



**U.S. AIR FORCE**

## **This Week in USAF and PACAF History** 16 - 22 March 2009



19 Mar 1910 Orville Wright opened the **first Wright Flying School** on a site at Montgomery, Alabama that later became **Maxwell Air Force Base**.

21 Mar 1912 Lt. Frank P. Lahm flew Signal Corps No. 7, a Wright Model B aircraft, at Fort William McKinley in the Philippines—the **first flight of an airplane at an overseas base**.

21 Mar 1916 The French air service authorized formation of the Escadrille Americaine, later known as the **Lafayette Escadrille**. Composed of pilots from the United States, many of whom later served in U.S. air units, this French unit trained Americans in aerial combat. The Escadrille is photographed at right with their lion cub mascots.



22 Mar 1941 The Air Corps announced the formation of its **first-ever black air combat unit**, the 99th Pursuit Squadron. The unit was to include 47 officers and 429 enlisted men; ground crews trained at Chanute Field, Illinois, while pilots trained at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.

19 Mar 1944 **Operation STRANGLE begins**. In the European theater of World War II, Allied progress north through Italy was blocked by a concentration of German defenses called the Gustav Line. To reach Rome, the Allies tried to go around these defenses with an amphibious landing at Anzio, but this attack was also blocked. The Mediterranean Allied Air Forces (MAAF) drafted a plan calling for thousands of aircraft to attack every enemy rail route and starve the German army of supplies. Operation STRANGLE differed from earlier air campaigns as the MAAF simultaneously targeted whole systems of bridges, yards, tunnels, and even open stretches of track (photo below). The Germans worked hard to repair the damage and tried using



trucks to keep supplies moving, but their transport system capacity was reduced from 80,000 to 4,000 tons per day delivered to the front. However, with a lack of Allied progress on the ground, the static battlefield permitted the Germans to maintain their forces in central Italy by strict rationing, foraging for food, and moving supplies and reinforcements after dark. When rested and refitted Allied armies assaulted the Gustav Line on May 12th, they

enjoyed the support of Allied air forces striking both the front and rear enemy areas. American and British ground forces finally breached the Gustav Line and forced the Germans to retreat. On the evening of June 4, 1944, American patrols entered Rome.

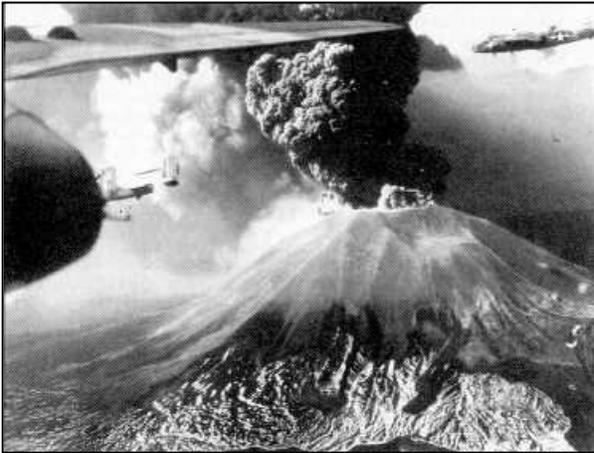


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20 Mar 1944 On the day after Operation STRANGLE began, **Mount Vesuvius erupted and buried the Pompeii airdrome**, the base of the 340th Bomb Group conducting operations against German forces. Lava cinders destroyed or damaged some 88 B-25s in one of the worst single losses of aircraft in the war.



18 Mar 1945 Approximately 1,250 U.S. bombers escorted by 670 fighters dropped 3,000 tons of bombs on Berlin's transportation and industrial areas. In numbers of bombers, this daylight mission was the **largest air attack of the war**.

21 Mar 1946 **Major Air Commands established.** Tactical Air Command was activated to provide air support to ground forces, Continental Air Forces was redesignated Strategic Air Command and given the atomic bombing mission, and Air Defense Command was established to provide air defense for the United States.

17 Mar 1947 The Army Air Forces' **first all-jet multi-engine bomber** – the North American XB-45, flew for the first time. Four Allison J35 engines powered the aircraft.

19 Mar 1947 The **Hawaii Air National Guard** received its first aircraft, a B-26C (#433). By the end of the fiscal year, nine more aircraft had been added to the inventory: two AT-6s, four B-26s, one C-46 and two L-5s. (Photo of a Hawaii ANG B-26 crew and aircraft at right.)





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23 Mar 1951 **Operation TOMAHAWK.** In the Korean War's second airborne operation and the largest to occur in one day, 120 USAF transports dropped more than 3,400 troops and 220 tons of materiel behind enemy lines at Munsan-ni, Korea. The operation attempted to catch the North Korean I Corps between the airborne troops and an armored attack across the front, but the enemy forces escaped northwards. Some believe the operation plan was leaked to the enemy.

18 Mar 1953 **Humanitarian rescue.** The 130-ton Japanese ship Ryosho Maru, with 38 crew members aboard, ran aground in heavy seas, coming to rest on rocks near the coast of Tori Shima, a small island west of Okinawa. An F-80 from Okinawa spotted the wreckage and contacted air rescue units at Kadena AB. Within an hour, an SA-16 flying boat from the 33d Air Rescue Sqdn dropped food, water, and first aid supplies to the shipwreck survivors on the island. A 33d ARS H-19 helicopter carried most victims from Tori Shima by hoist to the deck of a waiting Army ship, despite rough seas and high winds. When hydraulic problems grounded the first helicopter, a second H-19 evacuated the remaining survivors to Kadena. All together, 31 of 38 Ryosho Maru shipwreck victims were rescued.

24 Mar 1955 The **Seventh Air Force** established its headquarters at Wheeler AFB, Hawaii in the newly modified and rehabilitated Building 107.

17 Mar 1961 Northrop delivered the **first T-38 Talon jet trainer** to ATC at Randolph AFB. Since its introduction, it is estimated that some 50,000 military pilots have trained on this aircraft. The USAF remains one of the few armed forces using dedicated supersonic final trainers. Upgrades and modifications should extend the T-38 service life to 2020.





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21 Mar 1962 In a USAF test of the B-58's escape capsule, the **first survivor of a supersonic ejection** was punched out of his aircraft at 35,000 feet flying at 870 mph. He landed unharmed seven minutes and 49 seconds later. This survivor was a black bear named "Yogi." About two weeks later, Yogi was one-upped by another bear named Big John. The plane carrying Big John was flying at an altitude of 45,000 feet at more than 1,000 miles per hour when Big John punched out. Ten minutes later, he too landed safely. Both bears were sedated and slept through the ejections and descents.



23 Mar 1977 Tactical Air Command's **first E-3A Sentry aircraft** arrived at Tinker Air Force Base, Oklahoma. The Sentry, the Air Force's first airborne warning and control system aircraft, carried a large rotating radar disk above its fuselage.

17 Mar 1981 McDonnell Douglas Aircraft Company delivered the **first KC-10A Extender** tanker/cargo aircraft to Strategic Air Command. Substantially larger than the KC-135 tanker/cargo aircraft, the Extender not only could carry more fuel and cargo, but also could refuel more types of aircraft, including other KC-10s.

20 Mar 2006 The Air Force's **first operational CV-22 Osprey** was delivered to the 58th Special Operations Wing (58th SOW) at Kirtland AFB, New Mexico. The aircraft was flown from the test wing at Edwards AFB, Calif. to Kirtland by Lt. Gen. Michael W. Wooley, commander of Air Force Special Operations Command. This and subsequent aircraft became part of the 58th SOW's fleet of aircraft used for training CV-22 pilots and crewmembers.



The V-22 Osprey is a tiltrotor vertical/short takeoff and landing (VSTOL), multi-mission

air-craft developed to fill multi-Service combat operational requirements. The Air Force variant, the CV-22, will replace the MH-53J and MH-60G and augment the MC-130 fleet in the long-range insertion and extraction mission. The tiltrotor design combines the vertical flight capabilities of a helicopter with the speed and range of a turboprop airplane and permits aerial refueling and world-wide self deployment. The photo at left shows a CV-22 Osprey and an MH-53 Pave Low.