

Desert Lightning News

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

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356TH CES LAUNCHES CHALLENGE

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DM combat pilot awarded for saving 6 lives

By Staff Sgt.
Abbey Rieves

355th Wing Public Affairs

NELLIS AIR FORCE BASE, Nev. — “Attention” to orders: by direction of the President of the United States... The following individual is awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross while participating in aerial flight to the United States.”



U.S. Coast Guard photo by Aux. David Lau
Photo of a Distinguished Flying Cross.

U.S. Air Force Maj. Mark Ross, 66th Rescue Squadron HH-60G Evaluator helicopter pilot, was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross at a ceremony at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, Sept. 23, 2023.

Holding true to Air Combat Command’s mission to maintain combat-ready forces ready for wartime air defense, Ross did just that on Aug. 29, 2021.

“On this date, Major Ross led the last U.S. Air Force HH-60G helicopters out of Afghanistan through known Taliban controlled surface to air weapon systems, across hundreds of miles of hostile territory,” the citation read.

Ross’s heroism and extraordinary actions in aerial flight became evident when he saved six lives in rescue and combat missions during his deployment in Kabul, Afghanistan.

“Major Ross, ‘Wolf,’ awesome job; you have set the standard in what you do,” said U.S. Col. Air Force John Creel, 12th Air Force (Air Forces Southern) deputy commander. “You didn’t leave anyone behind, and you didn’t leave any equipment behind for the Taliban to use. That is — very commendable.”

Ross is a Davis-Monthan alumni, previously assigned to the 55th Rescue Squadron from 2017 to 2020, and assigned to the geographically separated 66th RQS, which organized under the 355th Wing but was inactivated on June 1, 2023.

DM’s rescue values have been ingrained in him: hostile environments or not, Ross must recover downed aircrew and



U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Elizabeth Tan

U.S. Air Force Maj. Mark Ross, 66th Rescue Squadron HH-60G Evaluator helicopter pilot, left, was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, Sept. 23, 2023. Ross was awarded the DFC because of his heroism and extraordinary actions in aerial flight during his deployment to Kabul, Afghanistan; He led the last U.S. Air Force HH-60G helicopters out of Afghanistan, through known Taliban controlled surface to air weapon systems, on August 29, 2021.

isolated personnel regardless of the time of day or weather event.

“I realized, after I flew that mission, how lucky I actually was,” said Ross, who aerial piloted a 25-mile scud run during the combat mission. “When all the odds were continuing to pile up against us, I still knew what to do. I knew this from all the training I had received throughout my entire career.”

In the heat of that moment, when decisions had to be made, Ross said he relied on the knowledge and wisdom passed onto him through his career. He now reflects his experiences forward.

“I take that with gratitude, for those who taught me, and also responsibility to pass that on to the next generation,” said Ross. “Rescue is not just a job, it’s a sacred mission.”

563rd leaders attend Guardian Angel summit

By Staff Sgt.
ABBEY RIEVES

355th Wing Public Affairs

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Leaders from the 563rd Rescue Group collaborated ideas with other senior leaders in the rescue career field at the Guardian Angel Senior Leader Working Group in Louisville, Kentucky, Sept. 5-8, 2023.

“The Guardian Angel summit strengthens collaboration with commanders and senior enlisted leaders from the active, reserve, and guard components to tackle significant organizational, training, and equipping issues across the total force,” said U.S. Air Force Col.



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

U.S. Airmen assigned to the 563rd Rescue Group and additional pararescue career field experts attend the Guardian Angel Senior Leader Working Group in Louisville, Kentucky, Sept. 7, 2023. The 563rd RQG collaborated on how to cultivate technical skills, brainstormed ways for capability enhancement and discussed the most impactful way to build future combat search and rescue warfighters.

See SUMMIT, Page 10

ARIZONA STADIUM GAME AND DM50 TAILGATE



U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Robert Allen Cooke III

Airmen from Davis-Monthan Air Force Base are recognized on the University of Arizona football stadium in Tucson, Arizona, Sept. 16, 2023. The Airmen were recognized during halftime for their achievements in service.



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Calvin Huffman, Senior Airman Frank Austin, and Senior Airman Jeremy Mann, 55th Rescue Generation Squadron avionics technicians, pose for a photo at the DM50 tailgate in Tucson, Arizona, Sept. 16, 2023. Active duty service members from Davis-Monthan Air Force Base volunteered to set up and work security at the tailgate.



U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Mark Doke, 355th Munitions Squadron armament maintenance section chief, sits with his family at the DM50 tailgate in Tucson, Arizona, Sept. 16, 2023. Airmen from Davis-Monthan Air Force base attended the DM50 tailgate with their families before the Wildcats game occurred in Arizona Stadium.



U.S. Navy Reserve Officer Training Corps midshipmen exit the stadium at the University of Arizona in Tucson, Arizona, Sept. 16, 2023. The midshipmen are students at the university and received military training along with an education while working toward a commission in either in the U.S. Navy or U.S. Marine Corps.



U.S. Navy Reserve Officer Training Corps midshipmen present the colors at the University of Arizona in Tucson, Arizona, Sept. 16, 2023. The presentation of the colors is a tradition that dates back to the beginning of our country.

A-10C Thunderbolt II brings new lightning

By Senior Airman
VAUGHN WEBER

355 WG/PA

Seven A-10C Thunderbolt II test pilots performed both developmental and operational tests and evaluations on 23 live GBU-39B small diameter bombs to validate the weapon performance and aircraft software at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, Aug 22, 2023.

The GBU-39B SDB's were field tested on the A-10s in the summer of 2023. However, the difference between the A-10 and other fighter aircraft comes in its ability to carry the bombs on six different weapon stations and takeoff with up to 16 of these bombs. This is the first time SDBs have been built and employed from DM and the units here will be the second units to ever employ them live from A-10s.

The A-10 Combined Test Force from Morris Air National Guard Base, Tucson, Arizona, visited DM this past week to test these weapons out in the Point Mugu Sea Range, of the coast of Southern California, with three A-10s. This is a 36,000-mile test range offering the opportunity for maximum

range SDB releases. In total 22 test events were planned to allow for seven specific test objectives and data gathering from each. This was the first live maximum range SDB employment for the A-10s.

"It's been awesome, this is the first time doing this at DM but also the first time with the base working as a whole," said U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Leif Nordhagen, AATC Combined Task Force director. "This works, the technical orders make sense and they're already finding some things to educate people on and are ensuring that a TO is double checked and done right."

Maintenance crews from the 354th Fighter Generation Squadron have gotten hands on experience and were able to provide insight into what needs to be rewritten in their TOs to make the process and techniques for making installing the GBU-39B SDBs safe.

"For example, you can hardly load station four with the tank on because the tire wants to go into the tank," said U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Brian White, 354th FGS armament specialist. "What we did with the pre-loaded bomb loader allowed for one on top of the other which is much faster than taking 2-3 minutes for every bomb to pick it up."

Additionally, when this started out, the bomb loading was intended for live load, however all the spots had been taken by another unit. To rectify this problem research into the net explosive weight, which is the difference between how much a munition weighs versus how much explosive weight is inside that munition, was done.

"We did a little bit of math and figured out we were four pounds shy of the maximum NEW on each one of these spots. We started making some phone calls and getting approvals to make sure we were good to push that NEW in these spots which helped everyone out a lot," said U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Jason Dodd, Air Education and Training Command weapons expeditor. "It saved us a lot



U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Vaughn Weber
U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt Anthony Becerra II and Staff Sgt Williams Sterling, Armament Specialists assigned to the 354th Fighter Generation Squadron, tighten in a screw at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Aug. 22, 2023.



A U.S. Air Force A-10C Thunderbolt II, assigned to the 354th Fighter Generation Squadron, is displayed on the flightline at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Aug. 23, 2023.



A U.S. Air Force A-10C Thunderbolt II, assigned to the 354th Fighter Generation Squadron, taxis on the flightline at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Aug. 23, 2023. The A-10 was designed to provide close air support to friendly ground troops by attacking armored vehicles, tanks, and other enemy ground forces.



U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt Anthony Becerra II and Tech. Sgt Brian White, Armament Specialists assigned to the 354th Fighter Generation Squadron, affix missiles into a loader at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Aug. 22, 2023. The newer GBU-39B SDBs were able to be fired from further distances.

of time with being able to do it here and kept these guys from having to share spots and sorties with another unit allowing for everything to be kept in house."

The 355th Munitions Group built and delivered the 23 GBU-

39B SDB's, which were racked on BRU-61s from the 162nd Fighter Wing to be tested by two A-10s from the 354th Fighter Squadron and one A-10 from the 924th Fighter Group. A better Air Force is built upon teamwork.



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If shutdown occurs in November, help is available

by
**SECRETARY OF
THE AIR FORCE**

Public Affairs

Editor's note: Although a stopgap measure to keep the government running until mid-November has been enacted by Congress, the issue is far from resolved. We decided to run this information in case talks break down.

ARLINGTON, Va. (AFNS) — Assistance to reduce potential impacts in the event of a government shutdown on Airmen, Guardians, civilians, and their families is available through various means.

Those experiencing financial difficulties should contact their chain of command, who can provide more information on the financial aid organizations below.

Compensation:

The Military Leaders Economic Security Toolkit, located on the Military OneSource website, offers information and support. The site is updated regularly to reflect challenges and policy changes related to economic security.

Unemployment Benefits:

Furloughed employees are eligible to apply for unemployment

benefits, but excepted employees working on a full-time basis are generally not eligible. Employees who wish to file should do so with the Unemployment Office for the state where the employee worked (i.e., last official duty station prior to furlough). Please be advised, however, that when employees receive retroactive pay, they will be required to pay back any unemployment benefits they received, in accordance with State law. For more information, see OPM guidance and the U.S. Department of Labor's Unemployment Compensation for Federal Employees.

Personal Financial Readiness:

The Military and Family Readiness Center personal financial readiness program sustains and improves financial literacy and readiness by offering information, education, training, and free personal financial counseling to Airmen, Guardians, and their families. The DAF has also increased the number of Personal Financial Managers available to assist and enhance financial readiness and money management skills for members and their families.

The Air Force Aid Society continues to support emergent needs such

as basic living expenses (e.g., food, rent/mortgage, utilities), vehicle expenses (e.g., payments, repairs, insurance), and child care costs. Airmen and Guardians can submit requests through local Military and Family Readiness Centers and Airman and Family Readiness Centers.

If Airmen, Guardians, or their families are not near an aid organization, they may seek financial assistance from the Red Cross.

Several banking institutions, such as USAA, Navy Federal Credit Union, and Marine Federal Credit Union, have been known to advance military pay to their customers during government shutdowns. Contact your bank to inquire about their policies for situations like these.

Food Insecurity:

First sergeants and Military and Family Readiness Centers assist Airmen, Guardians, and their families in need of food security-related grants and loans with referrals to programs such as: U.S. Department of Agriculture's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the Federal Subsistence Supplemental Allowance program, and the Air Force Aid Society.

The FY22 National Defense Authorization Act established a

Basic Needs Allowance. The BNA Program provides supplemental income for military members and dependents whose gross household income falls below 130% of federal poverty guidelines.

TRICARE:

In response to the ongoing possibilities of a government shutdown, the Defense Health Agency (DHA) has authorized its TRICARE contractors to continue delivering health care to the 9.4 million beneficiaries of TRICARE. TRICARE beneficiaries seeking medical care from private providers should feel no significant effects. Care at military hospitals and clinics would remain largely unaffected. The TRICARE website includes current information about the impact of the shutdown on TRICARE health plans and military hospitals and clinics.

Overseas and Remote Commissaries:

Check status of local commissaries to determine the status of your local store. During a shutdown some non-appropriated fund services may continue to operate. Check with your local installation's website to determine which services will remain open in your area. If able, plan ahead and minimize

its impact on day-to-day routine.

To see contingency plans for federal government agencies visit:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/agency-contingency-plans/>

Additional Helpful Links:

CONTINGENCY PLAN GUIDANCE FOR CONTINUATION OF ESSENTIAL OPERATIONS IN THE ABSENCE OF AVAILABLE APPROPRIATIONS: <https://media.defense.gov/2023/Sep/12/2003299418/-1/-1/1/GUIDANCE-FOR-CONTINUATION-OF-OPERATIONS-DURING-A-LAPSE-IN-APPROPRIATIONS.PDF>

AFPC TOTAL FORCE SERVICE CENTER: <http://www.afpc.af.mil/>

U.S. OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT: <https://www.opm.gov/search#furlough>

OMB OVERVIEW & FAQs: <http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/furlough-guidance/guidance-for-shutdown-furloughs.pdf>

SECAF GUIDANCE, DELEGATIONS OF AUTHORITY: https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/2023SAF/Tab_2_-_Shutdown_SecAF_Guidance_and_Delegations_of_Authority_20210907.pdf

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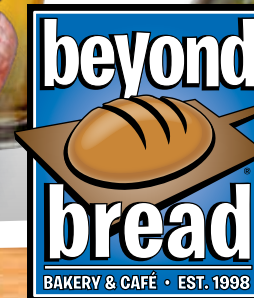
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D-M celebrates Air Force's 76th birthday

By Airman 1st Class
ROBERT ALLEN COOKE III

355th Wing Public Affairs

The 355th Wing celebrated the 76th birthday of the Air Force at the Desert Inn Dining Facility at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, Sept. 18, 2023.

During the event, U.S. Air Force Col. Scott Mills, 355th WG commander, and Airman 1st Class Caleb Jacks, 79th Rescue Generation Squadron crew chief, cut the ceremonial cake in honor of the Air Force becoming an official military branch after separating from the Army Air Corps in 1947.

"I'm a fifth generation Airman in my family," Jacks said. "I joined the Air Force to continue a family legacy. My mom was a crew chief on C-5s [Galaxy] at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware."

It is tradition for the youngest Airman and oldest Airman to join together for the cutting of a cake on the U.S. Air Force's birthday, in remembrance of the day that the National Security Act was passed.

"We had to track down our youngest Airman, so we went through our command support staff, trying to find out who he was, and it ended up being Airman Jacks," said U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Hope Laborin, 355th Force Support Squadron food service specialist. "He just turned 18. We didn't



U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Robert Allen Cooke III
U.S. Air Force Col. Scott Mills, 355th Wing commander, and Airman 1st Class Caleb Jacks, 79th Rescue Squadron crew chief, cut a cake in the Desert Inn Dining Facility at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, Sept. 18, 2023. The cake was cut by the commander and the youngest Airman, symbolizing the experience and the future of the Air Force.

know that he joined when he was 17. That was a surprise to us."

This symbolic cake-cutting tradition represents the heritage that passes between generations.

The dining facility offered cake and a special menu for the ceremony. The celebration

was an opportunity for DM Airmen to come together to recognize how far the Air Force has come since 1947 and look forward to the future of the force.

This is the first major event that the DFAC has been able to host since reopening in June 2023 after an extended closure.



Airmen barbecue outside of the Desert Inn Dining Facility at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, Sept. 18, 2023. A special menu was prepared in celebration of the Air Force's 76th birthday.



Slices of cake are on display at the Desert Inn Dining Facility at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, Sept. 18, 2023. The cake was cut during a ceremony celebrating the U.S. Air Force's 76th birthday.



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355TH CES LAUNCH



By Senior Airman
PAIGE WELDON

355th Wing Public Affairs

The 355th Civil Engineer Squadron held Davis-Monthan Air Force Base's first CE Readiness Challenge, Aug. 30-31, 2021.

DM Airmen from all 11 CE career fields participated in a variety of events to test their knowledge, speed, and overall readiness.

The challenge kicked off with assembling Alaska Small Shelter Systems. Airmen were split into six teams of 12 people all from different CE career fields.

"As a structures troop, I was able to lead and organize my team during the tent set up," said U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Francesco Chicco, 355th CES structures specialist. "We don't get the opportunity to work with other CE Airmen often, so we were also able to build comradery among all careers during the challenge."

Armed with only a map and compass,

participating Airmen were required to complete a land navigation course. By using a series of landmarks to aid them in finishing their course, teams located simulated patients who required tactical combat casualty care.

"The readiness challenge gave the squadron commander the chance to highlight our expeditionary skills and imbed an expeditionary mindset within the squadron," said U.S. Air Force Capt. Jacob Murray, 355th CES explosive ordnance disposal flight commander. "The events helped Airmen become a cohesive unit where they can share struggles and successes together."

Suited up in mission-oriented protective posture level 4 gear, teams performed post-attack reconnaissance sweeps in search of simulated unexploded ordnances and used proper procedures to report their findings and maintain safety.

"The readiness challenge was a good reminder to all of us that we are in the military and that these are essential skills required by all CE Airmen in a deployed environment," said Chicco. "We must all be prepared and comfortable for any situation that might occur."

The 355th Civil Engineer Squadron plans on conducting the readiness challenge twice a year to improve Airmen's competency in all duties—deployed or stateside—to remain lethal and agile against any threat they may face.



U.S. Airmen assigned to the 355th Civil Engineer Squadron, assemble a door to an Alaska Small Shelter System at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, Aug. 30, 2023. Airmen participated in shelter building, a land navigation course and simulated explosive ordnance reconnaissance during a CE Readiness Challenge.

U.S. AIR FORCE COMPLETES 1ST READINESS CHALLENGE



U.S. Air Force photos by Senior Airman Paige Weldon

U.S. Airmen assigned to the 355th Civil Engineer Squadron, disassemble an Alaska Small Shelter System at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, Aug. 30, 2023. The Air Force has used these shelters since 1999, both deployed and stateside.

LEFT; U.S. Airmen assigned to the 355th Civil Engineer Squadron, work together to assemble the structure of an Alaska Small Shelter System at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, Aug. 30, 2023. CE Airmen were split into teams and were required to assemble the shelters in an hour as part of a CE Readiness Challenge.



U.S. Airmen assigned to the 355th Civil Engineer Squadron assemble an Alaska Small Shelter System at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, Aug. 30, 2023. Airmen assembled the shelters as the first event of a CE Readiness Challenge.



A U.S. Airman assigned to the 355th Civil Engineer Squadron, assembles the structure of an Alaska Small Shelter System at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, Aug. 30, 2023. Airmen were split into teams of 12 with one person from each CE career field to build the shelters during a CE Readiness Challenge.



U.S. Airmen assigned to the 355th Civil Engineer Squadron, finish assembling a hardened door to an Alaska Small Shelter System at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, Aug. 30, 2023. Airmen collaborated with other CE career fields during a CE Readiness Challenge.

355th MXG Center of Resilience Grand Opening

By Senior Airman
WILLIAM TURNBULL

355th Wing Public Affairs

The 355th Maintenance Group now has a facility where MXG Airmen can foster their resilience and take advantage of resources that would normally be geographically separated from the flight line at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, Sept. 5, 2023.

With the completion of the Center of Resilience Airmen of the 355th MXG have access to a 24/7 gym, kitchen, on-call chaplain, and imbedded mental health providers.

"The Center of Resilience is a one-stop shop on the flight line for maintainers," said U.S. Air Force Chaplain (Capt.) Matthew Klimis, 355th Maintenance Group chaplain. "The objective is to care for Airmen

See **RESILIENCE**, Page 10



U.S. Air Force photos by Senior Airman William Turnbull

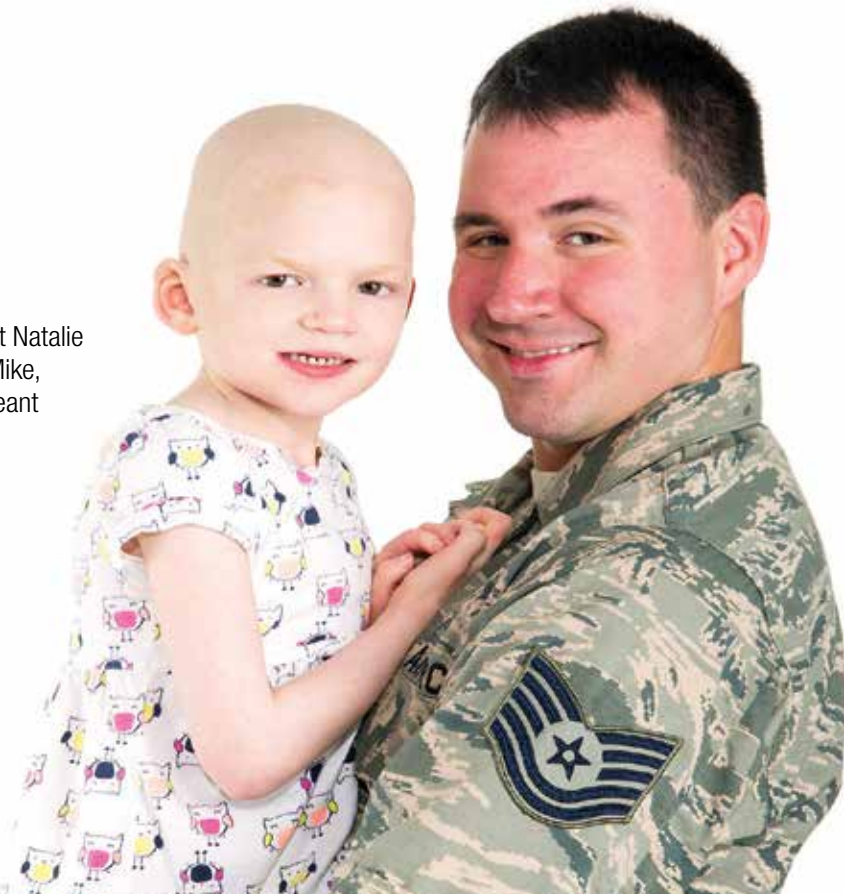
U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. William Gleim, 355th Maintenance Group maintainer, announces the grand opening of the 355th Maintenance Group's Center of Resilience at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, Sept. 5, 2023.



A group of Airmen wait for the ribbon cutting ceremony, signifying the grand opening of the 355th Maintenance Group's Center of Resilience at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, Sept. 5, 2023.

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RESILIENCE *(from Page 8)*

more than anyone thinks possible. It's providing mental health, spiritual health, and physical health all for the sake of expediting all of the aforementioned resources to the flight line."

The effect this addition has had on the morale of the maintenance and other flight line Airmen has caused other installations such as the 33rd Aircraft

Maintenance Squadron at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida to begin to create their own centers.

"The reason why we are all here right now is to make sure that the Airmen out there on the flight line have someone to talk to," said U.S. Air Force Col. Scott Mills, 355th Wing commander. "The Center of Resilience gives those Airmen a place to talk about their issues that are

close to them. I am so thankful to have a leadership team in the maintenance group that were able to keep this project going and know how much this matters to the Airmen here."

Resilience is an integral aspect of Airmanship and ensuring that Airmen have a dependable, accessible support system in place is crucial to setting them up for success in the short and long term.

SUMMIT *(from Page 1)*

Jose Cabrera, 563rd RQG commander. "It's how we achieve unity of effort for Guardian Angel units spread across seven major commands."

Guardian Angels are combat rescue officers; pararescue men; and survival, evasion, resistance, and escape specialists from joint, coalition, and combined operations who power together for personnel rescue and recovery.

Since the 355th Wing is one of the only active-duty rescue wings dedicated to combat search and rescue, it characterizes the 563rd RQG with a unique perspective for the summit. Some of the topics examined were, cultivating technical skills, brainstorming ways for capability enhancement and discussing the most impactful way to build future combat search and rescue warfighters.

"The senior leader working group left all attendees with a baseline understanding of what priorities and initiatives are being pushed," said U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Michael Reed, 68th Rescue Squadron chief enlisted manager. "[This way], rescue forces can adapt to the ever-changing Air Force and ensure that we provide the appropriate combat capabilities for our commanders."

Teaming together, Guardian Angel leaders also analyzed new methods to deliberately develop and strengthen the Department of Defense across all operational disciplines: weapons, precision parachuting, technical rescue, medical and communications.

Building connections, mentoring generations, and making data driven decisions is how the 563rd RQG's six combat and support squadrons continue—that others may live.



U.S. Air Force Col. Clarence McRae, 355th Maintenance Group commander, Chief Master Sgt. Raul Torres, 355th Maintenance Group senior enlisted leader, and Col. Scott Mills, 355th Wing commander, cut ribbons, signifying the grand opening of the 355th Maintenance Group's Center of Resilience at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, Sept. 5, 2023. Resilience is an integral aspect of Airmanship and ensuring Airmen have a dependable, accessible support system in place is crucial to setting them up for success in the short and long term.

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