



1st Lt. Dan Griffin is a student in the A-10C Pilot Initial Qualification course, upon completion of this course he will be a fully qualified A-10C pilot. (U.S. Air Force photo/Airman Jerilyn Quintanilla)



1st Lt. Dan Griffin, a pilot from the 358th Fighter Squadron, performs his first check ride in an A-10C Thunderbolt II here April 16. Lieutenant Griffin is a student in the A-10C Pilot Initial Qualification course, upon completion of this course he will be a fully qualified A-10C pilot. (U.S. Air Force photo/Capt. Stacie N. Shafran)

Behind the Scenes: The Making of an A-10C Pilot

by Capt. Stacie N. Shafran
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5/4/2010 - **DAVIS-MONTHAN AIR FORCE BASE, Ariz.** -- *(Editor's note: Curious about what it takes to become an A-10C pilot? Follow along as this series showcases 1st Lt. Daniel Griffin's journey to becoming a fully qualified A-10C attack pilot.)*

In a room full of seasoned pilots, all with tales to tell, it was a pilot identified as number "10," a rookie, whose charismatic and unpretentious personality caught my attention.

We were at the 358th Fighter Squadron following Lt. Col. Scott "Soup" Campbell's change of command ceremony March 26. During the celebration, the squadron's heritage room was abuzz with conversation and camaraderie.

For a brief moment during the festivities, the new commander silenced the crowd to recognize "new guy 10" and the 11 other pilots currently enrolled in the squadron's A-10C Pilot Initial Qualification course.

It turned out, two days prior each of the pilots flew the single-seat A-10C for the very first time.

When the cheers and toasts subsided, I met "10," also known as 1st Lt. Daniel Griffin, and asked him about that first flight.

"It was amazing and the most exciting thing I'd ever done," beamed the 27-year-old Rochester, N.Y. native. "It was something I've been thinking about doing my whole life. I loved it."

While flying, Lieutenant Griffin recalled being so focused on accomplishing the tasks required by the syllabus that he had to remind himself to look around outside the canopy. He described those moments of seeing the aircraft for the first time in the air, surrounding him, as surreal.

During our brief conversation, it was Lieutenant Griffin's enthusiasm and passion for flying that inspired me to want to share his journey toward becoming a fully qualified A-10C attack pilot.

Over the past month, through our interviews, I've listened as he's talked about becoming more familiar and confident with flying the jet -- it is apparent his basic skills are becoming more natural.

He wrapped up his initial training phase April 16 with his first graded instrument check ride.

"This was the test that certified I could fly the A-10," he explained.

This check ride is required by the Air Force to ensure its pilots can fly in various weather conditions. It is also the culmination of a year spent at pilot training, where the lieutenant learned the basics of flying, and his first seven flights here learning the specifics of piloting the mighty A-10C.

Until graduation in August, there will be more first-time memories and milestones, to include air-to-air refueling, firing the 30 mm GAU-8/A seven-barrel Gatling gun, and night flying. In a few weeks, the pilots will also earn call signs, or nicknames, and stop being referred to by the numbers they were assigned based on their rank, one through 12, when the course began in February.

The next few months will be demanding, but Lieutenant Griffin and his classmates will ultimately accomplish the



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same training each A-10 pilot has undergone since the jet was first delivered to Davis-Monthan in October 1975.

To be successful in the program, they will spend nearly 12 hours a day during the week studying (plus more on the weekends), attending academic sessions, training in a simulator and learning all they can from their instructor pilots and the squadron's experienced flyers. They will also be regularly tested, through exams and check rides.

For the lieutenant, this course is his last step in the training pipeline. He arrived at Davis-Monthan in February following completion of the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training Program at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas, in March 2009, and a fighter fundamentals course in early January.

"The ENJJPT program was awesome because of the training we received and the international friends I made," said Lieutenant Griffin.

A 2004 graduate of Purdue University, Ind., Lieutenant Griffin majored in aviation technology. Following graduation he pursued his goal of becoming an Air Force officer and military pilot by entering the Air National Guard. He applied to several guard units to become a pilot, but was only selected as an alternate. Simultaneously, he was hired to fly as a commercial airline pilot.

In 2006, the 111th Fighter Wing, 103rd Fighter Squadron, at the Willow Grove Joint Reserve Base Naval Air Station in Pa., selected him as a pilot candidate, launching him into the pilot training pipeline.

Following his training here, he'll ultimately be assigned to the Maryland Air National Guard's 175th Wing, 104th Fighter Squadron. The 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Commission opted to close the 103rd Fighter Squadron.

"I'm excited to finally be here and I'm looking forward to learning as much as I can from all of the instructors and coming away from here a solid wingman. I'm also looking forward to serving my country and employing the A-10C tactically," said Lieutenant Griffin.

Most of us will only see the jets fly overhead, taxi down the runway, or take off. This series, through stories, photographs and videos, will go behind-the-scenes into Lieutenant Griffin's life as he becomes one of the Air Force's next warriors; an A-10C attack pilot. The series, and all of its contents, can be found on www.dm.af.mil.