



left: QF-4E 72-1490 carries the standard 'HD' tailcode of Det1 of the 82nd ATRS as well as the original black and white check fin band of the 82nd FS, and the serial 74-665, for USAF Heritage Flight appearances.

below: Examples of the 49th Fighter Wing's two aircraft types, the F-117A Nighthawk and T-38A Talon, in formation. Now that the Nighthawk pilot training program has come to an end with the disestablishment of the 7th FS, the Talons are spread amongst the other two 49th FW squadrons for various duties.

Phantoms forever?

According to current forecasts, F-4 Phantoms will be converted into FSATs until FY2012 based on the number of available aircraft at AMARC, speed of regeneration, conversion at BAE Systems and annual expenditure rate. The latter obviously depends on the number of test programs, the number of Kill Authorizations (KA) requested by the different services for these programs, the actual number of KAs approved and how many aircraft actually get shot down. The latter figure is increasing, as the US Navy also requires FSATs after its last QF-4s were retired in 2004 and increased missile lethality (the AIM-9X and AMRAAM have close to 100 per cent kill rates) results in more FSATs being destroyed on their first NULLO sortie.

Therefore, the challenge is to keep the inventory at such a level as to continue to meet both Air Force and Navy requirements. The current estimate is that the last QF-4s will be delivered around July 2012. As the 'younger' F-4Gs will in the meantime have been used up (on March 16, 2006, Lt Col Charlie 'Tuna' Hainline flew the last manned mission ever by a 'Wild Weasel' F-4G), conversion continues using the many stored E-models, and some RF-4s may be included in the program.

NIGHTHAWK

The USAF's entire fleet of F-117A Nighthawks has been based at Holloman since May 9, 1992, following the deactivation of the 37th Tactical Fighter Wing at Tonopah. However, soon there will be none left.



In late December 2005, the USAF submitted its Program Budget Decision 720, also known as the Air Force Transformation Flight Plan (AFTFP), which outlined the service's plan to retire older aircraft 'aggressively' and thereby save more than \$2.6bn between 2007 and 2011, the money being directed into programs that should make the USAF a 'more lethal, more agile, streamlined force with an increased emphasis on the warfighter'. As a result, the F-117 fleet of 52 aircraft (50 in opera-

tional service and two with test squadrons) will go into early retirement by 2008.

Since the USAF submitted this plan, it has indicated that it may retain the Nighthawks for a somewhat longer period at the request of combatant commanders who have concerns over an interim capability gap during the proposed schedule of the F-117 phase-out. In April 2006, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen T. Michael Moseley stated that the service is working on a revamped timeline to keep the

