



U.S. AIR FORCE

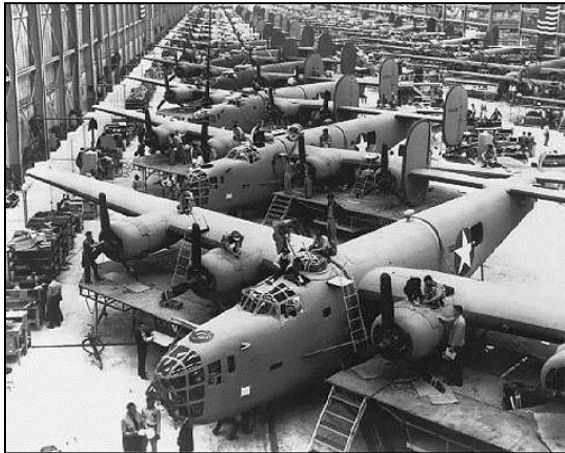
This Week in USAF and PACAF History 15 – 21 June 2015



16 June 1936 **P-35 Fighter Contract.** Seversky won the contract for the [P-35 fighter](#) (below) – the Army’s first all-metal, single-seat fighter with an enclosed cockpit and retractable landing gear. Fighting in the Philippines during the early days of World War II, P-35s shot down about 60 Japanese aircraft and destroyed another 30 on the ground. However, P-35s were vulnerable due to a lack of both armor and self-sealing fuel tanks. Before long, none of the P-35s were fit for combat. The P-35 was the forerunner of the P-47 Thunderbolt – but not the F-35 Lightning II.

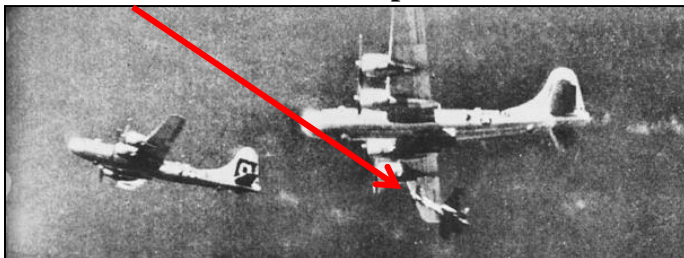


16 June 1941 **The Consolidated B-24 Liberator**, a four-engine bomber that could fly faster and farther than the B-17, **entered the Air Corps inventory.** B-24s were produced in larger numbers than any other U.S. aircraft and employed on more fronts than any other Allied or enemy bomber in World War II. Consolidated was originally asked to produce the B-17 under license, but submitted its own design for a more capable bomber. The placement of the B-24’s fuel tanks throughout the upper fuselage and its lightweight construction optimized assembly line production (photo at left) and increased range and payload, but made the aircraft more difficult to fly and more vulnerable to battle damage. On 31 May 1945, the last of 18,188 B-24s was delivered to the USAAF.



20 June 1941 **The War Department established the Army Air Forces (USAAF)** under MGen. Henry H. Arnold. USAAF unified command of both the Army Air Corps – responsible for research, development, supply, and maintenance, and Air Force Combat Command (formerly General Headquarters Air Force) – responsible for doctrine and operational training.

15 June 1944 Sixty-eight B-29 Superfortresses took off at night from staging bases at Chengdu, China, to bomb the Imperial Iron and Steel Works at Yawata on Kyushu, more than 1,500 miles away. This was the **first mission in the strategic bombardment campaign against Japan**, and it was the **first raid on the Japanese home islands since the Doolittle attack** of April 1942.



However, it caused little damage due to poor aiming. Coincidentally, on this same day the U.S. Marines invaded the Marianas Islands – which would host more effective B-29 bases. At left, a Japanese fighter (see arrow) makes a diving attack on Marianas-based B-29s.



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This Week in USAF and PACAF History 15 – 21 June 2015



15 June 1944 **Far East Air Forces (Provisional)** was established at Brisbane, Australia as the single air headquarters in the Southwest Pacific Area. The War Department approved its designation as Far East Air Forces (FEAF) on 20 June 1944, and FEAF was formally activated on 3 August 1944. **Lt Gen George C. Kenney**, Commander of 5th Air Force, became the **first commander of the Far East Air Forces**, the predecessor to Pacific Air Forces (PACAF). For more on FEAF's origins and the meaning behind FEAF's emblem (right), see the first two pages of the document at this [link](#).



21 June 1944 **The End of Operation FRANTIC**. In 1944, planners developed a concept for American bombers launching from the Mediterranean or England to strike Germany and then shuttle on to bases in the Soviet Union. These routes would allow U.S. bombers to reach targets deeper in Germany, divert Luftwaffe air support away from western approaches, and provide additional air cover for battles on the eastern front. It was also hoped that the operation would forge closer ties with the USSR and encourage Stalin to allow access to Siberian air bases for use against Japan. The concept proved successful in missions flown out of Italy. On 21 June 1944, an England-based B-17 force raided synthetic fuel plants near Berlin. However, after the raid a Luftwaffe He-111 bomber shadowed the B-17s to locate their Russian base. At about midnight that night, the Luftwaffe sent over 100 of their own bombers to drop flares and attack the B-17s, destroying or damaging about 70 American bombers. Soviet air defenses were not able to oppose the raid, and Operation FRANTIC was ended.



Russian military personnel in front of a damaged B-17 at Poltava, Russia (22 Jun 1944)



Two Russian pilots flank a US maintenance officer in front of a Soviet P-39

16 June 1948 **Geraldine Pratt May** became the **first director of Women in the Air Force (WAF) and the first female colonel** in the history of this branch of the armed forces. The WAF program ended in 1976 when women were put on an equal basis with men in the U.S. Air Force.



16 June 1963 Jr. Lt. Valentina Tereshkova (left), a Soviet cosmonaut, became the **first woman in space** on a three-day flight on *Vostok 6*. Twenty years later, on 18 June 1983, Sally K. Ride (right) became the **first U.S. woman in space**. She flew on the *Challenger* crew during the seventh space-shuttle mission.





U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 15 – 21 June 2015



18 June 1965 **ARC LIGHT begins.** Thirty B-52Fs from Andersen AFB, Guam, refueled by 30 KC-135s, bombed a Viet Cong stronghold near Saigon. This was the first use of B-52s in combat. Tragically, two B-52s were lost in a collision in the air refueling area. In the first three years of operations in Southeast Asia, B-52s flew more than 25,000 sorties and dropped more than 630,000 tons of bombs. Enemy ground forces could neither see nor hear the approaching B-52s, which typically released bombs from 30,000 feet.



16 June 1966 A Titan IIIC boosted seven experimental communications satellites and one gravity-gradient satellite into orbit 18,000 nautical miles above the equator. These satellites demonstrated the **feasibility of a global military communications satellite system.**

17 June 1968 Roll-out of the **first C-9 Nightingale aeromedical-evacuation aircraft.**



The requirement for an aero-medical transport had arisen in World War II and in subsequent conflicts. Eight McDonnell Douglas DC-9's were ordered with modifications such as a special care section and a hydraulic lift to load litters onto the aircraft. This first C-9 was christened with water from the Sea of Galilee by 2Lt Elsie Ott, the flight nurse on a 17 Jan 1943 mission that was the **first intercontinental movement of military patients.**

This mission evacuated five patients from India to Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D.C. Two were paralyzed from the waist down, one had tuberculosis, one had glaucoma and one was suffering manic-depressive psychosis. Ott had never flown before and was assigned to the flight with only 24 hours' notice. The only supplies she could find were bedding and a first aid kit. Only one other medical person was on board. With fuel stops, the mission took nearly a week.

Ott's critical after-action report highlighted the need for oxygen, more wound dressing supplies, extra coffee and blankets. She advised planners that skirts were impractical for this kind of duty. For her actions that day and her contribution to realizing the potential of aeromedical evacuation, 2Lt Elsie Ott became the **first woman ever awarded the Air Medal** (1943 photo at right).

The C-9 was named for English social reformer Florence Nightingale, who has been called the founder of modern nursing. The C-9 fleet was retired from active service in 2005.





U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 15 – 21 June 2015



19 June 1970 At Minot AFB in North Dakota, the **Minuteman III inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) first became operational.**

The Minuteman series was the first solid-fueled ICBM program in the U. S. inventory. This feature reduced maintenance and allowed much longer storage and nearly instantaneous launch. The Minuteman III was the world's first missile to carry more than one warhead, using a "Multiple Independently-targetable Re-entry Vehicle" (MIRV) system. However, since 2005 each missile has been limited to one warhead by international treaty.

The [LGM-30G Minuteman III](#) is the only operational land-based ICBM remaining in the United States' inventory. In the photo at left, a Minuteman III test launch is conducted at Vandenberg AFB, California.

19 June 1973 The **Case-Church Amendment** was passed by the U.S. Congress. It banned any further U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia, effective 15 August 1973. The veto-proof vote was 278-124 in the House and 64-26 in the Senate. On 14 August, U.S. bombing of Khmer Rouge forces in Cambodia was halted in accordance with the ban. With U.S. airpower gone, North Vietnam conquered South Vietnam in 1975.



20 June 1976 **Final U.S. Base Closures in Thailand.** The last two U.S. facilities in Thailand closed – U Tapao Royal Thai Naval Air Field and the Ramasun electronic monitoring facility. The last scheduled C-130 service from U Tapao departed on 19 June. After nearly 26 years, the U.S. Military Assistance Command Thailand ceased to exist and the facilities at U Tapao, with an estimated value of \$102 million, were given to Thailand.



18 June 1981 First flight of the [F-117 Nighthawk](#), the world's first stealth combat aircraft. The theory of "stealth" (low radar signature) aircraft was developed in the 1960s by scientists in several nations, but actual stealth aircraft designs were inherently unstable. With U.S. advances in flight computers and software, stealthy aircraft became practical. Decisions to develop the F-117 were made in 1973, and the decision to build the aircraft was made in 1978.



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This Week in USAF and PACAF History 15 – 21 June 2015



17 June 1983 **The [Peacekeeper ICBM](#) launched for the first time** at Vandenberg AFB, California. The unarmed warheads landed in the Kwajalein target area (see photo below of a similar test mission.)

Originally conceived as a survivable ICBM capable of attacking hardened strategic targets, the Peacekeeper was part of the nation's strategic deterrent from 1986 to 2005. It was the first U.S. ICBM to use "cold launch" technology in which the missile was ejected from its silo before its first-stage solid-rocket motor ignited.



The end of the Cold War and the signing of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) II banned all multiple-warhead ICBMs. By 2005, the entire Peacekeeper force was deactivated and Minuteman IIIs were limited to a single warhead. Some Peacekeeper boosters were used as satellite launch vehicles, and plans were made to use the newer Peacekeeper re-entry vehicles as replacements for some of the older Minuteman III warheads. The Peacekeeper launch silos have also been kept intact in an indefinite mothball status.

19-23 June 2006 **[Exercise VALIANT SHIELD 2006](#)** was the largest U.S. military exercise in Pacific waters since the Vietnam War and the first time observers from the People's Republic of China were present to view U.S. wargames. Over 290 aircraft, three aircraft carrier strike groups and some 22,000 U.S. military personnel participated in the exercise. USAF participation included B-2 and B-52 bombers, F-15C, F-15E, F-16CJ fighters; E-3 airborne control aircraft and KC-10 and KC-135 tankers.



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