



A T-38A wheels high over the QF-4 drone ramp at Holloman (above), while another lands (right). None of the 49th's T-38s will receive the AUP 'glass' cockpit upgrade, but they will remain in service at least as long as the F-117 due to the high demand for their services in support of the Nighthawk.

to be reactivated at the discretion of Air Force Headquarters. So some day the 'Screamers' may resurrect to fly again.

Det 1, 53d TEG

Being a tenant unit of the 49th Fighter Wing, Detachment 1, 53d Test and Evaluation Group – better known as the Dragon Test Team – was the sole Operational Test and Evaluation (OT&E) unit supporting the F-117 Stealth Fighter programme, managing and executing OT&E projects as directed first by Tactical Air Command (TAC) and later Air Combat Command (ACC) headquarters.

This included survivability, tactics development and evaluation programmes for the hardware, software and weapon upgrades that have maximised the F-117's operational combat capabilities. The unit also provided tactical and technical expertise to the United States Air Force, Department of Defense and the Aerospace Industry for the F-117 weapon system, and for future low-observable concept development and employment techniques. Over the years more than one hundred test projects were planned, executed and reported to support the operational warfighter.

Dragon Test Team

The origin of the Dragon Test Team name can be traced back to 1982, when test pilot Pete Barnes (Bandit 110) was scheduled to make his first F-117A flight on 9 July 1982 in aircraft 80-0787. Inspired by the magical dragon 'Eliot' in Walt Disney's movie *Pete's Dragon* of 1977, a green dragon was painted on the side of the aircraft, as the Stealth Fighter resembled the dragon in the movie by being invisible to all but 'Pete'. Consequently, this particular test aircraft



became known as 'The Dragon', while the USAF personnel involved in the Follow-On Test and Evaluation (FOT&E) programme began calling themselves the 'Dragon Test Team'.

In the early days, the 'Baja Scorpions' (now 410th Flight Test Squadron) were responsible for flying and certifying each of the 59 production aircraft before they were turned over to Tactical Air Command. Testing of new concepts was performed at the Developmental Test (DT) level before being handed on to the Initial Operational Test and Evaluation (IOT&E) organisation. If a modification received approval, it would then be tested at the FOT&E level in an operational setting. After all test phases had been accomplished successfully, the improvement would be incorporated into the operational fleet.

The first official commander of the Dragon Test Team was Lieutenant Colonel Bubba Jenny, who assumed command on 1 February 1984. In 1985, aircraft 80-0787 was replaced by 83-0807 in the FOT&E role, becoming 'Pete's Dragon II'. It was used for testing new weapons delivery compu-

tations after being updated with the second-generation Weapons System Computer. Later aircraft were simply referred to as the 'Dragon', and known replacements were 85-0835, 82-0804, 82-0803, 86-0837, 82-0803 and, finally, 'Dragon' 85-0835.

The Dragon Test Team members initially reported to the 4450th Tactical Group, but when the 4450th TG became the 37th Tactical Fighter Wing on 5 October 1989, Tactical Air Command activated the unit as Detachment 1 (Det 1), 57th Fighter Weapons Wing. It continued to operate from Tonopah Test Range, while receiving the 'WA' tail code. On 1 October 1991, the detachment was renamed Detachment 1, 57th Fighter Wing, but less than a year later, Det 1/57th FW was deactivated at Tonopah and re-activated at Holloman on 1 June 1992, this being the same day the entire F-117 force relocated from Tonopah to Holloman AFB. On 1 February 1993, the 57th Fighter Wing became the 57th Wing, resulting in the Dragon Test Team to be renamed as Detachment 1, 57th Wing.