



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 7 – 13 March 2011



Countdown to 7 December 1941.

8 March 1941 Secretary of State Cordell Hull reported a conversation with Japanese ambassador Kichisaburo Nomura. Despite some agreement on peaceful relations, “[the Japanese ambassador said] if our American embargoes continued to press his Government and the military group in control, they may feel forced to proceed further in a naval or military way. I again said to him that ... the whole responsibility and initiative with respect to military conquest and the departure from laws and treaties and other basic rules of friendly relationship by the Japanese Government rests entirely on that Government... The new order in greater Eastern Asia is unequivocally believed to be purely a program of military aggression and conquest with entirely arbitrary policies of political, economic and military domination. The Ambassador made no definite promise as to what his Government would do in respect to halting its aggression for purpose of discussions.”

11 March 1941 Congress approved Lend-Lease aid to countries such as Great Britain and China who were fighting the Axis powers – Germany, Italy and Japan.

12 March 1941 Admiral Kimmel, Commander-in-Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet, recommended “that until a light efficient net, that can be laid temporarily and quickly is developed, no A/T [(anti-torpedo)] nets be supplied this area.”

11 March 1918 Lt. Paul Baer of the 103rd Aero Squadron downed an enemy airplane and earned the **first Distinguished Service Cross awarded to a member of an Army air unit**. U.S. pilots with earlier aerial victories had served with the French.



10 March 1943 **Composite wing.** Fourteenth Air Force was activated at Kunming, China, under Maj. Gen. Claire L. Chennault, the former commander of the American Volunteer Group known as the “Flying Tigers.” Composed of U.S. and Chinese pilots, this composite wing conducted tactical air operations against Japanese forces occupying China. Photo at left.

9 March 1945 **Area bombing of Tokyo.** More than 300 B-29s dropped incendiary bombs that destroyed 16 square miles of Tokyo—about a fourth of the city. In terms of immediate loss of life (80,000-100,000), this air raid was the most destructive in history. The attack reflected a shift in U.S. bombardment policy from high-altitude daylight attacks on specific military targets to low-level area bombing at night in order to demoralize the Japanese. Photo at right.





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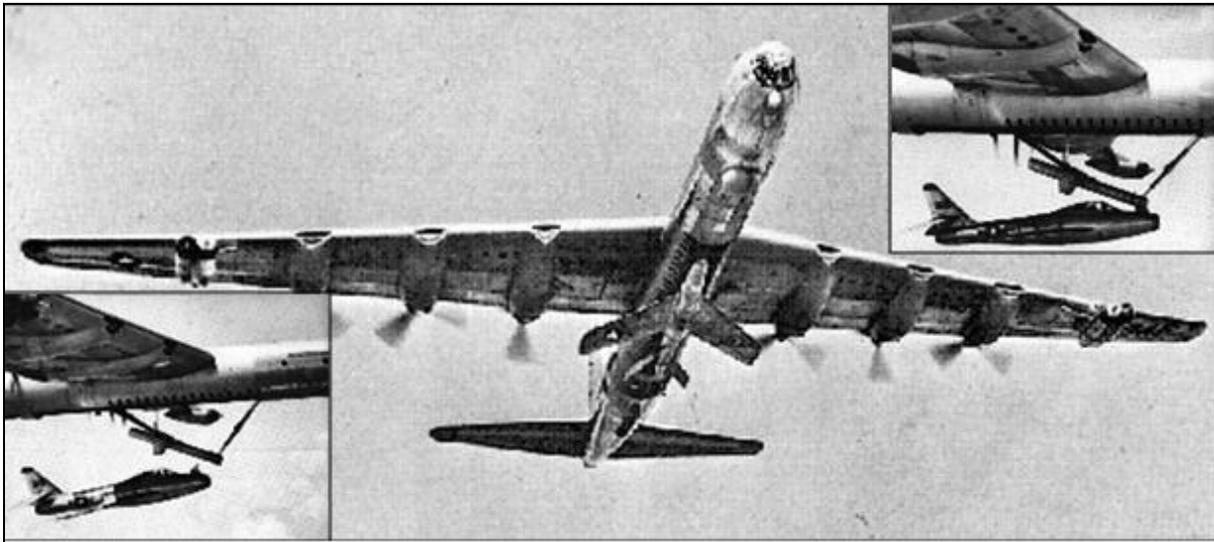
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12 March 1946 **Air University designated.** The Army Air Forces School at Maxwell Field was redesignated Air University, with jurisdiction over Air Command and Staff School, Air War College, and four bases.

8 March 1953 F-86 Saber pilot Joseph McConnell destroyed his sixth MiG-15 in aerial combat over Korea. The following month McConnell downed three MiG-15s in one day, becoming the **first jet fighter “Triple Ace.”**

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.



9 March 1959 **First PACAF F-102s.** The 16th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron at Naha AB, Okinawa, became the first squadron in PACAF to convert to Convair's F-102 Delta Dagger. The unit, previously equipped with F-86D Sabres, became operationally ready later in September.



10 March 1966 Major Bernard Fisher, a 1st Air Commando Squadron A-1E pilot, became the **first USAF Medal of Honor recipient in Vietnam.** Major Fisher (at left) led an attack on enemy forces surrounding an outpost in the A Chau Valley in the northwest part of South Vietnam. Fisher saw another A-1E pilot, Major Wayne Meyers; crash-land on a battered landing strip under intense enemy fire. Fisher decided to rescue Myers himself. In an outstanding display of airmanship, he landed on the runway that was littered with debris and pocked by holes from mortar fire. As Fisher passed the downed aircraft,



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he saw Myers jump up from cover and run toward him. Myers could not climb onboard because of prop wash, so Fisher throttled back and pulled Myers into the cockpit headfirst. Without taking time to buckle up, he once more turned his aircraft around, fire-walled the throttle, and took off, again avoiding the impediments on the runway. With 19 bullet holes in the aircraft, they cleared the mountains and made it safely to Pleiku. For his outstanding courage and airmanship, Maj Fisher received the Medal of Honor.



Lt. Col. Merlyn H. Dethlefsen

10 March 1967 Captain Merlyn H. Dethlefsen earned the **Medal of Honor** during the first bombing mission against the Thai Nguyen industrial works in North Vietnam. The Thai Nguyen works was the only plant in Southeast Asia making bridge sections, barges, and POL drums. Maj. Dethlefsen was a pilot in a flight of F-105 aircraft engaged in a fire suppression mission designed to destroy the anti-aircraft artillery and surface-to-air missile sites protecting the targets. Maj Dethlefsen repeatedly attacked the SAM defenses even after his aircraft was severely damaged. To make sure the SAM site wouldn't come up the next day, he hosed the site with his 20mm cannon, headed for a tanker, and nursed his damaged F-105 back to Takhli, 500 miles away.

10 March 1967 Capt Mac C. Brestel, an F-105 pilot with the 355th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB), Thailand, became the **first USAF pilot to down two MiGs in one mission in the Vietnam War**.

10 March 1977 The **first female navigator candidates** reported to Mather AFB, California for undergraduate navigator training.

10 March 1995 **TBM warning**. The 11th Space Warning Squadron became the first unit with the ability to warn battlefield commanders of incoming theater ballistic missiles, such as the Scud missiles fired by Iraq in DESERT STORM.

10 March 2006 The United States and Malaysia joined forces for **Cope Taufan '06**, a three-week air-to-air training exercise designed to sharpen air combat tactic skills and promote closer relations between allies. Cope Taufan (Taufan means “big storm” in Malaysian) is held bi-annually near the northwest coast of that country. Eight F-15 Eagles and more than 114 maintainers, munitions handlers and pilots from the 18th Wing participated in the exercise. The Malaysian AF flew MiG-29s in this exercise, providing USAF pilots with the “chance of a lifetime” opportunity to fly against “the real thing.” (see photo of MiG-29 involved in Cope Taufan, above).

