



This Week in USAF and PACAF History 18 – 24 April 2011



U.S. AIR FORCE

18 Apr 1942 **Doolittle Raid.** Colonel James H. “Jimmy” Doolittle led 16 B-25s from the aircraft carrier *Hornet* to bomb Tokyo and other sites in the first U.S. air raid on Japan.

Although the raid caused only minor damage, it raised U.S. morale, caused the Japanese to divert resources to their defensive perimeter, and was a factor in their decision to send their carrier fleet to its disaster at Midway.

Early sighting by Japanese ships forced the Doolittle raiders to launch prematurely from the carrier *Hornet*. Most of them had to crash land in China after the raid. Doolittle thought he would be court-martialed on his return, but instead was awarded the Medal of Honor. (At right, B-25s on the *Hornet* flight deck.)



18 Apr 1943 **Yamamoto Shootdown.** Flying P-38 aircraft over Bougainville Island, 1st Lt. Rex T. Barber and Capt. Thomas G. Lanphier, Jr., intercepted and shot down a Japanese bomber carrying Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto. The interception, meticulously planned and executed on the first anniversary of the Doolittle raid, deprived the Japanese of one of their most brilliant naval officers. Major John W. Mitchell led the flight of 16 P-38s in which Barber and Lanphier flew.

21 Apr 1948 **KEY WEST AGREEMENT.** The SECDEF issued a memo to his Secretaries with a paper defining the functions of the services and the JCS. It was the first delineation of functions drawn up after the National Security Act of 1947. The Air Force received primary responsibility for the air defense of America and the strategic nuclear bombing mission. **WHAT DID NOT HAPPEN:** The Air Force did not get carrier-based aircraft, which were retained by the Navy for naval campaigns. Since aircraft that attack ships can also attack targets on land, the agreement did not prevent a significant Air Force-Navy airpower rivalry. **WHAT DID HAPPEN:** Army and Marine Corps air capabilities were limited relative to the Air Force and the Navy. With little faith that other services would provide robust air support, the Army developed its own “air force” in the form of attack helicopters while the Marine Corps ultimately preserved its independent air wings. An effective, systematic concept for airpower unity of command was developed only after the Goldwater-Nichols DoD Reorganization Act of 1986 and the creation of the Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC) concept.



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 18 – 24 April 2011



22 Apr 1953 **New fighter mission in Korea.** Because of shortages of fighter-bombers, Fifth Air Force assigned a new mission to the F-86 Sabres of the 4th and 51st Fighter Interceptor Wings (FIWs) – armed reconnaissance of enemy lines of communication. In the photo at left, a 1954 flight of F-86 Sabres from the 51 FIW is led by the wing commander, Colonel Benjamin O. Davis.

23 Apr 1965 The first operational **Lockheed C-141 Starlifter** aircraft was delivered to Travis Air Force Base, California. Capable of crossing any ocean nonstop at more than 500 miles per hour, the Starlifter could transport up to 70,000 pounds of payload, including 154 troops, 123 paratroopers, or a combination of troops and supplies.

In the spring of 1960 the Air Force, needing replacements for its slower piston-engined cargo



planes, called for a new aircraft that would be capable of performing both strategic and tactical airlift missions. The Lockheed response was Model 300, the first large jet designed from the start to carry cargo. The aircraft had a high swept wing with four pod-mounted turbofan engines. The cabin floor's height only 50 inches above the ground allowed easy access through the rear doors. President John F. Kennedy's first official act after his inauguration was to order the development of the Lockheed Model 300, which became the C-141.

19 Apr 1967 **MEDAL OF HONOR.** Major Leo K. Thorsness earned a Medal of Honor by protecting a mission to rescue downed airmen in North Vietnam. While flying an F-105 with low fuel, Thorsness shot down one MiG-17, damaged another, and drove off three more. Despite his urgent need for fuel, Major Thorsness elected to recover at a forward operating base, allowing another aircraft in emergency condition to refuel from an aerial tanker. Shortly after this incident, Thorsness was shot down, captured, and held prisoner until his release on March 4, 1973.



(At right, Major Thorsness and his regular backseater, Capt. Harold Johnson, who flew 93 Wild Weasel missions over North Vietnam. Capt. Johnson received the Air Force Cross).



This Week in USAF and PACAF History
18 – 24 April 2011



U.S. AIR FORCE

24 Apr 1980 **Operation EAGLE CLAW.** In November of 1979, more than 3,000 Iranian militant students stormed the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, Iran, taking 66 Americans hostage. A rescue plan was developed that included the use of Air Force C-130s and Navy RH-53 helicopters to insert and extract an Army rescue team. On 24 April 1980, the attempt to rescue the hostages was aborted after night-time sandstorms and mechanical difficulties reduced the number of Navy RH-53 helicopters to an insufficient force. Subsequently, an RH-53 collided with an Air Force HC-130 on the dark, windy landing site in Iran, killing eight servicemen. Colonel James Kyle, USAF, Desert One on-scene commander, from his book *The Guts to Try*:

“The C-130 crews and combat controllers had not failed in any part of the operation and had a right to be proud of what they accomplished,” Kyle said. “They inserted the rescue team into Iran on schedule, set up the refueling zone, and gassed up the helicopters when they finally arrived. Then, when things went sour, they saved the day with an emergency evacuation by some incredibly skillful flying. They had gotten the forces out of Iran to fight another day — a fact they can always look back on with pride.”



Members of the 8th Special Operations Squadron who died in Operation Eagle Claw were (left to right): Capt. Richard Bakke, Tech. Sgt. Joel Mayo, Capt. Lyn McIntosh, Capt. Hal Lewis and Capt. Charles McMillan. See the USAF article: [Hurlburt remembers Operation Eagle Claw.](#)

23 Apr 2001 The **RQ-4A Global Hawk** completed the first nonstop trans-Pacific flight by an UAV. It flew from the Air Force Flight Test Center at Edwards AFB to Edinburgh, Australia, covering the 7,500 miles in about 23 hours. The flight demonstrated the Global Hawk’s high-altitude, long-range capabilities. (See USAF Global Hawk photo at right).

