



This Week in USAF and PACAF History
28 January – 3 February 2013



U.S. AIR FORCE

1 Feb 1943 **General Officer rescue.** Navy crews in PBY-5 Catalina aircraft rescued Thirteenth Air Force commander Maj. Gen. Nathan F. Twining and 14 others near the New Hebrides Islands after they were forced to ditch their aircraft and spend six days in life rafts.

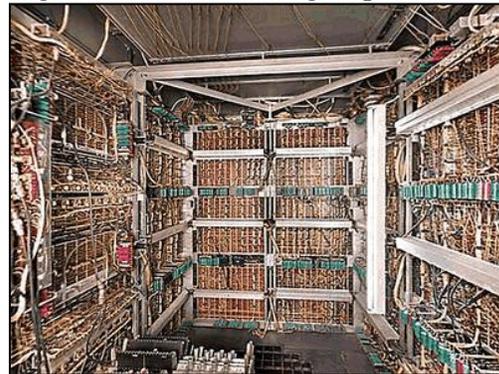
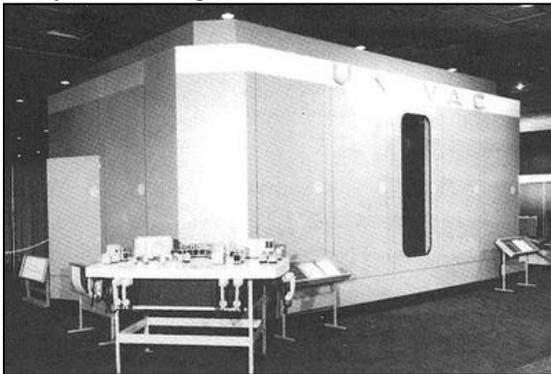


3 Feb 1944 Col Philip Cochran led five P-51s on the **first Air Commando attack** on Japanese forces in the Chinese-Burma-India theater. The 1st Air Commando Group was a self-contained force of fighters, cargo planes, light aircraft, and support personnel. With the motto "Anytime, Anywhere," the 1st ACG attacked enemy

forces, resupplied British commandos and evacuated injured soldiers.

The Air Commandos were prototypes for many modern USAF Special Operations concepts, including Combat Control Teams and Airborne Forward Air Controllers. In Vietnam, Air Commandos performed a variety of missions such as close air support, interdiction, civic affairs, psychological operations and defoliant operations. Five of the 12 Air Force Medals of Honor awarded during the Vietnam War went to Air Commando/Special Operations members.

1 Feb 1952 **The Air Force acquired its first general-purpose, high-speed digital computer.** Delivered a month later, the vacuum-tube-based **Universal Automatic Computer I** (UNIVAC I; below, left) was the second government buy of the computer, after the Census Bureau. The circuitry of the original walk-in UNIVAC I (below, right) now fits on a fingertip.



30 Jan 1953 **The Boeing B-47 Stratojet first flew.** Designed in the late 1940s, the innovative, all-jet B-47 (left) had swept wings and aerial refueling capability. The B-47 carried only one or two high-yield nuclear weapons, but it was produced in numbers sufficient to strike the targets in SAC's war plans. By 1956, there were over 1,300 B-47 bombers and over 200 RB-47 reconnaissance aircraft assigned to SAC. Many B-47 features were used in the B-52.



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1 February 1961 The **ballistic missile early warning system** (BMEWS) site at Thule, Greenland, became fully operational. Later, other sites became operational at Clear, Alaska and RAF Flyingdales in the United Kingdom. Operated by NORAD, the system could provide the warning of an impending Soviet missile attack on the United States in time to respond.

In a major test on the same day, the **Minuteman intercontinental ballistic missile** (ICBM) was launched for the first time at Cape Canaveral, Florida. The solid-fueled Minuteman could be stored more easily and fired more quickly than the liquid-fueled Atlas and Titan ICBMs.

3 Feb 1961 **Project LOOKING GLASS.** After six months of tests, SAC initiated continuous airborne command post operations. From this date, a Looking Glass aircraft (below, left) was in the air continuously for more than 29 years, logging more than 281,000 accident-free flying hours. The EC-135 Airborne Command Post gave SAC an ability to launch bombers and ICBMs in the event of a nuclear attack. The nickname “Looking Glass” arose from the mission to mirror ground-based command, control, and communications. On 2 Feb 1965, the USAF announced that Minuteman IIs could be launched by radio signal from the airborne command post. (Photo of aircraft interior below, right.) On July 24, 1990, Looking Glass ceased continuous airborne alert, but it remained on ground or airborne alert 24 hours a day. On Oct. 1, 1998, the [Navy's E-6B Mercury](#) replaced the EC-135 in the Looking Glass mission.



2 Feb 1962 **First USAF Loss in Vietnam/Operation RANCH HAND.** The first USAF aircraft loss in South Vietnam occurred when a C-123 crashed while spraying defoliant on a Viet Cong ambush site. The crew of three became the **first Air Force fatalities in Vietnam.**

2 Feb 1974 The **YF-16 fighter prototype made its first official flight** at Edwards AFB, CA. Vietnam War combat experience showed that America needed better fighters to face the latest Soviet designs. The Air Force wanted an agile, light-weight, low-cost, long-range air superiority fighter it could buy in greater numbers than the F-15 and the Navy's F-14 – which were thought to be too big and too costly. When the F-15 was made even larger and heavier to counter the new MiG-25, its numbers were cut and the Air Force announced a new competition for defense contractors to build the “Light-Weight Fighter” (LWF).



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In April 1972, General Dynamics and Northrop became the finalists to produce prototypes – the YF-16 and YF-17. The companies were given wide latitude for technical innovation in order to maximize performance rather than simply meeting design specifications. Two excellent but very different fighters were produced. After the flight testing, **the Air Force selected the YF-16**. It was a low-cost, nimble fighter capable of sustaining 9G turns. The YF-16 gave its pilot greater tolerance to high G-forces through a side-mounted control stick and a seat reclined to 30 degrees. Its frameless bubble canopy provided 360-degrees of unobstructed visibility with a 40-degree look-down angle on both sides. The YF-16 had superior acceleration, climb rates, maneuverability and range. It was also less expensive – partly due to its use of the same engine as the F-15. This provided huge savings in unit and maintenance costs because the same engine mechanics and spare parts could be used on both aircraft.



The YF-17 was a twin-engine/twin-tail aircraft. The Navy favored twin engines for flying over the ocean and needed a dual-role surface-attack and air-to-air fighter with a strong airframe for carrier operations. The Navy won approval to develop the YF-17. Modified with stronger landing gear, folding wings and catapult attachments, **the YF-17 became the F/A-18 Hornet**.

29 Jan 1991 **Battle of Khafji**. In the first weeks of Desert Storm, coalition air attacks were rapidly immobilizing Iraqi ground forces. The Iraqis, attempting to seize the initiative while their armored forces still had the ability to maneuver, assembled an assault force to attack across the border into Saudi Arabia. Joint STARS aircraft detected the Iraqi movements and warned coalition commanders. However, the weight of U.S. Army and other coalition land forces were in the midst of a three-week redeployment 200 miles to the west in preparation for the planned “left hook” coalition ground attack. Iraqi forces attacked and seized the town of Khafji, but the Joint Force Commander, General Schwarzkopf, decided not to play into Saddam’s hands by launching a ground counterattack. Instead, he told his commanders to use airpower as the key element, along with Marine, Saudi, and other coalition ground forces, to stop the Iraqi offensive.

Hundreds of air attacks on Iraqi forces in Kuwait were already scheduled and under way. With airpower already flowing through the kill boxes, air controllers quickly diverted sorties to the Marine forward air controllers or sent them ahead to interdict the Iraqi forces attempting to reach coalition lines. The previously dug-in Iraqi armored vehicles were now in the open and more easily identified and targeted by coalition air assets. In three days, the Iraqi attack was stopped.





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At 0600 hours on the morning of January 31, "Spirit 03" was the last of three AC-130 Spectre gunships on station to provide close air support.



Spirit 03 was due to end its patrol when it received a call from U.S. Marines needing an enemy missile battery destroyed. Despite the risk of enemy fire in daylight, the crew of "Spirit 03" chose to remain and destroy the position as requested. Soon after eliminating the target, Spirit 03 was shot down by an SA-7, killing all 14 crewmembers. This was the largest USAF loss of the war.

See the Air Force Magazine® article, [The Epic Little Battle of Khafji](#).

31 Jan 2001 **Disaster Relief.** Through 3 February, two C-5s and four C-17s flew 115 short tons of humanitarian cargo to Ahmedabad, India in the wake of a devastating earthquake. Each C-5 was refueled in flight by Hawaii ANG KC-135s during nonstop missions from Travis AFB, California to Andersen AFB, Guam. At Andersen, the cargo was transferred from the C-5s onto four C-17s from McChord AFB (photo at right) because Ahmedabad's airfield was too small for the C-5s. KC-135Rs from the 18th Wing at Kadena Air Base refueled the C-17s on their 13-hour flight between Guam and India.

