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Air Force Ends T-3 Flying Program

The Air Force is permanently grounding its T-3A Firefly training airplanes, officials announced Oct. 9. The service's introductory flight training will now be handled by commercial flight schools—a move that will save \$16 million a year in operating costs, according to Air Force estimates.

The move increases the training time for incoming pilots from 40 to 50 hours, while requiring that they earn a private pilot's license before entering the Air Force's undergraduate pilot programs.

The Firefly—a powerful and agile British-made propeller airplane—had been used to screen pilot candidates for the rigors of jet training. But the airplane has been dogged by problems with engine stalling.

The Air Force Academy had suspended use of the Firefly in 1997 after three cadets and three instructors died in crashes over a three-year period.