



Courtesy Photos

THE AIR FORCE TRAINER that Steve Dean of Gilmer learned in arrives at the Flight of the Phoenix Museum at Fox Stephens Field - Gilmer Municipal Airport. The inset photo shows a group of the planes in flight.

## Dean, old training plane, reunited Jet to be exhibited at Flight of the Phoenix Museum

A T-37 Tweety Bird Air Force Jet Trainer arrived recently in Gilmer from Sheppard AFB in Wichita Falls. Prior to being based at Sheppard AFB, it served at Reese AFB in Lubbock.

After Steve Dean of Gilmer, owner of the Flight of the Phoenix aircraft museum at Gilmer Airport, learned the "tail number" of this airframe, he researched his pilot log books, and found the same "tail number" listed as one of the planes he had flown as an Air Force student pilot in 1964 at Reese AFB in Lubbock.

Dean said he is eager to talk to Lt. Col. John Breazeale about the bird, because Breazeale most likely logged training flights in this same aircraft when he was an Air Force student pilot at Sheppard AFB, some 20 years after Dean flew it.

The T-37 will be officially welcomed to the FOTPAM display on Saturday, May 15, at the Armed Forces Day Museum Open House and Warbird Fly-In.

The following news release about the plane was sent out by the Air Force News Service last July 31:

**SHEPPARD AIR FORCE BASE, Texas (AFNS)**—More than 50 years of dependable service is a lot to ask, especially from a tool used to train thousands of people in a critical and sometimes dangerous business.

But as men and women in the U.S. Air Force said farewell to the T-37 Tweet July 31, they did so knowing they got all they asked for and more from the venerable training aircraft.

Among those who came to Sheppard to usher out the end of an era and welcome in a new technological advancement in undergraduate pilot training was Gen. Donald J. Hoffman, commander of Air Force Materiel Command. His story, like many of those who came before and after him, includes the Tweet, a durable and rugged training platform that provided the foundation of more than 78,000 Air Force, NATO and other international pilots since it became operational in 1957.

The general, who "owns" the final destination of the Tweet — the "Boneyard" at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., and home to the Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group, or AMARG — said his last flight in the venerable Tweet is one that holds a special place in his heart. Not only because of its heritage, but because it was the beginning of his 35-year Air Force career.

His first active assignment was as an 80th Flying Training Wing instructor pilot at Sheppard.

"Because I flew the Sheppard jets during my first assignment, and now have the Boneyard at Tucson as part of Air Force Materiel Command, I have a close sense of identity with the final retirement of this wonderful aircraft," General Hoffman said.

"Nothing compares to the feeling of stepping out of the aircraft and launching your student on their first solo. . . you can almost see their grin coming out from the edges of their oxygen mask."

The general is part of the group that will take four aircraft to AMARG. Another group will take a couple to the Utah Test and Training Range located at Hill AFB, Utah.

But why has the T-37 been such a dependable beginning trainer for so many pilots?

"For most students, the T-37 is the first jet, the first ejection seat, the first helmet and oxygen mask, and the first formal Air Force flying syllabus they have been exposed to," Gen. Hoffman said. "This can be an intimidating experience, but they get the ground training, simulator training and personalized attention of the instructor to get them through it."

Col. Kevin Schneider, commander of the 80th FTW, said when most people think of the U.S. Air Force and the air forces of NATO partners, they think of fighters and bombers going off to war to preserve freedom and democracy across the world. Those flying the warbirds didn't just get in them and begin to fly. They had to learn how first.

"Combat skill and success doesn't happen overnight and it certainly doesn't start without disciplined training," the colonel said. "The T-37 Tweet has been that starting point for pilots for more than 50 years."

The colonel witnessed a portion of that as a Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training undergraduate pilot training student at Sheppard in the late 80s. He said the Tweet was a very dependable aircraft during his training and remained so until its retirement.

"As the commander of the 80th Flying Training Wing, I have the unique opportunity to retire an incredibly durable trainer that has been the foundation of the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training Program," he said. "The departure of the last few U.S. and German-owned T-37s

closes the book on a legacy of success that may never be matched."

Brig. Gen. Jeffrey B. Kendall, deputy director of intelligence, operations and nuclear integration for flying training at Air Education and Training Command and commander of the 80th FTW from January 2005 to August 2007, recalled his first experience with the Tweet when he began pilot training in the ENJJPT program at Sheppard.

He described his "dollar ride," or first student flight, during his comments at the ceremony.

He said he was a nervous, yet excited student watching his instructor, Danish air force Capt. Gullach Tousgaard, go through the checklists. The general said he doesn't remember much from that first flight other than taking the flight controls for a while.

"The one thing I do remember to this day is how wide my grin was as I proudly walked back into the life support area to drop off my parachute and helmet," Gen. Kendall said. "The Tweet had firmly planted that silly (student pilot) smile on my face. I was truly hooked."

Gen. Hoffman, the leader in charge of providing the acquisition management services and logistics support required to develop, procure and sustain Air Force weapon systems, said there is a more-than-viable option to replace the Tweet, the T-6A Texan II.

"The T-6 is a highly capable replacement for the venerable T-37," he said. "We are still going through some growing pains, but it is much better suited to prepare student pilots for today's aircraft and those that will come in the future."

The Texan II provides a tandem cockpit configuration similar to 2-seater fighter setups compared to the side-by-side T-37. It also has a "glass cockpit," or all digital instrument panel.

Gen. Kendall said we should not be concerned about moving from a jet-powered aircraft to a single turbo-prop platform.

"Some might think it unusual or a step backwards to replace a jet aircraft with a prop-driven one," he said, "but let me say that this is not your granddaddy's T-6. This primary flight trainer outperforms the over 50-year-old flying 'birdwhistle' in just about every area except perhaps in noise generation."