

(Right) In *Top Gun*, Tom Cruise plays a cocky Navy Pilot who doesn't like to play by the rules and who's so good, he might get away with it. (Below) Cruise confronts his rival (Val Kilmer, left), a by-the-book star pilot.

TOP GUN

BY JIMMY SUMMERS

When the time came to cast the part of Maverick Mitchell, the best young Navy pilot in the air, the producers of *Top Gun* had only one actor in mind.

That was Tom Cruise. With relatively few roles to his credit, Cruise has become one of the most sought after and popular young performers in motion pictures.

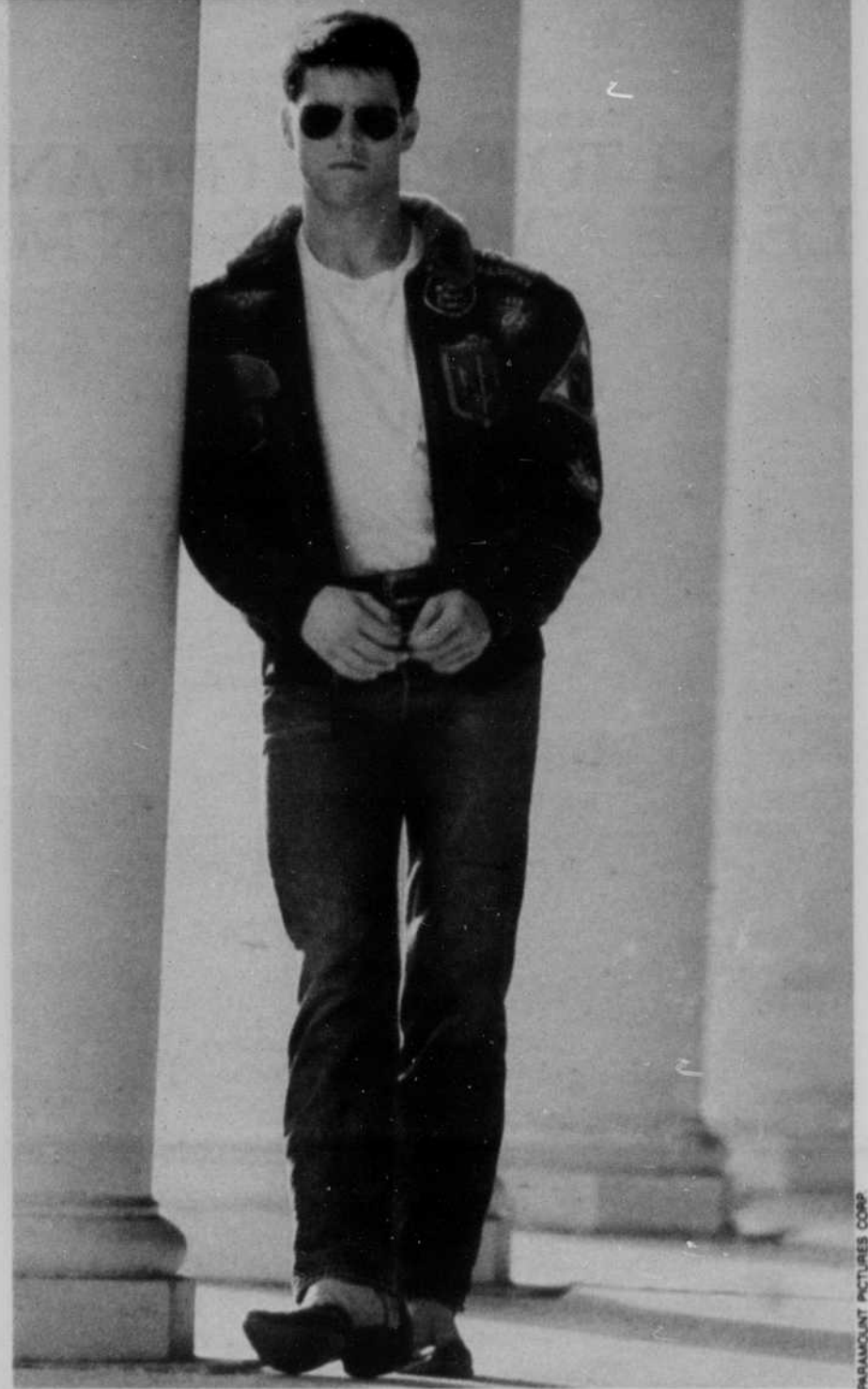
From his first appearance on screen in *Taps*, Cruise had a certain something that made him stand out from the rest of the crowd. By the time he starred in *Risky Business*, dancing in his underwear to the music of Bob Seger, the world knew it had a new star. Certain people just can't be held back from achieving success, and it seemed obvious that Cruise was one of those special people.

Now Cruise is playing a character that might be described in just the same way. Lt. Pete "Maverick" Mitchell is also a golden boy, but he's a golden boy of the sky. He's an F-14 fighter pilot who's been selectively chosen to participate in the Navy's prestigious Fighter Weapons School, or as it is known to the pilots, the *Top Gun* program.

The few who are privileged to be *Top Gun* students are chosen from the Navy's top air crews. Because the Navy's F-14 pilots already represent the best the Navy has to offer, the *Top Gunners* are the best of the best, the excelling elite. After an

intensive program that includes simulated in-air dogfights and hours of classroom study, the *Top Gun* graduates return to their commands and share their new expertise with the other crews in their squadron.

These aerial cowboys are a special



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breed, a description most readily supported by the pilots. During the production of *Top Gun*, Tom Cruise met many a *Top Gunner* and one of them summed up his slightly immodest attitude about his line of work by saying "there are only four occupations worthy of a man: actor, rock star, jet fighter pilot or President of the United States." That's not the sort of statement you get from a shrinking violet.

It's also not an attitude that's overly tolerant with outsiders. But Tom Cruise managed nonetheless to earn the pilots' respect. Said one *Top Gun* pilot: "Tom took his role very seriously. He looked like a pilot, studied like a pilot and sometimes even partied like a pilot. Fortunately, for him, he still made the salary of a movie star."

The pilot Cruise plays in *Top Gun* is considered one of the best in the Navy's program. But Maverick Mitchell is achieving his success without necessarily playing by the rules. He prefers to fly by instinct, a notion that keeps him in hot

water with his superiors. He may win more dogfights than any other pilot, but he's only a few steps away from being booted out of the program.

Matters are only worsened when he falls in love with a civilian specialist assigned to the program. Playing Charlotte Blackwood, the forbidden love interest, is Kelly McGillis. You might remember McGillis from an even more complicated romance in *Witness*, when she played the Amish widow in love with Harrison Ford's Philadelphia detective.

Rounding out the cast are more of Hollywood's promising new faces. Playing Maverick's radar intercept officer—his one partner in the air—is Anthony Edwards of *Revenge of the Nerds* and *Gotcha*. Playing his chief competition for the distinction of top *Top Gunner* is Val Kilmer of *Top Secret!* and *Real Genius*.

Also in the cast are Tom Skerritt, playing the *Top Gun* commanding officer and Michael Ironsides, playing the *Top Gun* instructor. ♦