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PROBING THE SECRETS OF NELLIS AIR FORCE BASE
By Steve Douglass

If you are ever on Highway 6, just outside of the little town of Tonopah, Nevada, and you can brave the heat, the rattlesnakes, and the isolation of the desert, get out of your car and wait. If you are patient enough you just might be amazed by what you'll see.

At first you'll only hear it, a high-pitched whining sound in the distance. Risking eye damage, you squint into the desert glare trying to locate the source of the sound. Suddenly you'll see it. It's an ominous-looking aircraft, perfectly flat on the bottom, pyramidal on the top.

Roaring across the high desert with its twin tail and swept back wings, it looks like a large black swallow. As it gets closer, you'll feel the urge to duck down among the lizards and the cacti. Such action is meaningless, though, for if you can see it, it can see you. So just stand and watch the Nighthawk go through its paces.

Since the beginning of the year, the F-117A Nighthawk stealth fighter has been engaged in daylight training missions from its secret base in Nevada. Still considered off limits to the press and public, the security forces at the base take a dim view of prying eyes. However, once in a while the Nighthawk must leave its protective nest.

It is on these rare occasions, when the Nighthawk is not surrounded by razor wire, patrolling dogs or security teams, that is when you might catch the F-117A strutting its stuff.

The secret Tonopah base is part of the Nellis Air Force Base military operations area. This secret range, which covers a large portion of south central Nevada, is the home of the Air Force's top secret proving grounds. Edwards Air Force Base was once the premier testing center but now is considered too public to test top secret stealth aircraft. The F-117 base on the northwest corner of Nellis is remote and removed from all but the most determined.

The F-117A Nighthawk is the official name of the stealth fighter but those who fly it have nicknamed it "The Wobbly Goblin." At slow speeds, the fighter is apparently hard to handle, hence, the odd title. Another term for the aircraft is "the sacred airplane" because when people see it for the first time they usually remark "Oh my God!"

A total of 49 are thought to be based on the Tonopah range, also known as Mellon Strip. The secret base, located in Area 30 on the Nellis range, consists of 72 nuclear hardened, specially built hangers for these secret aircraft.

The pilots who fly the F-117 are members of a new elite unit, the 445th Tactical Group.

{That should have been the 4450th TG.
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- JJA
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Most of the pilots first flew F-111 Aardvarks or have Wild Weasel experience. The special unit, known as "Team One-Furtim Vigilans" (vigilant by stealth) became operational in 1983.

Because of the secret nature of their missions, the pilots are not allowed to acknowledge to civilian air traffic controllers what type of craft they are flying. If asked, they are to say they are an A-7 Corsair.

Team One squadron is not the only squadron flying strange-looking aircraft on the Tonopah range. The 447th test and evaluation squadron, the Red Eagles, is based there as well.

{That should have been the 4477th TES.
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The Red Eagles fly authentic Soviet fighters. Captured in Afghanistan and turned over to the U.S., Mig 17s, 19s, 21s, 23s, 25s, 27s and Sukhoi Su20 Fighters are flown regularly in Nellis' Red Flag war

games.

Occuring almost every eight weeks, the Red Flag exercises are conducted in much the same way as the Navy's Top Gun school is used to train USAF pilots in dissimilar air combat tactics. What better way to train than against real Soviet fighters? To add to the realism, the Nellis range even is dotted with real Soviet air defense radars and SAMS (surface to air missiles) to give training pilots the feel of the real thing.

There is yet another secret base located in the middle of Nellis. Groom Lake, in an area called Dreamland, is known to be the test base of the mysterious Aurora and the F-19 stealth fighter. The Aurora, the stealth replacement for the SR-71 Blackbird and the F-19, the stealth replacement for the F-15 Eagle, is said to be flying from the Watertown Strip.

The Air Force has reportedly been testing the two top secret aircraft in Dreamland, Area 51, since 1980. (The SR-71 Blackbird was test flown in complete secrecy.) Other aircraft likely to be test flown from Dreamland in the near future are prototypes for the ATF (Advanced Tactical Fighter), the Phalanx Dragon, a stealth helicopter killer, and the A-12 (Navy Advanced Tactical Aircraft), a replacement for the A-6 intruder.

Although the bulk of stealth aircraft operations seem to be centered around Nevada, it is said that stealth aircraft have been seen at other bases as well. Last April the USAF said the F-117A would be used at bases nationwide to help integrate thge stealth technology within the rest of the Air Force inventory. The F-117A has been seen flying near Yuma, Arizona; Edwards AFB in Calfiornia, and Kadena AFB in Okinawa.

Recently it was rumed that F-117s are being stationed at the recently opened Roswell Air Force Base in New Mexico.

{They ended up at Holloman AFB, NM.

- JJA
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The Roswell strip was constructed originally for heavy bombers during WWII and Vietnam but closed in the late sixties. Residents of th area report that strange aircraft are once again slying out of the base. The White Sands missile range is not far from Roswell and the F-117A may be using the range to test the stealth cruise missile, General Dynamics AGM-129.

Another black aircraft program by General Dynamics known only as Project 100 is even more secret than all other stealth programs. Little is known about the project except that it is thought to be test flying out of Holliman AFB near Alamagordo, New Mexico, and only at night. A military radio net has been heard on various frequencies in the Holloman area (see frequency list) and it may be the testing of the Project 100 aircraft.

MONITORING

Trying to monitor the secret air force is nearly as hard as catching a glimpse of them. Best bets are the HF and UHF frequencies of the flight test bases and aircraft manufacturers. Also, a good place to monitor would be SAC and TAC frequencies. Another good place to listen is air traffic control centers near test areas.

So get cracking, heat up your set, and maybe you'll be the first to monitor the top secret Aurora and F-19!

FREQUENCIES

HOLLOMAN AFB, ALAMAGORDO, NEW MEXICO

Approach 324.3 MHz UHF
Departure 255.9 MHz UHF

Holloman flight test net/White Sands

Primary 260.8 MHz UHF
Secondary 264.9 MHz UHF

Other UHF frequencies monitored 189.4, 251.1, 353.6, 364.2, 376.1, 397.9
HF link 9.023 MHz USB
SATCOM links mentioned 262.925 MHz uplink
297.525 MHz downlink

Call signs heard:
Sierra Papa, Sierra Pete, Ringmaster, Battlestaff, Guardian Papa,
Dark Star, Dark Star Oscar

ROSWELL AIR FIELD, NEW MEXICO

Approach 239.6 MHz UHF
Tower 272.7 MHz UHF
Military Net
Primary 305.6 MHz UHF
Secondary 397.9 MHz UHF
Other frequencies monitored 259.2, 305.6, 348.7

NELLIS AFB, NEVADA

Approach 279.7 MHz UHF
Tower 324.3 MHz UHF
Ground control 275.8 MHz UHF
Clearance Delivery 289.4 MHz UHF
ATIS 270.1 MHz UHF

Nellis Military Operations Area

Dreamland base 255.8 MHz UHF
Sally corridor 343.0 MHz UHF
Groom Lake approach 361.3 MHz UHF
Watertown Strip approach 297.65 MHz UHF

EDWARDS AFB, CALIFORNIA

Tower 269.9 MHz UHF
Edwards command post (Conform) 304.0 MHz UHF
Edwards VHF ground control 121.8 Mhz UHF
Edwards approach 318.1 MHz UHF

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