



U.S. AIR FORCE

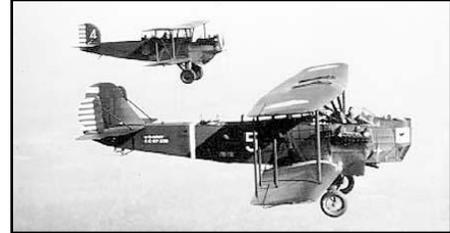
## This Week in USAF and PACAF History 21 – 27 December 2009



27 Dec 1935 **Lava flow diversion.** After Mauna Loa volcano on the island of Hawaii erupted, its lava flow threatened the water works for the city of Hilo. Aircraft of the 23d and 72d



Bombardment Squadrons were credited with diverting the lava flow when they dropped twenty 600-pound bombs in its path. Capt Joe J. Ladd led the flight of five Keystone LB-5s from Luke Field on Ford Island. The 23<sup>rd</sup> emblem is at left and LB-5 bombers are pictured at right.



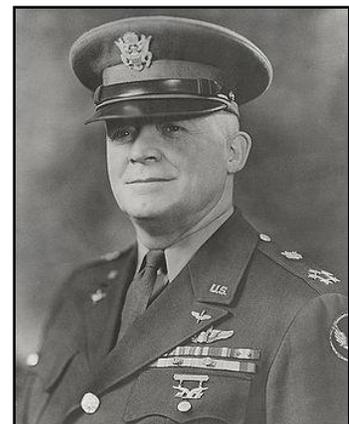
25 December 1941 - The **Hawaiian Air Force Base Command was established at Hickam** with four subordinate echelons—Hickam Field Base Command, Wheeler Field Base Command, Bellows Field Base Command, and the Hawaiian Air Depot (on Hickam). This action separated supply and service functions from tactical functions and operations within the Air Corps.



27 Dec 1942 Flying his P-38 Lightning against the Japanese in the Pacific, **2Lt Richard I. Bong scored the first two of his 40 aerial victories.** Bong was later awarded the Medal of Honor, and he remains the top U.S. ace in any war. (Bong’s photo is at left).

“Most of Bong's victories were in the earlier stages of the war against very experienced Japanese pilots. Bong relished the actual flying of combat, not how many enemy aircraft he could shoot down. Bong also knew how to get the most from the aircraft he was flying. He loved flying the P-38, and many pilots who flew with him commented on his mastery of it. He was not a flashy pilot, and knew the limitations of the P-38 and never pushed it beyond. His analytical nature was valuable when flying combat and he always analyzed the situation before going in with guns firing. Most importantly, he felt no shame in breaking off an engagement when the odds turned against him.” (<http://www.nationalaviation.org/enshrinee/bong.html>)

21 Dec 1944 **General Henry H. Arnold became General of the Army (5 stars).** Instructed to fly by the Wright Brothers, Arnold fought the senior leaders of the U.S. Army and U.S. Navy to bring about the creation of an independent Air Force. He rose to command the Army Air Forces immediately prior to U.S. entry into World War II and directed its expansion into the largest and most powerful air force in the world. A strong believer in research and development, Arnold led the Air Force in the development of the intercontinental bomber, the jet fighter, the extensive use of radar, global airlift, and atomic warfare as mainstays of modern airpower. Later appointed as General of the Air Force, Arnold is the only officer to hold 5-star rank in two separate services.





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26 Dec 1944 **Brig Gen Frederick W. Castle** led some 2,000 heavy bombers against German airfields. On the way, an engine failed and his unescorted B-17 became a target to enemy fighters. After his bomber sustained serious damage, he ordered the crew to bail out while he remained at the controls. Another enemy attack caused the right wing gas tanks to explode, and the bomber crashed with the General still inside. For this sacrifice, Castle received the **Medal of Honor**.



(B-17 photo above.)

26 Dec 1944 **Maj Thomas B. McGuire, Jr.**, reached **38 aerial victories** in the Pacific theater by shooting down four enemy planes. That made him the second leading ace in World War II. He died in combat 12 days later.

22 Dec 1956 **Project Gohan—an early humanitarian operation**. Severe winter weather led to crop failures and famine in Japan's northernmost major island of Hokkaido. A campaign called "Rice for Hokkaido" caught the attention of Maj. Gen. Russell L. Waldron, commander of the 315<sup>th</sup> Air Div, stationed at Tachikawa AB in Honshu. General Waldron sponsored an airlift of rice from Honshu to Hokkaido. Dubbed Project Gohan (*gohan* is the Japanese word for rice), the operation involved three 315th Air Div aircraft: two C-119 Flying Boxcars and one C-54 Skymaster. Waldron piloted the C-54 himself. The three airplanes transported 21 tons of rice from Tachikawa AB to Chitose AB in Hokkaido.

Incidentally, General Waldron was commander of the 31st Bombardment Squadron at Hickam Field when the Japanese attacked on 7 December 1941.

23 Dec – 23 Jan 1965 **Operation BLUE LIGHT**. MAC transported the 3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, from Hickam AFB, Hawaii to Pleiku, South Vietnam, to offset communist forces in the area. The airlift included 231 C-141 sorties to move 3,000 troops and 4,700 tons of equipment. At the time, it was the largest airlift into a combat zone.

27 Dec 1968 The **first men to circle the moon** – Apollo 8 astronauts, USAF Colonel Frank Borman, Navy Captain James A. Lovell Jr., and USAF Major William A. Anders, splashed down at 1051 approximately 1,000 miles southwest of Hawaii. The crew arrived at Hickam AFB on 28 December 1968, en route to the Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston, Texas. They received a large and festive welcome (including leis, grass-skirted hula girls, and many high-ranking civilian and military officials among the some 10,000 persons on hand to greet them) as they set foot on American soil for the first time since their liftoff from Florida.

22 Dec 1997 The **last Minuteman II missile silo was destroyed**. The silo implosion was in accordance with the 31 July 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty. Since the retirement of the Peacekeeper force, the Minuteman III is now the only deployed ICBM in the USAF inventory.



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26 Dec 2001 The Pentagon approved the low-rate initial production of the **Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM)**. JASSM is a precision cruise missile designed to attack both fixed and relocatable targets at ranges beyond enemy air defenses. After launch, it flies autonomously over a low-level, circuitous route—guided by inertial navigation with updating from a global positioning system. Target recognition and terminal homing is via an imaging infrared seeker. (See photo of JASSM and F-16 chase aircraft at right).



26 Dec 2004 **UNIFIED ASSISTANCE TSUNAMI RELIEF.** A 9.0 earthquake in the Indian Ocean triggered an enormous tsunami with 30-foot-high waves that slammed into the coasts of 13 nations and killed at least 300,000 people. The quake's epicenter was approximately 65 miles south of the Indonesian island of Sumatra. The death toll was greatest in Indonesia where at least 100,000 people perished. (Photos of Banda Aceh, Indonesia, before and after the tsunami are shown at left.) The tsunami also killed more than 29,000 people in Sir Lanka, 10,000 in India, and 4,600 in Thailand. Another three to five million people in South Asia and Southeast Asia were left without clean water, food, shelter, and sanitation. By the end of Operation Unified Assistance on 23 Feb 2005, AMC aircraft had flown 106 missions to airlift 2,768 passengers and 3,370 short tons of cargo



to Bandaranaike IAP in Colombo, Sir Lanka, U-Tapao AB, Thailand, and Banda Aceh and Jakarta IAPs in Indonesia. An expanded account is found in the PACAF/HO study "WITH COMPASSION AND HOPE: The Story of Operation UNIFIED ASSISTANCE -- the Air Force Support for Tsunami Relief Operations in Southeast Asia, 25 December 2004 - 15 February 2005" available on CD-ROM from the PACAF History Office.