



EIGHT UNL AIR FORCE ROTC cadets walk on the Tarmac toward the refueling plane.

Fill on the

PHOTOS AND STORY BY MATT MILLER



THE NEBRASKA AIR GUARD refuels a F-117A Nighthawk, more commonly known as a stealth, in midair Tuesday somewhere over New Mexico. The Air Guard refueled two stealths that day. Sixty-four Stealths, costing a total of about \$45 million each, were built before production stopped in 1990.

Air Force ROTC cadets experience stealth mission

OVER NEW MEXICO — Eight UNL Air Force ROTC cadets took a flight Tuesday they will never forget.

The beverage selection was minimal — water only.

And there were no flight attendants.

The seats were red canvas netting supported only by a metal pole that ran under the middle of the seat.

But not one of the cadets complained.

It's hard to complain about being some of the few Americans who get to see an F-117A Nighthawk Stealth Fighter from fewer than 40 feet away.

The eight cadets were almost all University of Nebraska-Lincoln freshmen and sophomores picked by lottery to fly on a stealth refueling mission.

Junior Shawn Pebley, Air ROTC public affairs officer, said the underclassmen were chosen so they could experience the Air Force in action.

The Air Force originated the 8th AF's refueling plane to fly with the stealth fighters, and today it does so.

Master Sgt. Steve Minnick, a 30th refueling boom operator, said the mission was a "big deal" for the cadets. "It's a big deal," he said. "It's a big deal." And he added, "It's a big deal." "It's a big deal," he said. "It's a big deal."

A big difference: The cadets cost just \$45 million.

"Little movements on one end of the stick makes big movements on the other end of the

broom," he said.

A stealth, however, is one of the easiest planes to refuel because of its technology, Minnick said.

"It's not as hard as what it looks like, but we like to make people think it is," he said.

The cadets were not only amazed with the sight of the fighters, but also the technology — especially the stealths' immunity to radar.

"It was weird. Usually the pilots can see planes on radar, but the pilots had to try and make visual contact," he said. "They were constantly scanning the skies."

Freshman Shelley Bauer said it was "phenomenal to see the stealth up close and personal."

But the mission was much more meaningful and memorable because the cadets did more than watch.

"We got to do everything — run the boom, ask the pilots, sit in the cockpit, talk to the navigator, everything but push the pilot's buttons and fly the plane."

The cadets' excitement wasn't quite the same, though, once the fighters were out of sight.

"You just see their expressions and how excited they were when the stealths were here, but after the stealths left, they just calmed down," Pebley said.

No one complained, though. And as soon as they stepped off the plane, everyone could talk about how amazing their flight had been.



FRESHMAN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION MAJOR ANDREW CHRISTEN looks out one of the four windows in the fuselage of the KC-135R on the way to New Mexico Tuesday.

JUNIOR SHAWN PEBLEY learns how to move the refueling boom in the back of the KC-135R as boom operator Staff Sgt. Randy Douglas teaches him what some of the controls do. The cadets, however, weren't allowed to do any of the actually refueling.