



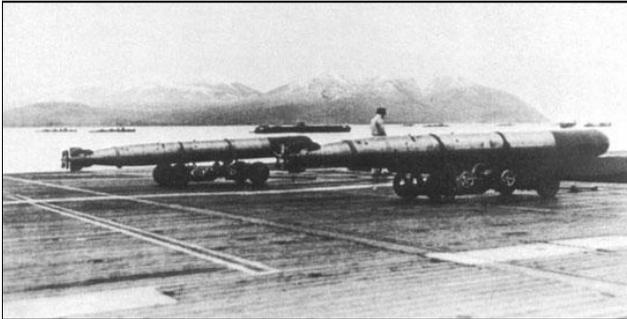
U.S. AIR FORCE

## This Week in USAF and PACAF History 24 Oct – 30 Oct 2011



### Countdown to 7 December 1941.

By late October, 1941, officers in Japan's First Air Fleet had begun to find practical solutions to the obstacles they faced in attacking the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. Through rigorous training, horizontal bomber accuracy had risen to 70%. Some aerial torpedoes had been modified with a fin previously used only as an aerial stabilizer, and new delivery tactics were developed to give even the unmodified torpedoes a chance to run in the shallow depths of Pearl Harbor. Refueling at sea was to be accomplished by loading more oil drums in new locations on naval vessels and developing new refueling tactics such as putting the warships in front of the tankers. Below, unmodified torpedoes sit on the deck of the *Akagi*.



The Japanese High Command set an ambitious schedule for the start of the war – with 7 December (Hawaii time) as the date of the opening attacks. This relatively early date was chosen for several reasons. U.S. forces in the Pacific were growing and Japanese oil reserves were shrinking by the

week. The approaching winter would bring bad weather and rough seas for the Japanese Navy as well as monsoons ashore for the Japanese Army. The specific date also revolved around the need for a full moon to aid in night operations and the U.S. Pacific Fleet's habit of returning to port for Sundays.

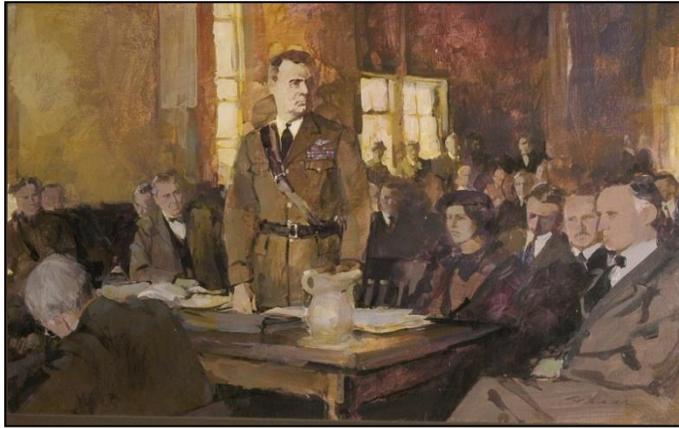
25 October 1925 The **court-martial of Brigadier General Billy Mitchell** began (photo below). Frustrated for years by the mismanagement of airpower, Mitchell was outraged when the Navy dirigible *Shenandoah* crashed despite her commander's pleas to cancel the flight due to bad weather. The commander was one of the 14 dead in the crash. Gen. Mitchell publicly accused senior military leaders of incompetence and "almost treasonable administration of the national defense." During his trial, Mitchell argued for the independence of military air forces. On 17 December, Mitchell was found guilty of insubordination and suspended from active duty for five years. Two months later, General Mitchell resigned from the Army.





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The painting at left, “Billy Mitchell Court Martial,” was based on the photograph above. This painting is on display in the Headquarters building of Pacific Air Forces on Hickam AFB, in Room I-324 (the PACAF/A4 Conference Room).

28 October 1941 **Predecessor of Fifth Air Force.** The Philippine Department Air Force was redesignated the “Far East Air Force” – which later became 5th Air Force. The U.S. was rushing a deterrent force to the Philippines, and on 7 December 1941 the Far East Air Force had 81 P-40s and 35 B-17s. However, these units were decimated by Japanese attacks on 8 December. (This was not the *Far East Air Forces* organized in Australia in 1944 that later became PACAF.)

27 October 1944 The **first US Army aircraft to be stationed in the Philippines since 1942** landed on the Tacloban airstrip. The 34 P-38s of the 9th Fighter Squadron refueled at once and shot down four enemy aircraft before the end of the day.

During 27 October - 31 December, the Japanese flew almost 1,050 sorties over Leyte. Pilots from the **5th Fighter Command shot down 314 confirmed aircraft** and received credit for 45 probables, yet suffered only 16 losses. On 29 October, the 49th FG scored its 500th victory.

27 October 1954 Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., became the **first African-American general officer in the USAF** (photo at right). Davis graduated from West Point, served in the infantry and taught military science at Tuskegee. In May 1941 he transferred to the Air Corps. After earning his wings he advanced rapidly and assumed command of the 332nd Fighter Group, the “Tuskegee Airmen” – the first fighter group with black pilots. During World War II, he and his men flew P-40s and P-51s in combat. Davis himself earned the Silver Star.



After military segregation ended, Davis commanded the fighter wing at Suwon during the Korean War and the Thirteenth Air Force during the Vietnam War. Lieutenant General Davis retired on Feb. 1, 1970, and was advanced to General on Dec. 9, 1998.



27 October 1962 **Cuban Missile Crisis/First Air Force Cross.** Major Rudolf Anderson, Jr., flying a U-2 reconnaissance mission over Cuba, was shot down by an SA-2. Major Anderson died when shrapnel decompressed his pressure suit at high altitude. He received the first Air Force Cross posthumously by direction of President John F. Kennedy. (By regulation, the Bronze Star was then the highest combat decoration that could be made for Cold War action.)



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The options facing the U.S. during the Cuban Missile Crisis all required indisputable proof of Soviet missiles in Cuba to our allies in NATO and the Americas. The photographs provided by Major Anderson and other Air Force pilots “rallied worldwide support behind the U.S. refusal to allow Soviet nuclear-armed missiles in the western hemisphere. Without that support, the Cuban Missile Crisis might have had a different, perhaps catastrophic, outcome for the world.” To read more see this article in [Air Force Magazine](#), Dec 1995.

27 October 1962 Also on this day, **Strategic Air Command placed the first ten Minuteman I intercontinental ballistic missiles on alert** in hardened silos at Malmstrom AFB, Montana. On the following day, Soviet Premier Khrushchev agreed to recall Russian ships enroute to Cuba and withdraw the missiles if the United States agreed not to invade the island.

24 Oct 1967 **Phuc Yen, the main fighter airfield in North Vietnam**, was attacked by U.S. Air Force and Navy aircraft for the first time. Previously, North Vietnamese airbases had been “off-limits” as targets. Twelve MiGs were damaged or destroyed and one runway was rendered unserviceable. During the attack, the Air Force downed its 69th MiG.

24 October – 3 November 1983 In **Operation URGENT FURY**, American military forces raided the Caribbean island of Grenada to evacuate U.S. citizens, restore democracy, and eliminate a hostile Cuban/Soviet base. MAC and Air Force Reserve C-5, C-141 and C-130 aircraft flew 496 missions to transport 11,389 passengers and 7,709 tons of cargo to Grenada. SAC tankers and TAC fighters, as well as ANG EC-130Es, supported the operation. During the operation, Lt. Col. James L. Hobson, Jr.,



USAF, led a flight of MC-130 Hercules aircraft that successfully completed an airborne assault on Point Salinas, dropping paratroopers at the exact planned time over target in a hail of anti-aircraft fire. For his actions in assuming the assault lead from a disabled aircraft, Lt. Col. Hobson earned the **Mackay Trophy**. Major General Hobson commanded Air Force Special Operations Command from 1994 to 1997.

25-27 October 2004 The United States, Australia, France, Japan, and 18 other nations conducted a **Proliferation Security Initiative exercise**, “**Team Samurai 04**,” off the coast of Japan near Sagami Bay, practicing joint maritime interdiction. It was first PSI interdiction exercise hosted by Japan. North Korea criticized the exercise as an attempt to “to isolate and stifle” the North.