## RTFM (READ THE FREAKIŃ MANUAL!):



## By Mike Berriochoa

Air shows across North America will soon be pushing throttles to full afterburner as we prepare for the 2015 air show season. And, for those shows fortunate enough to have secured a military demonstration team, the teams are saying one thing loud and clear: "READ THE FREAKIN' MANUAL!"

Well, they aren't saying it in quite those terms, but that is clearly the message they want to get out, because too many shows are either not reading or not following the manual. And that, in turn, is creating additional issues that should never arise in the first place.

It all boils down to expectations, and the expectations are that the shows will give the military the support it needs if those shows want the teams to come back. Huh? Or duh?
"If the 2013 air show season taught us nothing else, it demonstrated that contempo-
the future. And, with fewer military assets to go around, the pressure is on organizers to step up and do what they must to make sure that the teams' needs are being met well in advance.

## Air Shows as Public Outreach Opportunities for the Military

Whether it's the Blue Angels, the F-22 demo, the Snowbirds or a CF-18 demo, they all have support manuals that spell out the minimum requirements for a safe and entertaining performance. Indeed, the organizational charts of many air shows have been developed, in part, to ensure that the logistical needs of performers - both military and civilian - are reliably met.

But often overlooked are the public affairs requirements ... the need for the teams to gain maximum interaction with the public. With

Air Force personnel do and to get young men and women excited about doing something bigger than themselves by joining us, and shows have to help us do that," Fisher said.

When it comes to planning public affairs activities for the team, he said shows need to start by reading the manual and contacting the appropriate team members to discuss options, including media interviews, school visits, hospital visits, receptions, hangar parties, etc. "We also expect shows to work closely with local Air Force recruiters. The recruiters already have contacts with the schools and youth organizations that we want to reach and will know what will work best for us," he said.

Fisher said the public's interaction with the team is the return on the government's investment. "The Air Force is investing a lot of time and money for us to come to a show. We need to see a return. The logistics ensure a safe show, but our real reason for being there is to inspire young men and women to join the Air

rary military aircraft are our industry's biggest draw," said ICAS President John Cudahy.
"The air show business would do well to diversify, but - until we do - it's important that we recognize the unique drawing power of the military and do everything we can to help military leadership continue to see air shows as a strong investment of their time, money and resources."

When shows accept a military demonstration team, be it a multi-ship, solo demo, or parachute team, they are - in effect - signing a contract that includes an obligation to live up to the letter of the requirements spelled out in the team's support manual.

So far, none of the teams has refused to perform due to lack of adequate support, since they were able to overcome the problems they encountered, but they all say such issues will impact their decisions on whether to return in
an all-volunteer force, shrinking budgets, and a decreased percentage of the public with family members in the military, air shows are one of the few places where our military can interface with the public, and shows must do all they can to accommodate that mission.

Major Mike Fisher just completed three years as the advance pilot and narrator for the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds. Part of his job was to arrive at a show site a couple of days early and make sure that it was prepared before the team launched. If he didn't like what he saw, he would go to work with the show organizers to make things right.
"Most shows do a good job in meeting the requirements spelled out in the support manual, but we do so much more than fly an air show. The show is a tool to get face time with the public and to share the Air Force story. Our goal is to get people excited about what

Force. If we can't engage the public, we really have to ask what we accomplish by going there," said Fisher.

The Navy has an even greater public affairs challenge. Most communities have airports, but there is more to the Navy than airplanes. "We can't bring an aircraft carrier to Vidalia, Georgia, but we still need to be able to spread the Navy and Marine story," said Blue Angel \#6, Lieutenant Ryan Chamberlain. Now the team's opposing solo pilot, Chamberlain was the team's 2014 narrator and part of last year's advance team.
"The vast majority of shows are stuck in the mode of holding a reception that is exclusively for sponsors, performers, and a few invited guests. I understand that shows must say thanks to the people who donate money; it's an industry standard and I get it. But we in the military are heavily scrutinized on how we

spend our time and money, and we have to get the maximum exposure possible for our branch of the service. We have a job to do. We like and want events that are open to the public," Chamberlain said.

As examples, Chamberlain said one of the shows where the team appeared last year held a reception at a museum that was open to the public. Another held a reception at a baseball stadium where the public was invited at no cost. "We prefer events like the baseball stadium and the museum. It's a more valuable use of our time when we can attend an event where people don't need a ticket to get in and have open access to us," he said.
"It's sometimes difficult to see and feel change when you're right in the middle of it," says Cudahy. "But this is one of those times. The military's expectations of what air shows will do to support them in their public outreach initiatives are changing. Individual shows will either embrace that change or find themselves wondering why they no longer get military support."

At U.S. Air Force Air Combat Command (ACC), where they schedule the Air Force solo demos, they, too, take their public affairs commitment seriously. Not only do they spell out their expectations clearly in their support manual, but the expectations come with a direct warning.

1. The mission of the ACC Aerial Events Team is to recruit and retain personnel, display USAF airpower to the public, and act as ambassadors for the United States of America. Your assistance is vital for mission accomplishment.

Our support for your air show/open house is directly related to how effective we are in accomplishing our mission. Public outreach, specifically, firm interviews and community events, as well as children's hospital visits, school visits, etc., is central to our mission accomplishment. We appreciate your diligent efforts in supporting our team and its mission. Lack of this support will be weighed when generating future schedules.

Kathy White is the ACC Chief of Civic


Outreach. "It is a disservice to the pilot, the crew and the Air Force to just use the singleship demonstrations to fly in the show. Our officers and enlisted personnel are trained to meet the public, and to do interviews with the media. We are ready to visit hospitals and schools and we expect show organizers to work with recruiters to set those things up," she said.

White said shows are expected to have recruiting booths on the ramp and demo pilots will visit those booths if at all possible. She said they also want the pilots at the crowd line or in an autograph tent shaking hands and signing autographs. "It's not to our advantage to do shows where the entire crowd line is sold to the highest bidder because the crowd gets pushed back," she said.

In 2011, ACC had two F-16 teams, two A10 teams, one F-22 team and an F-15E Strike Eagle team doing air shows. Now they are down to two teams ... the F-16 and the F-22. That is a significant change and the ACC is giving each event more scrutiny in deciding where these limited assets will go.

The decision on where ACC assets go rests with Mark "TBO" Thibeault, Chief of Aerial Events at ACC headquarters, and his staff. He said some shows put in extra effort to help get the Air Force message out. They aggressively reach out to local media, and work well with recruiters to give them a strong presence at shows. They work with schools, and set up delayed entry ceremonies when appropriate. But he said that isn't always the case, and - at the end of a visit - the pilots will sit down with organizers and provide a critique of what went well and where improvements need to be made. A written report is also sent to Thibeault's office. "We want to get the Air Force message out to the public. It is impor-


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tant to us that the public sees the professionalism in our service because it helps with recruiting. We use feedback from our teams when deciding where we go in the future."

The Army's two Golden Knights parachute teams operate a bit differently from their winged counterparts, but the bottom line is still the same: organizers need to read the support manual to ensure a safe, entertaining demonstration and provide the opportunity to maximize exposure for their branch of the service.
"Interacting with the public is a huge portion of our commitment. We have a big push on this year to get information to our shows earlier than ever so they can more effectively promote our appearance," said Golden Knights scheduler, Sergeant First Class John Berentis. If his office hasn't heard from a show within a reasonable time, his media relations team will begin contacting the news media on their own to get the publicity they want.

Berentis has been with the team for eight years ... one year as a jumper, three years as
assistant team leader, and four years as the team leader. With more than 5,100 jumps under his belt, he's just about seen it all.
"How our jumpers are scheduled in a show lineup is an important issue to us. We want to get out into the crowd whenever possible, which means we need at least 90 minutes between our two jumps. We also want to jump at least two acts ahead of a jet team, because we know - if we jump just before a jet team flies the audience will be watching the jets and won't be paying much attention to us once we've landed," Berentis said.

Like other military teams, the Golden Knights' parachute demonstrations are only part of their job. "We take a lot of pride in getting the public, especially the kids, involved in our performance," Berentis said. When the team completes its performance, the jumpers gather their chutes, exit into the crowd at show center if possible, and give high fives to as many kids as they can. "Kids can reach out and touch us and touch our parachutes. We even ask them to help us repack, which they

love to do. It gives them a connection to us that they long remember," Berentis said.

In Canada, the story is much the same. Snowbird \#10, Captain Greg Mendez, is the team coordinator, as well as the advance pilot. "Social events, along with visits to schools and hospitals, are important to us. We will even do them on our days off, if necessary," he said.

Mendez says, for him, schools are the highlight of the year, answering questions and showing the team video. "Shows differ in what they want us to do. Some shows embrace our public interactions, but others aren't as supportive. It's a shame because we work hard to encourage students to pursue careers in science and aviation. We try to educate and inspire by sharing our personal stories," he said.

The Snowbirds enjoy attending hangar parties where the entire team of pilots and technicians can mingle with community members. And Mendez says they prefer to split the team up at these parties so they are not all sitting together. "We call that clumping when we are all directed to sit at one or two tables. We try to avoid that so we can meet more people."

The CF-18 solo demo team has the same mission as the Snowbirds... to put on a safe and entertaining performance and to be the public face of the Royal Canadian Air Force. Captain Susan Magill is the public affairs officer for 15 Wing at Moosejaw, Saskatchewan, where the Snowbirds and the CF-18 demo team are based. She said, when it comes to shows meeting the team's public affairs needs, it's a mixed bag.
"Some shows do it better than others. The smaller shows allow us to connect better with their communities because the public can get closer to the pilots and the airplanes. An air show is a bigger event in a small town and the


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team likes going to them," she said.
Magill said one of the things that the CF-18 team members will sometimes do is connect with one or two kids in the audience, then feed the information to the demo pilot. During his performance, the pilot may call the child out by name over the public address system, or he may just say that he can see a particular child wearing a certain article of clothing as he screams past the crowd.

Magill says the CF-18 is occasionally tasked to fly an over-water show or a show that is displaced from where the airplane is based. She says they are happy to do them, but that this hurts their ability to meet the public. "We really like it when [remote] shows are able to put us early in the show, and then provide a shuttle to get pilots to the show site after a performance so they can shake hands and sign autographs.

## The Logistical and Operational Challenges of Hosting the Military

The public affairs requirements are only a part of the support manual. RTFM is critical throughout all phases of a team's involvement with a show. Demonstration teams have made it clear that it is annoying when someone from an air show calls them to ask questions when the answer is clearly spelled out in the manual. It suggests that no one is reading the manual. The anxiety level for the team goes up as a result and it tells them there is an increased potential for problems.

While there is a strong emphasis on public interaction, it can't be accomplished at the expense of anything else that is contained in the manual. And it starts with shows having a single point of contact for military teams who knows and understands his or her role. Typi-

cally, that begins with the designated point of contact reading the manual.

When former Thunderbirds \#8, Major Mike Fisher, was the team's advance pilot and narrator, he said they experienced some common problems that had the potential for preventing some shows from going forward. "More than once, we discovered that there were discrepancies between the waiver and the TFR. Often, these [problems were] related to performance times or geographic coordinates that did not align between the two. We found [that our performance was scheduled to occur] within the waiver, but outside the TFR," he said.

Fisher said, each time that happened, they were able to solve problems by adjusting the waiver. But adjusting the TFR once it has been approved is a much more complicated and difficult process. So, now the team asks show organizers to provide a draft of their waiver application at least 45 days in advance to make sure the team has time to review it and confirm that the waiver and TFR are in sync.
"Fully 40 percent of the shows have errors in their waivers or TFRs, or both, and - the closer we come to the date of the show in discovering these problems - the more difficult it is to make changes," says Fisher. "The FAA has been great to work with everywhere we've gone, but these kinds of glitches create unnecessary stress for everyone at a time when no one needs any additional issues on their plates."

Fisher said glitches like this have happened at shows that have never hosted a jet team, as well as at experienced shows. "Our requirements change from year to year, which makes it doubly important for the show's point of
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contact to know what is in the manual. Just because he read it last year doesn't mean he knows what is in it this year. The manual is a roadmap to success. If [the event organizers] read through it, and then call with questions, we can work with them to resolve problems well in advance," he said.

Another common issue faced by the Thunderbirds is foreign object damage, or FOD. "The F-16 is a giant vacuum cleaner and we had episodes where the ramp, taxiway or runway weren't cleaned to the level we needed by the time we arrived. Most civilian fields aren't used to dealing with this issue to the same level as a military base and sometimes just aren't prepared. But these issues have to be resolved before the team shows up." And, he said, even some military bases don't understand the issue. "Fighter bases are always cleaner than bases that handle the heavies. Engines on the heavies don't suck up FOD like the F-16 and replacing engines on F-16s is an expensive proposition."

A change for the Thunderbirds this year is that they will be making their own housing arrangements. While they may ask a show for recommendations, Fisher said the team needs to have more control over where they stay. "We've stayed in some places that weren't the best or didn't match the image we want to project." For example, the team will no longer stay at a casino while on the road. Fisher said they try not to be too picky as long as the hotel is clean, comfortable and quiet.

Mark Thibeault from ACC echoes the
concerns of Major Fisher when it comes to reading the support manual. "Shows need to understand our needs are just as important as those of the Thunderbirds. When we ask for a diagram of the air show box in advance, we expect to get it. When we say we need the hard surfaces clear of FOD, we expect it will happen. We will do all we can to help shows be successful, but it starts with the manual."

To state the obvious, safety of a jet aircraft demonstration is hugely important. Shows must have everything in place to support the team. This includes all of the equipment listed in the manual. "But it goes beyond that. A clean, quiet hotel is also essential in order for our crews to get the rest they need," Thibeault said.

Often the F-16 is asked to participate in a Heritage Flight. According to ACC demo scheduler Larry Schleser, this brings with it some additional expectations. First, he said, the Heritage pilot is considered part of their demo team and is to be treated as such. "This means the Heritage aircraft is to be parked next to the F-16. And it means the pilot is to be lodged in the same hotel with the rest of the team. Shows would not split up other performing teams, and we don't want them doing it to us," Schleser said.

Captain John Cummings flew 20 F-22 Raptor demos in 2014, and will do the same this year. He said military bases have experienced issues right along with civilian shows. "When we send the support manual to a civilian show, that's what they go by. When we send it
to a military base, they are used to transient military aircraft operations and can be prone to go with what they know rather than what is in the manual. That doesn't always work for us," he said.

With the F-16 returning to air shows this year, ACC is combining the F-16 and F-22 support manuals. And, while the equipment requirements between the two planes are quite similar, the security requirements are significantly different. "What show sites seem to have the biggest problem with is security for the aircraft," says Cummings. "Because the F-22 is a stealth platform, we have to protect the technology on the aircraft. The F-22 is a national asset. We're a generation ahead of $B$ 2 in stealth technology, but shows often treat it like the F-16 or A-10 where people can come up and touch it. We can't allow that [with the F-22]," he said.

The Blue Angels have also encountered their share of issues resulting from the failure of air shows to read and follow their support manual. One frustrating experience occurred when a show had failed to draw up the aircraft parking plan and Lieutenant Chamberlain had to take over after he arrived. "I came very close to telling the team not to come," he said.

Fortunately, Chamberlain said, experiences like this are few and far between. The fact that the team now schedules shows two years in advance has helped immeasurably. "Without question, the two-year schedule makes life easier for everyone. It's unfathomable to think that a show can learn in December that the Blue Angels are coming at the end of March and be expected to be ready. Now, they have an entire year to plan and prepare."

Like every demonstration team, the Blue Angels prepare an after-action report that includes comments on the hotel, the air field, hospitality and other aspects of each show. "We also have a form we submit to the shows asking for their critique of us. We are looking for feedback," he said.

Chamberlain says the Blue Angels support manual spells out everything the team needs to put on a safe demonstration, and, "At the end of the day, that's all that matters." Shows that have trouble are usually trying to impress the team by going overboard with activities that get in the way of the team's

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ability to do their jobs.
"We understand that we are just another act and are in town for just a few days and they live with the show for an entire year, so we want to do the best job possible. But there are times when shows want us to do too much. We are not there to take a vacation. We have a lot of responsibilities and need time to complete them," he said.

One problem area for the team, Chamberlain says, has been hotel accommodations. While they appreciate guidance from the shows, the ultimate decision and responsibility rest with the team. "We ask that shows give us an idea or a recommendation, but we will decide where we stay and make the arrangements on our own," he said. He acknowledges the process can cause some confusion which the team tries to clarify with each site.

Because they are not dealing with multimillion dollar jet aircraft, the Army's Golden Knights parachute team can be a bit more flexible. Like the jet teams, it has a support manual and the team expects show personnel to read it and understand it, but their issues are usually easier to resolve.

And instead of having a dedicated advance team, they rotate the responsibility so that everyone on the team becomes familiar with interfacing with shows. "Sometimes we have team members from the area where we are performing, so we let him or her take that show because they already know the area and its people," said Golden Knights Scheduler, Sergeant First Class John Berentis. And like other military teams, the Golden Knights prefer to work with a single point of contact at each show.

Berentis said the team tries to be self-contained and low maintenance, but this can only happen if the organizer reads and follows the manual. "This means the hotels and cars have to be ready for us and we have to know where we are parking the team aircraft." Berentis said - if everything is in place - the meeting between the advance team and the POC should only take 30 minutes. If there are problems, it could take a lot longer.

Another concern for Berentis and his team is small shows where the air boss has limited experience. "When we encounter this, we start getting nervous." An inexperienced air
boss doesn't understand the risks of having vehicles moving up and down the fence line during their jumps. "Wind can catch a parachute and pull our jumper right into the path of the vehicle," he said. "If the air boss doesn't bring it up, we bring it up." Berentis said their mandate to shows is: "No engines running on the flight line during their performance." And, while this may seem obvious, Berentis said one of their shows experienced a larger than expected crowd. "There was no fencing, no barriers, airplanes were taxiing with their wings going over spectators, engines were starting inside the crowd, and the entire show was out of control. We jumped, but - as soon as we landed - we packed our chutes and left as quickly as we could." Berentis didn't identify the show, but he did say they won't be back.

A big issue for the Golden Knights - and it's true for the jet teams, as well - is making sure the team receives the required number of friends and family passes in advance. "We request 25 passes. It's uncomfortable for us if we have to ask for them on the day of the show. The requirement is spelled out in the manual, so the passes should be included in the material that our POC provides us when the advance team arrives," he said.
Berentis acknowledges there are many good shows out there that know how to do it right. "One show, for example, gave me a three-ring binder of information when I arrived that included everything we needed for the full weekend: passes, parking layout, maps, air show history, the bio for our baton recipient, and everything else we required. When you get a complete package like that when you arrive, you know it's going to be a good show. Your POC doesn't sit down with a pencil and paper and ask what you need," Berentis said.

Like U.S. military teams, Canadian teams send out advance personnel to go over details. "We have a 35 -page support manual and we expect show personnel to have read it and understood it. The advance team arrives just two hours ahead of the rest of the team, which doesn't give us a lot of time to resolve issues," said Snowbird \#10, Captain Greg Mendez.

Like all jet demonstration teams, Mendez said they have encountered issues, ranging
from encroachment into the Sterile Air Display Area (SADA) to radio controlled airplanes being flown in their box. "These are the issues that should have been resolved long before we arrived." He cited one incident where a road ran through the box that was supposed to have been monitored and barricaded, but traffic was still flowing. "Rather than land, we shifted into a non-aerobatic display, but the audience didn't get the full show they expected," he said.

The mountainous terrain of parts of Canada has presented its own set of problems for the Snowbirds. At one show in a remote area, Mendez said the team had just taken off when it spotted people in the SADA who had driven down forest roads on four-wheelers to get to a vantage point near the airport. The show had to dispatch a helicopter to chase them off. "We burned up so much fuel waiting for them to clear the area that we had to cut our show short," he said.

When it comes to hotels and cars, Mendez said the team's requirements are simple. The cars are important so they can move their people efficiently. He said they don't have to be new, but must be clean and reliable. The hotel can become an issue because substandard accommodations can prevent pilots and crew from getting the rest they need. "We have encountered hygiene issues at some hotels and even bed bugs. When that happens, we have to leave," he said.

The 2014 CF-18 demo pilot said he was fortunate last year. He encountered no show stoppers. And he said that's primarily because the organizers read the support manual and had everything ready for them. Captain Adam Runge flew demos at 24 different shows in 2014, and said the issues were few and small. "We have a 45 -day checklist of what has to be in place by the time we arrive. There were occasions when some of the issues did not get resolved until two weeks out, but we had time to work them and everything went well last year," he said.

Although Captain Runge and the others interviewed were respectful and polite, a less diplomatic military representative might have expressed their collective perspective even more succinctly: "Just read the freakin' manual!"

