

Hail and F



arewell

At Columbus AFB, Miss., the Tweet called it a career, leaving the mission to other trainers.

Photography by Greg L. Davis



Airmen of the 14th Flying Training Wing, Columbus AFB, Miss., fly their four types of training aircraft in a farewell formation. The venerable T-37 Tweet (second from bottom) was retired from Columbus in April after a 39-year career of training USAF and allied pilots there. The base retains the ability to train pilots in either the tanker/transport or fighter/bomber tracks, aboard (from top) the T-1A Jayhawk, T-38C Talon and T-6A Texan II (bottom).

AIR FORCE flying training once involved just two airplanes: the snub-nosed T-37 for initial, subsonic instruction, followed by the sleek T-38 for advanced and supersonic work. Today, pilot training is specialized, both to reduce costs and deliver pilots with more specific skills to waiting squadrons.

Student pilot instruction at Columbus is conducted by the 37th and 41st Flying Training Squadrons, now converted from the T-37 to the T-6A Texan II; the 48th FTS, flying the T-1A Jayhawk; and the 49th and 50th FTS, flying the T-38C.

[1] Capt. Matt Griffin, a 41st FTS instructor, offers critiques as a student performs a hard turn while maintaining formation.



[2] The T-6A Texan II is the Air Force's newest trainer. The tandem-seat turbo-prop, based on the Swiss Pilatus PC-9, presents student pilots with a modern cockpit and a bubble top offering excellent visibility. The instructor keeps an eye on the student from the back seat.

[3] A T-6A gleams in its patriotic red, white, and blue markings. Built by Raytheon, the Texan is maintained by contractors.

[4] One of two T-6s at Columbus wearing an experimental black and gray paint scheme. This particular bird bears markings for the commander of the 14th Operations Group.





[1] and [2] The 14th FW's types fly together. The last T-37 training hop at Columbus was flown March 31.

[3] Two Texans reveal the white-on-blue paint scheme, meant to enhance visibility while reducing maintenance.



[4] An AT-38C of the 49th awaits a sortie. Columbus absorbed Air Education and Training Command assets from Moody AFB, Ga., under base realignment, and picked up AT-38s like this one in the bargain.

[5] A four-ship of T-37s flies a last formation out of Columbus. The type will continue to serve at the Sheppard AFB, Tex., Euro-NATO program for a few more months. Thereafter, the Tweets will all go to the Davis-Monthan Air Force Base "boneyard" in Arizona. T-37s and variants are still flying with allied countries, and parts are still in demand.





[1] The T-37 tail #68-8068 flew the last T-37 sortie at Columbus. It was carefully chosen: One of the first T-37s delivered to the base, it arrived fresh from Cessna's Wichita, Kan., factory in 1969. Upon retirement, it had logged 10,531 sorties and 16,637.6 total flight hours.

[2] A T-37 and its successor, the T-6. Despite having one less engine than the Tweet, the Texan can fly faster and perform more aggressive aerobatics.

[3] A three-ship of T-37s holds a solid formation—one of the key skills military pilots must master. "Tweet" is a contraction of "Tweety Bird," an unofficial moniker bestowed early in the type's service life because of the T-37's distinctive engine whine.



[4] and **[5]** A Texan prepares to taxi, and at left, turns onto final approach.



[1] A T-6 in a banking dive.



[2] A Tweet and Texan fly formation. Although outclassed by the T-6 in most regards, the T-37 allowed engine-out training and side-by-side seating, giving instructors a close-up view of what their students were doing.

[3] 41st FTS members call themselves the "Flying Buzzsaws." Columbus aircraft wear the CB tailcode.



[4] An instructor and student in a T-37 clear for personnel before releasing brakes and taxiing.

[5] A sparkling T-6 in a sparkling sky. Once at altitude, pilots trade Columbus' haze and humidity for usually good flying weather.

The Texan was selected as the joint Air Force-Navy trainer in part because it offers jet aircraft-like performance at the cost of a turboprop. The joint acquisition allowed the use of common aircraft, parts, simulators, and training materials, saving significantly versus the cost to buy two different aircraft.

[1] Two Tweets practice formation flight. The view is from the instructor's seat. Although still serviceable, the T-37 traded out because it lacks modern navigational aids and displays, and because parts are getting harder to come by.

[2] The lineup of trainers. The T-1 gives pilots bound for "heavies" experience in a side-by-side arrangement with modern "glass cockpit" displays, similar to what they'll encounter in the operational fleet.



[3] A T-6 and a T-37 break away for the camera. The trial gray camouflage looks more "operational" and will save on paint, but doesn't offer the visibility so often useful when training novice aviators.

[4] A T-6 in a 90-degree turn. The Texan II is named after the North American T-6 Texan trainer of the World War II era. Like the modern trainer, it also served with the Navy, as the "SNJ." Many are still flying.





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[1] First Lt. Dan Flaherty walks toward a waiting crew bus after a T-6 sortie. He is an instructor with the 41st FTS.

[2] A T-6 retracts its gear after a touch-and-go at Columbus. The flying syllabus centers on basic skills such as takeoffs and landings, emergency procedures, traffic pattern procedures, and use of navigational aids. As students progress, they add aerobatics, cross-country trips, night flying, formation, and advanced navigation.



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[3] Two Tweets break away for a beauty shot. Some of the retired T-37s doubtless will become "gate guards" at flying bases throughout the South.

[4] Capt. Joseph Robert Howard of the 41st FTS scans for traffic while flying a T-6 sortie. The T-6s are expected to serve another 25 to 35 years. ■