

Lockheed T-33A Shooting Star

1953

General History

Jet Fighter Becomes Jet Trainer

The U.S. Air Force stepped into the jet age with the P-80 *Shooting Star*, America’s first operational jet fighter. With this new era came new challenges, and the P-80’s safety record left much to be desired. Veteran pilots of prop-driven *Mustangs* and *Thunderbolts* with years of experience handling piston-powered fighters weren’t instant experts at the controls of these strange new jets. It was clear that a trainer was needed to teach the finer points of flying in the jet age.

The T-33’s design originated from a P-80, but was stretched more than three feet to make room for a second seat. The *T-Bird*, as it was soon dubbed, looked clean and graceful, and was a dream to fly. T-33 pilot Zane Kelleher remarked, “The airplane is a sweetheart, it’s a puppy as long as you stay within the operational envelope.”

T-Birds began service with the Air Force in 1948. For nearly 13 years they helped train jet pilots. When replaced by newer training aircraft, *T-Birds* towed targets, simulated intruders and served as “hack” aircraft (flying military personnel and small parts from place to place).

Used Everywhere

It was once said that every military jet pilot in the free world had spent time in a T-33. Successful in the U.S., *T-Birds* have flown with the air forces of more than 40 countries for almost 40 years, as trainers, fighters and bombers. In addition to hundreds of ex-U.S. aircraft supplied to friendly governments, Canada and Japan have both built their own T-33s under license. Cuban *T-Birds* even shot down American bombers during the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. The aircraft is recognized worldwide, with some foreign T-33s still flying in military service today.

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About This Aircraft

The Museum’s T-33 has been in the Northwest for over 45 years! Built at Lockheed Aircraft in Burbank, California in 1955, the plane was assigned to the 123rd Fighter-Interceptor Squadron in October of that year. The 123rd is part of the Oregon Air National Guard and is based at Portland International Airport.

In March of 1963, the *Shooting Star* was transferred from the 123rd Squadron of the 142nd Fighter-Interceptor Group based in Portland, to the entire 142nd Group. In November of 1988, the T-Bird was dropped from Air Force inventory, and later placed on loan to the Museum.

Today, the plane’s canopy rail carries the name of Major General Charles A. Sams, former commander of the Oregon Air National Guard. When Sams joined the Air Guard in 1955, he flew his first sortie in this almost brand new T-33. In 1985, Sams flew this aircraft again on his “champagne flight,” his last mission before retirement.



Specifications

Type:	Military Trainer Aircraft
First Flight:	TP-80C on March 22,1948
Wingspan:	38 feet 11 inches (Without tip tanks)
Length:	37 feet 9 inches
Height:	11 feet 8 inches
Wing Area:	235 square feet
Weight,Empty:	8,365 pounds
Weight,Loaded:	12,071 pounds
Power:	One Allison J33 5,200 pounds static thrust engine
Normal Crew:	Two
Typical Armament:	None

Performance

Cruise Speed:	455 miles per hour
Top Speed:	600 miles per hour at sea level
Range:	1,025 miles
Service Ceiling:	48,000 feet