

# The Luke Air Force Base Thunderbolt

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



October, 2023  
Vol. 12, No. 10

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# Luke AFB hosts college AFROTC

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Airman 1st Class Elias Carrero

### RAPTER EXERCISE

See Pages 8 and 9

By Airman 1st Class  
MASON HARGROVE

56th Fighter Wing

The 56th Fighter Wing hosted a two-day tour for over 30 University of Arizona AFROTC cadets, Sept. 21-22, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.

The visit aimed to provide AFROTC cadets with knowledge of Luke’s training mission and operations.

“Seeing firsthand what most people have never experienced has been incredible,” said Matthew Fellows, University of Arizona AFROTC cadet. “It not only put the work we’re doing in AFROTC into perspective, but also gave us a glimpse of what’s to come.”

Cadets toured the 61st Fight-

See AFROTC, Page 7

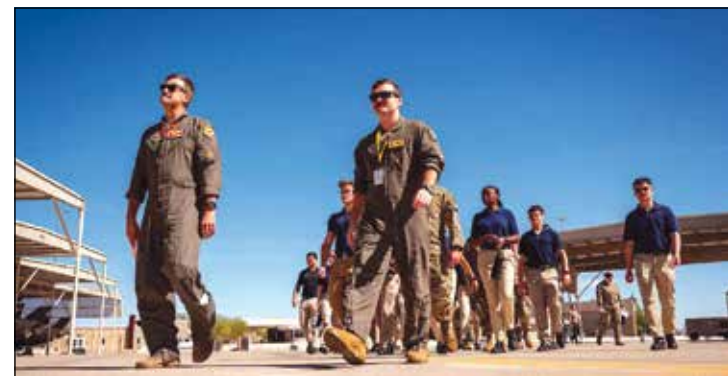


U.S. Air Force photos by Airman 1st Class Mason Hargrove

A University of Arizona AFROTC Cadet watches an F-35 Lightning II soar by on the Luke Air Force Base Air Traffic Control Tower, Sept. 21, 2023, at Luke AFB, Arizona. The visit gave cadets the opportunity to engage with active-duty personnel, gaining insight into quality of life within the service.



University of Arizona AFROTC Cadets watch a Luke Air Force Base fire truck spray water, Sept. 21, 2023, at Luke AFB, Arizona.



University of Arizona AFROTC Cadets walk on the flightline, Sept. 21, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The visit served as a strategic initiative to advance training by equipping future Air Force leaders with knowledge and firsthand operational insights.



University of Arizona AFROTC Cadets receive a tour of a Luke Air Force Base fire truck, Sept. 21, 2023, at Luke AFB, Arizona. The visit served as a strategic initiative to advance training by equipping future Air Force leaders with knowledge and firsthand operational insights.



University of Arizona AFROTC Cadets receive tour of the Luke Air Force Base fire station, Sept. 21, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The visit served as a strategic initiative to advance training by equipping future Air Force leaders with knowledge and firsthand operational insights.

## Luke Air Force Base Thunderbolt

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## Luke celebrates Air Force's 76th Birthday



U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Jakob Hambricht

**U.S. Air Force Lt. Gen. Scott Pleus, U.S. Forces Korea deputy commander, and Airman Jaylen Craig, 56th Security Forces Squadron defender, participate in the formal cake cutting ceremony during the 76th Air Force Ball, Sept. 16, 2023, at the Wigwam Resort, Litchfield Park, Arizona. The cake cutting ceremony involves the tradition of having both the youngest and oldest Airmen cut the cake together. Luke Air Force Base held the ball to celebrate the Air Force's 76th Birthday.**



U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Jakob Hambricht

**Members of the Luke Air Force Base Honor Guard present the colors during the 76th Air Force Ball, Sept. 16, 2023, at the Wigwam Resort, Litchfield Park, Arizona. The ball featured displays such as the POW/MIA and Battlefield Cross ceremony, a Pageant of the Flags showcase, and the formal cake cutting ceremony.**



U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Mason Hargrove

**U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Walker Shaman, Luke Air Force Base Honor Guardsman, raises the American flag, Sept. 18, 2023, in Glendale, Arizona. The flag-raising ceremony marked the Air Force's 76th year as a military branch. The ceremony was hosted at Litchfield Park, highlighting Luke Air Force Base's strong relationship with its local communities.**



U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Jakob Hambricht

**LEFT: Cadets of the Buckeye High School JROTC program perform the Pageant of the Flags ceremony during the 76th Air Force Ball, Sept. 16, 2023, at the Wigwam Resort, Litchfield Park, Arizona. The Pageant of the Flags ceremony showcased the different flags and colors that have flown for the U.S., from the time of English colonies to today.**

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# Operation KIDS kicks off!

By Senior Airman  
DAVID BUSBY

56 FW/PA

U.S. Military children took part in the 15th annual Operation

KIDS event Sept. 9, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Operation Kids is a simulated deployment experience for children of deployed service members, giving them a look into what their parents may

experience while deployed. Experiences like this help advance quality of life for military members and their families, contributing to a healthier work and life balance at Luke AFB.



U.S. Air Force photos by Senior Airman David Busby

U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Jose Ramirez, 56th Civil Engineer Squadron explosive ordnance disposal technician, shows a military child various EOD equipment during the 15th annual Operation KIDS event Sept. 9, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Over 100 children, nine squadrons and four local organizations participated in the event, giving kids the opportunity to experience the deployment process.



A U.S. Air Force child tries on combat gear during the 15th annual Operation KIDS event Sept. 9, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The program is designed for military children ages 6-15 years and provides children with a look at what their parents can encounter while on a deployment.



U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Jason Rueschhoff, 56th Fighter Wing commander, participates in the activities of the 15th annual Operation KIDS event Sept. 9, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.



U.S. Military children sign their certificates during the 15th annual Operation KIDS event Sept. 9, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.



U.S. Air Force Airman Angelica Arce, 944th Logistics Support Squadron inbound specialist, applies face paint to a child at the 15th annual Operation KIDS event Sept. 9, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The simulated deployed environment can provide insight on the deployment process and promote pride for parents while they are deployed.



Two U.S. Air Force children pose for a photo during the 15th annual Operation KIDS event Sept. 9, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Operation Kids is a simulated deployment experience for children of deployed service members, giving them a look into what their parents may experience while deploying.

# From dreams to reality: A foreign maintenance liaison at Luke AFB

In the vast expanse of the Arizona blue sky, dreams take flight.

For one individual, those dreams began as a child, gazing skywards at the picturesque landscape of northern Italy in search of aircraft from the nearby Aviano Air Base.

Today, his dreams have taken on new dimensions as he serves as a Foreign Military Maintenance Liaison at Luke Air Force Base in Arizona. This is the story of a remarkable journey, where a boy's dreams meet the reality of the Arizona blue expanse.

Now that his time at Luke AFB is drawing to a close, Lt. Col. Marco Pittini relates his story:

"As a young boy growing up near Aviano AB and with aviation engraved in my heart, I used to sit on my porch and look at the skies with wonder. My eyes, filled with a fascination for the sleek, powerful machines that traversed the heavens, would follow each aircraft's path until it disappeared

over the horizon. Among those aircraft were U.S. Air Force planes, which I admired with a sense of awe and curiosity.

"My youth and career in the Italian Air Force were punctuated by encounters with U.S. aircraft, sparking the desire to work with these magnificent machines and to play a role in their maintenance systems.

"Fast forward to the present, I am no longer that wide-eyed child gazing at the Italian sky. As a Participant Military Maintenance Liaison, I serve as a bridge between

the 56th Fighter Wing and my home country's air force. My role involves supervising maintenance activities, facilitating communication, and fostering cooperation to ensure seamless operations.

"Today, as I stand on the tarmac of Luke AFB, donning the uniform of a Foreign Officer, smelling burnt jet fuel and enjoying the sweet howling of the F-135 engine while it reaches idle; I listen to the sound of freedom from the F-35s flying over the runway losing myself in the blue sky...

"Arizona's blue sky is a



Lt. Col. Marco Pittini, center, joins a celebration of 3000 flight hours by Italian F-35 at Luke Air Force Base.



Photos by William J McElligott (Lockheed Martin)

The F-35 Contractor Field Team (CFT) do maintenance at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Lt. Col. Marco Pittini is back row, second from left.

stark contrast to the Italian Alps where I once watched the endless expanse of clear azure provides the perfect backdrop to fulfill the dreams I nurtured as a child, all while forging connections between the U.S. Air Force and Italian Air Force. My journey from Italy

to the heart of the American Southwest embodies the notion that dreams do indeed come true.

"Every day, in between the rugged desert and the vast Arizona blue skies, a Participant Military Maintenance Liaison embodies the spirit of collaboration and partnership. He understands the

importance of his role, not only in maintaining aircraft, but in preserving the bonds between Nations that share common goals of security and defense. In the realm of military aviation, the skies know no borders, and the connections forged beneath them are both powerful and enduring."

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# Fallen are honored at 9/11 Tower Challenge



**U.S. Air Force Col. Keagan McLeese, 56th Fighter Wing deputy commander, speaks during the 9/11 Tower Challenge, Sept. 11, 2023, at Desert Diamond Arena, Glendale, Arizona. The attacks on the World Trade Center claimed 2,977 lives including over 400 firefighters and police officers.**



**U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Brian Smith, 56th Operations Group senior enlisted leader, rings a bell after completing the 9/11 Tower Challenge, Sept. 11, 2023, at Desert Diamond Arena, Glendale, Arizona.**



**Members of the Luke Air Force Base Honor Guard present the colors during the 9/11 Tower Challenge, Sept. 11, 2023, at Desert Diamond Arena, Glendale, Arizona. Participants of the challenge climbed 110 floors around the arena in honor of the first responders who ascended the World Trade Center during the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001.**

See additional photos on Page 12



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# Salute to commitment & sacrifice

By  
**WILLIAM FORKNER**

56th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

It is a long-standing tradition as well as a source of pride for fighter pilots to have their name painted on the cockpit of an airplane.

Having one's name painted on a permanent static display aircraft is an even higher honor. Such a distinguished honor often comes with a substantial sacrifice. At Luke Air Force Base's 56th Fighter Wing, the most prominent static display aircraft, a U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon in front of the wing commander's building, pays tribute to 1st Lieutenant Brice Simpson.

In 1998, Brice was assigned to the 14th Fighter Squadron, Misawa Air Base, Japan. On July 24 that same year, while taking off on a routine training mission, Lt. Simpson needed to abort his take-off, but was unable to stop the aircraft on the runway. As the aircraft ran off the end of the runway, Brice accomplished a successful ejection, however, the aircraft impacted equipment just beyond the end of the runway and burst into flames. Simpson landed directly in the fire and suffered third-degree burns as well as internal injuries. Brice was airlifted to Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio but despite



U.S. Air Force courtesy photo

**U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Brice Simpson, a Luke Air Force Base Distinguished Graduate and an Air-to-Ground "Top Gun," poses for an official photo. Air-to-Ground "Top Gun," is a title given to graduates of the F-16 program signifying them as the most capable pilots at delivering aircraft ordnance to ground targets.**

heroic efforts by the medical staff to save him, Simpson succumbed to his injuries and passed away on Sept. 17.

Brice, a graduate of the United States Air Force Academy, excelled in pilot training at Sheppard Air



U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Elias Carrero

**A static display of an F-16 Fighting Falcon bearing the name of U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Brice Simpson, rests outside of the command building at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona, Sept 14, 2023.**

Force Base, Texas. He came to Luke AFB for F-16 training and quickly outpaced the classmates with his natural abilities and exceptional attitude. Simpson graduated a Distinguished Graduate and was named the Air-to-Ground "Top Gun," signifying him as the most capable pilot at delivering aircraft ordnance to ground targets. Brice was known by his friends as an enthusiastic Air Force Academy

football fan and a steadfast family man who was devoted to his wife. Above all, he personified the Air Force core values of integrity and character as he consistently motivated and encouraged all of those around him.

Simpson gave his life in defense of our country. Although not in direct conflict, his selfless commitment and sacrifice continues to serve as an inspiration to those who

knew him and to those who honor him by memorializing his legacy. As we observe the 25th anniversary of Brice's passing, we remember him with another fighter tradition of throwing a nickel on the grass, an expression of mutual respect from one warrior to another. Through this small action, we celebrate his life, we honor his accomplishments, and we acknowledge his sacrifice. Here's a toast...

**THE LUKE AFB 56TH MEDICAL GROUP  
WILL BE CLOSED ON THE FOLLOWING DATE:**

**Monday, Oct. 9 — Columbus Day**

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Luke Air Force Base

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# 50TH ANNIVERSARY

## of the Luke Air Force Base Gospel Heritage



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Friday, October 20th *“Old-Time Revival”*  
6:00 p.m. @ Chapel on the Mall

Saturday, October 21st *“Gospel Revival Explosion”*  
2:00 p.m. @ Luke Community Chapel

Sunday, October 22nd *“Morning Worship Service”*  
10:30 a.m. @ Chapel on the Mall



For more information about the celebration, contact the Celebration Publicity Officer,  
Toni Jones @ (623) 872-8928 or the Chapel @ (623) 856-6211.

### AFROTC (from Page 1)

er Squadron, Luke’s air park, fire station, air control tower, and concluded their visit at aircrew flight equipment.

“It turns classroom lessons into real-world experiences,” said U.S. Air Force Maj. Fred Olson, AFROTC Instructor. “It creates excitement for what the future holds.”

The visit also gave cadets the opportunity to engage with active-duty personnel, gaining insight into their quality of life within the service.

Hosting the cadets at Luke gives us the opportunity to show them firsthand what we do here,” said U.S. Air Force Maj. Greg Gai, Aircrew Flight Equipment flight commander. “It’s about inspiring the next generation of Airmen.”

By equipping future Air Force leaders with hands-on knowledge and insights, these visits aim to build stronger partnerships within the community and beyond.



U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Mason Hargrove  
**University of Arizona AFROTC Cadets learn about Luke Air Force Base’s Aircrew Flight Equipment, Sept. 21, 2023, at Luke AFB, Arizona. The visit gave cadets the opportunity to engage with active-duty personnel, gaining insight into quality of life within the service.**

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# TRAINING EXERCISE ROAD

By Airman 1st Class  
**ELIAS CARRERO**

The 56th Fighter Wing Explosive Ordnance Disposal team hosted Road RAPTER, a training exercise focused on the proper handling of weapons of mass destruction Sept. 5-7, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.

Road RAPTER or Radiological Assistance Program Training for Emergency Response, was spearheaded by Luke AFB's EOD unit, the Phoenix Regional Render Safe Team, and the Radiological Assistance Program.

"There were three organizations and roughly 50 people involved with this event," said U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Jacob Turcotte, 56th Civil Engineer Squadron explosive ordnance disposal technician. "We brought the Phoenix RRST and RAP here because in a real-world scenario, these are the organizations we would be working with to render safe a WMD."

The Department of Energy's RAP leverages the knowledge of nuclear scientists, engineers and technicians from national laboratories and sites across the country to assist the public with radiological incidents such as radiological ac-

cidents, searching for lost or stolen radiological sources, and community preparedness.

Additionally, the Phoenix RRST is made up of Federal Bureau of Investigation agents, Bomb Technicians assigned to the Phoenix Police Department, Glendale PD, Mesa PD, Tempe PD, Maricopa County Sheriff's Office, Phoenix Fire Department and Arizona Department of Public Safety. They train monthly and partner with DOE and DOD agencies regularly.

"This training is extremely beneficial for all organizations involved," said Turcotte. "It gives us the opportunity to share different tactics and techniques, essentially adding tools to our toolbox so we will be fully prepared in a real-world scenario."

The full training took three days, the first two days were classroom time lead by the RAP team, who provided the training aids and study materials for Road RAPTER.

"RAP works to standardize training for various response organizations," said Dr. Jose Trevino, RAP Region 4 outreach coordinator. "Our goal is to have all participants in our trainings, like the 56th EOD team members, develop a better working knowledge of the radiation haz-

ards that they might encounter while out on a mission so that they can respond in a safe and effective manner when out in the field."

RAP also provided the study materials and training aids used on the final day of training, a WMD response exercise lead by the Phoenix RRST and Luke EOD teams.

"This training alongside our Air Force EOD counterparts demonstrates how a critical incident response requires effort from multiple government agencies," said Taylor Biggs, FBI Phoenix special agent. "The Phoenix RRST bomb techs receive data from EOD that enables them to conduct a proper assessment of the threat and direct all bomb techs on scene in executing advanced procedures to deal with a WMD."

WMD response is part of Luke EOD's nine mission sets. While real world calls for this mission set are scarce, the skills are perishable. It is only through training that Airmen in all career fields stay ready to competently carry out their responsibilities when duty calls. Training like this helps Luke Airmen and local partners advance and hone their skills to prepare to win tomorrow's fight.



From left: U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Steven Webb, Staff Sgt. Zackary Stringer (center), 56th Civil Engineer Squadron explosive ordnance disposal technicians, and Deputy Jason Schweizer, Maricopa County Sheriff's Office bomb technician, carry x-ray equipment during training exercise Road RAPTER or Radiological Assistance Program Training for Emergency Response Sept. 7, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Schweizer is a member of the Phoenix Regional Render Safe Team, a coalition of bomb technicians from more than 10 different law enforcement and first responder agencies. During an active bomb threat Luke EOD would partner with the Phoenix RRST to identify and handle the suspected explosive device.



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Austin [Name] during training exercise Road RAPTER at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.



U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. James Voss Paul, 56th Civil Engineer Squadron technician, prepare simulated explosive during training exercise Road RAPTER or Radiological Assistance Program Training for Emergency Response Sept. 6, 2023,



# ROAD RAPTER



*Staff Sgt. Justin Huff, 56th Civil Engineer Squadron explosive ordnance disposal technician, remotely operates a robot during training exercise Road RAPTER or Radiological Assistance Program Training for Emergency Response Sept. 7, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.*

U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Elias Carrero



*Staff Sgt. Justin Huff (left) and Tech. Sgt. Tyler Vossah work on explosive ordnance disposal equipment during training exercise Road RAPTER or Radiological Assistance Program Training for Emergency Response Sept. 7, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.*



*U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Zackary Stringer (left), 56th Civil Engineer Squadron explosive ordnance disposal technician, briefs Matt Lightfoot, FBI Phoenix weapon of mass destruction coordinator and bomb technician, during training exercise Road RAPTER or Radiological Assistance Program Training for Emergency Response Sept. 7, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Lightfoot is a member of the Phoenix Regional Render Safe Team, a coalition of bomb technicians from more than 10 different law enforcement and first responder agencies. During an active bomb threat Luke EOD would partner with the Phoenix RRSST to identify and handle the suspected explosive device.*



*U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Zackary Stringer, 56th Civil Engineer Squadron explosive ordnance disposal technician, uses a radiological isotope identification device during training exercise Road RAPTER or Radiological Assistance Program Training for Emergency Response Sept. 7, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Identification devices are one of several tools used by EOD when assessing the danger represented by a radiological dispersion device.*



*U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Kristin Ponce, 56th Civil Engineer Squadron explosive ordnance disposal technician, removes the helmet of her bomb suit during training exercise Road RAPTER or Radiological Assistance Program Training for Emergency Response Sept. 7, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Road RAPTER was a training exercise where members of the Luke AFB EOD team and bomb technicians from multiple first responder and law enforcement agencies learned how to render safe weapons of mass destruction.*

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## POW/MIAs honored with 24-hour vigil



U.S Air Force photos by Airman 1st Class Jakob Hambright

*U.S. Air Force F-35 Lightning II aircraft assigned to the 56th Fighter Wing conduct a missing man formation during the POW/MIA retreat ceremony, Sept. 15, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The 56th FW capped off its 24-hour vigil with a retreat ceremony, featuring the missing man formation, as well as the retirement of the POW/MIA flag used during the vigil. The missing man formation recognizes those service members who have yet to return home, whether they are a prisoner of war, missing in action, or have given their life in service to the nation.*



*Retired U.S. Army Master Sgt. David Allwine, former prisoner of war, kicks off the POW/MIA 24-hour vigil, Sept. 14, 2023, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Allwine rode in a military jeep from the Vietnam War for the first three laps of the vigil alongside the first runners.*



**Saturday, October 14, 2023**



8:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

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## Chaplain's thoughts ...

### Crushing Excuses: Live Your Best Life

by Chaplain (Capt.)  
JEFF RYBOLD

Crushing excuses: Are you crushing them or are they crushing you?

Excuses, oh boy. They're like those sneaky gremlins, stealing our mojo, leaving you feel stuck. Seriously, excuses are the worst. They are the little whispers in your head saying, "Nah, you can't do it today."

Here's the deal — excuses steal your discipline, rob your time, and basically take a wrecking ball to your future. Now is the time to kick those thoughts to the curb and unlock your full potential.

Let's be real. Most of the time, an excuse is just a fancy way of dressing up an emotion. You're not actually tired; you feel tired. You're not weak, not at all; you feel

weak. So, instead of owning that lame excuse, flip the script. Don't identify as your excuse; identify as your goal. You might not feel disciplined, but guess what? You are disciplined. Feeling weak? Forget that! You are strong!

I get it, changing your mindset isn't easy like flipping a switch. But trust me, it's worth it. Discipline is like your superpower. It's what makes you stick to your goals, even when Netflix is calling your name or your iPhone is "pinging" you to your wit's end. When you embrace the identity of a disciplined person, excuses don't stand a chance.

And strength? Well, that's not just about pumping iron at the gym. It's about mental, emotional, and spiritual toughness. When you identify as strong, excuses can't pull you down. You can tackle life's curveballs with grit and determination.

Ready to kick those excuses to the curb? Here's the game plan:

1. Take a Breather: Pause and reflect

when you catch yourself making excuses. You aren't tired. You only feel that way.

2. Goal Setting: Be crystal clear about your goals, write them down, and remind yourself daily. It's like the GPS for your life.

3. Intentional Routines: Create routines that support your goals. Less thinking, more doing — that's the key to discipline. Don't just write it down. Give it some legs and forward motion.

4. Positivity Community: Hang out with folks who radiate positivity and share your ambition. They'll keep you on track.

5. Embrace the Oops: Remember, we all stumble sometimes. Don't let a setback turn into an excuse to quit. Every mistake is an opportunity to learn and grow. It's not a failure, it's a new option and direction.

In a nutshell, excuses are dream crushers. But when you shift your mindset, embrace discipline, and channel your inner strength, you'll be amazed at what you can achieve. Say goodbye to excuses



Courtesy photo

Chaplain (Capt.) Jeff Rybold

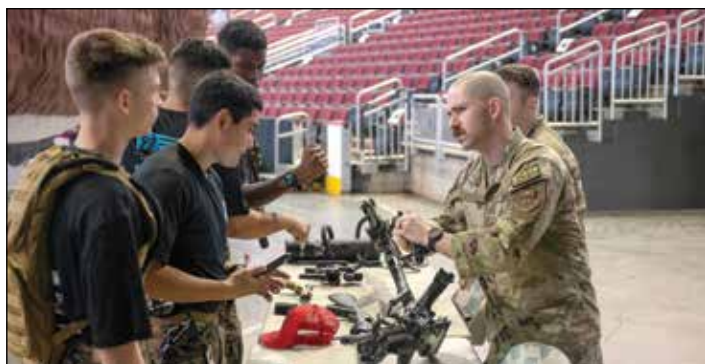
and hello to progress. Your future? It's looking pretty bright when you live the excuse-free, kick-butt life of a disciplined, strong individual.

## 9/11 Tower Challenge



U.S. Air Force photos by Airman 1st Class Jakob Hambricht

U.S. Air Force Col. Keagan McLeese, 56th Fighter Wing deputy commander, administers the Oath of Enlistment to U.S. Air Force recruits during the 9/11 Tower Challenge, Sept. 11, 2023, at Desert Diamond Arena, Glendale, Arizona. Over 20 new recruits took part in the oath which signifies a service member's commitment to upholding the U.S. Constitution. The swear-in took place during the 9/11 Tower Challenge, in honor of those who lost their lives in the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Casey Church, 56th SFS armory non-commissioned officer in-charge, and Staff Sgt. Austin Johnson, 56th Security Forces Squadron combat arms instructor, showcase various weapon platforms to local Navy Junior ROTC members during the 9/11 Tower Challenge, Sept. 11, 2023, at Desert Diamond Arena, Glendale, Arizona. Participants of the challenge climbed 110 floors around the arena in honor of the first responders who ascended the World Trade Center during the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. The attacks on the World Trade Center claimed 2,977 lives, including over 400 firefighters and police officers.

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