Italy world leader in flight training: Wings awarded to ten USAF pilots in Decimomannu

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On the morning of **Friday, January 16, 2026**, inside the auditorium of the **International Flight Training School (IFTS) in Decimomannu (CA)**, the ceremony of **awarding the *Wings* of military pilot** to **ten student pilots of the United States Air Force (USAF)** took place, who successfully completed the **Basic Jet Training** as per their training syllabus.

The **US Wings** represent the official badge that **certifies the completion of flight training** and the achievement of the qualification of **USAF military pilot**, with a function similar to that of the Italian **"Aquile Turrite"**. In both contexts, the awarding of the symbol marks **a professional milestone** and entry into the military pilot community, recognition of **competence, discipline, and dedication** developed along a challenging training path.

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Authorities present and highlights of the event

The training of USAF pilots was managed and coordinated by the **212° Gruppo Volo/IFTS**, a unit under the **61° Stormo di Galatina**, responsible for advanced military pilot training according to **standards shared with allied Air Forces**.

The event, presided over by **Air Force General Francesco Vestito**, Commander of the Air Force Schools and the **3rd Air Region**, was also attended by a representation of the United States Air Force led by **Brigadier General Matthew Leard**, Director of Plans, Programs, Requirements and International Affairs of the **Air Education Training and Command (USAF)**.

After the national anthems were played, **Colonel Gianfranco Liccardo**, Commander of the 61° Stormo, gave a welcome speech, particularly thanking the personnel of the **212° Gruppo** and **Leonardo**, the “main architects” of a result that confirms the validity of the **IFTS** project. The most intense moment was when the **families of the newly certified pilots** pinned the **Wings** on the pilots' uniforms: a simple but meaningful gesture that seals a path of **commitment and personal growth**.

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Strategic value of the IFTS and national training system

The ceremony concluded with a speech by **General Vestito** who, highlighting the strategic value of **international cooperation** in flight training, emphasized the importance of a training model capable of combining **excellence, innovation, and interoperability**. In this context, the awarding of the **Wings** to the American students testifies to the effectiveness of a **modern and advanced training system**, capable of preparing highly qualified professionals ready to operate in complex and multinational environments.

The event confirms the central role of the **International Flight Training School** and the **61° Stormo** as a strategic tool for the international projection of the **training excellence** of the Air Force and the Defense sector.

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The **IFTS** was born from the collaboration between the **Air Force and Leonardo** to create an **advanced flight training center** destined to become an international reference starting from **Phase IV (Advanced/Lead-In to Fighter Training)**. At the Decimomannu airbase, the training is based on the use of the **M-346 (T-346A)** and an **integrated system** that allows combining **real and simulated activities**, maximizing the quality and effectiveness of the training return.

The **61° Stormo** offers courses for **Phase II** (Primary Pilot Training) on **T-345A**, **Phase III** (Specialized Pilot Training) on **FT-339C**, and **Phase IV (LIFT)** conducted by the **212° Gruppo Volo/IFTS** with the **T-346 system** at Decimomannu.

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