**Midshipmen speak with pilots about T&E career path**

*Students visit strike aircraft test squadron*

By Michael Land  
F-35 Patuxent River Integrated Test Force Public Affairs

Under a mid-fall afternoon sky, blue and cloudless with unlimited visibility, some 30 midshipmen from the U.S. Naval Academy’s Aerospace Engineering Department recently had a chance to see and hear what their naval aviation futures could look like.

Overhead, test aircraft roared across the clear expanse, some banking out over the bay, attracting the attention of the aerospace engineering students during their field trip to Air Test and Evaluation Squadron (VX) 23 onboard NAS Patuxent River the second week of November. This outing was a rare escape from Annapolis for these students, their guide said. “This year it’s even more important because of lost opportunities,” said retired Navy Capt. Robert Niewoehner, who is a professor in the aerospace engineering department. He was the F/A-18E/F Chief Test Pilot at VX-23 from 1994-1998. Their summer internships at the likes of VX-23 and the Test Pilot School (TPS) and some flying events were curtailed in light of COVID-19 restrictions, Niewoehner explained.

With a 3 p.m. sun casting long shadows of the midshipmen in their Navy working uniforms, they saw, touched and even crawled under for a closer look at four test jets: an F-35C carrier variant (CV) of the Lightning II, an EA-18G Growler, an F/A-18E/F Super Hornet, and a T-45 Goshawk.

Academy grads who today are assigned as test pilots at VX-23 briefed the students about the aircraft, discussed their respective career paths that brought them to Naval Air Systems Command's largest flight test organization, and offered nuggets of professional advice.

“While it’s true that graduation from the academy’s Aerospace Engineering Department to the test and evaluation career path,” said Lt. Zach Fisher, VX-23 host for the visit, “a lot of us that graduated from the academy have a degree in Aerospace Engineering did so with the intentions of possibly becoming a test pilot or to fly jets.”

**Prepare for cold weather with a Pax River firewood permit**

By Donna Cipolloni  
NAS Patuxent River Public Affairs

Don’t let the cold weather sneak up on you. Be prepared by obtaining a firewood permit from the NAS Patuxent River Natural Resources Department and help yourself to wood available onboard the installation.

Anyone with base access can purchase the wood for personal use, such as heating a home with a fireplace or woodstove, use in recreational fire rings or pits, or for campfires and bonfires.

“Ensure you comply with safety and fire regulations when cutting the logs to the size they desire in order to remove them, and the safe operation of a chainsaw is required. Permit holders must bring their own equipment, such as a chainsaw, gloves, safety goggles and appropriate footwear. The permit cost is $15 per truckload, but varies by truck bed size,” LaBella noted. “Permits are issued for a two-week period and wood can be harvested any time within that timeframe.”

A permit is required before being allowed to remove any wood from Pax River.

“There have been some people helping themselves to wood stacks and we need to make sure people understand that since the base is government property, we cannot let people take it for free; that’s why there’s this low per-truckload fee,” LaBella said. “And wood collected on station may not be sold commercially.”

To purchase a permit, cutters must call (301) 342-3670 to schedule an appointment with a staff member to meet at the Natural Resources Education Center, building #1410, on Johnson Road. There, they can also obtain a copy of the Pax River Firewood Cutting Instruction, which governs the firewood cutting program.