



## This Month in 35th Fighter Wing and Misawa Air Base History December 2014



December is always a festive season at Misawa Air Base, and since 1945, U.S. military forces at Misawa have welcomed Christmas with celebration and cheer. December is generally the month of the first snow at Misawa, and a white Christmas is almost guaranteed at the world's snowiest U.S. military installation. Here are some of the holiday related milestones for Misawa Air Base:



**During Christmas 1952, the NCO and Officers' Wives Clubs sponsored a Christmas party for 600 Japanese children from the local community. The clubs raised money for gifts and collected clothes for the children.**

December 1945: Soldiers under the leadership of Captain Davis K. Stark, 32d Army Engineering Construction Group, celebrated the first Christmas at Misawa Air Base. Stark and his "Wildcats" had been tasked with the reconstruction of Misawa Air Base following World War II.

December 28, 1953: Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong brought cheer to Misawa and performed three shows in the base gymnasium as part of his Far East tour.

December 15, 1956: The Misawa Base Exchange reopened just in time for Christmas following a \$55,000 expansion that added 7,200 square feet to the Exchange building.

December 9, 1959: The Air Force's Thunderbirds kicked off the holiday season with their first, ever performance at Misawa Air Base.



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**Col. Donald A. Baccus, Misawa Air Base Commander, hosted the first FEN -- later AFN -- television broadcast at Misawa AB on Christmas Day, 1960.**

December 25, 1960: The Far East Network (FEN), predecessor to Armed Forces Network (AFN) Pacific, began television broadcasts at Misawa on channel 73. The television station went live at 11 a.m. on Christmas Day with a message from Misawa Air Base Commander, Col Donald A. Baccus. Daily broadcasts continued with programming beginning at 5 p.m. on weekdays and 2 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday.

December 1961: The *Wingspread*, the Misawa base newspaper, made the first mention of "Christmas Lane," the annual display of giant holiday greeting cards on the circle in front of the base headquarters building. The display, which continues today, was called Christmas Lane or Christmas Card Lane

through the 1980s, when the traditional name fell into disuse.

December 1980: The Misawa base newspaper, which had changed its name to *The Northern Light*, made the first mention of a tree lighting ceremony in front of the base headquarters building.

Additional anniversaries for the month of December include:

December 14, 1944: The 35th Fighter Group's 40th Fighter Squadron destroyed fourteen enemy bombers over the Negros Island while flying P-47 Thunderbolts. See the [declassified Mission Report](#).

December 19, 1961: Lieutenant Colonel John A. Sollars, Commander of Misawa Air Base's 531st Tactical Fighter Squadron, died on after ejecting from his F-100 Super Sabre during an instrument approach at Matsushima Air Base near Sendai. He remained with the crippled jet until it cleared a heavily populated area. Sollars escaped from the jet and survived in the Pacific Ocean until a rescue helicopter arrived. Sollars initially grabbed the rescue ladder that had been lowered, but



**Two P-47 Thunderbolts and six P-51 Mustangs in the maintenance area of the 35th Fighter Group, Lingayen Airfield, Luzon, Philippines, April 1945.**



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he slipped off the rung, fell back into the water, and drowned. Prolonged exposure to the cold temperatures of the water had weakened him. See [The Misawa Wing Spread, December 22, 1961](#) and [The Misawa Wing Spread, May 25, 1962](#).

December 21, 1982: The Japan Air Self-Defense Force activated an Airborne Aircraft Control and Warning Group at Misawa Air Base. It consisted of 117 personnel and two E-2C Hawkeye aircraft.

December 28, 1994: A major earthquake caused over \$4 million in damage to Misawa Air Base.

December 11, 1997: A Malaysian tanker carrying 181,000 liters of crude and fuel oil ran aground off the coast of Shimoda Town, approximately 10 kilometers south of Misawa Air Base. The base provided 100 35-gallon hazardous material containers for use in the cleanup effort.

December 17, 2001: The \$4.5 million Freedom Fitness Center opened in the north housing area.

December 29, 2005: The Chief of Naval Operations disestablished Naval Security Group (NAVSECGRU) Command, renamed and realigned all subordinate commands and detachments as part of the integration of NAVSECGRU functions into Naval Network Warfare Command (NAVNETWARCOM). At Misawa the U.S. Naval Security Group Activity (NSGA) Misawa became the U.S. Navy Information Operations Command (NIOC) Misawa. The NSGA Misawa was established in 1971 and was the longest continuous U.S. unit at Misawa Air Base until the inactivation of NIOC in 2014.