

THE AIR FORCE

1907-2007



The nation's air arm, which began with three people and no airplanes, has marked its 100th anniversary.

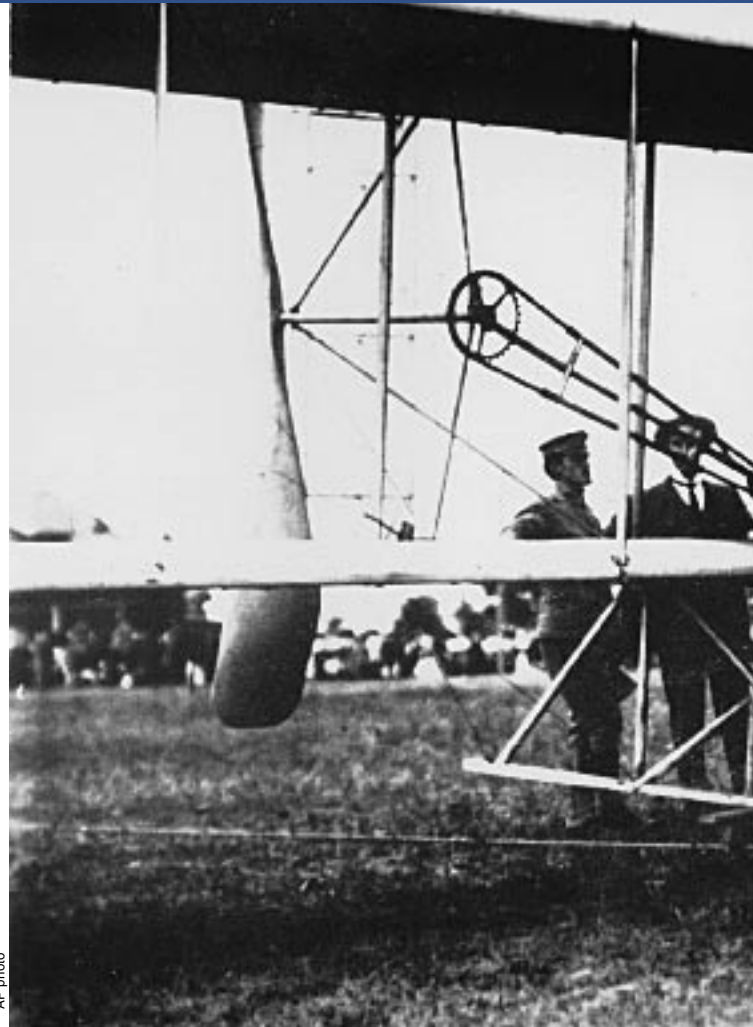
By John T. Correll

THE organization that would eventually become the US Air Force started small and progressed slowly. When the Army Signal Corps established the Aeronautical Division in August 1907, it consisted of only three people, soon reduced to two when one of them deserted.

The Aeronautical Division did not get its first airplane until 1909 and did not have its own budget until 1911. In 1913, it had about 20 serviceable airplanes, lagging behind the British, the Germans, and the French. Its first surge in growth came in World War I, when the Army Air Service, as it had been renamed, sent hundreds of airplanes to France and made a creditable showing, shooting down 756 German airplanes and penetrating as deep as 160 miles behind German lines.

After the war, the Air Service was cut back sharply. Unlike the Royal Air Force in Britain, established as a separate service in 1918, US airmen had to settle for being the Air Corps, a combatant arm of the Army.

The interwar years were a constant struggle to secure



"Signal Corps No. 1," world's first military airplane, in 1909. Foreground: 1st Lt. Frank Lahm (l) and Orville Wright. Background: 1st Lt. Benjamin Foulois and Wilbur Wright.

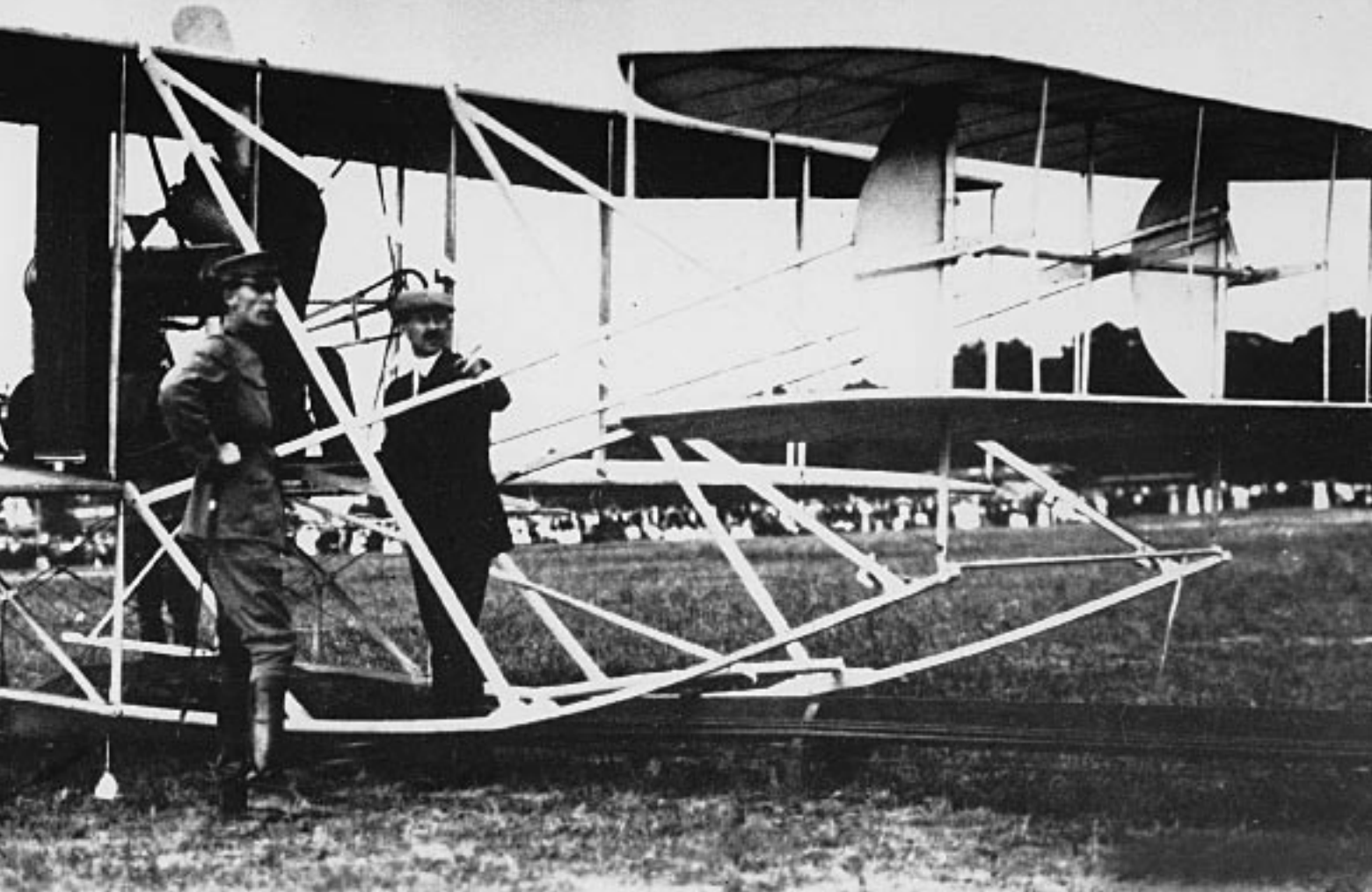
recognition and support for military airpower. Arguments on behalf of airpower sometimes went too far, promising more than could actually be accomplished, but the airmen were not as far wrong as their traditionalist critics, who held that airplanes were a passing fad with limited value in war.

A turning point came in 1935, when the Army established a "General Headquarters Air Force" and put all Air Corps tactical units under a single commander who was an airman. The Air Corps also overcame opposition and embarked on a long-range bombardment development. When World War II came, the Air Corps was still relatively small but was well-prepared to grow, which it did, exponentially.

By 1944, the Army Air Forces had a strength of 2.4 million, which accounted for 31 percent of total Army personnel. Hap Arnold, head of the AAF, was a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the force was demonstrating its strategic worth both in Europe and in the Pacific. AAF delivery of atomic bombs against Japan brought World War II to a close.

The Air Force became a separate service in 1947, but that

CENTURY



was not all that had changed. The Cold War had begun, and national security was tied to the deterrent power of nuclear weapons carried by Air Force aircraft. The newest service had become the first line of defense, which was difficult for the Army and the Navy, with 175 years of tradition and seniority, to accept. Competition for roles and missions—as well as shares of funding—would last into the next century.

USAF, in 1948, became the first service to integrate. The Air Force increased its range and speed with jet airplanes, aerial refueling, and other developments. ICBMs could put a warhead on target in a matter of minutes. Platforms in air and space provided an unprecedented degree of strategic information. The precision guided weapons the Air Force used in Vietnam pointed ahead to the coming revolution in military affairs.

The Air National Guard and the Air Force Reserve had long been important in the Air Force scheme of things, and their roles increased after the Total Force concept was instituted by the Pentagon in 1970. Women moved into

more Air Force career fields, and in 1976, the first women entered pilot training.

In 1990, the Air Force published a white paper describing its role as “Global Reach-Global Power,” but the Cold War was over and some thought there would be little for the Air Force to do. That was soon disproved by the Persian Gulf War and the other conflicts of the 1990s, in which airpower carried more of the combat workload than before and demonstrated new levels of weapons accuracy and results. The Air Force reorganized its forces for expeditionary operations, making them more ready than ever to go where they were needed.

When the War on Terror began, the Air Force was called upon to fly patrols above American cities and lead the strike against terrorist concentrations abroad. It has been in action constantly ever since.

As the Air Force observes its 100th anniversary and its 60th year as a separate service, it is difficult to believe that there ever was a serious question about the military value of airpower. ■

Key Dates in Air Force History

First Force: 1907-19

Aug. 1, 1907. Aeronautical Division of the US Army Signal Corps, forerunner of US Air Force, established.

Dec. 23, 1907. Signal Corps issues specification for first military airplane.

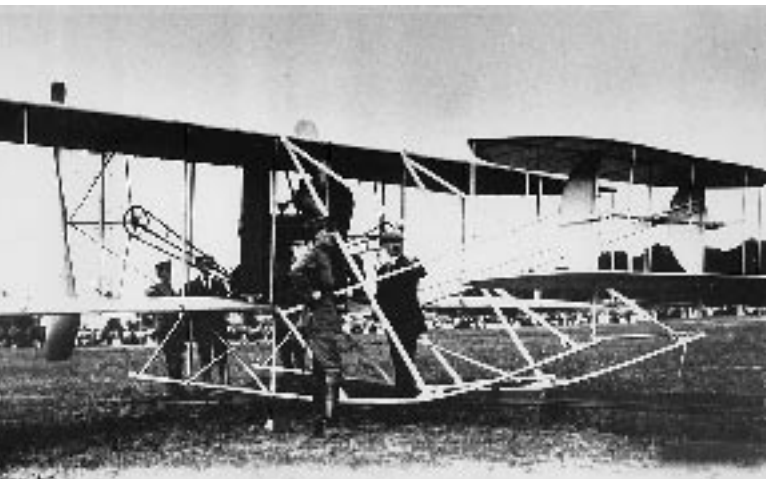
Aug. 28, 1908. Army buys its first dirigible.

Sept. 3, 1908. First test flight of an Army airplane, at Ft. Myer, Va.

Sept. 17, 1908. Wright Flyer crashes, killing Lt. Thomas E. Selfridge and injuring Orville Wright.

June 3, 1909. First demonstration flight of 1909 Wright Military Flyer.

Aug. 2, 1909. Army buys its first airplane from Wright brothers for \$30,000.



The 1909 Wright Military Flyer, designated "Signal Corps No. 1," cost the Army \$30,000 and was in service until 1911. Today it can be seen at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington.

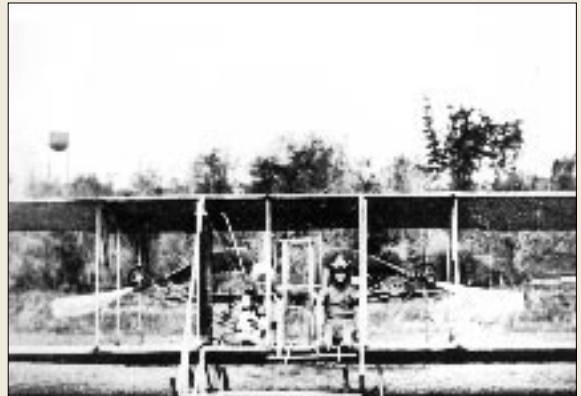
Oct. 26, 1909. Lt. Frederick E. Humphreys becomes first Army pilot to solo.

March 31, 1911. Congress makes first appropriation for Army aeronautics, \$125,000 for Fiscal Year 1912.

April 11, 1911. Army establishes flying school at College Park, Md.

Feb. 23, 1912. Army establishes standards for "Military Aviator" rating.

June 14, 1912. Cpl. Vernon Burge becomes Army's first enlisted pilot.



Enlisted Pilots

In 1912, Cpl. Vernon L. Burge became the first enlisted man to receive the military rating of pilot. The Army was not pleased to find out that 1st Lt. Frank P. Lahm had, without authorization, taught Burge to fly. The official view was that all pilots should be officers.

However, the Army changed its mind in 1914 and began training more enlisted pilots. Most of them eventually became officers. Burge, for example, was commissioned in 1917.

However, over the next 30 years, enlisted pilots flew regularly for the Army in all kinds of airplanes. In the 1930s, Sgt. John Williamson and Sgt. William C. McDonald Jr. were the wingmen for Capt. Claire L. Chennault in an aerial demonstration team that was the forerunner of the USAF Thunderbirds.

The great surge in enlisted pilots occurred at the beginning of World War II when the Army could not find enough pilot candidates who could meet the age and education requirements for commissioning. A total of 2,576 sergeant pilots were trained during the war. Most of them flew in transport, ferrying, and training assignments, but 217 of them flew combat missions overseas.

Only a handful of enlisted pilots continued flying after the war. The last of them, MSgt. George Holmes, retired in 1957.

March 2, 1913. Flight pay authorized: 35 percent over base pay.

March 5, 1913. Army's first aviation unit, 1st Aero Squadron, organized.

July 18, 1914. Congress creates Aviation Section of Army Signal Corps.

July 28, 1914. World War I begins.

March 15, 1916. 1st Aero Squadron joins expedition against Pancho Villa in Mexico.

March 21, 1916. France forms Escadrille Americaine (later Lafayette Escadrille) with American volunteer pilots.

April 6, 1917. US enters World War I.

June 5, 1917. 1st Aeronautic Detachment arrives in France.



Benjamin Foulois, as a first lieutenant, was the Army's first operational pilot, and, from 1909 to early 1911, he was the only pilot assigned to the Aeronautical Division of the Signal Corps.



USAF Photo

Mitchell Was Wrong

In 1924, Air Service Brig. Gen. Billy Mitchell submitted a report predicting that war in the Pacific would start with a Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that would begin at 7:30 a.m., followed by an attack on Clark Field in the Philippines at 10:40 a.m. He later added that this would happen on a Sunday morning.

Mitchell was wrong, of course. When the Japanese struck Pearl Harbor on Sunday Dec. 7, 1941, it was at 7:55 a.m.—almost half an hour later than Mitchell had predicted—and Clark Field was not attacked until 12:35 p.m.

March 19, 1918. 94th Aero Squadron makes first US operational flights across front lines.

May 24, 1918. Army Air Service established.

Sept. 12-16, 1918. Brig. Gen. Billy Mitchell leads 1,500 US and allied aircraft in St. Mihiel offensive in France.

Oct. 2, 1918. First test flight of Kettering "Bug" Aerial Torpedo, world's first guided missile.

Oct. 30, 1918. Capt. Eddie Rickenbacker records 26th aerial victory.

Nov. 11, 1918. World War I ends.

Dec. 4-22, 1918. Army JN-4s make transcontinental flight, California to Florida.

Sept. 1, 1919. Dive bombing demonstrated.

Air Corps: 1920s, 1930s

June 5, 1920. Army Air Service restricted to operating from land bases.

July 13-21, 1921. Martin MB-2 bombers sink three target ships, including former German battleship *Ostfriesland*.

Dec. 18, 1922. First flight of Army Air Service rotorcraft.

April 6-Sept. 28, 1924. Army Air Service Douglas World Cruisers circumnavigate the globe.

Dec. 17, 1925. Court-martial finds Billy Mitchell guilty of "conduct of a nature to bring discredit on the military service." Mitchell resigns rather than accept demotion.

July 2, 1926. Army Air Service becomes Army Air Corps.

July 2, 1926. Congress establishes Distinguished Flying Cross (retroactive to April 6, 1917).

May 25, 1927. James H. "Jimmy" Doolittle flies first successful outside loop.

Jan. 1-7, 1929. Air Corps Fokker C-2 *Question Mark* sets endurance record, staying aloft for more than 150 hours.

Sept. 24, 1929. Jimmy Doolittle makes first blind, all-instrument flight in a completely covered cockpit (accompanied by check pilot).

June 20, 1930. Randolph Field, Tex., "West Point of the Air," dedicated.



The Air Corps' Fokker C-2 Question Mark (lower) takes on fuel during its Jan. 1-7, 1929 record endurance flight.

Ups and Downs and Ups
Army Air Service, Air Corps, AAF Strength

Year	Officers	Enlisted
1919	19,189	178,149
1920	1,168	8,428
1932	1,305	13,400
1938	1,650	16,000
1939	2,300	19,000
1940	6,437	94,790
1944	306,889	2,104,405

The Army Air Service grew rapidly during World War I but was cut back by more than 95 percent when the war ended. The Air Corps was unable to achieve much growth until World War II began in Europe. The wartime surge for the Army Air Forces was enormous.

May 9, 1931. A-2 leather flight jacket approved for production.

March 20, 1932. First flight of P-26 “Peashooter,” Army’s first monoplane fighter, first all metal fighter, and last Air Corps fighter with an open cockpit.

March 1, 1935. General Headquarters (GHQ) Air Force created.

July 28, 1935. First flight of Boeing Model 299, prototype for B-17 bomber.

Dec. 17, 1935. First flight of Douglas DC-3 (military version, C-47).



The C-47 transport, popularly known as the Gooney Bird, was the military version of the Douglas DC-3 airliner.

April 6, 1938. First flight of Bell XP-39 Airacobra.

Oct. 14, 1938. First flight of Curtiss XP-40.

Oct. 26, 1938. First flight of Douglas Model 7B, prototype for A-20 Havoc.

Nov. 18, 1938. Roosevelt, in so-called “Magna Carta” meeting, tells Air Corps to develop a program for 10,000 airplanes.

Jan. 27, 1939. First flight of Lockheed XP-38.

Feb. 10, 1939. First flight of North American NA-40, prototype of B-25 Mitchell.

April 3, 1939. National Defense Act of 1940 authorizes 6,000 airplanes, 3,203 officers, and 45,000 enlisted personnel for Air Corps.

Sept. 1, 1939. Germans invade Poland, first act of World War II in Europe.

Dec. 29, 1939. First flight of Consolidated XB-24 Liberator.

Air Force: 1940s

May 16, 1940. President Roosevelt calls for 50,000 military airplanes a year.

Aug. 13-Oct. 5, 1940. Battle of Britain.

Oct. 8, 1940. RAF forms Eagle Squadron, consisting of volunteer US pilots.

March 22, 1941. First black flying unit, 99th Pursuit Squadron, activated; becomes one of three squadrons of 332nd Fighter Group—the Tuskegee Airmen.

June 20, 1941. Army Air Forces (AAF) established, with Lt. Gen. H.H. “Hap” Arnold as Chief.

Dec. 1, 1941. Civil Air Patrol established.

Dec. 7, 1941. Japanese attack Pearl Harbor and US bases in Hawaii.

Dec. 20, 1941. American Volunteer Group—the legendary Flying Tigers—begins combat operations in China.

Feb. 22, 1942. US Army Bomber Command establishes headquarters in England.



This USAAF P-40 fighter was destroyed in Japan’s Dec. 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor and other US bases in Hawaii.



Hap

H.H. "Hap" Arnold is recognized by all as the father of the US Air Force. He is the only American officer ever promoted to five star rank in two services—in the Army in 1944 and in the Air Force in 1949.

Arnold graduated from West Point in 1907, the year the Aeronautical Division of the Army Signal Corps was established. Disliking the infantry, he volunteered for aviation and was taught to fly by the Wright brothers. He was an excellent pilot, winning the first-ever Mackay Trophy for outstanding flight in 1912. (He won the Mackay Trophy again in 1934.) When First Lieutenant Arnold was assigned to the Philippines in 1913, his next-door neighbor was Lt. George C. Marshall, and they became lifelong friends.

The nickname "Hap"—short for Happy—described Arnold's disposition accurately but he was also tough. Threatened with court-martial for his intense support of Billy Mitchell, Arnold called the Army's bluff and got away with it. In the 1930s, Arnold commanded the 1st Wing of the GHQ Air Force.

He became Chief of the Air Corps in 1938 and Commanding General of the Army Air Forces when the AAF was formed. He built it from its small prewar size into a force of almost 2.4 million people and 80,000 aircraft. He helped shape operations in Europe and in the Pacific, and he selected and developed leaders for the AAF. His driving energy and determination were legendary. He demanded—and often got—results that went beyond what might have been reasonably expected.

Because of the effectiveness of Arnold's AAF during the war and the support Arnold inspired from Army Chief of Staff Gen. George Marshall and others, the Air Force subsequently became a separate military service.

He retired with health problems—he had already had four heart attacks—in 1946 and founded the Air Force Association to inform the public about airpower. He lived long enough to see the formation of the US Air Force in 1947 and to be appointed by Congress as the first and (so far) only five-star General of the Air Force. Arnold died in 1950.

March 9, 1942. US Army reorganized into three autonomous forces: Army Air Forces, Ground Forces, and Services of Supply.

March 26, 1942. First flight of Douglas C-54.

April 8, 1942. Hump Airlift—over the Himalayas from India to China—begins.

April 18, 1942. Doolittle Raiders take off from carrier USS *Hornet* and bomb Tokyo.

May 26, 1942. First flight of Northrop XP-61 Black Widow night fighter.



P-40 with shark mouth markings was the trademark of the legendary Flying Tigers in China.

June 12, 1942. US B-24s fly from Egypt against Ploesti, Romania, oil fields.

July 4, 1942. US crews in British Boston IIIs (RAF version of A-20) fly first AAF bomber mission over western Europe.

July 20, 1942. Joint Chiefs of Staff formed. Members are Army Chief of Staff, Chief of Naval Operations, and Chief of Army Air Forces, with President's military advisor as Chairman.

Aug. 17, 1942. B-17s fly first American heavy bomber mission in western Europe against railyards in France.

Sept. 21, 1942. First flight of Boeing XB-29 Superfortress.



Benjamin Davis Jr. was the wartime leader of the Tuskegee Army Airfield. In 1954, he became the first black Air Force officer to be promoted to general officer.



The B-17 was developed in the 1930s despite doubts and sometimes outright opposition from War Department and Army leaders. It went on to become the mainstay of strategic bombardment in Europe in World War II.

Jan. 27, 1943. B-17s make first American air raid on Germany.

March 1-4, 1943. In Battle of Bismarck Sea, land-based airplanes sink entire Japanese convoy, foil attempt to resupply and reinforce Japanese garrison on New Guinea.

March 19, 1943. AAF Chief Hap Arnold promoted to four-star rank.

April 8, 1943. Republic P-47 enters combat, escorting B-17s over Europe.

April 18, 1943. P-38 fighters shoot down aircraft carrying Japanese Adm. Isoroku Yamamoto, planner of Pearl Harbor attack.

Aug. 1, 1943. B-24s based in Libya fly large-scale, low-level attack on oil refineries at Ploesti, Romania.

Aug. 5, 1943. Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron merges with Women's Flying Training Detachment to form Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs).



B-25 of the Doolittle Raiders takes off from USS Hornet, bound for Tokyo.

Aug. 17, 1943. Eighth Air Force bombers attack Messerschmitt works at Regensburg, Germany, and ball-bearing plants at Schweinfurt; German fighters down 60 of the 376 American aircraft.

Oct. 14, 1943. Eighth Air Force "Black Thursday" mission against Schweinfurt; 600 airmen lost over enemy territory; 60 B-17s shot down; five crash en route home.

Dec. 5, 1943. P-51 pilots begin escorting bombers to European targets.

Jan. 8, 1944. First flight of Lockheed XP-80 Shooting Star.

Feb. 20-25, 1944. "Big Week" missions by AAF and RAF take heavy toll on German aircraft industry and Luftwaffe aircraft.

March 4, 1944. Eighth Air Force B-17s fly first daylight bombing raid on Berlin.



Lockheed's XP-80, shown here, became the F-80 Shooting Star, the first Air Force jet fighter used in combat.

May 21, 1944. Operation Chattanooga Choo-Choo—systematic Allied air attacks on trains in Germany and France—begins.

June 2, 1944. First shuttle bombing mission, using Russia as eastern terminus.

June 6, 1944. Allied pilots fly approximately 15,000 sorties on D-Day.

June 13, 1944. First German V-1 flying bombs launched against England.

June 15, 1944. B-29s based in India and staging through China strike targets in Japan.

Nov. 24, 1944. XXI Bomber Command B-29s attack Tokyo.

Dec. 17, 1944. Maj. Richard I. Bong, America's leading ace of all time, records 40th and final aerial victory.

Booze and Lose

“You people will lose this war if you don’t stop drinking.”—Lady Astor on visit to VIII Bomber Command headquarters at High Wycombe, Britain, 1942.

Dec. 21, 1944. Hap Arnold becomes General of the Army—first airman to hold five-star rank.

Jan. 11, 1945. Capt. William A. Shomo sets AAF record of seven enemy air victories in single engagement.

Feb. 25, 1945. B-29 crews begin night incendiary raids on Japan.

March 9, 1945. Incendiary night raid by B-29s from Marianas destroys a fourth of Tokyo.

March 11, 1945. AAF delivers 4,738 tons of bombs on Essen, Germany, the most on any single target in Europe.

March 18, 1945. Some 1,250 US bombers, escorted by 670 fighters, deal Berlin its heaviest daylight blow, 3,000 tons of bombs.

March 18, 1945. First flight of Douglas XBT2D-1, prototype of A-1 Skyraider.

March 27, 1945. B-29s begin mining missions around Japan; eventually establish complete blockade.

May 8, 1945. V-E Day. War ends in Europe.

June 16, 1945. First flight of North American XP-82 Twin Mustang.

Aug. 6, 1945. B-29 *Enola Gay* delivers atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan.

Aug. 9, 1945. B-29 *Bockscar* drops second atomic bomb on Nagasaki.



B-29 Enola Gay lands at Tinian after Aug. 6, 1945 atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

Sept. 2, 1945. Japan surrenders.

Feb. 28, 1946. First flight of Republic XP-84 Thunderjet.

March 21, 1946. Strategic Air Command, Tactical Air Command, and Air Defense Command activated.

June 17, 1946. First AAF Scientific Advisory Board meets, chaired by Theodore von Karman.

June 26, 1946. “Knot” and “nautical mile” adopted by AAF and Navy as standard aeronautical units of speed and distance.

Aug. 2, 1946. Smithsonian establishes National Air Museum (later National Air and Space Museum).

Aug. 8, 1946. First flight of Convair XB-36 prototype.

March 17, 1947. First flight of North American XB-45 Tornado, first Air Force jet bomber put into production.

Sept. 18, 1947. US Air Force becomes a separate service.

Oct. 1, 1947. First flight of North American XP-86 Sabre.

Oct. 14, 1947. Capt. Chuck Yeager reaches supersonic speed in level flight, Mach 1.06 (700 mph) at altitude of 45,000 feet in rocket-powered Bell XS-1 (later X-1).

Oct. 21, 1947. First flight of Northrop YB-49 flying wing jet bomber.

Atomic Expert

“This is the biggest fool thing we have ever done. ... The bomb will never go off, and I speak as an expert in explosives.”—Adm. William D. Leahy, military chief of staff to Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, on atomic bomb project, 1945.



USAF photo

Maj. Richard Bong, America’s leading ace of all time, ended with 40 confirmed aerial victories.



US Air Force C-54 transport delivers vital supplies during 1948-49 Berlin Airlift.

Nov. 23, 1947. First flight of Convair XC-99, cargo version of B-36 and world's largest landplane.

April 21, 1948. Air Force given primary responsibility for air defense of United States.

April 26, 1948. Air Force becomes first service to adopt policy of racial integration.

June 1, 1948. Navy and Air Force air transport systems consolidated into Military Air Transport Service under USAF.

June 26, 1948. Berlin Airlift begins.

Jan. 25, 1949. Air Force adopts blue uniforms.

Feb. 26-March 2, 1949. B-50A *Lucky Lady II* flies nonstop around the world.

May 7, 1949. Congress promotes Hap Arnold to permanent rank of General of the Air Force.

May 12, 1949. Soviets reopen routes into Berlin.

Sept. 30, 1949. Berlin Airlift officially ends.

Deterrent Force: 1950s

Jan. 31, 1950. President Truman orders development of hydrogen bomb.

March 15, 1950. Joint Chiefs of Staff assign Air Force responsibility for strategic guided missiles.

June 25, 1950. Korean War begins.

June 28, 1950. USAF aircraft attack tanks, trucks, and supply columns along North Korean invasion route.

Oct. 25, 1950. Communist China enters Korean War.

Nov. 8, 1950. 1st Lt. Russell J. Brown, flying a Lockheed F-80, downs North Korean MiG-15 in history's first all-jet aircraft aerial combat.

May 20, 1951. Capt. James Jabara becomes Air Force's first Korean War ace.

Feb. 1, 1952. USAF acquires its first digital computer, a Univac I.

April 1, 1952. Air Force redesignates grades of private first class, corporal, and buck sergeant as airman third class, airman second class, and airman first class.

June 23-24, 1952. Combined air elements of Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps virtually destroy electrical power potential of North Korea.

Oct. 31, 1952. US tests its first thermonuclear device at Eniwetok.

May 18, 1953. Capt. Joseph C. McConnell Jr., flying an F-86, downs three MiG-15s in two separate engagements and becomes leading American ace of Korean War with 16 victories.



Capt. James Jabara was USAF's first ace of the Korean War and the nation's first "jet ace." He shot down 15 MiGs over Korea.

May 25, 1953. First flight of North American F-100 Super Sabre prototype.

June 1, 1953. USAF aerial demonstration team, the Thunderbirds, activated.

June 5, 1953. B-47 bomber achieves initial operational capability.

July 27, 1953. UN and North Korea sign armistice agreement, producing cease-fire in Korea.

Aug. 23, 1954. First flight of Lockheed YC-130 Hercules.

Sept. 29, 1954. First flight of McDonnell F-101A Voodoo.



Sleek, swept-wing B-47 Stratojet became operational in 1953.

Oct. 12, 1954. First flight of Cessna T-37 trainer prototype.

Oct. 27, 1954. Benjamin O. Davis Jr. becomes Air Force's first black general officer.

June 19, 1955. B-52 bomber achieves initial operational capability.

Nov. 26, 1955. Pentagon gives Air Force operational control of ICBMs and all land-based missiles with ranges greater than 200 miles.

Nov. 11, 1956. First flight of Convair XB-58A, Air Force's first supersonic bomber.

Dec. 26, 1956. First flight of Convair F-106 Delta Dart.



August 1957 Air Force Magazine cover observes 50th anniversary of the founding of the Air Force on Aug. 1, 1907.

Jan. 18, 1957. Three B-52s complete first round-the-world nonstop flight by jet aircraft.

June 28, 1957. SAC receives first KC-135 jet-powered tankers.

Aug. 1, 1957. US and Canada form North American Air Defense Command.

Aug. 15, 1957. Gen. Nathan F. Twining becomes first USAF officer to serve as Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff.



Atlas, operational in 1959 with SAC, was the first US intercontinental ballistic missile. (It is shown here in a 1958 test.) The Air Force was assigned responsibility for ICBMs after a roles and missions challenge from the Army, which argued that ballistic missiles were just a new kind of artillery.

Dec. 17, 1957. First successful flight of Atlas ICBM.

May 27, 1958. First flight of McDonnell XF4H-1 (F-4) Phantom II.

Sept. 1, 1958. New enlisted supergrade, senior master sergeant (E-8), created.

Feb. 12, 1959. SAC retires last B-36, becomes all-jet bomber force.

June 3, 1959. First class graduates from Air Force Academy.

Sept. 9, 1959. Atlas ICBM operational with SAC.

Dec. 1, 1959. New enlisted supergrade, chief master sergeant (E-9), created.



The KC-135 aerial refueler, the Air Force's first jet-powered tanker, entered the SAC inventory in 1957.

Flexible Force: 1960s

Aug. 18, 1960. Air Force C-119J retrieves in midair a Corona satellite imagery capsule re-entering atmosphere from space.

Sept. 21, 1960. Tactical Air Command accepts first Republic F-105D Thunderchief.

Feb. 3, 1961. SAC's EC-135 "Looking Glass" Airborne Command Post begins operations.

July 21, 1961. Capt. Virgil I. "Gus" Grissom becomes first Air Force astronaut in space.

Nov. 16, 1961. USAF "Farm Gate" air commandos arrive in Vietnam.

Jan. 17, 1962. Air Force adopts Navy's McDonnell F4H-1 Phantom II fighter.

USAF photo



Capt. Virgil "Gus" Grissom was one of the first seven US astronauts. In 1961, he piloted Liberty Bell 7, becoming the first Air Force astronaut in space. He died in a 1967 flash fire aboard an Apollo spacecraft during a training mission.

Oct. 14, 1962. Air Force U-2 obtains photographic evidence of Soviet SS-4 intermediate-range nuclear missile sites in Cuba.

Oct. 22, 1962. Strategic Air Command goes on airborne alert.

Oct. 27, 1962. First 10 Air Force Minuteman ICBMs go on alert.

Oct. 28, 1962. USSR agrees to remove missiles from Cuba, ending Cuban missile crisis.

Oct. 22, 1963. In Exercise Big Lift, Air Force airlifts more than 15,000 Army troops from Texas to Germany.

Dec. 17, 1963. First flight of Lockheed C-141A Starlifter.

Primary Target

"We should stop swatting flies and go after the manure pile."—Gen Curtis E. LeMay, Air Force Chief of Staff, urging US to press the attack on North Vietnam, 1962.

Photo via NASA Dryden Flight Research Center



The futuristic North American XB-70A Valkyrie bomber, shown here, made its first flight in September 1964.

Aug. 2, 1964. Destroyer USS *Maddox* attacked by North Vietnamese patrol boats in Gulf of Tonkin.

Aug. 5, 1964. USAF moves in force into Thailand and South Vietnam.

Aug. 7, 1964. Congress passes Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.

Sept. 21, 1964. First flight of North American XB-70A Valkyrie bomber.

Dec. 14, 1964. Operation Barrel Roll, support of ground forces in northern Laos, begins.

Dec. 21, 1964. First flight of General Dynamics F-111A.

Dec. 22, 1964. First flight of Lockheed SR-71A "Blackbird" strategic reconnaissance aircraft.



USAF photo by TSgt. Michael Haggerty

Lockheed's SR-71A "Blackbird," the world's fastest-ever aircraft, made its debut in December 1964.

March 2, 1965. Operation Rolling Thunder, sustained air campaign against North Vietnam, begins.

April 3, 1965. Operation Steel Tiger, interdiction of Ho Chi Minh Trail, begins.

April 20, 1965. Strategy changes in Vietnam: all air operations in theater subordinated to ground war in South Vietnam.

June 3, 1965. Air Force Maj. Edward H. White makes first US spacewalk.

June 18, 1965. SAC B-52s are used for first time in Vietnam.

Sept. 27, 1965. First flight of YA-7A Corsair II attack aircraft.

Dec. 1, 1965. F-100F Super Sabres carry out first Wild Weasel radar suppression mission in Vietnam.

March 4, 1966. MiG 17s attack Air Force F-4C Phantoms in first air-to-air combat near North Vietnam.



No airplane is more symbolic of the air war against North Vietnam than the F-105. The "Thud" flew 75 percent of the strikes against the north and took more losses over North Vietnam than any other type of aircraft.



USAF photo

Paul Airey was chosen in 1967 to be the first Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force. He was a radio operator and B-24 gunner in World War II. His airplane was shot down and he was a POW from 1944 to 1945. Airey spent much of his career as a first sergeant and was noted for his interest in and personal contact with the force in the field.

Jan. 2, 1967. In MiG sweep, Operation Bolo, 8th Tactical Fighter Wing F-4s down seven North Vietnamese MiG-21s over Red River Valley in North Vietnam.

April 3, 1967. CMSgt. Paul W. Airey becomes first Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force.

May 13, 1967. F-4s from 8th Tactical Fighter Wing again shoot down seven MiGs in a single day.

Jan. 1, 1968. Battle of Khe Sanh in South Vietnam begins. Air Force airlifters deliver average of 165 tons of materiel daily during 77-day siege.

March 31, 1968. President Johnson announces partial halt of bombing of North Vietnam.

May 25, 1968. First flight of Grumman EA-6B electronic warfare-airborne jammer prototype.

Nov. 1, 1968. President Johnson halts all bombing of North Vietnam.

Air and Space Force: 1970s, 1980s

June 6, 1970. First operational C-5A Galaxy transport delivered to USAF.

August 1970. Pentagon promulgates "Total Force" concept.

Dec. 30, 1970. First squadron of Minuteman III multiple warhead missiles becomes operational.

July 16, 1971. Jeanne M. Holm becomes first USAF woman general officer.

Sept. 3, 1971. New US Air Force Museum building dedicated in Dayton, Ohio.

March 1972. North Vietnamese spring invasion halted and turned back by US airpower.

April 1, 1972. Community College of the Air Force established.

USAF photo



The C-5A Galaxy airlifter, shown here, entered the force in June 1970. It was at the time the world's largest transport.



The Air Force was designated as Department of Defense executive agent for space in 2001, but, long before that, its space programs had been providing many kinds of capability to all of the armed forces. The Defense Support Program satellite, shown here, stood watch against strategic missile launch during the Cold War.

April 6, 1972. US resumes sustained bombing operations against North Vietnam.

April 27, 1972. Four Air Force fighters employing Paveway I “smart” bombs knock down Thanh Hoa Bridge in North Vietnam, where 871 conventional sorties had previously failed.

May 10-11, 1972. F-4 Phantoms with smart bombs take Paul Doumer Bridge at Hanoi out of use.

July 1, 1972. Senior Noncommissioned Officer Academy activated at Gunter AFS, Ala.

Aug. 28, 1972. Capt. Steve Ritchie becomes Air Force’s first ace since Korean War.



Minuteman ICBM, shown in test flight, went on alert in October 1962. The Minuteman II version remains the backbone of the nuclear missile force.

Dec. 18, 1972. Operation Linebacker II, 11-day bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong, begins.

Jan. 28, 1973. Cease-fire ends US air operations in Vietnam.

Feb. 12, 1973. Operation Homecoming, return of POWs, begins.

Oct. 12-Nov. 14, 1973. US Nickel Grass airlift resupplies Israel in Yom Kippur War.

Nov. 14, 1973. First production F-15A Eagle delivered to the USAF.

Dec. 23, 1974. First flight of Rockwell B-1A variable-geometry bomber.

Jan. 13, 1975. General Dynamics YF-16 wins Air Force Lightweight Fighter competition.

Sept. 1, 1975. Gen. Daniel “Chappie” James Jr., USAF, becomes first black officer to achieve four-star rank in US military.



Capt. Steve Ritchie, in combat over Vietnam, notched his fifth victory in August 1972. He was USAF’s first ace since Korea.

Oct. 21, 1975. First flight of Fairchild Republic A-10A Thunderbolt II.

Nov. 29, 1975. First Red Flag exercise at Nellis AFB, Nev.

Aug. 26, 1976. First women enter USAF pilot training.

March 10, 1977. First flight of Grumman EF-111A airborne tactical jamming platform.

March 23, 1977. Air Force receives first E-3A Sentry (AWACS) aircraft.

June 30, 1977. President Carter cancels B-1A bomber program.



USAF photo

That's News to Many

“There is nothing in your job description that requires you to be a son of a bitch.”—Gen. Russell E. Dougherty, commander in chief, Strategic Air Command, 1974.

The F-15 Eagle, the most dominant air superiority fighter of its era, entered the USAF inventory in 1973. It has compiled a record of 104 kills and 0 losses in air-to-air combat.

Feb. 22, 1978. First test satellite for Navstar Global Positioning System launched.

Oct. 1, 1979. Atmospheric defense assets and missions of Aerospace Defense Command transferred to Tactical Air Command.

April 24, 1980. Desert One mission to rescue hostages in Iran fails.

May 28, 1980. First women graduate from Air Force Academy.

Aug. 22, 1980. Department of Defense reveals existence of stealth technology.

Oct. 2, 1981. President Reagan reinstitutes B-1 bomber program.

Feb. 24, 1982. NATO receives its first E-3A AWACS aircraft.

Sept. 1, 1982. Air Force Space Command established.

Sept. 13, 1985. Anti-satellite missile, launched by F-15, destroys a satellite in orbit.

Daniel “Chappie” James Jr., shown here in Vietnam, was a crack Air Force fighter pilot. In September 1975, he became the first black officer to achieve four-star rank in the US military.



Oct. 10, 1985. Peacekeeper ICBM reaches initial operational capability.

April 15, 1986. In Operation El Dorado Canyon, Air Force F-111s take off from England, refuel in air six times, strike targets in Libya, return to base in England.

Sept. 24, 1987. Air Force Thunderbirds fly in Beijing, first US combat aircraft to land in China in almost 40 years.

Nov. 10, 1988. Air Force reveals existence of Lockheed F-117A stealth fighter, operational since 1983.

USAF photo



The B-2 bomber, shown here, was USAF's first stealthy long-range strike aircraft. It made its combat debut in March 1999.

Dec. 29, 1988. USAF receives first dual-role F-15E fighters.

March 19, 1989. First flight of Bell-Boeing V-22 Osprey.

July 6, 1989. Nation's highest civilian award, Presidential Medal of Freedom, presented to Jimmy Doolittle.

July 17, 1989. First flight of Northrop B-2A stealth bomber.

Dec. 20, 1989. Operation Just Cause begins in Panama.

Expeditionary Force: 1990s-2007

June 1990. Air Force publishes “Global Reach-Global Power” white paper.

July 24, 1990. SAC EC-135 Looking Glass command post aircraft ends more than 29 years of continuous airborne alert.

Aug. 2, 1990. Iraq invades Kuwait.

Aug. 7, 1990. Operation Desert Shield, buildup prior to Gulf War, begins.

Aug. 8, 1990. Air Force C-141s, F-15s, AWACS arrive at bases in Saudi Arabia.



USAF photo

The B-52 bomber became operational in June 1955. It has seen combat in Vietnam, Desert Storm, the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq and continues to have a dual mission.

Aug. 17, 1990. First-ever activation of Civil Reserve Air Fleet.

Jan. 16-17, 1991. In 35-hour nonstop mission, B-52Gs take off from Barksdale AFB, La., strike targets in Iraq, and return to Barksdale to land.

Jan. 17, 1991. Operation Desert Storm, the Persian Gulf War, begins.

Jan. 17-Feb. 23, 1991. Iraqi forces sustain attrition of 50 percent or more from coalition air campaign.

Feb. 24, 1991. G-Day. Start of 100-hour ground battle for Kuwait and Iraq.

Feb. 28, 1991. Iraq surrenders.



UN mobility forces are shown moving humanitarian aid in the Balkans during Operation Provide Promise in the mid-1990s.

USAF photo



C-17s such as the one in the foreground have expanded USAF's transport capabilities. The airlifter was first delivered in June 1993.

April 18, 1991. First successful flight test of Martin Marietta-Boeing MGM-134A small ICBM, "Midgetman."

July 24, 1991. Operation Provide Comfort II begins, humanitarian relief and patrol of no-fly zone in northern Iraq. Becomes Operation Northern Watch in 1997.

Sept. 27, 1991. Strategic bomber crews stand down from round-the-clock alert.

Dec. 26, 1991. Soviet Union ceases to exist.

USAF photo



Troops with a small Global Positioning System receiver pinpoint their location. GPS satellite constellation was fully operational in April 1995.

Jan. 18, 1992. Air Training Command receives first T-1A Jayhawk trainer.

June 1, 1992. SAC, TAC, and MAC are deactivated. Air Combat Command and Air Mobility Command established.

July 2, 1992-Jan. 9, 1996. In Operation Provide Promise, USAF flies humanitarian relief missions into Croatia and Bosnia.

Aug. 27, 1992. Operation Southern Watch begins to enforce ban on Iraqi airplanes south of 32nd parallel.

List of Ten

10 Key People

1. Billy Mitchell
2. Hap Arnold
3. Carl Spaatz
4. Ira Eaker
5. George Kenney
6. Curtis LeMay
7. Bernard Schriever
8. Benjamin O. Davis Jr.
9. Paul Airey
10. Jeanne Holm

10 Key Airplanes

1. Wright Military Flyer
2. B-17
3. P-51
4. B-29
5. B-52
6. C-130
7. KC-135
8. C-5
9. F-15
10. B-2

10 Key Developments

1. Powered flight
2. Instrument flight
3. Radar
4. Aerial refueling
5. Jet aircraft
6. Atomic bomb
7. ICBMs
8. Space satellites
9. Precision guided munitions
10. Stealth

10 Key Events

1. Mitchell sinks *Ostfriesland*
2. Doolittle's Tokyo raid
3. Battle of Bismarck Sea
4. Big Week 1944
5. Hiroshima
6. Berlin Airlift
7. Cuban Missile Crisis
8. Thanh Hoa Bridge
9. Linebacker II
10. Gulf War air campaign

10 Places to Remember

1. St. Mihiel
2. Pearl Harbor
3. Schweinfurt
4. The Hump
5. MiG Alley
6. Fulda Gap
7. Route Pack 6
8. Hanoi Hilton
9. Baghdad
10. Lackland

10 Famous Organizations

1. Hat in the Ring Squadron
2. Lafayette Escadrille
3. Eagle Squadrons
4. Flying Tigers
5. Tuskegee Airmen
6. Eighth Air Force
7. 509th Composite Group
8. Strategic Air Command
9. Red River Rats
10. USAF Thunderbirds



US Navy/AP photo

Crowd gazes at blast-damaged facade of Khobar Towers apartment building, hit by a terrorist truck bomb in June 1996. The attack in Saudi Arabia killed 19 airmen.

April 12, 1993. NATO Operation Deny Flight begins in UN no-fly zone in Bosnia.

April 28, 1993. Department of Defense ends ban on women pilots flying combat aircraft.

June 14, 1993. Delivery of first operational C-17A transport.

July 1, 1993. Control of ICBMs passes to Air Force Space Command from Air Combat Command.

Nov. 21-23, 1994. In Project Sapphire, Air Mobility Command C-5s transport highly enriched uranium from former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan to United States.

April 27, 1995. Global Positioning System (GPS) achieves full operational capability.

July 29, 1995. Air Combat Command activates unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) unit.

Aug. 30-Sept. 14, 1995. Operation Deliberate Force brings Serbia to peace talks.

Dec. 20, 1995. NATO air operation Decisive Endeavor begins to monitor and enforce peace in Bosnia.

June 25, 1996. Terrorist truck bomb at Khobar Towers in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, kills 19 airmen.

New Way of War

"America has not only the opportunity but the obligation to transition from a concept of annihilation and attrition warfare that places thousands of young Americans at risk in brute, force-on-force conflicts to a concept that leverages our sophisticated military capabilities to achieve US objectives by applying what I like to refer to as an 'asymmetric force' strategy."—Gen. Ronald R. Fogleman, Air Force Chief of Staff, 1996.

Nov. 26, 1996. First fullup test of GBU-31 Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM).

Jan. 1, 1997. Operation Northern Watch, follow-on to Provide Comfort II, begins in no-fly zone over northern Iraq.

April 1, 1997. B-2A Spirit stealth bomber reaches initial operational capability.

Sept. 7, 1997. First flight of Lockheed F-22 Raptor.

Dec. 18, 1997. Joint STARS officially achieves IOC seven years after its employment in Persian Gulf War.

Aug. 4, 1998. Air Force announces plans to reorganize its operational capabilities into 10 standing Air Expeditionary Forces.

Dec. 16, 1998. US and British air and naval forces conduct Operation Desert Fox, a limited four-day operation against Iraq.

USAF photo



The F-22 Raptor, shown here on a training flight, replaces the F-15 as USAF's premier fighter. It first flew in September 1997.

March 24-June 20, 1999. Operation Allied Force, the NATO air campaign against Serbia.

March 24, 1999. B-2 bomber makes its combat debut in Operation Allied Force.

June 23-27, 1999. Air Force Lt. Col. Eileen M. Collins becomes first woman to command space shuttle.

Oct. 1, 1999. First regular Air Expeditionary Force rotational cycle begins.

Oct. 6, 1999. Destruction begins of 150 Minuteman III silos, in accordance with Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty.

Feb. 21, 2001. Predator UAV hits a stationary Army tank with a live Hellfire-C missile.

April 22-23, 2001. Global Hawk UAV takes off from California, flies nonstop and unrefueled, to precision landing in Australia.



USAF photo by Lt. Col. Terry Moultrup

With the smoke still rising from the World Trade Center after the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, an F-16 from the Vermont Air National Guard flies combat air patrol over New York City.

May 8, 2001. Air Force designated as Department of Defense executive agent for space.

Sept. 11, 2001. Airliners hijacked by terrorists crash into World Trade Center and Pentagon. Operation Noble Eagle—combat air patrols above American cities—begins.

Oct. 7, 2001. Operation Enduring Freedom begins in Afghanistan.

Oct. 7, 2001. US launches first combat mission of an armed Predator UAV against al Qaeda target in Afghanistan.

Nov. 13 - Dec. 9, 2001. Taliban, hammered hard by airpower, loses control in Afghanistan.

May 22, 2002. First flight of Boeing X-45A Unmanned Combat Air Vehicle prototype.

March 17, 2003. Northern Watch missions end in Iraq.



NASA photo

Air Force Lt. Col. Eileen Collins, in June 1999, became the first woman to command a space shuttle.

March 19, 2003. Southern Watch missions end in Iraq.

March 20, 2003. Air Force F-117 fighters, cruise missiles from US warships strike “leadership targets of opportunity” in Iraq.

March 20, 2003. Operation Iraqi Freedom begins.

April 9, 2003. Baghdad falls to coalition forces.

Dec. 15, 2003. National Air and Space Museum opens huge Udvar-Hazy annex in Chantilly, Va.

March 1, 2005. MQ-1 Predator UAV achieves initial operational capability.

Dec. 7, 2005. New Air Force mission statement adds cyber-space to current combat domains of air and space.

Dec. 15, 2005. F-22 fighter achieves initial operational capability.



Photo by Guy Aceito

Three spires of the Air Force Memorial in Arlington, Va., tower above bronze honor guard statues. The memorial dedication took place in October 2006.

March 20, 2006. Air Force receives first operational CV-22 tilt-rotor aircraft.

Oct. 14, 2006. Air Force Memorial dedicated in Arlington, Va.

Dec. 15, 2006. First flight, Lockheed-Martin F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter.

March 29, 2007. Tuskegee Airmen awarded Congressional Gold Medal.

Aug. 1, 2007. Centennial of founding of Aeronautical Division of the US Army Signal Corps, the genesis of the US Air Force. ■