



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 11 – 17 Jul 2011



13-21 July 1921 **Sinking the Ostfriesland.**

Brig Gen “Billy” Mitchell’s bombers sank several ships off the Virginia Capes. The tests studied the use of bombs on ships to suggest how ship design could counter an air attack. The bombers sank a German sub, the destroyer *G-102*, the light cruiser *Frankfurt*, and the battleship *Ostfriesland* (at right) on 21 July to prove that aircraft could sink capital ships.



15 July 1931 **The Air Corps Tactical School** moved from Langley Field, Virginia to Maxwell Field, Alabama. It produced most of the Air Corps’ doctrine during the 1930s, including the



concept of long-range, high-altitude daylight precision bombing of selected military and industrial targets—the fundamental strategy of the Army Air Forces in World War II. (Photo at left is Austin Hall in the 1930s.)

17 July 1944 **First use of napalm.** Ninth Air Force P-38s dropped napalm on an enemy fuel depot in France. Napalm, a jellied gasoline, was a revolutionary incendiary weapon.

14 July 1945 After its long, successful island campaign across the Pacific, **7th Air Force moved to Okinawa** and was assigned to the Far East Air Forces for missions against Japan.

16 July 1945 **“Gadget,” the first atomic bomb,** was detonated at the Trinity Site near Alamogordo, New Mexico. The 19 kiloton device was the prototype for the Nagasaki bomb.

13 July 1950 An Air Weather Service RB-29 led the **first strategic bombing strike from Japan against North Korea.** Fifty B-29s attacked the port of Wonsan.

11 July 1955 The **Air Force Academy admitted its first class** of 306 cadets. Classes were held at Lowry AFB while the Academy campus was built north of Colorado Springs.

15 July 1958 **Operation BLUE BAT.** After the fall of the Iraqi government brought civil unrest to the region, Lebanon’s President asked for U.S. assistance. President Eisenhower authorized Operation BLUE BAT, in which U.S. forces secured Beirut’s air and sea ports. TAC’s Composite Air Strike Force BRAVO deployed to the Middle East in 12 hours. By 8 September, MATS had airlifted 5,500 passengers and 5,500 tons of cargo in 314 missions to support the strike force. This was the first U.S. military operation in the region since WWII, and the intervention resulted in political negotiations that produced years of peace.





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16 July 1965 The **OV-10A Bronco** flew its first test flight. The Bronco was a multi-purpose, light attack aircraft developed under an Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps tri-service program. The USAF acquired the OV-10 primarily as a forward air control (FAC) aircraft, but it also performed observation, helicopter escort, reconnaissance, gunfire spotting, personnel transport and ground attack. Faster and more tactically versatile than helicopters, but slower and more maneuverable than jets, the Bronco utilized tactics not possible with either. The Bronco was highly effective against guerilla and conventional forces due to its outstanding capability to find and hit battlefield targets close to friendly troops. The first USAF OV-10As destined for combat arrived in Vietnam on July 31, 1968. A total of 157 OV-10As were delivered to the USAF before production ended in April 1969.



16 July 1969 **Apollo XI/First Lunar Landing.** The Apollo XI lunar landing mission launched from Kennedy Space Center, carrying astronauts Neil A. Armstrong, Col. Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin Jr, USAF, and Lt Col. Michael Collins, USAF. On 20 July, Armstrong and Aldrin flew the lunar module Eagle to the Sea of Tranquility, where Armstrong took the first step on the moon. On 24 July, Apollo XI splashed down in the mid-Pacific.

16 July 1971 [Jeanne M. Holm](#) became the **first female General Officer in the Air Force.**

15 July 1973 **LAST SOUTHEAST ASIA COMBAT MISSION / VIETNAM SUMMARY.** All U.S. bombing in Cambodia ended after eight years of conventional operations in SEA. An A-7D from the 354th Tactical Fighter Wing flew the last combat mission in SEA. Altogether, the USAF flew 5.25 million sorties over South Vietnam, North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. The USAF lost 2,251 planes—1,737 to hostile action and 514 for operational reasons—at a cost of \$3,129,948,000. During the Vietnam War, tactical or intratheater airlift carried 7 million tons of passengers and cargo from 1962 to 1973. Between 1964 and mid-August 1973, air rescue operations in Southeast Asia saved 3,883 lives. And from 9 June 1964 through 15 August 1973, KC-135s flew 194,687 sorties to supply 8,964 million pounds of fuel during 813,878 refuelings. They also routinely airlifted people, equipment, and aircraft parts between the U.S. and bases in the Far East and Southeast Asia. In the photo above, a U.S. Air Force HH-3 helicopter crewman fires a mini-gun during rescue patrol over South Vietnam, October 1968.



12 July 1976 **COPE THUNDER I**, the first of a series of realistic air combat exercises, began at the Clark/Crow Valley range complex in the Philippines. COPE THUNDER was a way to



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give aircrews their first taste of warfare and quickly grew into PACAF's "premier simulated combat airpower employment exercise." Since most combat losses had historically occurred during an aircrew's first eight to 10 missions, the goal of both RED FLAG in Nevada and COPE THUNDER was to simulate those first missions, increasing aircrew survival rates in real combat.

COPE THUNDER moved to Alaska in 1992 after the Mt. Pinatubo volcanic eruption and the closure of Clark AB. COPE THUNDER was redesignated **RED FLAG – Alaska** in 2006.

12 July 1980 The **McDonnell-Douglas KC-10** tanker-cargo aircraft made its first flight.

Doubts about the ability of the KC-135 fleet to meet all of DoD's air refueling requirements arose during the 1960s as the fleet supported both the nuclear alert force and the Vietnam War. The aerial resupply of Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur War highlighted a further need to improve aerial refueling of strategic transports. In 1977, the DC-10 airframe was selected as the new tanker, with modifications that included a boom station in the rear of the fuselage, extra fuel tanks below the main deck, and centerline boom and drogue/hose systems. Additional refueling stations were later mounted on the wings of some KC-10s.

The KC-10 program took advantage of the nearly \$2 billion development of the DC-10 by McDonnell Douglas and its subcontractors as well as very large investments by the airlines in establishing a worldwide support system. The result was a huge reduction in both the acquisition price and operating costs of the KC-10A as compared to an all-new military development.

Although the KC-10's primary mission is aerial refueling, it can combine tanker and cargo functions by refueling fighters and simultaneously deploying the fighter unit's support personnel and equipment.

The refueling capability of the KC-10A nearly doubles the nonstop range of a fully-loaded C-5 strategic transport.



17 July 1987 The first of 33 **MH-53J Enhanced Pave Low III** helicopters rolled out at NAS Pensacola. Pave Low provided night and adverse weather navigation capabilities.

17 July 1989 The **B-2 Spirit** flew for the first time over Edwards AFB. On 15 July 2000, the **final B-2** arrived at Whiteman AFB.

15 July 1998 The **first T-6A Texan II aircraft**, or **Joint Primary Aircraft Training System (JPATS)**, successfully completed its initial flight at Wichita, Kansas. To meet Air Force and Navy primary aircraft training needs, the DoD decided to buy 740 T-6A aircraft.

14 July 2001 A prototype Minuteman **ICBM interceptor** successfully targeted and destroyed an unarmed Minuteman II ICBM over the central Pacific. Ten minutes after launch, the interceptor, traveling at 15,000 mph and more than 140 miles in altitude, destroyed the warhead.