

Blue Angels History

At the end of World War II, on April 24, 1946, Chief of Naval Operations, Adm. Chester W. Nimitz, ordered establishment of a flight demonstration team to showcase naval aviation.

Lieutenant Commander Roy “Butch” Voris, the first flight leader, led the team of Lt. Chuck Knight, Lt. Maurice Wickendoll, Lt. Al Taddeo, Lt. Jim Barnitz, Lt. j.g. Gale Stouse, Lt. j.g. Ross Robinson and Lt. j.g. Mel Cassidy. During a trip to New York City, Wickendoll chanced across a reference to the city’s famous Blue Angel nightclub in *The New Yorker* magazine. Less than two months later, on June 15, the newly-named Blue Angels and their Grumman F6F Hellcats delivered the team’s first public performance at Craig Field in Jacksonville, Florida.

The Blue Angels transitioned to the Grumman F8F Bearcat, on August 25, only two months after the first performance. In 1947, Flight Leader Lt. Cmdr. Robert Clarke, introduced the famous Diamond Formation, now considered the Blue Angels’ trademark. The team was flying its first jet aircraft, the Grumman F9F-2 Panther at the end of the 1940s

In 1950, the Korean Conflict put a great demand on naval aviation. The Navy responded by re-assigning the Blue Angels team members to the aircraft carrier *USS Princeton* (CV 37), where they became the nucleus of Fighter Squadron 191 (VF 191), known as “Satan’s Kittens.”

The Blues reorganized in 1951 and reported to Naval Auxiliary Air Station (NAAS) Whiting Field in Milton, Florida, then transitioned to Naval Air Station (NAS) Corpus Christi, Texas, where the team began flying the F9F-5, a faster version of the Panther. The team remained in Corpus Christi until the winter of 1954. The beginning of 1955 brought the team to its present home, Forrest Sherman Field, at NAS Pensacola, Florida, where it adopted the swept-wing Grumman F9F-8 Cougar.

The ensuing 20 years saw the Blue Angels step up into successively advanced aircraft. In 1957, the team began flying the Grumman F11F-1 Tiger; by 1969 the team was performing in its first dual-engine jet, the McDonnell-Douglas F-4J Phantom II.

In December 1974, the Blue Angels team reorganized as the U. S. Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron, establishing Cmdr. Tony Less as the first commanding officer. The squadron added support officers and redefined its mission to support Navy recruiting. The Blue Angels also donned a new aircraft in 1974, the McDonnell Douglas A-4F Skyhawk II.

On November 8, 1986, the Blue Angels marked their 40th anniversary. During the ceremony the squadron unveiled its present aircraft, the sleek McDonnell-Douglas (now Boeing) F/A-18 Hornet. The Hornet is the first dual-role fighter/attack aircraft serving on the nation’s front lines of defense.

In 1992 the Blue Angels deployed for its first European tour in 19 years. More than one million people in Sweden, Finland, Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Italy, the United Kingdom and Spain saw the Blue Angels perform during their 30-day tour. In November 1998, Cmdr. Patrick Driscoll landed the first “blue jet” on a “haze gray and underway” aircraft carrier, *USS Harry S. Truman* (CVN 75).

Since its inception in 1946, the team has flown for more than 374 million fans, including more than 17 million spectators during the 2000 show season.