



**U.S. AIR FORCE**

## This Week in USAF and PACAF History 24-31 January 2011



27 January 1911 At an Aero Club show in San Diego, Calif., Lt Theodore G. “Spuds” Ellyson (U.S. Navy), a student at the nearby Curtiss School, inadvertently took off in a Curtiss “grass cutter” plane to become **the first Naval aviator**. With a blocked throttle, this ground plane was not supposed to fly, and Ellyson was not yet proficient enough to fly. He slewed off left, cracking up the plane somewhat by making a wing-first landing. Ellyson wasn’t injured, but from then on he was considered to have made his first flight.



Lt T.G. Ellyson in the “Grass Cutter.”

27 January 1912 **MACKAY TROPHY**. Clarence H. Mackay established the Mackay Trophy. Aviators could compete for the trophy annually under rules made each year, or the War Department could award the trophy for the most meritorious flight of the year.

24 January 1944 **D-DAY AT ANZIO**. After an extensive Allied air campaign in Italy, the allied assault forces landed at Anzio and Nettuno with minimal resistance. The Twelfth Air Force provided air cover for the landings and played a major role in defending the beachhead. To enhance cooperation between the ground and air commanders, Fifth Army and Twelfth Air Force personnel met nightly to review the day’s operations, and plan the next day’s attacks. The air-land team developed the “call targets” system, consisting of telephone calls from Fifth Army to 12 AF when emergency air support was needed. The 12 AF then directly assigned the “call targets” to air units standing-by for attack. Several dangerous penetrations by German forces into allied lines were repulsed. From D-Day until 15 February, allied air forces flew 27,204 sorties, dropped 13,035 tons of bombs, and destroyed 326 enemy planes; at a cost of 96 allied bombers and 133 fighters, lost mostly to German antiaircraft artillery.



24 January 1951 Close air support for United Nations ground troops remained a priority mission for Far East Air Forces during the Korean War. In **Operation THUNDERBOLT**, an Eighth Army campaign designed to reach the Han River, T-6 Mosquito controllers patrolled ahead of friendly ground forces, notified ground forces of enemy strong spots, and called in U.S. fighter-bomber air strikes. Generals Matthew B. Ridgway and Earl E. Partridge reconnoitered the frontlines in a T-6 prior to their 25 January dawn attack on Red Chinese forces. To sustain this offensive, in five days 68 C-119s dropped 1,162 tons of supplies, including fuel, oil, sleeping bags, C-rations, and signal wire, at Chunju, Korea.





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24 January 1953 Two USAF pilots of the 51st Fighter Interceptor Wing, Capt. Dolphin D. Overton III and Capt. Harold E. Fischer, Jr., achieved ace status. In doing so, Captain Overton (right) set a record for becoming a **jet ace in the shortest time** (four days). Initially, he did not receive credit for two additional kills because they occurred in Chinese airspace - a violation of the Rules Of Engagement at the time. For additional info see [Air Force Times, "Pilot gets medal 57 years after attack," 19 Sept 09.](#)



30 January 1953 **The Boeing B-47 Stratojet first flew.** Designed in the

late 1940s as a high-altitude, medium-range bomber, the innovative, all-jet B-47 (left) had swept wings and aerial refueling capability. Fielded before the age of SAMs, ICBMs, SLBMs or air-launched nuclear missiles, the B-47

was believed to be capable of evading the fighter interceptors of its day. It carried only one or two high-yield nuclear weapons, but it was produced in numbers sufficient to strike the targets in SAC's war plans. By 1956, there were over 1,300 B-47 bombers and over 200 RB-47 reconnaissance aircraft assigned to SAC. Many of the B-47's features were also used in the design of the B-52.

31 January 1958 The Army launched a Jupiter-C rocket from Cape Canaveral putting **the first U.S. satellite—Explorer I**—into an orbit. Circling the globe every 103.9 minutes, Explorer I was used to discover the Van Allen radiation belt. It reentered the atmosphere over the South Pacific on 31 March 1970, after more than 58,000 revolutions of earth.

29 January 1959 The Tactical Air Command received the **first ski-modified C-130A.**

27 January 1967 A **flash fire** during ground testing of the **Apollo 1** command module at Cape Kennedy Florida, killed three astronauts: Air Force Lt. Col. Virgil I. Grissom, Navy Lt. Cmdr. Roger B. Chaffee, and Edward H. White. They had been rehearsing for a 21 February flight.

27 January 1968 After North Korea seized the S.S. Pueblo on 23 January, MAC supported USAF and Army deployments from the U.S., Pacific, and South East Asia to South Korea and Japan as part of **Operation COMBAT FOX**. During the next three weeks, MAC moved 7,996 passengers and nearly 13,700 tons of cargo in over 800 missions to the region.

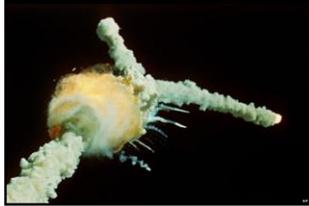
27 January 1973 After the 11-day Linebacker II bombing campaign against Hanoi and Haiphong, **North Vietnam signed a peace accord**, and a cease-fire was declared.

29 January-29 March 1973 Following the signing of the Vietnam peace accords, Air Force and commercial aircraft airlifted 21,000 American and allied forces and 7,000 tons of equipment from South Vietnam as part of **Operation COUNTDOWN**.



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28 January 1986 **Space Shuttle Challenger exploded** 73 seconds after liftoff, killing all seven astronauts, including Hawaii-born astronaut Lt Col Ellison Onizuka. More than 1,500 members of the 15th Air Base Wing were lined up for a scheduled open-ranks inspection at Hickam's base operations when the wing commander stepped up to the podium and informed them of the disaster. One of Hickam's missions was to act as an alternate or emergency base for contingency landings of the Space Shuttle. This tragedy delayed America's manned space program for more than two years.

25 January 1990 In a ceremony at Beale AFB, Calif., the Strategic Air Command **retired Lockheed's SR-71 Blackbird** from active service. The SR-71 aircrews flew more than 65 million miles, at speeds above Mach 2 (more than half above Mach 3) on high altitude reconnaissance missions.

27 January 1991 After 10 days of aerial combat during Operation DESERT STORM, US-backed coalition air forces attained air supremacy over the Iraqis. F-111 Aardvarks delivered guided bombs on the Al Ahmadi oil refinery to close oil manifolds opened by the Iraqis. This attack stopped the flow of crude oil—the biggest deliberate oil spill in history—into the Persian Gulf.

29 January 1991 **Battle of Khafji.** In the first major ground engagement of the Gulf War, Iraqi forces crossed the Kuwaiti border into Saudi Arabia. The USAF suffered its greatest loss of the war, when the Iraqis shot down Spirit 03, an AC-130H Spectre gunship, killing all 14 crewmembers on board. Tactical air strikes by coalition air forces, however, routed the invaders in three days. For more info see the AF Magazine article, [The Epic Little Battle of Khafji](#).



31 January-3 February 2001 In response to a 7.7 earthquake that devastated western India, two C-5s and four C-17s flew 115 short tons of humanitarian cargo to Ahmedabad, India. Each C-5 Galaxy flew nonstop from Travis AFB, California, to Andersen AFB, Guam. Hawaii ANG KC-135s refueled each C-5 en route. At Andersen (photo right), workers transferred the C-5 cargo onto four 62nd Airlift Wing C-17s from McChord AFB, because Ahmedabad's airfield was too small for the C-5s. KC-135Rs from the 18th Wing, Kadena AB, refueled the C-17s on their 13-hour flight between Guam and India.

28 January 2003 **Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.** The Air Staff waived the USAF General Flight Rules to allow Air Combat Command to deploy the RQ-4A *Global Hawk* for this operation. At the time, the Air Force Flight Test Center at Edwards AFB, Calif., still had the *Global Hawk* in developmental testing.