Fair Winds, Following Seas, Capt. Cox

“We have some of the best men and women in defense at Pax River. We have a great set of people here with all sorts of talent who want to do all sorts of things and it just has to be unleashed, enabled or empowered. It takes each person doing their part to the greatest of their ability, so everyone else can focus on doing their part. It's a team. Whether you're doing back office admin work, inventing new things in a lab, flying an aircraft, or controlling the airspace that planes fly in; everyone has their part and they play it well. That's how we can maintain the advantage we need in our Navy. And I thank them all for doing it.”

Capt. Christopher Cox
NAS Patuxent River Commanding Officer
August 2017 to September 2020

Test Pilot School partners with NASA for student training

By Paul Lagasse
U.S. Naval Test Pilot School Communications

The United States Naval Test Pilot School (USNTPS) is the Navy's principal operator of the Northrop Grumman T-38C Talon supersonic jet trainer, with 10 of the twin-engined aircraft in its inventory. The school's T-38s fly an average of 1,100 hours per year, providing students with valuable experience evaluating its performance, flying qualities, dynamics, and transonic and supersonic flight characteristics.

Because the T-38C is the school's primary fixed-wing trainer, students are required to receive formal flight training in the aircraft prior to their arrival. In the past, this has been done at the U.S. Air Force's Air Education and Training Command at Randolph Air Force Base in Texas. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic, AETC had to pare back its training commitments to the Navy and its other customers. With a new class of students preparing to arrive in September, USNTPS had to find an alternative — and quickly.

USNTPS turned to its long-standing partner, NASA, for assistance. NASA operates the T-38N variant, which is primarily used for astronaut space flight readiness training. NASA operates a simulator for the T-38N which is used to train basic and emergency procedures as well as crew resource management. After discussing the idea with NASA staff to determine availability and feasibility, the school quickly worked with NASA's training staff to tailor a simulator training program to the school's unique requirements. An inter-agency agreement was quickly drafted and funds were transferred to formalize the training program.

Observing strict travel and quarantine guidelines to ensure protection against exposure to COVID-19, five Test Pilots Under Instruction (TPUI) — the formal name for the students who attend USNTPS — traveled to the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, earlier this summer for training in the NASA simulator. The training was conducted by Cmdr. Adam Klein and Cmdr. Dick Clark, both of whom are USNTPS graduates and former USNTPS staff members, and are both NASA flight instructors.

NASA research pilot and U.S. Naval Test Pilot School (USNTPS) instructor Cmdr. Adam Klein, right, prepares for a T-38C training flight with USNTPS student Lt. Spencer Smith. Klein and fellow instructor Cmdr. Dick Clark oversaw the training of USNTPS students in NASA's T-38N simulator in Houston, Texas, after the COVID-19 pandemic prevented students from being able to conduct their pre-arrival training at Randolph Air Force Base.