

Red and Blue forces over Holland

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This summer there was an absolute spectacle on the program of the international airshow at Leeuwarden Airbase in Holland. This show was marked by the appearance of the Blue Angels, the famous stuntteam of the US Navy who didn't visit Europe since a long time. The team, nicknamed 'The Blues' accepted the invitation thanks to good relationship with Holland and where willing to attract the Dutch Public for an exclusive show.

The Blues were not alone.

In this occasion the Dutch found themselves another famous stuntteam present thanks to equal good relations. The Patrouille Suisse visited Holland before with their beautiful Red and White F-5 Tiger and where always much appreciated by the public. Without the feeling of a contest or to compare which team performs better it might be interesting to have a look at the differences or similarities between both teams. Having equally a rich history and existence for many years (Blue Angels formed in 1946, and Patrouille Suisse in 1964) they both flew several types. One striking difference is there to be noted primarily. Blue Angels have a major responsibility to promote the Navy to their own public in the USA. Appearance abroad is highly uncommon and apart from a European tour in 1994 visits to Europe were only occasionally. Although the Patrouille Suisse equally promotes the Swiss Airforce if you look at the impact 'The Blues' have on the young people it can't be compared. The stuntteam in the USA plays a far more important role in the acquisition of new soldiers to the Navy. To reach young people and have themselves recognised young pilots in the team give their best and will be replaced in considerable time.

Show yourself in two years

After a maximum of two years and in exceptional cases up till three years of service pilots give space for new members and return to their units. In these two years Blue Angels are completely committed to the team and the show activities. Their skills in combat flying which are ofcourse of the best quality are to be back in service after those two years. Being a Blue Angel gives you in the USA a heroic status compared with a popstar. New applicants must be highly capable and fit in the team. Therefore the much wanted place in the team can only be realised after acceptance of all teammembers.

Entering Patrouille Suisse also requires much experience

The root to lead you a pilot of Patrouille Suisse is in the beginning quite the same. You need lots of experience on several types of aircraft. The average of flying hours for Blue Angels is between 1500 – 2500 hours when entering the team. With a requirement of many flying hours on the F/A-18A Hornet, the teams current airplane. On the other hand pilots of Patrouille Suisse have a comparable quantity of flying hours and are also experienced with various types. Skills on jet aircraft includes not

only the F-5 Tiger currently in use by the team but funny enough also on the F-18 Hornet.

Acting in the stuntteam not the only job

While flying with Patrouille Suisse the Swiss pilots serve in the same time in frontline units of the Swiss Airforce and train and prepare only for show events in the season of airshows. Promoting Switzerland and the Swiss Airforce in general doesn't relieve the pilots from the obligation to be combat ready at any time. In the contrary to the full dedication of Blue Angels in just only two years the teammembers of Patrouille Suisse are not necessarily engaged to such a short period but are likely to stay longer. Let's mention some different attractive aspects. First of all the invitations throughout whole Europe give the opportunity to act international frequently. Secondly the distance to showplaces mostly involves short or medium distance, a fact which is a very suitable element to the pilots.

Blue Angels, a Top Act

In European airshows demonstrations are frequently the occupation of several international teams. This doesn't make you the sole outstanding performance but just a part of the show. Blue Angels are adapted to the feeling that they are the 'Top Attraction' which creates another atmosphere to the public. This not really odd if you imagine that in the USA there are only two military stuntteams. The Thunderbirds from the USAF and the Blue Angels from the US Navy. It could be easily possible to wait for years in the USA for a visit of 'The Blues' in your area. Another aspect in the Blue Angels show which contributes to the legendary status is the absolute perfection. This demonstrated already on the ground when pilots are introduced to the public. This a scenery with much show-element when pilots and groundcrew are marching very disciplinary and in simultaneous way to the planes. This became an image of the Blue Angels.

Manoeuvres with high precision

The main time of the show the Blue Angels demonstrate a flying pattern of a four-ship 'Diamond close Formation' which is their trademark. Two solo aircraft perform in the same time difficult manoeuvres. Some other figures are expressed with the complete team. Being both very professional and their shows full of attractiveness some minor details in the lay-out of the demo differ. Lacking the show element on the ground, the touch of discipline from the Swiss is comparable while there are no different standards in stuntflying. Only the best is good enough. The Blues stays a long time during the show in Diamond Formation to be changed by Delta or Shadow formation. Patrouille Suisse changes more frequently of figure from Delta or Diamond formation to Cross, Shadow, Flag, Tango, Canard or Supercanard formation. Both teams perform Loops, Rolls or Breaks and use an integrated smokesystem. You may say that the Blue Angels give more accent to the skill of Mirror flying which leads to more (controlled) dangerous moments.

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The Planes

The F/A-18A Hornet and F-5E Tiger are both satisfying in their role. Both aircraft are twin-engined with enough thrust, not heavy and have comparable maximum speed (F/A-18A 1700 km/hrs and F-5E 1600 km/hrs) however the Hornet is a later design

with more aerodynamic capabilities. The fly-by-wire controls enables the aircraft to move very swiftly with sharp angles. One single mistake or a sudden movement in steering directly influences the direction of the airplane. To minimize the danger of mid-air collision they took the play out of the stick with some special preparations. (Some kind of rubberbands) Another extra feature is the stopwatch in the HUD to help the pilot with timing, a most important ingredient.

The Blues are used to fly without G-suit to have more control with arm and leg on the stick. This is a most remarkable situation if you imagine the G-powers (up to 7-8 G) on your body while doing the show. These G-powers must be adapted by putting tension on the muscles at the right moment.

Fat Albert

A unique element in the Blue Angels show is the demo-flight of their transport aircraft. The beautiful Blue/Yellow/White coloured C-130T Hercules nicknamed 'Fat Albert' is an eye-catcher! An absolute spectacle is the Jet Assisted Take Off (JATO) with boosting rocket tubes and is something you may see maybe once in a lifetime. The action is such an impressive sight that it causes pure euphoric feelings in the public. The big transport plane is leaving the runway within 500 meters and climbs with an angle of 45 degrees to 1000 feet. Fat Albert is flown by pilots from the US Marinecorps (USMC) representing this part of the US Navy. There are rumours that the JATO show could end in near future because the team is running out of the special solid fuel needed for the rocket bottles.

Professionalism must always be on line

Like said before there is no competition. The two teams are highly competent and have their own attractive display. Respect and professionalism are the keywords in this work. Eventually, according to angel nr.3 Thomas Winkler the one thing you need for success is to act as a team, to get along with each other and to have trust in yourself and your fellow pilots. With these capacities you only need to learn to be media representative and you may become the next team member. Pilots will be changed, airplanes will be replaced but the work and fine art not only to promote your military force but proudly your whole country will always be asked and expected by the watching crowds.

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