



This Month in 35th Fighter Wing and Misawa Air Base History January 2015



One of the strengths of Misawa Air Base and of the 35th Fighter wing is the positive bilateral relationship with both the local community and the nation of Japan, and the month of January features prominently in the history of the U.S.-Japan relationship at Misawa. Here are a few of the important anniversaries:

January 19, 1953: Japanese civilian flight activities began at Misawa Air Base as the Japan Civil Aeronautic Association opened for business on the Misawa flightline. For many years, Misawa Air Base was the only air field in mainland Japan that hosted both military and civilian flight operations. Today, the Misawa Airport features regular commercial flights to Tokyo, Osaka-Kyoto and Sapporo.

January 11, 1966: A major fire erupted in the kitchen of a Misawa City store 200 yards from the Misawa Air Base front gate. Fanned by high winds, the fire became an inferno that quickly swept over 17 acres, destroyed 434 buildings, and displaced approximately 5,000 individuals in seven hours. Over 2,000 U.S. and 350 Japan Air Self-Defense Force personnel responded to assist the Misawa City fire department. *Pacific Stars and Stripes* later reported that “every able-bodied Airman ... had joined Japanese firefighters.” Remarkably, the fire left the air base untouched.

There were no civilian fatalities, and only two rescuers, Airman 1st Class Robert L. Cihak, Jr., 439th Combat Support Group, and Airman 2nd Class Richard A. Black, 356th Tactical Fighter

Squadron, suffered injuries. *The Misawa Wing Spread*, the official base newspaper, reported, “Airman Cihak inhaled fumes when an oil heater exploded in a house he was entering. He said he was going in to get someone out of an upstairs apartment.” The report continued, “Airman Black suffered a back injury when he was hit by a flying board.”

Col. Douglas I. Homes, Misawa Air Base Commander, told reporters that he was proud of the American response to the emergency and admired the effectiveness of Misawa City officials in responding to the aftermath of the tragedy.



Top: Misawa Airmen respond to a major fire in Misawa City on January 11, 1966.

Below: Fire destroys a Japanese bar just outside of the Misawa Air Base perimeter on January 11, 1966.

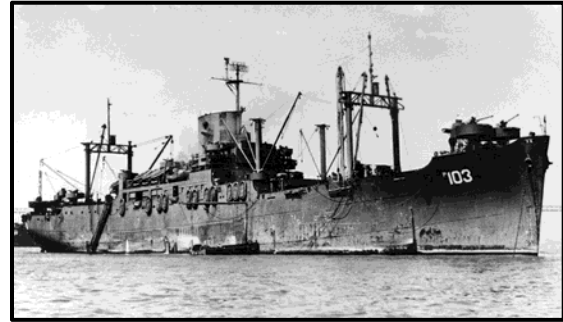


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Additional anniversaries for the month of January include:

January 12, 1942: The 35th Fighter Group boarded the USS President Polk en route to Australia, entering World War II as one of two fighter groups charged with halting the Japanese advance in the Pacific.



Above: The USS President Polk transported the 35th Fighter Group from California to Australia in January 1942. Photo late 1945.

January 20, 1950: The 35th Fighter Wing is redesignated the 35th Fighter-Interceptor Wing while stationed at Johnson Air Base, Japan.

January 22, 1953: The Misawa Air Force Intelligence Office released reports of unidentified flying objects sighted by Misawa pilots on December 29 and January 9. Pilots described the objects as “round, like a ferris wheel, emitting flashes of light for a period of two to three



seconds The color of the lights changed from red to white to green; each color remaining for two to three seconds and then a new series of flashes would begin.” Col. Donald J.M. Blakeslee, commander of the 27th Fighter-Escort Wing, was the first pilot to intercept the December UFO; Lt. Melvin E. Conine and Lt. Walter D. Kowley intercepted the January UFO in an F-94 all-weather night-fighter.

January 19, 1957: Misawa Air Base opened its new \$60,000 indoor swimming pool as Col. Elbert Helton, 49th Fighter Bomber Wing and Misawa Air Base Commander, presided over the ribbon-cutting. This was the first indoor pool facility in Far East Air Forces.

January 2, 1985: Col. Michael E. Ryan, 432d Tactical Fighter Wing Commander, and Capt. Chris Evans, Commander Naval Air Facility Misawa, signed a new inter-service support agreement transferring flightline operations from the Navy to the Air Force.



January 1, 1987: The 14th Tactical Fighter Squadron is activated at Misawa Air Base, assigned to the 432d Tactical Fighter Wing. The 35th Fighter Wing replaced the 432d at Misawa Air Base on October 1, 1994.