



**NAVAL STRIKE AND
AIR WARFARE CENTER**

NAVAL AVIATION'S PREMIER TRAINING GROUND



Story and Photos by Rick Llinares

The Naval Strike and Air Warfare Center (NSAWC) at NAS Fallon, Nev., is the Center of Excellence for Naval Aviation training and tactics development. Its mission is to improve the warfighting capability of Navy airpower. NSAWC provides training, assessment, aviation requirements recommendations, research and development priorities for integrated strike warfare, maritime and overland air superiority strike fighter employment, airborne battle management, combat search and rescue, close air support, and associated planning support systems. The command is also responsible for the development, implementation and administration of several courses of instruction, while functioning as the Navy point of contact for all issues relating to the Fallon Range Training Complex.

Two NSAWC F/A-18 Hornets fly over the Lake Tahoe area.





To accomplish its mission, NSAWC comprises more than 119 officers and 174 enlisted, 62 civil service and 500 contract personnel. The command flies and maintains 25 F/A-18A and 3 F/A-18B *Hornets*, 7 F-14 *Tomcats* and 4 SH-60 *Seahawk* helicopters.

NSAWC was established on 11 July 1996 with Rear Admiral Bernard J. Smith as the first commanding officer. Naval Aviation's three Centers of Excellence—Naval Strike Warfare Center (Strike U), Navy Fighter Weapons School (TOPGUN) and Carrier Airborne Early Warning Weapons School (CAEWWS)—were combined under one organization to focus on aviation tactical training effectiveness. The transition process began with Strike U, which was already aboard Fallon, then moving CAEWWS from NAS Miramar, Calif., at the end of 1995. TOPGUN arrived from Miramar in June 1996.

Located 60 miles east of Reno, Nev., and 250 miles from the Pacific coast, NAS Fallon was a good location for NSAWC. The relative remoteness and excellent weather of the Nevada desert region offered obvious advantages for tactical training flight operations. RAdm. Smith cited the Base Realignment and Closure Act as another reason for merging the three aviation schools at Fallon. "We can concentrate air wing training in one place, and that's more economical," he explained. Now, "NSAWC is like the hub of a wagon wheel, supporting and supported by the many spokes of different commands on both coasts. This new structure will enhance and improve the Naval Aviation training continuum," he added.

Combining the three commands expanded Strike U's original mission. The focus has evolved into addressing a future vision for Naval Aviation. RAdm. Smith described the integration of the fighter and attack arenas in today's *Hornet* Navy with *Tomcats* also performing attack missions. "We need to establish a strike/fighter mindset with attack and fighter attitudes. Our goal is unity of purpose, with excellence in training and tactics development," he said.

In addition to extensive classroom

An F/A-18 *Hornet* fires a decoy flare while performing an evasive maneuver.





Above, for its NSAWC training role, an F-14 *Tomcat* sports a special paint scheme. Left, the Naval Strike and Air Warfare Center at NAS Fallon, Nev., is Naval Aviation’s center of excellence for training and tactics development. Opposite, the SH-60 *Seahawk* is the “trainer” used in the helicopter version of TOPGUN.

academic training, two distinctly different areas of NSAWC training utilize the Fallon Range Training Complex: the Carrier Air Wing and the Strike Fighter Tactics Instructor courses. Air wing training brings together all the squadrons of an air wing for approximately four weeks. The course provides strike planning and execution training during a dynamic, realistic scenario in a simulated wartime environment. It is conducted an average of four times per year. The Strike Fighter Tactics Instructor course trains individuals in the art of air-to-air and air-to-ground superiority by providing highly advanced tactical training in the F/A-18 and F-14. It comprises five 9-week syllabi classes which involve extraordinary preparation and flight-hour execution.

NSAWC pilots also fly in the adversary pilot role to support airborne portions of the training. Annually, NSAWC hosts a combat search and rescue exercise that

includes all branches of the U.S. military. This exercise is approximately 10 days long with a full week of flight exercises.

When asked to describe how NSAWC has changed since it first stood up, public affairs officer Lieutenant Derek Handley said, “Since then, a Seahawk Weapons and Tactics Instructor course has been created. It is a helicopter version of TOPGUN. In addition, an unmanned aerial vehicle program is being developed. Air wing training is constantly being reevaluated to provide the best training possible. We try to tailor the training to what that air wing may encounter on deployment,” he explained.

NSAWC interfaces with similar units such as the U.S. Air Force Weapons School at Nellis AFB, Nev., and Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron (MAWTS) 1 at MCAS Yuma, Ariz. Lieutenant Commander Nicholas Mongillo, assistant TOPGUN department head, commented on the interservice





cooperation, “TOPGUN usually has at least one Air Force F-15 exchange pilot on staff, while a Navy F/A-18 pilot is assigned to the F-16 division of the USAF Weapons School. The Air Force also sends jets and pilots to participate in our graduate-level exercise. MAWTS-1 has a couple of Navy guys on staff and we have Marine aviators on the TOPGUN staff. Periodic conferences take place to discuss tactics and standardization between these organizations.”

Current NSAWC commanding officer RAdm. Richard J. Naughton stated, “One of our goals is to encourage feedback from the deployed air wings who matriculated here. What do they feel we could do differently to improve the course? It’s a dynamic situation, changing almost constantly. We must continue to be relevant to the fleet and make certain that all of our training is on the mark.”

Rick Llinares is a professional photographer and writer specializing in Naval Aviation subjects.



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