



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 21 – 27 May 2012



27 May 1913 **First Military Aviator's Badge.** Under General Order No. 39, Army officers who qualified as military aviators were to receive a Military Aviator's Certificate and badge (24 officers qualified at the time). The badge was originally made in 14-karat gold (photo at right). In August, 1917, the military aviator badge in silver was introduced.



21 May 1927 **Medal of Honor.** Charles Lindbergh (left), a 25-year-old Captain in the Missouri National Guard's 110th Observation Squadron, made the first nonstop solo flight across the Atlantic. Lindbergh was in pursuit of the \$25,000 *Orteig Prize* offered for the first successful nonstop flight between New York and Paris. His financing included \$2,000 of his own savings. Six well-known aviators had already died attempting to win the prize when Lindbergh took off. Lindbergh set a 3,609-mile record for straight-line distance in his 33-hour 39-minute flight. He faced many challenges, such as flying blind through fog for several hours, flying as low as 10 feet above the wave tops to avoid storms and icing, and navigating only by a magnetic compass, his airspeed indicator, the stars (when visible) and dead reckoning. Upon landing in Paris, Lindbergh immediately became an international hero and American celebrity. President Coolidge later presented Lindbergh with the Medal of Honor.

26 May 1942 The Northrop prototype for the **P-61 Black Widow**, the first U.S. aircraft designed as a radar-equipped night fighter, made its first flight at Hawthorne, California, with test pilot Vance Breese at the controls. The P-61 was originally designed to meet the urgent need for a high-altitude, high-speed aircraft to intercept Luftwaffe bombers attacking London. The requirement was for a fighter to patrol continuously over the city throughout the night, carrying multiple gun turrets and an early, heavy airborne radar unit.



25 May 1953 George Welch, North American test pilot, flew the prototype **YF-100 Super Sabre** for the first time, taking off and landing at Edwards Air Force Base, California. He broke Mach 1 during the flight. The F-100 was an unsolicited, company-funded North American project to improve on the F-86 Sabre, and this maiden flight was seven months ahead of schedule.

George Welch shot down four Japanese aircraft over Oahu on 7 Dec 1941 and had a total of 16 kills flying in the Pacific theater during World War II.



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26 May 1956 **First flight of Republic's F-105B Thunderchief.** Tactical Air Command accepted its first production F-105B at Republic's Farmingdale plant in Long Island.

The F-105B was the biggest single-seat, single-engine combat aircraft in history. At right, three F-105s fly next to two Navy A-4s. Originally designed for high-speed low-altitude penetration carrying a single nuclear bomb in its large internal bomb bay, the F-105 was the primary strike bomber of the Vietnam War, typically carrying a cargo of eight 750-pound bombs. Over 20,000 Thunderchief sorties were flown, with 382 aircraft lost (nearly half of the 833 produced) including 62 operational casualties. During the war, the two-seat F-105F and F-105G Wild Weasel variants became dedicated platforms for Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses (SEAD).



25 May 1959 Air Defense Command accepted its first **F-106 Delta Dart** (photo at left). Originally an advanced derivative of the F-102 Delta Dagger, this "Ultimate Interceptor" became a new design series in its own right. The major change was a fuselage shaped to reduce transonic shock waves that bleed away power and produce "wave drag." The innovation allowed the "Six" to reach its original design speed of Mach 1.2.

21-22 May 1960 **Hawaiian Tsunami.** Tremendous earthquakes in Chile produced tsunami waves that pounded the east coast of the island of Hawaii. Ignoring warnings, many Hilo-area residents had stayed in their homes near the bay, where up to 61 people died and hundreds were left homeless. By the end of May, the 1502nd Air Transport Wing from Hickam AFB airlifted more than 12 tons of emergency equipment and supplies to Hilo. The wing's 50th Air Transport Squadron flew C-124 Globemaster II airplanes for the relief operation, delivering a generator, refrigerator, vans, clothing, and food. On 23 May, **the Air Force began one of its largest humanitarian airlifts** to relieve the earthquake victims in Chile. Within a month, cargo aircraft had delivered more than 1,000 tons of equipment and supplies from bases in the United States, some 4,500 miles away from the stricken region. The airlift was called Operation AMIGOS.

21 May 1976 **Super Typhoon Pamela** hit Guam with 150 mph winds and 27 inches of rain in a 24-hour period, flooding the island and tearing apart most buildings. Despite preparations, the typhoon killed at least five people, injured 500 and deprived thousands of their homes. Andersen AFB suffered the same level of destruction. Communication with the outside world was lost for 14 hours, and the runways were flooded and buried under debris. Through 9 June, MAC supervised the airlift of 2,652 tons of cargo to Guam in seven C-141s, six C-5s, and one C-130.



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22 May 1990 23rd Air Force was redesignated as **Air Force Special Operations Command**, the USAF component of U.S. Special Operations Command.

27 May 1996 The USAF gave the name “**The Spirit of Hawaii**” to the nation’s newest **B-2 stealth bomber** at a ceremony held at Hickam AFB. (See photo at right of DV’s at the ceremony. From the left: ACC Commander Gen. Richard E. Hawley, Senator Dan Inouye, Senator Dan Akaka, CINCPACFLT Adm. Joseph W. Prueher, COMPACAF Gen. John G. Lorber and Ken Kresa, president of Northrop-Grumman.)



23 May 2000 The first production-model **T-6A Texan II** aircraft arrived at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas. Designed as a dedicated training aircraft with jet-like handling, the T-6A replaces



both the Air Force T-37 and the Navy T-34, which had been in service for 38 and 23 years respectively. The T-6A offers better performance and significant improvements in training effectiveness, safety, cockpit accommodations and operational capabilities. (Photo at left.)

22 May 2002 The **X-45A unmanned combat air vehicle (UCAV)** flew for the first time at Edwards Air Force Base, California. It was the first unmanned aircraft designed for combat operations in an extremely hostile environment (such as suppression of enemy air defenses). The X-45A was a swept-wing, stealthy design of composite construction, with two internal weapons bays, hardpoints for auxiliary fuel tanks or additional weapons, an internally mounted turbofan engine, and fully retracting landing gear. (Photos below by Jim Ross and NASA.)

