

## (4) Military Planners: *Recruitment, PR and PSYOPs*

Every summer, the military conducts sustained psychological warfare operations (PSYOP) under the guise of “air” shows across Canada and the U.S.

In “Psychological Operations,” a US Air Force (USAF) Doctrine Document dated August 27, 1999, Major General Timothy Kinnan says PSYOPs “are an integral part of today’s aerospace strategy.... Air Force PSYOP forces support US national and military objectives through planned operations to convey information to target audiences. PSYOP provide a low-cost, high-impact method to deter adversaries and obtain the support of friendly or neutral target audiences.”

Although they may not realize it, major media outlets that sponsor war shows are part of these operations. The PSYOP doctrine advises that the military “use transmission medium or media which are reliable and readily accessible by target audiences. US forces must ensure message media are tailored for the local populace. Media can range from leaflets, to posters, to radio, television, and digital broadcasts. Planners should ensure transmission media can reach and be understood by the target audience.”

According to the USAF doctrine, “air” shows fall under the PSYOP category called “Military Operations Other Than War.” They “support the elements of US national policy objectives, national security strategy and national military strategy; modify the behaviour of selected target audiences toward US and multinational capabilities; gain and sustain foreign popular belief in, and support for, US and multinational goals and objectives; increase foreign popular support for US and multinational military operations; diminish the legitimacy and credibility of the adversary political system.”

By building support for warplanes as an inevitable means of solving world conflicts, war shows perform a vital role. A document, entitled “Public Affairs Operations,” explains that their role is to “support the warfighter [and] gain and maintain public support for military operations, and communicate US resolve in a manner that provides global influence and deter-

rence. Commanders should consider community relations activities as a fundamental part of building public support for military operations. Public affairs operations bring together Air Force people and the civilian community through events such as air shows that feature the USAF Demonstration Squadron, open houses, anniversary activities, civic leader tours, support for local community activities and recruiting efforts. Effective community relations create mutual acceptance, respect, appreciation and cooperation between the USAF and civilian community.”

Even the seemingly innocuous presence of an air force band is part of a larger strategy to “capitalize on music’s emotional appeal to promote morale, encourage recruitment and build public support for the armed forces.” It is no accident that popular rock music plays when the warplanes take to the skies at air shows. It’s all part of the package that portrays war as glamorous, adventurous and sexy.

The ultimate purpose of war shows is summarized by the USAF: “Public affairs operations support a strong national defense, in effect preparing the nation for war, by building public trust and understanding for the military’s contribution to national security and its budgetary requirements. These operations make taxpayers aware of the value of spending defense dollars on readiness, advanced weap-

ons, training, personnel and the associated costs of maintaining a premier aerospace force. With public and congressional backing, military leaders are able to effectively recruit, equip and train airmen to perform the full spectrum of military operations.”

**Source:** Father’s Day Coalition for Peace. (See “A Few Contacts,” p.16.)

**“The Snowbirds have consistently fulfilled their mandate of public relations and recruiting while establishing themselves as a symbol of national pride and proud ambassadors of the Canadian Forces.”**

**Source:** Air Force: History <[www.airforce.forces.ca/hist/modern\\_e.htm](http://www.airforce.forces.ca/hist/modern_e.htm)>

**“We have a large chunk of assets on the road every summer as part of air shows. That’s where we get the most bang for our buck in getting our young men and women face-to-face with the public....The Snowbirds are great ambassadors for recruiting and advertising.”**

**Source:** L.Gen. DeQuetteville to National Defence Cttee, April 17, 1997.

### **Cotton Candy, Fighter Jets and Recruitment**

By Shannon McManimon

Air shows are great public relations events for the US military, a way to show off hardware, to encourage hero worship. Behind the carnival atmosphere and the good public relations is another motive: the recruitment of young people. Air shows are intended to lure children, to seduce them with the wonders of technology with cool stunts, flips, dives and tricks.

Although most visitors do not recognize this purpose, the military is quite open about it. The website of the F-15 team says that the “demo team’s primary mission is to promote recruiting, retention and community relations.” The mission of the Blue An-

gels is also “to enhance Navy and Marine Corps recruiting.”

In 2000, the *Colorado Springs Gazette* said, “About 70% of 1999 Air Force recruits who had seen the Thunderbirds had their interest in signing up increased greatly or moderately.” Navy Lt. Rob Webster said the Blue Angels stunt team is “a recruiting opportunity” (*Philadelphia Inquirer*). Lt. Cmdr. Ron Vaught said that “his target isn’t just teenagers looking to enlist in the next few years. Air shows can inspire big dreams in small children as well” (*Los Angeles Times*).

**Source:** American Friends Service Committee <[www.afsc.org/youthmil/200112/airshow.htm](http://www.afsc.org/youthmil/200112/airshow.htm)>