



**U.S. AIR FORCE**

## **This Week in USAF and PACAF History** 11 - 17 May 2009



16 May 1917 **Aircraft Production Board.** As the U.S. entered World War I, President Woodrow Wilson and the Council of National Defense established an Aircraft Production Board. This advisory body was to advance the science of aviation, stimulate better aircraft, assist in standardization and sources of materials and parts, cooperate with military inspection organizations, help establish aviation schools and supply sites, and prioritize the deliveries of aircraft materials between departments.



14 May 1923 **Curtiss Hawk pursuit plane prototype.** The Army accepted delivery of the first PW-8 prototype, the progenitor of the famed Curtiss Hawk series of sturdy post-World War I biplane pursuit aircraft. Production models of the PW-8 were the original Curtiss P-1 Hawks (left).

12 May 1938 **Coastal Defense Demo.** Three B-17 crews intercepted the Italian ocean liner *Rex* in the Atlantic Ocean 700 miles from U.S. shores, proving the potential of long-range bombers in coastal defense. Lt. Curtis LeMay was lead navigator for the flight and charged with finding the liner. (Photo at right of B-17s intercepting the *Rex*.)



In September 1944, the Germans tried to sail the *Rex* to Trieste and scuttle her to blockade the port. Aware of this plan, RAF aircraft sank the ship in the Gulf of Venice.



13 May 1940 **First helicopter free flight.** Igor I. Sikorsky flew in his Vought-Sikorsky VS-300 helicopter (left) in its first truly free flight. Previous experimental flights had consisted of short, tethered hops. On 17 May 1942, Sikorsky's XR-4, flown by Sikorsky and Les Morris, landed at Wright Field, Ohio, to deliver the first Army Air Forces (AAF) helicopter.

16 May 1940 In the months leading up to American involvement in World War II, President Franklin Roosevelt asked for **new defense appropriations**. The President said, "Our task is plain. The road we must take is clearly indicated. Our defenses must be invulnerable, our security absolute." President Roosevelt called for the production of **50,000 airplanes a year**.



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15 May 1942 Interceptor and pursuit organizations of the AAF were **redesignated as "fighter"** units. The 15th Pursuit Group (Interceptor) was redesignated the 15th Fighter Group.

15 May 1948 The Air Force asked Boeing to develop a **flying boom aerial fueling system**. Problems with the British hose system used on B-29s included slow fuel flow, time-consuming contacts, excessive weight and space requirements, and slow flying speeds during refueling.

11 May 1949 President Harry S. Truman signed a bill authorizing a 3,000-mile guided-missile test range for the Air Force, subsequently established at **Cape Canaveral**, Florida.

12 May 1949 **Berlin Blockade Ends**. Faced with the success of the Berlin airlift, the Soviet Union ended the land blockade of western Berlin. The airlift continued through September 30, building up stockpiles of food and coal in case of a renewed blockade.



17 May 1964 **Operation Water Pump**. Detachment 6, 1st Air Commando Wing, moved to Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base in March with a force of four T-28s. Its mission was to train the Royal Lao Air Force (RLAF) in operations and maintenance. The RLAF began operations against the Pathet Lao on 17 May. On the next day, the Water Pump T-28s were painted with Laotian markings and turned over to the RLAF.

Photo above is a T-28 with an O-1 Bird Dog in the background.

16 May 1965 **Tragic accident at Bien Hoa Air Base**. A bomb on a B-57 Canberra accidentally detonated, causing a series of explosions which destroyed ten other B-57s, 13 Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) aircraft and a Navy F-8. Also, 25 VNAF Skyraiders were damaged. At least 28 Americans and Vietnamese were killed; 105 wounded. The accident investigation found that aircraft and ammunition were stored too close together. Air Force engineers initiated a major construction program to build revetments and aircraft shelters to protect valuable assets.





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12 – 14 May **EVACUATION OF KHAM DUC.** Under extremely hostile conditions, C-130s helped to evacuate Kham Duc, a special operations base for reconnaissance teams near Laos. USAF transports carried over 500 of the 1,800 military and civilians from Kham Duc before it fell to the enemy. The enemy killed 259 people and destroyed several aircraft.

**MEDAL OF HONOR.** Lt Col Joe M. Jackson volunteered to rescue a three-man Air Force combat control team at **Kham Duc**. Enemy forces had set the camp afire, overran the forward outpost, destroyed eight aircraft and established gun positions on the airstrip. Despite the odds, Jackson and his crew (Maj Jesse Campbell, TSgt Edward M. Trejo, and SSgt Manson L. Grubbs) landed their C-123 under intense hostile fire, but were forced to take off. Making a second attempt, Jackson landed his C-123, extracted the combat controllers, and returned to safety. For his valiant effort, he received the Medal of Honor, the only airlifter so honored in the Vietnam conflict. Major Campbell received the Air Force Cross, while Sergeants Trejo and Grubbs earned Silver Stars.

In the photo below, Jackson's C-123 is seen at the top of the runway. The caption reads: "This is the only known photo of a Medal of Honor action taken while it was under way. Joe Jackson had just put his C-123 down to pick up three combat control team airmen. Jackson braved close-in enemy fire from both sides of the runway and from the hills above Kham Duc." See the October 2005 AF Magazine article, "Rescue at Kham Duc," at <http://www.afa.org/magazine/Oct2005/1005KhamDuc.asp>.





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16 May 1968 **The largest earthquake to hit Japan** since 1923 wreaked havoc in northern Honshu around Misawa city, killing at least 44 people, injuring 246, and leaving 1,200 homeless. Fires broke out in the city, and Air Force firefighters from Misawa lent assistance. By May 20, Air Force planes had airlifted 128 tons of relief cargo to the earthquake victims in the area.

The earthquake and several severe aftershocks rocked Misawa Air Base itself and hampered recovery efforts. All the buildings on base were damaged; the power, heat, and water were lost, and the runway cracked. Estimates of the damages reached \$6 million.

12 May 1975 **Mayaguez Incident.** Cambodian forces hijacked the US merchant vessel USS *Mayaguez* in international waters near Koh Tang Island. Starting on 15 May, MAC used 16 C-141s on 30 sorties to airlift 1,165 Marines and 121 tons of cargo from the Philippines and Okinawa to Utapao AB, Thailand. The ARRS sent HH-53 helicopters (right) to fly the Marines to Koh Tang Island and to the USS Holt, and later picked them up. Cambodia returned the *Mayaguez* crew after Marines, supported by USAF helicopters and A-7 aircraft, captured the empty ship and assaulted Koh Tang Island, where the crew was mistakenly thought to have been taken. U.S. casualties totaled 15 killed in action, 3 MIA, and 49 wounded. Three PACAF CH-53s were lost, and three others were damaged, in the operation. Maj. Robert W. Undorf, an airborne forward air controller in an OV-10A Bronco, received the **Mackay Trophy** for conspicuous gallantry, initiative, and resourcefulness during this military operation—the last major American military action in Southeast Asia.



17 May 1977 **Eniwetok Cleanup.** A joint US task group was activated on Eniwetok Atoll for a two-year, \$20-million cleanup and decontamination project. Actual cleanup operations began on 15 November. PACAF served as the executive agent for the USAF.

16-27 May 1978 In **Operation ZAIRE I**, Military Airlift Command used 43 C-141 and C-5 missions to transport 931 tons of cargo and 124 passengers to Zaire in support of Belgian and French troops who had intervened to rescue European workers threatened by a Katangan rebel invasion of Zaire from Angola. During this operation, Lt. Col. Robert F. Schultz and Capt. Todd H. Hohberger and their C-5 crews earned the Mackay Trophy for overcoming fatigue, limited en route support, crippling mechanical problems, and adverse operational conditions in a hostile area.

11-17 May 1994 **Operation PROVIDE ASSISTANCE.** Thirteen C-141 missions moved 239 tons of relief supplies from Incirlik AB to Mwanza, Tanzania, in a joint operation to help over 100,000 Rwandan victims of tribal warfare.