



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 31 Oct – 6 Nov 2011



Countdown to 7 December 1941.

1 November 1941 *Taiyo Maru*, the last passenger liner allowed to sail from Japan to the U.S. after the summer economic embargo, docked at Honolulu. *Taiyo Maru* carried a team of intelligence agents on the planned north-Pacific route of the Japanese task force that would attack Oahu on 7 December. These agents recorded sea and weather conditions and watched for ships or aircraft that might spot the task force on its voyage. The ship sailed into Honolulu harbor at 0830 on a Saturday morning, and the agents on board recorded weather conditions and military activities at that time and on the following morning – a Sunday. U.S. counter-intelligence officials watching the *Taiyo Maru* were preoccupied with passengers leaving the ship and returning, but none of the spy team on the *Taiyo Maru* left the ship. Instead, Japanese consulate personnel boarded the *Taiyo Maru* and were instructed to collect specific information. They brought the reports back concealed in daily newspapers. On 5 November, the *Taiyo Maru* sailed away with a wealth of information about U.S. military forces and activities on Oahu, including the conclusion that American air and sea surveillance north of Oahu was not likely to detect the Japanese task force. **Surprise seemed achievable.**



Built in Germany in 1911 as the *Cap Finisterre*, this ship had been transferred to U.S. control at the end of World War I. Commissioned by the U.S. Navy, she made four voyages ferrying American troops between Europe and the U.S. east coast. In 1921 the U.S. allowed the *USS Cap Finisterre* to be included in German war reparations paid to Japan, where she was re-named the *Taiyo Maru*.

On 8 May 1942, the *Taiyo Maru* was sailing under Japanese Navy escort when she was torpedoed and sunk by a U.S. Navy submarine. She was carrying 700 industrial experts whose mission was to reorganize countries in southeast Asia that Japan had conquered at the start of World War II.

5-13 November 1912 The **Army used aircraft for artillery adjustment for the first time** at Fort Riley, Kansas. Capt. Frederick B. Hennessy, Lt. Henry H. Arnold, and Lt. Thomas DeWitt Milling signaled the ground, using radiotelegraphy, drop cards, and smoke signals.

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1 November 1915 **First genuine National Guard aviation unit.** Capt. Raynal C. Bolling organized and took command of an aviation unit in the New York National Guard, but a lack of funding convinced Bolling that military aviation could only be developed within the regular Army. Bolling, a famed corporate lawyer, had written a Congressional bill on aircraft manufacturing and led a commission to Europe to evaluate aircraft production. He became an Air Service officer in World War I and was the first high-ranking U.S. officer to be killed in combat in that war. While scouting potential fields for U.S. Army Air Service aircraft during the second Somme offensive, Colonel Bolling and his driver were ambushed by German troops near the front lines. Bolling Air Force Base is named in his honor.

5 November 1934 **Lt Col Horace Meek Hickam**, a distinguished aviation pioneer, died when his A-12 struck an obstruction during night landing practice on the unlighted field at Fort Crockett, Texas. Six months later, **Hickam Field in Hawaii was dedicated in his honor.**

As a young officer, Hickam took flying lessons in his spare time. After earning the Silver Star in the Mexican Punitive Expedition, Hickam joined the Signal Corps' Aviation Section and trained as a pursuit pilot. He was chief of the Air Service's Information Division and then assistant commandant of the Advanced Flying School at Kelly Field, Texas. In November, 1925 he testified on behalf of airpower and a separate Air Force, stating "*I am confident that no general thinks he can command the navy, and no admiral thinks he can operate an army, but some of them think they can operate an air force.*"



After attending the Air Corps Tactical School, Air War College and other military courses, Hickam was assigned to the War Plans Division of the General Staff. Hickam was promoted to lieutenant colonel on March 1, 1932, and given command of the 3rd Attack Group at Fort Crockett. During the 1934 Air Mail operation, he commanded mail delivery operations in the U.S. Central Zone. Hickam often battled with the old soldiers of that era who classified the airplane as merely an auxiliary to ground troops. "*During the World War,*" he said in 1934, "*the airplane was considered as a weapon of the ground troops, but that day has passed just as has the concept of naval vessels as transports for soldiers. The Air Force has come into its own right, and like the Navy it has come to stay.*" Portraits of Hickam are on display in the Hickam PME Center auditorium, 15th Wing Headquarters and the AMC Passenger Terminal stairway.

1 November 1940 The Air Corps activated the **Hawaiian Air Force** at Fort Shafter under the



P-40 at Bellows Air Force Station

Army's Hawaiian Department. Its mission was air defense of the Hawaiian Islands. At the time of the 7 December 1941 attack, it was equipped with two pursuit groups at Wheeler Field (P-36s and P-40s), two bomb groups at Hickam Field (B-17s and B-18s), and some transports, observation planes and A-20 light bombers. This unit was later redesignated as the Seventh Air Force.

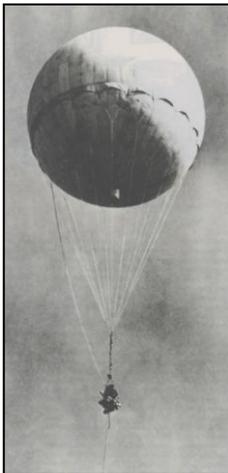


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2 November 1943 The **Fifth Air Force attacked Japanese shipping and bases at Rabaul** to protect the U.S. invasion of Bougainville. Three B-25 Groups escorted by seventy P-38s sank three Japanese destroyers, eight merchant ships, and destroyed 80 enemy aircraft. During this action, Major Raymond Wilkins won a posthumous **Medal of Honor**. Major Wilkins led his B-25 squadron in the attack and put his own airplane in the position of greatest risk. Despite battle damage, he continued his attack, strafing harbor vessels and scoring direct bomb hits on an enemy destroyer and a transport. Bombs expended, he was withdrawing his squadron when he saw a heavy cruiser barring their path. Wilkins went in for a strafing run to neutralize the cruiser's guns and attract its fire, which brought him down. (The photo above shows B-25s attacking Japanese shipping at Rabaul.)



3 November 1944 **Japanese balloons with bombs attached were first launched against the United States.** The Japanese hoped the jet stream would carry them eastward across the Pacific. (Photo at left.)

The Japanese launched some 9,000 balloon bombs against the U.S. during the war. The bombs were meant to start forest fires, produce chaos and divert U.S. manpower from the war effort. They were also a reprisal for the Doolittle raid on Tokyo. The hydrogen-filled balloons were 33 feet in diameter and carried ballast and hydrogen release mechanisms to maintain altitude across the North Pacific. They were armed with incendiary and anti-personnel bombs. Only about 300 were ever observed in North America (mapped [here](#)). The easternmost balloon reached the Detroit suburbs.

Analysts estimate that as many as 1,000 Japanese balloon bombs reached the U.S. mainland. Fighters in the U.S. intercepted about 20 of the balloons. The only fatal attack occurred in Oregon when a pastor's wife and six children were killed.

The U.S. strategy was to keep the Japanese from knowing that any balloons had reached the mainland. The press cooperated by not publishing any incidents. The Japanese learned of only one bomb that got to Wyoming but failed to explode, so they stopped the launches after less than six months. After the war, the press blackout was lifted and the public was warned about the potential danger of finding unexploded bombs. The last balloon with a still-lethal payload was discovered in 1955, and balloon remnants have been found as late as 1992.

On March 10, 1945, one of the balloons came down at the Manhattan Project's Hanford Site in Washington state. It short-circuited power lines to the nuclear reactor cooling pumps, but backup devices quickly restored power. The Hanford Site was the world's first plutonium production facility, and it provided materials for the Trinity test and the Nagasaki weapon.



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3 November 1965 A B-52 successfully fired an **AGM-28 Hound Dog missile** over Green River, Utah on a route to White Sands Missile Range.

The mission of the Hound Dog was to attack segments of the Soviet Union's air-defense system so that the launching B-52 could penetrate to its primary target. It had a maximum speed over Mach 2, a 49,000 foot ceiling and a range of nearly 600 nautical miles. It could conduct high or low altitude attacks with either air or surface detonations. The Hound Dog was deployed for 15 years until the missile was replaced by newer weapons including the AGM-69 Short Range Attack Missile and the AGM-86 Air-Launched Cruise Missile.



At left, U.S. Air Force artwork “Hound Dog” by Herb Mott. This painting is on display in the PACAF Headquarters building, I-wing, first floor.

5 November 1981 The **first operational EF-111A defense-suppression aircraft** was delivered to the 388th Electronic Combat Squadron at Mountain Home AFB, Idaho.

The EF-111A Raven (right) would eventually replace EB-66 and EB-57 aircraft as the U.S. Air Force's primary electronic warfare jamming aircraft. The EF-111A usually provided protection from a stand-off jamming orbit, but it could also escort attacking forces with its high-performance and night terrain-following capabilities built into the basic F-111 design.



EF-111s were involved in every U.S. conflict from Eldorado Canyon in Libya to Desert Storm, where an EF-111 was credited with one of the first kills of the conflict. A maneuvering Raven caused a pursuing Iraqi Mirage to crash.