



## This Week in USAF and PACAF History 25 – 31 Jul 2011



**U.S. AIR FORCE**

27 July 1909 Orville Wright, with Lt Frank P. Lahm as a passenger, flew the Army's **first official flight test** at Fort Myer, Virginia. The 72-minute sortie set a two-man endurance record.

28 July 1935 **First flight of Boeing's Model 299 – prototype of the B-17 Flying Fortress.** In 1934, the U.S. Army Air Corps tendered a contract to replace the Martin B-10 bomber. Two of the three main competitors had only two engines and three guns. The four-engine Boeing Model 299 (prototype of the B-17) was nicknamed "Flying Fortress" when it rolled out with four engines and seven machine guns. However, the Depression-era selection board awarded the contract to the B-18. Nevertheless, the Air Corps used a legal loophole to order 13 YB-17s as test aircraft, and the bomber went on to enter full-scale production in the following years.

28 July 1943 **MEDAL OF HONOR.** During a bombing mission in Europe, enemy fighters severely damaged Flight Officer John C. Morgan's B-17. A cannon shell totally shattered the windscreen and split the pilot's skull open, leaving him in a crazed condition. Morgan, as copilot, tried to fly the plane, while struggling with the pilot who was still trying to fly the aircraft. He continued the flight and for two hours flew in formation with one hand at the controls and the other holding off the pilot until the navigator came in to provide relief. For completing the bombing mission and safely returning to England, Morgan received the Medal of Honor. (Morgan's feat was the basis for a plot element in the movie "Twelve O'Clock High.") Morgan volunteered for more missions, including the first raid on Berlin on 6 March 1944. He was shot down that day and was a POW for the rest of the war. You can read more about [John C. Morgan](#) on the 327th Bomb Squadron website.



25 July 1944 In **Operation COBRA**, nearly 2,000 Eighth Air Force bombers conducted saturation bombing in northern France. Their objective was to allow Allied land forces to break through German hedgerow defenses that had stymied the Allied advance after D-Day. Unlike earlier "broad front" American offensives, Operation Cobra and its heavy air support were concentrated on a four-mile front. Fighter-bombers and artillery hit the forward German defenses while General Spaatz's heavy bombers hit enemy defenders for more than a mile behind the lines. The bombardment was an early example of "shock and awe," and greatly weakened German resistance. Allied forces broke out of the Normandy hedgerow country and into fast-advancing maneuver warfare that overran German positions in northwest France.

26 July 1947 President Harry S. Truman signed the **National Security Act**, which created a **Department of the Air Force** equal to the Army and Navy; a National Military Establishment under the Secretary of Defense; and an **Air National Guard** as a component of the Air Force.

30 July 1948 North American Aviation delivered the **USAF's first operational jet bomber**—the B-45A Tornado. Later, it became the first USAF aircraft to carry a tactical nuclear bomb.



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27 July 1953 **KOREAN WAR ENDS.** UN and Communist officials signed an armistice at Panmunjom. When the war ended, U.S. Air Force F-86 Sabre pilots enjoyed at least a 7-1 edge in air-to-air combat against MiG-15s. U.S. aircrews flew more than 625,000 combat sorties and destroyed 839 MiG-15s, probably destroyed 154 more, and damaged 919 others. FEAF pilots destroyed the North Korean Air Force in the first weeks of the war. They obliterated strategic targets in the first months and conducted an effective interdiction campaign throughout the conflict. FEAF aircraft destroyed 34,000 vehicles, 276 locomotives, and 3,800 railroad cars. The interdiction campaign destroyed 70 percent of North Korea's tanks, trucks, and artillery pieces and inflicted nearly 50 percent of North Korean troop casualties. The Military Air Transport Service (MATS) used C-47s, C-54s, C-97s, C-119s, and C-124s to airlift 214,000 passengers and 80,000 tons of cargo to the combat area. MATS air-dropped another 15,000 tons of supplies and conducted 386,536 medical evacuations. The Air Rescue Service recovered 9,898 UN troops, with 996 saves in the combat zone. SAC B-29s flew 1,995 reconnaissance and 21,328 combat sorties to drop 167,000 tons of bombs on various targets. The USAF suffered 1,729 casualties. Just before the armistice, Capt. Ralph S. Parr, Jr., USAF, scored the **last aerial victory of the Korean War** by shooting down an Il-2, allegedly with a number of senior Soviet officers onboard. The shoot down triggered a short-lived diplomatic protest from the USSR.



F-86 Sabre

26 July 1954 Lt. General Hubert R. Harmon was appointed the **first Superintendent of the USAF Academy**. In 1943, General Harmon had been appointed deputy commander for the air forces of the South Pacific Area. In January, 1944 General Harmon assumed command of the 13th Air Force, and he commanded all Allied air units in the Solomon Islands campaign.

31 July 1957 **The Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line was declared fully operational.** This string of radar installations across the Canadian Arctic warned of enemy bomber attacks.

29 July 1970 Col Vere Short, a C-141 pilot, attained 25,000 accident-free flying hours, the **most military flying time** by anyone on active duty.

29 July 1974 SECDEF James R. Schlesinger directed the **consolidation of all military airlift**. As a result, the USAF became the single airlift manager for all the armed services.



29 July 1995 **First USAF unit of unmanned aerial vehicles.** The 11th Reconnaissance Squadron was activated at Nellis AFB, Nevada. The unit was equipped with the MQ-1 Predator system – designed to provide persistent intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance information to the warfighter. An armed reconnaissance role was added in 2002.



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26 July 2005 Col. Eileen M. Collins, USAF, flew as Mission Commander for STS-114 on Discovery, the **first “Return to Flight” mission after the Columbia disaster** on 1 Feb 2003.

In 1995, Col. Collins became had been the **first female pilot of a space shuttle**. On 23 July 1999, Col. Collins became the **first female Mission Commander of a space-shuttle mission**, commanding STS-93 on Columbia. This mission deployed the Chandra X-Ray Observatory, designed to conduct comprehensive studies of the universe.



In the 2003 Columbia tragedy, the shuttle’s heat shield was damaged during liftoff by debris that broke off the external tank. The damaged heat shield did not protect Columbia during atmospheric reentry, and it broke apart.

Two and a half years were spent improving the safety of shuttle orbiters and external tanks. STS-114’s primary objectives were to test new safety procedures and to perform assembly and maintenance work on the International Space Station (ISS). Before docking with the space station, Col. Collins performed the first R-bar pitch maneuver (RPM) in a space shuttle. Known as the “rendezvous pitch maneuver,” this became standard procedure for all space shuttles docking with the ISS.

During the RPM, the shuttle approached the ISS along the R-bar, or Earth Radius Vector – the imaginary line connecting the space station to the center of the Earth. At 600 feet from the ISS, the shuttle performed a slow, 360-degree backflip so that the ISS crew could inspect and photograph the heat-resistant tiles forming the heat shield on the shuttle’s underside. If damage was found, the crew could conduct repairs or wait on the ISS for a rescue mission. The RPM required an outstanding pilot as the backflip was performed close to the ISS and the station was not always in full view.



The last space shuttle mission, STS-135 on Atlantis, returned to Earth on 21 July 2011.