

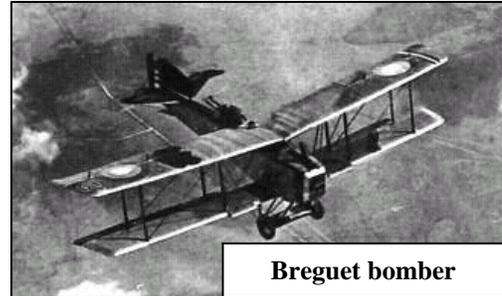


U.S. AIR FORCE

## This Week in USAF and PACAF History 2 – 8 February 2009



5 Feb 1918 Lt Stephen W. Thompson of Dayton, Ohio scored the **first official American aerial victory** (flying as an American and not as part of a foreign service). Since his American squadron had not yet started flying missions, Thompson visited a nearby French bombing squadron that day to observe preparations for a combat flight. A French observer became ill and Thompson was invited to replace him. Once inside German territory, Thompson's Breguet bomber was attacked. While defending it, Thompson shot down an Albatross fighter over Saarbrücken. Because of Thompson's unique status on this mission, he was not granted credit for his victory during the war. However, with the assistance of the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force, he was finally granted official recognition for the victory in 1967.



Breguet bomber

On July 28, 1918, while Thompson was an observer with the 12th Aero Squadron, German fighters attacked his Salmson airplane. He shot down two enemy planes before his own plane was shot down by the famous German ace Erich Lowenhardt. Thompson's pilot, Lt. John C. Miller, was able to land the Salmson inside friendly lines before he died of a bullet wound in the stomach. Thompson received a bullet in the leg and, because of the lack of immediate first aid in the front line area, he had to dig the bullet from his leg with a pocket knife.

6 Feb 1922 **Construction of Wheeler Field began** when a detachment of 20 men started to clear land south of Schofield Barracks. On Nov. 11 of that year, the resulting airfield was named in honor of Major Sheldon H. Wheeler, former commander of Luke Field on Ford Island. By the following summer, hangars and storage tanks were completed.



8 Feb 1938 **The first bombardment unit based at Hickam**, the 31st Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) arrived from Hamilton Field and was assigned to the 5th Composite Group. The 31st emblem (at left) was the distinctive skull and cross-bones proper on a black triangle. Four members of the 31BS were killed in action on 7 December 1941, nine members were wounded, and all of the squadron's B-18 Bolo bombers were either damaged or destroyed. Reequipped with B-17s, the squadron was assigned various maritime bombing and surveillance missions in the South Pacific. (See B-18 photo at right).



5 Feb 1942 **Redesignations.** The Hawaiian Air Force was redesignated as the 7th Air Force, the Far East Air Force (formerly the Philippine Dept. AF) was redesignated as the 5th Air Force, and the Alaskan Air Force was redesignated as the 11th Air Force.



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2 Feb 1944 **Operation FRANTIC.** Josef Stalin approved U.S. use of Soviet bases for “shuttle raids” against Germany. The operation allowed bombers based in Britain or the Mediterranean to attack German targets beyond the point of safe return and then recover in the Ukraine. The first of the missions, code-named “Frantic Joe,” took place four months later. The codename for the operation was changed to Frantic to avoid reference to the Soviet dictator. Few missions were actually flown due to the ease with which German forces could target U.S. bombers on the ground once they had landed in the USSR.

3 Feb 1944 Col Philip Cochran led five P-51s on the **first Air Commando attack** on Japanese forces in the Chinese-Burma-India theater. The 1st Air Commando Group, as it came to be known, was a self-contained composite force of fighters, cargo planes, light aircraft, and support personnel. With the motto "Anytime, Anywhere," the 1st ACG attacked the enemy from the air, resupplied British commandos on the ground, and airlifted injured soldiers out of battle.



The Air Commandos were prototypes for many modern USAF Special Operations concepts, including Combat Control Teams and Airborne Forward Air Controllers. In Vietnam, Air Commandos performed a variety of missions such as close air support, interdiction, civic affairs, psychological operations and defoliant operations. Five of the 12 Air Force Medals of Honor awarded during the Vietnam war went to Air Commando/Special Operations members.

8 Feb 1953 The American Medical Association recognized **Aviation Medicine as a medical specialty**, the first specialty to evolve from military practice and research.

7 Feb 1954 **The Lockheed F-104 Starfighter first flew.** In December, 1951, Lockheed Chief Engineer Kelly Johnson was told by some USAF fighter pilots in Korea that they thought the MiG-15 was superior to the larger and more complex F-86. The pilots wanted a small, simple aircraft capable of high speeds and climb rates. In response, Lockheed put a single powerful engine into the lightest, most aerodynamically efficient airframe possible. Nicknamed “the missile with a man in it,” the F-104 could exceed speeds of Mach 2 and altitudes of 90,000 feet. However, the Starfighter had a short range, poor turn radius, and limited payload capacity. Employed for a few years by SAC as an interceptor and TAC as a fighter bomber, F-104 production stopped in 1959 and it was withdrawn from front-line service in 1960.

The updated F-104G featured much improved avionics and better low-level strike capabilities, and it attracted customers in Europe and Asia as well as Canada. While only 296 Starfighters had been built for the USAF, an additional 2,282 upgraded F-104s were built for US allies and they served into the mid-1990s. (JASDEF F-104 at right.)





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6 February 1959 The Air Force successfully launched the **first Titan I intercontinental ballistic missile** at Cape Canaveral. With a range of 5,500 nautical miles, the two-stage liquid-fueled missile was to be deployed in underground silos and raised to the surface before launch.

3 Feb 1961 **Project LOOKING GLASS.** After six months of tests, SAC initiated continuous airborne command post operations. From this date, a Looking Glass aircraft (below, left) was in the air continuously for more than 29 years, logging more than 281,000 accident-free flying hours. The EC-135 Airborne Command Post planes and their equipment gave SAC an ability to launch manned bombers and ICBMs in the event of a nuclear attack. The nickname “Looking Glass” arose from the mission to mirror ground-based command, control, and communications.

On 2 Feb 1965, the USAF announced that Minuteman IIs could be launched by radio signal from the airborne command post. (Photo of aircraft interior below, right.)

On July 24, 1990, Looking Glass ceased continuous airborne alert, but it remained on ground or airborne alert 24 hours a day.



2 Feb 1962 **First USAF Loss in Vietnam/Operation RANCH HAND.** The first USAF aircraft loss in South Vietnam occurred when a C-123 crashed while spraying defoliant on a Viet Cong ambush site. The crew of three became the first Air Force fatalities in Vietnam.



8 Feb 1965 F-100 Super Sabres performed the **first retaliatory air strike in North Vietnam.** They flew cover for attacking South Vietnamese fighters, suppressing ground fire in the target area. (Photo at left.)

6 February 1967 **NORAD in the Mountain.** North American Aerospace Defense Command’s Space Defense Center moved into Cheyenne Mountain, Colorado, completing the movement of all units into the hardened, underground command and control facility.



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2 Feb 1974 The General Dynamics **YF-16 fighter prototype made its first official flight** at Edwards AFB; it attained 400 mph and 30,000 feet in altitude. Its *actual* first flight occurred accidentally during a high-speed taxi test on 20 January. While gathering speed, a roll-control oscillation caused a wingtip-mounted missile and then a stabilator to scrape the ground, and the aircraft began to veer off the runway. The test pilot, Phil Oestricher, decided to lift off to avoid wrecking the prototype, and he safely landed it six minutes later. The slight damage was quickly repaired and the official first flight occurred on time.



On 2 Feb 1983, F-16 pilot training began at Luke AFB.

3 Feb 1989 The **SECDEF implemented a new anti-drug mission** for the armed forces, including patrols by USAF fighters and airborne early warning systems over drug corridors from South and Central America.

6 Feb 1991 Capt. Robert R. Swain, Jr., of the 706th Tactical Fighter Sqdn, Air Force Reserve, scored the **first A-10 Thunderbolt II air-to-air kill** by shooting down an Iraqi helicopter.

7 Feb 1994 The **first Titan IV/Centaur rocket** boosted the **first Military Strategic and Tactical Relay (MILSTAR) satellite** into geostationary orbit. This system would provide the U.S. military secure, survivable communications through all levels of conflict.

3 Feb 1995 Lt. Col. Eileen Collins, USAF, became the **first woman pilot of a space shuttle**.

4 Feb 2002 An **unmanned aerial vehicle destroyed an enemy target** for the first time when a remotely controlled MQ-1B Predator fired a Hellfire missile to kill a group of senior al Qaeda members in southeastern Afghanistan.

8 Feb 2006 **The first of eight C-17 Globemaster IIIs arrived at Hickam**, greeted by a host of distinguished visitors and a cheering crowd in front of Base Operations. Hawaii Governor Linda Lingle christened the new C-17 the "Spirit of Hawaii - Ke Aloha." The aircraft are assigned to the 15<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing. The maintainers are a composite of active duty and Hawaii Air National Guard.

