



U.S. AIR FORCE

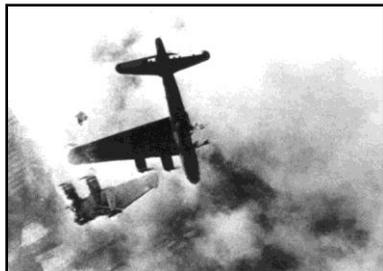
This Week in USAF and PACAF History 12-18 October 2009



12 October 1918 The 185th Aero Squadron flew the **first U.S. night pursuit operations** in France. The only U.S. unit designated for night operations, the 185th emblem was a bat against a yellow disk (at left). Night flying became essential as enemy bombers conducted raids at night and ground troops moved at night to avoid detection by aerial reconnaissance. Night flying put a priority on seeing the enemy by starlight, moonlight or searchlights (at 200-600 yards) and using aerodrome lights for landing at the home field. The most daunting prospect for a pilot was an emergency landing of a battle-damaged aircraft in unfamiliar territory.



14 Oct 1938 Edward Elliott conducted the **first flight test of the Curtiss XP-40** (below), the prototype of the P-40s used in World War II. The wartime P-40's semi-modular design was easy to maintain even in harsh conditions. Later versions were well-armored and equipped with self-sealing fuel tanks and more powerful engines. With good agility, very good dive speed, deadly armament and a durable structure, the P-40 had excellent results in head-on engagements with Japanese fighters and in ground attacks on surface forces. The P-40 saw action in many theaters of World War II, most famously with the American Volunteer Group's *Flying Tigers* in China.



14 October 1943 On "**Black Thursday**," the 8th Air Force conducted its second raid on **Schweinfurt**, the heart of the German ball bearing industry. Of 291 B-17 bombers in the attacking force, 60 were lost to fighter interceptors and flak, and 138 more were damaged, causing the Eighth to temporarily discontinue daylight bombing of targets deep in Germany.

When Hitler's minister of armaments and economics, Albert Speer, was interviewed after the war, he made this comment:

"The strategic bombing of Germany was the greatest lost battle of the whole war for Germany."

12 October 1944 **Ace in a Day**. Lt Chuck Yeager (right) shot down five of his 12.5 aircraft victories in a single engagement. As he closed on one Me-109, the German pilot broke left and collided with his wingman, giving Yeager two victories without firing a shot. In an intense dogfight, Yeager used his exceptional vision (20/10) and flying skills in three more aerial victories.



Earlier that year, Yeager was shot down and, with the help of French resistance, he evaded over the Pyrenees Mountains into Spain. The Spanish government then traded Yeager and five other Americans to the United States in return for gasoline.

Three years later, Yeager became the first man to fly through the sound barrier (next article).



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14 October 1947 At Muroc Field, Capt Chuck Yeager (right) was the **first person to break the sound barrier** in the rocket-powered Bell XS-1 after being dropped from a B-29. For this achievement, Yeager received the Mackay Trophy.



Retired Brig Gen Yeager celebrated the 30th and 50th anniversaries of his feat by flying faster than sound in an F-104 in 1977 and in an F-15 Eagle in 1997 (at left).

14 October 1947 SECDEF James V. Forrestal approved the Air Force's control over all "pilotless aircraft" and strategic missiles. The Army gained control over all tactical missiles.



15 October 1952 A B-47 photo reconnaissance mission, authorized by President Truman and staged out of Eielson AFB, was flown over the Chukotsky Peninsula in the Soviet Union. The mission confirmed that the Soviets were developing Arctic staging bases on the peninsula from which their bombers could easily reach targets on the North American continent.

14–15 October 1962 The **Cuban missile crisis** began when Maj. Richard S. Heyser and Maj. Rudolf Anderson, Jr., conducting U-2 reconnaissance flights over Cuba, proved that Soviet missile sites were under construction there. On October 18th, eight Air Force Reserve troop-carrier wings and six aerial-port squadrons were mobilized.



16 Oct 1964 The **Chinese Communists exploded their first nuclear device** near Lake Lop Nor in Xinjiang Province. The Air Force collected data on the explosion using Air Weather Service C-130, WB-50, and WB-57 aircraft from Yokota AB, Japan; Wheelus AB, Libya; Eielson AFB, Alaska; and McClellan AF, CA. Nuclear debris from the test was picked up on over 30 sorties by Yokota aircraft. Radio-chemical analysis of the fallout cloud from the Chinese test revealed that it was a uranium device and contradicted intelligence that the Chinese nuclear weapon program was focused on a plutonium weapon.



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13 October 1972 **Air Force Ace.** An F-4 weapon system officer, Capt Jeffrey Feinstein, shot down his fifth MiG-21 to become the **third USAF ace of the Vietnam War.** Feinstein shared the 1972 **Mackay Trophy** with Captains Steven Ritchie and Charles DeBellevue.

14 October – 14 November 1973 **Operation NICKEL GRASS.** Military Airlift Command delivered over 22,000 tons of materiel from 20 locations in the U.S. to Israel during the 1973 “Yom Kippur War.” MAC completed this airlift, with a one-way distance of 6,450 miles, in 567 C-5 and C-141 missions. By comparison, the Soviets supplied 15,000 tons to the Arabs in 40 days flying over a route of 1,700 miles in 935 missions. At right, a tank is unloaded from a USAF C-5 Galaxy.



16 Oct 1980 As part of the U.S. commitment to the security of South Korea, the USAF announced that **F-16s would replace the F-4Ds at Kunsan and Taegu.**

17 Oct 1980 **Cope North Expanded.** Exercise Cope North 81-1, held at Misawa AB, Japan, was the first of the series to be funded by JCS, and also the first to be joint/combined. US Marine Corps A-4s and EA-6Bs joined PACAF F-4Es and OV-10s to combine with the Japanese Self-Defense Force F-1, F-4EJ, and F-104J aircraft. Previous exercises were PACAF-funded, and limited to PACAF and Japanese Self-Defense Force participation.

13 October 1999 The world’s first hypersonic air-breathing free-flight vehicle, the **X-43A**,



arrived at Edwards AFB for testing by NASA. The 12-foot, unmanned X-43 uses Supersonic Combustion Ramjet, or “Scramjet,” technology. In 2001 the X-43A became the first vehicle with a non-rocket engine to fly at hypersonic speeds, and it has since flown at over Mach 9.

15 Oct 2005 The “**Weatherscout**” **unmanned aerial vehicle (WUAV)** flew its first mission from Northwest Field at Andersen AFB, Guam. The WUAV could become PACAF's equivalent of the 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron “Hurricane Hunter's” WC-130J Hercules. Earlier in the year, a Weatherscout flew into Hurricane Ophelia and conducted the first-ever detailed observations of a near-surface, high-wind hurricane environment—an area too dangerous for manned aircraft to observe directly. (At right, a Weatherscout is launched from a moving car).

