



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in PACAF and USAF History 21-27 September 2009



25 September 1918 **MEDAL OF HONOR.** On a voluntary patrol, Capt. Edward V. Rickenbacker spotted seven German aircraft. Despite the odds, he descended on the enemy aircraft and shot down two of them. For this action, he received the Medal of Honor.

24 September 1929 At Mitchell Field, New York, Lt. James H. "Jimmy" Doolittle made the **first instruments-only, all blind flight**, from takeoff to landing. Doolittle took off in a consolidated NY-2 airplane with a completely covered



cockpit, flew a short distance, and landed. He was accompanied by a check pilot who monitored the flight. One of Doolittle's most important contributions to aeronautical technology was the development of instrument flying. He assisted in the development of fog flying equipment including the artificial horizon and directional gyroscope. These accomplishments made all-weather flight operations safe and practical, and earned Doolittle the Harmon Trophy.



21 September 1942 **The Boeing B-29 Superfortress** (pictured left) made its **first flight**. This aircraft had many innovations including super-charged engines enabling it to carry bomb loads across the vast Pacific Ocean to targets in Japan. Combined with a pressurized cabin, the B-29's

innovations allowed the aircraft to reach 40,000 feet and 350 mph, where it was an extremely difficult target for both Japanese fighters and anti-aircraft artillery. However, many of its actual combat missions were low-level incendiary raids at night. Two of these aircraft delivered the atomic bombs to Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

27 September 1943 For the first time, **P-47s flew all the way** with B-17s in a raid on Emden, Germany. The escorting P-47s were able to fly over 600 miles by carrying additional fuel tanks. The P-47 Thunderbolt became a very effective air-to-ground attack aircraft in World War II, but it also rendered valuable service as a bomber escort.

25 September 1947 President Truman named Gen. Carl A. Spaatz as the **first USAF chief of**



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staff. On the following day, Defense Secretary James W. Forrestal ordered air personnel, bases, and materiel transferred from the Army to the new Department of the Air Force.

23 September 1951 The 27th Fighter-Escort Wing received the **first F-84G Thunderjet**. The F-84G was the first fighter with built-in aerial refueling capability and the first single-seat aircraft capable of carrying a nuclear bomb. The F-84G was also the first aircraft used by the USAF Thunderbirds flight demonstration team (photo at right).



27 September 1951 In Operation PELICAN, a **C-124 Globemaster II** flew for the first time from Japan to Korea, delivering 30,000 pounds of aircraft parts to Kimpo Airfield and demonstrating the potential of very large transport aircraft in a combat theater.

27 September 1956 **MACH 3.** Capt. Milburn G. Apt, USAF, while flying a Bell X-2 rocket-powered airplane dropped from a B-50 bomber launched at Edwards AFB, became the **first pilot to fly at Mach 3** (three times the speed of sound). The flight ended tragically in a fatal crash. The photo below is the X-2 with Capt Apt in the cockpit and Capt. Iven Kinchloe on the ladder. On his fatal flight, Capt. Apt followed the planned profile of climb to the "bend-over" altitude of 70,000 feet. The rocket engine burned perfectly, and the fuel lasted nine seconds



longer than it had ever lasted before. The speed climbed past the X-2's previous record (1,900 mph) to 2,200 mph—3.3 times the speed of sound. When the fuel was gone, Apt found himself further from home than anticipated. The planned flight profile called for slowing to Mach 2.4 before turning back to base, but the additional time to slow before turning may have put him beyond safe gliding range of his planned runway. Captain Apt called on his radio: "The engine has cut out and I'm beginning to turn." Still above Mach 3, he began a turn back towards Edwards. The X-2 began a series of diverging rolls and tumbled out of control. Apt separated the escape capsule and attempted to bail out, but he was

unable to free himself before impact. The lessons learned from Capt. Apt's flight and other tests led to improved airframe designs, stability augmentation systems and other improvements to high-performance aircraft.

21 September 1960 In a ceremony at Nellis AFB, Nevada, Tactical Air Command accepted the first **Republic F-105D Thunderchief**, an all-weather fighter able to carry a nuclear weapon.

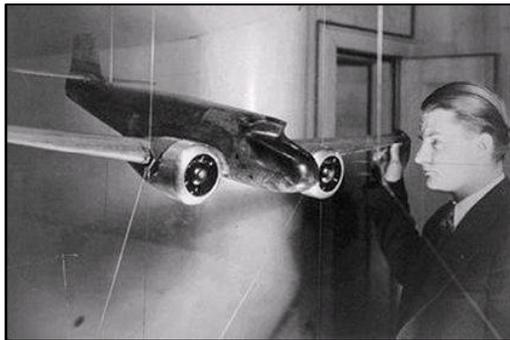


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21 September 1964 At Palmdale, California, **North American's B-70A Valkyrie** (pictured right) **flew for the first time**, with company pilot Alvin White and Col. Joseph Cotton, USAF, at the controls. The huge delta-wing aircraft was a strategic bomber that could fly up to three times the speed of sound and at altitudes above 70,000 feet, but advances in enemy surface- to-air-missile technology prevented its production beyond the prototype stage.



24 September 1964 President Johnson presented aviation's highest honor, the **Robert J. Collier Trophy to Clarence L. "Kelly" Johnson** of Lockheed (pictured left). Ten days earlier, Kelly Johnson also received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award. One of the most talented and prolific aircraft design engineers in the history of aviation, Kelly Johnson and Lockheed's "Skunk Works" designed and/or developed over 40 aircraft, including the P-38, F-104, U-2 and SR-71. Johnson's

boss at Lockheed once exclaimed, "That damned Swede can actually see air!"

24 September 1987 The **Thunderbirds** gave their first show ever in the People's Republic of China before some 20,000 Chinese in Beijing.

27 September 1991 President George H. W. Bush ordered termination of Strategic Air Command's alert force operations, initiated in October 1957, during which time crews stood ready around the clock to launch nuclear strikes. This event heralded the **end of the Cold War** between the United States and the Soviet Union.

27 September 2001 Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld announced that President George W. Bush had given authority to certain military commanders to order the destruction of hijacked civilian airliners.