

The Luke Air Force Base Thunderbolt

“We train the world’s greatest fighter pilots and combat ready Airmen”

August 1, 2025
Vol. 24, No. 8



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FEATURE



Senior Airman Elias Carrero

LUKE HOSTS WEAPONS LOAD

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2025 FREEDOM FEST



Luke Air Force Base community members enjoy the fireworks at the 2025 Freedom Fest, July 3, 2025, at Luke AFB, Arizona. Freedom Fest brings the Luke AFB community together to celebrate Independence Day.



Luke Air Force Base community members play cornhole at the 2025 Freedom Fest, July 3, 2025, at Luke AFB, Arizona. Independence Day is a holiday that celebrates American patriotism, often with parades, fireworks, and family gatherings.



BOTTOM LEFT: Luke Air Force Base community members sing together at the 2025 Freedom Fest, July 3, 2025, at Luke AFB, Arizona.

BOTTOM CENTER: Children in the Luke Air Force Base community enjoy a carnival ride at the 2025 Freedom Fest, July 3, 2025, at Luke AFB, Arizona.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Luke Air Force Base community members enjoy the festivities at the 2025 Freedom Fest, July 3, 2025, at Luke AFB, Arizona.

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

Luke Air Force Base community members walk to the 2025 Freedom Fest, July 3, 2025, at Luke AFB, Arizona.



Thunderbolt

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of the month

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15th day of the month
prior to date of publication

Veterans

Tell us Your Story
Active-duty, Reserve, Retirees
All military branches are included
Email name, phone number and a brief description of your service to kim@aerotechnews.com

PHONE NUMBERS

Airman and Family Readiness Center	623-856-6550
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Base taxi	623-856-6866
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Clothing sales	623-856-6310
Club Five Six	623-856-6446
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Community center	623-856-7152
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Crime Stop	623-856-6666
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Dermatology	623-856-2273
Dining hall	623-856-6396
Dorm management	623-856-7841
Education center	623-856-7722
EMERGENCY ONLY	911
Equal opportunity	623-856-7711
Eye clinic	623-856-7965
Falcon Dunes Golf Course	623-535-9334
Family health clinic	623-856-2273
Family housing	623-388-3515
Fire station	623-856-6641
Firestone Car Care	623-271-8104
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Housing facilities section	623-856-3007
Housing maintenance	623-935-2676
Identification cards	623-856-7832
Information, tickets and travel	623-856-6000
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A Guardian’s journey into military’s newest branch

By Bridget Bonnette,

National Space Defense Center

Initially unsure about her career path, U.S. Air Force Space Force Master Sgt. Allison Thodos landed a dream job as a flight chief of a collections team at the National Space Defense Center, working alongside some of the sharpest minds in the military.

Tell me about your military journey. When did you join the Air Force? Why?

I originally joined the Air Force in January 2007. I came into the military as an open general, so I was unsure what I really wanted to do. I was recruited out of bootcamp for the U.S. Air Force Honor Guard in Washington and spent three years working in the National Capital Region as a member of the firing party team. It was a great and fulfilling job that I really enjoyed. However, since honor guard is only a short tour, I ended up cross-training in aerospace medical in 2010 and was able to work all over the hospital, including pediatrics, family medicine, ambulance services and the intensive care unit.

In 2020, I was selected for Air Force recruiting duty and spent almost four years as an enlisted accession recruiter in Illinois. When I heard about the Interservice Transfer program to cross into the Space



Courtesy photos

Space Force Master Sgt. Allison Thodos poses for an official photo in 2025.



Space Force Master Sgt. Allison Thodos with her husband and two dogs in the Grand Canyon, Ariz., November 2024.

Job Title: Flight Chief, Collections Team

Stationed: Schriever Space Force Base, Colorado

Unit: National Space Defense Center/Space Delta 15

Hometown: Oakley, California



Space Force Master Sgt. Allison Thodos poses for a photo with members of the medical team at Travis Air Force Base, California, in 2016.



Master Sgt. Allison Thodos and other service members during a promotion ceremony at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, in 2018. Thodos and other service members during a promotion ceremony at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, in 2018.

Force, I jumped at the opportunity and was selected to crossover in 2024.

At the time I originally joined, I had been out of high school for two years and was still unsure what I wanted to do with my life. I was taking random college courses to see what interested me, and nothing really seemed to fit. I had a friend who was in the military reserve force, and [my friend] told

See JOURNEY, Page 5

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Luke Air Force Base

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U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Elias Carrero

LUKE COMMAND CHIEF LAUNCHES GENERAL'S JET

LEFT: U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Jason Shaffer (center), 56th Fighter Wing command chief, and Airman First Class Ninort Audisho (right), 310th Aircraft Maintenance Unit crew chief, speak with Brig. Gen. David Berkland (left), 56th Fighter Wing commander, prior to launching his jet on the flightline, July 16, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Shaffer, a defender by trade, learned how to properly launch a jet to show Airmen that, regardless of their career stage, they can develop multi-capable skillsets. An aircraft crew chief plays a vital role in flight operations, serving as the primary technician responsible for the maintenance, safety and readiness of an aircraft, ensuring it is always fully mission-capable.



LEFT: U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Jason Shaffer (center), 56th Fighter Wing command chief, and Airman First Class Ninort Audisho (left), 310th Aircraft Maintenance Unit crew chief, greet Brig. Gen. David Berkland (right), 56th Fighter Wing commander, on the flightline, July 16, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. As Shaffer prepared to retire, this hands-on training was one of the last opportunities he volunteered for as command chief, highlighting the importance of cultivating multi-capable Airmen to adapt and excel in diverse mission roles.



U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Jason Shaffer (right), 56th Fighter Wing command chief, speaks with Airman First Class Ninort Audisho (left), 310th Aircraft Maintenance Unit crew chief, after launching a jet on the flightline, July 16, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The Crew Chief role is crucial during jet launches, where they oversee final inspections, coordinate with pilots, and ensure every system is functioning properly to guarantee a safe and successful takeoff.



U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Jason Shaffer, 56th Fighter Wing command chief, prepares to launch a jet on the flightline, July 16, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Typically, this critical role of launching and maintaining jets is performed by crew chiefs who are responsible for ensuring aircraft safety, conducting final inspections, and coordinating ground operations before takeoff.

LEFT: U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Jason Shaffer, 56th Fighter Wing command chief, uses hand gestures to hold a jet prior to launching from the flightline, July 16, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The role is typically filled by crew chiefs through the use of precise hand gestures to communicate with pilots during launches, directing movements, signaling system checks, and ensuring safe ground operations without the need for radios.

Tucson's veteran groups receive \$250k

TUCSON, Arizona — Empower Coalition, Inc., a Tucson based non-profit, presented \$250,000 to eight beneficiaries at a ceremony recently at the La Paloma Country Club. This is the largest donation in the nine-year-history of the organization.

Geof Landis and Matthew Skidmore, incoming president and chair of giving, along with other members of Empower Coalition, presented the checks to the following organizations who will use funds to support veterans and their families. "It is our honor to be able to support such worthy organizations," said Landis. "To know that we will have a direct impact on the veteran community is very meaningful."

• **355th LRS Booster Club** — \$10,000: This organization supports service members at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base by offering holiday meals, celebrations, fundraising, family assistance, and events that foster camaraderie among Veterans and active-duty personnel, helping them feel connected to a supportive community and easing their transition after being away from family and friends during deployment.

• **Honor Flight Southern Arizona** — \$25,000: Deeply committed to honoring our nation's heroes, this organization offers transformative trips to Washington, D.C., where Veterans visit memorials dedicated to their service. These journeys provide



Photo by J.J. SNYDER, courtesy of <https://honorflightsaz.org>

Veterans on an Honor Flight tour of Washington D.C. pose in front of the Iwo Jima Memorial, at Arlington, Virginia in November of 2024. The Honor Flight of Southern Arizona group was given \$25,000 by the Empower Coalition, Inc. for their mission of taking vets to see the monuments to their service.

opportunities for reflection, healing, and celebration of their contributions, fostering closure for their past service and recognition of their enduring legacy.

• **The Institute for Better Education (IBE) Foundation** — \$30,000: Dedicated to eliminating financial barriers to K-12 education, this organization supports the



Photo by J.J. SNYDER, courtesy of <https://honorflightsaz.org>

Honor Flight of Southern Arizona participants watch the Tomb Guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington Cemetery, Arlington, Virginia in November of 2024.

unique needs of Veterans' and active-duty families by funding extracurricular activities, sports, arts, health services, and essential necessities, ensuring their children can fully engage in these opportunities.

See TUCSON, Page 11

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JOURNEY (from Page 2)

me all about the great benefits and the camaraderie of the military, so I figured it wouldn't hurt to speak with a recruiter. I ended up really liking everything the Air Force recruiter had to say and thought it would be a great fit for me.

When did you transfer to the Space Force? Why? Did your job change because of it?

I officially transferred into the Space Force in June 2023 and switched from being an enlisted recruiter to an intelligence analyst. My job completely changed, and I couldn't be happier. Being the newest branch of the military, the Space Force seemed so intriguing and amazing. I could not wait to be a part of the military branch that was focused on space and taking us into the future.

Talk about your journey that led you to the National Space Defense Center.

It has been an incredible journey that has led me to where I am now. When I first enlisted, I never imagined I would be a part of the newest branch of the military and get to work alongside some of the smartest minds in the military. I just wanted to be a part of something new and amazing, and very happy I have gotten that opportunity.

Describe your position at the NSDC.

Currently, I am the flight chief of the collections team within the NSDC. I help

to oversee all the different collections that take place within the NSDC, as well as help manage the military members within my section.

Have you always had an interest in space?

When I was younger, I enjoyed looking through the telescope in my backyard and trying to find certain constellations. Once I got older, I was so unsure as to what I wanted to do, but I was still fascinated by the ever-growing exploration and regions of space. It still amazes me to this day how far we have come with space exploration and our capabilities.

Why is an intel analyst so important as it pertains to space and its mission sets?

I believe all the intelligence analysts I work with play a huge role as it pertains to space and its mission sets. All the work and collections that happen through my job are all tied together with other organizations and centers.

What is the easiest or hardest part of your job today?

The easiest part of my job is probably the communication and comfortability with my coworkers. Everyone is so knowledgeable and eager to assist others that it makes it a great place to work. The hardest part is possibly trying to keep up with everything that is going on. Things are always ever-changing and moving and happening, so you need to make sure



Courtesy photo

Space Force Master Sgt. Allison Thodos and the Air Force Honor Guard march during a Veteran's Day parade in 2009 in Washington, D.C.

you are constantly on top of your current events and understand the different orbits and just everything that is going on. It's a lot to take in if you are not paying close attention.

What are your hobbies?

My husband and I love to travel and be anywhere outdoors. We are both fitness junkies, and we each have degrees in health and science. We have had great opportunities to travel to numerous states and go on some incredible hikes along the way. We have two dogs that we love

taking with us on all our adventures. Anything active I enjoy doing.

What are your goals?

I hope to continue my Space Force career and learn as much as I can from everyone I work with. I am very fortunate to work alongside some extremely intelligent people, and they are always so willing and eager to teach me things I am still learning about. I am also eligible for promotion to E-8 next year, so being able to pin on the senior master sergeant rank would be a great accomplishment as well.



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U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Elias Carrero)

U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt Taylor Christensen, 62nd Aircraft Maintenance Unit weapons load team member, examines training ordnance during the 56th Fighter Wing's third quarterly load competition, July 11, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.



LEFT: U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Mark Anthony Colon, 62nd Aircraft Maintenance Unit weapons load team member, uses a MJU-1 Lift Truck to load training ordnance onto an F-35A Lightning II during the 56th Fighter Wing's third quarterly load competition, July 11, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The load competition featured teams of three weapons load specialists working together to load various munitions onto an F-35A Lightning II or F-16 Fighting Falcon in quick and efficient manner while upholding all regulations and safety standards. Load competitions serve as one of the final evaluations for quarterly awards in the weapons career field.



LUKE HOSTS QUARTERLY WEAPONS LOAD



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Mark Anthony Colon (rear), 62nd Aircraft Maintenance Unit weapons load team member, and Staff Sgt Aaron Aguilar (front), 56th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron weapons load team member, utilize a MJU-1 Lift Truck to load training ordnance on the wing of an F-35A Lightning II during the 56th Fighter Wing's third quarterly load competition, July 11, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Bileigh Malone, 308th Aircraft Maintenance Unit weapons load team member, examines training ordnance during the 56th Fighter Wing's third quarterly load competition, July 11, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The load competition featured teams of three weapons load specialists working together to load various munitions onto an F-35A Lightning II or F-16 Fighting Falcon in quick and efficient manner while upholding all regulations and safety standards. Competitions like these enable load crews to showcase their technical excellence and receive recognition for their training and efforts.



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Austin Murray (front), 62nd Aircraft Maintenance Unit weapons load team member, examines training ordnance during the 56th Fighter Wing's third quarterly load competition, July 11, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.



LEFT: U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt Aaron Aguilar (rear), 56th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron weapons load team member, secures training ordnance to a MJU-1 Lift Truck operated by Senior Airman Mark Anthony Colon, 62nd Aircraft Maintenance Unit weapons load team member, during the 56th Fighter Wing's third quarterly load competition, July 11, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.



LEFT: U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Dundrae Brewer, 56th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron weapons load crew member, hosts the 56th Fighter Wing's third quarterly load competition, July 11, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Competitions enhance training and help produce command focused U.S., allied, and partner Airmen to meet warfighting needs.

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Program by JWV helps Veterans' families to remain at bedside

Knowing the generosity of Jewish War Veterans Post 619 and the money raised from their Veteran's Poppy Campaigns twice a year, Jodi La Roche, Phoenix Veteran Administration Medical Center ICU RN, reached out to Gabe Forsberg at JWV to fund a new program. She wanted to establish a way to allow Veterans' families to remain at their bedside during their loved ones' final hours.

Established in 2018, the new Bereavement Program, initially set up as a locked cabinet filled with hygiene and comfort items, has since grown to six carts so that every hospital wing has one. The Bereavement Cart provides simple nutrition, drinks, snacks, hygiene items, handmade blankets and other comforts which will ultimately allow the Veteran to pass surrounded by their family.

The metal carts are rolled into the room of the dying veteran so that the families need not leave the room to charge their phones, freshen up, get a drink or snack, etc. Nurses have commented that "The blankets are given to the families as they leave. We have heard that they feel this is a sweet reminder that there are organizations that care about the families of these fallen vets."

"If you're looking for a charity you can trust where the money goes directly to helping local veterans in need, JWV will wisely use your donation" offers Post Commander Jules Wyatt.

Mail checks to Jewish War Veterans Post 619, P. O. Box 13113, Chandler, AZ 85248.



Items recently delivered to the VA Medical Center for the Bereavement Cart Program are shown by (left to right): Dan Tilsner Gabe Forsberg, Michael Achey (VA Center for Development and Civic Engagement Director), Penny Craft (VA CDCE Specialist),

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Chaplain's thoughts ... *Focus Forward*

Chaplain (Maj.) Nathan Tarr

All the way back in 1952, Norman Vincent Peale wrote a book called *The Power of Positive Thinking*. Peale's book became a massive bestseller and is still being re-printed today. His basic thesis was that we move toward what we focus on. It is one of the ways our mind and body work together, often in ways that we are not consciously aware of.

When riding a motorcycle, you are taught to focus on the track you want to take rather than on the pothole you want to miss. When jumping a horse, your eyes are meant to be up and looking around the turn rather than at the fence you worry the horse won't avoid.

Instead of telling your child, "Don't throw this ball through the window!" you tell them, "Throw it right here to my glove." These examples remind us of the way mind and body

work together to move us toward the object of our focus.

This principle holds true in the spiritual, emotional, and psychological aspects of our life as well. In ways that we are not always fully conscious of, we move toward those people, events, and outcomes that we give our attention to.

The take-away for us is to recognize the significance of our focus. It is true that some of us may be prone to downplay legitimate concerns and refuse to take necessary precautions. We could use a bit more situational awareness.

When we go snorkeling in the open ocean, it is important to recognize that there may be sharks in the water. We may remove flashy jewelry, minimize splashing, and lift up our head from time to time. Others of us, however, become so anxious and stressed about the possibility of sharks that we can't enjoy the colors of the coral.



Courtesy photo

Chaplain (Maj.) Nathan Tarr

Rather than focusing on where we do not want to go, what we want to avoid, or what we hope does not happen, resilience and success come as we place our attention on our goals.

This supports our effort toward accomplishing constructive good in our life, rather than allowing it to melt away in anxiety, stress, and negativity.

What is an area of your life where you are tempted to focus on where you don't want to end up? How could you think, pray, or talk differently about that challenge? Take some time today to focus forward.

TUCSON (from Page 4)

• **Southern Arizona Adaptive Sports** — \$20,000: This initiative fosters opportunities for Southern Arizona Veterans with disabilities to participate in recreational and competitive sports, promoting fitness, recreation, and athletic engagement for individuals with disabilities.

• **Southwest Section PGA Foundation** — \$25,000: This program introduces Veterans to golf through a six-week developmental curriculum, guided by PGA Professionals trained in adaptive golf and military culture, fostering friendly competition, rehabilitation, and community reintegration through the sport.

• **Boulder Crest** — \$50,000: Promotes post-traumatic growth for Veterans and their families through week-long, no-cost retreats at their dedicated Sonoita, Arizona, facility, delivering research-backed, innovative training programs grounded in the science of post-traumatic growth, complemented by follow-up care to foster resilience and thriving after trauma.

• **Basecamp for Veterans** — \$30,000: Addressing the needs of Veterans through collaborative partnerships and sustainable initiatives, featuring a week-long, equine-assisted therapy program

centered on foundational healing, growth, and fellowship with fellow Veterans navigating similar challenges in reintegrating into everyday life. The program fosters lifelong relationships through reunion meetings, connecting Veterans in shared experiences.

• **Esperanza En Escalante** — \$60,000: Offers transitional housing, comprehensive social services, tailored programs, and transportation to support Veterans in their journey back to civilian life. Homeless Veterans participating in the program address personal challenges, acquire skills for reintegration, and work toward independent living in their own homes while reentering the workforce.

Empower Coalition raises funds through three main events: The Beefsteak, The Great Tricycle Race and an Annual Dinner. They also receive funds from their specialty license plate. This specialty plate is available to anyone, and \$17 from each plate goes to empowering charitable organizations with the resources necessary to carry out their missions. Community members can support Empower's mission by ordering an Empower specialty plate through Arizona MVD at <https://azmvdnow.gov/>.

For more information on Empower Coalition, visit <https://empowercoalition.org/>

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