



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History **4 – 10 June 2012**



4 June 1920 The **National Defense Act** established the Air Service as a combatant arm of the Army – equivalent to the infantry, cavalry, and artillery. Congress also created the rating of “airplane pilot” and authorized flying pay at 50 percent above base pay.

10 Jun 1943 The RAF and the USAAF launched the **Combined Bomber Offensive** against Germany. Eighth Air Force struck industrial targets by day and the RAF attacked cities by night. The objective was to destroy the Germans’ ability and will to continue the war. Three days later, in a raid on Kiel, Germany, Eighth Air Force lost 26 of 60 bombers, demonstrating the need for fighter escorts. A similar bombing campaign in the Pacific was not possible until late summer, 1944, when U.S. forces captured the Marianas Islands and built air bases within range of Japan.

6 Jun 1944 **D-DAY**. Operation OVERLORD, the Allied invasion of northwest Europe, began. Ninth Air Force conducted a tactical air offensive from 1 May to 6 June, flying more than 35,000 sorties in preparation for the amphibious and airborne assaults. Ninth Air Force struck enemy airfields, coastal gun positions, rail and road systems, bridges and communications from the Netherlands to the Pyrenees. The Allied air attacks prevented any effective Luftwaffe response to the invasion and cut transportation arteries, isolating the beachheads from German forces.

On D-Day and the night before, Eighth and Ninth Air Forces and the RAF supported the invasion with 15,000 interdiction, close air support, and airlift sorties. More than 1,400 C-47s, C-53s, and gliders of Ninth Troop Carrier Command delivered three full airborne divisions (13,000 men) and artillery on the night before and during the Allied amphibious invasion of Normandy. The airborne troops’ mission was to secure the land approaches to and from the beaches.



C-47s towing gliders to landing zones near Ste. Mère-Eglise.



Tow planes deliver gliders in the hedgerow countryside of Normandy.



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8 Jun 1953 The **USAF Thunderbirds performed for the first time** at Luke AFB, Arizona. The team was named partly for the legendary Thunderbird of Native American folklore – an awesome creature that shook the earth with the thunder of its great wings.

The first Thunderbird team of pilots and support personnel was carefully selected from officer and enlisted ranks. The first Thunderbird aircraft was the F-84G Thunderjet (at right). The left and right wings were flown by twin brothers – Captains [Charles C. "Buck" Pattillo](#) and [Cuthbert A. "Bill" Pattillo](#) – both of whom flew combat missions in Vietnam and retired as a Lieutenant and Major General, respectively. Maj. Gen. Charles Pattillo was Vice Commander of PACAF in 1975.



6 Jun 1960 **Electronic Flight Planning.** An operational development of major importance was successfully tested when two F-100s took off from Itazuke Air Base, Japan on what was **PACAF's first computer-planned mission**. The computer-produced frag orders were more detailed and accurate and could be produced in a few seconds. The time and money saving features of the new system were obvious, but most important was the quick reaction to changes in combat profiles, a factor which was to prove a vital ingredient of combat missions to come.

9 Jun 1964 **First KC-135 Support for Vietnam Combat Operations.** Four KC-135s from Clark AB, Philippines, refueled eight F-100s from Da Nang on an attack against anti-aircraft batteries in northern Laos. PACAF RF-101Cs and KB-50Js supported the strike.



10 Jun 1969 **Project Misty Bronco.** Beginning in April, Misty Bronco tested the effectiveness of armed OV-10s providing an immediate USAF strike presence readily available to ground forces. The concept was deemed successful, and arming of all OV-10s was authorized on 10 June 1969. (OV-10 at left).

7-24 Jun 1976 **First TEAM SPIRIT Exercise.** Team Spirit was a joint and combined field training exercise designed to evaluate and improve the interoperability of the ROK and U.S. forces. One of the specific objectives of this first Team Spirit was to test and evaluate the Korea Tactical Air Control System. A total of 608 U.S. and ROK aircraft flew 2,418 sorties.

4-18 June 1977 **Cope Thunder Expanded.** Cope Thunder IX included units from PACAF, MAC, SAC, the U.S. Marine Corps, two U.S. Navy aircraft carriers, the Philippine Army and the U.S. Army. A total of 632 sorties were flown in nine flying days. The realistic exercises filled a vital need in PACAF, and the exercise grew and expanded in subsequent years.

8 Jun – 2 Jul 1991 The **eruption of Mount Pinatubo** in the Philippines buried Clark Air Base and two other U.S. military installations with volcanic ash, forcing the Air Force to evacuate



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some 15,000 people to Guam and the United States. **FIERY VIGIL** became the largest evacuation operation since the fall of South Vietnam in 1975. Clark Air Base, the oldest and largest USAF overseas base, closed permanently. The photos below show the eruption (left) and a part of Clark Air Base some weeks after the ash fall (right).



USGS



USGS

6 Jun 1996 At NAS Whidbey Island, Washington, the first USAF aircrew graduated from the Navy's EA-6B Fleet Replacement Squadron to join one of five new **Navy/Air Force EA-6B "Prowler" squadrons**. The joint venture consolidated the airborne threat radar jamming mission and led to the retirement of the EF-111 Raven.



EA-6B Prowler

10 Jun 1999 **Operation ALLIED FORCE**. Yugoslavia agreed to the replacement of Serb forces in Kosovo by multinational peacekeepers as well as the return of ethnic Albanians.

Early in this air campaign, political restrictions on targets, meager air forces and poor weather led to disappointing results and continued Serb intransigence. Noted military historian John Keegan, a long-time critic of airpower, said that "airpower simply does not seem to be working."



F-117

After a 23 April summit, NATO employed a more robust air component. The target set was expanded to include more Serb military forces as well as military-industrial plants, lines of communication, petroleum resources, electrical grids, and C2 facilities. USAF combat forces developed effective flex tactics for striking Serb forces as soon as they were located by reconnaissance assets. When Serbia capitulated to NATO terms, Keegan stated that **ALLIED FORCE** was the first war in history won by air power alone.

4 June 2003 Members of the Indian Air Force arrived at Eielson AFB, Alaska for **Cooperative Cope Thunder**, marking the first time Indian military forces fully integrated and participated in the U.S. exercise. A Soviet-built Indian IL-76 transport also participated for the first time, and the exercise also marked the first time fighters from the Japanese Air Self Defense Force deployed to North America for an exercise.