



This Week in USAF and PACAF History 4 - 10 May 2009



U.S. AIR FORCE

5 May 1918 The **1st Pursuit Group** was organized in France, to coordinate the 94th and 95th Aero Squadrons. Now the 1st Operations Group, 1FW, it is the oldest USAF Group in existence.

8 May 1918 **First Flight Surgeons.** Captains John F. Gallagher, Robert J. Hunter, and Claude T. Uren became the first medical officers to be assigned as flight surgeons at U.S. airfields. The role of the flight surgeon during World War I was to investigate the appalling death rate among military flying cadets and front line pilots due to disorientation and other physical factors associated with flying as well as poor aviator selection and other medical issues.

9 May 1932 **First blind solo.** At Dayton, Ohio, Capt. Albert Hegenberger completed the first blind solo flight (on instruments alone) without even a check pilot aboard. Capt. Hegenberger, a graduate of MIT, used a radio direction finder to navigate an early version of an instrument approach over pre-positioned transmitters. By executing planned turns, approach legs and rates of descent as he followed the radio signals, Hegenberger landed without ever seeing the runway.

Of note: Lt. Hegenberger had previously made the first non-stop Mainland-to-Hawaii flight with Lt. Lester Maitland in 1927, a feat comparable to Lindbergh's flight across the Atlantic. Hegenberger was stationed in Hawaii several times in the 1920s and 1930s. Brigadier General Hegenberger commanded the Seventh Bomber Command at Hickam Field until leaving for combat operations in the Far East in July, 1942.

6 May 1941 The **Republic P-47 Thunderbolt flew for the first time**, with company test pilot Lowery Brabham at the controls.

Designed by Russians who fled the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, the P-47 was one of World War II's largest, heaviest, and most rugged fighters. Twice the size of other fighters, the P-47 was best when attacking from higher altitudes. Exceptional diving capabilities gave the P-47 a serious advantage over lower enemy fighters, since they couldn't escape in a dive. With its high payload capacity and eight half-inch machine guns, the P-47 had a considerable firepower that could destroy an enemy fighter, tank or armored train in seconds. (Photo above.)



4-8 May 1942 **The Battle of the Coral Sea** was the first naval engagement fought by aircraft as the opposing ships made no contact. Although both sides lost carriers in the battle, the U.S. prevented a Japanese conquest of New Guinea, which might have isolated Australia. The loss of the *Lexington* was a severe blow to the U.S., and damage to the *Yorktown* was estimated to require months in port for repairs. However, *Yorktown* was rushed to Pearl Harbor and, in a miracle of improvisation and determination, made more-or-less battle-worthy after just two days in dry-dock. *Yorktown*, unlike the Japanese carriers damaged at the Coral Sea, fought at the decisive Battle of Midway one month later.



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9 May 1944 **Enemy airbases depleted.** Eighth Air Force B-17s and B-24s bombed German airfields and radar stations to begin an offensive that would prevent the German Air Force from recovering before the Normandy invasion on D-Day. During this air battle, the Luftwaffe lost many of its most experienced fighter pilots, and those who returned to their bases found their runways damaged and often had to ditch their aircraft. Subsequently, the Luftwaffe mounted only a limited response to the invasion on 6 June.

10 May 1944 **Friendly airbases completed.** Some 400,000 Chinese laborers completed the Chengdu Project, building five bomber bases and six fighter fields in China for U.S. B-29 air operations. The project had begun in January and used only primitive construction methods. Under **Operation Matterhorn**, B-29s carried their own fuel, ordnance and other supplies from India over the Himalayas (photo at right) to the forward bases in China.



Missions were flown from these bases against the Japanese in their home islands as well as Formosa, Singapore and other areas. Although the campaign had limited direct success against its assigned targets, the B-29 operations helped to rally the Chinese, demonstrated the vulnerability of Japan to strategic bombing, combat tested the B-29 and matured the B-29 force.

7 May 1945 **V-E Day and redeployment.** Germany surrendered unconditionally at Reims, effective 9 May. With that surrender, Air Transport Command began to move 250,000 people and 5,900 aircraft from Europe and the Mediterranean theaters to the U.S. by September 1945.

5 May 1948 **Early USAF tanker.** Boeing flight-tested B-29s that had been modified for aerial refueling. A British hose system was installed and nylon-lined aluminum fuel tanks were placed in the bomb bays. The success of the tests ultimately led the USAF to convert 92 B-29s into KB-29M hose-method tankers (left). Seventy-four B-29s were equipped to receive air refueling by hose. Later, KB-29 tankers were also tested with rigid booms.



Six years later, on 5 May 1954, the USAF issued a requirement for a turbo-jet tanker to support the refueling needs of jet aircraft. This requirement was eventually met by the KC-135.

4 May 1960 **HIANG facilities.** A groundbreaking ceremony for the Hawaii Air National Guard fighter complex was held in the Hickam Harbor-Fort Kamehameha area. Following the ceremony, contractors began work on the \$1,847,000 project, which included a new parking apron, maintenance hangar, annex for administration and supply, roads, and utilities.



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6-15 May 1972 **Operation CONSTANT GUARD III.** During North Vietnam's Nguyen Hue Offensive (the "Easter offensive"), MAC helped the 49th TFW move 3,195 airmen and 1,600 tons of cargo from Holloman AFB, to Takli, Thailand. Later, MAC C-5s airlifted 26 U.S. Army tanks on 10 flights to Da Nang, where they joined the battle in a matter of hours.

8 May 1972 **Operation LINEBACKER I.** President Nixon approved this operation as a military measure to defeat North Vietnam's Easter offensive and to end the Vietnam War.

The enemy offensive began on 30 March. A U.S. interdiction campaign against North Vietnam began on 6 April and expanded rapidly to targets in Hanoi and Haiphong. On 16 April,



B-52s bombed fuel storage tanks at Haiphong, escorted by fighters and aircraft specializing in electronic warfare and suppression of surface-to-air missiles (see photo of F-105G at left). Air Force and Navy fighter-bombers also struck a tank farm and a warehouse complex on the

outskirts of Hanoi. Naval aircraft began mining North Vietnamese harbors on 8 May, and two days later the administration expanded the air campaign, formerly known as *Freedom Train* but now designated *Linebacker*, throughout North Vietnam.

The tactics employed and results obtained in Linebacker were a great improvement over the earlier, gradually escalating air campaign named Rolling Thunder. During Linebacker, American aircraft attacked vital targets like airfields, power plants, and communication stations which disrupted the flow of supplies and reinforcements to enemy units fighting in the South. Laser-guided bombs were introduced and proved highly effective, especially against bridges such as those at Thanh Hoa and over the Red River at Hanoi. However, the traffic was not halted entirely because the enemy adapted by crossing at night on ferries or movable pontoon bridges. Improved American electronic warfare restricted enemy use of radar and radio communications, while U.S. radars helped direct our fighters to intercept North Vietnamese MiGs as they took off from their bases.

Linebacker I was essential in the defeat of the Easter offensive without bringing U.S. ground forces back to Vietnam. In fact, the last U.S. Army combat troops left Vietnam in August 1972 while the South Vietnamese were driving back the enemy. However, both North and South Vietnam realized that the South would be vulnerable to an invasion if U.S. airpower was withdrawn. In order to obtain a peace agreement, Nixon offered Thieu "absolute assurance" that he would take "swift and severe retaliatory action" if North Vietnam should attack again, and he resumed the bombing campaign against North Vietnam, culminating in December with Operation Linebacker II.



B-52s launch on a Linebacker mission.

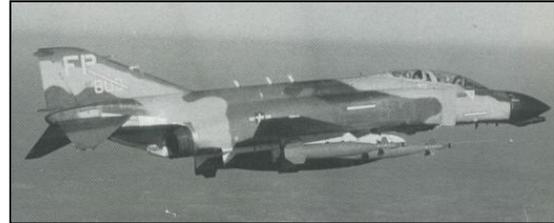


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10-11 May 1972 **Doumer Bridge dropped.** Using guided bombs, F-4Ds of the 8th TFW finally dropped the Doumer Bridge. The first attempt to destroy this rail and highway bridge, a key feature of the supply line to the south, took place on 3 April 1965, but the bridge was still standing at the bombing halt declared in 1968. The bridge was seen as a symbol of North Vietnamese resistance, and was a challenge to US fighter crews. (USAF photo at right is an F-4D, circa May 1972).



7 May 1975 **PACAF lives!** As the U.S. withdrew from southeast Asia, planned military force reductions included the disestablishment of PACAF on 1 July 1975. The Department of Defense planned to assign 5th and 13th Air Forces to Tactical Air Command and to transfer control of theater airlift resources to Military Airlift Command. However, the fall of South Vietnam and Cambodia to communists in early 1975 led to the 7 May 1975 announcement by the Secretary of Defense that the disestablishment of PACAF would be delayed for six months. Further delays followed, and ultimately PACAF remained the air component of U.S. Pacific Command.

4 May 1990 The **AIM-120A Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile (AMRAAM)** passed its final flight test for use on U.S. fighters. The AIM-120A demonstrated its ability to achieve multiple kills against multiple targets. On the Gulf Test Range near Eglin AFB, an F-15 fired two missiles at two QF-100 drones at 10,000 feet and two more at two drones at 5,000 feet. The test resulted in three direct hits and one pass within lethal distance.

10 May – 13 Jun 1991 **Operation SEA ANGEL.** In response to flooding along the Bangladesh coastline from Cyclone Marion, MAC dispatched C-5, C-141, and C-130 missions to deliver 738 passengers and 832 tons of food, equipment, and supplies. Sea Angel demonstrated the ability of U.S. armed forces to respond to two simultaneous crises. While joint forces delivered thousands of tons of relief equipment and supplies to Bangladesh, U.S. military units continued to send aid to thousands of Kurdish refugees in northern Iraq and eastern Turkey.

8 May 1994 **Operation PROVIDE PROMISE.** Through 26 July, five C-141s flew humanitarian missions from Germany to Bosnia. They joined the earlier deployment of C-130s from the 437 AW and 315 AW at Charleston AFB. The C-141s delivered over 7,000 tons of cargo by the time their flights ended.

5 May 1996 Colonel Betty L. Mullis became the **first woman to command a flying wing** when she assumed command of the 940th AREFW (AFRES) at McClellan AFB.

8 May 2001 Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld designated the Air Force as **executive agent for DoD space activities.**