



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 16 – 22 February 2009



17 Feb 1913 The Army first tested an **automatic pilot** device called a **gyrostabilizer** by its inventor, Lawrence Sperry (left), the son of the famed gyrocompass inventor Elmer Sperry. A gyroscope is a weighted, balanced wheel mounted in bearings and spinning at high velocity through a connection to a motor. The gyroscope holds its position, no matter at what angle it is held. Sperry's automatic pilot used gyroscopes to stabilize an airplane's controls. When they sensed movement, the gyros activated compressed air, which acted on pistons to activate the aircraft controls.

In 1914, Lawrence Sperry's device won an award of 50,000 francs from the French when he demonstrated the device in a flight over Paris. On the first pass, he took his hands off the controls and held them visible to the crowd below. On the second pass, he held his hands out while a mechanic walked out on the plane's wing. On the third pass, both Lawrence Sperry and the mechanic were out on the wings with an empty cockpit.

18 Feb 1918 The "**Lafayette Escadrille**" transferred to American forces as the 103rd Pursuit Squadron and began operations on the front under tactical control of the French. The "**Lafayette Escadrille**" was a unit in the French military comprised of American volunteers who joined the fight before the United States entered World War I. (See photo at right.)



On this same date, the first proper US fighter unit (95th Aero Squadron) arrived in France.

21 Feb 1924 **Carl B. Eielson** flew the first airmail from Fairbanks to McGrath, Alaska.

20 Feb 1934 The Army Air Corps was designated to take over all **U.S airmail operations** and made its first airmail flight. President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 6591 on 9 February canceling existing airmail contracts because of fraud and collusion. The Air Corps continued to operate airmail services until July 1934. (See photo of B-7 at left; four were lost with their pilots during the 1934 Airmail Emergency).



18 Feb 1938 **Jacqueline "Jackie" Cochran** received the General William Mitchell Memorial Plaque for her achievements in aeronautics, based on her speed records. In 1937, Cochran set a national air speed record from New York to Miami in 4 hours, 12 minutes, 27 seconds, and she achieved a new women's national speed record at 204 miles per hour.



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20 Feb 1944 **BIG WEEK.** Through 25 February, Eighth and Fifteenth Air Forces began Big Week air raids on German aircraft production. The planners intended to lure the Luftwaffe into



decisive battle, achieve air superiority and then proceed with the invasion of Europe. Although damage to the German aircraft industry was only moderate, the newly arrived P-51 escorts decimated the pilot ranks of the heavy, twin-engined German fighters. These fighter escorts lowered US bomber losses from 30 to six percent and won air superiority over Europe for the rest of the war.

16 Feb 1945 **Army Air Forces C-47s dropped 2,065 paratroopers** on the Japanese-held island of Corregidor in Manila Bay in conjunction with a U.S. amphibious landing on the island. The goal was to secure the harbor of Manila, the most important city in the Philippines.

16 Feb 1958 **North Korean agents hijacked a South Korean DC-3 airliner.** As the Korean National Airlines plane neared Seoul, armed hijackers forced the American civilian pilot, Willis Hobbs, to fly to Pyongyang, North Korea. With Hobbs were his copilot, USAF Lt. Col. Howard McClellan (logging flying hours with Air Force permission) and 32 passengers. The hijacked aircraft was not intercepted on either side of the DMZ. North Korea demanded that South Korea enter into direct negotiations for the missing DC-3 (and thus officially recognize North Korea—something the South had always refused to do). Hobbs, McClellan and 26 passengers were released in early March. The six remaining passengers were assumed to be North Korean agents.

Willis Hobbs was also a Civil Air Transport (CAT) pilot. He flew six C-119 missions to resupply French forces at the 1954 siege of Dien Bien Phu in North Vietnam.

17 Feb 1962 Formal dedication of **new Hawaii Air National Guard facilities** at Hickam included participation by the Governor, State Adjutants of the Army and Air Force National Guards, and the Hickam Base Commander. A fly-by of HIANG F-102 jets closed the morning ceremony, and an open house in the afternoon was attended by an estimated 10,000 people. (see HIANG F-102s over Hickam facilities, circa 1960s, at right).





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18 Feb 1965 **USAF jets soloed for the first time** without Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) crewmembers **in an attack against enemy targets** in South Vietnam. The USAF flew Martin B-57 Canberras and North American F-100 Super Sabres against the Viet Cong near An Khe.

22 Feb 1967 **First paratroop drop of the Vietnam War.** Over 700 US paratroopers of the 173d Airborne Brigade were dropped by PACAF C-130s into War Zone C, South Vietnam, in **Operation JUNCTION CITY**. The personnel drops were followed by heavy drops of equipment and supplies.

16 Feb 1968 Since 1964, **Itazuke Air Base** had been in dispersed operating base (DOB) status, with no active flying units. On 16 February, the base was **brought back to life** with the arrival of the RF-4Cs of the 15 TRS and the EB-66s of the 16 TEWS, which had been in Korea as part of Combat Fox. The move to Itazuke was to ease crowded conditions at Osan Air Base. The resumption of flying operations from the base was not viewed with enthusiasm by the local Japanese. (See photo, "Itazuke Ramp, 1969," below).



18 Feb 1972 **PACAF assigned its first C-9A aeromedical aircraft** to the 20th Operations Squadron at Clark AB. The C-9s replaced the C-118s.

20 Feb 1972 Lt. Col. Edgar Allison set a recognized class record for great circle distance without landing (turboprop aircraft) of 8,732.09 miles, flying from Ching Chuan Kang AB, Taiwan, to Scott AFB, Illinois, in a Lockheed HC-130. The record still stands.

22 Feb 1973 **CEASE FIRE IN LAOS.** After signing the cease-fire for South Vietnam on 27 January, the US redirected most of its air operations against North Vietnamese forces in Laos. Besides the 4,482 attack sorties flown by the Royal Lao Air Force, the USAF flew 50 B-52 Arc Light sorties and 4,000 tactical sorties in January. After the 22 February cease-fire, the Laotian government requested three B-52 strikes on 23 February to answer North Vietnamese violations. B-52s also flew 41 more sorties on 15, 16, and 17 April. These were the final B-52 strikes against targets in Laos.



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22 Feb 1978 The first test satellite in the Air Force's Navstar **Global Positioning System** was launched into Earth orbit.

17 Feb 1997 The **Air Force Reserve became a major command**—the Air Force Reserve Command—reflecting the growing integration of Reserve and regular forces and the increasing role of the Reserve in regular USAF operations.

Feb-Apr 2000 U.S. Air Force personnel and cargo aircraft participated in **Operations Atlas Response and Silent Promise**, airlifting humanitarian relief supplies to Mozambique and South Africa following severe flooding in those nations. (AF photo at right: USAF MC-130P reconnaissance of damaged roads in Central Mozambique, March 2000).



21 Feb 2001 An **RQ-1 Predator fired a Hellfire missile to hit a tank** at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, becoming the first unmanned aerial vehicle to destroy a ground target. Until then, the remotely controlled airplane had been used only for reconnaissance.

22-25 Feb 2002 **Senior leaders from the USAF and Indian AF** joined for a conference at PACAF — the first between the Air Forces since the U.S. lifted anti-nuclear sanctions against India in October 2001.

20 Feb 2003 The 65th Airlift Squadron marked the **initial operational capability of its new C-40B (#01-0015)** with a dedication ceremony. Aeronautical Systems Center, Boeing, and 15 AW personnel attended and toured the aircraft. The C-40 B/C transports U.S. leaders to locations around the world and performs other operational support missions. The C-40 B/C is based on the Boeing 737-700 but it has winglets. See photo at left.



21 Feb 2006 The **second C-17 Globemaster III arrived at Hickam**, with a celebration hosted by the Hawaii Air National Guard. Welcoming DVs included Major General Robert F. Lee, adjutant general of the Hawaii National Guard, and Major General Darryl Wong, Hawaii Air National Guard commander.