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**Contact:** Nathan Duff **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Phone:** (662) 846-4678

**Email:** nduff@deltastate.edu

**AFJROTC cohort earns pilot licenses at DSU**

**CLEVELAND, Miss. —** For the fifth consecutive year, Delta State University proudly served as a host institution for the United States Air Force Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (AFJROTC) Flight Academy, an intensive 8-week summer program designed to inspire and prepare young individuals for careers in aviation.

Delta State University achieved a remarkable 100% graduation rate for the second consecutive year, placing it in the top seven among the twenty-four participating institutions nationwide and distinguishing it as the only program to achieve a perfect graduation rate this year. The 2025 cohort, consisting of twelve cadets from across the country, completed a rigorous curriculum equivalent to standard private pilot training, condensed into an accelerated 8-week schedule.

This comprehensive program culminated in all cadets earning their private pilot licenses. Notably, cadets Kyanna Petz and Jackson Pollock completed the program in an impressive six weeks, while the remaining cadets finished in seven weeks.

A graduation ceremony was held July 25 at the Statehouse–West End District in Cleveland to honor the 2025 cadets:

Myles Alonzi, Melbourne, Fla.

Katelyn Deiner, Kapolei, Hawaii

Escher Gardella, Glendale, Ariz.

Douglas Jett, Deltona, Fla.

Nicholas Klapper, Mechanicsville, Va.

KyAnna Petz, Custer, S.D.

Jackson Pollock, Mount Pleasant, S.C.

Jillian Rivera, Palm Coast, Fla.

Julian Schiff, San Diego, Calif.

Julia Taylor, Kuna, Idaho

Laina Thongs, Newnan, Ga.

Ella Vanderwest, Tampa, Fla.

The event included a welcome by Marshall Tomlinson, director of flight operations at Delta State. Dr. Joseph Childs, dean of the College of Business and Aviation, delivered the invocation. Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Bradly MacNealy gave the keynote address. Certificates were presented by Tomlinson, Childs, and Wayne Barron of the U.S. Air Force Junior ROTC.

Aerial Applicator Program Coordinator Sheila Millican led the program alongside several DSU flight instructors. She praised the cadets and instructors, saying, “Achieving a 100% graduation rate for the second year in a row is a testament to the dedication of our cadets and the strength of our program. Delta State continues to lead the way in preparing the next generation of aviators, addressing the critical pilot shortage in the aviation industry.”

The Air Force JROTC Flight Academy provides hands-on flight training, mentorship, and exposure to aviation careers. Delta State’s ongoing success in the program highlights its commitment to excellence and its leadership in aviation education.

For more information about Delta State’s aviation programs, visit [www.deltastate.edu](http://www.deltastate.edu).

Cutline: These 12 cadets completed their private pilot license training during the recent Air Force JROTC Flight Academy at Delta State: (front row, L to R) Laina Thongs, Julia Taylor, Jillian Rivera, Ella Vanderwest, KyAnna Petz, Katelyn Deiner, (back row, L to R) Escher Gardella, Myles Alonzi, Jackson Pollock, Julian Schiff, Nicholas Klapper, Douglas Jett.

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**About Delta State University:**Delta State University is a four-year public institution whose nearly 2,700 students come from most U.S. states and more than 45 countries. Acknowledging its beginning as a teacher’s college, the University sustains excellence in teacher education while continuing to expand offerings in traditional as well as unique fields of study. Programs such as those available through the Delta Music Institute, the Commercial Aviation Department, and the Center for Interdisciplinary Geospatial Information highlight the University’s commitment to meeting the evolving needs of the students it serves with world-leading, industry-acclaimed programs. Situated in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, Delta State offers top-notch academic programs in business, arts, sciences, nursing, education, and more. DSU Athletics has won 14 national championships, 70 conference championships, and 37 regional titles.