



Stealth Fighter: A Year in the Life of an F-117 Pilot

By Lt. Col. William B. O'Connor USAF (ret.)

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The F-117 Stealth Nighthawk was a truly groundbreaking aircraft when introduced in the early 1980s. The strange shape of the jet, all flat panels and angles, rendered the aircraft nearly invisible to radar. This highly classified program wasn't acknowledged publicly by the U.S. Air Force until 1988. The Nighthawk was retired in 2008 after twenty-five years of service, including bombing missions over Panama, Iraq during both Gulf Wars, and Yugoslavia during the Kosovo war.

Brad O'Connor flew the Nighthawk during the NATO bombing campaign over Kosovo in 1999. His first-person experience puts the reader in the cockpit of this revolutionary combat aircraft. From his F-117 assignment through training, deployment, mission planning, and combat flights, O'Connor relates the day-to-day life of a pilot in the world's first stealth fighter.

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Editorial Review

Review

"For a personal account of flying the F-117, you'll need O'Connor's book." - *Air & Space Smithsonian*

From the Inside Flap

Stealth fighter. Nighthawk. The Black Jet. Each name for the F-117 is ominous and the feeling is intensified by its strange futuristic appearance, all flat surfaces and sharp edges. Those odd angles scatter radar waves to effectively render the aircraft undetectable. All other design considerations came second to radar invisibility, even aerodynamics. As a result, the F-117 is wildly unstable; four separate computer systems continuously monitor and adjust its flight path to keep it from tumbling out of control. What fighter pilot wouldn't want to fly such a machine into a war zone?

Lt. Col. William B. O'Connor, USAF (ret.), began his F-117 training in May 1998 and *Stealth Fighter* focuses on the following year of his life as he completes his training and enters combat when continuing turmoil in the former republics of Yugoslavia leads to a NATO bombing campaign. Some thirty-seven-thousand sorties were flown over Yugoslavia during the Kosovo War with only two jet losses. But a pilot was two and a half times more likely to have been shot at with surface-to-air missiles during Kosovo than pilots over Iraq in Desert Storm.

O'Connor, a fighter pilot who had often felt left out of the fight earlier in his career, earned a Distinguished Flying Cross for his service in the Kosovo War. The citation reads, in part, "On [14 April 1999], Colonel O'Connor executed one of several coordinated strike missions deep into the heart of the Serbian integrated air defense system. With complete disregard for his personal safety, Colonel O'Connor prosecuted his attack and braved a barrage of surface-to-air missile launches and anti-aircraft artillery fire . . . resulting in the precision-guided weapon destroying the target. Colonel O'Connor's flawless aerial skill and coolness under pressure while attacking a key Serbian military facility directly contributed to the historic success of the Operation Allied Force air campaign."

Stealth Fighter is an engaging look into the culture of those who fly high-tech fighters and bombers and an exciting personal account of the pinnacle of one pilot's career in the cockpit.

From the Back Cover

As I watch the moving map display in my cockpit, the small white symbol representing my jet crosses the northern border of Serbia. . . . This is it. I've just violated a sovereign national border with the intent, and my government's authorization, to commit acts of war. I also accept that my opposition, in the course of their duty to protect their homeland, is fully entitled to try to kill me in return. Finally, I can relax.

Lt. Col. William B. O'Connor, USAF (ret.), flew the F-117 stealth fighter during the Kosovo War (1998–1999). Although nearly undetectable by radar, the "Black Jet," as it was called by its pilots, was as visible to the naked eye as any aircraft and had to be flown after dark to truly disappear. Flying by instruments at 20,000 feet in the dead of night, with nearly no light in the cockpit, the brightest objects were

the surface-to-air missiles rocketing upward from the enemy's defensive positions. In *Stealth Fighter*, the first book-length pilot's account of flying the Nighthawk in a war zone, O'Connor puts the reader in the cockpit during the action that earned him a Distinguished Flying Cross citation.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Michelle Han:

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