6 Mar 1942  The Army Air School for black aviators at Tuskegee, Alabama, graduated the first five black military pilots. George Roberts, Benjamin Davis Jr., Charles BeBow Jr., Mac Ross and Lemuel Custis received the silver wings of Army Air Force pilots. These men were the first of nearly 1000 Tuskegee aviators to complete Army flight training and earn their wings.

Despite the obstacles of racial prejudice, the Tuskegee Airmen built an admirable combat record in World War II. Their courageous service was a major factor in the desegregation of the armed forces after the war. The U.S. Air Force became a separate service in 1947 and was the first service to erase the color line. On July 26, 1948, President Truman's executive order 9981 directed all the armed services to ensure "equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons ... without regard to race, color, religion or national origin."

3-11 Mar 1944  Operation THURSDAY. Allied aircraft and gliders airlifted British Special Forces with 9,000 personnel and 1,400 mules and horses from India at night to a location 200 miles behind enemy lines in Burma. This action initiated an unconventional warfare campaign that helped keep China in the war and disrupted Japanese plans to invade India.

British Brigadier General Orde C. Wingate had created a long range penetration group called the Chindits to conduct a guerilla campaign behind Japanese lines in Burma. The 1st Air Commandos were directed to provide airlift and aerial resupply of the Chindits. This was the first Allied campaign to combine tactical air support at every level (the 1st Air Commandos) with extensive and far-flung ground operations (the Chindits) conducted deep behind enemy lines. This support included air interdiction, transport, supply, medical evacuation, and reinforcements. The air support was critical since the Chindits were isolated by distance and terrain, making the Air Commandos their only source of logistical and combat support.

On the first day, the Air Commandos landed gliders carrying Chindits, engineers, bulldozers, pack animals and other supplies at two jungle clearings deep behind Japanese lines. The engineers transformed these clearings into air strips used for the rest of the Chindits’ campaign. The gliders were launched using a new “snatch” technique in which a hook on the end of a boom from a C-47 flying 20 feet above the ground would grab a glider’s tow rope that was suspended in a frame about 12 feet high (see photo at right from the National Archives). During the campaign, this boom-hook system was also used to disrupt Japanese communications, as the C-47s would snare Japanese telephone and telegraph lines, sometimes uprooting the poles as well. When interviewed after the war, Japanese Imperial Army generals testified:

_The penetration of the airborne force into Northern Burma caused the failure of the Army plan to complete the Imphal [India] Operations. . . . The airborne raiding force . . . eventually became one of the reasons for the total abandonment of Northern Burma._
3 Mar 1952  **Operation SATURATE.**
Far East Air Forces (FEAF) initiated an around-the-clock interdiction effort against North Korean railroad lines. Fighter-bombers attacked during the day and B-26 bombers at night. Continuous attacks were carried out through May, and continued periodically thereafter. However, the vulnerability of the B-26 to communist ground fire led to reassessments and tactical adjustments in the interdiction campaign. (B-26 at left.)

8 March 1953  F-86 Sabre pilot Joseph McConnell destroys his sixth MiG-15 in aerial combat over Korea. The following month McConnell would down three MiG-15s in one day, becoming the **first jet fighter “Triple Ace.”**

8 Mar 1955  On this date, the U.S. Air Force formed the 91st Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron to perform a unique mission: inflight launch and recovery of fighters from bombers.

During the Korean War, long-range bombers and reconnaissance aircraft had been highly vulnerable to enemy fighters and sometimes to ground-based anti-aircraft fire. In response, the USAF experimented with **B-36 bombers carrying, launching and recovering F-84F fighters** using a trapeze apparatus installed in their bomb bays. After launch, the F-84Fs could engage enemy interceptors or perform strike or reconnaissance missions in high-threat areas. The F-84 pilots boarded their aircraft through the modified B-36 bomb bay. Called the FICON system (for Fighter-Conveyer), this perilous procedure led to many near-fatal accidents until air refueling, the U-2 Blackbird reconnaissance aircraft and other measures made the program obsolete.

OPR: PACAF/HO
4-5 Mar 1971  In early March, **Typhoon Yolling struck Okinawa** in the Ryukyu Islands. The Air Force launched an immediate airlift to provide aid. On March 4 and 5, two USAF cargo planes delivered 41 tons of equipment from Clark Air Base in the Philippines to Kadena Air Base on Okinawa. The cargo included nine trucks, nine trailers, and an ambulance. A C–5 Galaxy carried 26 tons of equipment to Kadena from Charleston, South Carolina. A C–141 Starlifter from Travis AFB, California, flew the other 15 tons from Clark to Kadena.

4 Mar 1973   Among 104 American POWs released by the North Vietnamese on this day was Lieutenant Colonel James H. Kasler, **the only three-time recipient of the Air Force Cross**.

James Helms Kasler enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Forces toward the end of World War II and flew seven missions as a B-29 tail gunner. Kasler used his veteran’s benefits to complete a college degree before re-joining the U. S. Air Force. During the Korean War he flew 100 combat missions in the F-86 Sabre and became one of the first jet aces with six kills.

Kasler earned the Air Force Cross three times during the Vietnam War. His first award was for his successful leadership of an F-105 raid on the heavily defended Hanoi petroleum, oil and lubrication facility. After the raid, more than 90 percent of the facility was destroyed, and the North Vietnamese abandoned it for the rest of the war. He earned his second Air Force Cross on his 91st combat mission in Vietnam. After his wingman was shot down, Kasler stayed in the area to command the rescue operation, refueling with an aerial tanker in order to stay at the scene. Flying dangerously low while looking for his downed comrade, Kasler was shot down by enemy ground fire.

Kasler’s third Air Force Cross was awarded for heroism during his six and a half years as a POW. Kasler’s leg was severely wounded during his ejection, and his North Vietnamese captors used his wounds to increase the severity of his torture. At times, he was deprived of sleep and tortured on an hourly basis. During those years in captivity, Kasler (left) never signed a statement or made any remarks that disparaged the United States or its allies. Kasler was later promoted to full Colonel and went on to be a fighter wing commander. He passed away on 24 April 2014 at the age of 87. The painting at right commemorating Colonel Kasler’s service to the United States is on display at PACAF Headquarters in the I-wing second-floor stair landing.

OPR: PACAF/HO
5 Mar 1976  An Air Force Systems Command aircrew, flying a B-52G over White Sands Missile Range, N.Mex., **launched the first air-launched cruise missile (ALCM)**. The photo below left is an ALCM launch from a B-52; below right is an ALCM in flight after the wings have deployed.

7 Mar 1983  In the largest B-52 mining exercise to date, 10 B-52D/Gs dropped mines off the South Korean coast in **"Team Spirit 83."** The exercise included U.S. Navy and Marine minelayers and fighters, Strategic Air Command and Navy tankers, and Republic of Korea fighters. (B-52 photo below.)

Between 1976 and 1993, Team Spirit became PACOM’s largest exercise, with over 200,000 personnel participating in the 1986, 1988 and 1989 events. Team Spirit also led North Korea to put their forces on high alert each year at an enormous cost and helped persuade North Korea to negotiate on their nuclear programs.

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