



Airman

Magazine of America's Air Force

December 1992

*State
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Passing the Stick

The 417th Fighter Squadron at Holloman AFB, N.M., proved itself combat-ready during the Persian Gulf war. But when it comes to the F-117 stealth fighter, its true role is that of a trainer.

"Our mission is to train new stealth pilots at the most basic level of training," said Lt. Col. Steve Farnham, squadron commander. "Then they progress to the operational level [the 415th and 416th Fighter Squadrons], and they're brought up to fully mission-ready status."

But this formula doesn't happen without a lot of hard work.

Although eligible pilots are required to have a minimum of 750 flying hours and have previously flown in another combat fighter aircraft, they must earn their credentials. In addition to classroom and simulator training, instructor pilots take their students through 10 flights, including air refueling and air-to-ground attack.

A challenging twist to these flights is that the instructors in AT-38 Talon aircraft trail their students, who fly the \$47 million stealth aircraft.

"You can't sit in the cockpit with the student

and say 'that was wrong,'" said Capt. Dan DeCamp, an instructor pilot for the 417th. "You have to sit back and analyze the mistake. It's like sticking your hands in a black box and figuring out what the object is. You do the same thing figuring out the student's mistake."

But, he adds, by virtue of the flying

requirements, he's working with an experienced fighter pilot. "We're not teaching neophytes."

One of the eight stealth instructor pilots, DeCamp said the move from Tonopah Test Range Air Field, Nev., to Holloman has offered many new challenges.

"The move here gave us a lot of new territory and targets. And instead of going up and doing things the way we had always done at TTR, we had to learn to interact with everything else on base, such as other flying programs and air traffic control."

— K. A. Keane



Lt. Col. Steve Farnham

