



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 28 February – 6 March 2011



Countdown to 7 December 1941.

Commander Minoru Genda was the Imperial Navy's most brilliant airman—a Japanese Billy Mitchell. Genda envisioned Operation Hawaii six years before it happened. He proposed a concentrated fleet of carriers massing airpower against the objective. In late February, 1941 Genda drafted a plan with these elements:

1. The attack must catch the enemy completely by surprise.
2. Enemy aircraft carriers were the first priority.
3. Another priority was land-based planes, preferably destroyed on the ground.
4. Every available carrier should participate in the operation.
5. All bombing tactics should be used – in this order: torpedo, dive, and high-level.
6. Fighters should protect both the bombers and the carriers during the attack.
7. The attack should launch in darkness and attack the target at dawn.
8. Refueling ships at sea would be a major problem but necessary for the operation.
9. Planning must be done in strict secrecy.

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).



This Week in USAF and PACAF History 28 February – 6 March 2011



U.S. AIR FORCE

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.



3 Mar 1952 **Operation SATURATE**. FEAF initiated an around-the-clock interdiction effort directed against North Korean railroad lines. Fighter-bombers attacked during the day and B-26 bombers at night. Continuous attacks were carried out through May, and continued periodically thereafter. However, the vulnerability of the B-26 to communist ground fire provoked reassessments and adjustments to the interdiction campaign. (B-26 at left.)

28 Feb 1959 The Air Force successfully launched **the Discoverer I satellite** into polar orbit from Vandenberg Air Force Base, California. A polar orbit allows a satellite to fly over all surface points because of Earth's rotation.

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.

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





This Week in USAF and PACAF History 28 February – 6 March 2011



U.S. AIR FORCE

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. The result was the A-10 Warthog.

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 air-launched cruise missile (ALCM)**. The photo below left is an ALCM launch from a B-52; below right is an ALCM in flight after the wings have deployed.)



28 Feb 1994 **Operation DENY FLIGHT.** Two F-16 Fighting Falcons from the 526th FS, 86th Wing, at Ramstein AFB shot down four Serbian J-21 Jastreb-Galeb attack aircraft over Bosnia. In accordance with the rules of engagement, the F-16s ordered the Serbian aircraft to "land or exit the No-Fly Zone or be engaged." The Serbian aircraft ignored the orders, dropped bombs, and were engaged by the F-16s. This action was the **first aerial combat in NATO history**. (Photo at right is a J-21 Jastreb of Armed Forces of Bosnia-Herzegovina.)



28 Feb 1998 **The RQ-4 Global Hawk first flew.** This new unmanned aerial vehicle, designed for high-altitude, long-range, long-endurance reconnaissance missions, took off from Edwards AFB, California, on a 56-minute flight. The aircraft, with a wingspan of 116 feet, was built to fly at an altitude of up to 65,000 feet and photograph an area the size of Kentucky in 24 hours.

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.

OPR: PACAF/HO