

Naval Aviation Bids Farewell To Johnny O

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After more than two decades training flight test professionals in the skies above NAS Patuxent River, Johnny O brings the OH-58C through a celebratory water arch to make his final landing in front of the USNTPS hangar. (U.S. Navy photos by Kaitlin Wicker)

NAVAL AIR STATION PATUXENT RIVER, Md. - In a fitting farewell, the United States Naval Test Pilot School (USNTPS) bid fair winds and following seas to its Chief Academic Instructor, John O'Connor. Known to most as Johnny O, O'Connor has been part of the naval aviation flight test community for 35 years, spending the last 20 as an instructor and curriculum manager at USNTPS.

"Surrounded by the finest in all respects I enjoyed a unique wealth of comradery, intelligence, experience, and passion for over 20 years," said O'Connor. "My staff had the prestige of a major league baseball club, and I felt like the luckiest manager in the show."

Johnny O gears up for his final flight checking his Survival Egress Air bottle before heading to the flight line.

Over the decades, O'Connor trained, mentored, and influenced countless flight test professionals leaving a legacy of excellence that reaches from the fleet to space. Focused on developing critical thinkers who identify and clearly communicate aircraft deficiencies and solutions, O'Connor and the USNTPS staff take highly skilled aviators and teach them to be flight test professionals.

"I admire every student that took on the challenges imposed by the school," said O'Connor. "Each of them taught me something, they made me a better teacher and thinker."

O'Connor watched, with what he admits may be too much pride, as his students have gone on from USNTPS to meet test challenges in the Navy's test squadrons, command fleets and squadrons, run program offices, and go to space. Through decades of experience, knowledge, and success O'Connor gained the trust and confidence of the school's commanding officers, and in return provided the Navy with a great asset: flight test professionals.

"Every Skipper gave me the trust and latitude of a Cold War fleet lieutenant," said O'Connor. "I felt like the most powerful force in the Navy."

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