

## 3638 FLYING TRAINING SQUADRON



### LINEAGE

### STATIONS

Stead AFB, NV

Sheppard AFB, TX, 1 Jan 1968-30 Jun 1971

### ASSIGNMENTS

### WEAPON SYSTEMS

### COMMANDERS

### HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

### EMBLEM

## **MOTTO**

### **OPERATIONS**

In January 1958, a small group of instructor pilots from Randolph AFB, Texas, were sent to Stead AFB to determine the feasibility of advanced helicopter training in the area's mountains. On July 15, 1958, the 3635th Crew Training Wing was re-designated the 3635th Flying Training Wing (Advanced) concurrent with the relocation of the USAF Helicopter Pilot School at Stead.

During the summer and fall of 1958, the USAF Helicopter School was moved from Randolph AFB to Stead AFB and designated the 3638th Flying Training Squadron (Helicopter). The base provided ample facilities and an unencumbered airspace in which to operate the flying training mission.

The pilots would undergo training in the H-19B and H-21B helicopters. The syllabus would contain basic transition training and instruments as well as advanced operational techniques in high altitude confined area and mountain operations. Most pilots would also attend the USAF Survival School in preparation for overseas assignments.

The flying training would be conducted at Stead as well as an auxiliary airfield, Sky Ranch, located about 10 miles east of the base. A number of unprepared ridgetop and pinnacle landing spots at altitudes up to 8,100 feet MSL were located on Peavine Mountain directly south of the base. A similar number of tree-lined spots were located in Dog Valley, southwest of Peavine, to conduct confined area landing and takeoff procedures. The area north of Stead to Pyramid Lake was used for instrument training.

The first students to go through helicopter pilot training were rated fixed wing pilots. In fact, all pilots undergoing helicopter pilot training since 1944 had been rated pilots. In 1965, students were entered into helicopter pilot training having received approximately 120 hours in T-28's but had not received their wings. They would receive their wings upon graduation from helicopter training.

The 3638th Flying Training Squadron (Helicopter) trained not only USAF pilots but also many from foreign countries. At least a dozen countries, including Japan, Argentina, Pakistan, India, France, Bolivia and China (Taiwan), sent pilots to basic helicopter pilot training as well as instructor pilot upgrading. There was an Exchange Program with England's Royal Air Force and the Royal Australian Air Force for a 2-year tour by the Exchange pilots. Two U.S. Marine pilots flying H-34's were given a short course in high altitude mountain flying techniques. Four RAAF helicopter pilots also received several hours of mountain indoctrination on their way from UH-1 training at Ft. Rucker and returning to Australia to fly their own "Hueys". From 1958 through 1965, the Helicopter School trained over 1252 USAF and 384 foreign helicopter pilots.

Part of the School included the Instructor Training (IT) Section of the Squadron. Experienced line pilots assigned to the Squadron to be instructors had to be indoctrinated into the standardized techniques and grading procedures used in the School. This sometimes required

some rethinking on the part of the new instructors that had been used to doing it "their way" when in the field. They were reminded about how they handled the controls when they had only 5 hours of helicopter time and relate it to their students. Standardized procedures were necessary for scoring of the student's progress and if a change of instructors might be required.

From February through July 1962, eleven pilots and 6 H-21B helicopters were airlifted by C-124 aircraft to Christmas Island, South Pacific in support of Operation Dominic atomic tests. They would provide personnel airlift and search and rescue. They also conducted recovery of rocket nose cones shot through the clouds of an atomic device detonation by Research agencies. This required entering ground zero within 20 minutes of detonation and flying 15-25 miles over the shark infested Pacific Ocean without any flotation device on the helicopter. All nose cones were successfully recovered.

VIP transport for dignitaries such as Secretary of Labor Goldberg inspecting Titan missile sites near Mountain Home, Idaho in 1964.

In 1961, four H-21's were dispatched to Moab, Utah to transport Secretary of Interior Udall along the Green and Colorado rivers in Utah to check out the area for possible National Park status (it later became Canyonlands National Park).

March 7, 1962, found an H-19 and H-43 on their way to Quincy, California to retrieve a balloon and gondola from a 6,000-foot mountainside where it had landed. The 2,000-pound gondola was used in extreme high altitude research directed by Captain Joe Kittinger, Mission Commander of Operation Stargazer.

Two H-21's were dispatched to Indian Springs, Nevada Test Site to support underground nuclear tests of Project Mercury in February 1961.

Some of these extended missions severely drained the instructor numbers and required extra duty time for many. The loss of IP's during Operation Dominic cut the squadron resources by 60 per cent. This meant the remaining Instructor Pilots had to "double-up" to maintain the training schedules.

From March 1962 to March 1963, the 3638th FTS (Helicopter) flew 213 hours on search and rescue missions and rescued 15 persons.

On 3 September 1962, an H-43B made an extremely difficult and hazardous rescue of an injured mountain climber in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California. The rescue was accomplished at nightfall at an altitude of 11,900 feet on a 70-degree slope and is possibly the highest rescue ever performed by a helicopter in the continual United States. In October 1962, two H-19B's were sent to Susanville, California to assist in the search for and evacuation of hunters stranded following heavy rain and snow.

In December 1964, unseasonable rainfall of over 12 inches in the Northwestern states created

regional flooding. H-19, H-21, H-43 and CH-3 helicopters and crews were dispatched to Yreka, California to conduct rescue and humanitarian aid missions. Three of the H-21's were sent to Lakeview, Oregon to carry bales of hay to hundreds of starving cattle stranded on dikes above thousands of acres of flooded land.

A search mission was launched with Stead H-19 helicopters after strong winds swamped several boats on Pyramid Lake. Several bodies were sighted but unfortunately no survivors.

A Navy F8U fighter pilot was recovered by two Instructor pilots after they heard his Mayday call and diverted from an instrument proficiency flight to the crash site north of Fallon, Nevada.

In May 1962, Lt. Colonel Francis M. "Blackie" Carney, the commander of the 3638th, was awarded the Frederick L. Feineberg Memorial Trophy for setting four new official world helicopter records in an HH-43B helicopter. In October 1961, Lt. Col. Carney piloted an H-43B to 32, 840 feet, over 2,000 feet above the old record. He also set 3 "Time to climb" records.

In January 1963, eleven officers, commanded by Lt. Colonel Jimmy Hamill, were sent to South Vietnam to organize a helicopter pilot school. The 917th Field Training Detachment established a training course in one month and began training Vietnamese officers to become helicopter pilots. This school is the first USAF Helicopter Course ever set up in a foreign country. During their 18-month tenure, the 917th FTD trained 95 helicopter pilots and 92 mechanics.

For its exceptional meritorious service in support of military operations, search and rescue, and service of great international significance during the period from 1 March 1962 through 1 March 1963, the 3638th Flying Training Squadron (Helicopter) was awarded the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award.

In 1964, Defense Secretary McNamara made the announcement that Stead AFB was to be closed and the Helicopter School would be relocated. Among the bases discussed were Hill AFB, Utah, Sheppard AFB, Texas, and Kirtland AFB, New Mexico. The USAF Helicopter School moved to Sheppard in late 1965. School was moved to Hill AFB in 1971 and to Kirtland in 1976 where USAF Advanced Helicopter Training is still being conducted.

At the direction of the Department of the Air Force, ATC inactivated Stead AFB, Nevada, and its 3635<sup>th</sup> Flying Training Wing (Advanced) on 15 June 1966. Stead's helicopter pilot training unit, the 3638<sup>th</sup> Flying Training Squadron (Helicopter) was discontinued on 1 April, and the 3637<sup>th</sup> Combat Crew Training Squadron (Survival and Special Training) ceased to exist on 1 June. Helicopter training moved to Sheppard AFB in Texas.

---

USAF Unit Histories

Created: 3 Jan 2022

Updated:

Sources

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