

Aerospace Education History Events: April

1 April 1918-The British Royal Air Force (RAF) is established making it separate from the navy and army forces. The RAF was also given its own ministry.

3 April 1936-Richard Bruno Hauptmann is executed. Hauptmann was convicted of the 1932 kidnapping of Charles and Anne Lindbergh's 20 month old son Charles Lindbergh III.

3 April 1996-Ronald H. Brown, US secretary of commerce, is killed with 32 fellow Americans when their US Air Force aircraft crashes into a mountain near Dubrovnik, Croatia. Brown was the first African-American secretary of commerce.

4 April 1933-The US Navy airship, Akron, crashes in the Atlantic Ocean during a bad storm killing 73 of the 76 crew members. This becomes one of the first major air disasters in history.

4 April 1975-A US Air Force cargo jet crashes shortly after takeoff from Tan Son Nhut airbase in Saigon. All 138 people aboard are killed, most of them children. This was part of Operation Baby Lift in which about 2,600 children were airlifted out of Saigon, before its fall to North Vietnamese forces, to be adopted by families in the US.

5 April 1976-Eccentric multi-millionaire, movie producer and aviation pioneer Howard Hughes dies at the age of 70 years old. Hughes broke many aviation records and at one time owned Trans World Airlines.

7 April 1945-Japanese battleship, Yamato, is sunk by US forces using torpedoes launched from aircraft. The Yamato was considered the greatest battleship ever constructed, weighing 72,800 tons and fitted with nine 18.1 inch guns. It took 19 torpedoes to sink her.

9 April 1959-NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) introduces America's first astronauts. The first astronauts are: Scott Carpenter, L. Gordon Cooper Jr., John H. Glenn Jr., Virgil "Gus" Grissom, Walter Schirra Jr., Alan Shepard Jr. and Donald Slayton.

10 April 1972-B-52 bomber begin bombing of North Vietnamese SAM-2 missile sites near Hanoi. At the time US official declared these sites as "the most sophisticated air defenses in the history of air warfare".

11 April 1970-The third planed lunar landing, Apollo 13, is successfully launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida with astronauts James A. Lovell, John L. Swigert and Fred W. Haise aboard.

12 April 1633-Astronomer Galileo Galilei is convicted of heresy for holding to the belief that the Earth revolves around the Sun. Galileo was imprisoned and secluded during the trial of his beliefs. Later they were proved true.

12 April 1961-Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Alekseyevich Gagarin becomes the first man into space as well as to orbit the Earth while aboard Vostok 1. The flight lasted 89 minutes at an altitude of 187 miles above Earth's surface.

12 April 1981-The space shuttle Columbia is launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida becoming the first reusable space craft to go into space travel. That first flight lasted 54 hours and completed 36 orbits of Earth before landing at Edwards Air Force Base in California. Columbia was piloted by astronauts Robert L. Crippen and John W. Young.

13 April 1970- While 200,000 miles away from Earth oxygen tank No. 2 aboard Apollo 13 explodes causing critical damage to the space craft. The lunar landing mission becomes a rescue mission of the astronauts.

14 April 1918-Two US pilots from the First Aero Squadron engage in the first aerial dogfight with enemy aircraft by US personnel over Toul, France. The pilots were Douglas Campbell and Alan Winslow. Campbell later went on to become the first "ace" of World War One by shooting down five enemy aircraft by the end of May 1918.

14 April 1975-The end of Operation Baby Lift, 2,600 Vietnamese children were airlifted out of Saigon to America.

14 April 1986-America launches air strikes against Libya in retaliation of their sponsorship of terrorism against American troops and citizens. Of the five targets bombed, one was the headquarters of Libyan leader Muammar al-Qaddafi.

16 April 1972-Apollo 16 departs from Cape Canaveral, Florida for a lunar landing. Astronauts John W. Young, Charles M. Duke and Thomas K. Mattingly made the 238,000 mile trip to the moon. Astronauts Young and Duke used the Lunar Rover vehicle to collect over 200 pounds of moon rocks.

17 April 1945-US Army Lt. Col. Boris T. Pash commandeers 1,100 pounds of uranium at Strassfurt, Germany in an effort to keep the Russians from developing an atomic bomb.

17 April 1970-Apollo 13 makes a safe landing in the Pacific Ocean after suffering a major explosion while on a planned lunar landing trip to the moon. The three astronauts, James A. Lovell, John L. Swigert and Fred W. Haise, returned home safe.

18 April 1915-French pilot Roland Garros is shot down by personnel from the German Railway Protection Guard in Flanders, France. Garros and his plane were both captured by the Germans. Later France named their tennis stadium in Garros' honor.

18 April 1942-Lt. Col. James H. “Jimmy” Doolittle leads 16 B-25 Mitchell bombers that took off from the aircraft carrier USS Hornet on the Tokyo Raid. The Tokyo Raid did little damage to the Japanese mainland but it did do much damage to the prestige of the Japanese government.

19 April 1967-US Air Force Major Leo K. Thorsness of the 357th Tactical Fighter Squadron and his electronic warfare officer Capt. Harold E. Johnson destroy two SAM missile sites and shoot down a Mig-17 before escorting search and rescue helicopters to a downed air crew. Even though fuel was low on Maj. Thorsness’ F-105 he attacked four more Mig-17s to keep them away from the downed air crew. Maj. Thorsness was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions.

20 April 1978-Soviet aircraft force a Korean Air Lines jet to land in the USSR after it veered into Soviet airspace. Two people were killed and others injured when the jet liner made a rough landing on a frozen lake 300 miles south of Murmansk.

21 April 1918-Baron Manfred von Richthofen is shot down by Allied ground fire. He died of a gunshot to the torso shortly after his forced landing. Richthofen was better known as the “Red Baron” for his all red painted aircraft that he flew. He is credited with 80 downed aircraft during World War One.

23 April 1942-In retaliation for the British air raids on Lubeck, German bomber strike the British cities of Exeter, Bath, Norwich, York and other “medieval city centers” in what is called the “Beadaker Raids”.

23 April 1967-Soviet cosmonaut Vladimir Komarov is killed when the parachute lines became tangled and failed to deploy on his Soyuz 1 spacecraft.

24 April 1945-President Harry Truman is briefed and learns the full details of the Manhattan Project. The Manhattan Project was America’s first creation of the Atomic bomb.

25 April 1980-A Dan-Air Boeing 727 crashes directly into a mountain in the Canary Islands. The pilot became confused by an order issued from air-traffic control. The airport on the Canary Islands did not have radar capabilities and often suffered from extremely cloudy conditions. All 146 people aboard perished.

25 April 1990-The space shuttle Discovery places the Hubble Space Telescope in a low orbit around Earth. The Hubble Telescope is solar powered and makes an orbit of Earth every 97 minutes. Of the many images captured by the Hubble Telescope it has sent images to earth of a comet’s collision with Jupiter, a direct look at Pluto’s surface and distant galaxies.

26 April 1937-The Germans test their new air force, the Luftwaffe, during the Spanish Civil War on the town of Guernica in northern Spain.

