



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 2 – 8 May 2011



8 May 1918 **First Flight Surgeons.** Captains John F. Gallagher, Robert J. Hunter, and Claude T. Uren became the first medical officers to be assigned as flight surgeons at U.S. airfields. The role of the flight surgeon during World War I was to investigate the appalling death rate among military flying cadets and front line pilots due to disorientation and other physical factors associated with flying as well as poor aviator selection and other medical issues. The Army assigned officers to flight duty that were not physically qualified for infantry or cavalry duty. Due to G-forces, disorientation, and hypoxia in flight, early flight surgeons found that flyers must be scrupulously healthy and well trained in aerospace physiology.

6 May 1941 **The Republic P-47 Thunderbolt flew for the first time.** Designed by Russians who fled the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, the P-47 was one of World War II's largest, heaviest, and most rugged fighters. Twice the size of other fighters, the P-47 was best when attacking from higher altitudes. Exceptional diving capabilities gave the P-47 a serious advantage over lower enemy fighters, since they couldn't escape in a dive. With its high payload capacity and eight half-inch machine guns, the P-47 had a considerable firepower that could destroy an enemy fighter, tank or armored train in seconds. (Photo above.)



2 May 1957 **The USAF accepted its first F-101A Voodoo.** The post-World War II requirement for a long-range bomber escort drove the initial development of the Voodoo, which originally was designed to have a large fuel/weapons pod similar to the B-58 Hustler. With the advent of jet bombers such as the B-52, SAC lost interest in the F-101. The Voodoo (photo at left) was used as an air defense interceptor, reconnaissance platform and low-altitude nuclear fighter-bomber. Significantly, the F-101 was a precursor to the F-4 Phantom.

3 May 1960 General Curtis LeMay, VCSAF, announced the approval of a **single tanker force** managed by Strategic Air Command. This was a part of LeMay's vision to enable the USAF jet bomber force to reach distant targets and return. Components of the concept included the KC-135 jet tanker (to keep up with jet bombers), the rigid tanker boom for a more stable and rapid transfer of fuel, and single-point refueling which allowed one fuel insertion point to feed all the fuel tanks on the receiving aircraft.

4 May 1960 **HIANG facilities.** A groundbreaking ceremony for the Hawaii Air National Guard fighter complex was held in the Hickam Harbor-Fort Kamehameha area. Following the ceremony, contractors began work on the \$1,847,000 project, which included a new parking apron, maintenance hangar, annex for administration and supply, roads, and utilities.



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3 May 1961 The **first launch of an ICBM from an underground silo** was conducted when a Titan was launched from an underground silo at Vandenberg AFB, CA.

When cryogenic liquid fuels were used in ICBMs, the missiles had to stand empty and then be fueled just prior to launch. Even silo-based missiles such as the Atlas had to be fueled in the silo and then raised to the surface for firing. New ICBMs such as the Titan II (and the Soviet UR-100) used new liquid fuels that could be stored in the missiles, thereby allowing for rapid launch directly out of silos. Introduction of solid fuel systems in the late 1960s made this even easier. (Photo of Vandenberg ICBM launch at left.)

6-15 May 1972 **Operation CONSTANT GUARD III.** During North Vietnam's Nguyen Hue Offensive (the "Easter offensive"), MAC helped the 49th TFW move 3,195 airmen and 1,600 tons of cargo from Holloman AFB, to Takli, Thailand. Later, MAC C-5s airlifted 26 U.S. Army tanks on 10 flights to Da Nang, where they joined the battle in a matter of hours.

8 May 1972 **Operation LINEBACKER I.** President Nixon approved this operation as a military measure to defeat North Vietnam's Easter offensive and to end the Vietnam War.

The enemy offensive began on 30 March. A U.S. interdiction campaign against North Vietnam began on 6 April and expanded rapidly to targets in Hanoi and Haiphong. On 16 April,



B-52s bombed fuel storage tanks at Haiphong, escorted by fighters and aircraft specializing in electronic warfare and suppression of surface-to-air missiles (see photo of F-105G at left). Air Force and Navy fighter-bombers also struck a tank farm and a warehouse complex on the

outskirts of Hanoi. Naval aircraft began mining North Vietnamese harbors on 8 May, and two days later the administration expanded the air campaign, formerly known as *Freedom Train* but now designated *Linebacker*, throughout North Vietnam.

The tactics employed and results obtained in Linebacker were a great improvement over the earlier, gradually escalating *Rolling Thunder* air campaign. During Linebacker, American aircraft attacked vital targets like airfields, power plants, and communication stations. This disrupted the flow of supplies and reinforcements to enemy units fighting in the South. Laser-guided bombs were introduced and proved highly effective, especially against bridges such as those at Thanh Hoa and over the Red River at Hanoi. However, the traffic was not halted entirely. The enemy adapted by crossing at night on ferries or movable pontoon bridges. Improved American electronic warfare restricted enemy use of radar and radio communications, while U.S. radars helped direct U.S. fighters to intercept enemy MiGs as they took off.



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Linebacker I was essential in the defeat of the Easter offensive without bringing U.S. ground forces back to Vietnam. In fact, the last U.S. Army combat troops left Vietnam in August 1972 while the South Vietnamese were driving back the enemy. However, both North and South Vietnam realized that the South would be vulnerable to an invasion if U.S. airpower was withdrawn. In order to obtain a peace agreement, Nixon offered South Vietnam's President Thieu "absolute assurance" that he would take "swift and severe retaliatory action" if North Vietnam should attack again, and he resumed the bombing campaign against North Vietnam, culminating in December with Operation Linebacker II.



B-52s launch on a Linebacker mission.

7 May 1975 **PACAF lives!** As the U.S. withdrew from southeast Asia, planned military force reductions included the disestablishment of PACAF. The DoD planned to assign 5th and 13th Air Forces to Tactical Air Command and to transfer control of theater airlift resources to Military Airlift Command. However, the fall of South Vietnam and Cambodia to communists in early 1975 led to a SECDEF announcement that the disestablishment of PACAF would be delayed. Ultimately, PACAF remained as the air component of U.S. Pacific Command.

2 May 1981 **First airborne laser kill.** The Airborne Laser Laboratory (ALL), a modified NKC-135A aircraft armed with a carbon dioxide laser, shot down a drone over White Sands Missile Range, NM. Two years later, the ALL shot down five Sidewinder air-to-air missiles, proving its utility as an antimissile system. These technologies were later used in the Airborne Laser Program—a theater missile defense platform that will engage ballistic missiles in their boost phase.



8 May 1994 **Operation PROVIDE PROMISE.** Through 26 July, five C-141s flew humanitarian missions from Germany to Bosnia. They joined the earlier deployment of C-130s from the 437 AW and 315 AW at Charleston AFB. The C-141s delivered over 7,000 tons of cargo by the time their flights ended.

5 May 1996 Colonel Betty L. Mullis became the **first woman to command a flying wing** when she assumed command of the 940th Air Refueling Wing (AFRES) at McClellan AFB.

8 May 2001 Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld designated the Air Force as **executive agent for DoD space activities.**