

A Natural High

Story and photos by JO1 Joshua M. Hudson



Greek mythology tells of Icarus, who flew on wings of wax to escape from Crete. Unfortunately, he soared too close to the sun, the wings melted and he plummeted into the Aegean Sea. The closest Navy fliers can come to that “freeing” sensation is aboard a glider at the U.S. Naval Test Pilot School (TPS).

At TPS, these aircraft are used to increase the students’ knowledge of the dynamics of flight. The only “lift” the planes get is from a combination of an initial tow by one of the school’s two U-6A *Beavers* and the pilot’s skill.

The pilot frees the glider from the tow cable at 3,000 feet. With speeds topping out at 60 mph, the gliders perform a hammerhead maneuver, pulling up toward the sun until they stop and rotate in a half circle, then head downward. Fighting the pull of gravity, the gliders pass over the tarmac using the rising thermals from the black surface to gain lift. At 1,000 feet, the glider prepares for landing.

Swooping down to the landing strip, the one-wheel craft slows until its nose scrapes the asphalt and comes to a stop.

Unlike Icarus, the Naval Aviators who fly these planes at TPS are skilled enough to never fly too close to the sun. ✈





Tow Slow . . . Let Go . . . Air Flow

Gliders get to altitude with a little help from one of the two TPS U6-A *Beavers* via a tow line. TPS XO Cdr. Bob Stoney (back seat) and Royal Navy exchange pilot LCdr. Michael Burrows (front seat) do their preflight checks readying for one of their many flights that morning. Glider flights are not very long, and the same glider may perform 20 to 30 sorties within a three-hour period.

