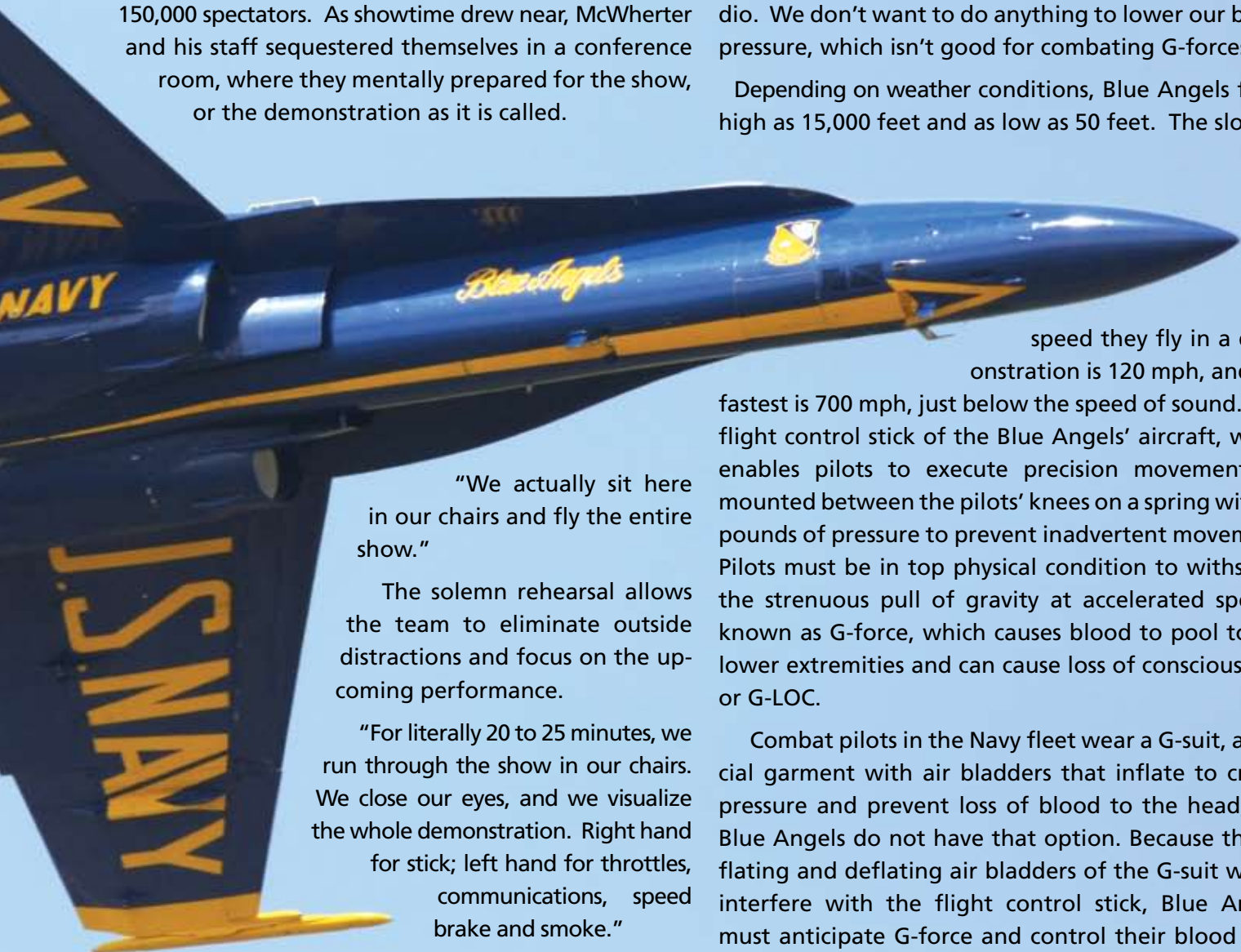




The Blue Angels' performance was the star attraction of the two-day Beaufort Air Show that attracted 150,000 spectators. As showtime drew near, McWherter and his staff sequestered themselves in a conference room, where they mentally prepared for the show, or the demonstration as it is called.

"We work out six days a week. It's primarily weight with some cardio mixed in, but not a whole lot of cardio. We don't want to do anything to lower our blood pressure, which isn't good for combating G-forces."

Depending on weather conditions, Blue Angels fly as high as 15,000 feet and as low as 50 feet. The slowest



"We actually sit here in our chairs and fly the entire show."

The solemn rehearsal allows the team to eliminate outside distractions and focus on the upcoming performance.

"For literally 20 to 25 minutes, we run through the show in our chairs. We close our eyes, and we visualize the whole demonstration. Right hand for stick; left hand for throttles, communications, speed brake and smoke."

Behind the precision maneuvers spectators see at an air show is a team of focused pilots undergoing a strenuous workout. To prepare for the arduous demonstration schedule, pilots follow a strict weight and cardiovascular exercise regimen.

speed they fly in a demonstration is 120 mph, and the fastest is 700 mph, just below the speed of sound. The flight control stick of the Blue Angels' aircraft, which enables pilots to execute precision movements, is mounted between the pilots' knees on a spring with 40 pounds of pressure to prevent inadvertent movement. Pilots must be in top physical condition to withstand the strenuous pull of gravity at accelerated speeds, known as G-force, which causes blood to pool to the lower extremities and can cause loss of consciousness, or G-LOC.

Combat pilots in the Navy fleet wear a G-suit, a special garment with air bladders that inflate to create pressure and prevent loss of blood to the head, but Blue Angels do not have that option. Because the inflating and deflating air bladders of the G-suit would interfere with the flight control stick, Blue Angels must anticipate G-force and control their blood flow through muscle contractions known as the Hick technique. Pilots say the word "hick" every three seconds, closing off their airways and bearing down as they pronounce the K, which increases chest pressure and maintains blood flow to the heart and brain.