

Aerospace Education History Events: December

5 December 1945-Five Navy Avenger torpedo-bombers making up Flight 19 leave Ft. Lauderdale Naval Air Station in Florida for a routine three hour training mission at 2:10pm. Their flight plan was to go 120 miles east, turn 73 miles north and make the 120 mile return trip. About two hours into the flight all five aircraft reported instrument failure. At about 6:20pm a distorted radio message came from the flight leader reporting to his flight mates to prepare to ditch due to low fuel. At about 7:30 pm a Mariner search and rescue aircraft radioed that they were under way on their mission and were never heard from again. No trace of the 27 men and six aircraft were ever heard from again. Flight 19 disappeared some where near the Bermuda Triangle and the “Lost Squadron” helped further the mystery of the Triangle.

7 December 1941-Over 360 Japanese planes takeoff from aircraft carriers in the Pacific Ocean and attack Pearl Harbor, Hawaii at about 7:55am. This attack came as a complete surprise. Radio operators spotted large groups of aircraft at about 7:02am coming toward the island and thought it was a scheduled flight of B-17s coming from the mainland. Also going against the naval base was that most of the personnel had been given passes to go to religious services off base. Five battleships, three destroyers and seven other ships were either destroyed or severely damaged as well as 200 aircraft. Over 3,500 Americans were either killed or wounded. The Japanese losses were 30 aircraft, 5 midget subs and less than 100 men.

9 December 1972-Apollo 17 lifts off from Cape Canaveral, Florida with astronauts Eugene A. Cernan, Ronald E. Evans and Harrison H. Schmitt. Cernan and Schmitt conducted three separate missions on the moon’s surface in the Lunar Rover vehicle and are on the surface of the moon for 75 hours.

11 December 1961-The ferry carrier, USNS Core, arrives in Saigon with the first American helicopter unit. Included were 33 Vertol H-21C Shawnee helicopters and 400 air and ground crewmen for operation and maintenance.

14 December 1995-Boeing authorizes a new contract for over 30,000 machinists, ending a 69 day long strike. The new contract included a bonus, new hourly wage increase and improved health insurance.

16 December 1998-President Bill Clinton orders air strikes against Iraq after Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein repeatedly refuses UN weapons inspectors access. Iraq was suspected of continuing production of weapons of mass destruction. Ultimately the air strikes failed to get Saddam to allow the inspectors in.

17 December 1903-At 10:35am Wilbur and Orville Wright make the first successful flight in a heavier than air, self propelled aircraft in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. Orville piloted the bi-plane and stayed aloft for 12 seconds covering a distance of 120 feet. The plane was powered by a 12 horsepower internal combustion engine designed by Wilbur

and Orville Wright. The Wright flier is on permanent display at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington D.C.

18 December 1972-President Richard Nixon orders the beginning of Operation Linebacker II after peace talks failed with the North Vietnamese. The bombing raids continued for almost two weeks. B-52s and fighter bombers dropped over 20,000 tons of bombs on the cities of Hanoi and Haiphong. America lost 15 of its B-52s and 11 other aircraft in the attacks.

19 December 1972-The Apollo lunar missions come to an end after the last three astronauts to walk on the moon's surface splash down in the Pacific Ocean.

21 December 1968-Apollo 8 is launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida with astronauts Frank Borman, James Lovell, Jr., and William Anders aboard. Apollo 8 becomes the first manned mission to the moon.

21 December 1988-Pan Am flight 103 explodes in mid air over Lockerbie, Scotland killing all 259 passengers and crew on board. Eleven people on the ground were killed as well. The cause of the crash was a bomb hidden in a tape cassette player that detonated in the cargo hold when the aircraft was at an altitude of 31,000 feet. The Libyan government later accepted responsibility for the act and compensated the families of the victims.

23 December 1986-Pilots Dick Rutan and Jeanna Yeager (no relation to Chuck Yeager) land the experimental aircraft Voyager at Edwards Air Force Base in California after a non-stop around the world flight. Voyager was built by Dick's brother Burt Rutan, owner of Rutan Aircraft Company. Voyager became the first aircraft ever to fly around the world without having to land or be mid air refueled. It flew on one load of fuel. After having flown 25,012 miles there were only five gallons of fuel left in the remaining operational tank. The flight lasted almost nine days to the minute. The Voyager aircraft is on permanent display in the National Air and Space Museum in Washington D.C.

24 December 1905-Howard Hughes is born on this day in Huston, Texas. Hughes would eventually make many aviation milestones, including; setting a speed record, a flight around the world, majority owner of TWA and founder of Hughes Aircraft.

27 December 1968-Apollo 8 returns and makes a safe landing in the Pacific Ocean after completing the first manned space mission to the moon.

31 December 1968-The Soviets make the first test flight of their supersonic airliner, the TU-144. The TU-144 so closely resembled the Concorde that the press named the TU-144 the "Konkordski".

