



This Week in USAF and PACAF History
27 August – 2 September 2012



U.S. AIR FORCE

31 August 1939 **Wheeler Field** became a separate permanent military post, although the transition to independent status had been gradual. By the end of the year, units stationed at Wheeler included the 18th Pursuit Group and the 4th and 5th Reconnaissance Squadrons, under the jurisdiction of the 18th Bomber Wing headquartered at Hickam Field.

27 August 1945 B-29s of the Twentieth Air Force flew their **first supply-drop mission to Allied prisoners of war** at a camp near Peiping, China. When the war ended, it was estimated that evacuation of the prisoners would take 30 days. Due to starvation, disease and maltreatment, many lives would be saved by rapid supply of POW camps. In all, 154 camps with 63,500 prisoners in Japan, China, and Korea got food, medical supplies, and clothing. (At right, a camp with “P-W” and other markings on the roofs. POW camps were often located next to Allied bombing targets.)



28 August 1945 **FEAF arrives in Japan.** An advance team of communications specialists flew in to Atsugi Airfield, 16 miles southwest of Tokyo – the first American personnel to begin the occupation of Japan. Among the American personnel was **Colonel Gordon Blake**, former Base Operations officer in charge of Hickam Field who was on duty during the attack of 7 December 1941. Protected only by units of the Japanese Imperial Army, Col Blake and this stalwart band set up the control tower and communication equipment necessary for occupation forces to land. Two days later, the operation called Mission 75 began landing American occupation forces in Japan. A total of 1,336 C-54 flights airlifted the initial Air Transport Command detachment, the 11th Airborne Division, the 27th Infantry Division, and advanced headquarters echelons for General MacArthur, Eighth Army and Far East Air Forces. From 30 August to 12 September, Special Mission 75 ferried 39,928 occupation troops and 8,202 tons of supplies from a staging area in Okinawa to Japan. The mission used 259 C-54s and 360 B-24 bombers as cargo planes, and associated aircraft.



2 September 1945 **“V-J Day” – Japanese Surrender ends World War II.**

In ceremonies onboard the battleship *USS Missouri* in Tokyo Bay, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, formally received the Japanese envoys who signed the instrument of surrender, ending World War II.

29 August 1952 FEAF set a new 24-hour record when **Fifth Air Force flew 854 sorties against Pyongyang, Korea.** This attack destroyed 56 buildings and damaged 33 others.



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31 August 1956 The **Boeing KC-135 Stratotanker** flew its maiden flight. With far more capability than existing propeller-driven tankers, the KC-135 could cruise at the same speed as jet bombers while refueling, drastically reducing the time for in-flight refueling missions.

30 August 1960 With six Atlas missiles ready to launch, the 564th Strategic Missile Squadron at Francis E. Warren AFB, Wyoming, became the **first fully operational ICBM squadron**.



1 September 1966 Tactical Air Command activated the **Tactical Fighter Weapons Center, forerunner of today's USAF Warfare Center**, at Nellis AFB. The Center was activated during the Vietnam War to improve tactical air operations in conventional war and contingencies. At the time, the Center conducted special fighter training in F-100s, F-105s, and F-4s.

1 September 1968 **MEDAL OF HONOR.** Lt Col William A. Jones led a flight of four A-1H Skyraiders on an escort mission to rescue an F-4 pilot down near Dong Hoi. Spotting the downed flier, Jones repeatedly attacked an enemy gun position, sustaining heavy damage to his aircraft and severe burns to himself. Finding his radios broken, Jones returned to base, where he reported the downed pilot's location while on the operating table. The F-4 pilot was rescued later that day.



28 August 1972 **Capt Richard S. "Steve" Ritchie**, with his backseater Capt Charles D. DeBellevue, shot down his fifth MiG-21 near Hanoi. (At left, Ritchie and DeBellevue in their F-4 cockpit.) This made Ritchie the **first USAF ace of the Vietnam War**. For this feat, Ritchie shared the 1972 Mackay Trophy with the other USAF aces in the Vietnam War – Captain DeBellevue and Captain Jeffrey S. Feinstein.



Artwork depicting these three aces and Vietnam-era fighters can be viewed in the PACAF Headquarters second floor hallway approaching the Command Briefing Room (go to the south end of G-wing and turn right).

1 September 1982 **Space Command activated** at Peterson AFB, Colorado. It was redesignated **Air Force Space Command** in 1985 following the activation of U.S. Space Command.

30 August 1983 Lt. Col. Guion S. Bluford, USAF, became the **first black astronaut** to journey into space. He rode aboard *Challenger* on the eighth space shuttle mission.



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31 August 1983 **Korean Air Lines Flight 007**, a Boeing 747, left New York en route to Seoul. After refueling in Anchorage, Alaska, KAL 007 strayed over the Kamchatka peninsula and southern Sakhalin Island. Before dawn on September 1, a Soviet SU-15 interceptor shot down the airliner as it was about to re-enter international airspace. KAL Flight 007 had 269 people aboard, including many U.S. citizens. Three HC-130 aircraft from the 33rd Rescue Squadron at Kadena AB deployed at Yokota AB for the search. An HC-130 flown by Capt. Mark Leuthold and his crew was the first U.S. aircraft over the search area. However, no survivors were found.

29 August 1990 The Lockheed/Boeing/General Dynamics team **unveiled the YF-22A Advanced Tactical Fighter** in ceremonies at Lockheed Plant 10 in Palmdale, California.

30 August 1995 NATO launched **Operation DELIBERATE FORCE**, a precise air campaign against Serb targets in Bosnia-Herzegovina, accompanied by a Bosnian-Croatian ground offensive. On Sept. 14th, the Serbs agreed to peace terms that were signed in December.

1 September 1995 **The SR-71 returned to active service.** The Air Force had retired its fleet of SR-71s on 26 January 1990 because of a decreasing defense budget and high costs of operation. The aircraft was retired again in 1998.

31 August – 3 September 1996 **Operation DESERT STRIKE.** Iraq attacked Kurds and seized the city of Irbil in a zone protected by the United States. In response, President Clinton ordered a strike on military targets in Iraq posing a threat to coalition aircraft in the no-fly-zone. The B-52 contingent of AEF IV in Southeast Asia left Andersen AFB, Guam on 2 September and flew non-stop for 33.9 hours and 13,600 miles, launching 13 conventional air launched cruise missiles (CALCMs) against targets in Iraq. Nine KC-10s – one from McGuire AFB and eight from Travis AFB--along with 14 KC-135s from Fairchild AFB flew air refueling missions to support the raid. Andersen AFB also began hosting more than 6,600 Kurdish evacuees during the eight-month humanitarian assistance mission, Joint Task Force Pacific Haven (16 Sep 1996 – 30 Apr 1997). In the photo above, a B-52 launches a CALCM.



31 August 2006 **Super Typhoon Ioke** passed almost directly over Wake Island, with winds approaching 160 mph. Ioke was the first Category 5 storm to develop in the Pacific since record-keeping began in the early 1960s. Ioke demolished buildings, toppled satellite dishes, and ripped out communication links. Three days earlier, C-17s from the 15th Airlift Wing and HIANG 154th Wing had evacuated 188 personnel from Wake Island.