



## This Week in USAF and PACAF History 9 – 15 April 2012



**U.S. AIR FORCE**

15-16 Apr 1928 The **first flight across the Arctic Ocean** was made by World War I aviator and Arctic explorer Carl Benjamin Eielson, together with Australian explorer Hubert Wilkins. The flight from Point Barrow across the top of Greenland to Spitsbergen covered 2,200 miles and took 20 hours. Eielson was decorated with the Distinguished Flying Cross and won the 1928 Harmon Trophy for the greatest American aviation feat of the year.

Eielson died in a crash the following year while attempting to rescue 15 passengers of a cargo vessel trapped in ice near Siberia. In 1948, Eielson AFB, Alaska was named in his honor.



11 Apr 1942 The Curtiss-Wright Company unveiled its **first production C-46 Commando**. The C-46 eventually became the largest and heaviest twin-engined aircraft used by the U.S. Army Air Forces (AAF). Due to its load capacity and high-altitude performance, the AAF primarily used it in the Pacific region where it was an important factor in the success of the “Hump” airlift over the Himalayas.

11 Apr 1944 **MEDAL OF HONOR** Edward Michael was an AAF aircraft mechanic strafed at Wheeler Field on 7 Dec 1941. In 1944, Lt. Michael was a B-17 pilot flying missions in Europe.

On 11 Apr 1944, enemy fighters riddled his plane with shells. Fire filled the bomb bay, but the emergency release did not work. Lieutenant Michael ordered a bail-out, but the bombardier’s parachute was damaged. Michael and his copilot stayed with the aircraft. The bombardier found a way to manually release the weapons. The pilots dodged enemy fighters down through a cloud deck, but they broke out into accurate flak. They flew back to England at treetop level. Michael told the other two men to bail out with the remaining chutes, but they refused. The landing gear, flaps, altimeter and airspeed indicator did not work, and the ball turret guns and bomb bay doors were jammed downward. The aircraft threatened to break apart on landing. Nevertheless, Michael belly-landed the B-17, saving the lives of his fellow crewmembers. Read the full story at this [website](#).



11 Apr 1966 **MEDAL OF HONOR / AIR FORCE CROSS**. A1C William Pitsenbarger (left), a pararescue jumper in Vietnam, hoisted nine soldiers to safety aboard a HH-43 Huskie and then remained behind to treat the wounded amid heavy mortar and sniper fire. Despite several gunshot wounds, he continued to treat wounded soldiers until fatally shot. He was the first airman to receive the Air Force Cross posthumously, and his award was later upgraded to the Medal of Honor.



U.S. AIR FORCE

## This Week in USAF and PACAF History 9 – 15 April 2012



Read A1C Pitsenbarger's complete story in [airforce-magazine](http://airforce-magazine.com).

9 Apr 1967 Through 14 April, the 315th Air Division began the largest tactical unit move in the Vietnam War. In 351 sorties, **C-130s airlifted the entire 196th Light Infantry Brigade** – 3,500 people and 4,000 tons of equipment – 375 miles from Tay Ninh to Chu Lai.



10 Apr 1967 **Operation POKER DICE.** The Strategic Air Command completed the beddown of B-52 bombers at U-Tapao, Thailand with the arrival of the first three aircraft. Later that same day, the B-52s from U-Tapao flew their first bombing mission in the Vietnam War. B-52 combat sorties out of U-Tapao averaged three hours in duration as compared to twelve hours for Guam-based aircraft. (See photo at left of a B-52 and KC-135 at U-Tapao).

14 Apr 1972 **BATTLE OF AN LOC.** Through 30 June, C-130s airdropped 4,853 tons in 359 sorties to the besieged garrison at An Loc to help prevent a North Vietnamese take over. After losing five aircraft to enemy ground fire, C-130s used high-altitude airdrops for the first time. Flying above the lethal range of enemy anti-aircraft fire, the airdrop effort suffered no further losses. Improvements to the parachute opening mechanisms and payload cushioning helped achieve a 90% effectiveness rate. By the time the road routes to An Loc reopened on 23 July, the C-130s had flown 763 sorties to deliver 10,081 tons of supplies. B-52 attacks provided essential close air support to embattled troops in An Loc.



15 Apr 1974 **CAS Fly-Off.** Under Congressional pressure, the Air Force began a fly-off between the Fairchild A-10 and the LTV A-7D Corsair. The fly-off showed the A-10 to be more capable in the close air support (CAS) mission.



The A-10 carried a larger payload and a more lethal gun—the GAU-8 30mm cannon. The A-10 was judged more survivable after being hit by enemy ground fire and its maneuverability made it less vulnerable to air-to-air losses. Pilots felt the A-10s maneuverability would be also be a great asset in providing effective CAS to ground units, especially during limited visibility or low-ceiling weather conditions.



**U.S. AIR FORCE**

## **This Week in USAF and PACAF History** **9 – 15 April 2012**



12 Apr 1975 **Operation EAGLE PULL.** On 6 April 1975, the U.S. had begun the aerial evacuation of Phnom Penh, Cambodia, which was surrounded by Khmer Rouge forces. By 11 April, some 875 Cambodians had flown to Thailand aboard USAF C-130s. On 12 April, USAF and USMC helicopters, with escorts from USAF fighters and gunships, evacuated 287 people in the final airlift from Phnom Penh. The city fell to communist forces on 17 April.

14 Apr 1986 **Operation EL DORADO CANYON.** The U.S. retaliated against Libya for its involvement in terrorism with an airstrike. F-111s from RAF Lakenheath conducted the attack, supported by five EF-111s from RAF Upper Heyford. Navy aircraft also struck Libya from the USS America and USS Coral Sea (14 A-6Es, six A-7s and six F/A-18s). The aircraft successfully hit targets at Benina Airfield, Benghazi Military Barracks, and Aziziyah Barracks in Tripoli. During a long, circuitous flight around France and Spain, the 24 F-111s were air-refueled by 28 KC-10 Extenders and KC-135 Stratotankers, flying out of RAF Fairford and RAF Mildenhall. The tankers refueled the F-111 strike force four times, maintaining radio silence during the entire mission. The US lost one F-111 in the attack. On the return flight to the UK, the tankers refueled the F-111s two more times. (Artwork at right by Ronald Wong.)



10 Apr 1994 Two F-16s struck a Bosnian Serb command post near Gorazde, Serbia after Bosnian Serbs attacked UN personnel. This was the **first close air support mission of Operation DENY FLIGHT** and the **first air-to-ground bombing in NATO's history.**



9 Apr 1997 The **F-22 roll-out ceremony** was held at Marietta, Georgia after many years of development.

The “Advanced Tactical Fighter” entered the Demonstration and Validation phase in 1986. The prototype aircraft first flew in late 1990. Engineering and manufacturing development began in 1991, low rate initial production in 2001 and full rate production in 2005.

The F-22 Raptor is an exponential leap in warfighting capabilities. Its combination of stealth, supersonic cruise, maneuverability and integrated avionics allows an F-22 pilot to kill air-to-air threats before being detected. The

F-22 also has a significant capability to attack surface targets. This capability will be enhanced in the future with an upgraded radar and carriage of up to eight small diameter bombs.

AETC, ACC and PACAF are the primary Air Force organizations flying the F-22.