



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 4 – 10 May 2015



8 May 1918 **First Flight Surgeons.** Captains John F. Gallagher, Robert J. Hunter, and Claude T. Uren became the first medical officers to be assigned as flight surgeons at U.S. airfields. The role of the flight surgeon during World War I was to investigate the appalling death rate among military flying cadets and front line pilots due to disorientation and other physical factors associated with flying as well as poor aviator selection and other medical issues. The Army had assigned officers to flight duty that were not physically qualified for infantry or cavalry duty. Due to G-forces, disorientation, and hypoxia in flight, early flight surgeons found that flyers must be scrupulously healthy and well trained in aerospace physiology.

9 May 1932 **First blind solo.** At Dayton, Ohio, Capt. Albert Hegenberger completed the first blind solo flight (on instruments alone) without a safety pilot aboard. Capt. Hegenberger used a radio direction finder to navigate an early version of an instrument approach over pre-positioned transmitters. By executing planned turns and descent rates as he followed the radio signals, Hegenberger landed without ever seeing the runway. *NOTE: Jimmy Doolittle made the first blind flight on 24 Sep 1929 – with a safety pilot on board.*

In 1927, then-Lieutenant Hegenberger and Lt. Lester Maitland made the [first non-stop Mainland-to-Hawaii flight](#) a feat comparable to Lindbergh’s flight across the Atlantic (photos at left from Hawaii.gov). The two aviators received the Distinguished Flying Cross and the



Mackay Trophy. Albert Hegenberger was stationed in Hawaii several times, commanding the 11th Bomb Group and the 18th Bomb Wing at Hickam Field and rising to the rank of Major General. See his bio [here](#).

6 May 1941 **The Republic P-47 Thunderbolt flew for the first time.** Designed by Russians who fled from the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, the P-47 was one of World War II’s largest, heaviest, and most rugged fighters. Twice the size of other fighters, the P-47 was best when attacking from higher altitudes. Exceptional diving abilities gave the P-47 an advantage over enemy fighters below, since they couldn’t escape by diving away. With its high payload capacity and eight half-inch machine guns, the P-47 had a considerable firepower that could destroy an enemy fighter, tank or armored train in seconds.



9 May 1944 **Enemy airbases depleted.** Eighth Air Force B-17s and B-24s bombed German airfields and radar stations in France to begin an offensive that would prevent the German Air Force from recovering before the Normandy invasion on D-Day. During this air battle, the Luftwaffe lost many of its most experienced fighter pilots, and those who returned to their bases



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 4 – 10 May 2015



found their runways damaged and often had to ditch their aircraft. Subsequently, the Luftwaffe mounted only a limited response to the invasion on 6 June.

10 May 1944 **Friendly airbases completed.** Some 400,000 Chinese laborers completed the Chengdu Project, building five bomber bases and six fighter fields in China for U.S. B-29 operations. The project had begun in January and used only primitive construction methods. In **Operation Matterhorn**, B-29s carried their own fuel, ordnance and other supplies from India



over the Himalayas (photo at left) to the forward bases in China. Missions were flown from these bases against the Japanese home islands as well as Formosa, Singapore and other areas. Although the campaign had limited direct success against its assigned targets, the B-29 operations helped to rally the Chinese, demonstrated the vulnerability of Japan to strategic bombing, combat tested the B-29 and matured the B-29 force.

6-15 May 1972 **Operation CONSTANT GUARD III.** During North Vietnam's "Easter offensive," MAC helped the 49th Tactical Fighter Wing move 3,195 airmen and 1,600 tons of cargo from Holloman AFB, NM to Tahkli, Thailand. MAC C-5s also airlifted 26 U.S. Army tanks on 10 flights to Da Nang, and the tanks joined the battle just a few hours after landing.

8 May 1972 **Operation LINEBACKER I.** President Nixon approved this operation as a military measure to defeat North Vietnam's Easter offensive and to end the Vietnam War.

The enemy invaded on 30 March, and a U.S. interdiction campaign against the North began on 6 April, expanding rapidly to targets in Hanoi and Haiphong. B-52s bombed targets in the North while being escorted by fighters and aircraft specializing in electronic warfare and suppression of enemy air defenses.



F-105G Wild Weasel



B-52s launch on a Linebacker mission.

Air Force and Navy fighter-bombers also struck targets on the outskirts of Hanoi. On 8 May the campaign expanded throughout North Vietnam, including the mining of North Vietnamese harbors by U.S. Navy aircraft.

The tactics and results of Linebacker were a great improvement over the earlier, gradually escalating **Rolling Thunder** air campaign.



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 4 – 10 May 2015



During Linebacker, U.S. aircraft attacked vital targets like airfields and power plants in the North while disrupting the flow of reinforcements and supplies to enemy units in the South. Improved U.S. electronic warfare restricted enemy use of radar and radio communications, while U.S. radars helped direct U.S. fighters to intercept enemy MiGs as they took off. Laser-guided bombs were introduced and proved highly effective, especially against bridges. However, the traffic was not halted entirely. The enemy adapted by crossing at night on ferries or movable pontoon bridges.

Linebacker I was vital to the defeat of the Easter offensive without bringing U.S. ground forces back to Vietnam. In fact, the last U.S. Army combat troops left Vietnam in August 1972 while the South Vietnamese were driving back the enemy. However, both sides realized that the South would be vulnerable to an invasion if U.S. airpower was withdrawn. In order to obtain a peace agreement, Nixon offered South Vietnam's President Thieu "absolute assurance" that he would take "swift and severe retaliatory action" if North Vietnam should attack again.



7 May 1975 **PACAF lives!** As the U.S. withdrew from Southeast Asia, planned military force reductions included the disestablishment of PACAF. The DoD planned to assign 5th and 13th Air Forces to Tactical Air Command and to transfer control of theater airlift resources to Military Airlift Command. But South Vietnam and Cambodia fell to communists in early 1975, those plans were shelved and PACAF remained the Air Force component of U.S. Pacific Command.

8 May – 26 July 1994 **Operation PROVIDE PROMISE.** USAF C-141s flew humanitarian missions from Germany to Bosnia, joining the earlier deployment of C-130s. The C-141s delivered over 7,000 tons of cargo by the time their flights ended.

5 May 1996 [Colonel Betty L. Mullis](#) became the **first woman to command a flying wing** when she assumed command of the 940th Air Refueling Wing (AFRES) at McClellan AFB. Mullis (left) rose to the rank of Major General before retiring on 1 Sep 2005.

8 May 2001 The Secretary of Defense, Donald H. Rumsfeld designated the **Air Force as executive agent for DoD space activities.** Later that year, Air Force Materiel Command transferred its Space and Missile Systems Center at Los Angeles AFB to Air Force Space Command (AFSPC), unifying the responsibility for space operations and acquisitions. In April 2002, AFSPC became a separate four-star Air Force major command distinct from both U.S. Space Command (which was later merged with U.S. Strategic Command) and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD).



Your comments on *This Week in USAF and PACAF History* are valued and appreciated.
[Please click here to make a comment.](#)