

Desert Lightning News

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Serving Southern Arizona's military community, including Davis-Monthan Air Force Base

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Airman 1st Class Jasmyne Bridgers-Matos

HERITAGE FLIGHT TRAINING

See Pages 6 and 7

Special Warfare and Combat Rescue Airmen demonstrate ACE capabilities

By 355th Wing

Public Affairs

The 355th Wing at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, demonstrated the ability to employ special warfare teams and combat rescue aircraft to execute agile combat employment operations in support of unmanned aircraft systems.

During Exercise Agile Angel, a team of special warfare Airmen assigned to the 48th Rescue Squadron, conducted a low-visibility ground infiltration to rapidly establish and control an austere landing zone and a forward arming and refueling point while mitigating the risk of enemy detection.

The exercise leveraged HC-130J Combat King II aircraft and FARP capabilities originally developed for the combat rescue mission, to airlift munitions, fuel, and maintenance support for an MQ-9 Reaper unmanned aerial vehicle, assigned to the 27th Special Operations Wing. The team executed an integrated combat turn for the MQ-9 and were then re-tasked to launch in



U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Jasmyne Bridgers-Matos

U.S. Airmen assigned to the 48th Rescue Squadron re-task to a combat search and rescue mission during Exercise Agile Angel at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, Feb. 20, 2024. The main objectives of Exercise Agile Angel were to execute at speed with a small number of personnel and with minimal active communications, which are all critical requirements to successfully execute ACE operations in a contested environment.

support of a combat search and rescue mission.

The main objectives of Exercise Agile Angel were to execute at speed with a small number

of personnel and with minimal active communications, which are all critical requirements to successfully execute ACE operations in a contested environment. Additionally, the SWT employed a locally developed resilient mesh-network with over-the-horizon communications capabilities to command and control the entire operation.

Furthermore, the exercise demonstrated that a small element of special warfare, combat rescue, fuels, ammunition, and maintenance Airmen with multi-capable skills, led by an O-3 and an E-7 operating under mission type orders, can be a highly agile maneuver force capable of delivering operational level effects.

"War is changing," said U.S. Air Force Capt. Aaron Smith, 48th Rescue Squadron combat rescue officer. "We have new emerging threats. The tactics of the past 20 years will not

work. We need to integrate and expand our capabilities."

The 48th RQS recently established their first SWT, combining pararescue, tactical air control party, survival, evasion, resistance, and escape, and special warfare mission support Airmen to execute a wide range of Air Force missions. These highly capable teams are being designed to operate under the control of future combat Wings to execute their legacy joint fires integration, global access, and personnel recovery missions, while also delivering ACE, tactical C2, sensing, and multi-domain effects for the Air Component commander.

"These are truly exciting times for our Airmen," said U.S. Air Force Col. Jose Cabrera, 563rd Rescue Group commander. "Their resourcefulness and willingness to step outside of traditional roles is exactly what the Air Force needs for the future fight."



U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Abbey Rieves

U.S. Airmen assigned to the 48th Rescue Squadron push an aircraft generator and flood lights during Exercise Agile Angel at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, Feb. 20, 2024. Training outside of their particular specialties was deliberately designed to outpace adversary action in the future fight.

Desert Lightning News

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AIRMEN GET FAMILIAR WITH JOLLY GREEN II



LEFT: Airmen assigned to the 943rd Rescue Group, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, inspect the 920th Rescue Wing's first HH-60W Jolly Green II helicopter on the flight line Feb. 1, 2024. The HH-60W is the successor to the HH-60G Pave Hawk and is used for a variety of missions to include combat search and rescue operations in hostile or denied territory. Located at Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona, the 943rd RQG is one of three geographically separated units that fall under the 920th RQW, Patrick Space Force Base, Florida.



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Harley Straps, 943rd Maintenance Squadron crew chief, looks into the transition section on the 943rd Rescue Group's brand new HH-60W Jolly Green II helicopter as part of familiarization training at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, March 2, 2024.

U.S. Air Force photos by Senior Airman Nicole Koreen



Airmen assigned to the 943rd Maintenance Squadron look into the oil cooler compartment of the 943rd Rescue Group's brand new HH-60W Jolly Green II helicopter as part of familiarization training at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, March 2, 2024.



Staff Sgt. Christopher Pinney, 943d Maintenance Squadron crew chief, explains new features of the HH-60W Jolly Green II helicopter to 943d MXS Airmen as part of familiarization training at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, March 2, 2024.



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Justin Krigbaum, 943rd Maintenance Squadron crew chief, reaches into the engine compartment of the 943rd Rescue Group's brand new HH-60W Jolly Green II helicopter as part of familiarization training at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, March 2, 2024. As the HH-60G successor, the HH-60W enhances the capabilities of the 301st and 305th Rescue Squadrons in performance of the wing's mission to plan, lead and conduct military rescue operations and missions in order to deny competitors and adversaries exploitation of isolated personnel.



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Harley Straps, 943rd Maintenance Squadron crew chief, inspect the engine compartment of the 943rd Rescue Group's brand new HH-60W Jolly Green II helicopter as part of familiarization training at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, March 2, 2024.

DM hosts NATO partner in Exercise Cougar South 2024

By Staff Sgt. ANNEY RIEVES

355th Wing Public Affairs

The Royal Canadian air force conducted Exercise Cougar South at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, March 14, 2024. The exercise included scenario-based missions, air combat tactics, close air support training, air-to-air refueling training, and employment of precision-guided munitions.

Davis-Monthan trained the RCAF to uphold its primary mission of deploying, employing and sustaining combat search and rescue, attack airpower in support of combatant commanders anywhere in the world.



U.S. Air Force photos by Staff Sgt. Abbey Rieves

Two CF-18 Hornet aircraft assigned to the Royal Canadian air force taxi during Exercise Cougar South at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, March 14, 2024. ECS was an eight-week training mission designed to enhance tactical fighter readiness and weapon maintenance in the Northern Atlantic Treaty Organization.



LEFT: Royal Canadian air force Master Cpl. Denis, left, and Cpl. Bandeira, right, 425th Tactical Fighter Squadron air weapons system technicians, loads a bomb during Exercise Cougar South at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, March 14, 2024. DM supported the RCAF, which strengthened the Northern Atlantic Treaty Organization.



LEFT: U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Luis Pulido, 355th Logistics Readiness Squadron petroleum, oils and lubricants technician, left, and Royal Canadian air force Cpl. Taillerfer, 425th Tactical Fighter Squadron avionics systems technician, fuel a RCAF CF-18 Hornet aircraft during Exercise Cougar South at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, March 14, 2024. ECS was a high-tempo, large-scale exercise intended to increase the RCAF's fighter force readiness and maintain tactical fighter interoperability between the RCAF and the U.S. Air Force.



Royal Canadian air force weapon technicians arm a CF-18 Hornet aircraft during Exercise Cougar South at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, March 14, 2024. DM trained the RCAF to uphold its primary mission of deploying, employing and sustaining combat search and rescue, attack airpower in support of combatant commanders anywhere in the world.



LEFT: Royal Canadian air force members conduct routine maintenance on a CF-18 Hornet aircraft during Exercise Cougar South at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, March 14, 2024. The RCAF defends and protects Canadian and North American airspace in partnership with the U.S.



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563rd OSS mask modernization

By Senior Airman
GUADALUPE BELTRAN

355th Wing

The Air Force Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defense Systems Branch fielded new respirator masks to the 563rd Operational Support Squadron and 755th OSS, March 7, 2024.

The new mask, known as the Joint Service Aircrew Mask Strategic Aircraft or M69, replaced the legacy MBU-19/P Aircrew Eye and Respiratory Protection equipment, which launched in the early 1990's.

Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, was provided the new chemical defense masks for aircrew members to wear while flying during chemical attacks.

"The M69 is a new material solution," said Kevin O'Neal, Air Combat Command aircrew flight equipment operations specialist. "This week we are conducting new equipment training as part of the total package fielding."

The NET subject matter experts provided the aircrew flight equipment technicians their new equipment and then trained them how to maintain and use the equipment.

"In the last 40 years, every time we get a new piece of equipment, it just showed up and we were expected to read the technical order and figure it out on our own," said Bryan McCoy, Air

Force CBRN Defense Systems Branch JSAM SA fielding coordinator. "This training is not like that. We wanted to perpetuate this, and how things should be fielded. We have had some good results and success with it."

During NET, instructors taught Airmen how to deconstruct and rebuild the M69 masks. Replacing the MBU-19/P AERP, the M69 showed less wear and damage during routine inspections.

"The standard M69 inspection cycle is 18 months, which is directly correlated to logistics and the Mean Time Before Failure rates of the mask," said O'Neal. "In addition to the 18 month inspection cycle, our AFE technicians conduct post-flight inspections when aircrew complete training with their assigned M69 kit."

During the 18-month inspection cycle, the specialists conduct normal post flight inspections. Each kit is fitted to each aircrew member. If a pilot flies in-between that 18-month period, a post flight inspection is conducted on the pilot's kit.

"One of the huge benefits of the new system is that the maintenance is significantly less," said McCoy. "The mask is also much more resilient than the previous system."

The first delivery of the M69 occurred in 2020. Since then, 73 TPF and NET events have been successfully completed with additional deliveries scheduled across the Air Force.

Air Force fielding scheduled for late 2024.



U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Guadalupe Beltran

U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Elijah Bartley, 563rd Operations Support Squadron aircrew flight equipment technician, wears a new M69 Joint Service Aircrew Mask Strategic Aircraft respirator mask at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, March 6, 2024. The M69 was built to protect Airmen in environments with chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear agents.

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43rd ECS transitions to EA-37B

Story by
CHARLES HAYMOND

55th Wing Public Affairs

The 43rd Electronic Combat Squadron took its final flight in the EC-130H Compass Call aircraft on Feb. 15, 2024, at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona.

The Air Force is replacing the aging fleet of EC-130H aircraft with new EA-37Bs.

“Throughout its storied existence, the squadron’s adaptability and commitment to evolving military technologies shine through, having operated 11 different aircraft types across six continents,” said Lt. Col. Tray C. Wood, 43rd ECS commander. “The final EC-130H flight marks the end of an era and signals the beginning of a new chapter with the forthcoming EA-37B transition.”

The 43rd ECS is the first squadron under the 55th Electronic Combat Group to move itself away from the EC-130H Compass Call aircraft to the new EA-37B Compass Call. A total of 10 EA-37B aircraft are on track to be delivered while simultaneously retiring the EC-130H fleet in a phased approach.

“This shift to the squadron’s 12th aircraft emphasizes its enduring legacy and continuous efforts to stay at the forefront



U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class William Finn

The 43rd Electronic Combat Squadron (ECS) took its final flight in the EC-130H Compass Call aircraft on Feb. 15, 2024, at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona. The 43rd ECS is the first squadron under the 55th Electronic Combat Group to move itself away from the EC-130H Compass Call aircraft to the new EA-37B Compass Call.

of technological advancements in military aviation,” Wood said. “This rehost emphasizes the squadron’s commitment to maintaining operational excellence and readiness in the face of evolving global security challenges.”

A part of the 43rd ECS philosophy is a connection to the past and the unity embodied by all current and former 43rd ECS members.

“We are simply carrying on the traditions of our past members as we usher in a new era and aircraft,” said U.S. Air

Force Capt. Austin Galeazzo, 43rd ECS director of staff.

“Our squadron is exemplified by its camaraderie, we proudly carry 107 years of traditions from the Bats that came before us,” said Capt. Paul Matthews, 43rd ECS executive officer. “With our mantra, ‘Once a Bat, Always a Bat,’ the legacy of the 43rd ECS will live on in us long after our service has ended.”

During this transition, the 43rd ECS is appreciative of the support received from Air Combat Command, 16th Air Force,

and the 55th and 355th Wing leadership teams. During this new journey, Wood and 43rd ECS members look forward to reaching new heights ahead of them.

“As we welcome a new era of electronic attack, the 43rd Electronic Combat Squadron will play a critical role in security, air superiority and mission success within the multi-domain theatre,” Wood said. “In an era where electromagnetic dominance is synonymous with strategic advantage, the 43rd ECS remains at the forefront, ensuring the continued success of the warfighter.”



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DM HOSTS HERITAGE FLIGHT TRAINING

By Staff Sgt.
Nathan Call

355th Wing Public Affairs

The Heritage Flight Training Course took place at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, Feb. 29-March 3, 2024.

Air Force demonstration pilots went through various routines, solo and with civilian Air Force Heritage Flight Foundation pilots, and became certified to perform in the 2024 air show season.

The new F-16 Viper Team Demonstration Team pilot, U.S. Air Force Capt. Taylor "SAM" Heister, and F-35 Lightning II Demonstration Team pilot, U.S. Air Force Capt. Melanie "MACH" Kluesner, received their certifications to perform at airshows this season.

The performances featured modern fighter and attack aircraft flying alongside World War II, Korea and Vietnam-era planes.

This year's Air Force Air Combat Command's four demonstration teams, to include: the F-35 Lightning II, F-22 Raptor, F-16 Viper and A-10 Thunderbolt II. The Heritage flights included the following aircraft: the P-51 Mustang, F-86 Sabre, P-38 Lightning, and the F-5 Tiger.

U.S. Air Force Col Amy Meier, 355th Wing acting deputy commander, was able to take an incentive flight on a P-51 Mustang with founding member of the Air Force Heritage Flight program and pilot, Jim Beasley.

"My grandpa was a side gunner on a B-24 (liberator) and so World War II history has always been a part of my life," said Meier. "I felt closer to my grandpa because it was one of those moments where you really connect with your family history."

Heritage flights raise awareness of the Air Force mission and serve as a living memorial to the men and women who have served, or are currently serving in the Air Force.

"We're learning so much about what our capabilities are and what we're going to do in the future," Meier said. "That comes with always keeping an eye on where we started."



A P-51 Mustang aircraft returns from flying during the Heritage Flight Training Course at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, March 3, 2024. The aircraft honors Air Force history by providing 50-70 annual Heritage Flight demonstrations around the world.



U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Abbey Rieves

An A-10 Thunderbolt II aircraft flies during the Heritage Flight Training Course at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., Feb. 29, 2024. The A-10 was designed for the close air support mission, airborne forward air control and combat search and rescue.



U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Jasmyne Bridgers-Matos

An F-22 Raptor aircraft, an F-35A Lightning II aircraft and two F-5 Tiger aircraft fly in formation during the Heritage Flight Training Course at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, March 3, 2024. Heritage flights were flown with past and current U.S. Air Force aircraft to honor the past, present and future of American airpower.



An F-35A Lightning II aircraft flies during the Heritage Flight Training Course at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, March 3, 2024.

LIGHTNING COURSE 2024



U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Jasmyne Bridgers-Matos
Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, Feb. 29, 2024. The Air Force Heritage Flight Foundation celebrates U.S. air power



U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Jasmyne Bridgers-Matos
Heritage 1 An F-35A Lightning II aircraft flies over Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, March 1, 2024. The F-35A Lightning II Demonstration Team was part of the first operational F-35A wing for the Air Force, the 388th Fighter Wing, and flew capability demonstrations at air shows around the world.



U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Jasmyne Bridgers-Matos
An F-22 Raptor, A-10C Thunderbolt II and a P-51 Mustang aircraft fly in formation during the Heritage Flight Training Course at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona., March 2,



U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Jasmyne Bridgers-Matos
An F-35A Lightning II aircraft flies alongside two P-51 Mustang aircraft during the Heritage Flight Training Course at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, March 1, 2024.



U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Jasmyne Bridgers-Matos
An A-10C Thunderbolt II aircraft flies alongside an F-5 Tiger aircraft during the Heritage Flight Training Course at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, March 1, 2024. During HFTC, aircrew practiced ground and flight training to enable civilian pilots of historic military aircraft and U.S. Air Force pilots of current fighter aircraft to fly safely in formations together.

2024 DAF Art Contest opens for 2D, 3D artists

By
DEBBIE ARAGON

Air Force Installation
and Mission Support Center Public Affairs

JOINT BASE SAN ANTONIO-LACKLAND, Texas (AFNS) — The 2024 Department of the Air Force Art Contest opened March 1 and runs through April 30.

Any authorized patrons of DAF morale, welfare and recreation programs and facilities – beginning at age six – can participate in the contest.

Following the success of last year's introduction of three-dimensional art, this year's contest, managed by the Air Force Services Center, again includes both 2D and 3D works of art.

"We're excited to have 3D art be a part of our annual art contest," said Abbie Pollard, AFSVC Community Programs team lead.

With 3D art, the contest now includes items such as hand-made sculptures, basket weaving, jewelry, pottery and quilting, as long as it's three dimensional.

For 2D art, artists can create submissions in oil, watercolor, acrylic, pastel, mixed media, gouache, egg tempera, pen and ink, charcoal, colored pencil, scratch board, markers, and metal point. Digital art isn't included in the contest.

Artists can submit one or two photos of their entry at <https://forcesupport.awardsplatform.com> no later than April 30 at 11:59 p.m. CDT.

"This is a great opportunity for our Air Force and Space Force families to showcase a talent that reflects the beauty of their creativity," said Naybu Fullman, AFSVC art contest program manager.

"Art increases social interaction, allows for open conversations and expressions of all types of topics, creating a bridge of understanding between diverse groups," Pollard said. "It opens a space for people to feel confident in sharing who they are and expressing their personality."

After the competition closes, a panel of judges will look for impact, creativity and technical expertise when deciding the winners in each of these categories: Adult novice and adult accomplished for those 18 and older at the time of entry. Adult novice category is for new or inexperienced artists while accomplished is for those with knowledge based on education, training, experience, or those who operate as professional artists. Youth categories, based on the age of the artist at the time of submission, are ages 6-8, pre-teens ages 9-12 and teens ages 13-17.

AFSVC will announce the top three winners in each category this summer.



U.S. Air Force graphic by AFSVC

RIGHT: The 2024 Department of the Air Force Art Contest is underway and closes April 30, 2024. Authorized Air Force morale, welfare and recreation program and facilities patrons ages 6 and older can participate by entering 2- or 3-dimensional art.

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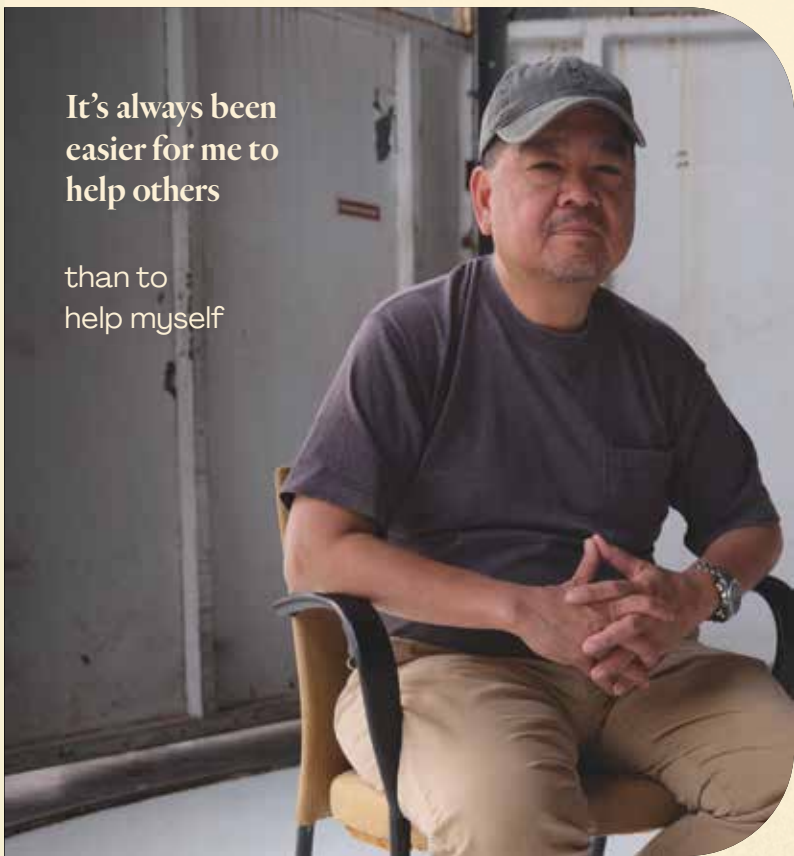
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F-35 Demo Team announces new pilot and commander

By Staff Sgt.
Kaitlyn Ergish

388th FW

HILL AIR FORCE BASE, Utah — U.S. Air Force Capt. Melanie “MACH” Kluesner, an F-35A Lightning II pilot assigned to the 421st Fighter Squadron, became the new certified pilot and commander of the F-35A Lightning II Demonstration Team during the Air Combat Command Heritage Flight Training Course at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., Mar 1, 2024.

Kluesner comes from a military family and was inspired at young age by her parents, both U.S. Air Force pilots, to become a fighter pilot.



U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Kaitlyn Ergish

U.S. Air Force Capt. Melanie “MACH” Kluesner, F-35A Lightning II Demonstration Team pilot and commander, taxis off the runway after being certified on her aerial demonstration by the 388th Wing commander at Hill Air Force Base, Utah, Feb. 22, 2024.



U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Kaitlyn Ergish

U.S. Air Force Capt. Melanie “MACH” Kluesner, F-35A Lightning II Demonstration Team pilot and commander, poses for a photo at Hill Air Force Base, Utah, Feb. 23, 2024. Kluesner took command of the F-35 Demo Team during the Air Combat Command Heritage Flight Training Course at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., Mar. 1, 2024.

“When I was growing up, I really appreciated my parents, family members and friends who believed in me and encouraged me to follow my dream of becoming a fighter pilot,” said Kluesner. “My dad was the Pacific Air Force’s F-16 Fighting Falcon demo pilot in the 1980s and my mom was the first

graduating class of women from the Air Force Academy. She graduated pilot training as fighter qualified, but at that time women weren’t allowed to fly fighters. My parents are a huge inspiration to me and have some incredible stories from their careers.”

After graduating from the University of Southern California, Kluesner commissioned into the U.S. Air Force in 2014. She is a veteran combat fighter pilot with more than 1,000 hours of experience in a variety of aircraft, including the T-6A Texan II, T-38 Talon, F-16 Fighting Falcon, F-35B and F-35A Lightning II.

“It was a long road to get to where I am and there is nothing more rewarding than doing a job you love for something that’s bigger than yourself,” said Kluesner. “Being the demo pilot means spreading that message to the next generation and I’m really excited for the airshow season to begin.”

Not only is the F-35A Demo Team commander responsible for a traveling team of 14 maintainers and supporting personnel, but they also reenforce the mission of the team across the globe each year by showcasing the combat capabilities of the F-35 and their unique military experiences to recruit, retain and inspire thousands of viewers at each airshow.

“I think it’s really important for people to realize that if you want to be a fighter pilot or serve in the military, it doesn’t matter what you look like or that you fit the specific mold,” Kluesner explained. “What does matter is being willing to stay disciplined, work hard, become a team player and care about serving your country. I’m humbled to be in this position and hope everyone who watches the demonstration is inspired to dream big just like I was when I was a little kid.”



U.S. Air Force photo by 1st Lt. Nathan Poblete

U.S. Air Force Capt. Melanie “MACH” Kluesner, incoming F-35A Lightning II Demonstration Team commander and pilot, and Maj. Kristin “BEO” Wolfe, F-35A Lightning II Demonstration Team out-going commander and pilot, walk down the flight line at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., March 1, 2024. After several months of rigorous training and flying sorties together, Kluesner completed her Air Combat Command Heritage Flight Training Course certification.



U.S. Air Force Capt. Melanie “MACH” Kluesner, F-35A Lightning II Demonstration Team pilot and commander, prepares to fly an aerial demonstration certification flight at Hill Air Force Base, Utah, Feb. 22, 2024.

U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Kaitlyn Ergish


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