This Week in USAF and PACAF History
7 – 13 December 2015

7 Dec 1941 **Japanese carrier-based aircraft attacked U.S. military airfields on Oahu** along with their primary target—**the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor.** The attacks on Oahu killed over 2,400 Americans, sank eight battleships, damaged many other Navy vessels and destroyed or disabled over 150 of the 234 U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF) aircraft on the island. The bombing and strafing of Hickam, Wheeler and other airfields crippled the U.S. air defenses on Oahu and prevented U.S. bombers from striking the Japanese aircraft carriers. The Army Air Forces on Oahu suffered at least 690 casualties, including 238 personnel killed.

U.S. Navy photos from Naval History and Heritage Command

The attack brought America into World War II against Japan and its allies, Germany and Italy. The photos at right show the Wheeler flightline burning and a pile of aircraft wreckage collected after the attack (inset).

Within hours of the attack on Oahu, **Japan also attacked U.S. forces in the Philippines**. Japanese warplanes destroyed more than 100 U.S. aircraft at Clark and Iba Airfields, including 17 B–17s and 55 P–40s, mostly on the ground. The attack killed some 80 airmen, wounded about 150, and ruined the striking power of the U.S. Army Air Forces in the Philippines. Five U.S. pilots shot down seven of the attacking airplanes.

10 Dec 1941 Five B–17 bombers of the 93d Bombardment Squadron (assigned to the 19th Bombardment Group) carried out the **first heavy bombardment mission of World War II.** The B-17s attacked a Japanese convoy as it landed troops on northern Luzon in the Philippines. These B-17s were D models (see photo at left).

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Later B-17 models (see B-17G photo below) had a larger and longer fuselage, a larger tail, a tail gun and powered, fully traversable gun turrets in the top and bottom of the fuselage. These modifications greatly improved aircraft defense, especially against rear attacks.

13 Dec 1941 In response to the U.S. entry into World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt authorized the Secretary of War to **take control of any civilian airline needed for the war effort**. Contracts with the airlines permitted the purchase of aircraft and airline services. Ten years later, on 15 Dec 1951, the U.S. Air Force directed the Military Air Transport Service (MATS), a joint airlift command activated in 1948, to develop the **Civil Reserve Air Fleet** (CRAF) program. Under CRAF, aircraft from U.S. airlines augment DoD airlift in emergencies. CRAF has been formally activated twice – for Operation DESERT SHIELD/STORM and Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

On 7 Dec 1956, **the Air Force became the single service manager for all air transport,** with MATS as the operating agency. Most Navy airlifters were transferred to MATS. Nine years later, MATS became Military Airlift Command (MAC) which was active until 1 June 1992. On that date, MAC was inactivated and most airlift and air refueling aircraft were united under the new **Air Mobility Command** (AMC), the Air Force component of U.S. Transportation Command. Today, the Commander, USTRANSCOM is the activation authority for CRAF activation – with the approval of the Secretary of Defense.

The AMC emblem (above, left) consists of the original MATS emblem inside the AMC shield.

In recognition of next year's 75th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack and the subsequent U.S. entry into World War II, This Week in USAF and PACAF History will include the *Countdown to 7 December 1941* first presented five years ago.

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U.S. AIR FORCE

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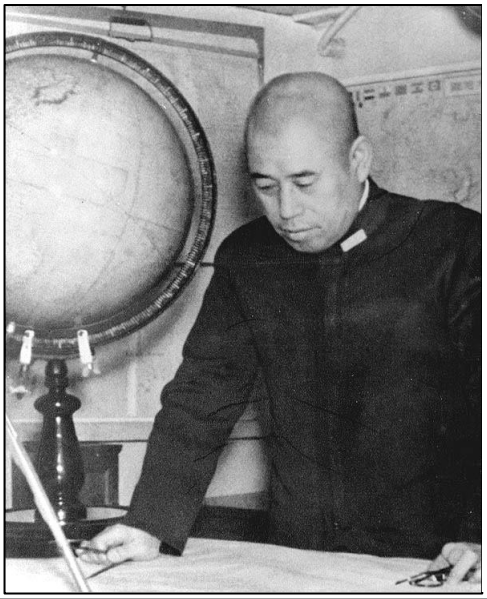
Countdown to 7 December 1941 - Background.

Beginning in the 19th century, Japan took steps to build a modern, industrial nation to deal with both western powers and historic Asian rivals. Japan wanted to build a **"Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere"** which some have compared to the American "Manifest Destiny" concept in the western hemisphere a century earlier. These goals required resources not found in Japan, and their military conquests in east Asia were opposed by western powers such as Britain and the U.S. as well as China and Russia.

Japan's perspective included these grievances against the United States:

- US was a non-Asian presence in Asia (with British, French, Dutch)
- US embargoes of vital industrial/war materials against Japan
- US support for the enemies of Japan's allies (Germany and Italy)
- US recognition of the hostile Chiang Kai-Shek regime in China and not the pro-Japanese puppet regime in Manchukuo
- US denial of citizenship to Japanese immigrants not born there and US exclusion of any further Japanese immigrants to the US
- Most of all – America's huge naval expansion program and the unequal provisions in naval arms limitation treaties

For many years, hardline Japanese nationalists believed conflict with the U.S. was inevitable. These factions ultimately rose to power in Japan's government. Ironically, one of the Japanese leaders most demonized by Americans for planning the 7 December 1941 attack was actually opposed to war with America as well as Japan's alliance with Germany and Italy.



Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, Commander of Japan's Combined Fleet, told the Japanese Prime Minister in September, 1940:

"The Tripartitie Pact has been concluded, and we cannot help it. Now that the situation has come to pass, I hope you will endeavor to avoid a Japanese-American war."

10 December, 1940 Admiral Yamamoto (left) wrote to his naval academy classmate, Vice Admiral Shigetaro Shimada:

" . . . the present government appears to be in complete confusion. Its action in showing surprise now at America's economic pressure and fuming and complaining against it reminds me of the aimless action of a schoolboy which has no more consistent motive than the immediate need or whim of the moment . . ."

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10 Dec 1954 **Highest G-forces**. In a rocket-propelled sled run, Lt. Col. John P. Stapp, USAF, reached 632 mph and sustained greater G forces (25 Gs with peaks to 40 Gs) than humans had ever endured in recorded deceleration tests—the equivalent of Mach 1.7 at 35,000 feet. The test determined that **humans could survive ejection from aircraft at supersonic speeds**. See a History Channel® video of this and other tests by Col. Stapp at this link.

9 Dec 1956 The U.S. Air Force received its **first C–130 Hercules** tactical airlifter. This four-engine turboprop had an unrefueled range of over 2,500 miles, could carry outsized cargo of almost 50,000 pounds or up to 92 troops, and could take off and land within about 3,600 feet. The C-130 has had the longest continuous production run of any military aircraft in history, remaining in production for some 58 years. At left, a Yokota Air Base C-130 on a training mission near Mount Fujiyama in Japan.

11 Dec 1956 **Operation SAFE HAVEN began**. By 30 June 1957, the U.S. Air Force had airlifted more than 10,000 Hungarian refugees from West Germany to asylum in the United States. The refugees fled their country as Soviet troops crushed an anticommunist rebellion.

This was one of several "safe haven" operations. Operation SAFE HAVEN 1967 airlifted U.S. civilian dependents from Wheelus AFB, Libya. Operation SAFE HAVEN 1994 moved Cuban migrants from Guantanamo to Panama. Operation SAFE HAVEN IRAQ 2009 airlifted endangered Iraqis who had supported U.S. and allied operations in their country.

8 Dec 1958 **Tilt-Wing Aircraft**. Hiller Aircraft Corp. unveiled its X-18 Propelloplane (left) at Moffett Field, California. This 16-ton, tilt-wing aircraft was capable of conventional and vertical takeoffs and landings. The X-18 flew 20 test flights out of Edwards AFB, California from 1959 to 1961. The X-18 had several problems, including susceptibility to wind gusts when the wing was rotating. Also, the turboprop engines were not cross-linked, so the failure of one engine meant a crash. On the last flight, the aircraft had to be recovered from a spin. Ground testing continued until the plane was severely damaged when a test stand failed. The program was cancelled in January, 1964 and the X-18 aircraft was cut up for scrap.

Many years later, the tilt-wing concept was revived in today's **CV-22 Osprey** (right).

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14 Dec 1964 **Operation BARREL ROLL armed reconnaissance missions were first flown in Laos**. This mission was the start of continuous tactical fighter operations in Southeast Asia. Aircraft used included the AT-28 Trojan and A-1E Skymaster (left).

8-9 Dec 1978 **Iran Air Evacuation**. Due to tension in Iran, Military Airlift Command airlifted some 900 evacuees from Tehran to the U.S. and Germany. This airlift included 11 C–141 and C–5 missions. About 5,700 U.S. and third-country nationals left Iran on regularly scheduled MAC flights until Iran's revolutionary government closed the airport in February 1979.

9 Dec 1992 to 4 May 1993 **Operation RESTORE HOPE I.** Air Mobility Command aircraft moved 51,431 passengers and 41,243 tons of cargo in more than 1,000 missions to support United Nations peacekeeping efforts in Somalia. The 28,000 deployed troops protected the food, supplies, and aid workers from armed factions in the country. U.S. Air Force Reserve crews flew 190 sorties to deliver 1,500 tons of supplies, while refuelers completed 1,170 missions to deliver 82.4 million pounds of fuel. At right, aerial port personnel and infantrymen prepare a Bradley M2-A2 fighting vehicle for transport on a C-5 to Mogadishu, Somalia.

13 Dec 2001 President George Bush provided six-month notice to Russia of the **United States' withdrawal from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty**. President Bush stated: "I have concluded the ABM treaty hinders our government's ability to develop ways to protect our people from future terrorist or rogue state missile attacks." The withdrawal cleared the way for the construction of a missile defense system in Alaska. The plans called for basing a command center and silo-based missiles at Fort Greely and an advanced radar installation at Eareckson AS on Shemya. Additional components of the missile defense system were located at other stations such as Vandenberg AFB, California. The photo at left shows Fort Greely's first interceptor missile being lowered into its silo in 2004.

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