

Randolph's 435th FTS sees mission expansion with AETC's IFF consolidation

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A year and a half after moving into Hangar 6 here from the trailers where they used to operate, the 435th Fighter Training Squadron is slated to expand further, making a big impact on Randolph Air Force Base and saving the Air Force millions in tax payer money.

According to a news release by Air Education and Training Command Public Affairs, due to a decreased demand for Air Force Introduction to Fighter Fundamentals graduates, the Air Force will combine operations, currently conducted at five separate bases, to three. While both Randolph and Columbus Air Force Base were originally considered for the consolidation, May 2 it was announced that Randolph has been chosen as the preferred location.

The move is projected to save the Air Force approximately \$55 million over the next eight years, the release stated.

IFF teaches the curriculum for training pipeline-level pilots, pilot instructors and foreign nationals, Lt. Col. David Drichta, 435th FTS commander, said. Pilots learn air-to-air engagements, such as how to attack other aircraft and avoid being attacked, and air-to-ground engagements, including how to perform air strikes.

"This training is very important," he said. "Here they train for what they will see while deployed."

Once plans are approved, the consolidation is projected to bring in 15 more T-38 Talons, 14 additional active-duty pilot instructors and 37 support positions to the 435th FTS, Colonel Drichta said. The changes will allow the 435th FTS to accommodate the additional 80 students who will be trained here every year.

"This change will allow us to gain back the efficiencies we lost in the Air Force's drawback of numbers," he said. "With the increase of manpower, everyone will be able to do so much more."

Although nothing will be finalized until after an environmental assessment is conducted in June and July, Colonel Drichta said, Randolph has been deemed the most desirable location, a decision based on both installations' capabilities to expand operations.

"They tested our air-space ability, capacity for more students, ramp and hangar space, cost, base support, whether or not we could add more bodies and our weather," he said. "We scored higher."

After the decision is official, new classes are scheduled to start in October, he said.

"This will be terrific for us when it is finalized," Colonel Drichta said. "We have the world's best mission."



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Lt. Col. David Drichta
435th Fighter Training Squadron commander

Maj. Bryan France (left), 435th Fighter Training Squadron instructor pilot, receives assistance from Juan Garcia, 12th Flying Training Wing maintenance directorate, as he straps into a T-38 Talon prior to take off on a training mission here Monday.



Photos by Rich McFadden

Clockwise from top left: Maj. Kyle Goldstein (right), 435th Fighter Training Squadron assistant director of operations, gives final clearance to fly a training mission to Maj. Ben Hollo (from left to right), Maj. Bryan France and Capt. John Stukavec, all from the 435th FTS.

Maj. Ben Hollo, 435th FTS IFF student, checks out life support equipment prior to a training mission here Monday.

Maj. Bryan France (left), 435th FTS instructor pilot, and Capt. John Stukavec, 435th FTS IFF student, perform a final check prior to take-off during a morning training flight here Monday.

Maj. Bryan France, 435th FTS instructor pilot, tests his oxygen mask as part of the routine equipment check prior to a training mission here Monday.