

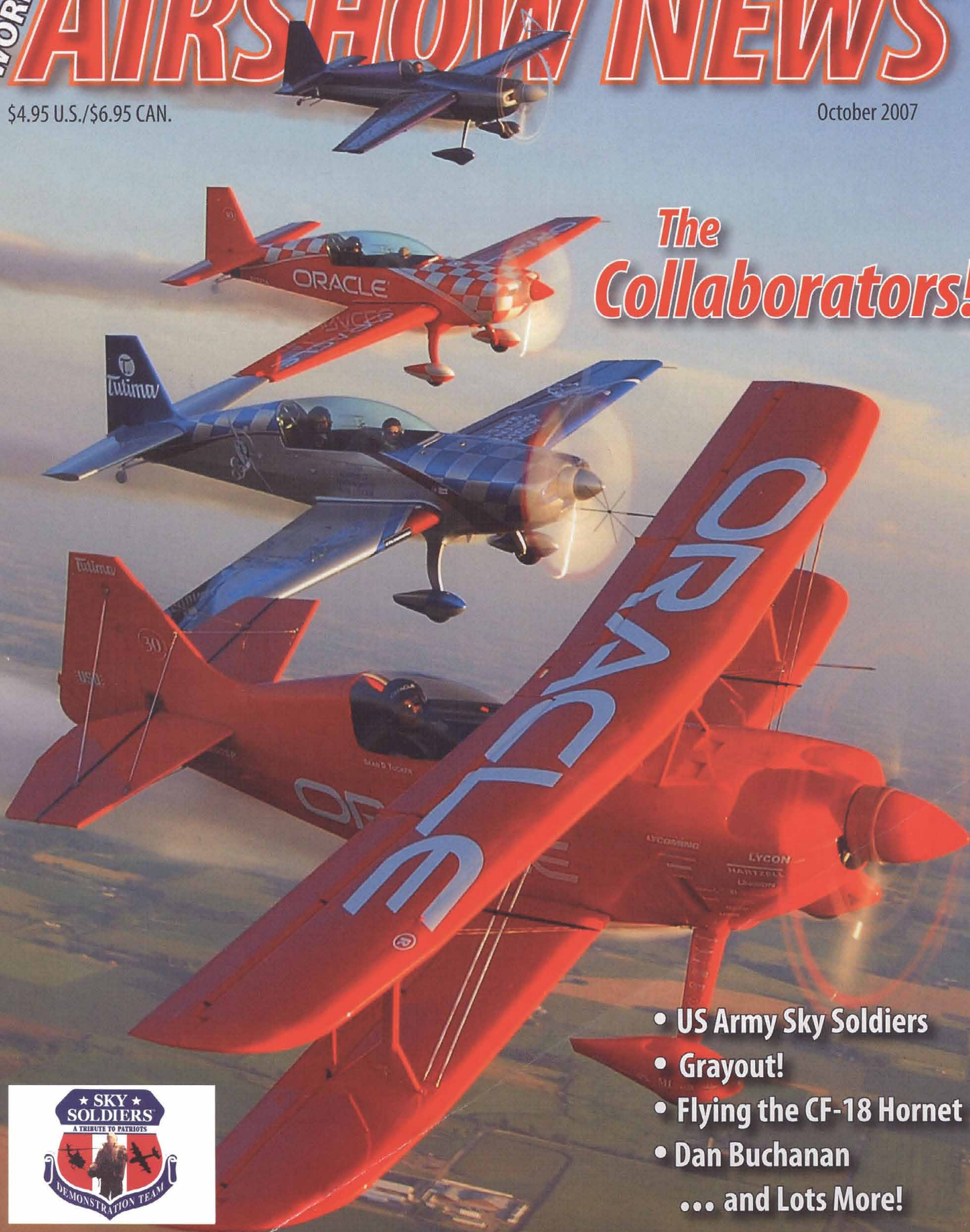
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WORLD AIRSHOW NEWS

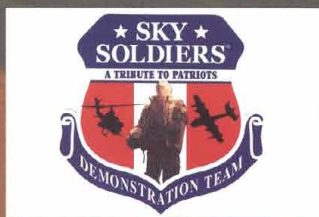
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October 2007

The Collaborators!



- US Army Sky Soldiers
- Grayout!
- Flying the CF-18 Hornet
- Dan Buchanan
- ... and Lots More!



AN ARMY OF FOUR: THE US ARMY



Interview and photography by Shawn Yost

The U.S. Army Sky Soldiers have thundered onto the 2007 airshow scene with an innovative twist. Unlike their military demo team brethren – the Thunderbirds, Blue Angels, and Golden Knights – this team is not active duty military flyers, as the name may suggest. The group is made up entirely of patriotic volunteer retired military veterans – now civilians – flying retired AH-1F Cobra attack helicopters.

The Sky Soldiers incorporate a three-fold approach in assisting their sponsor, the United States Army, in its recruiting efforts. The most visible thrust is the aerial team which consists of five Cobra aircraft – four used in their formation aerial demonstration and the fifth used as a static display and/or a spare aircraft. The second element, and arguably one of their more important assets, is a large tented chalet to entertain Army invitees. The third and final element of the program, and a main attraction in and of itself, is a sophisticated interactive and hands-on Army exhibit.

Short of their parachute team the Golden Knights, the Army has been relatively absent from the airshow circuit for a number of years. In fact, the Army has not had a flying demonstration team since the

US Army Silver Eagles helicopter team of the 1970s. With Army aerial assets being used throughout the world for various commitments, the Army is very limited on assets available to assist their recruiters. The Army Aviation Heritage Foundation of Atlanta was the ideal candidate to assist the Army in their goals.

World Airshow News interviewed the U.S. Army Sky Soldiers' founder and president, Mike Brady, and Director of Army Programs and narrator SgtMaj Shanda Elkins (USMC retired) to provide more insight on the team.

WAN: How did the idea come about to form the U.S. Army Sky Soldiers?

BRADY: Several things came together at the same time. First, the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation (AAHF) has been out in the airshow environment for about eight years, and we have done over 100 airshows using ex-military helicopters in our Vietnam re-enactment program. Our Vietnam program helped us develop a good base of experience and knowledge. Then, when I was at an Army Aviation convention in Nashville, Tennessee, Lt. Gen.

AAHF announced a unique partnership with the US Army for the 2007 airshow season, resulting in a four-ship helicopter demonstration team. Shawn caught up with Mike again this summer to learn more about the unique marketing partnership that supports the new US Army Sky Soldiers.

SKY SOLDIERS DEMONSTRATION TEAM

Tony Jones, Deputy Commanding General of the Army Training and Doctrine Command, approached me with an idea. He said, "Mike, the Army has some challenges right now. There is a big need for recruiting. The recruiting folks are asking for Army Aviation assets to help, but we don't have them readily available. They are either overseas fighting the war, back in the states being rebuilt, or being

which took about a year and a half.

We were able to persuade Congress to change the law to allow our organization to be able to obtain surplus equipment, including aircraft. Then once we had the various program parts together – the volunteer veterans and the aircraft – we had to develop an exciting and innovative recruiting program for the Army.

WAN: How did you develop the recruiting program?

BRADY: I had already been looking at that, watching what was going on in the airshow business with the other military services. I saw some things from my airline industry marketing background, and I thought we could do better. I thought about how to integrate a demonstration team and make it multifaceted to present a strong recruiting product for the Army. We developed the whole concept. We developed an enhanced ground package, and then went out with the Army Recruiting Command to put it all together. It was a tremendous experience. The Army decided this year to do a proof-of-concept program. The Army identified geographic locations they were interested in. We in turn identified key airshows in those areas.

WAN: What is the background of the demonstration pilots and the Cobra airframes?

BRADY: Our organization has been operating Cobras now for eight years.

Opposite page: Army Sky Soldiers arrive at show center in echelon formation. Top: Two of the Sky Soldiers show off their innovative dual smoke system. Left: A rear side profile of a U.S. Army Sky Soldiers' AH-1F Cobra.

We have a large experience base with the aircraft, both in maintenance and flight operations. We are very fortunate that the head of our maintenance department is also an Army-trained maintenance officer with lots of Cobra experience, and he is also a Cobra pilot. All of our pilots are highly experienced Cobra pilots. They are all Army or Marine trained.

We currently have ten show-qualified Cobra pilots that have a combined total of 74,000 military flight hours. It is a mind blowing level of experience. All of them are combat veterans except for one. They are the real McCoy – real American military heroes. To put it into perspective, they have ten Distinguished Flying Crosses among them, 160 Air Medals, and numerous Bronze Stars with valor devices.

In order for our program to work, a highly maneuverable, highly capable aircraft had to be chosen. The Apache would be the ultimate, but they are all overseas, being used for training, or being rebuilt. The Cobra was the predecessor to the Apache, and they just came out of the Army inventory a couple years ago. The Marine Corp is still using them. They have all been de-militarized. The weapon



used for training to deploy. So I thought of you guys." That started the conversation. We started playing off one another, and a lot of good things happened.

WAN: How did you move the U.S. Army Sky Soldiers from concept to reality?

BRADY: What we are doing has never been done before. Never before has a major military service had veterans come in as their sponsor demonstration team to assist with recruiting. The concept required lots of meetings, and lots of presentations. We had to have approvals by Congress, the Secretary of the Army, the Department of the Army, and the Department of Defense to obtain the aircraft,

Editor's Note:

In the January 2007 issue of this magazine we presented Shawn Yost's interview with Mike Brady of the Army Aviation Historical Foundation (AAHF) who discussed their Vietnam re-enactment that has become a popular act on the airshow circuit. At about that same time,



get special seating, they sit up front, and they can see everything. We have food and drinks, and lots of space for break-out areas. We also have other tents away from the chalet that are used for our Huey Helicopter Ride raffle and audience surveys.

WAN: *What makes the U.S. Army Sky Soldiers different from other civilian acts and other military teams?*

BRADY: There is nothing like our act out there. There are no other United States military helicopter demonstration teams. We are a group of volunteer veterans using recently retired military aircraft. Airshow organizers are always looking for something new and different to advertise to their audience to bring them in. We are not the same old thing.

It is totally exciting. We are in front of the audience the entire time. So, it is different, and it is unique.

Left: Two Cobras face off during the climatic "Cobra Dance." The U.S. Army Sky Soldiers form into the diamond formation. The team flies a tight diamond considering the aircraft's large main rotor.

systems are non-operational but are still on the aircraft.

WAN: *How did you decide on a color scheme for the aircraft?*

BRADY: The color scheme of the aircraft is based on the signature colors of the Army – black and gold. We were fortunate when a graphic artist that had once worked for the Army Recruiting Command retired. We asked him to review the silhouette of the Cobra and make a design based on his knowledge of recruiting motif and standards. After several renditions, we presented the design to the Army, and they loved it. They did not make one change to the aircraft. We incorporated the Army logo, the words "Sky Soldiers" and the Sky Soldiers' logo. All of that was designed by us and the Army approved it.

WAN: *Did the Army have any input on the aerial portion of the show, or was that done by the Sky Soldiers?*

BRADY: No, the flying part of the program is totally ours. We presented our program and script to the Army, and they totally approved it with virtually no changes.

WAN: *How does the aerial team integrate with the ground package?*

BRADY: We are all "gray hairs", which I think is a real asset. We have been there, and done that. The entire group at various levels has had military experience, and now we have successful civilian careers. We can sit down with the potential recruits and their families, and say, "Here is why we decided to join the service, here is what we learned from it, and here is how we have applied it to our civilian jobs." We can talk to the parents because we have grown children.

ELKINS: The Army chalet is very nice because the invitees can have lots of interaction inside. Our people can speak with the invitees, parents, or with the recruiters. When the show starts, they



Though the Sky Soldiers do not have 50 to 60 years of "branding" like the military jet teams, we present a totally new and very exciting military-oriented flying program. We are non-aerobatic, so we do not even require a waiver. Our demonstration is anywhere from three feet to 800 feet off the ground. Unlike the other teams, we are not as weather restricted. With helicopters, as long as you are not endangering the people on the ground and remain clear of clouds, you can operate in light rain and low ceilings. In a sense, we are a weather insurance policy for airshows.

WAN: *What feedback have you received about the U.S. Army Sky Soldiers?*

BRADY: It has been a roaring success. We are way above the goals that have been established for us by the Army. The airshows are very happy with the program and product. The audience reaction has been outstanding, and as a matter of fact, a majority of the shows have already invited us back for next year. We are working with the Army already for next year to determine where we will go. Next year's shows will probably be announced at the ICAS convention in Las Vegas in December.

To learn more about the U.S. Army Sky Soldiers, or the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation, please visit their website, <http://www.armyav.org>.