

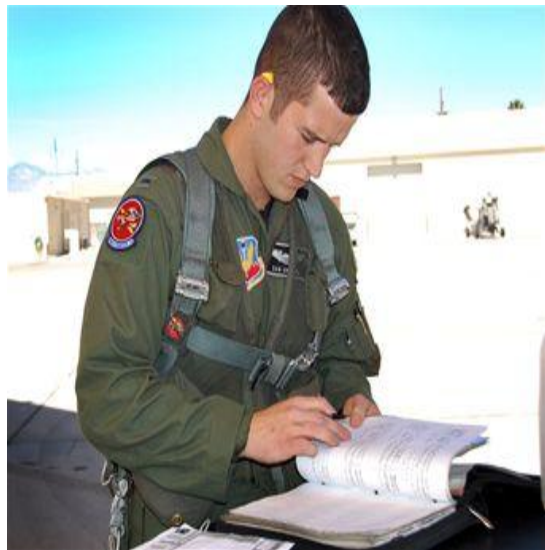
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1st Lt. Dan Griffin, a pilot from the 358th Fighter Squadron, fires the A-10's 30 mm Gatling gun for the first time at the Barry M. Goldwater Range May 3. Lieutenant Griffin is a student in the A-10C Pilot Initial Qualification course, upon completion of this course he will be a fully qualified A-10C pilot. (U.S. Air Force photo/Airman Jerilyn Quintanilla)



Prior to his flight May 3, 1st Lt. Dan Griffin, a pilot from the 358th Fighter Squadron, reviews maintenance records for his A-10C aircraft. He was on his way to the Barry M. Goldwater range to fire the A-10C's 30mm Gatling gun for the first time as part of the A-10C Pilot Initial Qualification course curriculum. Upon completion of this course he will be a fully qualified A-10C pilot. (U.S. Air Force photo/Capt. Stacie N. Shafran)



Prior to his flight May 3 to the Barry M. Goldwater Range, 1st Lt. Dan Griffin, a pilot from the 358th Fighter Squadron, inspects his A-10C aircraft. Lieutenant Griffin is a student in the A-10C Pilot Initial Qualification course and upon completion of this course he will be a fully qualified A-10C pilot. (U.S. Air Force photo/Capt. Stacie N. Shafran)



1st Lt. Dan Griffin, a pilot from the 358th Fighter Squadron, fires the A-10's 30 mm Gatling gun for the first time at the Barry M. Goldwater Range May 3. 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/Airman Jerilyn Quintanilla)

Behind the Scenes: The Making of an A-10C Pilot “Rite of Passage”

by Capt. Stacie N. Shafran
355th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

5/27/2010 - **DAVIS-MONTHAN AIR FORCE BASE, Ariz.** -- *(Editor's note: Curious about what it takes to become an A-10 pilot? Follow along as this series showcases 1st Lt. Daniel Griffin's journey to becoming a fully qualified A-10C attack pilot.)*

"Everyone says you remember the first time you shoot the gun - how it smells, how it feels and how it sounds," said 1st Lt. Dan Griffin, as he prepared for this rite-of-passage sortie May 3.

The lieutenant, a student in the 358th Fighter Squadron's A-10C Pilot Initial Qualification Course, was finally flying an A-10C with real, live rounds loaded into his GAU-8/A 30mm cannon.

During his pre-flight inspection, Lieutenant Griffin examined the aircraft, noticing the 12 BDU 33s, or practice bombs, which were placed under the wings for the first time.

Once it was time to depart, Senior Airman Jan Wampler, the 355th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron crew chief assisting Lieutenant Griffin, saluted the pilot. In a few hours, Lieutenant Griffin would return back to the parking spot with his jet stripped of its bombs and carrying fewer bullets.

Lieutenant Griffin and his instructor pilot, Maj. Cameron Curry, flew north to Range 2 at the Barry M. Goldwater Range. Major Curry's role was to make sure Lieutenant Griffin hit all of the parameters and correct him if he did something wrong.

While at the range, Lieutenant Griffin fulfilled the requirements for his first basic surface attack mission and practiced low-altitude tactical navigation. In other words, he approached the target, aimed the gun's site, and fired.

The lieutenant practiced all of this in a simulator the week before, reviewing procedures for rolling in on the range's targets and practicing what to say on the radio.

All of the training helped him have a successful mission.

During his first strafing pass he fired 80 rounds and on his second pass, he fired 20 rounds, hitting the target with all of the rounds.

"The experience was amazing," said Lieutenant Griffin. "I could feel the whole plane shake and see the smoke and the rounds hit downrange. I even felt the gun rotate to cool the barrels down."

The A-10 is configured so the pilot sits on top of the gun. It is placed slightly off center in the nose of the plane, with the front landing gear positioned to the right of the center line, so that the actively firing cannon barrel is directly on the aircraft's center line. The gun is capable of firing 3,900 rounds per minute to defeat a wide variety of targets including tanks.

Lieutenant Griffin also performed air-to-ground tactics by releasing the BDU 33s, marking the first time he was allowed to release something from an aircraft.

"I was excited to see the bombs hit the targets, see their smoke and receive real-time feedback," he said.



While at the Barry M. Goldwater range May 3, dust and smoke fill the air as 1st Lt. Dan Griffin fires the A-10C's 30mm Gatling gun for the first time. Lieutenant Griffin is a student in the A-10C Pilot Initial Qualification course. To learn more about his journey through the course, check out "Behind the Scenes: The Making of an A-10C Pilot" at www.dm.af.mil. (U.S. Air Force photo/Airman Jerilyn Quintanilla)

The achievement of firing the gun for the first time formally welcomed Lieutenant Griffin into the A-10 community and instantly earned him a bit more respect among his peers.

After Lieutenant Griffin returned to base and parked the jet, 358th Fighter Squadron Commander Lt. Col. Scott Campbell passed by -- he had also just returned from a sortie, and he became the first to offer congratulations.

Next, Major Curry came by and placed an A-10 patch on Lieutenant Griffin's left sleeve. It was proof he was now truly one of them.

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 photos and video from Lieutenant Griffin's trip to the range, along with the rest of the series, can be found on www.dm.af.mil.