

# Building the Pilot Force

Photography by Jim Haseltine

Randolph's 12th Flying Training Wing keeps the Air Force stocked with capable pilots.





*A trio of T-6 Texan IIs from the 559th Flying Training Squadron practice formation flying during a mission from JBSA-Randolph, Tex. The single-engine prop T-6 supplanted the twin-jet T-37 Tweet in Air Force training squadrons over the last 12 years.*

**J**BSA-Randolph, Tex., serves as home to both Air Education and Training Command and the 12th Flying Training Wing. The unit provides basic and advanced pilot training, along with combat systems officer training. The Randolph flight line hosts three types of trainers: the Raytheon T-6A Texan II that all student pilots start out with; the T-1 Jayhawk, flown by students headed for tankers and transports; and the Northrop T-38C, for pilots headed to fighters and bombers. The T-6A joined the fleet in the early 2000s, the product of the joint primary aircraft training system (JPATS) program with the Navy, which also uses it to train pilots and backseaters. The Jayhawk was introduced in the early 1990s, when USAF began specialized undergraduate pilot training, and the venerable T-38 recently celebrated its 52nd anniversary with USAF.





**11** A T-38C takes off on a mission from Randolph. The C upgrade, completed a few years ago, updated the vintage "White Rocket" with cockpit amenities more similar to those modern fighter pilots enjoy, such as a head-up display and updated navigation, plus engine improvements. Distinguishing the A and B models from the C are the latter's straight air inlets. **12** A pair of T-6s of the 559th Flying Training Squadron in the break. **13** Randolph's iconic "Taj Mahal" tower overlooks the "Missing Man" monument dedicated to fliers lost in Southeast Asia. **14** Maj. David Braun (on the wing) and Lt. Col. Christopher Westin of the 99th FTS preflight a T-1. **15** (l-r) Lt. Col. Joseph Mirarchi, Lt. Col. Michael Simon, Maj. Thomas Young, and Capt. Christopher Williams head back for a debrief of their T-38 sortie. **16** A retired T-38A rests on a pedestal in one of Randolph's parks.



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111 The T-38s gave up their white paint for a more “operational” scheme, in keeping with their mission of combat preparation. Formation has always been a key skill for fighter pilots. Here three T-38s keep it tight. 121 A T-38C over Texas. Forward visibility for the instructor, in the elevated backseat, is excellent. 131 Maj. Cameron Williams and Capt. Matthew Roberson of the 560th FTS strap into their T-38. 141 A T-38C taxis out for a mission. 151 Lt. Col. Curtis Johnson preflights a T-6 under a sun shelter on the Randolph flight line. The shelters reduce wear and tear on the aircraft as well as on the airmen working on them in the sometimes brutal Texas heat.





*111 Roberson preflights his T-38. 121 Three 560th FTS jets fly formation. 131 Capt. Eric Reichert checks out a T-6 before a mission. Though some complained that going from the jet T-37 to the turboprop T-6 was a step backward, the T-6 in many ways outperforms its predecessor. 141 A T-38 taxis past T-1s of the 99th FTS at Randolph. 151 A T-6 banks during a mission. Dark blue areas on the aircraft are not just decorative, but they tend to be where soot and dirt accumulate, allowing the aircraft to look better between washings.*





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11| T-38s pull a formation right turn. Formation flying is crucial in fighters, not just to hold combat formations but also because fighters must routinely practice aerial refueling, requiring precise station-keeping relative to another aircraft. 12| Maj. Anthony Straw checks out the gear of a T-38 during a preflight. 13| The upgrade to the T-38C was called the Pacer Classic program. 14| Maj. Cameron Williams signals ground handlers to watch out as he gets ready to test the control surfaces. 15| A three-ship of T-38s awaits clearance to taxi. The T-38 has trained some 60,000 USAF pilots as well as thousands more from allied countries.



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111 The T-38 was developed in parallel with Northrop's export fighter, the F-5, and both served in USAF, Navy, and Marine Corps as "aggressor" adversary aircraft. 121 Though it has served brilliantly, the Air Force says the T-38 must soon be replaced, and planning has begun for a new trainer, the T-X. Here, Dominicio Delafuente and Javier Chavez prepare to reinstall a T-38's tail after engine service. 131 A T-6 of the 559th FTS touches down after a training flight. 141 Lt. Col. Eric Moraes, Maj. Cameron Williams, Lt. Col. Kristen Kent, and Roberson (l-r) walk back to the 560th FTS after a mission. ■