



U.S. AIR FORCE

## This Week in USAF and PACAF History 17 – 23 December 2012



23 Dec 1907 Brig. Gen. James Allen, chief signal officer, issued the **first specification for a military airplane**. It called for an aircraft that could carry two people, fly at a minimum speed of 40 miles per hour, go 125 miles without stopping, be controllable for flight in any direction, and land at its takeoff point without damage.



17 Dec 1925 Airpower pioneer **Billy Mitchell was found guilty** of "conduct of a nature to bring discredit on the military service" and sentenced to a five-year suspension of rank, pay and command. After World War I, Brig. Gen. Mitchell (at left) grew increasingly critical of senior military leaders for failing to recognize the potential of airpower in war. After the crash of a Navy dirigible, Mitchell accused senior leaders in the Army and Navy of incompetence and "almost treasonable administration of the national defense." He was court-martialed at the direct order of President Calvin Coolidge. After the verdict, Mitchell resigned from the Army and wielded far less influence thereafter. He died in 1936 at the age of 56.

Mitchell's predictions about the rise of airpower came true in World War II, including a specific prophecy that Japan would conduct an early morning aerial attack on Pearl Harbor. He was posthumously awarded a special Congressional Medal of Honor in 1946. Named in his honor, the B-25 "Mitchell" bomber is the only American military aircraft named after a specific person. In 2007, the Air Force first awarded the Air Force Combat Action Medal (at right), which is based on the insignia painted on Billy Mitchell's aircraft during World War I.



20 Dec 1941 **The Flying Tigers entered combat for the first time** over Kunming, China. Colonel Claire Chennault's American Volunteer Group, flying P-40 Warhawks (at left), destroyed almost 300 enemy aircraft with a loss of only fourteen of their own. The Tigers scored innovative tactical victories when the war news back home was mostly reports of battles lost to the Japanese. Colonel Chennault was eventually promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General.

17 Dec 1944 Major Richard I. Bong of the U.S. Army Air Forces scored his 40th aerial victory in the Pacific, the **highest victory total of any U.S. ace**.

20 Dec 1944 **The Women's Airforce Service Pilot (WASP) program came to an end**. Women pilots had ferried 77 types of aircraft, including the P-38 and F-5, P-39, P-40, P-63, C-54, C-46, and B-24. The women encountered the same flying conditions and problems as male pilots, sometimes guarding their own planes at under-staffed airfields and frequently flying open-cockpit planes in sub-zero weather.



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21 Dec 1944 **General Henry H. Arnold became General of the Army (5 stars).** Instructed to fly by the Wright Brothers, Arnold fought to bring about the creation of an independent U.S. Air Force. He rose to command the Army Air Forces immediately prior to U.S. entry into World War II and directed its expansion into the largest and most powerful air force in the world. A strong believer in research and development, Arnold led the Air Force in the development of the intercontinental bomber, the jet fighter, the extensive use of radar, global airlift, and atomic warfare as mainstays of modern airpower. Later appointed as General of the Air Force, Arnold is the only officer to hold 5-star rank in two separate services.

17 Dec 1950 **Far East Air Forces F-86s encountered North Korean MiG-15s** in combat for the first time. Lt. Col. Bruce H. Hinton scored the first F-86 victory over a MiG-15.



21 Dec 1950 The Boeing Company delivered the **first KC-97A Stratofreighter** to the USAF. Basically a converted C-97 transport, this was a propeller-driven, four-engine tanker with a flying boom and four extra fuselage tanks.

Exactly 15 years later, the USAF phased out its last two KC-97s. At one time, the USAF had 36 KC-97 squadrons with 780 total aircraft.

19 Dec 1954 **The F-102 Delta Dagger made its first flight.** By reconfiguring the YF-102 prototype delta-wing airframe (below, left) to reduce transonic drag, the F-102A reached design requirements as a supersonic, high-altitude Cold War interceptor (below right). Known as the “Deuce,” the design underwent so many modifications for the F-102B model that it was given an entirely new aircraft designation – the F-106 Delta Dart.





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22 Dec 1956 **Project Gohan—an early humanitarian operation.** Severe winter weather led to crop failures and famine in Japan's northernmost major island of Hokkaido. A campaign called "Rice for Hokkaido" caught the attention of Maj. Gen. Russell L. Waldron, commander of the 315th Air Division at Tachikawa AB in Honshu. General Waldron sponsored an airlift of rice from Honshu to Hokkaido. Dubbed Project Gohan (*gohan* is the Japanese word for rice), the operation involved three 315th Air Div aircraft: two C-119 Flying Boxcars and one C-54 Skymaster. Waldron piloted the C-54 himself. The three airplanes transported 21 tons of rice from Tachikawa AB to Chitose AB in Hokkaido.

Incidentally, General Waldron was commander of the 31st Bombardment Squadron at Hickam Field when the Japanese attacked on 7 December 1941.

18 Dec 1958 The Air Force placed in orbit the **first artificial communications satellite**, a *Project Score* relay vehicle integral with the four-ton Atlas launcher. The next day, the satellite broadcast a taped recording of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Christmas message—the first time a human voice had been heard from space.

22 Dec 1964 On its maiden flight, the **Lockheed SR-71** strategic reconnaissance aircraft



exceeded 45,000 feet and 1,000 miles per hour. During its operational life, the SR-71 "Blackbird" flew missions worldwide at speeds above Mach 3 and altitudes above 85,000 feet. The aircraft required many technological breakthroughs to withstand the air friction and high temperatures of Mach 3 flight. The titanium alloy airframe was complimented by special fuel, sealants, lubricants, wiring and other components that could endure temperatures of 450 to 950 degrees Fahrenheit.

23 Dec – 23 Jan 1965 **Operation BLUE LIGHT.** MAC transported the 3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division from Hickam AFB, Hawaii to Pleiku, South Vietnam to offset communist forces in the area. The airlift included 231 C-141 sorties to move 3,000 troops and 4,700 tons of equipment. At the time, it was the largest airlift into a combat zone.

18 Dec 1969 Air Force Missile Development Center crews completed the **first guided launch of the Maverick**—an air-to-surface television-guided missile capable of attacking moving targets at short range. Designated the AGM-65, the missile would eventually be carried by a variety of bomber, fighter, and attack aircraft. At right, an A-10 launches a Maverick over the Pacific Alaska Range Complex.



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18-29 Dec 1972 **Operation LINEBACKER II.** To bring the North Vietnamese back to peace negotiations, President Nixon ordered an 11-day all-out bombing campaign against targets in Hanoi and Haiphong. USAF aircraft dropped 20,370 tons of bombs, including 15,000 tons from B-52s. SSgt. Samuel Turner, USAF, became the first B-52 tail gunner to down an enemy aircraft.



Altogether, the USAF flew 714 B-52 and 830 fighter sorties, while the Navy and Marine Corps flew another 386 sorties over the 11 days. KC-135s flew some 1,300 air refueling sorties. Fifteen B-52s, two F-4s and two F-111s were shot down by the enemy. A cease fire agreement was signed in January, 1973.



22 Dec 1986 **Peacekeeper IOC.** The Peacekeeper ICBM reached its initial operating capability at Warren AFB, Wyoming. The Peacekeeper carried ten independently targetable warheads and was developed to solve survivability issues, but the program was plagued by ineffective basing schemes and production problems. The last Peacekeeper was retired in 2005 and the warheads were placed on Minuteman III missiles. At left, a time exposure of eight Peacekeeper re-entry vehicles during a flight test.

17 Dec – 14 Feb 1990 **Operation JUST CAUSE.** USAF aircraft struck targets, airlifted troops, and flew special operations to restore democracy in Panama. F-117 stealth fighter-bombers flew in combat for the first time. In the largest night-combat airdrop since World War II, the USAF airlifted 9,500 airborne troops from Pope AFB to Panama.

17 Dec 1993 The **first B-2 Spirit bomber** arrived at Whiteman AFB, Missouri. At right, a B-2 deployed to Andersen AFB, Guam flies a training mission over the Pacific Ocean.



18 Dec 1997 After **Typhoon Paka struck Guam**, the USAF airlifted more than 2.5 million pounds of equipment and supplies to Andersen AFB to aid in the relief effort.

22 Dec 1997 The **last Minuteman II missile silo was destroyed** in accordance with the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty. Since the retirement of the Peacekeeper force, the Minuteman III is now the only deployed ICBM in the USAF inventory.