



TOPGUN TURNS 50

Quick Facts

- TOPGUN took in its first class of fighter pilots and weapons systems officers on March 3, 1969.
- TOPGUN's official name is the Navy Fighter Weapons School.
- TOPGUN is a “graduate school,” where the best naval fighter aircrew learn and perfect the latest tactics to then teach others.
- TOPGUN started during the Vietnam War, when Navy F-4s had a kill ratio of 2:1 against North Vietnam's MiG fighters — far below the ratios in World War II and Korea.
- In the last years of the Vietnam War, TOPGUN graduates and their students helped raise the kill ratio to 12:1.
- The character of Charlie in the film “Top Gun” was modeled after a real analyst from CNA. This research organization has supported TOPGUN with nearly continuous, on-site support from scientists since 1975.
- TOPGUN is also the U.S. Navy's center of innovation in fighter tactics, with instructors tasked to develop new employment standards to counter an ever-evolving threat
- Over the 50 years it has been in operation, more than 2000 pilots and weapons systems officers have graduated from TOPGUN, receiving the coveted TOPGUN patch. (above left)
- 28 CNA analysts have deployed with TOPGUN, serving for up to four years. Of those, 26 had Ph.D.s in mathematics, physics and related fields.
- The success of the TOPGUN "train the trainer" model has led to other Navy graduate schools for crews that operate early warning aircraft (sometimes called “TOP DOME”), Growler electronic warfare aircraft (HAVOC), helicopters (SEAWOLF) and even Tomahawk missiles. Collectively, these schools make up the Naval Aviation Warfighting Development Center.
- In 1996, TOPGUN moved from Naval Air Station Miramar in San Diego to Naval Air Station Fallon, in Nevada.
- Prospective new instructors are tested at “murder boards” in front of TOPGUN's 35-member staff and subject matter experts.
- TOPGUN pushes the envelope in fighter tactics, requiring sophisticated computer models involving aerodynamics, stochastic processes, simulations of multivariate systems and several fields of fundamental physics.

