



## Remembering Our Heritage



### 24-30 December

**24 Dec 1941:** The ground echelon of the 11th Fighter Squadron, after traveling across country by train, boarded the Army Troop Transport *St. Mihiel* at the Port of Seattle and departed for Alaska on Christmas Eve. The group arrived at Seward on the morning of 29 December and transferred to Alaska Railroad cars, arriving at Elmendorf Field that evening, where they awaited the arrival of the air echelon. The squadron historian reported that the morale was good but the living conditions were rugged with few available recreation facilities. The men caught rides or walked into Anchorage where they found high prices. (Johnson, Hist, 11<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, pp. 13-15.)



**27 Dec 1941:** The ground echelon of the 77th Bombardment Squadron, which received orders to deploy to Elmendorf Field, departed Gowen Field, ID, by train with four officers, three aviation cadets and 187 enlisted men under the command of Capt Ray S. Bartholomew. The men joined the ground echelon of the 11th Fighter Squadron in Seattle on 28 December and departed with them aboard the *St. Mihiel* for Alaska. (Lt Baily K. Howard, Hist, 77<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron, 15 Jan 1941-31 Dec 1943, p. 5; Chronology, 77<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron, undated; Hist, Fourth Air Force, *The First Phase of the Battle for the Aleutians*, Oct 31, 1943, p.p. 1-2.)

**28 Dec 1941:** The War Department established the Alaskan Air Force with headquarters on Elmendorf Field and Col Everett S. Davis as its commander. The Alaskan Air Force replaced the Air Force, Alaska Defense Command, which had been created by the Alaska Defense Command two months prior. The War Department order provided a formal organization and more command authority. Colonel Davis answered administratively to General DeWitt and operationally to General Buckner. The War Department letter also authorized the creation of a headquarters squadron with an initial strength of 15 officers and 158 enlisted men with personnel drawn from existing organizations and from request made outside of Alaska. It represented the first step taken towards the creation of the Eleventh Air Force as the air component of the Alaska Defense Command. (Ltr, War Department, subj: Activation of Air Corps Unit, AG 320.2, 28 Dec 1941.)



**25 Dec 1942:** The 11th Fighter Squadron celebrated Christmas on Umnak Island with a large Christmas dinner, free cigarettes, and two bottles of beer, the first in the Aleutians, for each man. (Johnson, Hist, 11FS, p. 61.)

**27 Dec 1942:** Maj Edward Larner, 90th Bombardment Squadron Commander, led nine B-25s on a low-level attack against Japanese ground positions at Gona. Twelve newly acquired P-38s from the 39th Fighter Squadron accompanied them. The Lightning pilots shot down 11 Japanese aircraft, marking a shift of fighter advantage to the Americans. (*Grim Reapers*, p. 41)



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**30 Dec 1942:** The Eleventh Air Force launched two coordinated bomber and fighter attacks against the Japanese on Kiska, the largest since the 14 September 1942 raid. The 21st Bombardment Squadron began with the launch of B-24D weather reconnaissance aircraft at 0845 from Adak, followed by the launch of five B-25Ds from the 77th Bombardment Squadron and four B-26s from the 73rd Bombardment Squadron 52 minutes later. The 54th Fighter Squadron provided an escort of 14 P-38s. Major John A. Pickard,



Commander, 77th Bombardment Squadron led three B-25 crews in an attack against two large transports in Kiska Harbor. They dropped their bombs without observing any hits. Anti-aircraft fire struck the B-25D, 41-29747, flown by 1 Lt Julius Constantine, forcing the crew to ditch in the waters eight miles off Little Kiska. Those lost in addition to Lieutenant Constantine included 1 Lt Sam P. Couris, 1 Lt Thomas Pfeiler, 2 Lt Edward A. Supinski, SSgt Henry S. Jones Jr., SSgt Andrew A. Maichau and SSgt Harold A. Forbes. (Intel Summary, Field HQs, 11AF, 30 Dec 1942; Ransohoff, Hist, 11AF, pp. 244-245.)

**24 Dec 1944:** Personnel on the ground at McGrath, AK made the first sighting of a Japanese bomb-carrying balloon in Alaska as it drifted overhead. (Monthly Intelligence Summary, 1-31 Jan 1945, HQs Eleventh Air Force, Task Force 90, North Pacific Area.)

**26 Dec 1944:** The 3rd Bombardment Group departed Leyte Island, for their new station, Mindaro Island, both in the Philippine chain. Mindaro Island had been invaded one week earlier by Allied troops. While convoying to the new duty station, the ships were constantly harassed by Japanese fighters, who sunk an ammunition-laden Liberty ship. 23 enemy fighters were shot down in the encounters. (Hist, Third Bombardment Group (Light), 1 April 1944 to 31 December 1944, Unit History for December, pp. 2, 4)



**29 Dec 1944:** The Eleventh Air Force and Fleet Air Wing Four flew a joint mission, which called for three B-24 crews from the 404th Bombardment Squadron to take photographs of the Kashiwabara Staging Area and Kataoka Naval Base from 28,000 feet, while the 77th Bombardment Squadron committed four B-25s and Fleet Air Wing Four three PV-1s from VPB-131 and one PV-1 from VPB-136 on a decoy mission to draw away Japanese fighters. The 404th Bombardment Squadron also launched a B-24 to obtain weather information. The PV-1 crews experiencing unsatisfactory communications, noting the early return of the other aircraft and observing a weather front moving through the area, turned back to Attu. The B-25 crews also elected to return to Attu. Two disappeared. The B-24 crews continued on, passing through the weather front on instruments. Two crews decided to turn back short of the Kuriles after their instruments froze in the intense cold. First Lieutenant William T. Reynolds, the pilot of the third B-24 elected to continue on dropping 600 pounds of bombs in the vicinity of Bettobi Airfield located on the central part of Shimushu Island and taking the first vertical photographs of the airfield. (Msg., COAB Shemya to HQ 11 AF Adak, 30 Dec 1944; Chronology, Fleet Air Wing Four, 15 Dec 1944-1 Mar 1945, p. 1; 1/Lt T.G. Young, Hist, 404<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron, Dec 1944, p. 24.)



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**25 Dec 1946:** The 404th Bombardment Squadron, now down to 20 officers and 186 men commanded by Maj David L. Hopking, celebrated its last Christmas on Shemya. Each individual assigned to the squadron received a booklet on the squadron with B-24L, 44-49474, "Myasis Dragon," on the cover. The following day, Headquarters Alaskan Department published General Order 195, inactivating the 404th Bombardment Squadron effective 5 January 1947. (1/Lt Ronald J. Sullivan, Hist, 404<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron, 1 Dec 1946-5 Jan 1947, pp. 7-8.)



**24-25 Dec 1950:** Capt Samuel Behrens, pilot, Lt Clarence C. Humphries, navigator, and SSgt Mack C. Walker, gunner, from the 8th Bombardment Squadron spent Christmas Eve on a night intruder mission over North Korea searching for enemy targets. Flying between Huichon and Kangye, they spotted and attacked several trucks unloading troops near a railroad siding, setting the train on fire. Using the light of the blazing train, the B-26 crew continued to strafe and bomb the enemy. (*The Invader*, 9 Jan 1951)

**27 Dec 1951:** General Old informed Gen Nathan Twining, Vice Chief of Staff, USAF, that "we have experienced considerable effort in an attempt to cover a large gap in our radar coverage to the west of Elmendorf between Takotna and Naknek (later renamed King Salmon). We have selected Sparrevohn (F-15), a mountain top—3,400 feet in elevation---and constructed a landing strip in the valley, a camp, a 4-mile road climbing to the top of the mountain, and erected a tower and installed a CPS-5." Both Indian Mountain (F-16) and Sparrevohn (F-15) were accessible by air only.



The runway at Sparrevohn posed a particular challenge due to the fact that it had to be constructed as close to the base of the mountain as possible. As a result it had a north-south orientation and one end was restricted by a swamp. The approaches could only be made from the south and at low-lever. Because of weather, it required an excessive number of flights on the good days. (Chart, *ACW Development in Alaska*, p.82.)

**29 Dec 1953:** HQ USAF, at the direction of the DoD, ordered Alaskan Command, to establish an Alaskan Communications Study Group to develop a communications system in Alaska fulfilling primarily the known requirements for an effective air defense of Alaska. Within the area, facilities to meet other government and civil requirements will be provided by this system to the extent that they can be economically integrated in the system and will clearly benefit the government." The group that formed, and composed of representatives from the Alaskan Command; Alaskan Air Command; United State Army, Alaska; Alaska Communications System; Alaskan Sea Frontier, and the Civil Aeronautics Administration. The primary communications supporting the AC&W system at the time consisted of VHF and combined HF and LF being used as a backup. (Study, Alaskan Communications Study Group, "Background to Communications in Alaskan Air Defense," Apr 1954, pp. 86-87.)



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**26-30 Dec 1955:** Elmendorf AFB witnessed a record 36-inch snowfall, haltering virtually all activities until the runway and roads could be cleared. Seventeen inches fell within one 24-hour period. (Chart, Hist, AAC, Jul-Dec 1955, p. 11.)

**28 Dec 1966:** As part of an Air Force-wide initiative to change and reassign code names, the annual remote site resupply operations was changed from Mona Lisa to Cool Barge. (Study, Lt. Michael Wise, Office of Hist, AAC, "Cool Barge, Resupply of Alaskan Air Command's Remote Sites," Nov 1982, p. 22.)



**26 Dec 1967:** Four flights from the 3rd Tactical Fighter Wing, scrambled to assist friendly forces involved in Operation Dan Chi. Pilots cleared the area, allowing ground forces to sweep the area. The Wing air support was credited with destroying eight military structures, four bunkers, and three sampans. They also damaged 11 military fortifications and three sampans. (Hist, 3 TFW, Oct-Dec. 1967)



**27 Dec 1974:** Maj Darrell Pyle died when his Piper PA-18 crashed around noon at Six Mile Lake, Elmendorf AFB. His nine year old son, Philip, survived with minor injuries. The fuel tank in the plane ruptured on impact causing minor fires. Major Pyle was recovered from the wreckage and taken to the Elmendorf AFB Hospital where he died of injuries sustained in the crash. His son was treated for cuts and bruises and released. Major Pyle had been a POW in North Vietnam from February 1966 until February 1973. He was born on 24 April 1940 in Long Beach, CA; graduated from Compton High School, Compton, CA, in 1958; and the University of Arizona and joined the Air Force in 1963. He had rowed down the Amazon River and spent time in the jungles of Ecuador. While in captivity, he dreamed of coming to Alaska. He was assigned to the 43rd Tactical Fighter Squadron as an F-4E pilot. Major Pyle had been awarded the Legion of Merit, the Silver Star with oak leaf

cluster, the Bronze Star with V device with oak leaf cluster and a second oak leaf cluster to the Air Force Commendation Medal. He was cited for his resistance to more than 40 days of extreme physical and mental torture. He had written a book about his POW experiences. The publisher, however, wanted more details on his torture, which he did not want to go into again, and it was never published. The 3rd Wing Headquarters Building is named after Major Pyle. ("Aviator Dreamed of Alaska Living," *Anchorage Times*, 29 Dec 1974.)

**29 Dec 1975:** The 3rd Tactical Fighter Wing began flying operations at Clark AB, Philippines. (3 TFW History, 1 Oct-31 Dec 75, p.5)

**26 Dec 1978:** General Scott received a message from the Director of Programs, Headquarters, USAF, that Alaskan Air Command would receive additional F-4Es, allowing it to form a third squadron. His staff had already investigated various options on where to base it. They had looked at Eielson AFB, which had a severe housing shortage at the time, and decided the squadron should be based on Elmendorf AFB. (Cloe, Hist, AAC, 1978, p. 223.)

**23-26 Dec 1982:** Secretary of the Air Force and Mrs Vern Orr spent the Christmas Holiday touring remote stations in Alaska. They visited Fort Yukon and Indian Mountain, where he spent Christmas Night. He then flew to Galena Christmas Day, and then on to Tin City, where they spent the night. They returned to Elmendorf AFB on 26 December. (Cloe, Hist, AAC, 1982, p. 508.)



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**27 Dec 1988:** Senator Ted Stevens announced that a sub-unified command would be established under the Pacific Command during an address to the Anchorage Rotary Club. He issued a news release the same day. He stated he met with Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci, Secretary of the Navy William Ball, Deputy Secretary of Defense Will Taft, ADM Huntington Hardestry who had replaced Admiral Hays, ADM Dave Jeremiah, Commander, Third Fleet, General McInerney, MG Tom Fields, Commander, 6th Infantry Division (Light), and the CAB. He praised them for resolving a "thorny problem." He noted that the sub-unified command recognized "the global significance of the defense of Alaska," and the disestablishment of the Alaskan Command in 1975 had been a mistake. He went on to say:

The new structure permits Alaska to be a visible partner in the defense of the Pacific while maintaining our ability to defend Alaska. The Alaskan Command's inclusion in the Pacific theater of operations will be a constant reminder that the era of the Pacific Rim's strategic importance is upon us. (Cloe, Hist, AAC, 1988, p. 36.)



**29 Dec 1999:** Lt Gen Thomas Case, Eleventh Air Force Commander, and Brig Gen Phillip E. Oates, Adjutant General, Alaska National Guard, signed a letter of agreement to transition the mission and manning requirements of the 611th Air Control Squadron to the Alaska Air National Guard. The squadron operated the Regional Air Operations Center (RAOC). (Cloe, Hist, 11AF, 1999, pp.8 and 54.)

**27 Dec 2001:** The 3rd Communications Squadron completed the conversion from a Private Internet Protocol Address Scheme to a Public Internet Protocol Address Scheme. The change involved 11,000 computer systems and over 7,000 network users on base. (Hist, 3 WG, 2001, p. 64)

**28 Dec 2004:** The local media began discussing the fact that Elmendorf AFB and Fort Richardson would no longer supply heated water for the two hatcheries located near the power plants. These hatcheries are stocked with rainbow trout and char and Chinook salmon. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game estimate that approximately 80 percent of the rainbows harvested in the state each year come from these hatcheries. The military planned to shut the plants down as a cost-saving measure. (Media File, AP, "Hatchery Warm Water Closed," Dec 2004)



**29 Dec 2006:** As a result of budget cuts, the Elmendorf Base Library closed permanently. Base residents had library services offered by the library on Fort Richardson. (Hist, 3 WG, 2006, pg cvii.)