



# NEWS RELEASE

Museum of Aviation, P.O. Box 2469, Warner Robins, GA 31099

[www.museumofaviation.org](http://www.museumofaviation.org)

Contact: Bob Dubiel  
bdubiel@museumofaviation.org  
(478) 926-6870  
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## MUSEUM OPENS THUNDERBIRDS F-16 AIRCRAFT EXHIBIT Air Force Association Sponsors New Paint Job

Warner Robins, GA – The Museum of Aviation opened a permanent “Thunderbirds” F-16 aircraft exhibit Sunday, May 3 – the same day the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds aerial demonstration team performed at Robins Air Force Base.

Thanks to a generous donation from Carl Vinson Chapter 296 of the Air Force Association, the Museum’s F-16A aircraft – once a part of the famous flying team from 1982-1991 – was repainted in the red-white-

and-blue paint scheme and is now on display in the Century of Flight Hangar. The Air Force Association donated over \$17,700 for the supplies and paint to put the Thunderbirds paint scheme on the aircraft. The paint scheme is the same one used by the team today.



Thunderbirds Team Leader Lt. Col. Greg Thomas, Warner Robins Air Logistics Commander Maj. Gen. Polly Peyer and a group of Museum of civic leaders helped “cut the ribbon” on the new display at an Air Show reception Saturday night, May 2. The entire Thunderbirds Team along with the U.S. Army’s Golden Knights Parachute Team attended the event in the Museum’s Century of Flight Hangar. The two-day air show at Robins Air Force Base was attended by more than 150,000 people.

“The Air Force Association’s Chapter 296 and its Community Partners are privileged to sponsor the Museum of Aviation’s fantastic Thunderbird Exhibit,” said Jack Steed, AFA National Director Emeritus. “This exhibit will not only tell the story of the Ambassadors in Blue but will also serve as a model of extraordinary service to which our youth may aspire while giving all museum visitors a sense of great pride not only in the Thunderbirds but for the entire United States Air Force as well”.



Besides the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force in Dayton, Ohio, the Museum is now the only other Air Force Museum in the country to have a former Thunderbirds F-16 on display.

***Cutting the ribbon on the new Museum of Aviation Thunderbirds Exhibit are (l-r) Museum Foundation Capital Campaign Chairman Carl Swearingen, Museum Director Ken Emery, former Thunderbirds Team Leader Richard McSpadden, WRALC Commander Maj. Gen. Polly Peyer, Thunderbirds Team Leader Lt. Col. Greg Thomas, Museum Board of Directors Chairman Marlan Nichols, and Air Force Association Chapter 296 members Jack Steed and Dan Callahan.***

“We are proud to be one of only two Air Force museums to have such a display,” said Museum Director Ken Emery. “Besides the aircraft, we have on display some of the uniforms and equipment used by the Thunderbirds team and we show how the team represents all U.S. Air Force men and women doing their jobs around the world.” The exhibit includes a flight simulation program which allows visitors to “take the stick” and fly an F-16.

The Museum gained the F-16 Fighting Falcon a year ago from Sheppard Air Force Base Texas where it had been used as a maintenance trainer for several years. It flew as the Number 2 and Number 3 aircraft in the Thunderbirds formation from 1983 until 1991 when the Air Force team converted to the newer model F-16C .

The Lockheed Martin F-16 Fighting Falcon is a multirole jet fighter aircraft originally developed by General Dynamics for the United States Air Force. Designed as a lightweight fighter, it evolved into a successful multirole aircraft. The Fighting Falcon's versatility is a paramount reason it has proven a success on the export market, having been selected to serve in the air forces of 25 nations. The F-16 is the largest Western jet fighter program with over 4,400 aircraft built since production was approved in 1976. Though no longer being bought by the U.S. Air Force, advanced versions are still being built for export customers. In 1993, General Dynamics sold its aircraft manufacturing business to the Lockheed Corporation, which in turn became part of Lockheed Martin after a 1995 merger with Martin Marietta.

The Fighting Falcon is a dogfighter with numerous innovations including a frameless, bubble canopy for better visibility, side-mounted control stick to ease control while under high g-forces, and reclined seat to reduce the effect of g-forces on the pilot. Weapons include a M61 Vulcan cannon and various missiles mounted on up to 11 hard points. It was also the first fighter aircraft deliberately built to sustain 9-g turns. It has a thrust-to-weight ratio greater than one, providing enough power to climb and accelerate vertically – if necessary. Although the F-16's official name is "Fighting Falcon", it is known to its pilots as the "Viper", due it resembling a cobra snake and after the Battlestar Galactica starfighter. It is used by the Thunderbirds air demonstration team.

The F-16 is scheduled to remain in service with the U.S. Air Force until 2025. The planned replacement is the F-35 Lightning II, which is scheduled to enter service in 2011 and will gradually begin replacing a number of multirole aircraft among the air forces of the program's member nations.

The only modifications needed to prepare the F-16 aircraft for its air demonstration role are installing a smoke-generating system in the space normally reserved for the 20mm cannon, and the painting of the aircraft in Thunderbird colors. The aircraft can be reconfigured to combat-ready status in less than 72 hours.

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