

TOUCHING THE SECRET

TEST-FLYING THE LOCKHEED F-117 NIGHTHAWK

Following his exchange posting to the UK during 1979–81 to fly Harrier GR.3s with the RAF (as covered in *TAH45*), **COLONEL JOHN W. ZINK USAF (Retd)** returned to the USA to resume his career as a USAF F-4E Instructor Pilot. In 1985, however, an intriguing interview with a USAF Colonel led to his transition from Phantom to “ghost”



AFTER MY POSTING to the Harrier GR.3s of the RAF's No 1 (F) Sqn during 1979–81 [see the author's *A Yank in the RAF in TAH45 – Ed.*], I returned to the USA and requalified to fly the McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II. I was an F-4E Instructor Pilot and Flight Commander with the 20th Tactical Fighter Training Squadron (TFTS) at George AFB, California, in 1982–85, training Luftwaffe aircrew on the Phantom.

In the spring of 1985 I was in the control tower when I received a phone call. A person wanted to interview me at Base Operations. I co-ordinated the visit with my squadron and proceeded to the office. The staff there was abuzz with curiosity, as a Mitsubishi MU-2 twin-engine turboprop transport had recently landed, with a civilian registration as opposed to USAF markings.

I went to an interview room and met with a USAF Colonel. I was a Major at that time. The Colonel went on to tell me about an assignment flying the Ling-Temco-Vought A-7D Corsair II at Nellis AFB, Nevada, in order to conduct advanced avionics-testing “in the national interest”, with the 4450th Tactical Group (TG), which was unfamiliar to me. I was told to think

ABOVE The author beside a Lockheed F-117 in 1990. OPPOSITE PAGE Quite unlike any other aircraft from any angle, the F-117 employed “faceting” in its design, in which every surface was carefully considered for its radar-signal return characteristics, resulting in an extremely angular science-fictionesque profile. SGT LANCE CHEUNG / USAF

