



This Week in USAF and PACAF History 1 – 7 March 2010



U.S. AIR FORCE

6 Mar 1942 The **Army Air School for black aviators at Tuskegee, Alabama**, graduated the **first five black military pilots**. George Roberts, Benjamin Davis Jr., Charles BeBow Jr., Mac Ross and Lemuel Custis received the silver wings of Army Air Force pilots. These men were the first of nearly 1000 Tuskegee aviators to complete Army flight training and earn their wings.

Despite the obstacles of racial prejudice, the Tuskegee Airmen built an admirable combat record in World War II. Their courageous service was a major factor in the desegregation of the armed forces after the war. The U.S. Air Force became a separate service in 1947 and was the first service to erase the color line. On July 26, 1948, President Truman's executive order 9981 directed all the armed services to ensure "equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons ... without regard to race, color, religion or national origin." (See Tuskegee photo at right.)



1-4 Mar 1943 **Battle of the Bismarck Sea**. Crews of the Fifth Air Force and the Royal Australian Air Force flying out of Port Moresby, New Guinea attacked a Japanese convoy aimed at relieving their forces in New Guinea. Combining the innovation of skip-bombing and heavily armed B-25s with forward- and side-firing .50-caliber guns, the Allied forces wreaked havoc on



the Japanese convoy of eight troop transports, eight destroyers, and two cruisers. Out of 6,900 Japanese troops who were badly needed in New Guinea, only about 800 made it to Lae. As General Kenney later reported, "In the space of twelve minutes, we had destroyed or damaged 114,000 tons of Japanese shipping, shot down or destroyed on the ground eighty-five airplanes." (See AAC photo of 3d Bomb Group attacking Japanese shipping, March 1943).

1 Mar 1950 Boeing delivered the **first production B-47A Stratojet bomber** to the Air Force. The B-47 program originally came from a World War II requirement for a jet bomber and reconnaissance aircraft that could reach Nazi Germany in the event that Great Britain fell. The eventual design of the aircraft was heavily influenced by the examination of captured German aircraft technology, especially the advantages of swept wings.





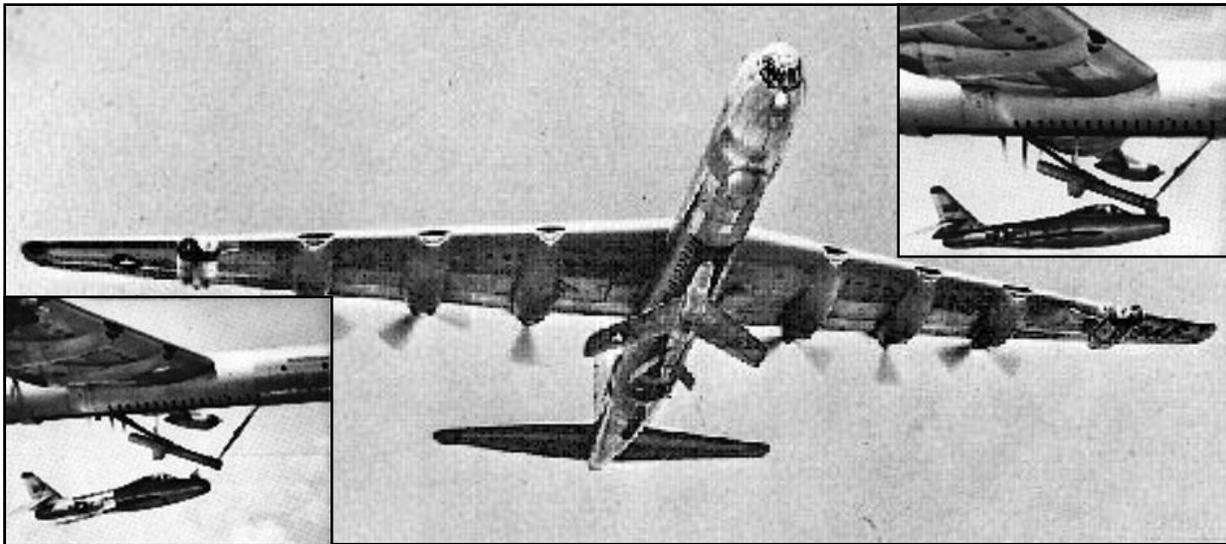
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3 Mar 1952 **Operation SATURATE.** In March, FEAF initiated Operation Saturate, a round-the-clock interdiction effort directed against North Korean railroad lines. Fighter-bombers attacked during the day and B-26 bombers at night. The attacks were carried out with intensity through May, and continued periodically thereafter. In the spring of 1952, the increased vulnerability of the B-26 light bomber to communist ground fire provoked a reassessment of the night interdiction campaign. (Photo at left of B-26 bomb release.)

7 Mar 1955 The USAF formed the 91st Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron to perform a unique mission. During the Korean War, long-range reconnaissance aircraft were highly vulnerable to enemy fighters. So the 91st used **B-36 bombers as mother-ships to carry, launch and recover F-84F reconnaissance aircraft.** F-84 pilots boarded their aircraft through the modified B-36 bomb bay. Known as the Fighter-Conveyance (FICON) system, this perilous procedure led to many near-fatal accidents until the U-2 and other measures made the program obsolete.



4-5 March 1971 In early March, **Typhoon Yolling**, a tropical storm from the Pacific Ocean, struck Okinawa in the Ryukyu Islands. The Air Force launched an immediate relief operation, airlifting more than 80 tons of equipment to Kadena AB, Okinawa.

In 1972, the United States and Japan signed a treaty transferring Okinawa and the Ryukyu Islands from the United States to Japan, with the condition that U.S. military bases remain.



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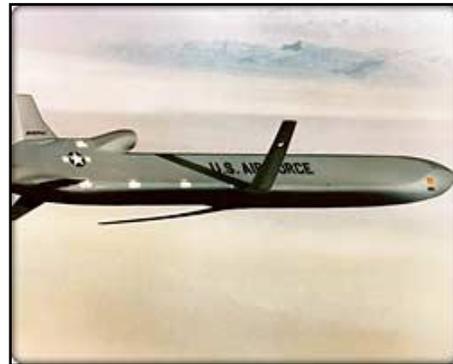
1 March 1973 Fairchild-Republic received a **contract for the A-10**, the first U.S. Air Force aircraft designed primarily for close air support (CAS). See photo below.

Large numbers of aircraft were shot down by ground fire in Vietnam, and the Air Force was criticized for neglecting the CAS mission. Military helicopters of the time carried only anti-personnel weapons which were ill-suited for use against armor. Fighters of the day flew too fast and lacked an effective gun to engage small, hardened battlefield targets. They also consumed fuel too quickly to loiter in the battle area. In 1967, the Air Force initiated a design study for a low cost attack aircraft that would have long loiter time, low-speed maneuverability, massive cannon firepower, and extreme survivability.

The study concluded that the ideal aircraft would combine the heavy armor and powerful guns of the Soviet Ilyushin IL-2 and the German Henschel HS-129 of World War II with the ordnance capacity, loiter time and low altitude maneuverability of the Douglas A-1 Skyraider. In May 1970, the USAF issued a revised request for proposals as the threat of Soviet armored forces and all weather attack operations became more serious. On 26 Feb 1974, the A-10A fired its GAU-8/A gun for the first time during an inflight test at Edwards AFB.



5 Mar 1976 An AFSC aircrew, flying a B-52G over White Sands Missile Range, N.Mex., **launched the first ALCM**. (Photo below left is an ALCM launch from a B-52; below right is an ALCM in flight after the wings have unfolded.)



1 March 2002 **Operation ENDURING FREEDOM / ANACONDA**. The US and its coalition partners launched Operation ANACONDA in eastern Afghanistan. Using B-52s, B-1s, AC-130s, A-10s, and F-15s for air support, the coalition ground operation tried to surround and kill Taliban and al Qaeda forces regrouping south of Gardez.