

# The Luke Air Force Base **Thunderbolt**



"We train the world's greatest fighter pilots and combat ready Airmen"

Sept. 22, 2023

## *History of Luke*



Courtesy photo

***U.S. Air Force AT-6C's fly near Luke Field in 1943. The AT-6's were the first trainer aircraft flown by Luke in 1941. The AT-6's were the first trainer aircraft flown by Luke in 1941.***

## PHONE NUMBERS

Airman and Family Readiness Center .....	623-856-6550
Airman's Attic .....	623-856-6415
Armed Forces Bank .....	623-535-9766
Base Exchange main store .....	623-935-2671
Base taxi .....	623-856-6866
Beauty shop .....	623-536-1897
Chapel .....	623-856-6211
Chapel (after duty hours) .....	623-856-5600
Child development center .....	623-856-6338
Clothing sales .....	623-856-6310
Club Five Six .....	623-856-6446
Command post .....	623-856-5600
Commissary .....	623-935-3821
Community center .....	623-856-7152
Computer IT service desk .....	DSN 945-2900
Crime Stop .....	623-856-6666
Dental clinic .....	623-856-2273
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
Fitness center .....	623-856-6241
Flight medicine .....	623-856-2273
Food court .....	623-935-2671
Fort Tuthill .....	623-856-3401
Fraud, waste and abuse hotline .....	623-856-6149
Hobby shop .....	623-856-6722
Housing assistance section .....	623-856-7643
Housing facilities section .....	623-856-3007
Housing maintenance .....	623-935-2676
Identification cards .....	623-856-7832
Information, tickets and travel .....	623-856-6000
Law enforcement desk .....	623-856-5970
Legal assistance .....	623-856-6901
Library .....	623-856-7191
Lodging office/switchboard .....	623-856-3941
Maintenance control center .....	623-856-5469
Marine Corps .....	623-856-2417
Marine Corps 24-hour duty desk .....	602-421-5806
Marketing .....	623-856-3245
Medical appointments .....	623-856-2273
Military equal opportunity .....	623-856-7711
Military pay .....	623-856-7028
Navy Operations Support Center .....	602-353-3008
OB/GYN clinic .....	623-856-2273
Office of Special Investigations .....	623-856-6821
Optometrist .....	623-856-2273
Orthopedic clinic .....	623-856-2273
Outdoor recreation .....	623-856-6267
Pass and registration .....	623-856-4880
Patient advocate .....	623-856-8968
Pediatric clinic .....	623-856-2273
Pharmacy refill call-in .....	623-856-3969
Photo services .....	623-856-6168
Post Office .....	623-935-1343
Public affairs .....	623-856-6011
Recycling information .....	623-856-4749
Retiree Activities office .....	623-856-3923
Rodgers Travel .....	623-856-6894
Safety .....	623-856-6941
Security forces .....	623-856-5970
Security incidents .....	623-856-7777
Service calls CE maintenance .....	623-856-7232
Sexual Assault Prevention/Response .....	623-856-4878
Shoppette .....	623-266-0040
Sick call .....	623-856-2273
South Gate VRC .....	623-856-4768
Straight-Talk line .....	623-856-7064
Telephone repair (Base) .....	623-856-4400
Thrift store .....	623-935-5782
Ticket/tour office .....	623-856-6000
Travco .....	855-896-7939
Travel management office household goods .....	623-856-6425
TMO passenger travel .....	623-856-7035
Transient alert .....	623-856-6204
Travel pay .....	623-856-7028
Vehicle maintenance .....	623-935-6576
Veterinary services .....	623-856-6354
Weather .....	623-856-6805
Wellness center .....	623-856-2273
Youth center .....	623-856-7470

## Meet Luke AFB's namesake: 2nd Lt. Frank Luke Jr.

by  
**STEPHEN DELGADO****56th Fighter Wing**

Imagine Phoenix with only 5,000 people, one high school, running water in the Salt River, Arizona State University being called Tempe Normal, and horses and horse-pulled buckboards as the standard means of transportation.

This was Phoenix in 1897 and on May 19 of that year, an aerial-combat legend was born, destined to become the namesake of what is now known as Luke Air Force Base.

Frank Luke Jr. was the fifth of nine children, born May 19 to parents who had emigrated from Germany in 1874. Aviation would define Luke's life, but ironically, when he was born it would be six years before the Wright Brothers flew at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

Junior would inherit his restless and adventurous approach to life from his father who, after arriving in New York, ventured out west and settled in the Phoenix area. There was no form of state government until 1881, so life was a tough prospect, but through it all, the elder Luke, his wife, Tillie, and their children flourished. Although the younger Luke lived a short life of 21 years, he crammed in more living than most people do who live much longer lives.

As a youth, Luke engaged in numerous activities, such as horseback riding, hiking and camping. He was known to spend days in the desert and mountains surrounding Phoenix. What's more, he was a gifted athlete, playing numerous sports at Phoenix Union High School.

Legend has it he broke his collarbone during a football game but refused to come out of the game. Luke was known for his grittiness and never-back-down attitude.

While working at a copper mine, he



Courtesy photos

**World War I flying ace, Frank Luke Jr. was called the Arizona Balloon Buster. He is the namesake of Luke Field, which later became Luke Air Force Base.**

was known to have participated in bare-knuckle boxing matches, and to show his graceful side, he taught dancing. He was also a deeply religious person.

However, Frank Luke Jr.'s world took a profound turn when the United States entered World War I in 1917. He enlisted in the aviation section of

the Signal Corps Sept. 25 of that year.

He is the namesake of Luke Field, which later became Luke Air Force Base. He received his pilot training at Kelly Field, Texas, and Rockwell Field, California, and upon completing it was commissioned a second lieutenant in January 1918. He then sailed out of New York Harbor to his first assignment in France. Luke would find himself at school again at the U.S. Aviation Instruction Center, Issoudun, France, which was followed by an assignment at Orly, France, to ferry new aircraft from the American Aviation Acceptance Park for front-line units.

In July, Luke was assigned to the famed 27th Pursuit Squadron, flying the SPAD XIII. The squadron was commanded by Maj. Harold Hartney, who soon afterward was replaced by Capt. Alfred Grant. Hartney assumed command of the 1st Pursuit Group. Grant and Luke did not get along. It was the disciplinarian, by-the-book type versus the independent thinker.

There is an old saying, "Some people go by the book, and others write the book." Luke fit into the latter category, which got him into trouble from time to time. Luke's first aerial combat occurred Aug. 16 and began a 45-day period of death-defying aviation. The average World War I Airman entered combat with ten flight hours, and his life expectancy was ten days in combat.

Luke's aerial combat debut started on the shaky side. His SPAD XIII wasn't ready when the flight took off. He was able to take off later, hoping

See LUKE, Page 3



**Frank Luke, Jr. of the 27th Aero Squadron, an Ace and Medal of Honor recipient, flew a SPAD 13 fighter in France during World War I. Images: US National Archives**

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# Luke's role in the mission over the years

by  
**56th FIGHTER WING**

Public Affairs

Luke AFB has been a part of the Air Training Command and Air Education Training Command for approximately half of its lifetime and has been the largest fighter wing in the United States Air Force since 1989. While typical wings have three squadrons, Luke has always had four or more.

"Even during World War II, Luke was the largest training base," said Richard Griset, 56th Fighter Wing historian. "The training mission is a great mission and we've done it for a long time. Since the very beginning we have taken our pilots and trained them to fly our fighter aircraft."

During World War II, Luke Field produced 17,321 graduates from fighter training programs for the U.S. and its allies.

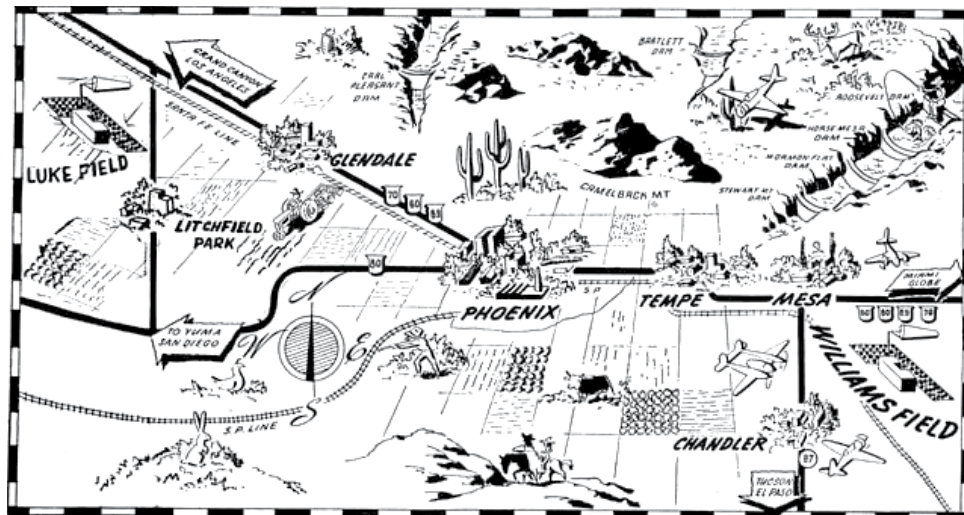
After a brief period of inactivation, the



U.S. Air Force courtesy photo

**The Spad XIII is the oldest aircraft on display at the Luke Air Force Base Air Park. The French-built Spad XIII equipped 16 U.S. Air Service pursuit squadrons in World War I, including Lt. Frank Luke Jr.'s 27th Aero Squadron. A walk through the air park is a walk through decades of Air Force history, with nine types of aircraft at the park that have graced Luke's runways. They include the AT-6, F-84, F-86, F-100, F-104, T-33, F-4, F-15 and F-16.**

base was reactivated as Luke AFB during the Korean War. The base was initially equipped with F-51 Mustang and F-84 Thunderjet aircraft. In 1957, Luke AFB joined the supersonic age when the North American F-100 Super Sabre was assigned to the base. In 1964, Luke began foreign military sales



Courtesy photo

**Vintage map of Maricopa County showing Luke Field in the far side of the valley, and many miles from the cities, in the early years of Luke Field.**

## LUKE (from Page 2)

to catch the flight over the front. It turned out to be a controversial flight because he landed long after the squadron returned. His airplane was riddled with bullets and Luke claimed to have shot down a German Fokker aircraft.

However, his squadron mates, including Grant, doubted his claim because he couldn't verify it. The only exception was 1st Lt. Joseph Wehner. He believed Luke, and from that day forth the duo became inseparable friends. Luke's exploits in the next five weeks would be the stuff of legend. He earned his nickname, the Arizona Balloon Buster, by shooting down 14 enemy observation balloons.

However, his Sept. 18 mission, while successful in shooting down enemy aircraft, would have a devastating ending. Luke's best friend, Wehner, had been shot down. The duo had a late takeoff time looking for enemy observation balloons.

They successfully found and destroyed two balloons but were attacked by a formation of German Fokker aircraft. Luke shot down the lead aircraft and the wingman, but couldn't locate Wehner, so he headed home. On his way, he encountered another enemy balloon and gave chase, causing it to crash inside friendly lines.

What's more, he had shot down three airplanes and two balloons in less than 10 minutes. Unfortunately, his friend Wehner had been downed in enemy territory and died from his wounds. His death deeply affected Luke, leaving him sad and lonely. In the succeeding days he began to fly whenever he wanted and was occasionally absent without leave.

Battle fatigue and Wehner's death were taking a toll on Luke. He had become moody and silent, and Hartney ordered him to take leave for five days. He returned Sept. 25, the one-year anniversary of his enlistment, with four days left to live. Luke flew missions Sept. 26, 28 and his final mission Sept. 29.

He was having constant conflicts with Grant, who realized he had no control over Luke. Grant talked with Hartney about authorizing Luke to fly as a lone wolf, but despite their conversation, Luke took off in his SPAD XIII without authorization. His unauthorized flight netted him two more kills. He landed at the French Aerodrome

at Cigognes, where he spent the last night of his life.

Luke returned to the 27th Fighter Squadron base the following morning, Sept. 29. He gave Grant his report of the previous day's mission and received a tongue lashing for flying without authorization. Grant grounded Luke for an unspecified period, but instead, he boarded his aircraft and took off to a forward airfield at Verdun, France. He was arrested on Grant's orders.

However, Hartney landed at Verdun soon afterward. Luke asked Hartney for permission to attack three observation balloons near Verdun. He received permission and took off on schedule. What exactly happened during the mission is shrouded in mystery, with numerous versions as to how Luke died.

The story accepted by most military historians is that Luke successfully shot down the three balloons, but received a severe wound from a machine gun fired from a hilltop about a mile from where he shot down the

training programs in the F-104 Starfighter and the F-5A Freedom Fighter.

The A-7D Corsair arrived in 1969, but was reassigned when the U.S. Air Force decided to make Luke AFB the Air Force's primary F-4 Phantom II training base. The F-4 was used extensively throughout the Vietnam War, due to its ground-attacks and aerial roles. The first F-4 was assigned in 1971.

The first of the Superfighters, the F-15 Eagle, was assigned to the base in 1974, followed in 1982 by the second Superfighter, the F-16 Fighting Falcon. Then the F-15E Strike Eagle arrived in 1988.

On Oct. 1, 1991, the 58th Training Wing was re-designated a fighter wing, making Luke AFB the service's primary F-16 training base. Also in 1991, the F-15 was reassigned, and four years later the F-15E was reassigned.

In 1994, the 58th was re-designated and moved to Kirtland AFB, New Mexico, and the 56th Fighter Wing was reassigned from MacDill AFB, Florida, to Luke AFB.

On March 10, 2014, the first F-35A landed at Luke, starting the next period in history.

From the AT-6 Texan in 1941, to the F-35A Lightning II aircraft that we fly today, Luke has been home to a number of fighter aircraft. Since then, Luke has produced more than 61,000 graduates from fighter training programs for the U.S. and its allies and has earned its nickname, "Fighter Country."

Today, the 56th Fighter Wing, a unit which historically had some of the world's greatest fighter pilots, continues the mission that has been identified with Luke AFB since 1941: training the world's greatest fighter pilots and combat ready Airmen.

"With the community support we have received over the years, it looks like we'll be here a long while," Griset said. "The F-35 program sets the future up for Luke Air Force Base to remain very significant as part of AETC."

final balloon. The bullet entered under the right armpit. Luke landed in a field near the small village of Murvaux, France, after strafing a band of German soldiers on the ground.

He was severely weakened by his wound, but made his way out of the aircraft and headed for a nearby stream. He collapsed a short distance later and died. The Germans buried Luke the following day in the Murvaux cemetery. His body was retrieved two months later by American forces and buried at Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery and Memorial, Romagnesous-Montfaucon, France.

Luke was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor — the first aviator to receive this honor. He flew 11 sorties in eight days, shooting down 14 observation balloons and four airplanes. Capt. Eddie Rickenbacker later wrote of Luke, "He was the most daring aviator and greatest fighter pilot of the entire war. No other ace, even the dreaded German ace, Manfred von Richthofen, known as the Red Baron, ever came close to Luke's achievements."

The Army Air Corps renamed the newly opened Litchfield Park Field to Luke Field June 6, 1941. Contributors to this story include Richard Griset, former 56th Fighter Wing historian, the National Aviation Hall of Fame and Wikipedia.



## Thunderbirds take flight at Luke

by  
**RICK GRISET JR.**

**56th Fighter Wing**

On May 25, 1953, the 3600th U.S. Air Force Air Demonstration Flight activated.

The history of the now famous Thunderbirds began at the end of World War II. The U.S. Army Air Forces' fighter arm only had piston engine aircraft. The first jet fighter was just coming into the inventory.

After the war, a number of commands decided to develop teams to demonstrate the capabilities and flying precision of their pilots and new jet aircraft.

In 1948 in Europe, Capt. Charles Pattillo, a WWII 352nd Fighter Group fighter pilot, helped organize the U.S. Air Force aerial demonstration team, the Skyblazers, where he flew left wing. His twin brother, Capt. Cuthbert Pattillo, flew in the same WWII group until he was shot down and became a prisoner of war.

Starting in 1948, he was assigned to the same fighter wing as his brother and also helped organize and fly in the Skyblazers. In August 1952, Charles Pattillo was assigned to Air Training

Com- Crew Training Wing at Luke Air Force Base.

The following March, his brother arrived. Catledge, a WWII fighter pilot and POW, also arrived at Luke about the same time as Charles Pattillo to command one of the training squad-

rons. Capts. Robert Kanaga, William Brock and Robert McCormick were also on base. McCormick had been a member of Air Defense Command's Sabre Dancers demonstration team.

See THUNDERBIRDS, Page 9



Courtesy photo



Courtesy photo

Capt. Cuthbert Pattillo, left; 1st Lt. Aubry Brown, standing; Capt. Robert McCormick, middle, Maj. Richard Catledge, front middle; and Capt. Charles Pattillo. August 1953.

LEFT: The original Thunderbird pilots, from left: Capts. Robert Kanaga and Charles Pattillo; Maj. Richard Catledge; Capts. Robert McCormick and Cuthbert Pattillo.

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# Newspaper records history of base

By  
**Stephen Delgado**

56th Fighter Wing

The base newspaper is 79 years old, and in those nearly seven decades, it has had five different names, but the common denominator has been keeping the base population up to date with events.

The base newspaper has been there through 14 American presidents in World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, Desert Storm, Operations Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom and other interventions in the Middle East.

Commanders, as well as numerous types of aircraft, have come and gone, but the newspaper is still here to record history in the making.

What's more, the technology in creating the paper has changed profoundly. When the base paper debuted in 1944, manual typewriters were state-of-the-art technology. Computers and digital photography were decades away and the things of science fiction.

The Nov. 4, 1944, edition started the long tradition of the Luke

Air Force Base newspaper and was called the Lukeomunique. The front page had nine stories, with the headline being "GI Jitters to be staged Thursday." The theater was showing Buffalo Bill starring Joel McCrea and Maureen O'Hara and For Whom the Bell Tolls starring Gary Cooper and Ingrid Bergman.

The 1940s rolled on by, and in March 1951 there was a contest, with a prize of \$25 to rename the newspaper. The paper was renamed Jet Sun, with the debut issue hitting the newsstand April 11, 1951. The first edition of the Jet Sun was only eight pages. The top story was the visit to Luke of Maj. Gen. Robert Harper, Air Training Command commander. Page 7 featured an extensive article on the base's namesake, 2nd Lt. Frank Luke. In July 1951, massive flooding hit Luke during a monsoon.

It was time for another name change in 1962. The new name

was similar to the previous name. The Jet Sun was now the Jet Journal. It was the heart of the Cold

War and events such as the Cuban Missile Crisis affected Luke personnel. The Jet Journal reported through the Vietnam War and the Watergate years. Its last issue was published Dec. 20, 1974. Jan. 10, 1975, was the dawning of a new era with the debut of the Tally Ho. This name would last until May 2001 and be the longest lasting. Technology had greatly advanced since the days of the Lukeomunique. Computers, digital photography, and color photos were becoming common place in the final years of the Tally Ho. The old cut and paste and cropping photos had gone the way of the rotary telephone.

The Tally Ho took us through the Iran Hostage Crisis, the defense buildup during the 1980s, Operation Just Cause, the Bosnia and Kosovo crises and to the doorstep of 9/11.

The current name of the base newspaper published its first issue May 11, 2001, with the headline reading, Luke earns "excellent" rating. The operational readiness inspection had just been completed. The paper was mostly black and white, with a few color

photos sprinkled in mostly on the front page.

The Thunderbolt has taken us through the War on Terror and its effects on Luke.

The years of Luke newspapers saw the Phoenix area grow from a sleepy desert town of less than 100,000 people to a bustling metropolis of more than four million people. When the first newspaper was published there was little or no development for miles around Luke.

Throughout the decades, the base newspaper has reported base triumphs such as successful inspections and prestigious awards won, but the paper has been there for sad and tragic events as well. It has been a publication that base personnel and retirees could use to learn good and bad news.

There are many newspapers both civilian and military that are going to online publications. Technology keeps marching on, but whether in hard copy form or online, the Luke newspaper will be there to cover the happenings on base and continue to be a uniting force.



Courtesy graphic

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# LUKE OVER THE Y

## 1940s

The majority of heavy maintenance for Luke Field's aircraft was performed by civilians during WWII.



In 1940, the U.S. Army sent a representative to Arizona to choose a site for an Army Air Corps training field for advanced training in conventional fighter aircraft. The city of Phoenix bought 1,440 acres of land, which they leased to the government at \$1 a year effective March 24, 1941. On March 29, 1941, the Del. E. Webb Construction Co. began excavation for the first building at what would later become Luke Field.

The first class of 45 students, Class 41 F, arrived June 6, 1941, to begin advanced flight training in the AT-6, although only a few essential buildings had been completed. Flying out of Sky Harbor Airport until the Luke runways were ready, pilots received 10 weeks of instruction and the first class graduated Aug. 15, 1941. Capt. Barry Goldwater served as director of ground training the following year.

During World War II, Luke was the largest fighter training base in the Air Corps, graduating more than 12,000 fighter pilots from advanced and operational courses in the AT-6, P-40, P-51 and P-38, earning the nickname, "Home of the Fighter Pilot."



## 1941

Capt. Barry Goldwater served as director of ground training for the inaugural flight class. Goldwater would retire as a major general, served as a U.S. Senator from Arizona, and was a 1964 presidential candidate. During World War II, Luke was the largest fighter training base in the Air Corps, graduating more than 12,000 fighter pilots from advanced and operational courses in the AT-6, P-40, P-51, and P-38, earning the nickname, "Home of the Fighter Pilot."

## 1994

Capt. Sharon "Betty" Preszler graduates from 61st Fighter Squadron becoming the first female U.S. Air Force F-16 pilot. During 20 years in the Air Force, Preszler was a navigator, flew a Lear Jet and the F-16. In addition to -16 (a single seat, single engine fighter) and the first woman to fly combat missions and instruct in the F-16. Preszler has over 1,300 hours in the F-16, including over 50 combat hours in Iraq and one ejection, due to electrical failure.



## 1994



The 56th Fighter Wing flag with its many campaigns and awards streamers was unfurled for the first time April 1, 1994, when the wing took over host unit duties.

## 1996

On Oct. 23, 1996, the 56th Fighter Wing functions. Today, the 56th Range Management and contract personnel who operate the

Force Auxiliary Field. They direct all operational environmental issues. They are also responsible for the 11 million acres management issues, they liaise directly with 15 separate can tribes



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# YEARS

## 1964

Maj. Gen. John Meyer, 12th Air Force commander, accepted the first F-5A Freedom Fighter on April 30, 1964, for Luke's F-5 International Fighter Training Program.



## 1944

### Luke's one millionth flying hour

On Feb. 7, 1944, Luke Field completed 1,000,000 hours of flying, a milestone in its progress and development. As the hour of expectancy approached, Col. John C. Nissley, commanding officer, climbed into ship X-1 and logged the remaining minutes. On the flightline to greet Col. Nissley were Col. Lester S. Harris, director of training, under whose supervision the total flying time was amassed, Maj. Hugh A. Griffith, Jr., base operations officer, and Capt. William A. Payton, assistant operations officer.



## 1974

The first F-15 Eagle was delivered into the U.S. Air Force's inventory Nov. 14, 1974. It was the Air Force's first pure fighter since the F-86 of the 1950s. The event was presided over by President Gerald Ford.



Photos courtesy of 56th Fighter Wing

Wing formed the 56th Range Management Office by merging three Management Office is responsible for more than 200 military, civilian and the 1.7 million-acre Barry M. Goldwater Range and Gila Bend Air environmental stewardship activities to ensure sustained range operations of airspace assigned to Luke AFB. In resolving airspace and land separate Federal and State of Arizona agencies, as well as 26 Native Ameri-

## 2003



aptive breeding program began for Sonoran pronghorn antelope with construction of a large pen in Cabeza Prieta Wildlife Refuge after 18 antelopes survived a 2001-2002 severe drought. The program attempted to save endangered local herd from extinction. In danger of becoming extinct. By 2004, the antelope numbered 100-plus, largely because of the captive breeding enclosure and commitment of several federal and state agencies.

## 2013

On March 13, 2013, 1st Lt Matthew J. Wetherbee, a 309th Fighter Squadron student pilot, flew Luke Air Force Base's 1,000,000 U.S. F-16 flying hour in Tail No. 89-2157.



## 2014

The F-35A's arrives in Luke Air Force Base in Arizona in 2014. Since then, pilots have racked up more than 90,000 flight hours in the F-35A at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. This F-35A was flown in April 2023 by U.S. Air Force Maj. Christopher Jeffers, 62nd Fighter Squadron student pilot on his final training sortie needed to graduate as the 2,000th F-35 pilot in the Department of Defense.

U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Katelynn Jackson

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## THUNDERBIRDS *(from Page 4)*

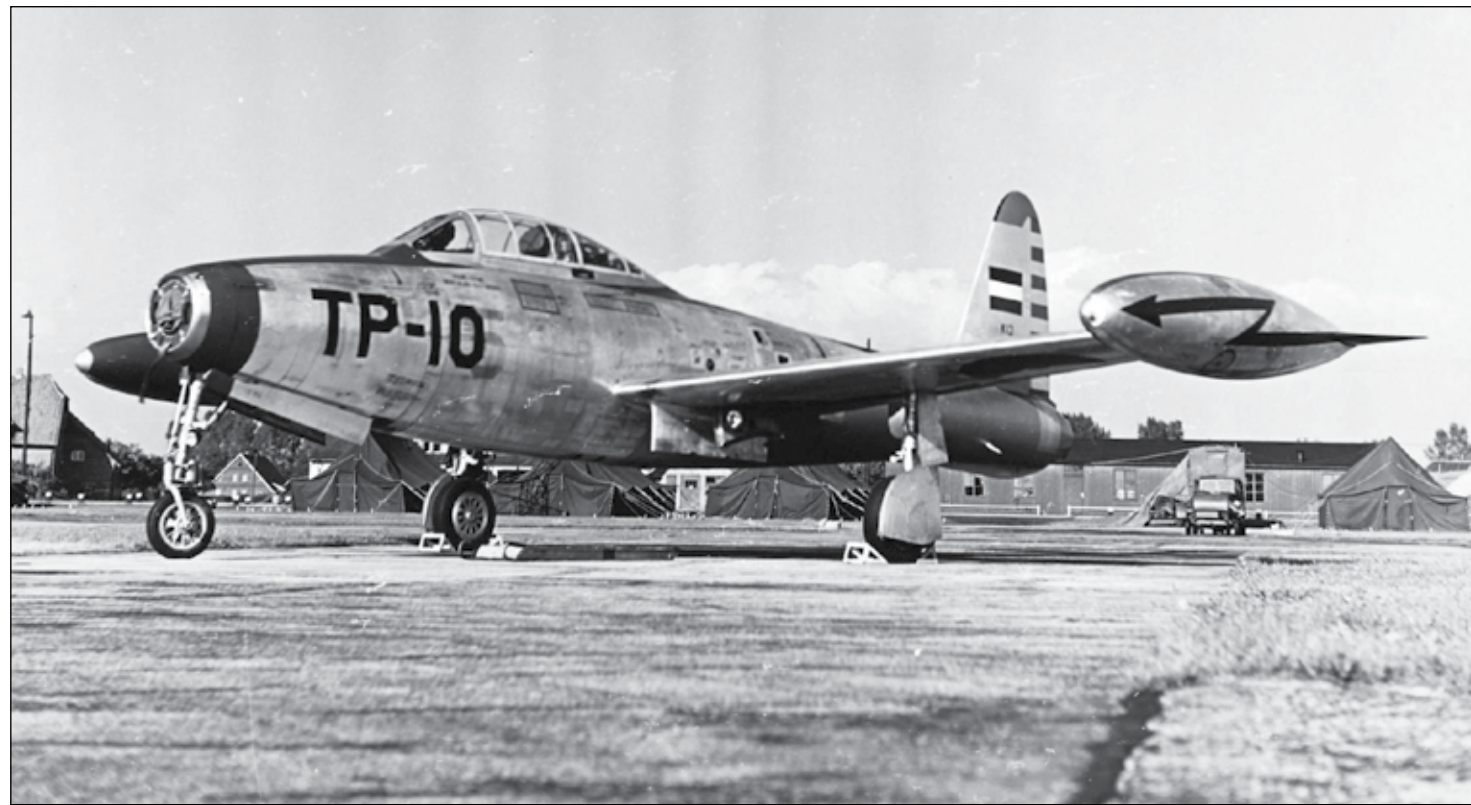
First Lt. Aubry Brown arrived at Luke in March 1953 to be an instructor pilot. Both McCormick and Brown were Korean War fighter pilots. Given the large number of aircraft at Luke, flying more than 400 sorties per day, Air Training Command chose the base for its aerial demonstration team. Flying the subsonic, straight-winged Republic F-84G Thunderjet, Maj. Richard Catledge flew lead. Charles Pattillo flew left wing, and his brother flew right wing. Kanaga flew the difficult slot position. The diamond shape was the team's basic formation.

McCormick was the spare pilot and could fly slot. Brown served as the maintenance officer, and Master Sgt. Earl Young hand-picked the team's 21 maintenance technicians. Brock served as the narrator and information officer.

Three weeks later, they gave their first performance to the chief of staff of the Air Force. Prior to Kanaga's reassignment in September, McCormick moved to slot and the team used the spare aircraft to conduct some solo maneuvers. Catledge selected Brown for that task.

The team stayed together until February 1954, when Charles Pattillo became a squadron director of operations and later squadron commander. In May 1954, Brown went back to being an instructor pilot. A month later, Cuthbert Pattillo became a squadron commander. All three stayed at Luke. In the fall, Catledge left for Randolph AFB, Texas.

McCormick was the last of the original



Courtesy photo

**An example of the Republic Thunderjet F-84G, the plane that the 3600th U.S. Air Force Air Demonstration Flight, later named the Thunderbirds, used at its inception in 1953.**

fliers to leave the team in November 1954.

In 1955, to show off the most advanced fighters, the team switched to the swept-wing Republic F-84F Thunderstreak. In 1956, the team switched aircraft again to the super-sonic North American F-100C

Super Sabre. To simplify maintenance and logistics, the team moved from Luke AFB to Nellis AFB, Nevada, in 1956, where it has remained and flies the F-16 Fighting Falcon today.

Charles Pattillo retired as a lieutenant

general and died in 2019, and Cuthbert died in 2014 and was a Major General when he retired.

The twins are interred together at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.

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## 2,000th U.S. F-35 pilot graduates from Luke AFB

By Airman 1st Class  
KATELYNN JACKSON

56th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

The 56th Fighter Wing graduated the 2,000th F-35 Lightning II pilot across the DoD, U.S. Air Force Maj. Christopher “Blade” Jeffers, April 17th, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.

This milestone marks a step forward for the Airmen at Luke in realizing its mission of training the world’s greatest fighter pilots.

Since 1941, Luke AFB has graduated over 61,000 pilots, approximately 105 F-35 pilots and 188 F-16 pilots annually, accounting for 75 percent of the world’s F-35 pilots.

“Here at Luke, we don’t just take pride in the number of pilots we produce,” said Col. Keegan McLeese, 56th Fighter Wing vice commander. “We take great pride in the quality of our graduates, because they will be the ones who advance airpower for decades to come.”

Before flying the aircraft, pilots must undergo 192 hours of academic and simulator-based training. Fifty hours of flying are needed to complete the course and nearly half are accredited through the F-35 Full Mission Simulator, an immersive technology designed to replicate the hardware of the F-35.

“The simulator was very close to the airplane,” said Jeffers. “It is about as realistic as you can get.”

Jeffers flew the F-16 from 2014 to 2022 with over 1,600 flight hours prior to attending the Transition Course (TX) for the F-35. Jeffers became certified to fly the F-35 while assigned to the 62nd Fighter Squadron.

“The most rewarding part of training is just seeing what I can do now in the F-35 compared to the F-16,” said Jeffers. “The situational awareness and capabilities that the F-35 offers, would take multiple F-16s.”

The F-35A is the U.S. Air Force’s latest fifth generation fighter, with over 8 million



U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Katelynn Jackson

**U.S. Air Force Maj. Christopher Jeffers, 62nd Fighter Squadron student pilot, poses for a photograph in front of an F-35A Lightning II fighter jet, April 17th, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Jeffers is the 2,000th F-35 pilot to graduate from across the Department of Defense and join the growing F-35 community.**

lines of three-tiered code making up the flying systems.

“The biggest differences in the fifth-generation aircraft and the F-16 is stealth,” said Jeffers. “It increases the survival rate in missions. The next is sensor fusion. The F-16 can give you a lot of information, but you as the pilot have to decipher what is and isn’t important. Whereas, the F-35 knows what you want and increases battlespace awareness.”

In addition to re-enforcing national security, the F-35 serves as a vessel for strengthening global partnerships. Luke AFB currently upholds training partnerships with Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Singapore and Denmark.

“I had the opportunity to train with foreign

partners here at Luke,” said Jeffers. “It was a really good experience to train with them and see the motivation and drive they had to learn and improve.”

Upon completing 3 ½ months of flight training accompanied by 50 hours of flying, TX pilots like Jeffers are then trained as instructors in instructor upgrade training. Jeffers will carry out the remaining three years of his contract as an F-35 instructor pilot at Luke AFB.

“I see myself flying the F-35 here at Luke until I can retire,” said Jeffers.

It took 14 years from the F-35’s introduction in 2006 to achieve 1,000 trained fighter pilots in 2020. Three years later the Department of Defense has doubled that number.

It’s Jeffers’ belief that with the ever-evolving and innovative nature of the Air Force, this rate of force growth will continue.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if we jump to 6,000 pilots in a fraction of the time it took to get to 2,000,” said Jeffers. “The Air Force is always improving and growing.”

As the F-16 approaches the end of its training mission at Luke AFB, a force of 2,000 trained F-35 fighter pilots strengthens the aircraft’s role in modern warfare.

“We will be flying the F-35 for years to come, and then the next generation of fighter aircraft will come along,” said Jeffers. “But I think the F-35 will be around for the next generation of aspiring fighter pilots.”

Luke AFB is fully committed to continuing quality F-35 training in support of its mission. Producing combat-ready Airmen that train alongside high-performance, multi-role aircraft strengthens combat readiness.



**U.S. Air Force Maj. Christopher Jeffers, 62nd Fighter Squadron student pilot, signals to his crew chief, April 17th, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Jeffers was preparing for takeoff on the final flight needed to graduate as the 2,000th F-35 pilot in the Department of Defense.**

## Murvaux flag shown on centennial of Luke’s death



Courtesy photo

**Participants in the Murvaux flag ceremony celebrate the unveiling of the Murvaux flag May 7, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The flag was given to 56th Fighter Wing leadership in 2018 by the mayor of Murvaux, France, during the 100th anniversary ceremony honoring the death of Luke AFB’s namesake, 2nd Lt. Frank Luke Jr.**

by  
56th FIGHTER WING

Public Affairs

Luke AFB leadership unveiled a flag from 2nd Lt. Frank Luke Jr.’s grave in Murvaux, France, April 7, 2023, at Luke AFB, Arizona.

The flag was gifted to 56th Fighter Wing leadership in 2018 by the mayor of Murvaux during the 100th anniversary ceremony honoring Luke’s death and is now on display at Club Five Six on Luke AFB as a heritage item.

“The flag is part of Murvaux’s history,” said U.S. Air Force (ret.) Lt. Col. Rick Griset, former 56th Fighter Wing historian. “It is significant that the mayor wanted to gift this historic item to the representatives of Luke AFB in order to commemorate the skill and courage of Frank Luke.”

Luke was an aviator during

World War I and Luke AFB, where the Murvaux flag currently resides, is his namesake.

“The Murvaux flag is associated with the town where Frank Luke’s last mission ended,” said Griset. “That mission earned Frank Luke a Medal of Honor.”

On September 29th, 1918, while under heavy fire from ground forces and the active pursuit of eight German planes, Luke successfully shot down three German war balloons. After finishing off the third balloon, Luke was forced to land due to injuries sustained during his aerial assault. He continued firing on enemy ground troops in his descent, killing six more German soldiers. Once his plane landed, the mortally wounded Luke drew his automatic pistol and defended himself until he fell dead from a chest wound.

A group of farmers from Mur-

vaux witnessed the event and buried the then unknown American aviator nearby. They later signed a statement given to the U.S. Army retelling their eyewitness account of Luke’s heroism. This account led to Luke becoming the first aviator to receive the Medal of Honor.

“We are honored by the town of Murvaux gifting us this piece of our base’s history,” said Brig. Gen. Jason Rueschhoff, 56th Fighter Wing commander. “We strive every day to honor the legacy and heroism of Lt. Frank Luke Jr. here at Luke Air Force Base. It was his pursuit of excellence and willingness to give the ultimate sacrifice that continues to inspire our own efforts today.”

The U.S. Air Force has a long tradition of honoring the courage, integrity, and dedication of service members who made the ultimate sacrifice.



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