



INTO THE BLUE: THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE AT 75

SEPTEMBER IN AVIATION HISTORY

It took almost 40 years for members of the U.S. Army to define the requirements for a dedicated air force. The first time such a requirement was needed happened just months before a centralized force could be established. In 1941, the United States was pushed into World War II after an insidious attack struck Americans and British in the Pacific. Shortly thereafter, the U.S. Army reorganized its aeronautical division (the U.S. Army Air Corps) and re-established it as a proper Army Air Force.

It was the U.S. Army Air Force that flew numerous campaigns against the Axis Powers in the European and Pacific Theaters. The bombing campaign in Europe became the baseline for future bombing operations throughout the Cold War, while the benefits of air superiority and close air support were thoroughly observed. By the time the war ended, the B-29 had demonstrated borderline intercontinental range and had helped thrust the Americans not only into the atomic age but enabled them to deliver an atomic payload.

In 1947, an act of Congress enacted the National Security Act of 1947, a sweeping piece of legislation that restructured the U.S. military. The act established multiple new agencies and consolidated the military departments under a single National Military Establishment, which was renamed as the Department of Defense in 1948.¹ Along with the consolidation, the establishment of a Department of the Air Force in 1947 was one of the many significant changes to American military structure. The first Secretary of the Air

Force, William Stuart Symington III, was appointed on 17 SEP 1947 unilaterally with the activation of the department.

Almost immediately, the new United States Air Force (USAF) was met with obstacles. The first of which was the infamous B-36 scandal, coupled with the onset of the Korean War.² Over appropriation of funds for modernization of the fleet of aircraft following the advent of the jet proved to be a struggle that hung over the Air Force well into the mid-1950s.³ Throughout the Korean War, the USAF primarily operated with uparmored and upmodified World War II era warbirds with a smattering of complimentary modernized aircraft, such as the F-86 Sabre.

Overcoming the initial obstacle of funding and organization, the USAF found its footing as time progressed towards the Vietnam War. Successful fielding of the B-52 had helped to begin phasing out the aging B-17's, B-36's, and B-39's. The century-series fighters had begun to phase out the F-51 and F-80 with faster aircraft capable of heavier payloads. However, the real struggle for the USAF came during Vietnam, when its until-then emphasis on bombing strategies began to cause erosion of force cohesion. Learning lessons from the war, the Air Force embarked on another modernization mission to maintain its edge in a rapidly developing world.

By the mid-1970s, proposals for the F-15 and F-16 had been met with approval, and other projects such as the F-117 had moved to the final stages.⁴ Meanwhile, the Advanced Technology Bomber,

which went on to produce the B-2, entered the design and development phase.⁵ By the time of *DESERT STORM* in 1991, the USAF had remodernized its fleet and was already in the process of ensuring its next update of aircraft would be met with less resistance.

In 1997, *DESERT FOX* provided female flight crews their first combat missions, while also providing real-world testing of the B-1. The USAF stood ready to defend a shaken nation in the days that followed 11 SEP 2001 and followed warfighters into battle during the opening shots of the Global War on Terror.

Today, the USAF stands ready to provide air support to Allied forces on the ground anywhere on Earth, while standing ready to defend a grateful Nation. After 75 years, the Air Force continues to fly, fight, and win.

REFERENCES

1. US Congress. "National Security Act of 1947." *Public Law 235*. 26 JUL 1947.
2. Wolk, Herman S. *Fulcrum of Power: Essays on the United States Air Force and National Security*. Diane Publishing, Darby, Pennsylvania. 2003. p. 163.
3. Barlow, Jeffery G. *Revolt of the Admirals: The Fight for Naval Aviation, 1945-1950*. Naval Historical Center, Washington D.C. 1994. p. 42.
4. Sweetman, Bill. *Lockheed Stealth*. Zenith Imprint, Grand Rapids, Michigan. 2005.
5. Withington, Thomas. *B-1B Lancer Units in Combat*. Osprey, Oxford, United Kingdom. 2006.



1974
1976
1985
1997
2001

An SR-71 Blackbird flies from New York to London in 1 hour and 55 minutes, a record that stands to this day.

01

A Soviet Air Force defector lands his MiG-25 in Japan and seeks political asylum in the United States.

06

An F-15A Streak Eagle flown by MAJ Wilbert Pearson, Jr. fires an ASM-135 anti-satellite missile that destroys a target 330 miles above the Earth's surface.

13

The first production model F-22 Raptor makes its first flight, the fifth generation of aviation is born.

07

The North American Aerospace Command assumes control of all American air space and orders 24/7 watches following the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

11

