

# The difference between fighter pilots and other pilots.

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As a current F-15C instructor pilot with over 2,000 hours and an A320 airline pilot I can answer this.

Except for fighter pilots, everyone's primary mission is to get from point A to point B safely.

Fighter pilots go from point A to somewhere to kill other aircraft, then go back to point A. 10% of the fighter pilot's focus is on getting there and 90% is focused on the mission to kill people and break things.

Fighter pilots begin their careers in the year long Air Force pilot training where every aspect of performance is graded. The best pilots get their choice of jets and they usually choose fighters. Then they go through two more schools – 3 months of introduction to fighter fundamentals in a T-38C and then the 6+ month course in their primary aircraft. Each course has approximately a 20% washout rate. If a fighter pilot washes of these courses, they're sent to fly other jets in the AF inventory. Fighter pilots generally did better in pilot training and survived (literally and figuratively) the follow-on courses.

Excelling in pilot training and surviving follow on training requires a confident attitude so all fighter pilots start with that.

Once you're in the fighter world things get hard. Killing someone who's trying to kill you in an equally capable supersonic, 9G capable aircraft is an impossibly complicated task. The F-15C 3-1 (the fighter pilot bible) is over 500 pages, and that just includes the tactics. This changes every year because both our weapons and our enemy's weapons are constantly evolving. Fighter tactics must evolve to cope. Fighter pilots know every detail of this manual, have the ability to brief to it, employ those tactics in a jet moving over 1000 nm/hour while pulling 9 G's and then debrief every aspect of the mission. There are also the more mundane but important aspects of doing what every other pilot does, including navigation, aircraft systems knowledge, and emergency procedures.

Mastery of all of this knowledge and these skills takes enormous amounts of time. Fighter pilots spend untold hours of their lives in Top Secret facilities debriefing training missions, studying and talking tactics. It can be very fun, but it's exhausting. Spending untold hours of your life with equally hard working, smart, fun people tends to shape already confident people into a certain way of looking at things. Fighting, and training to fight also requires taking risks and pushing yourself. There are physical and mental limits that fighter pilots are constantly pushing to improve. If they don't and their enemies do, bad things happen. Fighter pilots start confident, which tends to grow over time as their skills improve and this can lead to arrogance. The fighter community has actively worked to tone this down because they understand that every other platform has an important piece to play.