



# Remembering Our Heritage



**27 - 28 Feb 1935:** The 3rd Attack Group transferred from Fort Crockett, TX to Barksdale Field, LA for its new duty station. The group's mission was to act as a mobile air strike force that could work directly with ground commanders. (Hist, 3rd Bomb Group (Light), Activation to 31 December 1941, p. 18, *Air Force Combat Units*, p. 31)



**1 Mar 1935:** General Headquarters, Air Force was established. In this reorganization, the 3rd Attack Group was assigned to 3rd Wing, General Headquarters, Air Force. The 60th Service Squadron was relieved of assignment and attached to the 3rd Group for duty. The 51st Attack Squadron was assigned to the Group on detached service at Maxwell Field, AL. The 5th Photo Section was relieved of assignment from the Group. (Hist, 3rd Bomb Group (Light), Activation to 31 Dec 1941)



**1 Mar 1942:** The 36th Bombardment Squadron received its first Boeing B-17E Fortress, 41-2398. It had been used by the Cold Weather Detachment at Ladd Field for testing and was the fifth production E model. The three LB-30s, AL602, AL613 and AL622, arrived in May. A B-17B, 38-215, which had been undergoing testing at Ladd Field arrived in May. All were equipped with the SCR-521 airborne radar. The five bombers constituted the only long range striking force in the Eleventh Air Force until just before Dutch Harbor when other B-17Es arrived. (Hist, 36<sup>th</sup> Bomb Sq, 1 Feb 1940-31 Aug 1943, p. 3; Ransohoff, Hist, 11 AF, p. 116.)

**1 Mar 1943:** The 18th Fighter Squadron flew the first single engine fighter attack against Kiska since October 1942 when the single engine fighter attacks from Adak against Kiska had been called off as being too risky. The fighter strip at Amchitka placed the P-40 pilots within 90 miles of Kiska. The four pilots arrived over Kiska to find their target obscured by clouds. They jettisoned their bombs and returned to Amchitka to find the landing strip covered by clouds. After a failed attempt to talk them down by radio, another squadron pilot, Lt Donald J. Crisp, volunteered to take off and lead them down through a hole in the cloud layer. All five landed safely. (Winzeler, Hist, 18FS, Sec II.)



**3 Mar 1943:** The 18th Fighter Squadron flew the first successful fighter mission against Kiska from Amchitka when Maj. James Dowling, Capt Joseph S. Littlepage and Lts Sidney M. Richman and George T. Terault took off at 2:15 PM and landed at 3:20 PM after dropping fragmentation bombs on the Main Camp area. It signaled a stepped up offensive against Kiska. An average of 46 sorties a day were flown during March and April. (Intel Summary No. 11, XI Fighter Command, 3 Mar 1943; Hist Data, 11AF.)



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**3 Mar 1943:** The 3rd Bombardment Group launched the first of two low-level attacks with 12 A-20s and 12 B-25s during the morning hours against the Japanese convoy bringing reinforcements and resupply to the garrison at Lae. Following a second attack during the afternoon, 3rd Bombardment Group claimed in what became known as the Battle of the Bismarck Sea the sinking or damaging of 16 Japanese ships. Only one crippled cargo ship and a destroyer reached Lae and both sunk later. The Japanese had lost 6,000 men. The 3rd Bombardment Group lost 13 men killed and 12 wounded. The battle proved that airpower could destroy a naval force at sea. (Hist, Third Bombardment Group (Light), 1 January 1942 to 31 March 1944, pp. 39-45, *Grim Reapers*, pp. 42-46)



**26 Feb 1944:** Task Force 90 issued Field Order Number II that ordered the Eleventh Air Force and Fleet Air Wing Four to conduct day and night air strikes and armed photoreconnaissance missions against Japanese installations and shipping in the Kurile Islands. Additionally, it directed it to conduct sea searches when ordered. Although Fleet Air Wing Four retained that responsibility, it provided the opportunity for the two bomber squadrons to attack Japanese fishing boats. The order also lowered the manpower ceiling of the Eleventh Air Force from 80,000 to 50,000 by 1 July 1944. (Ransohoff, Hist, 11AF, pp. 333-334.)

**1 Mar 1944:** The Eleventh Air Force activated the XI Strategic Air Force on Shemya as a provisional organization. It included all the units of the XI Bombardment Command and XI Fighter Command and was organized for tactical operations only with no administrative functions. The Commander, XI Bombardment Command, Lt. Col. Robert H. Harman, also served as Commander, XI Strategic Command. (Hist, XI Bombardment Command, 18 Mar 1943-31 Mar 1944, p. 8.)



**26 Feb 1951:** Alaska Delegate to Congress, E.L. Bartlett, read a series of articles written by Mr. Andrew Tully of the Scripps-Howard Newspaper Alliance on the deplorable family housing conditions in Alaska into the Congressional Record 26 and 28 February. Mr. Tully had visited Alaska to gather information for feature articles for his paper. He cited instances where military families were paying up to \$85 a month for tar paper shacks that did not include utilities which added up to \$50 to the rent. (Hist., ALCOM, Jan 1947-Dec 1951, pp. 151-152.)

**28 Feb 1953:** Headquarters, USAF informed AAC that Shemya AFB and Thornbrough AFB would be no longer needed because of the slowdown in flight traffic along the Great Circle Route. The two bases had been slated for closure prior to the outbreak of the Korean War, but the Air Force decided to keep them open. The Alaskan Air Command began planning to close the two bases. The plans included withdrawing Air Force dependents from Shemya AFB and the gradual reduction of personnel at the two bases and their transfer to the Civil Aeronautics Administration. Work stopped on operations and maintenance projects. The closure announced resulted in concerns being expressed by commercial air services over the possible loss of the rights to use the two bases. (Chart, Hist, AAC, Jan-Jun 1953, pp. 60-65.)



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**1 Mar 1960:** Pan American Airways inaugurated jet service to Fairbanks. Because an expansion project at Fairbanks International Airport had not been completed, the airlines requested use of Ladd AFB for four jet flights per week. Congress had approved an expenditure of \$4.1 million to extend the civilian runway at Fairbanks from 6,500 feet to 10,300 feet to accommodate jet operations. The project was scheduled to be completed about the same time as the proposed September 1961 transfer of Ladd AFB to the Army. (Miller, Hist, AAC, Jan-Jun 1960, pp. 146-145.)



**3 Mar 1961:** The Alaska Pipeline Company submitted a proposal to provide natural gas power and heat to Elmendorf AFB, which at the time had a coal powered power plant. Natural gas had just been discovered in the Cook Inlet region. The Command conducted a study which determined that the cost of .45 per million British thermal units (BTU) was cheaper than the .595 per million BTU from burning coal and that the conversion cost would be amortized in three years after which Elmendorf AFB would save \$584,391 a year. The Command recommended the conversion be accomplished by August 1962. (Miller, Hist, AAC, 1961, pp. 272-276.)

**1 Mar 1962:** The Alaskan Air Command published *AAC Survival Plan*, which provided guidance for the survival of military and non-combatants living on military installations in the event of an enemy attack. Plans called for the evacuation of Air Force non-combatants to the continental US in the event of a minimum of a 30 day notice and to Safe Haven at Seward for forces south of the Alaskan Range and Birch and Harding Lakes north of the range in the event of a minimum of a 24-hour notice. The Alaskan Air Command was responsible for the first and USARAL for the second. The Commander, Alaskan Sea Frontier was responsible for evacuating personnel from Kodiak and Adak. The plan also provided for a third option, survival in place. (Miller, Hist, AAC, Jan-Jun 1962, pp. 48-53.)



**4 Mar 1962:** The Alaska Switching System was activated to provide direct dialing services to some 50 Air Force locations in Alaska. The Alaska Air Command became the first major Air Force command to be equipped with the automated switching system. It allowed users to dial in a code from anywhere in Alaska that allowed access off the system to any other state in the US by way of Alaska Communication System operators in Anchorage. Four switching centers, Neklasson Lake near Anchorage, Pedro Dome near Fairbanks and Big Mountain and Kalakaket Creek in western Alaska facilitated the system. Its implementation had taken over two years to plan. The White Alice Communications System completed in 1958 had been engineered to provide for all known requirements plus a 50 percent expansion factor. A rapid increase in military communications overwhelmed it within 18 months. Implementation of the Alaska Switching System eliminated operators, improved reliability and improved quality of communications. (Miller, Hist, AAC, Jan-Jun 1962, pp. 250-251.)

**3 Mar 1969:** The *ALCOM Digest* announced that ceremonies had been held marking the opening of the new MAC Main Passenger Terminal and holding area on Elmendorf AFB. The holding area, a former warehouse, had been renovated to provide better passenger accommodations flying the North Pacific Channel route. (*ALCOM Digest*, 3 Mar 1969.)



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**1-6 Mar 1971:** The Alaskan Command conducted Ace Band/Polar Cap, field training exercise involving the airdrop of 123 men from Company O, 75th Infantry (Arctic Rangers) on 4 March approximately 150 miles north of Point Barrow from four 17th Tactical Airlift Squadron C-130s. It was the first mass parachute-drop on the Polar Ice Cap. The exercise was designed to exercise procedures for rescuing and recovering passengers from a crashed commercial airliner on the Polar ice. The 17th Tactical Airlift Squadron airlifted 349,000 pounds of cargo and 414 passengers in 56 sorties. The 5040th Helicopter Squadron logged 19 sorties in 72 flying hours and airlifted 5,400 pounds of cargo. The ground temperatures averaged minus 35 degrees Fahrenheit during the exercise. (Mongin and Mesloh, Hist, AAC, Jul 1970-Jun 1972, p. 93; AAC Information Office News Release 74A-3-14, "Arctic Jump," 25 May 1971.)

**27 Feb 1974:** Aeroflot An-24 Coke, tail number 47195, made emergency landing at Gambell on St Lawrence Island. The ice reconnaissance aircraft had been intercepted numerous times over the Bering Sea between 18 May 1972 and 27 February 1974. Two F-4Es from the 43rd Tactical Fighter Squadron, scrambled from King Salmon made the intercept over Bristol Bay. The crews consisted of Lt. Chet Wood, pilot; Capt. Duane Miller, weapons system officer; Lt. Bob Duncan, pilot; and Capt. Bill Guthrie, weapons system officer. The An-24



crew encountered strong headwinds and decided to divert to Provideniya rather than its home base at Anadyr. Since Provideniya was fogged in, the crew then decided to land at Gambell on St. Lawrence Island. The pilots made a straight in approach with one of the two turboprop engines quitting on final due to lack of fuel. Within minutes, word quickly spread around the village of 736 residents that the Russians had landed. The An-24 contained a crew of three plus twelve scientist. The villagers provided space heaters and food and there was an exchange of souvenirs including watches, coins, gloves and stamps. While the Gambell residents attempted to contact authorities in Nome, the Soviet Embassy in Washington, DC, made contact with the State Department and Defense Department and requested fuel for the stranded plane. Later that night, AAC received guidance on the type of fuel needed and how to contact the crew. Last minute planning and additional passengers, that reached a total of 28, delayed the takeoff of the 17th Tactical Airlift Squadron C-130 0700 to 1058 on 28 February. The passengers included representatives from ALCOM, AAC and the U.S. Customs Office in Anchorage. The C-130 landed at Anchorage International Airport to fill a 600 gallon bladder with 900 gallons of JP-1. It then proceeded to Gambell. On landing at around 1400, Col. Charles E. Koeninger, AAC Director of Command and Control, an interpreter and customs agent fluent in Russian approached three Russians who were standing near the An-24. An Alaskan State Trooper from Nome and members of the local Alaska Army National Guard were also present. Initially, the Russians were nervous and reserved. After it had been explained that their Embassy in Washington had asked for fuel, they became more relaxed. The fuel was transferred. The State Department had asked for a list of names, crew position and date of births. The Russian complied except for the date of birth. Following refueling, the An-24 took off at around 1930, made a pass over the field, tipped its wings and headed west. The C-130 departed approximately ten minutes later. (Hales, Hist, AAC, Jul 1972-Jun 1974, pp. 270-278.)



## Remembering Our Heritage



**27 Feb 1975:** The Joint Chiefs of Staff announced that revision to the Unified Command Plan included the disestablishment of the Alaskan Command. The following day, the Office of the Secretary of Defense released the information that the Alaskan Command would be disestablished. In his statement, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger stated: "The reorganization was part of a continuing effort to gain management effectiveness by reducing headquarters and support units and at the same time, improving command and control of combat units." He went on to say, "...that after a thorough review of the command structure in Alaska, including ALCOM; it was evident that the command arrangements and plans for the defense of Alaska could be significantly improved. (Cloe, Hist, AAC, Jul 1974-Jun 1975, p. 26.)



♦The decision drew the anger and disappointment of Alaska's Congressional delegation. Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK) stated, "I am deeply disappointed. I thought we might get a chance to get a run at it, but it is an economic move as far as the Department of Defense is concerned." Senator Mike Gravel (D-AK) stated it was "part of an ongoing mistake made by the Department of Defense." (Cloe, Hist, AAC, Jul 1974-Jun 1975, p. 27.)

♦Local political reaction varied. Greater Anchorage Area Borough Mayor Jack Roderick stated, "...that the ranking officer would not be a lesser general than is now, and they would also continue with the same number of people. He expressed surprised at the decision but believed that it would not have a significant impact on the economy. Anchorage Mayor George Sullivan felt otherwise, stating the decision,..."disturbs me greatly...it was short-sighted of the military and would effect the economy of Alaska...the move was the first step in the erosion of the military in Alaska." (Cloe, Hist, AAC, Jul 1974-Jun 1975, p. 27.)



**1 Mar 1982:** The first two F-15As, on loan from TAC, arrived at Elmendorf AFB and were greeted during an acceptance ceremony. The lead Eagle, an F-15B was flown by Col. Jerry D. Cobb, Commander, 21st Tactical Fighter Wing, and an instructor pilot from TAC. Major Thomas Sokol, Chief, Weapons and Tactics Branch, Operations and Training Division, Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations, flew an F-15A. General Clark and a crowd of distinguished visitors were on hand to greet their arrival. The two F-15s were met by two F-4Es and escorted to a landing. The event received considerable media attention. By the end of 1982, all 27 assigned F-15s had arrived. The two A-10As, which had been painted in white and olive drab camouflage, flew 16 sorties. A video with voice narrations was made and distributed. (Cloe, Hist, AAC, 1982, pp. 262-263.)

**1 Mar 1991:** Headquarters PACAF issued Programming Plan 91-06 for the beddown of the F-15E at Elmendorf AFB. It assigned specific tasks to the various staff agencies. (Cloe, Hist, 11AF, 1991, p. 160.)

**3 Mar 1995:** The C-17 made the first landing on Elmendorf AFB. (Cloe, Hist, 11AF, 1995, p. xi.)