

# Blue Angels return to Meridian in 2011

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In 2011, Naval Air Station Meridian will celebrate its 50th anniversary honoring the commissioning of the base in July 1961, along with celebrating the Centennial of Naval Aviation.

What a better way to celebrate than with an air show featuring the Navy's elite Flight Demonstration Squadron, the Blue Angels.

NAS Meridian Commanding Officer Capt. Charles Gibson is proud to announce that "Golden Wings Over Meridian" is set for March 26-27, 2011.

The Angels last performed at NAS Meridian in March 2009 to a record-breaking crowd of more than 90,000 spectators. The NAS Meridian air show will be the third stop during the Blue Angels 38 show 2011 season.

Demonstration sites are selected in support of U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, and Department of Defense objectives with safety as a primary consideration. Performances greatly assist in the recruiting and retention goals of the military services, enhance esprit de corps among uniformed men and women, and demonstrate the professional skills and capabilities of the Naval Services to the American public and U.S. Allies.

At the end of World War II, Chester W. Nimitz, then

the Chief of Naval Operations, ordered the formation of a flight demonstration team to keep the public interested in naval aviation. The Blue Angels performed their first flight demonstration less than a year later in June 1946 at their home base, Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Fla., flying the Grumman F6F Hellcat.

Over the years, the Blue Angels have flown the Grumman F8F Bearcat, the Grumman F9F-2 Panther, and the Grumman F9F-8 Cougar. The ensuing 20 years saw the Blue Angels transition to two more aircraft, the Grumman F11F-1 Tiger (1957) and the McDonnell Douglas F-4J Phantom II (1969).

In December 1974, the Navy Flight Demonstration Team began flying the McDonnell Douglas A-4F Skyhawk II and was reorganized as the Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron. This reorganization permitted the establishment of a commanding officer vice a flight leader. On Nov. 8, 1986, the Blue Angels completed their 40th anniversary year during ceremonies unveiling their present aircraft, the new sleek F/A-18 Hornet, the first dual-role fighter/attack aircraft now serving on the nation's front lines of defense.

The NAS Meridian Air Show Committee has been formed and plans are underway to book additional acts and demonstration aircraft. As in years past, the air show will be free and open to the public.