



required as every single initial qualification ride of the student pilots needed to be accompanied by a T-38 chase, except when they took their F-117 to the tanker at the end of the course. All the check rides from the 8th and the 9th Fighter Squadron also required a T-38A for chase. In addition, the Talon was used for chase duties during re-qualifications (e.g. landing currency) and during a part of the reduced-altitude training syllabus. The Test and Evaluation Group and Weapon School required a substantial amount of Talon support for weapons separation and other tests.

Although the aircraft have not been selected to receive the avionics upgrade (AUP), the fleet of T-38As clearly remains in high demand by the different units, and during the last fiscal year 3,700 hours in total were scheduled. Those F-117 pilots flying chase missions in the T-38A are required to fly the Talon twice a month to maintain their proficiency.

The main asset of the 7th Fighter Squadron was a fleet of six F-117A Nighthawks, each wearing the blue squadron fin flash. They were, however, maintained by the 9th Aircraft Maintenance Unit (AMU). Both the 7th and 9th squadrons shared their aircraft on a pooling basis. Although blue tails were preferably assigned to 7th FS missions, no specific trainer aircraft exist, allowing student pilots to fly standard aircraft.

A total of 12 authorised slots for Formal

Left: Undergoing what was officially known as the F-117A Transition/Re-qualification Training Course, a regular transition pilot required 52 training days, of which 33 were Ground Training Days (GTD) and 19 Flight Training Days (FTD), before graduating. The goal of the course was to produce F-117A pilots with basic proficiency in aircraft systems and weapons delivery (day mission, single-ship only). The course was a prerequisite to Mission Qualification Training (MQT), in which new pilots learned to employ the offensive systems of the F-117A to become fully combat-qualified.

Right: Ground personnel attend to an F-117 on its return from a mission. The aircraft carries the red fin-stripe of the 9th Fighter Squadron 'Flying Knights'. Although each of the squadrons had aircraft marked specifically for them, it was not uncommon for the 7th to use 9th aircraft, as the two squadrons shared a pool of aircraft. Aircraft were drawn as required, based on availability and configuration.

Training Unit – Instructor Pilots (FTU IP) formed the cadre of instructors, but many other IPs were available on base. Although assigned to other units with different tasks, they were still qualified and available when required. All instructors were originally volunteers serving with the 8th and the 9th. The preference was to select those who were already instructor pilots in one of these two operational squadrons.

They were then hired by the 7th and went through the instructor-upgrade course, learning FTU specifics and how to fly chase. New instructors were taught the tutorial specifics of every single ride that the normal upgrade pilots had to fly during their course and actually flew them all with a qualified instructor in the back seat. All instructors had exceptional flying and teaching skills and, on average, had 2,000 flying hours, including some 700 to 800 hours instructor time.

High proficiency

Working with two completely different airframes, with very different flying characteristics flying in one formation, the degree of proficiency required to fly a T-38 was very high. When flying chase, the instructor pilot was not only flying his own T-38 (callsign DEMON), but to a certain extent was also directing the student pilot's F-117. This called for excellent situational awareness from the instructor.

With the autopilot activated, the Nighthawk is easy to fly under normal flying conditions, but can easily be put into an unrecoverable situation when turning in for landing or during the approach itself due to its unusual aerodynamics and poor power-to-weight ratio. This required the instructor to fly the Talon in a completely different way to normal, using F-117 numbers and procedures. He also needed to watch what the student was doing and how he was doing it, all the while ensuring that both were complying with the local procedures.

For those 8th or 9th Fighter Squadron pilots who were not chase-qualified when they were hired by the 7th, they received a somewhat more extensive training upgrade, consisting of T-38 academics, simulator training and instructor-specific briefings before they started flying.

New F-117 pilots took a course known officially as the F-117A Transition/Re-qualification Training Course. All upgrading pilots, except foreign exchange officers and inter-service exchange or transfer officers, must have been graduates of the Introduction to Fighter Fundamentals (IFF) course.

Four different tracks existed, depending on the pilot's background and proficiency. Those pilots put into Track I were transition/upgrading pilots that had been a previous four-ship flight lead with a minimum of 500 hours flight time in any F, A, RF or SR prefix aircraft.

