

# Centennial of Flight

## 100 years of aviation history



**May 1, 1951:** With a large American military force in Korea, bombers from Strategic Air Command stood on alert at RAF Lakenheath, ensuring the security of Western Europe.

**April 11, 1966:** Airman 1st Class William H. Pitsenbarger of Piqua, Ohio, gave his life defending his wounded comrades during the Vietnam War. Pitsenbarger participated in more than 300 combat missions and posthumously received the Medal of Honor.



**April 14, 1986:** 48th Tactical Fighter Wing F-111s, armed with the Air Force's newest laser guided weapon systems, struck terrorist targets in Libya during Operation Eldorado Canyon.

**March 19, 2003:** Operation Iraqi Freedom begins. Since the launching of combat operations, the Air Force has flown more than 30,000 sorties, including 12,000 strike sorties, and dropped more than 21,300 munitions, 70 percent of which were precision-guided. Over 1,000 Liberty Wing warriors have deployed to more than 22 countries in support of OIF.



**Oct. 7, 2001:** Just weeks after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, the U.S. Air Force launched Operation Enduring Freedom.

**July 27, 1972:** The first F-15, the Air Force's top air superiority weapon, made its maiden flight.



**Aug. 13, 1961:** As the Berlin Wall separated East from West, the people of the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing waited on short notice alert, able to respond within minutes using their fully armed F-100 Super Sabers.

**Dec. 18, 1972:** President Nixon ordered the beginning of Operation Linebacker II. Air Force B-52 bombers and tactical fighter aircraft struck every possible military and transportation target in North Vietnam, forcing a return to peace talks.

**Jan. 17 1991:** Operation Desert Storm began as air power devastated the world's four largest military in Iraq. U.S. Air Force aircraft flew more than 100,000 sorties during the war – for its part, the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing destroyed 920 Iraqi tanks.

**March 24, 1999:** Fulfilling General Billy Mitchell's vision of the potential of air power, NATO air forces led by the USAF defeated Serbian aggression against Kosovo Albanians during Operation Allied Force. During the air war, 48th Fighter Wing F-15Es led 46 percent of all strike packages while F-15Cs recorded four aerial victories.

1905 1910 1915 1920 1925 1930 1935 1940 1945 1950 1955 1960 1965 1970 1975 1980 1985 1990 1995 2000

**Aug. 2, 1909:** Spending \$25,000, the U.S. Army bought its first aircraft from the Wright Brothers following flight tests at Fort Meyer, Virginia.

**Sept. 25, 1918:** At the beginning of World War I, airplanes served in a limited reconnaissance role. By the end of the war, the strategy and tactics of aerial warfare and strategic bombardment were well established and airpower became a key component of all future conflicts.

**March 15, 1916:** Capt. Benjamin Foulois led the 1st Aero Squadron in the first-ever operational deployment of U.S. military aircraft. Using Curtis' JN-3 aircraft, the squadron flew reconnaissance missions to hunt for Pancho Villa and his forces.

**May 21, 1927:** Charles A. Linbergh became the first person to solo nonstop flight across the Atlantic Ocean.



**Feb. 19, 1934:** President Franklin D. Roosevelt directed the U.S. Air Corps to begin delivering airmail in the place of contracted civilian airlines.

**June 25 1950:** North Korean Forces invaded South Korea. Air Force jet aircraft entered combat for the first time as F-80s helped save South Korea.



**June 6, 1944:** P-47s of the 48th Fighter Group flew dive-bombing missions supporting the allied invasion of Normandy. General Eisenhower acknowledged the importance of air power to the Normandy campaign, when he said, "Without air power I would not be here."

**Nov. 14, 1938:** In preparation for World War II, President Roosevelt committed to the building of 20,000 aircraft.



**July 21, 1921:** Demonstrating the lethal potential of air power, Brig. Gen. William "Billy" Mitchell led the bombing of several German warships, including the "unsinkable" Ostfriesland. The successful bombing runs proved that aircraft could sink the largest and most powerful ships in the world.



**Dec. 17, 1903:** The Wright Brothers achieve the first heavier-than-air powered flight near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. Orville Wright flew the first flight, which lasted 12 seconds and traveled 120 feet.

BY MASTER SGT. GREG HENNEMAN  
48TH FIGHTER WING HISTORIAN

Dec. 17, 2003 marks the 100th anniversary of the Wright Brothers' first flight and a century of military aviation. Two humble bicycle mechanics from Ohio achieved the first controlled, powered, heavier-than-air flight – an event that many consider to be the most important invention of the 20th Century.

Just over a decade after this first flight, the airplane became an important weapon in the First World War. Although the crude aircraft of the Great War were made of little more than sticks and canvas, the strategy and tactics developed by these daring airmen laid the foundation for the future of military aviation.

Two decades later, air power served in a decisive role during World War II. Spitfires and Hurricanes of the Royal Air Force repelled a German invasion of England during the Battle of Britain. In addition, the skies over East Anglia filled with American B-17s forming up in Thousand Bomber Raids as P-51 Mustangs streaked through the sky providing air superiority.

Paralleling the advances in military air power, for more than 60 years the 48th Fighter Wing has recorded many aviation firsts and served on the front lines of nearly every major air campaign over the last six decades.

Flying dive-bombing missions with the P-47 Thunderbolt, pilots of the 48th prepared the beaches of

Normandy for the D-Day invasion and provided close air support during the Battle of the Bulge. During the Cold War, F-100s, F-4s, and F-111s sat ready on the Lakenheath runway – fueled, armed and ready to launch within minutes in the event of Soviet aggression.

When the military's focus shifted from a single threat of communism to the war on terrorism, the 48th FW served in the opening salvo. On April 14, 1986, the wing led the bombing of terrorist targets in Libya during Operation Eldorado Canyon. Five years later, the men and women of the 48th FW employed laser-guided munitions, destroying the Iraqi military during Operation Desert Storm. A decade of combat in the 1990s culminated with the Statue of Liberty Wing again leading the fight, as more than 1,000 people from RAF Lakenheath deployed and achieved victory in the air war over Serbia – Operation Allied Force. Likewise, the people of the 48th FW have been called upon to provide the muscle behind Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

History is not just something that happened decades ago by unfamiliar people in grainy black-and-white photographs. As members of the United States Air Force and the 48th Fighter Wing, we are part of a family with a rich tradition of sacrifices and achievements that have significantly contributed to the century of aviation. The centenary of flight is not merely the anniversary of the first flight at Kitty Hawk, but is a celebration of our achievements as the world's most