

# The U.S. AIR FORCE THUNDERBIRDS

by Carrie A. Braulick



**BLAZERS**



# The Thunderbirds in Action

The Thunderbird planes  
glide into the air. People in a  
large crowd are excited for the  
show to begin.

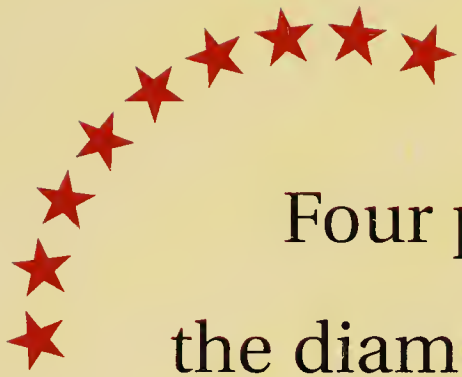












Four planes fly beside each other in the diamond formation. They make a large loop.

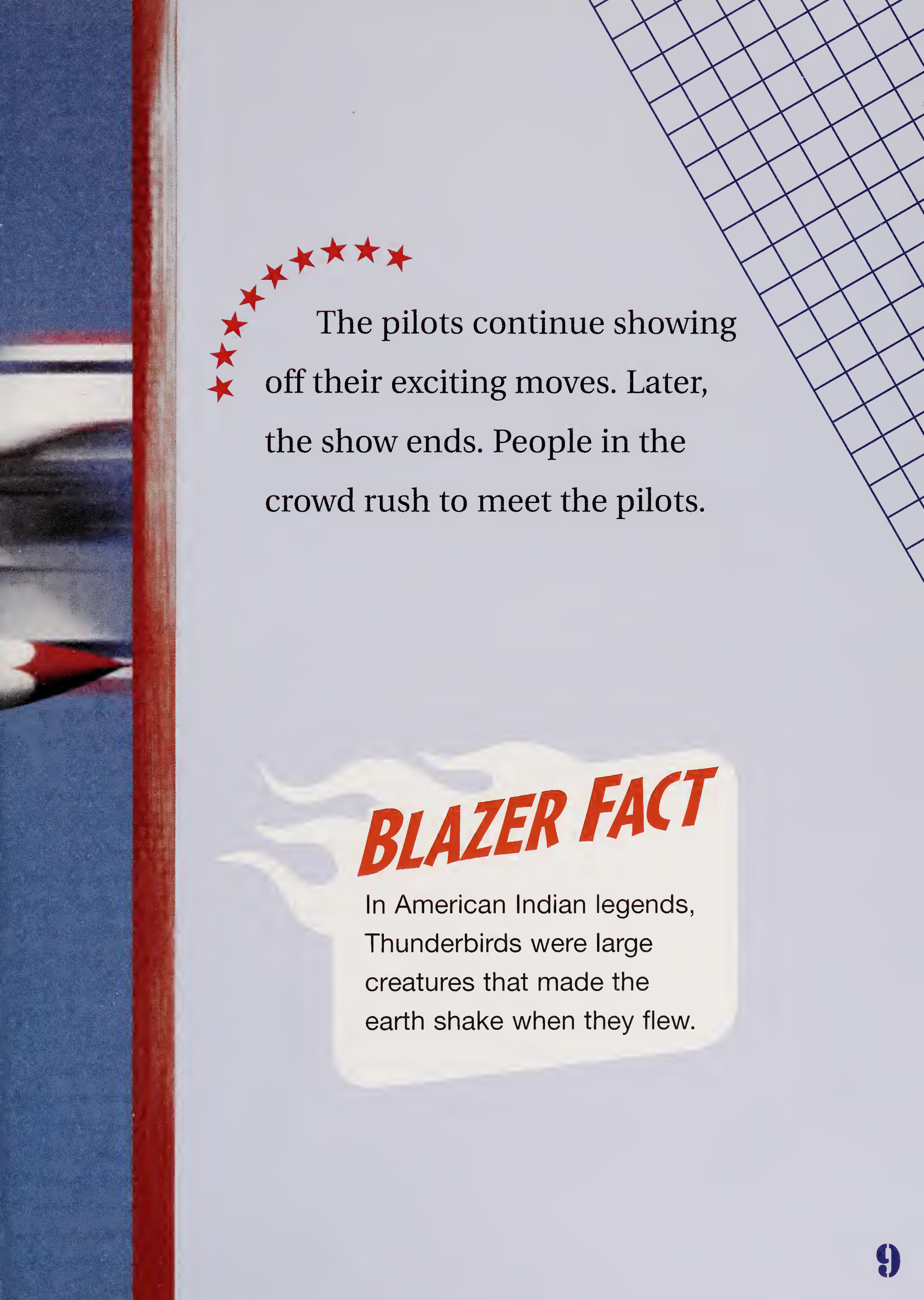




**Opposing knife-edge pass**







The pilots continue showing off their exciting moves. Later, the show ends. People in the crowd rush to meet the pilots.

## ***BLAZER FACT***

In American Indian legends, Thunderbirds were large creatures that made the earth shake when they flew.



# Thunderbird Planes

The U.S. Air Force

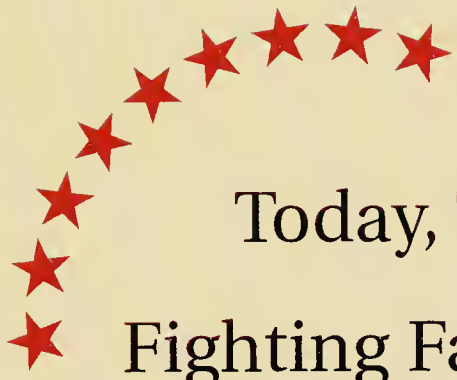
Thunderbirds perform daring moves with planes. Their first planes were Thunderjets.



# Thunderjets







Today, Thunderbirds fly F-16  
Fighting Falcons. These fighter jets are  
fast and easy for pilots to control.







## ***BLAZER FACT***

Many pilots call F-16s "Vipers."  
As F-16s land, some people  
think they look like pit  
viper snakes.

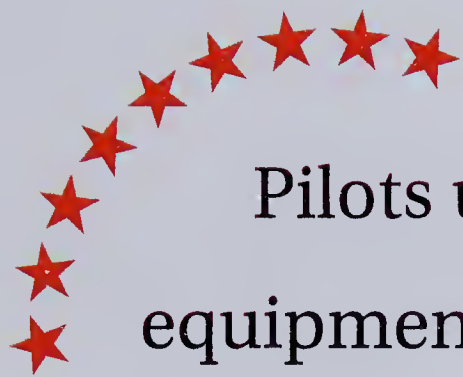




**Control stick**







Pilots use cockpit  
equipment to fly the planes.  
They use a control stick  
to change directions.



# Maneuvers

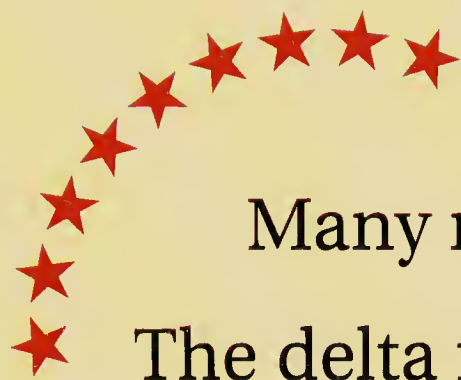
High-speed maneuvers are the heart of a Thunderbird show. Rolls, loops, and dives thrill crowds.



**Bomb burst**







Many maneuvers include formations.

The delta formation is shaped like a triangle. Four planes make an arrowhead formation in the arrowhead loop.

**Delta**

## **BLAZER FACT**

The Thunderbirds' delta formation is named after the fourth letter of the Greek alphabet.







**Arrowhead**





**Crossover break**

Sometimes, one or two planes are the center of attention. In the crossover break, two planes cross paths.







# Delta Positions



**Commander**

**Left wing**

**Right wing**

**Lead solo**







**Opposing solo**

**Slot**





# Thunderbird Jobs



The pilots in shows are not the only Thunderbirds. Other team members fix planes, plan shows, and do other jobs.









All Thunderbirds train for their jobs. New pilots learn each maneuver before they fly in shows. Skilled pilots keep shows both exciting and safe.



**Bon-ton rouille**





# Flying in the diamond formation









# Glossary

**cockpit** (KOK-pit)—the area in the front of a plane where the pilot sits

**control stick** (kuhn-TROHL STIK)—the lever in a plane's cockpit that a pilot uses to steer

**delta** (DEL-tuh)—the six-plane formation of the Thunderbirds

**diamond** (DYE-muhnd)—a formation in which four Thunderbird planes form a diamond shape

**fighter jet** (FYTE-ur JET)—a fast plane designed to destroy enemy aircraft

**formation** (for-MAY-shuhn)—a group of planes flying together in a pattern

**maneuver** (muh-NOO-ver)—a planned and controlled movement

**roll** (ROHL)—to turn sideways in a complete circle