



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 21 – 27 February 2011



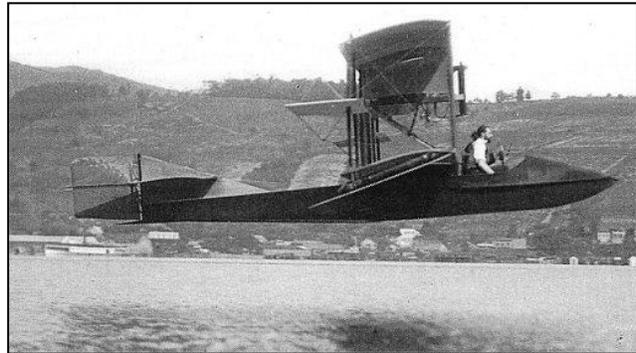
Countdown to 7 December 1941.

21 February 1941 Shortly before daylight, thirty-one P-36s launched from the carrier *Enterprise* and joined the Hawaiian Air Force at Wheeler Field. This launching of Army fighters from a Navy carrier was a historic first in military aviation. Among the pilots were Lieutenants George Welch and Kermit Tyler.

25 February 1941 In a conference in the Office of the Chief of Staff, General Marshall stated: "In view of the Japanese situation the Navy is concerned with the security of the fleet in Hawaii... Their particular point is the type of air force in Hawaii, particularly Pursuit. They are in the situation where they must guard against a surprise or trick attack. It is necessary for the fleet to be in anchorage part of the time and they are particularly vulnerable at that time. I do not feel that it is a possibility or even a probability, but they must guard against everything.... The Navy viewpoint is that the whole fleet is involved and that the sea power of the United States might be jeopardized."

24 Feb 1914 **Pusher aircraft condemned.**

Due to the large proportion of deaths in pusher airplane accidents, an Army board at the Signal Corps Aviation School condemned all such aircraft. On these aircraft, the engine was mounted behind the pilot, and the propeller behind the engine. In a crash, the power plant was almost certain to break loose from its mountings and crush the pilot.



21 Feb 1924 **Carl B. Eielson** flew the first airmail from Fairbanks to McGrath, Alaska.

26 Feb 1945 **Lt. Gen. Millard F. Harmon**, Commanding General, Army Air Forces, Pacific Ocean Areas, **disappeared on a B-24 flight** enroute from the Marshall Islands to Hawaii. Despite an intensive search by aircraft and surface vessels, no trace of the plane was ever found.

24 Feb 1952 **Wheeler AFB was reactivated** following a period of minimum caretaker status since 1949. This reactivation was part of the Air Force expansion during the Korean Conflict.

26 Feb 1960 **US Missile Launch.** On 26 February a TM-61C Matador tactical missile was successfully launched from Pad 1, Osan Air Base, Korea. The missile failed to destruct on command and was shot down by an F-100D chase plane which fired a Sidewinder missile.

22 Feb 1967 **First paratroop drop of the Vietnam War.** Over 700 paratroopers were dropped by PACAF C-130s into War Zone C, South Vietnam, in **Operation JUNCTION CITY**. The personnel drops were followed by heavy drops of equipment and supplies.



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23 Feb 1967 **End of the Charging Sparrow test program.** The AIM-7 was a radar-guided air-to-air missile first developed shortly after World War II. During the Vietnam War, the AIM-7D/E had been virtually useless against maneuvering fighter-size targets, especially at low altitude. The Charging Sparrow program was designed to evaluate the

Sparrow missile capabilities of the Southeast Asia fighter force, and it required that every F-4C aircraft launch an AIM-7 against an aerial target. The results showed only two thirds of the F-4C force could successfully launch an AIM-7, and that only 80 percent of the missiles met requirements. The AIM-7F joined the Air Force inventory in 1976 as an almost completely new missile, and each new Sparrow version substantially improved the missile's performance.

24 Feb 1967 **Medals of Honor.** Flying an unarmed and unarmored O-1 Bird Dog aircraft near Di Linh, South Vietnam, forward air controller Capt. Hilliard A. Wilbanks, USAF, attacked a large body of Vietcong, who had ambushed a smaller force of South Vietnamese rangers. Repeatedly flying over the enemy force, Captain Wilbanks used smoke rockets and an M-16 rifle to slow the enemy advance until U.S. fighters could arrive to protect the rangers. Wilbanks was shot down and died during his evacuation, earning the Medal of Honor.



Two years later, on 24 Feb 1969, an enemy mortar shell struck an AC-47 gunship on which A1C John L. Levitow served as loadmaster during a night mission in South Vietnam. Although seriously wounded and stunned, Airman Levitow flung himself on a smoking magnesium flare that was rolling in the cargo compartment, dragged it to an open cargo door, and threw it out of the aircraft. Almost immediately the flare ignited. For this selfless heroism, Levitow became the fourth enlisted airman to win the Medal of Honor.

22 Feb 1973 **CEASE FIRE IN LAOS.** After signing the cease-fire for South Vietnam on 27 January, the US redirected most of its air operations against North Vietnamese forces in Laos. Besides the 4,482 attack sorties flown by the Royal Lao Air Force, the USAF flew 50 B-52 Arc Light sorties and 4,000 tactical sorties in January. After the 22 February cease-fire, the Laos requested three B-52 strikes on 23 February to answer North Vietnamese violations. B-52s flew 41 more sorties during 15-17 April. These were the final B-52 strikes against targets in Laos.

22 Feb 1978 The first test satellite in the Air Force's Navstar **Global Positioning System** was launched into Earth orbit.

26 Feb 1980 **Exercise RIMPAC 80.** PACAF hosted and participated in the first multinational exercise, RIMPAC 80, in Hawaiian waters. The exercise included Japanese forces.



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24 Feb 1991 **DESERT STORM Ground Offensive.** After more than a month of air strikes that severely weakened Iraqi forces, the U.S.-led coalition launched a ground offensive from Saudi Arabia. C-130s had already airlifted elements of the Army XVIII Airborne Corps from eastern Saudi Arabia to Rafha, on the Saudi-Iraqi border. Flying more than 300 sorties a day in 10-minute intervals, the C-130s delivered 13,843 troops and 9,396 tons of cargo. This movement enabled coalition forces to encircle Iraq's Republican Guard in what Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf, combatant commander of US Central Command, described as the "Hail Mary maneuver." Within 100 hours, coalition ground forces, coupled with continued air attacks, totally overwhelmed the Iraqi ground troops. Between February 24 and 28, the Air Force flew 3,000 reconnaissance, close air support, and interdiction sorties.



Operation DESERT STORM ended on 28 February at 0800 hours with a coalition-declared cease-fire. During the war, coalition forces released approximately 16,000 precision-guided munitions against Iraqi forces and dropped some 210,000 unguided bombs. In 42 days of around-the-clock operations, USAF aircraft flew 59 percent of the nearly 110,000 combat sorties. U.S. aerial strength of approximately 1,990 aircraft comprised 75 percent of the total coalition air power. Extensive use of satellite technology during DESERT STORM persuaded some USAF leaders subsequently to refer to the operation as **the "first space war."**

23 Feb 1998 **B-2s deployed overseas for the first time**, flying from Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri, to Andersen Air Force Base, Guam.

21 Feb 2001 An **RQ-1 Predator fired a Hellfire missile to hit a tank** at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, becoming the first unmanned aerial vehicle to destroy a ground target. Until then, the remotely controlled airplane had been used only for reconnaissance.

22-25 Feb 2002 **Senior leaders from the USAF and Indian AF** joined for a conference at PACAF — the first between the Air Forces since the U.S. lifted anti-nuclear sanctions against India in October 2001.

21 Feb 2006 The **second C-17 Globemaster III arrived at Hickam**, with a celebration hosted by the Hawaii Air National Guard. Welcoming DVs included Major General Robert F. Lee, adjutant general of the Hawaii National Guard, and Major General Darryl Wong, Hawaii Air National Guard commander.