



This Week in USAF and PACAF History 5 - 11 October 2009



U.S. AIR FORCE

5 October 1905 **The first “practical” airplane.** Even after the **Wright brothers** created separate, independent controls of the three flight axes—pitch, roll and yaw—their Flyer still had marginal performance. After Orville was nearly killed in a crash, they rebuilt the Flyer with the forward elevator and rear rudder both enlarged and placed several feet farther away from the wings. On 5 October 1905, the new *Wright Flyer III* flew for more than half an hour and covered nearly 24 miles near Dayton, Ohio.

Four days later, the Wright brothers wrote to the War Department, describing their new flying machine and offering it to the Army for purchase. Misunderstanding the offer as a request for research funds, the Board of Ordnance and Fortification turned them down.



11 October 1910 President Theodore Roosevelt became the **first President to fly** when he flew with Archibald Hoxsey in a Wright biplane at St. Louis. See the full-size photo at this link to the *New York Times* Store: [1910 President Roosevelt Flight](#).

5 October 1918 **The first sustained effort at aerial resupply** of a ground unit occurred during the Meuse-Argonne offensive of World War I. Planes from the 50th Aero Squadron dropped supplies and aided in determining the location of the famous “Lost Battalion” (elements of the



1Lt Harold E. Goettler

77th Division that were cut off from the Allies and besieged by the Germans). The following day, 1Lt Harold E. Goettler and 2Lt Erwin P. Bleckley, flying as an observer, were killed trying to drop supplies to a surrounded US Army battalion in the Argonne Forest near Binarivelle, France. Goettler and Bleckley flew as low as possible to deliver the supplies more precisely, but enemy ground fire brought them down. Both men received the **Medal of Honor**.



2Lt Erwin P. Bleckley

9 October 1918 During this same offensive, more than 250 bombers and 100 pursuit planes, dropped 32 tons of bombs in the cantonment district between La Waville and Damvillers. This was the greatest massing of military aircraft to date.

7 October 1931 Army personnel observed the Navy test of the **Norden bombsight**—the product of ten years of development by inventor Carl Norden. The Navy immediately ordered a number of units and later provided some units to the Air Corps. Norden subsequently applied for a patent on his bombsight, which the U.S. Patent Office issued 16 years later, on 10 October 1947. Norden had worked for the Sperry Corporation before forming his own company, and both firms provided bombsights to the U.S. Army Air Forces during World War II.



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8 October 1940 The Royal Air Force announced formation of the **first Eagle Squadron**, a fighter unit consisting of U.S. volunteers. This group later became the U.S. 4th Fighter Group.

11 October 1945 The Army launched the first **US-made ballistic missile** at White Sands Proving Ground. The Tiny Tim booster with a Corporal rocket reached 43 miles in altitude.

11 October 1947 The Boeing **C-97 Stratofreighter**, a transport variant of the B-29, began service in ATC. It could be configured to transport materiel, troops, or casualties.



7 October 1949 **Andersen AFB, Guam was named** in honor of Brig Gen James Roy Andersen, who died on 26 Feb 1945 in an aircraft accident near Kwajalein Island, en route to Hawaii. Previous names for Andersen AFB included North Field (Dec 1944) and North Guam AFB (Mar 1949). On 6 September 2007, Brig Gen Douglas Owens, 36WG/CC, presided over a ceremony re-installing the recently-discovered dedication plaque (pictured left) in front of the 36th Wing Headquarters.

10 October 1950 The USAF activated **the first Air National Guard units to support the Korean War**. Eventually, the U.S. mobilized 66 flying units and 45,000 guardsmen.

6 October 1955 The DoD awarded a contract to the Glenn L. Martin Company, as primary contractor, to build a **rocket for launching an earth satellite**. General Electric Company subcontracted to build the rocket motor.

6 October 1961 In the **first hardened ICBM silo**, the 724th SMS of Lowry AFB, Colorado received the Air Force's **first Titan I missile**. The 165-foot deep silo was the first of its kind.

11 October 1961 **PROJECT FARM GATE**. President Kennedy authorized the deployment of a "Jungle Jim" detachment from the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron (later the 1st Air Commando Group) to South Vietnam. The deployment consisted of 151 officers and enlisted men and eight T-28, four SC-47, and four RB-26 aircraft carrying Vietnamese AF markings. The unit arrived in Vietnam on 14 November and flew its first T-28 strike from Bien Hoa on 26 December. The aircraft were used until 1 April 1964. (See photo above of Hickam's RB-26 displayed on Atterbury Circle).



7 October 1966 The Air Force selected the University of Colorado to conduct independent investigations of **Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs)**.



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8 October 1969 General Bruce K. Holloway accepted SAC's **first FB-111A** (No. 67-7193) at Carswell AFB for the 340th BG. This aircraft replaced the F-105 and the B-58 as a high-speed nuclear bomber. The FB-111 could carry the AGM-69 Short-Range Attack Missile (see photo at left) as well as gravity weapons. The FB-111A also had a unique integration of the terrain-following radar into the automatic flight control system, allowing "hands-off" flight at high speeds and low levels (down to 200 feet), even in adverse weather.

11 October 1970 The USAF's **first undergraduate helicopter pilot student** entered training at Fort Wolters, Texas. The Army program was geared to train 225 Air Force pilots a year.

10 October 1986 The Air Force placed the LGM-118A, also called the **Peacekeeper** or **MX missile**, on alert duty. Each of these new ICBMs could deliver warheads to 10 different targets.

10 October 1994 **Operation VIGILANT WARRIOR**. After Iraqi troops massed near the Kuwaiti border, USAF cargo planes began flying additional U.S. forces to the Persian Gulf region. During October the number of USAF aircraft in-theater increased from 77 to 270, including F-15E Eagles, F-16 Fighting Falcons, and A-10 Thunderbolt IIs.

7 October 2001 **Operation ENDURING FREEDOM**. The U.S. initiated airstrikes against terrorist and Taliban targets in Afghanistan. The 509th Bomb Wing at Whiteman AFB launched six B-2 bombers that flew from Missouri across the Pacific to drop bombs on targets in Afghanistan and recover at Diego Garcia. One flight took 44 hours – the **longest combat mission in history**. The operation also involved B-1Bs, B-52Hs, F-15Es, KC-10s and KC-135 tankers, E-3 AWACS, EC-130s, AC-130 gunships, and MC-130 and MH-53 special operations aircraft. Naval involvement included F-14s, F/A-18s, and AV-8 aircraft from three carriers in the Indian Ocean. Lt. Gen. Charles F. Wald, USAF, served as Operation ENDURING FREEDOM's first Joint Force Air Component Commander.

On the following day, two C-17s airdropped about 35,000 humanitarian rations over Afghanistan. The two airdrops were the **C-17's first combat missions**, first combat airdrops, and the first humanitarian airdrops of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. The C-17s flew from Ramstein AB, Germany more than 6,500 miles in a 22-hour round trip and were air refueled multiple times. (At right is a C-17 landing at Bagram in 2004.)

