



FLIGHT SQUADS

BY EMILY SCHLESINGER



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Formation

The commander speaks first. "Diamond burner go. Right turn off."

Pilots chime in.

"Sure," says #2.

"Let's go," says #4.

The commander speaks again. "Left turn. Diamond dirty clean flat pass."

"Perfect," says #3.

The commander continues. "Now roll it. Break out. Join at the top of the loop. Here comes a G. Get after it!" Pilots brace.

“Coming left. Smoke on. Pull. Smoke off. Push. Take it in. Easing power. Easy brakes. Shut down.”

“Emergency brakes,” says #3.

“Brakes released,” say all.

The planes are on the ground. Everyone has landed safely. All breathe quiet sighs of relief.



Back at the Office

It is the next morning before dawn. The pilots sit around a conference table. Their eyes blink in the fluorescent light. Each pilot clutches a pen. They hold it like the control stick of a jet. The location is a small building. It is deep in the Sonoran Desert. This is a pre-dawn briefing. The team talks through the day's flight.

Once in air, planes fly up to 700 miles per hour. They travel in a tight **formation**. There are rapid force changes. Some moves are upside-down. Pilots push the limits of what jets can do. In order to do this, minds must be ready. The team prepares for the flight. There can be no mistakes. Those are deadly. The team is a flight demonstration **squadron**. These pilots represent the best of the U.S. military.



FAST FACT: Members of flight squads are not paid differently than the rest of the military. Their salaries are based on rank and years of service.

Flight Demonstration Squads

The U.S. military has two flight demonstration squads. One is the Blue Angels. This team is part of the **Navy**. **Marines** are included too. The other team is the Thunderbirds. They fly for the **Air Force**. Both teams feature top fighter pilots. Planes are lightning fast.

The teams perform around the country. There are over 100 shows a year. Up to one million people go to watch. Why? Six planes fly at once while doing daring moves. This is called **aerobatics**. It is what makes the shows famous.



FAST FACT: The first flight squad was formed in 1931 in France. They are called the Patrouille de France.



The Mission

The teams fly fighter planes, but they do not fight. No guns or bombs are onboard. Their mission is different. The goal is to engage the public. The pilots share their military expertise with Americans across the country. Skills are on display. Courage and teamwork are too. For these pilots, character is as important as flying skill.

The teams represent nearly a million service members. Each pilot gives their all. Nothing less than their best is good enough. This is the culture of the military.

FLIGHT SQUADS

A group of fighter jets flies at lightning fast speed. The planes move in tight formations, performing daring moves. Some even fly upside-down. Crowds watch in awe as pilots push the limits of what planes can do. These are the U.S. military flight demonstration squadrons.



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