



**The 'Flying Knights' of the 9th FS took over the operations of the 37th FW's 415th FTS 'Nighthawks' (formerly 'Night Stalkers').**

As the F-117 emerged from the classified world, so pilots were able to apply directly to the programme. The experience requirements were high, initially requiring pilots to have 1,000 hours flying time in tactical fighters. As the F-117 programme matured, those requirements were dropped to 750 hours and then to 500 hours, where they remained to the end. In the old days, pilots were hand-picked and initially only senior officers were admitted to the course. For some years now, captains and majors have graduated. The programme also opened up a bit with regards to previous pilot experience and, although most Stealth pilots come from single-seat fighter or attack jets, pilots who came from 'heavy' aircraft, such as B-1 and B-52 bombers, have successfully

graduated from the course. The criterion was that all those who had the potential to be a mission commander were acceptable. Those upgrading pilots that had no previous air-to-air refuelling experience yet were otherwise qualified under Track I, were put into Track IA.

Track II students were those upgrading pilots who had already graduated as F-117 pilots, but had been out of the Nighthawk cockpit for more than 18 months, and their course basically was a shorter re-qualification course. A fourth track was available for senior officers (colonel-select and above). Graduates of Test Pilot School (TPS) did not have a separate track.

#### Course aims

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 in the aircraft. Unlike during the F-117A Transition/Re-qualification Training Course, all of the MQT training missions were flown at night, without a chase instructor, and were handled by the operational squadrons (8th and 9th FS) themselves.

The number of training days was based on a nominal class size of five to six students. The unit normally scheduled five classes a year, producing a total of 25 to 30 students annually. Track I and IA had a total duration of 52 training days, of which 33 were Ground Training Days (GTD) and 19 Flight Training Days (FTD). Track II pilots required a total of 43 training days, of which 27 were ground training days and 16 were flying training days. A typical Track I student spent some

### 7th Fighter Squadron history

**A**ctivated on 16 January 1941, at Selfridge Field, Michigan, as the 7th Fighter Pursuit Squadron, the squadron has served its country heroically, and engaged in combat in World War II, Korea, Vietnam and other important campaigns. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, training was greatly accelerated to prepare the squadron for combat duty. By 16 February 1942, the 7th found itself at Bankstown, Australia, as one of the first American aviation units in the Southwest Pacific, flying the Curtiss P-40. The first air engagement came on 14 March over Horn Island off Cape York, Australia, with the 7th downing five Japanese Zeros for no loss.

Until the following September the 7th would remain in Australia, engaged primarily in air defence. It then moved north to Port Moresby, New Guinea, where its P-40s flew attack and air defence missions against Japanese fortifications. During this period, the squadron – originally known as the 'Screamers' Demons' – adopted a new mascot and emblem: the Bunyip, an Australian aboriginal den mascot. During World War II, the 7th had 10 of its members earn 'ace' status, as each of them destroyed five or more enemy aircraft in aerial combat.



The squadron continued to function effectively during the war, scoring 38 kills in December 1944. By the end of the war, the 'Screamers' Demons' had achieved 178 kills and would later transition to the P-47 and P-38. At the end of the war, the 7th was based in Japan as part of the occupational force flying P-51s and F-80s. When hostilities broke out in Korea, the unit was again readied for combat and deployed to Taegu, Korea. There it was the first combat fighter unit to operate actively from bases in South Korea as part of the 49th Fighter-Bomber Group. After the Korean War, the 7th moved back to Japan. The squadron was stationed at Hazuka, Misawa and Chitose, from where the unit flew F-84s and F-86s. In 1957, the squadron moved to the European theatre, first to Etain-Rouvres, France, to become the 7th Tactical Fighter Squadron (TFS) on 8 July 1958. In 1959

the unit moved to Spangdahlem, West Germany, from where it operated the North American F-100 Super Sabre.

In 1962 a conversion was made to the F-105 Thunderchief. In February 1967, the 7th TFS activated the 49th Weapons Training Detachment at Wheelus Field, Libya, to begin transition to the F-4D Phantom II aircraft. Finally, in 1968, the 7th TFS moved back to CONUS to Holloman AFB, New Mexico, as part of the 49th Wing. However, the squadron retained its NATO commitment to return once a year to its dual-base home at Spangdahlem. In April 1972 the 7th TFS was ordered to deploy with the 49th Wing to Takhli AB, Thailand, to help defeat the Communist Spring Offensive in Vietnam. The 7th returned to Holloman AFB in August 1972 where the 'Bunyaps' began their transition to the F-15 Eagle in mid-1977. This was completed by early 1978. Eagles were flown until the squadron deactivated on 30 September 1991.

On 11 September 1992, the 7th Fighter Squadron was reactivated and assigned A1-38B aircraft to perform the fighter lead-in training role. A year later, on 2 December 1993, the 7th Fighter Squadron took over the mission of training stealth pilots as the F-117A Formal Training Unit (FTU). This mission and many of the personnel were taken over from the 417th Fighter Squadron 'Bandits', which deactivated on the same day.

**Throughout the 1980s the 49th FW operated the F-15A/B Eagle, having converted from the Phantom in 1977/78. Aircraft of the 7th Tactical Fighter Squadron were blue fin-stripes to distinguish them from those of the 8th (yellow) and 9th (red).**

