the bombing of North Vietnam.

29 Oct 1965 **Project Long Shot**, the first underground nuclear explosion in Alaska, was the third in a series of underground tests aimed at providing a means for detecting and locating secret underground nuclear tests. The Defense Advanced Research Agency detonated an 80-kiloton nuclear device 2,300 feet below the surface of Amchitka Island, selected because of its remote location and the fact that it was in an earthquake prone area. One of the desired results of the test was the differentiation of an underground nuclear explosion from an earthquake.



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31 October 1965 **SAC accepted its first 10 Minuteman II missiles**, assigning them to Grand Forks AFB, North Dakota. The Minuteman II was larger and more advanced than the Minuteman I, but it could be fired from the same silos.

1 November 1970 The 336 TFS began the **first USAF tests of new bare base mobility equipment** in a field exercise at North Field, S.C. The exercise demonstrated the unit's ability to deploy and operate from a bare base site using specially designed air transportable, expendable shelters and work facilities. The buildings included dormitories, workshops, hangars, control tower, medical facilities, and water systems.

28 October – 18 December 1995 In an operation called **VIGILANT SENTINEL**, the Air Force first tested the **air expeditionary force concept**, deploying F-16 Fighting Falcons of the 20th Fighter Wing and the 347th Wing to Bahrain.

27 October 2006 The USAF rolled out the 747-400F **Airborne Laser aircraft** in a ceremony at Boeing's Integrated Defense Systems facility in Wichita. The ABL objective is to use a high-energy, chemical oxygen iodine laser (COIL) mounted on a modified 747-400F to intercept theater ballistic missiles in their boost phase.

