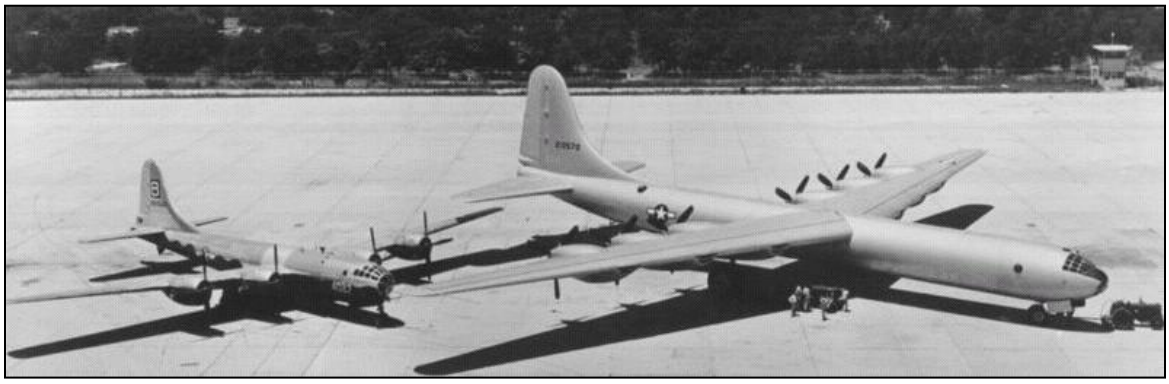
This Week in USAF and PACAF History

25 June – 1 July 2012

26 June 1948 **Berlin Airlift.** The USAF launched "Operation Vittles" in response to a Soviet blockade of rail and road lines into West Berlin. C-47 and C-54 aircraft and personnel of the Pacific Division, Military Air Transport Service (MATS), deployed from Hickam to Germany to support the operation, which delivered 2.3 million tons of cargo to West Berlin over the next year. Operation Vittles became the largest humanitarian airlift in history.

26 June 1948 The 7th Bomb Group received the USAF's first operational **B–36 Peacemaker** heavy bomber. With a length of 160 feet and wings spanning 230 feet, the Peacemaker was the world's largest warplane and is still the largest bomber ever built. The huge six-engine bomber was designed in 1941 when it appeared England might fall to Germany and the U.S. would need a trans-Atlantic bomber in a war against the Nazis. (Photo below is an early B-36 next to a B-29. Four jet engines were eventually added to the B-36 design to improve performance.)



1 July 1949 **The USAF Medical Service** was established under Maj. Gen. Malcolm Grow, the first USAF Surgeon General. Malcolm Grow Medical Center on Andrews AFB is named for him.

25 June 1950 **The Korean War.** At 0400 hours, North Korea launched an all-out attack against the Republic of Korea. A Hickam-based MATS C-54G parked at Kimpo Airport (just west of Seoul) was destroyed by North Korean fighters – the first American aircraft lost in the Korean conflict. The UN Security Council called for the withdrawal of North Korean forces from South Korea, and Fifth Air Force prepared to airlift U.S. citizens out of Seoul, the South Korean capital. C–54, C–47, and C–46 transport aircraft from the 374th Troop Carrier Wing and Headquarters Far East Air Forces (FEAF) began airlifting hundreds of evacuees from Seoul and Suwon Airfields to Japan. They were escorted by F–82 and F–80 jet fighters and B–26 light bombers. On the same day, an F–82 pilot, 1st Lt. William G. Hudson, earned the first aerial victory credit of the Korean War when he shot down a North Korean Yak–11 that was attacking a South Korean airfield near Seoul. Five other USAF pilots also shot down enemy airplanes.

F-80 attack on North Korean invaders

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28 June 1950 **Korean War.** North Korean forces occupied Seoul and nearby Kimpo Airfield. FEAF launched its first successful airstrike as more than twenty B-26s from the 3rd Bomb Group attacked enemy rail and road traffic north of Seoul. One B-26 was lost to enemy fire.

29 June 1950 **Korean War.** President Truman authorized bombing targets in North Korea. General MacArthur directed General Stratemeyer to concentrate air attacks on the Han River bridges and North Korean troops massing north of the river. B-26s attacked the bridges, and 5th Air Force F-80s patrolled the area. The 35th Fighter Bomber Squadron (FBS) and 80th FBS shot down five enemy aircraft attacking Suwon, while eight B-29s from the 19th Bomb Group (BG) attacked enemy-held Kimpo Airfield and the Seoul railroad station. B-29 gunners shot down an enemy airplane for the first time. Later that day, the 3 BG launched 18 B-26s to attack Heijo Airfield near Pyongyang, claiming up to 25 enemy aircraft destroyed on the ground.

B-29 bombing mission during the Korean War

1 July 1950 **North Korean forces occupied Suwon Airfield**, the last major airfield near Seoul, forcing U.S. fighters to operate from bases much further south. Also, the first U.S. troops arrived in South Korea by airlift, carried by 374th Troop Carrier Wing transports from Japan to Pusan.

1 July 1954 The **"Pacific Air Force"** was activated at Hickam AFB, Territory of Hawaii, and assigned to Far East Air Forces (FEAF), which was still headquartered in Japan at that time. Major General Sory Smith assumed command of the Pacific Air Force, which functioned primarily as the Air Force staff component and planning element of U.S. Pacific Command.

On 1 July 1956, Pacific Air Force was redesignated **Pacific Air Force/FEAF (Rear)**. Headquarters FEAF began preparations to move from Japan to Hawaii. Major General Smith assumed additional responsibilities as Deputy Commander, Far East Air Forces.

28 June 1957 The first **KC–135 Stratotanker** arrived at Castle AFB, California. The jet tanker could fly at the same speed as jet bombers, drastically reducing the length of refueling missions.

1 July 1957 **FEAF becomes PACAF**.
Far East Air Forces completed its move from Japan to Hawaii and was redesignated as Pacific Air Forces. The FEAF Commander, General Laurence Kuter, assumed command of PACAF. Pacific Air Force/FEAF (Rear) was inactivated. Major General Smith was appointed commander, 4th Air Force, at Hamilton AFB, California.

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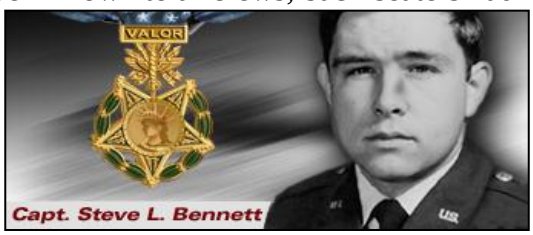
30 June 1968 The **C-5A Galaxy**, the world's largest aircraft at the time, flew its first test flight from Dobbins AFB, Ga. On 5 July 1970, the first C-5A aircraft arrived at Hickam AFB, Hawaii. The C-5 (right) was designed for higher overall performance than previous airlifters, but also with a specific objective to carry the outsized equipment of the US Army. The C-5 cargo bay can carry 36 cargo pallets or two M1-A1 Abrams main battle tanks or seven UH-1 Huey helicopters or one U.S. Army 74-ton mobile scissors bridge or 270 passengers in the air-bus configuration.

26 June 1972 **The Air Force unveiled the F-15 air superiority fighter** in ceremonies at the McDonnell Douglas facility in St. Louis. Arguably the world's most successful fighter program, the F-15 has excellent radar and supporting avionics, a very reliable airframe and superb maneuverability. The F-15 may have been the first aircraft with "hands-on-throttle-and-stick" (HOTAS), a human-machine interface concept which puts key controls on the throttle and control stick – immediately accessible to the pilots' fingers. The combination of HOTAS and heads-up display (HUD) allowed the pilot to focus outside the cockpit while operating weapons and other systems. At left, an F-15 intercepts a Russian Tu-95 bomber near Alaska.

29 June 1972 **MEDAL OF HONOR.** Capt Steven L. Bennett, an OV-10 forward air controller, and his observer strafed enemy troops that were attacking a friendly unit, forcing the enemy to retreat. A surface-to-air missile crippled the OV-10 and shredded his observer's parachute. The structural weakness of the OV-10 was well-known to aircrews; back-seaters had survived OV-10 ditchings, but no pilot ever had. Nevertheless, Bennet decided to ditch the aircraft rather than bail out and leave his observer to die in the back seat. Capt Bennet was killed in the ditching, but his observer survived. Bennett received the Medal of Honor posthumously.



30 June 1977 President Carter announced the **cancellation of the B–1A bomber program** citing the reliability of B–52s and cruise missiles to penetrate enemy airspace. Another factor was the on-going development of stealth technology that eventually produced the B-2 Spirit.

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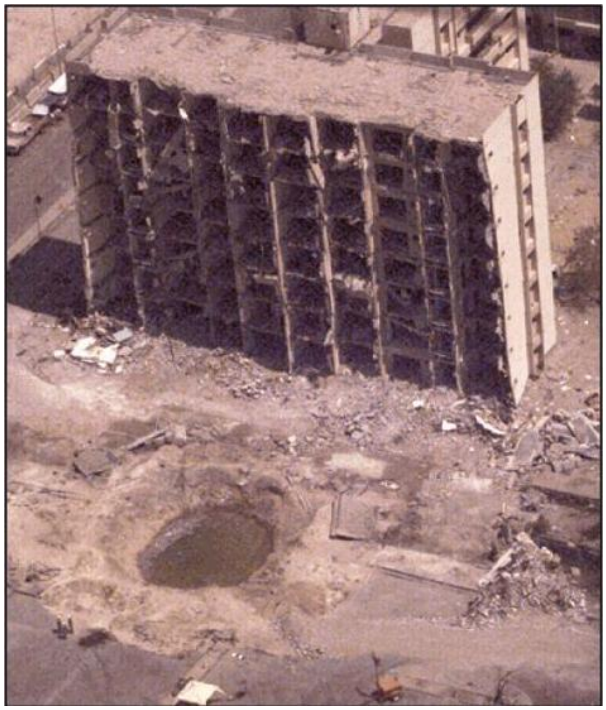
In the 1980s, the B-1 program was revived and the design was modified. B-1B improvements included a low radar cross-section, automatic terrain-following high-speed penetration, and precision weapons delivery. With an empty weight just 3% larger than the B-1A, the B-1B increased its gross takeoff weight limit from 395,000 to 477,000 pounds and added a movable bulkhead between the forward and intermediate weapons bays, allowing the B-1B to carry a wide variety of nuclear and conventional munitions.

On 4 July 1987, four USAF crewmembers took off in a B-1B from the Rockwell plant at Palmdale for its **initial acceptance flight**. They set speed and payload records off the Pacific Coast by traveling 1,080 nautical miles with a 66,140-pound payload at 685 mph. Then, through 17 September, two B-1Bs set 72 world and national speed, distance, and payload records and were awarded the **Mackay Trophy**.

On 1 July 1994, the 184th Bomb Group in Kansas became the first **Air National Guard** unit to be equipped with the B-1B Lancer. (B-1B photo at left.)

25 June 1996 **Khobar Towers.** Terrorists detonated a truck bomb outside the fence surrounding a housing facility near King Abdul-Aziz Air Base, Saudi Arabia. The blast killed 19 Air Force personnel and injured 300 others.



Force protection measures at the facility were primarily concerned that terrorist bombers might penetrate the building, as happened at the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983. Concrete barriers surrounded the fence around the Khobar Towers, but there were few lights. No surveillance cameras, sensors, or alarms were in use. USAF Security Police overlooking the perimeter from the roof saw the truck being parked and alerted many occupants to the threat. However, the evacuation was still in progress when the bomb detonated. The perpetrators escaped. (The photo shows the bomb crater and the damage to the housing facility.)

As a result of the bombing, most USAF personnel in Saudi Arabia were moved to remote sites that were easier to defend.

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