



USAF Maj. Michelle Curran, call sign “Mace”, arrives at Selfridge ANGB in Mt. Clemens, Michigan when the team staged from the U.S. for an airshow performance in Canada during the global pandemic lockdown. Despite the pandemic, Maj. Curran and the Thunderbirds effectively leveraged social media to maintain visibility of the team across all media channels. (Photo: Author)

Facebook Post Announces “Career Pivot” For Popular F-16 Lead Solo.

In a Facebook post from Wednesday afternoon, October 27, 2021, USAF Maj. Michelle Curran, call sign “Mace”, announced she is, “about to make a big career pivot and will be leaving the Active Duty Air Force in the new year”. Maj. Curran is widely known as a member of the [U.S. Air Force Flight Demonstration Team, the Thunderbirds](#). She flies position #5, lead solo, one of the most visible positions on the team. This is Curran’s third season with the [Thunderbirds](#).

During her three years of assignment with the Thunderbirds, she quickly established herself as a highly visible and positive influencer for the Air Force through innovative use of social media. Curran also provided unique and candid transparency about her career and personal life, effectively leveraging social media to bring airshow fans and aviation enthusiasts inside the world of a fighter pilot. Curran defined what it is to be a modern Air Force officer for many outsiders, providing a valuable insight into the Air Force experience and showcasing the opportunities of an Air Force career.

In conversations around the U.S. during three air show seasons, Curran told *The Aviationist* about her role on the team and its opportunity to, “showcase the Air Force experience and let people know what is possible”. During a conversation at the Henry Ford in Dearborn, Michigan for the Thunder Over Michigan Airshow in 2021, Curran told *TheAviationist.com* that, “These are long days sometimes, but this is the best job in the world. The thing that makes it great are the people I serve with- everyone, the team I work alongside every day. We lift each other up, we accomplish more as a team”.

[“Mace” Curran quickly became an accessible and popular connector with airshow fans. Perhaps to a greater degree than any previous Thunderbird, Curran granted candid access to the life of an Air Force fighter pilot. \(Image credit: Thunderbirds\)](#)

Maj. Curran flew as Thunderbird #6, opposing solo, before her advancement to Thunderbird #5, lead solo in the 2020/21 airshow season. During the latter part of her role on the team, many airshows were cancelled due to the global pandemic. This shift in airshow schedules meant that Maj. Curran’s social media contributions became even more important for maintaining the relevance of the Thunderbirds for public audiences.

Curran has worked with the Thunderbird team media personnel to bring scintillating in-cockpit viewpoint video of the lead solo’s dynamic routine during the Thunderbird demonstration, including thrilling video of opposing maneuvers with Thunderbird #6 and her signature vertical rolls during the team’s “high show”.

In her less visible but equally crucial role with the Thunderbirds, “Mace” Curran served as Chief of Standardization and Evaluation for the team, a leadership role which will positively impact the trajectory of the team in upcoming seasons.



In addition to her role with the Thunderbirds, “Mace” Curran is an experienced F-16 combat fighter pilot with 163 combat hours over Afghanistan in support of operations Resolute Support and Freedom’s Sentinel. She has also served as an F-16 Instructor Pilot and Flight Commander at the Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base, Fort Worth, Texas.



Curran holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Criminal Justice from the University of St. Thomas and is a 2010 graduate of the Air and Space Basic Course, Squadron Officer College. She went on to complete the Squadron Officer School in 2014.

In the Facebook post announcing her career transition, Michelle Curran wrote: "I'll be continuing to serve in a part time capacity and pursuing some goals in the business world. Meanwhile, the part of this job that I really love is inspiring others. I'm hoping to continue to do that through this platform, public speaking, a children's book...let's just say I have a lot of goals and I hope you'll continue to come along for the journey. I'm also excited to get into the general aviation world and hopefully also try my hand at helicopters. My presence here won't end when I hand off the #5 and I have a lot more to share with you!"

[Maj. Michelle "Mace" Curran with author Tom Demerly of TheAviationist.com at The Henry Ford during the team's 2021 combined demonstration with the U.S. Navy Blue Angels. Curran signed a unique print by aviation artist Sean Hampton of Afterburner Profiles commemorating the two teams' rare combined demonstration at Thunder Over Michigan, 2021.](#)



Tom Demerly is a feature writer, journalist, photographer and editorialist who has written articles that are published around the world on TheAviationist.com, TACAIRNET.com, Outside magazine, Business Insider, We Are The Mighty, The Dearborn Press & Guide, National Interest, Russia's government media outlet Sputnik, and many other publications. Demerly studied journalism at Henry Ford College in Dearborn, Michigan. Tom Demerly served in an intelligence gathering unit as a member of the U.S. Army and Michigan National Guard. His military experience includes being Honor Graduate from the U.S. Army Infantry School at Ft. Benning, Georgia (Cycle C-6-1) and as a Scout Observer in a reconnaissance unit, Company "F", 425th INF (RANGER/AIRBORNE), Long Range Surveillance Unit (LRSU). Demerly is an experienced parachutist, holds advanced SCUBA certifications, has climbed the highest mountains on three continents and visited all seven continents and has flown several types of light aircraft.

Source: [USAF Maj. Michelle "Mace" Curran, Thunderbird #5, to Leave Team](#)