At Moody AFB, Ga., the next generation of pilots flies with a next generation trainer.

Photography by Greg L. Davis

Texans Built for Two

A pair of T-6A Texan II trainers from Moody's 3rd Flying Training Squadron fly over southern Georgia.

This past November, the first class of student pilots to train exclusively on the T-6A Texan II began flying at Moody AFB, Ga. The students, who are undergoing Joint Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training, use USAF's newest trainer to learn the flying skills basic to all military pilots.

At Moody, the 479th Flying Training Group—which was activated at the base in July 2000—conducts training through three operational units: the 49th and 435th Flying Training Squadrons, both using versions of the AT-38 trainer, and the 3rd FTS, operating the T-6As shown here.

Photos by Greg L. Davis

DOD began the drive for a new USAF and Navy trainer in the 1980s. Raytheon won the contract for the aircraft element of the Joint Primary Aircraft Training System in 1996. JPATS also encompasses simulators, training devices, and computer management systems.

The T-6A is to replace USAF's T-37 and the Navy's T-34C over the next eight to 10 years. The first production T-6A flew in July 1998. Air Education and Training Command at Randolph AFB, Tex., took delivery of the first operational version about two years later.

The new trainer is a single-engine turboprop with stepped-tandem seating (as shown at right) instead of side-by-side seating. The instructor sits in back, on a seat slightly raised to improve visibility. The aircraft has features designed for ease of maintenance, such as large, hinged access doors on the sides of the fuselage, giving maintainers easy access to avionics and other equipment.

Photos by Greg L. Davis

The Texan II was named after one of the most widely used aircraft, the North American AT-6 Texan. The original T-6 first flew in 1935 and was flown by nearly every Army Air Forces pilot who trained during World War II. At least a dozen allied nations also flew the trainer.

Today's Texan II has a maximum speed of 368 mph, with a ceiling of 35,000 feet. Its single engine delivers 1,100 horsepower. The aircraft's thrust-to-weight ratio enables it to make an initial climb at 3,300 feet per minute. It is fully aerobatic. Unlike the T-37, a student can recover from a spin simply by reducing power and releasing the stick—the T-6A does the rest.

At Moody, the 3rd FTS has taken precautions to ensure safe flightline operations around the T-6A's four-blade aluminum propeller. Ground crews painted large red arcs on the tarmac to mark each aircraft's parking space. This reminds everyone to keep clear of the prop, which has a diameter of 97 inches.

Photos by Greg L. Davis

The Texan II's wide field of view benefits the student and instructor, especially when it comes to visual approaches and learning formation flying. The canopy, as well as the wing and tail assembly leading edges, windscreen, and engine inlet, were designed to withstand bird-strikes. In an emergency egress situation, a pilot can pull a firing handle to activate a Martin–Baker ejection seat. The canopy fracturing system automatically severs the transparencies from the canopy to provide a clear path for the seats.

The 3rd FTS was activated at Moody in April 2001, and this first class of Texan II students began training six months later. The 15 students will graduate from their six-month course next month.

About 250 students will train at Moody each year, with classes starting every three weeks. The students undertake hours of academics and practice on simulators before getting into the cockpit.

State-of-the-art instrumentation includes liquid crystal displays resistant to glare from sunlight. Because the cockpit is fully pressurized with an anti–G system, training can take place at higher, less-congested altitudes.

Photos by Greg L. Davis

The trainer's tricycle-type landing gear is down and locked as the T-6A above makes its final approach to Moody.

Below, T-6As flying in a "finger four" formation make a right-hand turn together. Tight formation flying enhances situational awareness as well as attention to the basic stick-and-rudder skills.

USAF is slated to receive about 400 T-6A Texan IIs. Laughlin AFB, Tex., is next on the list, followed by the other Air Force JSUPT bases: Columbus AFB, Miss., Randolph, Sheppard AFB, Tex., and Vance AFB, Okla. For the Navy, Texans will be assigned to NAS Corpus Christi, Tex., and NASs Pensacola and Whiting, Fla.

After graduation from primary training, USAF pilots go on to training for the bomber–fighter, airlift–tanker, or helicopter track. Whatever their next step, pilots from Moody's JSUPT Class 02-01 will always have the distinction of being the first trained in the Texan II. ■