

23 FLYING TRAINING SQUADRON



MISSION

Train undergraduate aircrew members in all aspects of helicopter operations for follow-on training in special operations, combat search and rescue (CSAR), missile support and distinguished visitor airlift missions.

LINEAGE

76 Bombardment Squadron (Medium) constituted, 20 Nov 1940

Activated, 15 Jan 1941

Redesignated 23 Antisubmarine Squadron (Heavy), 3 Mar 1943

Disbanded, 6 Feb 1944

23 Troop Carrier Squadron constituted, 11 Nov 1944

Activated, 21 Nov 1944

Inactivated, 7 Sep 1946

23 Helicopter Squadron constituted, 24 Feb 1956

Activated, 9 Jul 1956

Inactivated, 8 Jan 1958

23 Tactical Air Support Squadron constituted, 8 Apr 1966

Inactivated, 22 Sep 1975

Activated, 30 Nov 1975

23 Antisubmarine Squadron (Heavy) reconstituted and consolidated with 23 Troop Carrier Squadron; 23 Helicopter Squadron; and 23 Tactical Air Support Squadron, 19 Sep 1985. Consolidated unit designated 23 Tactical Air Support Squadron

Inactivated, 1 Nov 1991

Redesignated 23 Flying Training Flight, 22 Dec 1993

Activated, 15 Jan 1994

Redesignated 23 Flying Training Squadron, 21 Dec 1999

STATIONS

Salt Lake City, UT, 15 Jan 1941

Gowen Field, ID, 4 Jun 1941

McChord Field, WA, 20 Jan 1942 (operated from Jacksonville Mun Aprt, FL, 21 May-24 Jul 1942; Opalocka NAS, FL, 24 Jul-6 Aug 1942; Drew Field, FL, 6 Aug 1942-24 Feb 1943 Batista Field, Cuba, 28 Feb-24 Apr 1943)

Drew Field, Fla, 8 Mar 1943 (operated from Langley Field, VA, 9-23 Ju1 1943)

Edinburgh Field, Trinidad, 5 Aug 1943 (ground echelon remained at Drew Field until 15 Oct 1943 then moved to Smoky Hill AAFld, Kan, where it was disbanded, 6 Nov 1943; detachment of air echelon operated from Zandery Field, Surinam, 15 Aug- Dec 1943)

Drew Field, 24 Dec 1943

Clovis AAFld, NM, 6 Feb 1944

Barkstone Heath, England, 3 Apr 1945

Roye Army Airfield, France, 18 Apr-13 Jul 1945

Bergstrom Field, TX, 19 Sep 1945-7 Sep 1946

Sewart AFB, TN, 9 Jul-12 Oct 1956

Plahlsbourg AB, France, 1 Nov 1956-8 Jan 1958

Udorn RTAFB, Thailand, 15 Apr 1966

Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, Thailand, 15 Jul 1966-22 Sep 1975

Bergstrom AFB, TX, 30 Nov 1975-1 Jul 1980

Davis Monthan AFB, AZ, 1 Jul 1980-1 Nov 1991

Fort Rucker, AL, 15 Jan 1994

ASSIGNMENTS

42 Bombardment Group, 15 Jan 1941 (air echelon attached to 45 Bombardment Group 21 May 1942, to AAF Antisubmarine Command, 13 Oct 1942, and to 26 Antisubmarine Wing, 20 Nov 1942-9 Mar 1943)

41 Bombardment Group, 12 Feb 1943

AAF Antisubmarine Command, 3 Mar 1943

26 Antisubmarine Wing, 9 Mar 1943

I Bomber Command, 15 Oct 1943

XX Bomber Command, 6 Feb 1944

349 Troop Carrier Group, 1 Dec 1944-7 Sep 1946
505 Tactical Control Group, 15 Apr 1966-7 Dec 1966
504 Tactical Air Support Group, 8 Dec 1966
Thirteenth Air Force, 30 Jun to 22 Sep 1975
602 Tactical Air Control Group, 30 Nov 1975 -1 Nov 1991
58 Operations Group

ATTACHMENTS

Trinidad Detachment, Antilles Air Command, 5 Aug-Dec 1943

WEAPON SYSTEMS

B-18, 1941
B-26, 1941-1942
A-29, 1942-1943
B-25G, 1943
C-47 1944-1945
C-46 1944-1946
H-21 1956-1957
O-1 1966-1968
O-2 1967-1971
OV-10 1975-1980
OA-37 1981-1991
UH-1H 1994
TH-1H

COMMANDERS

1st Lt William L. Mcdowell, 15 Jan 1941
Maj Robert O. Cork, 1 May 1941
Lt W. R. Stark, Aug 1941
Capt William L. Mcdowell, Aug 1942
Capt John F. Moran, Aug 1943-Unkn
Maj Tom H. Wheat, 21 Nov 1944-Unkn
Maj James L. Blackburn, 9 Jul 1956-8 Jan 1958
Lt Col Robert L. Johnston, 15 Apr 1966
Maj James D. Metcalf, 5 Oct 1966
Lt Col Elwyn L. Crawford Jr., Nov 1966
Lt Col David S. Pallister, 19 May 1967
Lt Col Benjamin F. Starr Jr., 10 Apr 1968
Lt Col Thomas D. Alexander, 8 Sep 1968
Lt Col Dryden E. Morris, 1 Apr 1969
Lt Col George S. Thomas, 30 Nov 1969
Lt Col Budd F. Knapp, 24 Jan 1970
Lt Col Wayne A. Melandrez, 5 Jun 1970
Lt Col Kenneth C. Culp, 1 Mar 1971

Lt Col Lachlan Macleay, 17 Oct 1971
Maj Max C. Brestel, 31 May 1972
Lt Col John T. Williams, 9 Aug 1972
Lt Col Howard J. Pierson, 11 May 1973
Lt Col Donald W. Polglase, 13 Oct 1973
Lt Col Howard J. Pierson, 13 Nov 1973
Lt Col Donald W. Polglase, 16 Mar 1974
Lt Col Louis R. Batson Jr., 11 Jun 1974
Lt Col Edwin R. Maxon, 28 Feb 1975
Lt Col P. D. Kiernan, 27 Aug 1975
Lt Col C. A. Birchman, 1 Feb 1977
Lt Col P. H. Hafner, 21 Jun 1977
Lt Col Henry J. Cochran, 15 May 1978
Lt Col Ramon E. Dearrigunaga, 10 Sep 1979
Lt Col George R. Davis, 5 Oct 1981
Lt Col David C. Grumet, 21 Oct 1983
Lt Col George W. Williams, 9 Jul 1985
Lt Col Charles H. Jackson, 6 Mar 1987
Lt Col George Defilippi, 3 Mar 1989-Unkn
Unkn, 15 Jan-14 Feb 1994
Lt Col Daniel J. Beatty Jr., 15 Feb 1994
Lt Col Henry B. Gaither Jr., 21 Mar 1996
Lt Col Richard A. Kianka, 15 Jan 1998
Lt Col William L. Bassett, 26 Jul 2000
Lt Col Kenneth R. Arteaga, 6 Jun 2002
Lt Col Robert K. Abernathy, 23 Jun 2004
Lt Col Kyle F. Taylor, 23 Jun 2006
Lt Col Brett Hauenstein, 23 Jun 2008

HONORS

Service Streamers

Antisubmarine, American Theater

Campaign Streamers

Vietnam:

Vietnam Air

Vietnam Air Offensive

Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase II

Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase III

Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase IV

TET 69/Counteroffensive

Vietnam Summer-Fall 1969

Vietnam Winter-Spring, 1970

Sanctuary Counteroffensive

Southwest Monsoon
Commando Hunt V
Commando Hunt VI
Commando Hunt VII
Vietnam Ceasefire
Southwest Asia
Defense of Saudi Arabia
Liberation and Defense of Kuwait

Decorations

Presidential Unit Citations

15-30 Apr 1966

1 Aug 1968-31 Aug 1969

1 Nov 1968-1 May 1969

1 Jan-31 Dec 1970

30 Jan-31 Dec 1971

1 Apr 1972-22 Feb 1973

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards with Combat "V"

1 Nov 1969-31 May 1970

23 Feb 1973-28 Feb 1974

24 Jan-2 May 1975

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award

1 Jul 1978-30 Jun 1979

1 May 1984-30 Apr 1986

15 Jan 1994-30 Jun 1994

1 Jul 1994-31 Dec 1995

1 Jul 1996-30 Jun 1998

1 Jul 1998-30 Jun 2000

1 Jul 2001-30 Jun 2002

1 Jul 2002-30 Jun 2003

1 Jul 2003-30 Jun 2004

1 Jul 2004-30 Jun 2005

1 Jul 2006-30 Jun 2007

1 Jul 2007-30 Jun 2008

Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Crosses with Palm

15 Apr 1966-28 Jan 1973

8 Feb-31 Mar 1971

1 Apr 1971-9 Mar 1972

EMBLEM



76 Bombardment Squadron/23 Antisubmarine Squadron emblem: On and over a light blue disc flecked with white clouds, bordure yellow, a caricatured figure wearing a brown flight suit, white helmet and goggles, and sitting on the fin of a large red aerial bomb, ringed white, and cutting a large yellow sky rope, by which the bomb is suspended, with a white knife held in right hand. (Approved, 24 Feb 1943)



23 Helicopter Squadron emblem



23 Tactical Air Support Squadron emblem





MOTTO

BEST IN THE WEST

Nail

OPERATIONS

Antisubmarine patrols, Dec 1941-Dec 1943.

Squadron was deployed to Batista Field, Cuba on 28 Feb 1943 with the Lockheed A-29, although it reequipped with 16 B-25Gs. Throughout this period, the ground echelon of the Squadron remained at Drew Field, Florida.

During September 1943 the Squadron flew 56 convoy coverage missions and 48 anti-submarine sweeps. The unit also had elements at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and rotated its crews from the home field in Florida to its operating elements about every 10 weeks. One flight was temporarily stationed at Caracas, Venezuela. The squadron was disbanded, 6 Feb 1944.

Reconstituted as the 23rd Troop Carrier Squadron on 11 Nov 1944, the unit transported cargo and personnel throughout the European Theater of Operation until its inactivation on 7 Sep 1946.

The 23rd Helicopter Squadron, equipped with the Piasecki H-21B "Workhorse," was the first flying unit assigned to Phalsbourg after its completion.

The H-21Bs deployed to France by first flying 500 miles south to Brookley AFB, AL where they were loaded on an aircraft transport ship, TCUV-64 Tripoli. All eighteen H-21s, squadron personnel, and support equipment arrived in Bremerhaven, West Germany, on 1 November 1956, after nineteen days at sea. The 23rd Sq personnel de-cocooned, inspected, tested, and then flew their helicopters across Germany and France to Phalsbourg.

On 7 November, the first two H-21s left Bremerhaven and headed across south Germany toward Phalsbourg AB. Along the way, one of the helicopters No. 52867 - we were in the British

zone near RAF Alhorn - had an engine failure and a quick autorotation in a farm near Badbergen in northern Germany. Spent a week in the local "guasthouse". The winter snow and a British Van crew guarded our bird a couple miles out - while waiting a call from UASFE at Ramstein. A week later a British Officer came by and took three of us to RAF Alhorn (left 2 of the crew to wait for an engine change). Next fun was they took us to a train out of Oldenburg - which none of us had ever been on - and went down to Stassbourg. The only military people at Phalsbourg were about 2 hours away- and picked us up after midnight. A week later - a crew flew back up to Badbergen to pick up the bird which had been an engine failure.

On the return to Phalsbourg - the third engine failure occurred within 1-2 miles of the last failure. The folks from RAF Alcorn came in with several helpers and large trailer to tow the bird back to the airfield. The road was one of the somewhat ancient brick roads which just barely had the width of the H-21 wheels. With several troops, flashlights and night - the crew just trying to guide the tow truck missed a brick, which jammed one of the rear wheels as the truck kept moving and ripped the entire landing gear rigging out of the cabin and the H-21 rolled over on its side! The next morning the H-21 was literally cut in half and hauled up to RAF Alcorn - and then flown in pieces to Chatareaux AB in France for major overhaul.

Our wives had already been shipped in a troop carrier and were a few weeks ahead of us and were living in Italian "trailers" on the base. The runway - built by the French, for a Fighter Wing had sunk in, so the 23rd Heli guys were only Officers/Crews around except for two Doctors, a Priest and some cooks! We provided our own music and dancing! We had to drive or fly to Ramstein to pick up our "funny money" since no or little US money used or available!

The squadron was assigned to the 322d Air Division at Evreux AB for operational control, mission scheduling, and airlift priorities. The 23rd Helicopter Squadron provided very useful general airlift support throughout France. Standard helicopter missions included: Special Air Lift Mission, Administrative Support Mission, and Emergency Air Evacuation Mission. The H-21 was ideal for transferring injured U.S. personnel and dependents that required major medical attention to full-service hospitals from remote military sites across Europe. Other missions supported radar sites along East German border.

Phalsbourg had plenty of hangar space and quarters for the 23rd Squadron. It could keep all its H-21Bs indoors. But the 23rd Helicopter Squadron had some difficulties operating from Phalsbourg. Neither a wing nor group operations staff was assigned to the base, and the squadron had insufficient manning to provide a complete base flight operations section. The H-21 had only a low frequency ADF (ARN-59) installed for radio navigation. The Eschbourg radio beacon, when installed in the spring of 1957, finally provided a means of finding Phalsbourg in bad weather. The 23rd had no helicopter losses and no fatalities during its brief fourteen months of flying in France.

The 322d Air Division recommended that the 23rd Helicopter Squadron be divided into four detachments for greater utilization. Detachments #1 and #4 remained at Phalsbourg with ten

aircraft. Major maintenance was performed by teams dispatched from Phalsbourg, and all H-21B-peculiar spare parts were stocked at Phalsbourg.

Detachment #2 flew four H-21s to RAF Wethersfield, UK via Fontainebleau, Evreux AB, Lille, France, and on across the English Channel. These four H-21Bs were equipped with air-sea hoist provisions for rescue flights. Their first task was to assist in the rapid assembly of a ground radar antenna structure at RAF Upper Heyford. The H-21Bs lifted large antenna segments and saved at least four weeks of time erecting these antennas.

Detachment #3 relocated four H-21Bs to Wheelus AB in December 1956. The H-21 was designed for rapid disassembly and reassembly for this type of air movement; both rotor assemblies were removable, and the fuselage split in half to make smaller and lighter loads. This process required eight hours work by an eight-man team at each end of the Workhorse's journey. The four H-21s were moved to Wheelus to support gunnery range operations at El Uotia and Tarhuna, and to assist the TM-61 Matador missile launches and flight test programs. This required some long range flights of 250 miles into the desert to missile target sites such as Mizda. Soon after arrival, on 22 March 1957, Det #3 recovered one injured pilot and one fatality from an RB-57A crash that occurred on the gunnery range, and then supported the crash investigation team for several days. Their mission was so successful that after the 23rd HSq departed France, six of their H-21Bs continued to operate at Wheelus AB, supported by the 7272d Flying Training Wing. During 1960 the helicopters participated in an ongoing long distance rescue mission when they evacuated American and European civilians from the Congo where they were being threatened by rioting native troops.

USAFE felt the limitations of helicopter airlift were not worth the costs, and decided to eliminate the 23rd Helicopter Sq from its force structure after fourteen months in Europe. During this same time, the U.S. Army in France was obtaining similar helicopter airlift capabilities, which made the 23rd redundant. The squadron was inactivated on 8 January 1958, as part of USAF-wide reductions due to DOD budget cuts. Ten H-21Bs from Phalsbourg and two from RAF Wethersfield, UK, were returned to Brookley AFB, Alabama, in August 1959. They were shipped to CONUS on the aircraft transport ship, TCVU-64 Tripoli.

The Vietnam War saw the unit's reconstitution as the 23rd Tactical Air Support Squadron operating from Nakhon Phanom Royal Thailand Air Force Base (RTAFB), Thailand, from 15 April 1966 to 22 Sep 1975. They flew low and slow in the O-1 Bird Dog (Cessna) supporting ground troops and calling in air strikes to disrupt activity on the Trail. The O-1 was subsequently replaced with the faster, more maneuverable OV-10.

Losses of 23rd TASS pilots started in March with Karl Worst, whose plane disappeared in an apparent mid-air with an F-105 during an air strike. Next was Joe Brown, in Mu Gia Pass, in early April. Then in May Lee Harley was shot down very near the border of North Viet Nam in the valley now named for him, on a recently-discovered alternate trail. In June Warren P. "Willie Pete" Smith was shot down, and Tom Wolfe was killed in the jump seat of an A-26 that was shot down by heavy triple-A during an orientation flight, in Harley's Valley.

The 23rd TASS flew Cessna O-1s in 1966 and part of 1967. All aircraft were the F variant, whose most important difference was a variable-pitch propeller. Many of them were camouflaged at first, including that of Karl Worst, and were repainted gray with very small markings by a contractor at Tan Son Nhut, a few at a time.

The unit was called Operation Cricket, which name the area airborne control ship took for a callsign, and the original pilot callsign was Gombey. For some reason this was changed to Nail in mid-1966, and that stayed.

The squadron was inactivated on 22 Sep 1975 only to be reactivated on 30 Nov 1975 at Bergstrom AFB, TX to train forward air controllers. They then moved to Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ on 1 Jul 1980 until their inactivation on 1 Nov 1991.

By the late 1980s, the Vietnam vintage OA-37BS and OV-10As were reaching the end of their useful lives. In the eyes of the Air Force, so was the A-10, as far as front-line combat operations were concerned. Beginning in 1987, selected A-10As were redesignated as OA-10As, the first serving with the 23rd TASS. There is no physical difference between an A-10A and a fast FAC OA-10A. Because they only employ rockets for target marking and do not utilize the majority of the A-10A's arsenal, the OA-10A costs about \$45-30 less per hour to operate than an A-10A. In these days of ever decreasing defense budgets, every penny counts, and the OA-10As are not counted as fighter aircraft under the CFE treaty.

On 2 August, 1990, Kuwait, was invaded by Saddam Hussein's Iraqi army. President George Bush had begun forging an international coalition of allied forces against Hussein to drive the Iraqi's out of Kuwait. The deployment of the American units occurred under the code name "Operation Desert Shield." Four A-10 squadrons were included in the first deployment and had moved to King Fahd International Airport, Saudi Arabia, by the end of August. The A-10s deployed as squadrons not wings to the Gulf region. The 354th TFW's contribution consisted of the 353rd and 355th TFSs. The organization in Saudi Arabia in charge of the deployed units was known as the 354th TFW (Deployed). The 74th and 76th TFSs of the 23rd TFW were deployed under the 23rd TFW (Deployed). The deployed wings kept the same command staff as the 354th and 23rd TFWs back at their U.S. bases. The two units were later merged into a single wing referred to as the 23/354 TFW (Deployed). The wing was jointly commanded by officers of both contributing wings. In December, 1990, 9th AF established the 14th Air Division (Provisional) to control all deployed tactical fighter wings. Also, the wings were redesignated to more official provisional designations. The 354th TFW (Deployed) officially became 354th TFW (Provisional), though the unique command structure actually resulted in the 23/354 TFW (Provisional). Three more A-10 squadrons arrived in the Gulf area in December. The 23rd TASS deployed joining six of their OA-10s which had deployed in October. The 511th TFS also deployed. In early January, 1991, these three squadrons joined the 23/354th. At the height of the deployment there were 155 A-10s at King Fahd International Airport. February 19: 76-0543, 23rd TASS, was shot down. The pilot, LT COL Jeffery Fox was captured. February 27: 77-0197, 23rd TASS crashed on landing. The pilot, LT Patrick Olson was killed in the crash.

On 15 January 1994, AETC realigned its helicopter training function by inactivating Detachment 1, 14th Flying Training Wing, and activating the 23rd Flying Training Flight at Fort Rucker.

The 23rd Flying Training Squadron at Fort Rucker, Ala., conducted the first training flight of its new Career Enlisted Aviator Rotary Wing Fundamentals course, according to unit officials. The course—the first of its kind in the Air Force—will act as a "crash course in helicopter operations," providing enlisted aircrew members with a foundation in flying before they get to their graduate-level training at Kirtland AFB, N.M., said TSgt. Seamus Feeley, CEARF student flight chief, three days after the inaugural flight. Before the course, enlisted aircrew members, including aerial gunners and flight engineers, would arrive at Kirtland without any prior flight experience. As such, failure rates for mission qualification training on helicopters and CV-22 tiltrotor platforms were "upwards of 50 percent," Squadron officials hope this course will change that. "CEARF will save lost time and money by reducing washouts and allow more individuals to successfully complete training and fill a critically undermanned career field," said Feeley. The course takes 36 training days to complete. CEARF will train about 88 flight engineers each year. 2013

The 23rd Flying Training Squadron is using virtual-reality technology to increase their numbers without having to sacrifice excellence. Hidden away on Fort Rucker, Alabama, an Army post, the 23rd FTS is responsible for training helicopter pilots and enlisted aircrews, preparing them for their next assignments. While the Air Force's rotary-wing community is small, the 23rd FTS has a tall order to fill as the Air Force's one-stop shop for helicopter aircrews. Currently, the squadron produces between 74 and 85 pilots per year. With the arrival of the new Air Force HH-60W "Whiskey" helicopter, however, those numbers need to increase to more than 120 by the year 2023. This is where the "da Vinci" project comes into play.

The project, named after famed polymath, Leonardo da Vinci, supplements hours within a flight simulation that translates over into flight hours in an actual aircraft. The idea for project da Vinci was created during the AFWERX conference in Las Vegas in January. Maj. Gen. Patrick Doherty, the former Nineteenth Air Force commander, invited helicopter training experts to attend the conference to brainstorm new ideas to propel the community forward.

"I was a student (at the 23rd FTS) from 2002 through 2003 and I would agree that the way we trained then was pretty similar to the way we trained our students prior to this virtual-reality class, so this is a really exciting time for the community," said Lt. Col. Jake Brittingham, 23rd FTS commander. "Coming together and addressing this as a vertical-lift community as a whole was really beneficial and it paid off. I think we're all in agreement that this is the right thing to do and to assume a little bit of risk to advance our training mythologies." It was at this point the team at the 23rd FTS began thinking of ways in which virtual reality could be used to increase their numbers and best utilize their resources.

"One of the things that makes the Air Force culture so distinct from the other branches in the U.S. military is that innovation is a part of who we are and it's what we do," said Capt. Jarrod Huffman, 23rd FTS chief of future operations. "As new technologies are becoming available, we're wanting to adapt to those technologies and incorporate them in our training processes." In standard training, student pilots are required to obtain 105 in-seat flying hours,

with each hour costing the Air Force approximately \$1,300. The new class, featuring virtual reality, cuts those flying hours down to about 60, thus cutting the cost per student roughly in half. With an investment of less than \$30,000, the new training system will save the Air Force more than \$5.7 million per year.

In addition to cutting down costs, the incorporation of virtual reality also condenses the course length. The once eight-month course now only takes five months. Though they are producing pilots in a radically different way, Huffman said they are working hard to ensure that the students are able to perform at the same level as the students who go through the original program. In order to successfully test whether or not the new program is efficient, the pilots responsible for passing and failing the students at the end of the program were not integrated or exposed to the virtual-reality training, as to not skew the overall program standards.

Through the new program, the student pilots spend approximately 23 1/2 hours in the virtual-reality simulations before even stepping foot in the aircraft, ultimately saving fuel, flight hours and maintenance hours. Capt. Matthew Strick, 23rd FTS innovative flight commander, recalled a student who was able to hover the aircraft and then fly it to a staging field without any assistance from the instructor pilot, all during their first time in the aircraft, adding that this type of progress is unheard of through the original program. Even with the progress this initial class has shown, the team at the 23rd is aware that there is still a lot to be determined as the use of virtual reality is further refined.

“It’s important to know that this virtual-reality technology is still very much in its infancy and part of the da Vinci project was to learn if this technology has the potential to be rewarding a payoff for helicopter operations ... I think with the speed of technology and what is becoming available, we will see a day where we can really invest in virtual reality and for it to be cost effective,” Brittingham said. 2019

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORIES

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency, U.S. Air Force, Maxwell AFB, Alabama.

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

Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.