

The Luke Air Force Base Thunderbolt

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June 6, 2025
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FEATURE



Belinda Guachun-Chichay

MISSION-READY ALS AIRMEN

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Luke K-9s compete with neighboring counties



U.S. Air Force photos by Airman 1st Class Belinda Guachun-Chichay

U.S. Air Force Airmen assigned to the 56th Fighter Wing and civilian law enforcement officers await the start of a K-9 competition, May 14, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The 56th FW held various events throughout Police Week to commemorate fallen defenders and honor current security forces and civilian officers. These individuals keep the base and community safe every day of the week.



Rik, a K-9 with the Casa Grande Police Department, bites a decoy during a K-9 competition, May 14, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The competition featured an obstacle course for the working dogs, testing their abilities in differing terrain and raised ledges to see how the K-9s adapt to unfamiliar settings. Awards such as Tough Dog, was based on greatest running speed, force of impact, and bite strength, were awarded to the K-9s.



Christian Corrales, Arizona Department of Corrections dog handler, and his K-9 partner, Dag, compete in a K-9 event, May 14, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Popular law enforcement K-9 breeds include German Shepherds, Belgian Malinois, Bloodhounds, and Labrador Retrievers. Depending on their specialized tasks, these dogs can be either single-purpose or dual-purpose.

Thunderbolt

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Blitz, a K-9 assigned to the Casa Grande Police Department, runs toward a decoy during a police and military K-9 competition, May 14, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Beyond their daily work in the K-9 unit, these handlers and their canine counterparts also showcase their skills through competitions and public demonstrations. These demonstrations allow the unit to connect with the community at public safety events and schools.



U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Joseph Longhurst, 56th Logistics Readiness Squadron mission generating vehicle equipment maintenance apprentice, and honor guardsmen assigned to the 56th Fighter Wing, present the colors and perform at a K-9 Competition, May 14, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Held during Police Week, the competition showcased the skills and bond between law enforcement working dogs and their handlers. Luke AFB held various events throughout the week recognizing military and civilian police.

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National Police Week closes at Luke



U.S. Air Force photos by Airman 1st Class Belinda Guachun-Chichay

U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Alexander Williams, 56th Security Forces Squadron defender, recites opening remarks at Luke Air Force Base's National Police Week closing ceremony, May 16, 2025, at Luke AFB, Arizona. National Police Week provides a time for honor, remembrance, and support, bringing together law enforcement, survivors, and the community to pay homage to fallen officers. The week includes the National Peace Officers Memorial Service and other events recognizing their ultimate sacrifice.



U.S. Air Force Airmen assigned to the 56th Fighter Wing gather at Luke Air Force Base's closing ceremony for National Police Week, May 16, 2025, at Luke AFB, Arizona. This observance specifically honors military and civilian law enforcement, including the base's own defenders who safeguard the installation. Throughout the week, events are held to recognize their vital role in protecting the community and the sacrifices made in the line of duty.



U.S. Air Force honor guardsmen assigned to the 56th Fighter Wing present the colors at Luke Air Force Base's National Police Week closing ceremony, May 16, 2025, at Luke AFB, Arizona. This formal act concluded a week honoring the fallen, active-duty military, and civilian law enforcement. This ceremony served as a tribute to their bravery and sacrifice in the line of duty.

LEFT: U.S. Air Force Airmen assigned to the 56th Fighter Wing gather at Luke Air Force Base's closing ceremony for National Police Week, May 16, 2025, at Luke AFB, Arizona. This observance specifically honors military and civilian law enforcement, including the base's own defenders who safeguard the installation.

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2025 POLICE WEEK DEFENDERS CHALLENGE



U.S. Air Force photos by Senior Airman Jakob Hambright
U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Jaylen Craig, 56th Security Forces Squadron defender, high crawls during the 2025 Police Week Defender Challenge, May 13, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The Defender Challenge consists of various strength and endurance trials, including tire flips, casualty movements, and ammo can presses. The Defender Challenge is part of National Police Week, which honors the men and women of law enforcement agencies around the country, while remembering those who gave their lives in service.



U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Jaylen Craig (left), Senior Airman Jason Wright (center), and Airman 1st Class Jren Jordan (right), 56th Security Forces Squadron defenders, push a Humvee during the 2025 Police Week Defender Challenge, May 13, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The Defender Challenge consists of various strength and endurance trials, including tire flips, casualty movements, and ammo can presses.



U.S. Air Force Airmen assigned to the 56th Security Forces Squadron move a simulated casualty during the 2025 Police Week Defender Challenge, May 13, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The Defender Challenge consists of various strength and endurance trials, and is part of National Police Week, which honors the men and women of law enforcement agencies around the country, while remembering those who gave their lives in service.



LEFT: U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Jren Jordan (left), and Senior Airman Jason Wright (right), 56th Security Forces Squadron defenders, conduct ammo can presses during the 2025 Police Week Defender Challenge, May 13, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The Defender Challenge consists of various strength and endurance trials, including tire flips, casualty movements, and ammo can presses. The Defender Challenge is part of National Police Week, which honors the men and women of law enforcement agencies around the country, while remembering those who gave their lives in service.

2025 Police Week Weapon Manipulation Contest



U.S. Air Force photos by Senior Airman Jakob Hambricht
A M240B medium machine gun stands as a part of a weapons exhibit during National Police Week, May 13, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The exhibit showcased various weapons platforms employed by U.S. Air Force Security Forces including sidearms, rifles, and machine guns. National Police Week honors the men and women of law enforcement agencies around the country, while remembering those who gave their lives in service.



Members of the 56th and 944th Security Forces Squadrons watch as U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Casey Kaneshiro, 309th Aircraft Maintenance Unit weapons load crew member, disassembles an M4 carbine during a manipulation competition for National Police Week, May 14, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.



Members of the 56th and 944th Security Forces Squadrons watch as U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Casey Kaneshiro, 309th Aircraft Maintenance Unit weapons load crew member, disassembles an M4 carbine during a manipulation competition for National Police Week, May 14, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Participants conducted timed disassembly, reassembly, and function drills of the M4 carbine and M17 pistol for a chance to win prizes.

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K-9 (from Page 1)



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Julia Caccavo, 355th Security Forces Squadron military working dog handler, directs her K-9 partner, SSilke, to jump through a training arch in an obstacle course during a police and military K-9 competition, May 14, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The day's K-9 competition tested the dogs' obedience and speed in accurately completing the course. Several portions of the obstacle course were strategically designed to test the dogs' obedience by creating hesitation in following orders.

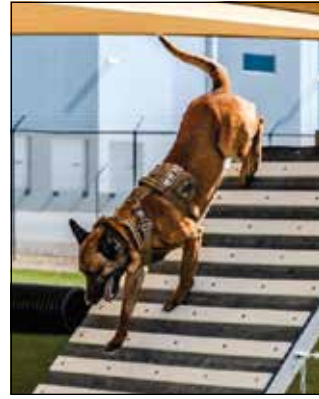


U.S. Air Force photos by Airman 1st Class Belinda Guachun-Chichay

Ralph, a K-9 with the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office, sprints toward a target during a police and military K-9 competition, May 14, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The MCSO's K-9 unit assists with patrol duties, searches, tracking, apprehension of suspects, and bomb and narcotics detection. These K-9s and their handlers undergo extensive training to ensure qualification for their assigned duties.



LEFT: Axl, a K-9 with the Maricopa County SWAT Division, bites a decoy during a police and military K-9 competition, May 14, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. In March 2024, K-9 Axl alerted narcotics officers of an envelope disguised as legal mail at a Lower Buckeye jail, revealing pages soaked in methamphetamine. The hard work of K-9 partners on the front lines contributes significantly to community safety.



U.S. Air Force military working dog Enzo, assigned to the 56th Security Forces Squadron, runs down an elevated platform in an obstacle course during a civilian police and military K-9 competition, May 14, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The day's K-9 competition tested the dogs' obedience and speed in completing the course accurately. Decoy trainers were also strategically placed throughout the event to provide stimulating distractions for the military working dogs, which reflect the skills military dogs and handlers need to carry out the mission.

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Mission-Ready ALS Airmen

By A1C Belinda Guachun-Chichay

56th Fighter Wing

Approaching the end of Airman Leadership School at the 56th Fighter Wing, seasoned junior enlisted Airmen learn to become future well-trained non-commissioned officers, taking their skills and expertise in their current career fields to the next level in preparation to be the new leaders of tomorrow.

This five-week program is designed to transition senior airmen into roles where they lead and supervise future troops, with a curriculum focusing on leadership, communication, and professional aspects of the Air Force. This course serves as a mandatory prerequisite for promotion to staff sergeant in the Air Force.

On May 2, 2025, the Airmen in the course applied their knowledge from weeks of classroom instruction during a full day of hands-on training, combining everything they learned in a practical setting. This exercise, called Ready Airman Training/Mission-Ready Airman training, had the primary objective of mission planning, teamwork, and agile combat employment awareness.

The immersive training covered a broad spectrum of skills, including team movements, base defense, tactical casualty combat care, navigating stress under fire, and basic air refueling. U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Justin Vaughn, 56th Force Support Squadron primary lead instructor, described the curriculum.

"ALS students spend a week going over Air Force Core Missions, the Joint Force, the National Defense Strategy, and more," Vaughn said. "This exercise is the 'capstone' event that puts everything they have learned over the last four weeks into play."

For many Airmen in the course, this exercise provided their first experience in a simulated deployed environment, which they found essential for applying leadership skills.

"As a team leader, I feel more confident in quickly assessing damage, efficiently assigning roles, and maintaining high morale, even under pressure," noted U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Brooke Wingo, 56th Civil Engineer Squadron structural journeyman. "This exercise improved

our speed and teamwork while maintaining safety and quality of repair."

Adapting to changing plans proved to be a significant lesson. "Scenarios never go as we planned," said U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Brandon Medina of the 56th Logistics Readiness Squadron. "You can do all the training and planning prior to an exercise, but nothing will ever prepare you enough for real-world operations. Our decision-making skills were sharpened. Today, bridged the gap between the classroom and operational readiness."

Instructors were pivotal to the exercise's success, even incorporating new elements like hands-on work with an F-35A Lightning II on the flightline.

"Thanks to the tremendous efforts of our senior advisors for Class 25-4, we were able to get an F-35A on Taxiway Alpha for some exposure training," said U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Jose Beltran, an Airman Leadership School instructor with the 56th Force Support Squadron.

This unique opportunity, made possible through the efforts of some ALS students and their connections within their respective shops, allowed Airmen to learn the basics of refueling a jet.

"We've been trying to get Airmen's hands on with aircraft to see how to work on a jet and get it in the air, making the overall mission possible," said Beltran. "We are constantly working with various agencies to ensure this continues for future classes."

The overall Mission-Ready Airman exercise accentuated the importance of teamwork, translating classroom knowledge into functional use, and understanding everyone's role in mission success. By understanding everyone's part in a larger operational picture, the training showcased the Air Force's identity as a fighting force by creating the agile leaders of tomorrow.

At Luke AFB, the commitment to creating combat-ready Airmen and training the world's greatest fighter pilots is always key. This vital mission is made possible by the dedication of all Airmen across the base who work tirelessly in maintaining our aircraft, ensuring we are always ready for tomorrow's challenges.



U.S. Air Force Airmen attending the John J. Rhoades Airman Leadership School to land, May 2, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Ready Airman Training, a combat casualty care, runway repair, and clearing buildings. The students, drawn officers in the Air Force.



U.S. Air Force Airmen assigned to the 56th Fighter Squadron pose for a photo with a fueling truck and F-35A Lightning II, May 2, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Refueling marked the final portion of their Mission-Ready Airmen training, providing a hands-on perspective on the basics of fighter jet refueling. This training is essential for the future non-commissioned officers to understand the planning and materials needed for such an effort in real-life scenarios.



AT LUKE AFB



Airmen march to a forward operating point near the flightline as an F-35A Lightning II prepares for a day of hands-on training in which all ALS students participated, including tactical operations. Airmen drawn from various career fields, are preparing to become future non-commissioned officers.



U.S. Air Force Airmen attending the John J. Rhoades Airman Leadership School plan their next moves in an area active with armed enemies, May 2, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Under pressure from base volunteers acting as paintball-armed threats, ALS students cleared areas for personnel transit and established a secure operational zone. The team of Airmen also received a refresher on tactical combat casualty care during the exercise, critical skills for field operations.



From left, U.S. Air Force Senior Airmen Jessey McClain, Logan Ellett, and Ethan Jacobs, 56th Fighter Wing Airman Leadership School students, prepare to clear a building, May 2, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Facing pressure from base volunteers acting as paintball-armed threats, the team was responsible for securing the area around their forward operating point for the safety of following troops. They utilized their classroom knowledge to de-escalate chaotic situations with minimal simulated casualties.



U.S. Air Force airmen assigned to the 56th Fighter Squadron role-play as antagonistic threats against Airman Leadership School students, May 2, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Instructed to be confrontational, the volunteers aimed to challenge the soon-to-be non-commissioned officers' ability to manage unruly crowds and uncontrollable individuals, observing the students' reactions.



U.S. Air Force Airmen assigned to the 56th Fighter Wing, participate in a final hands-on training, May 2, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. To simulate real-world challenges, base volunteers role-played as both helpful good Samaritans and hostile enemies. This dynamic environment required the Airman Leadership School students to apply their newly learned skills in de-escalating tense encounters and establishing secure guarded perimeters.

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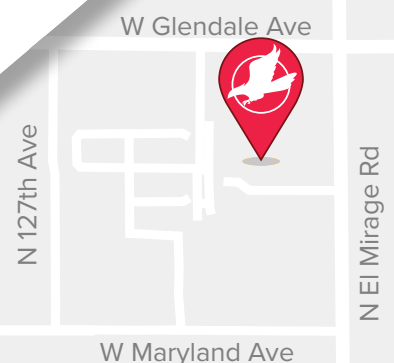
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Janine Sijan-Rozina visits Luke



U.S. Air Force photos by Senior Airman Jakob Hambright

Janine Sijan-Rozina, Capt. Lance P. Sijan's sister, speaks with U.S. Air Force Airmen assigned to the 56th Fighter Wing during a lunch event held in honor of her brother, Medal of Honor recipient Capt. Lance Sijan, May 16, 2025, at Falcon Dunes Golf Course, Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Capt. Lance Sijan died while being held as a prisoner of war during the Vietnam War, and he is the first Air Force Academy graduate to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. His sister, Janine, frequently visits Air Force installations to retell the story of her brother's heroism and sacrifice.



Janine Sijan-Rozina, Capt. Lance P. Sijan's sister, attended a lunch event held in honor of her brother, Medal of Honor recipient Capt. Lance Sijan, May 16, 2025, at Falcon Dunes Golf Course, Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Capt. Lance Sijan died while being held as a prisoner of war during the Vietnam War, and he is the first Air Force Academy graduate to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. The Sijan award, named after Capt. Lance Sijan, was first presented in 1981, and each year it is given to a senior and junior officer, and a senior and junior enlisted member who demonstrated outstanding leadership abilities throughout the year.



Janine Sijan-Rozina, Capt. Lance P. Sijan's sister, sits with U.S. Air Force Airmen assigned to the 56th Fighter Wing during a lunch event held in honor of her brother, Medal of Honor recipient Capt. Lance Sijan, May 16, 2025, at Falcon Dunes Golf Course, Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Capt. Lance Sijan died while being held as a prisoner of war during the Vietnam War, and he is the first Air Force Academy graduate to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. Sijan was shot down over Vietnam on Nov. 9, 1967. Despite severe injuries, he evaded capture for 45 days, later passing away while being held at the infamous Hanoi Hilton. Sijan was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroism.



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