



Before Topgun Days: The Making of a Jet Fighter Instructor

By Dave Baranek

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Becoming the best doesn't happen overnight; you've got to work for it.

Before becoming an instructor in the Navy's Topgun program, Dave "Bio" Baranek was just another kid with a dream. Upon graduating from college, he joined the Navy with the goal of becoming a fighter pilot. But, his eyesight waning, he knew that he would never be able to reach that goal. Undaunted, he plowed ahead and found his niche as a radar intercept operator in the backseat of the sleek, new Grumman F-14 Tomcat.

Join Baranek in *Before Topgun Days* as he takes you along for this greatest, most exciting time of his young life: training to become a naval flight officer. Taking place before the events recounted in his previous memoir, *Topgun Days*, Baranek brings to life the anxieties and excitement of entering the fast-paced world of fighter jocks. From a green recruit to an experienced flyer, discover what it took to become a Topgun instructor.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Many may dream of one day wearing Navy Wings of Gold, but few truly appreciate what is required to earn those wings and move from the street to the Fleet. In this book, "Bio" shows how he climbed from college student to experienced naval flight officer. Aircraft have changed, but that process continues on. Here's a great read for any aviation enthusiast, and especially for anyone considering a career in Naval Aviation."
.—**Vice Admiral "Streak" Chanik, USN (Ret.)**, former F-14 pilot and Topgun instructor

"I couldn't put Dave Baranek's book down—he put me right in the cockpit of his aircraft and made me feel like I was a Navy RIO running intercepts on bad guys. Dave wanted to be a pilot; so did I, but our eyesight wasn't quite good enough, so we both chose to become backseaters. It doesn't matter where you sit in a fighter or bomber or reconnaissance plane—it's all about flying; military flying; taking planes to the edge of the envelope. It's about tough training and besting the bad guys if and when you meet up with them. In *Before Topgun Days* Dave takes you from the day he reports to NAS Pensacola as an utter novice until he straps on an F-14 Tomcat and flies with a carrier at sea. What I liked best about the book is being part of his demanding training—day by day, event by event. I love the book. This is an aviator's book—for anyone who loves to reach for the sky." —**Wolfgang W Samuel, Colonel, USAF (Ret.)**, author of *German Boy* and *In Defense of Freedom*

"Baranek describes a relatively little-known area of Navy flight training, that of the F-14 radar intercept officer or RIO, the guy-in-the-back, as skilled as his pilot up front but not as familiar to the average reader of modern aviation literature. Only someone who has actually experienced the demanding instruction required to earn this unique position in a flight crew, followed by the months of deployments in the Fleet in a combat-ready F-14 squadron could hope to tell this story in such deeply personal detail. Even after a life-long association with aviation, I found myself filling in many of the blanks as I read this lively adventure story. Great job, Bio!"

- **Commander Peter Mersky, USNR (Ret.)**, author of *WHITEY, F-8 vs. MiG-17*, and *U.S. MARINE CORPS AVIATION SINCE 1912*

About the Author

No Bio

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