557th FLYING TRAINING SQUADRON

MISSION

The 557th FTS conducts more than 12,600 training and competition hours annually, focused on developing leaders of character among U.S. Air Force Academy cadets. It operates airmanship training courses designed to introduce cadets to powered flight and provides them with an opportunity to solo in a T-53 Kadet 2, a light, general aviation aircraft.

Cadets participate in the squadron's Airmanship 419 and 420 courses. The 557th FTS also operates the cadet Flying Team, which competes nationally against other universities.

LINEAGE

557th Bombardment Squadron (Medium) constituted, 25 Nov 1942
Activated, 1 Dec 1942
Redesignated 557th Bombardment Squadron, Medium, 9 Oct 1944
Inactivated, 12 Nov 1945

557t Tactical Fighter Squadron constituted, and activated, 17 Apr 1962
Organized, 25 Apr 1962
Inactivated, 31 Mar 1970
Redesignated 557th Flying Training Squadron, 18 Jun 1974
Activated, 31 Jul 1974

557th Bombardment Squadron, Medium and 557th Flying Training Squadron consolidated, 19 Sep 1985. Consolidated organization designated 557th Flying Training Squadron

STATIONS
MacDill Field, FL, 1 Dec 1942
Lakeland AAFld, FL, 12 Apr 1943
Godman Field, KY, 12 May–10 Jun 1943
Chipping Ongar, England, 1 Jul 1943
Stoney Cross, England, c. 21 Jul 1944
Maupertuis, France, c. 27 Aug 1944
Chateaudun, France, 18 Sep 1944
Clastres, France, 2 Nov 1944
Beek, Holland, 2 May 1945
Rosieres-en-Santerre, France, 27 May–4 Nov 1945
Camp Kilmer, NJ, 11–12 Nov 1945
MacDill AFB, FL, 25 Apr 1962–Nov 1965
Cam Ranh Bay AB, South Vietnam, 1 Dec 1965–31 Mar 1970
USAF Academy, CO, 31 Jul 1974

ASSIGNMENTS
387th Bombardment Group, 1 Dec 1942–12 Nov 1945
Tactical Air Command, 17 Apr 1962
12th Tactical Fighter Wing, 25 Apr 1962
836th Air Division, 8 Nov 1965
12th Tactical Fighter Wing, 1 Dec 1965–31 Mar 1970
Air Training Command, 31 Jul 1974
United States Air Force Academy, 1 Oct 1982
12th Operations Group, 1 Jul 1993

WEAPON SYSTEMS
B–26, 1942–1945
B-26B
B-26G
B-26C
F–84, 1962–1964
F–4, 1964–1970
T–41, 1974
UV–18, 1979–1982
DA-20, 2002-2007
T-51, 1982
T-52, 2009
T-53A

COMMANDERS
None (not Manned), 1-15 Dec 1942
2Lt Clifford F. Bailey, 16 Dec 1942
LTC Charles R. Keller Jr., 16 Jan 1943

LTC Joe M. Whitfield, 12 Feb 1944
Cpt Sidney S. Pidgeon, 13 May 1945-unkn
None (not manned), 25 Apr 1962-unkn
LTC Leonard I. Wiehrdt, by Aug 1962
LTC Mark V. Wilson, by Dec 1963
Maj George F. Williams, by Jun 1964
LTC Mark V. Wilson, by 1 Oct 1964
LTC Allen J. Diefendorf, by 16 Oct 1964
Maj David G. Palmer, c. Oct 1966
LTC William E. Adams, 1 Nov 1966
LTC William G. Fuller, 18 Jun 1967
LTC Ernes Craigwell Jr., 18 Sep 1967
LTC Victor E. Bocquin, 23 Apr 1968
LTC James D. Smith, 10 Aug 1968
LTC Boyd E. Gibson, 8 Nov 1968
LTC Ira L. Kimes Jr., 26 Mar 1969
LTC George Aubry Jr., 3 Dec 1969-10 Mar 1970
None (not manned), 11-31 Mar 1970
LTC Howard D. Jumper, 31 Jul 1974
LTC James E. Wilhelm, 3 Jun 1977
LTC Richard F. Lord, 28 May 1980
LTC James L. Higham, 30 Mar 1981
LTC James D. Manning Jr., 9 Jul 1982
LTC Monroe S. Sams Jr., 19 Sep 1983
LTC Gary L. Scheimer, 13 May 1986
LTC Dennis R. Bell, by Jul 1989
LTC Irvin L. Cakerice, 14 Jun 1990
LTC James L. Thomas, 4 Jun 1993
LTC Vincent P. Wisniewski, 12 Apr 1995
LTC Paul M. Poronsky, 14 Jul 1998
LTC Robert A. Nissen, 13 Oct 2000
LTC Kathleen T. Dody, 5 May 2001
LTC Phillip J. Beaudoin, 10 Jan 2003
LTC Jeffrey A. Koch, by Jul 2005
LTC Chris F. Carper, 16 Jun 2006-unkn
LTC Jeffrey J. Bakken, Jun 2010
LTC A. J. Diefendorf

HONORS
Service Streamers
None

Campaign Streamers
World War II

Air Offensive, Europe
Normandy
Northern France
Rhineland
Ardennes-Alsace
Central Europe

Vietnam
Vietnam Defensive
Vietnam Air
Vietnam Air Offensive
Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase II
Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase III
Vietnam Air/Ground
Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase IV
TET 69/Counteroffensive
Vietnam Summer-Fall, 1969
Vietnam Winter-Spring, 1970

Armed Forces Expeditionary Forces
None

Decorations
Distinguished Unit Citation
Germany, 23 Dec 1944

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards with Combat "V" Device
1 Dec 1965–30 May 1966
1 Jun 1966–31 May 1967
1 Jun 1967–31 May 1968
1 Jun 1968–31 May 1969
1 Jun 1969–[10] Mar 1970

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards
1 Jan 1979–30 Apr 1980
30 Mar 1981–31 Oct 1982
1 Jan 1983–18 Dec 1984

Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm
[1 Dec] 1965–[10] Mar 1970

Decorations
Distinguished Unit Citation: Germany

23 Dec 1944

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards with Combat "V" Device
1 Dec 1965-30 May 1966
1 Jun 1966-31 May 1967
1 Jun 1967-31 May 1968
1 Jun 1968-31 May 1969
1 Jun 1969-[10] Mar 1970

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards
1 Jan 1979-30 Apr 1980
30 Mar 1981-31 Oct 1982
1 Jan 1983-18 Dec 1984
1 Jan 1987-31 Dec 1988
1 Jul 1991-30 Jun 1993
1 Jul 1993-30 Jun 1994
1 Sep 1994-31 Oct 1995
1 Nov 1995-30 Jun 1996
1 Jul 1996-30 Jun 1998
1 Jul 1998-30 Jun 2000
1 Jul 2005-30 Jun 2007
1 Jul 2007-30 Jun 2009

Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm
[1 Dec] 1965-[10] Mar 1970

EMBLEM

557th Bombardment Squadron emblem

On a Blue disc edged with a narrow Yellow border, a White horizontal vapor stream on which is a stylized aircraft in horizontal flight; overall on a Brown jesse detailed Black, a falcon, Gray with White head and neck, Yellow beak and claws, Gray talons, eyes, feathers and highlight detail Black. (Approved, 8 Sep 1975; replaced emblem approved, 19 Apr 1943)

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS
Combat in ETO, 31 Jul 1943–19 Apr 1945. Combat in Southeast Asia, 1 Dec 1965–10 Mar 1970.

On 1 October 1967, nearly a year prior to the arrival of T-41Cs at the Academy, the Air Force activated the 3253rd Pilot Training Squadron to provide the instruction for cadets. When the program began at USAFA, the 3253rd had 45 operational T-41Cs. Initially, the Pilot Indoctrination Program suffered setbacks not uncommon when significant changes occur in a program. During the first year, only 223 cadets were able to complete PIP. After the first months, the program gained full steam, allowing over 700 cadets to go through PIP by 1972. Each cadet received 36.5 hours of flying training, with 30 additional hours of academic training. The superintendent, Lt Gen Albert P. Clark, allowed PIP to be a flight screening program for the Academy. Cadets who qualified in the T-41C went on to different AETC bases after graduation to learn to fly Cessna T-37s and Northrop T-38s in the undergraduate pilot training (UPT) program.

In 1974, as part of an Air Force program to renumber its units, the 3253rd was inactivated; in its stead, the 557th Flying Training Squadron (FTS) was activated on 31 July 1974 and assumed control over PIP. The 557th designation was chosen to carry on its illustrious legacy from World War II. The original squadron had been activated on 1 December 1942 as the 557th Bombardment Squadron, flew Martin B-26's in the European theater of operations, and led the air attack on Utah beach on D-Day. During the Vietnam War, the squadron was reactivated as the 557th Tactical Fighter Squadron (TFS) and flew the F-84F Thunderchief before upgrading to the F-4C Phantom II. The 557 TFS was inactivated on 31 March 1970 and remained inactive until ATC reactivated it to conduct flying training at the Academy.

Like the 3253rd, the 557th remained at the United States Air Force Academy as a tenant unit reporting directly to HQ ATC. The new 557 FTS's mission had three major facets. The first was to motivate all physically qualified cadets toward a rated career in the Air Force. The second was to identify those physically qualified cadets who possessed the basic aptitude to be Air Force pilots. The final goal was to minimize attrition of the United States Air Force Academy graduates in UPT.

Control of the 557th Flying Training Squadron remained under ATC from 1974 to 1982. During this time, superintendents at the Academy increasingly pushed for control of the airmanship programs. The Academy found a friendly ear in General Thomas M. Ryan Jr., ATC commander, who wrote in 1982 that shifting command of the programs to USAFA would "simplify command and control by consolidating all Academy airfield activities – soaring, parachuting, aero club, and T-41 – under a single manager." Furthermore, the expansion of the airfield at the Academy was completed in 1974, allowing all flying operations to move from Peterson Field to the Academy. On 1 October 1982, the United States Air Force Academy gained control of the powered flight programs (along with soaring and parachuting). At the same time, the flight

screening program would remain. General Ryan confirmed that “the Academy will, of course, continue to provide the UPT screening function.”

The Air Force Academy continued to control all of the flight programs throughout the remainder of the 1980s and the 1990s. In 1989, three Broad Area Review (BAR) meetings, with representatives from across the Air Force, met to discuss all aspects of training in the flying community. The BAR determined that while PIP was a good program, flying limitations of the Academy’s aircraft hindered what could be accomplished. Members of the BAR agreed that increasing the number of flight hours in the T-41C would provide only a marginal benefit. At this time, ATC was promoting the new enhanced flight screening (EFS) program, which the command believed would lower attrition rates in undergraduate pilot training. To adopt such a program, the Air Force needed a better aerobatic plane than the T-41C, and AETC began looking for a replacement.

After much searching, on 29 April 1992 the Air Force decided that Slingsby Aviation Limited of Great Britain and Northup Worldwide Aircraft Services, Inc., of Oklahoma would receive the contract to provide the needed replacement aircraft. The plane chosen was the Slingsby Firefly, whose military designation was the T-3A. It was a single-engine, piston-driven plane with side-by-side seating and dual-stick controls. Furthermore, the T-3A was commercially built and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) had certified it for aerobatics. The $28 million contract included 56 aircraft for the Academy. Although the first planes would arrive in June 1993, cadets wouldn’t begin training until January 1994. On 1 July 1993, the 557th returned to ATC’s control coinciding with the arrival of the new T-3A, which would be used with the EFS programs at the Academy and also at Hondo, Texas.

The new aircraft required testing prior to being allowed to fly at the Academy. During the five-month testing phase, conducted by 3d Flying Training Squadron at Hondo, a series of 12 engine failures occurred. After final modifications, the planes were considered adequate for training purposes. the new T-3A continued to have persistent problems with engine failures, and more modifications were made to the plane. At the beginning phase of EFS at the Academy, the engine failures fortunately occurred while the planes were on the ground.

1995 22 February, Slingsby T-3A Firefly, *93-0555*, *N3092K*, 'RA', of the 557th FTS, crashes when it fails to recover from a spin, killing instructor Capt. Dan Fischer, 29, and Cadet Mark Dostal, 20, of Moraga, California. Trainer made 17 tight spirals as it dropped one mile in 30 seconds before impacting 50 miles E of the Air Force Academy in Colorado. This was the first of three Firefly fatal accidents before the type was withdrawn from operation and the surviving airframes scrapped.

AETC immediately changed the T-3A program at the Academy to accommodate the elevation differences between Texas and Colorado. New air conditioners were installed, but wing bonding problems and engine failures persisted. Nothing seemed to help. By November 1995, at the two locations AETC flew T-3As, 34 engine failures occurred with 32 on the ground and two in the air. The contractor delivered the last T-3A on 9 January 1996 and with it came follow-

on testing. By October 1996, the follow-on test and evaluation (FOT&E) determined that the T-3A was completing its mission of reducing the attrition rates in UPT, but the aircraft failed to meet three of the five measured criteria for maintenance. This meant that the aircraft were considered highly unlikely to meet the mandated 95 percent fully mission capable rate or the 98.5 percent mission completion success probability rate. While these rates were optimistic, the plane was not performing as well as expected.

Fully aware of the maintenance issues, the program continued. On 30 September 1996, a second T-3A crashed at the Academy after the engine stalled. The IP was unable to recover the aircraft, and both the IP and the student died in the crash. Again, ATC made changes to the program, including having Oklahoma City Air Logistics Center's management come in to help with the maintenance problems. The problems were again thought to have been fixed; but on 26 June 1997, the Academy suffered its third fatal T-3A crash, which killed both the instructor and the cadet. On 25 July 1997, ATC commander, General Lloyd W. Newton, terminated all T-3A training in the EFS program.

General Newton's order to stop flying the T-3A caused a major switch in the flight screening process. The end of T-3A flying operations concluded the enhanced flight screening program. For about a year and a half, there were no light plane flying programs at the Academy. Then, in October 1998 the Academy initiated an interim program known as Introductory Flight Training (IFT). The IFT program mirrored the Flight Instruction Program that AFROTC had used for many years. Small numbers of cadets initially flew Cessna 172s at the Academy.

Cadets at first flew 40 hours, but later this increased to 50 hours, which allowed cadets to earn a Private Pilot's License (PPL). The next major overhaul for the 557th was in October 2000, when the squadron once again realigned from AETC to the Academy. Control of the squadron fell under the 34th Operations Group, 34th Training Wing. At this point, the IFT program was structured so that 300 cadets received their instruction at the Academy airfield. Because of insufficient capacity at the Academy airfield, another 200 went to local airfields to get their PPL. In 2002 the IFT program was contracted out to Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. While the program was "meeting and exceeding expectations," according to Lt Gen John R. Dallager, Academy Superintendent, the program did not necessarily build the needed skills for Specialized UPT, AETC's new multitrack pilot training program, such as preflight stand-ups and bold-faced procedures. Changes would have to be made to IFT, but they would not take effect until AETC once again took over the 557th in 2004. At that time, AETC also gained the Academy's soaring and parachute programs, which also dated back to the Academy's early years.

After cancellation of the EFS program in 1997, the stopgap IFT program allowed cadets to learn the basic operations of a single-engine aircraft, but it failed to adequately prepare cadets for SUPT. Instruction was not standardized, and weather and aircraft maintenance problems prevented many cadets from completing the program in the allotted time.

In 2003, Lt Gen John R. Dallager, the Academy superintendent, officially addressed the problems with the IFT program. In a letter to General John P. Jumper, the Air Force Chief of Staff, he stated that: As you know, Initial Flight Training has returned to the Academy. This program, contracted to Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and under close Air Force supervision, is meeting and exceeding expectations and provides cadets with a private pilot certificate. we cannot provide all Academy pilot candidates with this training and are forced to train some off base. In addition, the Private Pilot's Certification (PPC) does not provide the skill set we desire for SUPT.

General Dallager proposed replacing IFT with a flight screening program. The proposed Academy Flight Screening (AFS) program would reduce IFT's required 50 hours to a more manageable 25-hour curriculum. Under IFT, many students were unable to complete the required 50 hours in one semester, creating a backlog of students in the program. All of the flight training would be conducted from the Academy's airfield and no longer dispersed to the surrounding civilian airfields. The average student would solo at 15 hours and get a final check ride at 25 hours. General Dallager pointed out also that the new plan would save the Air Force $1.2 million annually. Yet, while these were enticing incentives, the adoption of the AFS program was pushed back.

On 27 April 2004, Brig Gen Teresa Peterson, Deputy Chief of Staff for Air and Space Operations, recommended the transfer of flight operations at the Academy from the 34th Operations Group to AETC. The leadership at the Academy initially balked at the thought of giving up control of the 557th, which they had only recently gained from AETC.

Nevertheless, General T. Michael Moseley, Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force, signed the proposal, and a month later AETC sent a site survey team to the Academy to determine the best way to move flight operations to the command. The proposal for the transfer did not pass uncontested. In May 2004, a memorandum regarding the financial prospects of the endeavor was passed up the chain of command.

Headquarters AETC's Directorate of Operations cautioned that the transfer could cost $2 to $3 million annually that would have to be sourced from other programs within AETC. Despite these financial reservations, the site survey team determined that "for the past year aircraft, maintenance, and regulatory problems have reduced the 34 Operations Group's ability to accomplish its mission." The team then concluded that "moving the 34 Operations Group to AETC would enable USAFA to focus exclusively on military training and officership issues and enable AETC to apply flying training expertise to the Academy environment."

At this point, AETC established a Site Activation Task Force (SATAF) to facilitate the transfer of the Academy's flying programs to AETC. One of the major areas of concern the SATAF addressed was the soaring program's degraded landing facilities. Academy personnel referred to the large grassy area west of the runways as the Sailplane Landing Area (SPLA). During the 30 years of soaring operations at the Academy, the SPLA was used as the primary landing location for the glider fleet, allowing for up to 300 glider sorties a day.

For the past three years, a drought had withered the grass in the majority of the SPLA. The surviving grass grew in clumps that damaged the new TG-10 series glider tails on landing. The landing impact on the gliders forced operations to move primarily to the paved runway, reducing sorties to a maximum of 100 sorties a day.

Another pertinent issue the SATAF raised was manpower. The SATAF noted "the biggest concern is sourcing the HQ AETC and Nineteenth Air Force oversight as well as remaining 34 OG manpower requirements." Under the Academy's control, the airmanship programs relied heavily on attached rated USAFA personnel to fill rated instructor slots. The Academy conducted a manpower study and determined that the airmanship program was at 60 percent of that required. The study recommended continuing to use attached personnel after the realignment to AETC, as well as adding additional permanent members at the airfield.

Nonetheless, the benefits of AETC control outweighed the command's fiscal concerns. Under AETC, the airmanship programs would be run by a seasoned organization where the primary mission for many years was training the future pilots of the Air Force. Beyond having expertise in flight training, AETC also had a well-oiled, formal process for acquiring the funds needed to run an air training program.

On 4 October 2004, AETC officially took control of flight operations at the Academy, activating the 306th Flying Training Group (FTG), which comprised the 557 FTS's IFT light plane programs, the 94 FTS's soaring programs, and the 98 FTS's jump curriculum. Ultimately, the transition allowed the Academy's leadership to deal with their fundamental purpose of training young men and women to become future officers in the United States Air Force.

After October 2004, with AETC firmly in control of the program, many needed changes came to the cadet flying programs. The insufficient manpower at the Academy forced the commanders of the airmanship programs to cut back flying days from six to five each week. Using a manpower and workload study the Academy conducted, AETC authorized an additional 65 positions to the 111 personnel who had already transitioned from the Academy to AETC, funding 51 of them in FY06. Such a dramatic increase in personnel allowed for a more stable program. The financial support of AETC was also very significant. AETC added $7 million to the FY04 budget for airfield and operational expenses and then increased the annual budget to $6.8 million in FY05.

Following the AETC transfer, the Academy was able to begin the transition from IFT to AFS. In November 2002, the Academy managed the contract with Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (ERAU) to conduct the IFT program, while AETC provided the funding. Six months prior to each semester, the 557 FTS commander submitted the expected number of cadets for IFT to Embry-Riddle. Embry-Riddle would then hire the required number of pilots to teach the cadets. Cadets could not always make it to the airfield due to schedule conflicts with military training, and by agreement the contracted pilots were paid whether or not they flew. The out of-pocket expenses to reimburse Embry-Riddle were fairly significant. AETC managed the

contract with EMAU after February 2005. In the adjusted contract, the Academy would pay for the unused hours when cadets could not make it to the airfield.

The new Academy Flight Screening program dramatically shifted the purposes and methods of powered flight training at the Academy. The temporary IFT program was less than ideal in many respects for providing SUPT the best candidates. In IFT, the primary purpose was to allow cadets to fly for 50 hours to earn their PPL. Although the bulk of the program was contracted to Embry-Riddle for training at the Academy, many cadets had to go off base to other airfields for training. Consequently, no uniform method of training existed for the cadets, especially preparing them for the rigors of SUPT. A major benefit to AFS was that it all training would be conducted at the Academy for USAFA cadets. The contracted IPs from Embry-Riddle still instructed cadets with the same Diamond DA20-C1 aircraft, but military oversight increased.

The AFS program brought a distinctly military-orientated approach to the powered flight training, which included pre-flight stand-ups, bold-faced memorizations, and a uniform method of instruction for the cadets that simulated the environment students experienced in SUPT. Cadets were given 25 hours in the trainer aircraft, of which 1.7 hours were solo. The reduced number of hours meant that cadets enrolled in the program would be able to fly all the required hours in one semester. The bottom line was to allow the Air Force to identify those cadets who would not make it in SUPT. The AFS program officially began at the Academy on 6 June 2005, hallmarking the latest evolution of the flying programs.

Air Force Lineage and Honors
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Sources

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The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.
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