



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 30 April – 6 May 2012



30 Apr 1908 **First Air National Guard unit.** Aviation enthusiasts in the 1st Company, Signal Corps, New York National Guard, organized an “aeronautical corps” to learn ballooning—the earliest known involvement of guardsmen in aviation. Organized that year into the 1st Aero Squadron, the unit was federalized for service in 1916 as the 102nd Rescue Squadron, New York ANG. The 102nd is recognized as the oldest of all official ANG units.

6 May 1941 **The Republic P-47 Thunderbolt flew for the first time.** Designed by Russians who fled the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, the P-47 was one of World War II’s largest, heaviest, and most rugged fighters. Twice the size of other fighters, the P-47 was best when attacking from higher altitudes. Exceptional diving capabilities gave the P-47 an advantage over lower enemy fighters, since they couldn’t escape in a dive. With its high payload capacity and eight half-inch machine guns, the P-47 had a considerable firepower that could destroy an enemy fighter, tank or armored train in seconds. (Photo at right.)



1 May 1943 Staff Sergeant Maynard H. "Snuffy" Smith, a B-17 gunner on his very first combat mission, earned the **first Medal of Honor awarded to an enlisted airman.** In the photo at left, Secretary of War Henry Stimson is presenting the award to Smith. When Stimson landed at his base to present the award, Smith had to be recalled from Kitchen Patrol (KP) duty that he had been assigned for disciplinary reasons. (More on Smith’s life and character [here.](#))

On that first mission, Smith’s aircraft was badly damaged by German fighters and anti-aircraft artillery. Fires on the aircraft were fed by the fuel supply and burned so hot that they melted holes in the airframe and starting exploding the ammunition stores. Although he could have bailed out and several other crewmembers had already done so, Smith stayed onboard. For 90 minutes, Smith fired at enemy fighters, threw ammunition out of the aircraft, fought the fires and gave first aid to the wounded. His fire-fighting resources were quickly used up, so he wrapped himself in clothing and put out flames by hand. The B-17 aircraft, hit by over 3,500 bullets and pieces of shrapnel, broke in two after it touched down in England. (At right, SSgt Smith at a B-17 gun station.)



1 May 1945 **Operation CHOWHOUND.** Eighth Air Force sent nearly 400 B-17s from England on a mercy mission to drop nearly 700 tons of food to starving civilians in German-occupied Holland. The Germans approved this flight and promised not to shoot down the bombers if they flew along specified routes so as not to observe German troop positions. Eighth Air Force and RAF bombers flew five more missions and delivered nearly 7,900 tons of food.



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2 May 1957 **The USAF accepted its first F-101A Voodoo.** The post-World War II requirement for a long-range bomber escort drove the initial development of the Voodoo, which originally was designed to have a large fuel/weapons pod similar to the B-58 Hustler. With the advent of jet bombers such as the B-52, SAC lost interest in the F-101. The Voodoo (left) was used as an air defense interceptor, reconnaissance platform and low-altitude nuclear fighter-bomber. This aircraft was also a precursor to the F-4 Phantom.



1 May 1960 **U-2 Shoot-down.** A U-2 flying out of Pakistan on a secret CIA/USAF flight over the Soviet Union was shot down by a salvo of fourteen SA-2 missiles. The U-2 pilot, a former Air Force officer named Francis Gary Powers, was unable to employ the U-2's self-destruct mechanism before his capture, and the wreckage was recovered by the Russians (photo below). Among other items, they found the aircraft's camera with its film and Powers' survival pack, which included 7500 rubles and some jewelry. When Pres. Eisenhower refused to apologize publicly for the incident, Soviet Premier Khrushchev cancelled a summit meeting. Powers was convicted of espionage by the Russians, but he was later exchanged for a captured Soviet agent. This incident worsened Soviet relations with both the U.S. and Pakistan, and accelerated the U.S. satellite reconnaissance program.



3 May 1960 General Curtis LeMay, VCSAF, announced the approval of a **single tanker force** managed by Strategic Air Command. The concept was part of LeMay's vision to enable the USAF jet bomber force to reach distant targets and return. Components of the concept included the KC-135 jet tanker (to keep up with jet bombers), the rigid tanker boom for a more stable and rapid transfer of fuel, and single-point refueling which allowed one fuel insertion point to feed all the fuel tanks on receiving aircraft. In the *Boeing* photo at left, the first production KC-135A Stratotanker refuels a B-52C.



4 May 1960 **HIANG facilities.** A groundbreaking ceremony for the Hawaii Air National Guard fighter complex was held in the Hickam Harbor-Fort Kamehameha area. Following the ceremony, contractors began work on the \$1,847,000 project, which included a new parking apron, maintenance hangar, annex for administration and supply, roads, and utilities.



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3 May 1961 **The first launch of an ICBM from an underground silo** was conducted at Vandenberg AFB with the launch of a Titan I (SM-68).



ICBMs with cryogenic (very cold) liquid fuels and oxidizers had to stand empty and then be fueled just prior to launch. New fuels and oxidizers could be stored in the missiles, allowing rapid launch directly out of silos. Introduction of solid fuel systems in the late 1960s made this even easier. Underground silos also made ICBMs easier to maintain and more survivable in an enemy first strike.

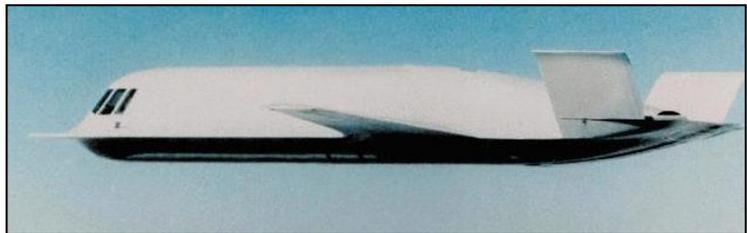


6-15 May 1972 **Operation CONSTANT GUARD III.** During North Vietnam’s “Easter offensive,” MAC helped the 49th Tactical Fighter Wing move 3,195 airmen and 1,600 tons of cargo from Holloman AFB, to Tahkli, Thailand. Later, MAC C-5s airlifted 26 U.S. Army tanks on 10 flights to Da Nang, where they joined the battle in a matter of hours.

2 May 1981 **First airborne laser kill.** The Airborne Laser Laboratory (ALL), a modified NKC-135A aircraft armed with a carbon dioxide laser, shot down a drone over White Sands Missile Range, NM. In later tests, the ALL shot down air-to-air missiles. These technologies were transferred to the Airborne Laser Program (ALP) – designed to engage ballistic missiles in their boost phase. However, the ALP’s high costs and limited capabilities led to its cancellation.



30 Apr 1996 The Air Force revealed the **Tacit Blue** aircraft secretly used during 1982-1985 to validate a number of innovative stealth technology advances. Tacit Blue (photos left and below) furnished much of the technology used to produce the B-2 Spirit bomber.



5 May 1996 Colonel Betty L. Mullis became the **first woman to command a flying wing** when she assumed command of the 940th Air Refueling Wing (AFRES) at McClellan AFB.