

Summary of the 2024 ANNIVERSARIES AND BIRTHDAYS OF NOTE Document

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Rather than a regular installment of Air and Space this Week, I am offering instead a summary of useful dates in 2024 on/around which education/outreach programming might be conducted. “Round Number” means anniversaries ending with a “5” or a “0,” numbers that tend to attract audience (and perhaps media) attention. A summary of those dates, broken down by topic, is below. The same information is on the Archive: Other Stuff page of the Air and Space this Week website (<https://www.airandspacethisweek.com/otherstuff>) in a Word file called “2024 ANNIVERSARIES AND BIRTHDAYS OF NOTE,” organized chronologically. Many of the entries below have been the subject of an Item of the Week, linked to on entries in the archived version.

I hope you find this information useful! It’s an honor and a pleasure to work with the JPL Solar System Ambassadors Program in bringing it to your attention.

Best wishes to you and yours for a safe and successful 2024!

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Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum (retired)

2024 “Round Number” Dates with Aviation, Astronomy and/or Space Exploration Connections

Useful for Education/Outreach Programming Planning

See the [Archive: Other Stuff section](#) of the Air and Space this Week website for a Word file version of the material below, entitled “2024 ANNIVERSARIES AND BIRTHDAYS OF NOTE.” Many of these entries have been (one of) the subject(s) of an A+StW Item of the Week; see the archived Word document for links.

Remember for the April 8 Total Solar Eclipse

Einstein Was Right!

May 29 is the 105th anniversary of a total solar eclipse where data acquired by Arthur Eddington showed the starlight passing near the Sun was slightly deflected by solar gravity, as predicted by Einstein.

Other Astronomical Anniversaries

January 9: The 185th anniversary of Thomas Henderson determining the distance to Alpha Centauri accurately by geometric parallax.

Oh! Those Meteors!

February 8: The 55th anniversary of the fall of the Allende meteorite in Mexico. A carbonaceous chondrite type, Allende provides information on the formation of the Solar System, and is likely the most extensively-studied of all meteorites.

November 30: Meteors hit buildings from time to time, but there is only one fully-documented case of a direct hit on a person, one Ann Hodges of Sylacauga, Alabama, 70 years ago.

Amazing Aviators

Captain Sully's Miracle on the Hudson

January 15: The 15th anniversary of the Hudson River forced landing of US Airways Flight 1549, after taking off from LaGuardia and striking a flock of birds. Good piloting decisions, superb piloting, and a rapid response by nearby boaters saved the crew and all passengers.

Sioux City Miracle

July 19: The 35th anniversary of the crash landing of UA Flight 232 at Sioux City, Iowa. The DC-10 suffered an explosion of its central (tail) engine, disabling the plane's entire hydraulic system. The pilots could only steer by jockeying the throttles of the two remaining engines; they had no operable control surfaces. The only asset they had was their skill, and the help of an additional pilot, a Training Check Airman deadheading on the flight. They made a crash landing at Sioux City, and 181 of the 293 aboard were killed. A tragedy, yes, but over 100 survived a situation that should have killed them all. Many have tried the scenario faced by UA 232 in the simulator since then, and not a single pilot has even made the field, let alone landed with survivability.

Something You Might Use in Programming with the Above

It doesn't have a round-number anniversary in 2024, but it might make a good addition if you do a program on excellent piloting. Air Canada Flight 143 was on a routine flight from Montreal to Edmonton on July 23, 1983. It was a brand new B757, and through an incredibly-stupid English-Metric error, it ran out of fuel midway. What saved the day was the fact that the pilot was an accomplished and experienced sailplane pilot, who had the guts and skill needed to side-slip the large aircraft close to the ground in order to land safely, something that no one had ever even thought about trying in a plane that large. The only runway available was at

Gimli, a decommissioned airbase converted into a drag strip, active that day. The B757 was repaired and returned to service, known as the “Gimli Glider” for the rest of its operational life. The Smithsonian Chanel [featured it](#) in Season 1, Episode 2, of its “Air Disaster” series.

Cool Co-incidences

Cook and Eddington

Captain **James Cook** was sent to Tahiti to make astronomical observations of a transit of Venus in order to determine the actual size of the Solar System as part of an international effort. The transit occurred **255 years ago on June 3**, almost exactly 150 years before Arthur Eddington, studying another thing-in-front-of-another-thing proved Einstein right by making detailed measurements of the deflection of starlight passing near the Sun during a total solar eclipse on **May 29**. Link the two events together for an interesting program.

Darwin and Lincoln

Evolutionary Biologist **Charles Darwin** and **President Abraham Lincoln** were **born on the very same day**: February 12, 1809. The 165th anniversary of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* is on November 24. Happy 215th birthday to both!

Chris and Deke at 100

Famed NASA Flight Director, **Chris Kraft**, and Astronaut/Manager **Deke Slayton**, have **100th birthdays** only one day apart in 2004: Kraft on 2/28 and Slayton on 3/1. What a great time to spotlight both, and (their role in) the early USA Manned Space Program!

Lady Be Good and Rod Serling

A play entitled *Lady Be Good* opened on Broadway, 100 years ago on **December 1**. Its music was by George Gershwin, and it starred Fred and Estelle Astair. *Twilight Zone*’s Rod Serling would have been 100 on **December 25**. The connection? The play was remade into a movie, with Ann Sothorn, in 1941. A B-24 crew based in Benghazi in 1943 named their bomber after the movie, but were lost tragically on their first mission. Their bomber was found a decade later, but the crew... The story of the *Lady Be Good* inspired a CBS made-for-TV movie (*Sole Survivor*) and a *Twilight Zone* episode (*King Nine Will Not Return*). This is an interesting story, and has the additional “100” link because Serling would have been 100 on December 25. See [here](#).

Alignment with Smithsonian Heritage Months

The Smithsonian Institution recognizes a series of Heritage Months during the year, each celebrating the accomplishments of a specific subset of the American experience. Aviation, Astronomy, and Space Exploration anniversary events occurring in those months in 2024 could be especially useful in program planning.

February: Black History Month

Several anniversary events in 2024 related to civil rights, but none of them occur in January. You should, however, be aware that 2024 has anniversaries that will attract public/media attention, including:

May 11: The 75th anniversary of the acceptance of the Air Force's desegregation plan, required by President Truman.

July 2: The 60th anniversary of the signing of the Civil Rights Act by President Johnson.

July 6: The 80th anniversary of military charges being filed against 2Lt Jackie Robinson, for not going to the back of the bus. He was exonerated. Then he played some baseball.

March: Women's History Month

March 19: One event is made-to-order for aviation-related programming: the round-the-world flight of Geraldine Mock, in her Cessna 180, the *Spirit of Columbus*, which departed for the journey on this date, 60 years ago. Other women-related (not in March) anniversaries include:

February 10: The 30th anniversary of [Jean Flynn](#) completing flight training to become the USA's first female combat pilot.

April 9: Would have been the 75th birthday of astronaut Judith Resnik, lost on the *Challenger*.

July 23: The 25th anniversary of Eileen Collins becoming the first female Space Shuttle Commander, on STS-93.

April: Arab-American History Month; May: Jewish-American History Month; June: Pride Month; Hispanic Heritage Month (9/15-10/15); and Native American Heritage Month

No connections in A+StW database.

Military Appreciation Months (May and November)

Many 80th anniversaries of military aviation events take place in 2024, since it is 80 years after 1944, a pivotal year in WWII. The ones in the A+StW database in May and November are highlighted.

February 20: The start of the "Big Week" bombing campaign in the ETO, a prelude to D-day. This was also the day SSgt Archibald Mathis' bravery would earn a posthumous Medal of Honor.

April 25: The first use of a helicopter (a YR-4 Hoverfly) to evacuate wounded troops.

May 1: The actions of Sgt. Maynard Smith, B-17 gunner, would earn him a Medal of Honor.

May 1: A floatplane off of battleship *North Carolina* facilitated the rescue of 22 airmen by the submarine *Tang* during the Operation Hailstone attack on Truk.

June 6: D-Day! No doubt that the media will cover its 80th. Over 12,000 aerial combat sorties were flown this day in support of the Normandy invasion.

June 19: The lopsided Battle of the Philippine Sea, aka the "Great Marianas Turkey Shoot"

October 25: Culmination of the Battle of Leyte Gulf

December 17: 40th and final aerial combat victory, making P-38 pilot Richard I. Bong the top-scoring US pilot in WWII. He was removed from combat but died during flight test on 8/6/45.

Other military anniversaries in 2024 include:

April 1: The 70th anniversary of President Eisenhower signing the legislation that established the U.S. Air Force Academy.

May 12: The USSR re-opened roads to Berlin, due to the success of the Berlin Airlift.

August 2: The 115th anniversary of the first aircraft purchase by the U.S. Army

October 5: The 110th anniversary of the first aerial combat victory.

October 17: The 50th of the first flight of the prototype of the Blackhawk helicopter.

December 19: The 35th anniversary of the first combat flight of the F-117 Nighthawk.

December 22: The 60th anniversary of the first flight of the SR-71 Blackbird prototype.

December 23: The 50th anniversary of the first test flight of the B-1A bomber.

Alignment with Specific NASA Programs/Missions

A number of key NASA mission events have round-number anniversaries in 2024, including the following:

January 3: The 20th anniversary of the landing of the *Spirit* rover on Mars' Gusev Crater. Its twin, *Opportunity*, would safely land on January 25, in Meridiani Planum. If your car's 50K-mile warranty worked as well as they did, you'd drive 2 million miles with need for any repair, or any fuel!

February 5: The 50th anniversary of *Mariner 10* becoming the first spacecraft to use a gravity assist from a planetary fly-by to go on to a different target, in this case flying by Venus to get to Mercury.

February 7: The 25th anniversary of the launch of the *Stardust* spacecraft, which successfully collected material from the tail of Comet Wild 2 and returned it to Earth.

February 8: The 50th anniversary of the third and final *Skylab* crew returning to Earth, after 84 days in orbit. *Skylab* would re-enter Earth's atmosphere and crash harmlessly on July 11.

March 2: The 45th anniversary of the "Great Planetary Called Shot." Scientists Peale, Cassen, and Reynolds' boldly predicted in *Science* that Jupiter's moon, Io, would have active volcanoes. A mere three days later, the first (of many) successful planetary fly-bys by the Voyager spacecraft (Jupiter) occurred, returning images of the plumes of large Io volcanoes! *Voyager 2* would make the final planetary fly-by in the Voyager program, and only one of Neptune to date, 35 years ago on August 25. Quite the decade!

March 7: The 15th anniversary of the launch of *Kepler*, the exo-planet finding spacecraft.

April 9: The 65th of the official announcement for America's first seven Astronauts.

May 18: The 55th anniversary of the launch of *Apollo 10*, the Moon landing “dress rehearsal.”

June 18: The 15th of the launch of the highly-successful *Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO)* and the *Lunar Crater Observation and Sensing Satellite (LCROSS)*.

July 1: The 20th anniversary of the *Cassini* spacecraft entering orbit around Saturn.

July 16: The 30th of the impact of fragments of Comet Shoemaker-Levy on Jupiter.

July 16: The 55th of the launch of *Apollo 11*, the first Moon landing.

August 3: The 20th anniversary of the launch of the highly-successful *MErcury Surface, Supace ENvironment, GEochemistry, and Ranging (MESSENGER) spacecraft to orbit Mercury.*

August 19: The 60th anniversary of the launch of *Syncom 3*, the first geostationary satellite.

August 25: The 35th anniversary of the fly-by of Neptune by *Voyager 2*.

September 1: The 45th anniversary of the first fly-by of Saturn, by *Pioneer 11*.

October 18: The 35th of the launch of the *Galileo* Jupiter probe from Space Shuttle *Atlantis*.

November 19: The 55th of the successful landing on the Moon by *Apollo 12*.

November 28: The 60th of the launch of *Mariner 4*, the important Mars fly-by mission.

Other Aviation Events

January 10: The 70th anniversary of the crash of a DeHavilland Comet airliner. The cause was not known right away, but careful crash analysis determined the cause to be metal fatigue. This underscored the importance of competent accident investigations for the future. BTW: The crash that killed Knute Rockne on March 31, 1931 was also due to material fatigue.

February 3: The 65th anniversary of “The Day the Music Died.” Buddy Holly, the Big Bopper Richardson, and Richie Valens died in a plane crash.

February 26: The 75th anniversary of the start of the first non-stop around-the-world flight, in a B-50A Superfortress. The trip took 94 hours and required four mid-air refuelings.

July 15: The 70th anniversary of the first flight by the Boeing 367-80 jetliner, the precursor to the highly-successful Boeing 707.

July 25: The 115th anniversary of the first flight across the English Channel, by Louis Bleriot.

August 23: The 70th anniversary of the first test flight of the YC-130 cargo plane. The C-130 Hercules is still in service today!

September 28: The 100th anniversary of the completion of the first round-the-world flight, by the Douglass World Cruisers.

Current Events of the Time

February 9: The 60th anniversary of the first appearance by the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan Show. Over 73 million people saw the game-changing broadcast. Yeah, yeah, yeah!

June 29: The 65th anniversary of the ratification of the Antarctic Treaty, a rare act of international cooperation.

August 15: The 55th anniversary of the Woodstock Music and Art Festival.

November 24: The 165th anniversary of the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*.

Other Birthdays

January 6: Jedidiah Smith would have been 225.

January 15: Martin Luther King Jr. would have been 95.

March 9: First Person in Space (Orbit), Yuri Gagarin, would have been 90.

March 24: John Wesley Powell would have been 190.

April 22: Physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer would have been 120.

April 25: Inventor of the Radio, Guglielmo Marconi, would have been 150. This could attract media coverage, and allow for a "how far we've come" event/piece on communications tactics since, especially those tested by NASA.

July 20: Everest-climber Edmund Hillary would have been 105. **NOTE: *Apollo 11* landed on Hillary's 50th birthday.**

September 7: Hawai'i Senator Daniel Inouye would have been 100. This is a good opportunity for NASM to conduct a program around astronomy on Hawai'i, since a solar telescope at Haleakala on Maui is named for him; he also [played a pivotal role](#) in the establishment of the neighboring Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian.

November 9: Scientist and Author Carl Sagan would have been 90.

November 20: Astronomer Edwin Hubble would have been 135. On December 30, 1924, **one-hundred years ago**, he showed that the Andromeda "Nebula" was a separate "island universe" unrelated to the Milky Way.