



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History **7 – 13 May 2012**



8 May 1918 **First Flight Surgeons.** Captains John F. Gallagher, Robert J. Hunter, and Claude T. Uren became the first medical officers to be assigned as flight surgeons at U.S. airfields. The role of the flight surgeon during World War I was to investigate the appalling death rate among military flying cadets and front line pilots due to disorientation and other physical factors associated with flying as well as poor aviator selection and other medical issues. The Army had assigned officers to flight duty that were not physically qualified for infantry or cavalry duty. Due to G-forces, disorientation, and hypoxia in flight, early flight surgeons found that flyers must be scrupulously healthy and well trained in aerospace physiology.

9 May 1932 **First blind solo.** At Dayton, Ohio, Capt. Albert Hegenberger completed the first blind solo flight (on instruments alone) without even a check pilot aboard. Capt. Hegenberger used a radio direction finder to navigate an early version of an instrument approach over pre-positioned transmitters. By executing planned turns and descent rates as he followed the radio signals, Hegenberger landed without ever seeing the runway.

In 1927, then-Lieutenant Hegenberger and Lt. Lester Maitland made the first non-stop Mainland-to-Hawaii flight, a feat comparable to Lindbergh's flight across the Atlantic. Hegenberger was stationed in Hawaii several times in the 1920s and 1930s. Brigadier General Hegenberger commanded the Eleventh Bombardment Group at Hickam Field in 1941-1942.

NOTE: Jimmy Doolittle made the first blind flight on 24 Sep 1929 – with a safety pilot on board.

9 May 1944 **Enemy airbases depleted.** Eighth Air Force B-17s and B-24s bombed German airfields and radar stations to begin an offensive that would prevent the German Air Force from recovering before the Normandy invasion on D-Day. During this air battle, the Luftwaffe lost many of its most experienced fighter pilots, and those who returned to their bases found their runways damaged and often had to ditch their aircraft. Subsequently, the Luftwaffe mounted only a limited response to the invasion on 6 June.

10 May 1944 **Friendly airbases completed.** Some 400,000 Chinese laborers completed the Chengdu Project, building five bomber bases and six fighter fields in China for U.S. B-29 air operations. The project had begun in January and used only primitive construction methods. In **Operation Matterhorn**, B-29s carried their own fuel, ordnance and other supplies from India over the Himalayas (photo at right) to the forward bases in China. Missions were flown from these bases against the Japanese in their home islands as well as Formosa, Singapore and other areas. Although the campaign had limited direct success against its assigned targets, the B-29 operations helped to rally the Chinese, demonstrated the vulnerability of Japan to strategic bombing, combat tested the B-29 and matured the B-29 force.





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U.S. AIR FORCE

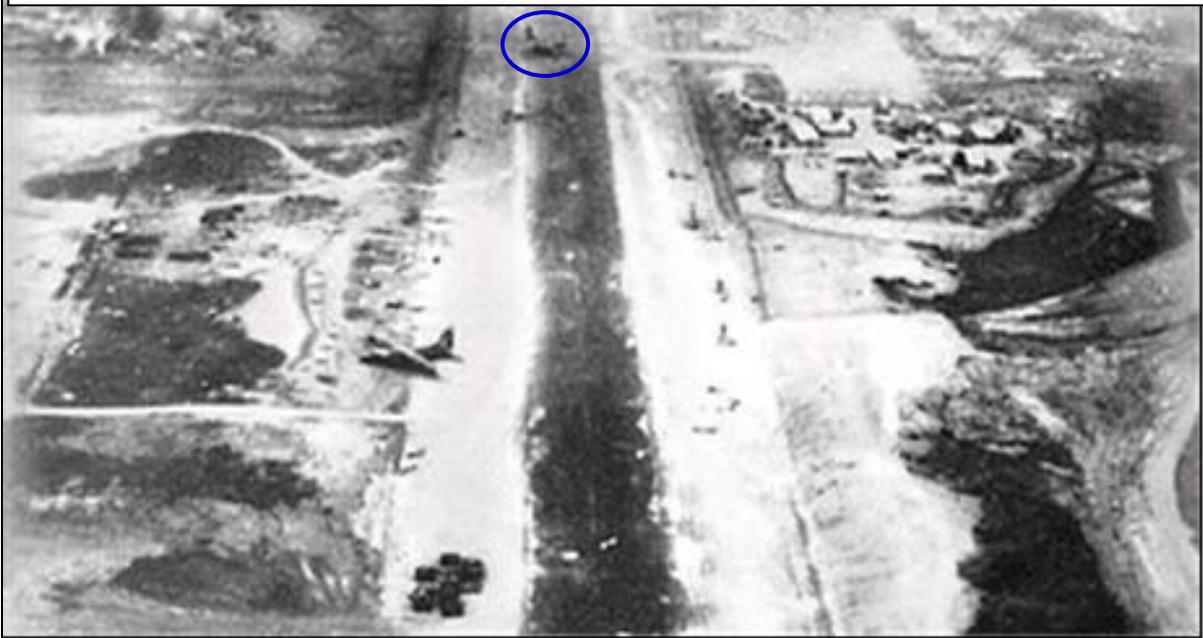
11 May 1949 President Harry S. Truman signed a bill authorizing a 3,000-mile guided-missile test range for the Air Force, subsequently established at **Cape Canaveral**, Florida.

12 May 1949 **Berlin Blockade Ends.** Faced with the success of the Berlin airlift, the Soviet Union ended the land blockade of western Berlin. The airlift continued through September 30, building up stockpiles of food and coal in case of a renewed blockade.

12 – 14 May 1968 **EVACUATION OF KHAM DUC.** Under extremely hostile conditions, C-130s helped evacuate Kham Duc, a special operations base for reconnaissance teams near Laos. USAF transports carried over 500 of the 1,800 military and civilians from Kham Duc before it fell to the enemy. The enemy killed 259 people and destroyed several aircraft.

MEDAL OF HONOR. Lt Col Joe M. Jackson volunteered to rescue a three-man USAF combat control team at **Kham Duc**. Enemy forces had already established gun positions on the airstrip and destroyed eight aircraft. Despite the odds, Jackson and his crew (Maj Jesse Campbell, TSgt Edward M. Trejo, and SSgt Manson L. Grubbs) landed their C-123 under intense hostile fire, but were forced to take off. Making a second attempt, Jackson landed his C-123, extracted the combat controllers, and returned to safety. For his valiant effort, he received the Medal of Honor, the only airlifter so honored in the Vietnam conflict. Major Campbell received the Air Force Cross, while Sergeants Trejo and Grubbs earned Silver Stars.

Jackson's C-123 is at the top of the runway. Caption: "This is the only known photo of a Medal of Honor action taken while it was under way. Joe Jackson had just put his C-123 down to pick up three combat control team airmen. Jackson braved close-in enemy fire from both sides of the runway and from the hills above Kham Duc." See the October 2005 AF Magazine article, "[Rescue at Kham Duc.](#)"





U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 7 – 13 May 2012



8 May 1972 **Operation LINEBACKER I.** President Nixon approved this operation as a military measure to defeat North Vietnam's Easter offensive and to end the Vietnam War.

The enemy invaded on 30 March, and a U.S. interdiction campaign against the North began



on 6 April, expanding rapidly to targets in Hanoi and Haiphong. B-52s bombed targets in the North while being escorted by fighters and aircraft specializing in electronic warfare and suppression of enemy air defenses (see F-105G at left).

Air Force and Navy fighter-bombers also

struck targets on the outskirts of Hanoi. On 8 May the campaign expanded throughout North Vietnam, including the mining of North Vietnamese harbors by U.S. Navy aircraft.

The tactics employed and results obtained in Linebacker were a great improvement over the earlier, gradually escalating *Rolling Thunder* air campaign. During Linebacker, U.S. aircraft attacked vital targets like airfields and power plants in the North while disrupting the flow of reinforcements and supplies to enemy units in the South. Improved U.S. electronic warfare restricted enemy use of radar and radio communications, while U.S. radars helped direct U.S. fighters to intercept enemy MiGs as they took off. Laser-guided bombs were introduced and proved highly effective, especially against bridges. However, the traffic was not halted entirely. The enemy adapted by crossing at night on ferries or movable pontoon bridges.

Linebacker I was vital to the defeat of the Easter offensive without bringing U.S. ground forces back to Vietnam. In fact, the last U.S. Army combat troops left Vietnam in August 1972 while the South Vietnamese were driving back the enemy. However, both sides realized that the South would be vulnerable to an invasion if U.S. airpower was withdrawn. In order to obtain a peace agreement, Nixon offered South Vietnam's President Thieu "absolute assurance" that he would take "swift and severe retaliatory action" if North Vietnam should attack again.



B-52s launch on a Linebacker mission.

7 May 1975 **PACAF lives!** As the U.S. withdrew from Southeast Asia, planned military force reductions included the disestablishment of PACAF. The DoD planned to assign 5th and 13th Air Forces to Tactical Air Command and to transfer control of theater airlift resources to Military Airlift Command. But South Vietnam and Cambodia fell to communists in early 1975, those plans were shelved and PACAF remained the Air Force component of U.S. Pacific Command.

12 May 1975 **USS Mayaguez Incident.** Cambodian forces hijacked this American merchant vessel in international waters near Koh Tang Island. Starting on 15 May, MAC used 16 C-141s on 30 sorties to airlift 1,165 Marines and 121 tons of cargo from the Philippines and Okinawa to Utao AB, Thailand. The Air Rescue and Recovery Service sent HH-53 helicopters (below) to



U.S. AIR FORCE

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fly the Marines to Koh Tang Island and to the USS Holt, and later picked them up. Cambodia returned the *Mayaguez* crew after Marines, supported by USAF helicopters and A-7s, captured the empty ship and assaulted Koh Tang Island, where the crew was mistakenly thought to have been taken. U.S. losses totaled 15 killed in action, three MIA and 49 wounded. Three PACAF CH-53s were lost, and three others were damaged, in the operation. Maj.

Robert W. Undorf, an airborne forward air controller in an OV-10A Bronco, received the **Mackay Trophy** for conspicuous gallantry, initiative, and resourcefulness during this military operation—the last major American military action in Southeast Asia.

AIR FORCE CROSS. Staff Sergeant Jon D. Harston (right) was a flight mechanic on a CH-53 Sea Stallion helicopter that was shot down at the shoreline of Koh Tang Island during the first wave of the *Mayaguez* rescue mission. Though shot in the leg, Harston returned to the burning helicopter to retrieve his M-16. Finding Marines still trapped, he led them through the flames to safety and provided covering fire while the wounded men waded into deep water. While returning a second time to rescue more men, his helmet and life preserver were hit by enemy small arms fire. Later, while 40 yards from shore and clinging to the damaged life preserver, Harston and an injured Marine heard cries for help and went back again to rescue a seriously injured, blinded Marine struggling by the wreckage. For the next three hours, Harston kept himself and the two wounded Marines afloat until their rescue. For his extraordinary heroism in the face of the enemy, he was awarded the Air Force Cross.



8 May 1994 **Operation PROVIDE PROMISE.** Through 26 July, five C-141s flew humanitarian missions from Germany to Bosnia. They joined the earlier deployment of C-130s from the 437 AW and 315 AW at Charleston AFB. The C-141s delivered over 7,000 tons of cargo by the time their flights ended.

8 May 2001 Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld designated the Air Force as **executive agent for DoD space activities.**