



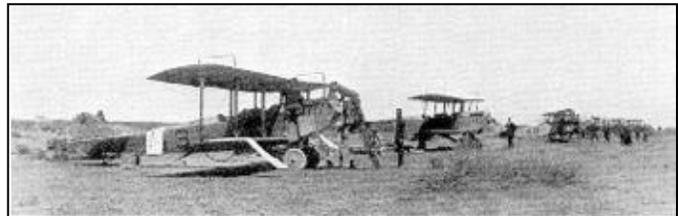
U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 9 - 15 March 2009



15 March 1916 The 1st Aero Squadron (AS) became the **first U.S. aviation unit to engage in field operations**. Equipped with eight Curtiss JN-3 aircraft (photo below), the 1st AS arrived at Columbus, New Mexico to join Brig. Gen. John J. Pershing's punitive expedition against Mexican revolutionary leader Pancho Villa. The following day, Capt Townsend F. Dodd, pilot, and Capt Benjamin D. Foulois, observer and unit commander, flew over Mexico in the first American military reconnaissance flight over foreign territory.

The 1st Aero Squadron enabled Pershing to locate and communicate with his widely dispersed, fast-moving columns and carried dispatches between Pershing's main and advanced bases. The squadron also scouted for hostile forces and threats to Pershing's lines of communications. These efforts were made in some of the worst weather and poorest conditions imaginable, and by the end of April all eight of the 1st AS airplanes had been destroyed.



11 March 1918 Lt. Paul Baer of the 103d Aero Squadron downed an enemy airplane and earned the **first Distinguished Service Cross awarded to a member of an Army air unit**. U.S. pilots with earlier aerial victories had served with the French.

10 March 1934 **Airmail suspension**. The Army Air Corps temporarily suspended domestic airmail deliveries because of nine crash fatalities. Lack of instruments in Army aircraft for night and bad-weather flying contributed to the accidents. After some reorganization, equipment overhauls, and reduction of routes and flights, Air Corps airmail flights resumed on March 19.



10 March 1943 **Composite wing**. The Army Air Forces activated Fourteenth Air Force at Kunming, China, under Maj. Gen. Claire L. Chennault, former commander of the American Volunteer Group, the "Flying Tigers." Fourteenth Air Force, which included a composite wing composed of U.S. and Chinese pilots, conducted tactical air operations against Japanese forces occupying China. (Photo at left.)



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 9 - 15 March 2009



9 March 1945 **Area bombing of Tokyo.** More than 300 B-29s dropped incendiary bombs that destroyed 16 square miles of Tokyo—about a fourth of the city. In terms of immediate loss of life (80,000-100,000), this air raid was the most destructive in history. The attack reflected a shift in U.S. bombardment policy from high-altitude daylight attacks on specific military targets to low-level area bombing at night in order to demoralize the Japanese. (Photo at left donated by *Corbis-Bettmann* to the Japan Society.)



12 March 1946 **Air University designated.** The Army Air Forces School at Maxwell Field was redesignated Air University, with jurisdiction over Air Command and Staff School, Air War College, and four bases.

15 March 1950 The JCS gave the USAF formal and exclusive **responsibility for strategic guided missiles** in a basic decision on the role and mission of guided missiles.

9 March 1959 **First PACAF F-102s.** The 16th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron at Naha AB, Okinawa, became the first squadron in PACAF to convert to Convair's F-102 Delta Dagger. The unit, previously equipped with F-86D Sabres, became operationally ready later in September.

10 March 1966 Major Bernard F. Fisher, a 1st Air Commando Squadron A-1E pilot, became the **first USAF Medal of Honor recipient in Vietnam.** Maj. Fisher (photo below) led an attack on enemy forces surrounding an outpost in the A Shau Valley at the extreme northwest of South Vietnam. Fisher observed the crash landing of fellow A-1E pilot Maj. D. Wayne Meyers, who landed on a battered landing strip under intense enemy fire. Fisher decided to attempt to rescue Myers himself. In an outstanding display of airmanship, he landed on the runway that was littered with oil barrels, rocket casings, and fragments of aircraft and was pocked by holes from mortar fire. As he passed the downed aircraft, he saw Myers jump up from the ditch and run toward him. Myers could not climb up on the wing because of prop wash, so Fisher throttled back, reached out to grasp Myers, and pulled him into the cockpit headfirst. Without taking time to buckle up, he once more turned his aircraft around, fire-walled the throttle, and took off, again avoiding the impediments on the runway. With 19 bullet holes in the aircraft, they cleared the mountains and made it safely to Pleiku. For his outstanding courage and airmanship, Maj Fisher received the Medal of Honor.





U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 9 - 15 March 2009



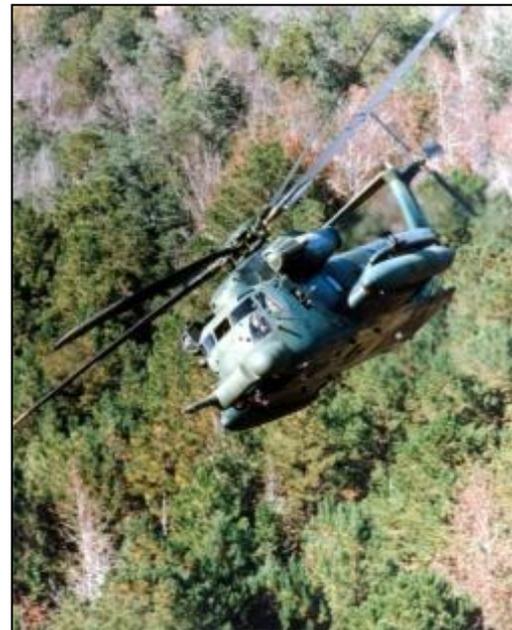
Lt. Col. Merlyn H. Dethlefsen

10 March 1967 Captain Merlyn Hans Dethlefsen earned the **Medal of Honor** during the first bombing mission against the Thai Nguyen industrial works in North Vietnam. The Thai Nguyen works was the only plant in Southeast Asia making bridge sections, barges, and POL drums. Maj. Dethlefsen was a pilot in a flight of F-105 aircraft engaged in a fire suppression mission designed to destroy the anti-aircraft artillery and surface-to-air missile sites protecting the targets. Maj Dethlefsen repeatedly attacked the SAM defenses even after his aircraft was severely damaged. To make sure the SAM site wouldn't come up the next day, he hosed the site with his 20mm cannon, headed for a tanker, and nursed his damaged F-105 back to Takhli, 500 miles away. He was the third of 12 airmen to be awarded the nation's highest decoration for valor during the Vietnam War.

10 March 1967 Capt Mac C. Brestel, an F-105 pilot with the 355th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB), Thailand, became the **first USAF pilot to down two MiGs in one mission in the Vietnam War.**

15 March 67 The **Sikorsky HH-53B**, the largest and fastest helicopter in the USAF inventory, made its **first flight** at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio.

The HH-53 was the first helicopter specifically designed for combat search and rescue (CSAR) operations, and it succeeded the HH-3 Jolly Green Giant as the primary CSAR asset in Vietnam. The "Super Jolly" was faster, more heavily armed, and had nearly triple the take-off weight of the HH-3. With almost double the shaft horsepower, it had better overall performance and hover capability, especially at altitude. For its CSAR role, the HH-53B was equipped with armor plating, self-sealing fuel tanks, three 7.62 miniguns and an external rescue hoist with 250 feet of cable and a 20,000-pound capacity. It could transport 38 combat-equipped troops – or 22 litter patients with four medical attendants – or 18,500 pounds of freight. The improved performance of rescue helicopters like the HH-53 made terrain an ally rather than a hindrance. Ridgelines, karst, and jungle canopy in Vietnam were used to minimize the effectiveness of enemy fire. (Photo above.)





U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History **9 - 15 March 2009**



15-20 March 1969 **Exercise FOCUS RETINA** deployed 2,500 assault troops and supporting equipment from the 82d Airborne Division to Korea in the largest tactical airlift attempted to date. Originating at Pope AFB, NC, the Army brigade staged through Okinawa and dropped into the Korean exercise area on 17 March. Hundreds of jets from four Fifth Air Force tactical fighter wings provided notional ground support for the paratroopers.

15 March 1970 **AUTOVON completed.** The overseas portion of the worldwide automatic voice network (AUTOVON) was completed, connecting all U.S. military installations by telephone. Originally a Cold War adaptation of an Army system, Autovon's purpose was to serve as a DoD common-user, long-distance telephone system that would survive enemy attack. This analog system was gradually replaced in the 1980s and 1990s by what is now the Defense Switched Network (DSN).

10 March 1977 The **first female navigator candidates** reported to Mather AFB for undergraduate navigator training.



15-28 March 83 **SAC's new sea interdiction capability** was successfully demonstrated with three AGM-84 Harpoon missile launches from a B-52 at the Pacific Missile Test Range on Kwajalein Atoll. The AGM-84 Harpoon is an all-weather, over-the-horizon, anti-ship missile system. Its low-level, sea-skimming cruise trajectory, active radar guidance and warhead design assure high survivability and effectiveness. The AGM-84D Harpoon was adapted for use on B-52H bombers, which can carry eight missiles externally on pylons. External carriage of AGM-84s allows the B-52 to additionally upload U.S. Navy sea mines internally in the bomb bay providing the theater commander a long-range, rapid response platform for sea control and area denial. Photo at left.

14 March 1988 E-Systems Inc. unveiled the new **MC-130H Combat Talon II** special operations airlifter. This aircraft is designed to infiltrate/exfiltrate troops and resupply them behind enemy lines. Its navigation and terrain-avoidance systems allow the aircraft to fly as low as 250 feet at night and in adverse weather and to locate unmarked zones with pinpoint accuracy. The tail was strengthened to allow high speed/low-signature airdrop. The aircraft is also equipped with aerial refueling pods to provide in-flight refueling of SOF and CSAR helicopters.

10 March 1995 **TBM warning.** The 11th Space Warning Squadron became the first unit with the ability to warn battlefield commanders of incoming theater ballistic missiles, such as the Scud missiles fired by Iraq in DESERT STORM.



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History **9 - 15 March 2009**



10 March 2006 The United States and Malaysia joined forces for **Cope Taufan '06**, a three-week air-to-air training exercise designed to sharpen air combat tactic skills and promote closer relations between allies. Cope Taufan (Taufan means “big storm” in Malaysian) is held bi-annually near the northwest coast of that country. Eight F-15 Eagles and more than 114 maintainers, munitions handlers and pilots from the 18th Wing participated in the exercise. The Malaysian AF flew MiG-29s in this exercise, providing USAF pilots with the “chance of a lifetime” opportunity to fly against “the real thing.” (see photo of MiG-29 involved in Cope Taufan, above).

