This Week in USAF and PACAF History
5 – 11 January 2009

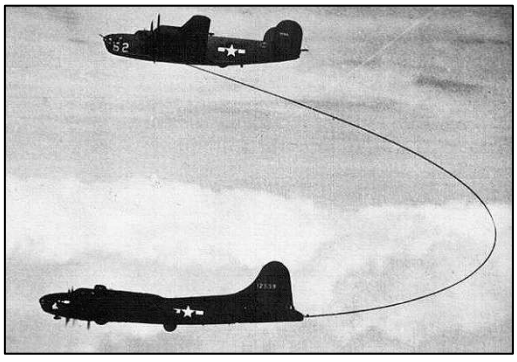
9 Jan 1793 Jean Pierre Blanchard made the **first manned balloon flight in America** with a 46-minute trip from the Wall Street Prison in Philadelphia, Pa., to Debtford Township, N.J. He carried landing clearance orders signed by President George Washington and a small black dog as a passenger.

5 Jan 1916 The 1st Company, 2nd Aero Squadron, sailed from San Francisco, California for the Philippines. It was the **first Aero unit to serve outside the US**.

9 Jan 1917 **New Aero Squadron Commanders**. Capt Henry H. Arnold was ordered from Aviation School duty at San Diego to Panama to organize and command the 7th Aero Squadron. Capt John F. Curry was ordered to Fort Kamehameha, Hawaii, to command the 6th Aero Squadron.

7 Jan 1931 **The MacArthur-Pratt Agreement**. General Douglas MacArthur (CSA, at left) and Admiral William Pratt (CNO, at right) agreed that: "The Naval Air Force will be based on the fleet and move with it as an important element in solving the primary missions confronting the fleet. The Army Air Forces will be land-based and employed as an essential element to the Army in the performance of its mission to defend the coasts at home and in our overseas possessions, thus assuring the fleet absolute freedom of action without any responsibility for coast defense." Admiral Pratt believed that the Navy should have maximum mobility and striking power, without being tethered to a static coastal defense role. While in effect, this agreement recognized the Army's primary responsibility for coastal defense. Two years later, MacArthur defined the Army Air Corps mission "to conduct the land-based air operations in defense of the United States and its overseas possessions."

10 Jan 1942 The Army Air Forces Materiel Center started investigating **ways to use aerial refueling in the war against faraway Japan.** Planners wanted to launch B-17 bombers from Midway Island to attack Tokyo, refueling them with modified B-24 bombers (see photo at right of an inflight test of this tactic). They also considered using B-24s launched from Hawaii, with refueling by US Navy seaplanes. A third option involved fuel-filled gliders, towed by B-17s, which would serve as tankers for the bombers. However, the Army Air Forces put greater efforts into establishing air bases in China and on islands in the Pacific, and developing aircraft with large internal fuel capacity, such as the B-29 Superfortress. No air refueling proposals were implemented until after World War II.



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7 Jan 1966 The 4200 SRW at Beale AFB received the **first operational SR-71 Blackbird strategic reconnaissance aircraft**. Strategic Air Command had SR-71 Blackbirds in service from 1966 through 1991. Of the 32 SR-71 aircraft in the inventory, 12 were destroyed in accidents, though none was lost to enemy action. SR-71s first arrived at the 9th SRW's Operating Location at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa on 8 March, 1968. On 21 March 1968, Major (later General) Jerome F. O'Malley and Major Edward D. Payne flew the first operational SR-71 sortie from Kadena. From 1968 until 1972, the Blackbird's sortie rate in reconnaissance missions over enemy territory (North Vietnam, Laos, etc.) gradually increased from one sortie a week to nearly one sortie every day. While deployed in Okinawa, the SR-71s and their aircrew members gained the nickname ***Habu*** after a dangerously venomous pit viper, which the Okinawans thought the plane resembled.

9 Jan 1973 SAF Robert C. Seamans, Jr., picked **Fairchild's A-10** and the General Electric TF-34 engine as the **winners of the A-X competition**.

10 Jan 1975 **The first E-3A Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS)** aircraft rolled out. The premier command and control battle-management aircraft in the world, the E-3's jam-resistant radar and IFF systems provide a highly detailed picture of the battlespace to engage enemy air and surface forces.

9 Jan 1976 The first operational F-15 Eagle arrived at the 1st Tactical Fighter Wing, Langley Air Force Base, VA. The F-15 was the **first fighter to have a thrust greater than its weight**, allowing it to accelerate while going straight up.

6 Jan 1977 The DoD placed the **Air Launched Cruise Missile (ALCM)** program into full-scale development and set up a joint cruise missile project office. Four years later, on 11 Jan 1981, the Boeing Company delivered the **first USAF air-launched cruise missiles** to the 416th Bombardment Wing at Griffiss Air Force Base, New York. Capable of delivering a nuclear weapon to a target 1,500 miles away, the new missiles contained a terrain-contour-matching system that allowed extremely low-altitude flight to avoid detection by enemy radar.

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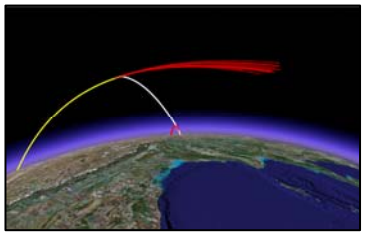
8 Jan 1977 The **first YC–141B (stretched C–141 Starlifter) rolled out** of the Lockheed-Georgia Marietta plant. Equipped with in-flight refueling capability, it was 23.3 feet longer than the original C–141A, enabling it to carry more troops and cargo.

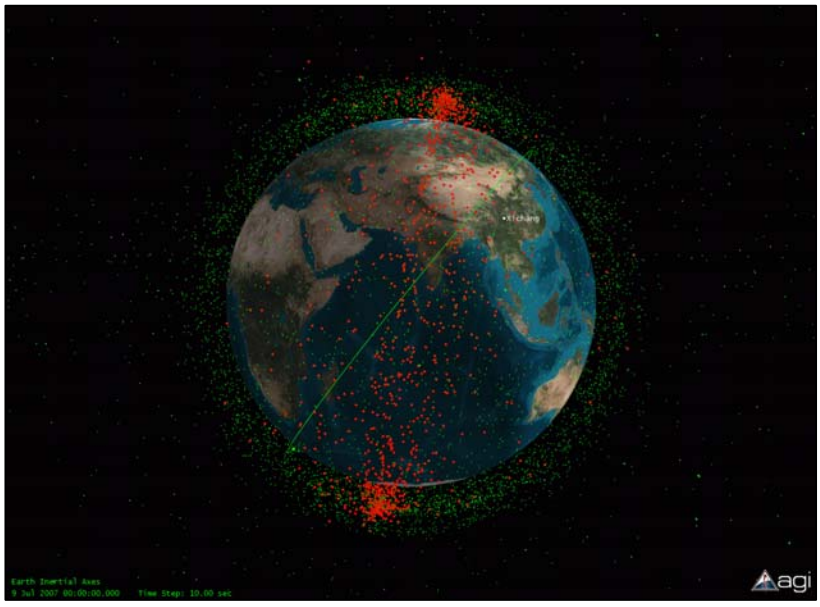
6 Jan 1979 The 388th Tactical Fighter Wing at Hill Air Force Base, Utah, received the **first General Dynamics F–16 delivered to the Air Force**. The F–16, the newest multirole fighter, could perform strike as well as air-superiority missions.

8 Jan 1986 Military Airlift Command accepted delivery of its **first C–5B Galaxy**, an improved version of the C–5A, at Altus Air Force Base, Oklahoma. The C-5B had stronger, redesigned wings, improved avionics, upgraded turbofan engines and more than 100 additional system modifications to improve reliability and maintainability.

9 Jan 1996 After three-and-a-half years, Operation PROVIDE PROMISE officially ended. During this international operation—**the longest sustained humanitarian airlift in history**—the U.S. Air Force flew more than 4,500 sorties to deliver 62,802 metric tons of cargo to Sarajevo and other parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina.



10 Jan 2007 **China's first successful test of an anti-satellite weapon** consisted of a direct-ascent kinetic-kill vehicle destroying an aging Chinese weather satellite. It was the first known successful satellite intercept test since 1985, when the United States conducted a similar test.



The PRC ASAT test was the worst space debris-generating event on record, generating at least 2,087 pieces of debris large enough to be tracked. It far surpassed the previous record of 713 pieces from the 1996 explosion of a Pegasus rocket body.

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