



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## **USAF Thunderbirds Headline Salute**

MIDWEST CITY, Okla. \_ “Thunderbirds, run ‘em up!”

That legendary call will be heard from the end of the runway on Saturday, May 24, at Tinker Air Force Base as the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds take to the Oklahoma sky with a dazzling display of precision flight.

For 55 years the Thunderbirds have wowed audiences with their precision aerial maneuvers and lightning-quick speed. This paramount demonstration squadron represents more than 500,000 airmen, reservists and National Guardsmen worldwide.

According to Indian legend, the Thunderbird was a powerful bird, believed to be a giant hawk or eagle. This massive bird was both respected and feared. When the Thunderbird took flight, the earth trembled from the thunder of its great wings. No man or beast could challenge this mighty creature. It is with the same presence the USAF Thunderbirds take to the sky.

The demonstration begins as Thunderbirds 1 through 4 lift off the slot aircraft slips immediately into position behind 1 to create the signature diamond formation in the climb. The jets roar past the crowd and move into a rolling turn at the departure end of the field and set up for their first pass – the diamond clover loop. In certain formations, one Thunderbird must be inverted, and it is always Thunderbird No. 5. The "5" on this aircraft is painted upside down, and actually appears right-side-up for much of the routine. The No. 5 pilot's tailored flight suit features his name and number, but unlike his fellow airmen, his number is inverted.

The Thunderbirds began in May 1953 as the Air Force's official air demonstration team. Designated the 3600th Air Demonstration Unit, the team was activated at Luke Air Force Base in Arizona. Seven officers and 22 enlisted were selected for the first demonstration team, and most were handpicked from the cadre at Luke. Currently, the Thunderbirds consist of 12 officers and more than 120 support personnel.

The first aircraft utilized by the original T-Birds was the straight-wing F-84G Thunderjet built by Republic Aviation. The straight-wing configuration was considered well suited for aerobatic maneuvers, and although the aircraft could not exceed the speed of sound like some military aircraft, it easily met the needs of a demonstration aircraft. Today and for the last 20 years, the Thunderbirds race across the sky in the F-16 Fighting Falcon.

While the Thunderbirds of today call Las Vegas, home, they have more than 40 scheduled performances across the globe in 2008.