

# Golden Wings Over Meridian air show lineup expands

**By Penny Randall**

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The Black Daggers – the U.S. Army Special Operations Command Parachute Demonstration Team will join the list of performers already announced for Naval Air Station Meridian's "Golden Wings Over Meridian" Air Show.

Set for March 26-27 in Meridian, the air show celebrates NAS Meridian's 50th anniversary and the Centennial of Naval Aviation. Headlining the air show will be the Navy's Blue Angels.

The mission of the Black Daggers is to perform live aerial demonstrations in support of Army Special Operations community relations and recruiting. Comprised of volunteers from throughout Army Special Operations, the Daggers have diverse backgrounds and are skilled in various military specialties including Special Forces, Rangers, civil affairs, psychological operations and signal and support. The team represents the professionalism and dedication of special operations forces.

Also scheduled to perform is the Viper East Team, one of two F-16 demonstration teams in the U.S. Air Forces' Air Combat Command. The F-16 Fighting Falcon, more commonly known to military pilots as the Viper, is a compact, extremely maneuverable multi-role fighter aircraft. The F-16 has proven itself in air-to-air combat as well as air-to-surface attack. It provides a relatively low-cost, high-performance weapon system for the air forces of the United States and other allied nations.

NAS Meridian also welcomes an AV-8B Harrier to the air show lineup.

Primarily used by the U.S. Marine Corps, the Harrier is a vertical/short takeoff and landing ground-attack aircraft. The plane is typically operated from small aircraft carriers, large amphibious assault ships and austere forward operating bases.

There are currently seven squadrons with 20 aircraft each and one training squadron with 20 AV-8B and 15 TAV-8B aircraft for a total 175 aircraft.

Operation Desert Storm in 1991 was highlighted by expeditionary air operations performed by the AV-8B. The Harrier II was the first Marine Corps tactical strike platform to arrive in theater, and subsequently operated from various basing postures. Three squadrons, totaling 60 aircraft, and one six-aircraft detachment operated ashore from an expeditionary airfield, while one squadron of 20 aircraft operated from a sea platform. During the ground war, AV-8Bs were based as close as 35 nautical miles (40.22 miles) from the Kuwait border, making them the most forward deployed tactical strike aircraft in theater. The AV-8B flew 3,380 sorties for a total of 4,083 flight hours while maintaining a mission capable rate in excess of 90 percent. Average turn-around time during the ground war surge rate flight operations was 23 minutes.

Other aircraft set to perform demos are the T-2 Buckeye, A-4 Skyhawk, F-5 Tiger and the Blue Angels Fat Albert. NAS Meridian's T-45C "Goshawks" will perform a fly by.

For more information about "Golden Wings Over Meridian" go to [www.goldenwingsovermeridian.com](http://www.goldenwingsovermeridian.com).