

This Day in History... September 18, 1947

U.S. Air Force Established

After 40 years and two wars, the aeronautical division of the US military was established as its own branch, the Air Force, on September 18, 1947.

What would later become the Air Force was originally created as an aeronautical division of the Army Signal Corps in 1907. The next year, the Army purchased its first plane, and in 1911, Congress appropriated funds for aviation. Control passed to the aviation division in 1914.

After the US entered World War I, it became apparent that aviation was going to play a major role going forward. Therefore,

President Woodrow Wilson created

the US Army Air Service. By the end of that war, American pilots in 45 squadrons destroyed 832 enemy aircraft and balloons. After the war, creating a separate air corps was debated extensively, but was rejected due to budget limitations. In 1926, Congress established the US Army Air Corps.

Adolf Hitler's invasion of Poland in 1939

led the US Air Corps to expand its personnel and equipment. The Army Air Forces was officially created in June 1941 and grew even faster following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Under the command of General Henry "Hap" Arnold, the Army Air Forces sparked a major expansion of the American aviation industry. At its peak during the war, the Air Force had 80,000 aircraft and 2.4 million personnel. Flying planes including the C-47 Skytrain, P-51 Mustang, B-17 Flying Fortress, and B-29 Superfortress, the Air Force participated in every theater of the war.

As the war came to an end, the Air Force was demobilized along with all other military branches. However, recognizing their accomplishments, President Harry Truman signed the National Security Act on September 18, 1947, creating the US Air Force as its own independent branch.

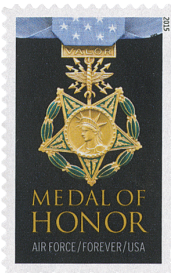
With the motto, "Aim High... Fly-Fight-Win," the US Air Force has five core missions – air supremacy, intelligence and surveillance, rapid mobilization, strategic bombing, and command and control. Today it's the world's the largest air force and America's second largest service branch.



Stamp pictures F-16Cs of the Air Force's precision flying team, the Thunderbirds, flying in diamond formation.



Stamp pictures the Boeing B-52 Stratofortress, which was first flown in 1952.



The Air Force Medal of Honor was established in 1965.



The US Air Force Academy was established in 1954.



In 1949, Arnold was made the first five-star general of the Air Force.



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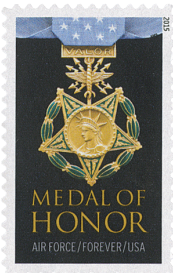
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