



**HQ AETC**  
**Randolph AFB, Texas**

## **THE AETC HISTORY AND MUSEUMS PROGRAM**

**Mission:** to inspire and inform Airmen to win any fight using our shared Air Force heritage and history to live the Core Values

**Vision:** Fortify resiliency in all airmen by providing history and heritage expertise and products

Welcome to the Air Education and Training Command History and Museums Program. For almost 75-years, AETC historians have captured the command's proud tradition of recruiting, training, and educating Airmen to deliver Airpower for America and its allies. While the command's mission has changed substantially over the years, the goal for AETC historians remains the same--enhancing training wherever and whenever possible through the use of our knowledge, heritage holdings and special collections and repositories. We are accountability agents for the Air Force and command, and work every day to inspire Airmen to achieve the latent greatness they possess. AETC is a unique command built on technical experience and education, and the AETC History and Museums Program is no exception. We are fortunate to have some of the recognized experts of certain programs and issues in our field offices and here on the headquarters staff.

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# **A Brief History of Air Education and Training Command**

## **Introduction**

Air Education and Training Command (AETC) predates the establishment of the Air Force. The War Department activated AETC as the Air Corps Flying Training Command on 23 Jan 1942, redesignated it as the Army Air Forces (AAF) Flying Training Command in Mar 1942, added technical training to its mission in 1943 and redesignated the command as Army Air Forces Training Command on 31 Jul 1943. By the end of World War II, AAF Training Command had produced about 200,000 pilots, 48,000 navigators and air crew, 1.9 million technical training graduates, and a staggering 2.8 million basic military training graduates. On 1 Jul 1946, AAF Training Command became Air Training Command (ATC). Air University merged with ATC on 1 Jul 1993, and the command took its present designation of Air Education and Training Command. "The First Command," AETC is responsible for recruiting, technical training, flying training, and the continuing education of each generation of Airmen. Inspired Airmen are ready to perform the mission anywhere, anytime thanks to the dedicated professionals of AETC.

## **Early Aviation Training and Education**

While AETC dates its origins to 1942, it should be noted that when the Air Force's initial predecessor, the Aeronautical Division of the Army Signal Corps, activated on 1 August 1907, training was an obligatory function of the nascent aviators. The initial cadre of two enlisted men, Corporal Eddie Ward and PFC Joseph Barrett began training in balloons almost immediately at the Leo Stevens Balloon Factory in New York City. Learning the fundamentals of balloon fabric and the manufacture of buoyant gasses, the two became the first technically trained American Airmen in history. When the United States accepted its first Wright Military Flyers two years later, training and education in aircraft and aircraft systems began a slow, steady march of progress that would lead to an independent Air Force within 40-years. The early efforts to fully establish an Air Force were hamstrung by severely limited resources and never-ending legal battles over patents and manufacturing in the United States. After a fitful start in Mexico during the Punitive Expedition of 1916, training, airmanship, and generalized technical education underwent an extreme metamorphosis during the great aviation expansion in World War I.

## **World War I**

After the United States entry into World War I in April, 1917, it had limited capabilities to deal with the dramatic expansion required for the huge conflict. The Army decided quickly to establish vast technical training courses under the auspices of civilian vocational schools, aircraft and engine factories, and the military flying fields as they became available. Many Americans trained in Canada and Europe with the Royal Flying Corps—some entering the conflict in before their nation declared war. Indeed the nation's first Ace, Frederick Libby followed such a course—training in motor transports in Canada before learning and surviving OJT under fire as an observer/gunner in F.E.2b aircraft in France. While definitely improvised at the start, the program began to accelerate after overcoming its fitful start. By November 1918, 28 schools in the U.S. had graduated 14,176 enlisted mechanics.

As the pipeline to Europe progressed, Americans also trained as mechanics in Great Britain. The British set up facilities to train as many as 15,000 students at a time and this allowed many Americans to receive deferred technical training in Britain; by war's end 22,059 American mechanics had been trained. The Army Air Service estimated that, of these, 11,000 mechanics later served in France (where a fraction also received end point training). The U.S. Army Air Service had 51,229 enlisted personnel in theater at peak strength but was still short of mechanics for the ever-more complex aircraft coming into service, such as the Salmson 2A-2, De Havilland DH-4, and Spad XIII.

Between the wars, budgets plummeted, and the difficulty that preceded the establishment of what would become Air Education and Training Command was a generalized rationing of resources which sometimes required training to be sacrificed for mission imperatives. The budget of the Army Air Corps languished at about 10-percent that of the rest of the Army. As a build-up was required for the next Great War, it was obvious that the paltry facilities and capabilities of the old Air Corps would have to be completely revamped and expanded at an unprecedented level.

## World War II

Military developments in the years leading up to America's entry into World War II confirmed the nation's need for a strong air arm. The increased demand for flying training caused by this expansion and American entry into World War II resulted in the creation of the Air Corps Flying Training Command on 23 January 1942. The first commander was Maj Gen Barton K. Yount. The organization was redesignated the Army Air Forces Flying Training Command on 15 March 1942; and on 1 July 1942, General Yount shifted the command's headquarters from Washington, D.C., to Fort Worth, Texas.

Despite ever-increasing production goals, the flying training and technical training commands were able to meet the nation's demand for trained pilots, aircrews, and technicians. Between 1 January 1939 and the end of the war, the training commands produced 192,676 pilots, 294,847 gunners, more than 45,000 bombardiers and over 1.3 million technicians.



While successful, this enormous expansion of the training mission highlighted some difficulties with the Army Air Force's training command structure. To remedy these, the flying training and technical training missions were merged on 31 July 1943, creating the Army Air Forces Training Command. Major General Yount, who was promoted to lieutenant general in September 1943, remained its commander. Its headquarters stayed in Fort Worth. At the peak of the war, his command consisted of 461,656 personnel and 438 training bases.

## **Post-War Drawdown**

Even before the war was even over, demand for new personnel began to decline. However, with Japan's surrender on 2 September 1945, demobilization and consolidation of training activities began in earnest. By the end of December 1945, the number of command personnel had dropped from 496,000 to 196,000, while the number of active training stations had decreased from 95 to 39. By mid-1946 that number was down to 13.

The post-war drawdown resulted in several organizational changes for the Army Air Forces Training Command. In February 1946, the command's headquarters moved from the leased facility in Texas to Barksdale Field, Louisiana. On 1 July 1946, Army Air Forces redesignated the command as Air Training Command (ATC). And on 18 September 1947, the National Defense Act established the United States Air Force as a separate service.

## **Berlin Airlift and the end of the 1940s**

This downward trend ended in June 1948 when the Soviet Union blocked ground access to the American, British and French sectors of Berlin. With air corridors being the only available supply routes into the city, the Berlin Airlift provided the newly independent U.S. Air Force with an extreme test of its air transport capabilities. This resulted in a temporary surge in both flying training and technical training. During this period, ATC first began using the T-33 "Shooting Star" jet aircraft in advanced single-engine pilot training. But when the Berlin Airlift ended in 1949, the Air Force was again hit with reductions that resulted in forced reorganizations and reduced training quotas. On 17 October 1949, Headquarters ATC moved to Scott AFB, Illinois

## **Korean War and the 1950s**

These reductions, budget cuts, and a lull in training production, resulted in a shortage of trained manpower when the Korean War erupted in June 1950, forcing ATC to quickly expand its training efforts to meet wartime demands. Shortly after the war began, the Air Staff transferred most of the combat aircrew training mission from the operational commands to ATC, placing an even heavier burden on the command. Air Force doubled pilot production to 7,200 per year and told ATC to ramp up technician production to 225,000 per year. In the first year of the war alone, the command increased its flying training bases from 17 to 29, and increased its population from 70,000 to 109,000. By the end of the war, its personnel strength reached over a quarter of a million. Although ATC added only one technical training base during the war, it surpassed the technician production goal.

With the end of the Korean War in July 1953, ATC again began to downsize. Over the next ten years, ATC reduced its bases from 43 to 16, and its personnel from 271,849 to 79,272, largely due to the return of the crew training mission to the operational commands. However, ATC gained another mission in 1954 when it took over responsibility for recruiting. In 1957,

Headquarters ATC moved from Scott to Randolph AFB, Texas. One year later, the command began experimenting with eliminating propeller-driven aircraft from primary pilot training. “Project All-Jet” was a success; and in 1959, ATC began replacing the T-28 “Trojan” propeller-driven trainer with the T-37 “Tweet” jet engine primary trainer.

### **Vietnam War and the 1960s**



**The T-38 “Talon” advanced trainer.**

While the 1960s were full of crisis and conflicts, ATC met the challenges head on. In the early 1960s, ATC converted from specialized to generalized undergraduate pilot training (UPT). Under generalized UPT, all pilots received the same training, regardless of what type of operational aircraft they would ultimately fly. In 1961, ATC acquired the T-38 “Talon” jet as the main advanced trainer aircraft for all student pilots. The first T-37/T-38 undergraduate pilot training course was held at Webb AFB, Texas, in February 1962. When America’s military involvement in Vietnam increased in 1965,

the requirement for Air Force training requirements increased as well. However, this time, unlike previous wars, ATC did not require drastic increases in the number of its bases or personnel. Then in 1969, ATC’s involvement in training and equipping the Vietnamese Air Force to become self-sufficient caused technical training production to surge by approximately 50 percent. This increase, however, was not to last long.

### **Post-Vietnam and the 1970s**

As popular support for the Vietnam War waned and American forces began to pull out of Southeast Asia, ATC’s training requirements gradually diminished. From almost 73,000 personnel assigned in 1972, the command shrank to slightly over 50,000 in 1977. President Richard M. Nixon ended the draft on 30 June 1973, converting the military to an all-volunteer force. During this same period, the percentage of recruits with a high school education declined to the lowest point in the history of the Air Force. These factors combined to make the 1970s yet another era of change for Air Training Command.

One change was in the command’s approach to technical



**Basic trainees at Lackland AFB, Texas, receive military haircuts.**

training. Poor retention rates and the generally lower quality of recruits prompted ATC to shift from a “career oriented” technical training philosophy to one of teaching only those tasks recruits needed during their first enlistment, reducing the length of training and lowering costs. To supplement on-duty training, and in hopes of attracting higher-quality recruits, Air Force established the Community College of the Air Force in 1972 as part of ATC. Another change came in the form of increased opportunities for women. The first class of 10 women pilots in the USAF received their wings at Williams AFB, Arizona, on 2 September 1977, and the first class of female graduates from undergraduate navigator training received their wings at Mather AFB, California, on 12 October 1977. The need to reduce costs in order to fund aircraft modernization



**The first class of USAF women pilots received their wings on 2 September 1977.**

ation schools. However, Air Force officials soon became concerned this arrangement lowered the visibility and diminished the importance of Air War College and the other schools. Therefore, on 1 July 1983, the Air Force returned command status to Air University. The USAF Security Service at Goodfellow AFB, Texas, had conducted all Air Force cryptologic training since 1958; but on 1 July 1978, both Goodfellow and the cryptologic training mission transferred to ATC.

programs lead to the closing of Craig and Webb AFBs, increased reliance on flight simulators, and reduced flying hours in UPT. Still another change was the way in which ATC conducted undergraduate navigator training, shifting to a specialized orientation, with follow-on advanced training specific to the student’s career track.

In keeping with the consolidations of the 1970s, ATC assumed responsibility in 1978 for two additional functions: Air University and cryptologic training. Air Force transferred Air University to ATC effective 15 May 1978. Air University, established as a major command on 12 March 1946 at Maxwell Field in Montgomery, Alabama, controlled many of

### **Reagan Era and the 1980s**

During the military expansion in the early 1980s, ATC was able to expand training in several areas. It added more flying hours to the pilot training program, extending the course by three weeks. In the fall of 1981, ATC began training pilots from North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries under the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training program at Sheppard AFB, Texas. In 1984, expanded training budgets allowed ATC to change a philosophy of training technical personnel to the fullest extent possible, increasing the average length of some technical training courses, especially those in “sortie-producing” specialties, to nearly 17 weeks.

However, several events in the middle and late 1980s brought about the next cycle of restricted military spending that affected ATC’s mission. The first was passage of the Gramm-

Rudman-Hollings Act in 1985, which attempted to reduce the national debt by forcing federal government agencies to eliminate deficit spending. Within three years, funding for technical training dropped by over 15 percent. Then, in rapid succession beginning in 1989, the Berlin Wall came down, the Soviet Union collapsed, and the Cold War was over. Suddenly, the threat from the East that had dominated American foreign policy for decades was gone. Savoring the “peace dividend,” Congress quickly cut military spending in response to the diminished threat.

### **Persian Gulf War and the 1990s**

To cope with these changes, the concept of “Global Reach-Global Power” came to the forefront as a blueprint for organizing, training, and equipping the Air Force. As part of this, 1992 was designated the “Year of Training” with a goal of to make all Air Force members “mission ready” upon arrival at their first duty station. One aspect of this was a requirement for all enlisted personnel to attend technical training. Another was a return to specialized undergraduate pilot training (SUPT). Under SUPT, students received a common core of training in the T-37, followed by specialized training depending on the pilot’s intended career track. Students on the fighter-bomber track received advanced training in the T-38. Those planning to fly tankers and transport aircraft received specialized instruction in the T-1A “Jayhawk,” which ATC began acquiring in 1990.



**T-1A “Jayhawk”**



In the midst of these changes, the Persian Gulf War erupted when Saddam Hussein’s Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait on 2 August 1990. In support of wartime demands, ATC deployed over 3,000 command personnel. In addition, the Air Force activated ATC’s 11<sup>th</sup> Contingency Hospital and deployed it to the United Kingdom to treat expected casualties from the war. Fortunately, the conflict was soon over, and ATC got on with the task of consolidating training. In 1993 and 1994, the command closed Chanute, Mather, Williams, and Lowry AFBs.



**A C-17 “Globemaster III” taxis during an aircrew training mission at Altus AFB, Oklahoma.**

An especially important Year of Training initiative was the recommendation to create a single, coherent education and training structure for officer, enlisted, and civilian personnel. On 1 July 1993, the Air Force again merged Air University and ATC, redesignating the command as the Air Education and Training Command. AETC gained two numbered air forces—Nineteenth to oversee flying training from Randolph AFB and Second to manage basic and technical training from Keesler AFB, Mississippi. The command also converted its training centers to training wings and resumed responsibility for much of the aircrew training mission, freeing the operational commands to focus on

warfighting. Consequently, the command gained Tyndall, Luke, and Altus AFBs and a unit at Kirtland AFB in 1993 and Little Rock AFB in 1997. But the Congressional demand to consolidate missions by closing bases continued, and the command lost one of its SUPT bases in 1997 when Reese AFB, Texas, closed. However, Lackland AFB gained new missions when Kelly AFB closed in 2001, and the base gained control of the Kelly runway. AETC welcomed the new primary trainer in 2000 when the first T-6A Texan II arrived at Randolph.

### **Into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

As the 20<sup>th</sup> Century ended, AETC continued to face the challenges of modernization, but the terrorist strike on New York City and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001 swept the command into a new era of change as fighters and tankers from AETC wings flew combat patrols over the American landscape as part of Operation Noble Eagle. As the nation entered a second conflict in the Middle East in just over 13 years, the importance of training new Airmen became clear. Applying hard-earned lessons after combat in Afghanistan and Iraq with Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, AETC added new tactics to its operational flying training courses and created new courses like basic combat convoy as Airmen began performing missions out of their core competencies. Over 6,000 AETC personnel routinely deployed every year.





**A student stands watch beside a tractor-trailer he drove during an exercise at the Basic Combat Convoy Course.**

Adding further to the turmoil caused by continuing expeditionary operations, the Gulf Coast experienced a disaster when Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the Mississippi coast on 29 August 2005. AETC responded almost immediately, not only to recover its training wing at Keesler AFB but also to alleviate the suffering of those reeling from the hurricane's destruction. For the first time in Keesler's history, training had to be shut down for more than just a day or two. AETC C-17s and C-130s from Altus and Little Rock AFBs flew supplies into and personnel out of the devastated area. Little Rock AFB received international aid from all over the world. Despite their personal tragedies, Keesler members focused on restoring the wing's mission, beginning training after only three weeks. While full recovery took much longer, the response is a tribute to the command's overall effort.



**As Katrina struck Keesler, rising waters swallowed cars parked along the streets.**



**Keesler students flew to Sheppard AFB aboard a C-17 from Altus AFB after Hurricane Katrina hit.**



Things didn't remain static for long. In the first decade of the new century, AETC welcomed four new aircraft into its inventory: the T-6A "Texan II," F-22 "Raptor," C-130J "Hercules," and the CV-22 "Osprey," and prepared to begin training with the F-35 "Lightning II." Efforts to bed down these new aircraft were both challenging and satisfying as pilot and crew training began to meet the needs of the Air Force of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### **Tyndall's F-22 "Raptor"**

trainees were the first to use the \$28 million Expeditionary Airmen Skills Training course on Medina Annex Basic; carry an inert M-16 rifle through the 8.5 weeks; and receive training with M-9 pistols, self-aid and buddy care, and self-defense. The latest revision of BMT curricula will have students spending their last week living and breathing the Core Values as they prepare to embark on highly technical specialties.

But perhaps the training that changed the most was that for new Air Force recruits. Within a year of the start of combat operations, Air Force commanders identified the need for more robust training with a longer "practical training exercise" to experience dealing the unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive devices. After 40 years, the Air Force increased BMT from 6.5 to 8.5 weeks with the class beginning on 4 November 2008. These



**A crawl through cold, wet sand is a part of the new five-day deployment exercise.**



**After encountering a simulated explosive, instructors use it to heighten the group's IED awareness.**

Randolph, long home to different versions of pilot training over years, picked up a new training mission in 2008—that of training pilots for Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA). AETC developed a new course in short order; and on 21 November 2008, 10 recent SUPT graduates entered the first RPA Fundamentals Course. The Air Force also wanted to see how well officers with no previous aviation experience would do "flying" unmanned combat drones, so it put out a call for volunteers. These 10 prospective RPA operators began their training by attending the six-

week Initial Flight Screening course at Pueblo, Colorado, on 5 January 2009, and then moved on to the Fundamentals Course at Randolph and then to Creech AFB in Nevada.



**RPA cyber-based training at Randolph**

As the command entered the second decade of the Twenty-first Century it, like the rest of DOD, faced budget cuts as the nation dealt with the drawdown of combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and trillions of dollars of debt. In an attempt to turn in a balanced budget request, ACC chose to retire about 240 of the Combat Air Forces legacy aircraft early. As part of this plan, the 325th Fighter Wing lost all of its F-15s, leaving it with a squadron of F-22s and the Air Battle Manager schoolhouse. ACC had a plan for that too, receiving approval to move a squadron of F-22s from Holloman to Tyndall and return with wing and base to ACC, which occurred in October 2012. To compensate for the loss of mission, the Air Force decided to relocate an F-16 group to New Mexico from Arizona to make room for the anticipated F-35 pilot training center at Luke AFB, which planned to receive their first Lightning IIs.

As the location of the new Joint Integrated Training Center for the F-35, the 33d Fighter Wing transferred from ACC to AETC in October 2009. Almost two years later, July 2011, the first F-35 touched down at Eglin. After a slow and lengthy process, the 33d Fighter Wing conducted engine run-ups and taxi operations before finally flying local area operations. At the completion of an independent evaluation of Eglin's capability to conduct F-35A pilot training, AETC declared the 33 FW ready for F-35 training in December 2012.



**AETC's first F-35 lands at Eglin**



**The 33d FW's first F-35 sortie**

Nicknamed the “First Command,” AETC entered the new millennium proud of its past and ready for the challenges of the future. In its seventh decade of service to the nation, the command continues to build on the achievements of the thousands of dedicated men and women who have stood on the shoulders of giants to recruit, train, educate, and innovate for the greatest air, space, and cyberspace force in the world.



**The F-35 Lightning II—ready for training**