



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 20-26 April 2009



25-26 Apr 1944 **First AAF helicopter combat rescue.** Lt. Carter Harman of the 1st Air



Commando Group (standing at left in the photo), flying a Sikorsky YR-4 helicopter, rescued four men from the Burmese jungle in the first Army Air Forces combat rescue by helicopter.

In late April 1944, a 1st Air Commando light plane crash landed deep behind Japanese lines in Burma with three wounded British soldiers aboard. Lt. Harman flew his helicopter from his base in India on a circuitous 500 mile route to avoid the Japanese. He had to stop for fuel every 100 miles at landing zones torn out of the Burma jungles and controlled by friendly ground commandos. He then flew to a clearing

near the crash site to pick up the first wounded British soldier and took him to an emergency strip prepared by British commandos on a sand-bar 10 miles away. He went back and picked up the second wounded soldier, but an overheated engine forced him to remain at the sandbar overnight. He went back the next morning to get the third wounded soldier and then went back again and got the L-IB pilot.

25 Apr 1945 **HQ Far East Air Forces on the move.** On 25 April, FEAF Headquarters moved to Fort William McKinley, just outside Manila, the Philippines.

21 Apr 1948 **KEY WEST AGREEMENT.** The SECDEF issued a memo to his Secretaries with a paper defining the functions of the services and the JCS. It was the first delineation of functions drawn up after the National Security Act of 1947. The Air Force received primary responsibility for the air defense of America and the strategic nuclear bombing mission.

WHAT DID NOT HAPPEN: The Air Force did not get carrier-based aircraft, which were retained by the Navy for naval campaigns. Since aircraft that attack ships can also attack targets on land, the agreement did not prevent a significant Air Force-Navy airpower rivalry.

WHAT DID HAPPEN: Army and Marine Corps air capabilities were limited relative to the Air Force and the Navy. With little faith that other services would provide robust air support, the Army developed its own "air force" in the form of attack helicopters while the Marine Corps ultimately preserved its independent air wings. An effective, systematic concept for airpower unity of command was developed only after the Goldwater-Nichols DoD Reorganization Act of 1986 and the creation of the Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC) concept.

26 Apr 1949 Lt Gen George E. Stratemeyer became **Commanding General, Far East Air Forces**, Tokyo, taking over from Lt Gen Ennis G. Whitehead. Gen Stratemeyer remained commander until 9 June 1951. His book, "The Three Wars of Lt. Gen. George E. Stratemeyer: His Korean War Diary," is available at the Air Force Historical Studies Office.



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21 Apr 1953 **Operation LITTLE SWITCH** began. By May 15, the Air Force had airlifted more than 150 sick and wounded former prisoners of war from Korea to Japan and from Japan to the United States after North Korea released them in a prisoner exchange. On 28 April, thirty-five former POW's released by North Korea arrived at Hickam en route to the mainland. On 30 April, a second flight of released POW's arrived, followed in May by five more "Freedom Airlift" flights. On each occasion, the POW returnees were greeted by dignitaries, presented with leis, and entertained by hula dancers.



22 Apr 1953 **New fighter mission in Korea.** Because of shortages of fighter-bombers, Fifth Air Force assigned a new mission to the F-86 Sabres of the 4th and 51st FIWs – armed reconnaissance of enemy lines of communication. In the photo at left, a 1954 flight of F-86 Sabres from the 51st FIW is led by the wing commander, Colonel Benjamin O. Davis.

20 Apr 1965 Two years after the first Titan I unit went on alert, Strategic Air Command shipped its **last Atlas missile** to storage facilities to be used as a launch vehicle in various research and development programs. This completed the phase-out of the first generation of intercontinental ballistic missiles, all of which were liquid-fueled.

23 Apr 1965 The first operational **Lockheed C-141 Starlifter** aircraft was delivered to Travis Air Force Base, California. Capable of crossing any ocean nonstop at more than 500 miles per hour, the Starlifter could transport up to 70,000 pounds of payload, including 154 troops, 123 paratroopers, or a combination of troops and supplies.

In the spring of 1960 the Air Force, needing replacements for its slower piston-engined cargo planes, called for a new aircraft that would be capable of performing both strategic and tactical airlift missions. The Lockheed response was Model 300, the first large jet designed from the start to carry cargo. The aircraft had a high swept wing with four pod-mounted turbofan engines. The cabin floor's height only 50 inches above the ground allowed easy access through the rear doors. President John F. Kennedy's first official act after his inauguration was to order the development of the Lockheed Model 300, which became the C-141. (See photo of early C-141 aircraft above.)



26 Apr 1966 **The Navy leaves MAC.** Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara approved a joint recommendation by the secretaries of the Air Force and Navy to discontinue Navy participation in the Military Airlift Command.



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23-24 Apr 1980 **CLOUD CHORUS.** PACAF E-3A AWACS aircraft participated in this NATO exercise for the first time. The exercise was held at Ramstein AB, Germany.

24 Apr 1980 **Operation EAGLE CLAW.** In November of 1979, more than 3,000 Iranian militant students stormed the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, Iran, taking 66 Americans hostage. A rescue plan was developed that included the use of Air Force C-130s and Navy RH-53 helicopters to insert and extract an Army rescue team. On 24 April 1980, the attempt to rescue the hostages was aborted after night-time sandstorms and mechanical difficulties reduced the number of Navy RH-53 helicopters to an insufficient force. Subsequently, an RH-53 collided with an Air Force HC-130 on the dark, windy landing site in Iran, killing eight servicemen. Colonel James Kyle, USAF, Desert One on-scene commander, from his book *The Guts to Try*:

“The C-130 crews and combat controllers had not failed in any part of the operation and had a right to be proud of what they accomplished,” Kyle said. “They inserted the rescue team into Iran on schedule, set up the refueling zone, and gassed up the helicopters when they finally arrived. Then, when things went sour, they saved the day with an emergency evacuation by some incredibly skillful flying. They had gotten the forces out of Iran to fight another day — a fact they can always look back on with pride.”



The members from the 8th Special Operations Squadron who died in the fatal accident during Operation Eagle Claw were (from left to right) Capt. Richard Bakke, Tech. Sgt. Joel Mayo, Capt. Lyn McIntosh, Capt. Hal Lewis and Capt. Charles McMillan.

(<http://www.hurlburt.af.mil/mediapage/pressreleasearchive/story.asp?storyID=123095779>;
courtesy photo)



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23 Apr 2001 The **RQ-4A Global Hawk** completed the first nonstop Pacific flight by an UAV. It flew from the Air Force Flight Test Center at Edwards AFB to Edinburgh, Australia, covering the 7,500 miles in about 23 hours. The flight demonstrated the Global Hawk's high-altitude, long-range capabilities. (See USAF Global Hawk photo, below).



22 Apr 2002 The Air Force announced a **new standard wing structure** that would include four groups: operations, maintenance, missions support, and medical.