

The Luke Air Force Base Thunderbolt

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

March 7, 2025
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INSIDE

56TH FW COMPLETES FINAL U.S. F-16 SORTIE

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Airman 1st Class Belinda Guachun-Chichay
HONORARY COMMANDER’S IMMERSION TOUR
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U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Belinda Guachun-Chichay

U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Michael Ress, 309th Fighter Squadron commander, taxis a U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon, Feb. 26, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. For decades, these jets have been central to the 56th Fighter Wing’s pilot training program. As Luke AFB transitions its U.S. pilot training exclusively to the F-35A Lightning II, it reinforces the Department of Defense’s commitment to building a more advanced and dominant airpower force.

56th Fighter Wing

Public Affairs

The 56th Fighter Wing flew the final U.S. F-16 Fighting Falcon local training sortie Feb. 26, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.

The 309th Fighter Squadron was the last U.S. Air Force F-16 training squadron at Luke. The squadron will convert to training

See SORTIE, Page 4

RIGHT: U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Michael Ress, 309th Fighter Squadron commander, smiles as his wife wipes his face after his final flight with the squadron, Feb. 26, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.



U.S. Air Force photo by Airman Tekorey Watkins



U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Katelynn Jackson
U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Michael Ress, 309th Fighter Squadron commander, fastens his oxygen mask to his helmet in the cockpit of a U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon for the final F-16 flight of the 309th FS, Feb. 26, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.



U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Katelynn Jackson

LEFT: U.S. Air Force Airmen assigned to the 56th Fighter Wing watch as a U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon takes off for the final flight of the 309th Fighter Squadron, Feb. 26, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. This flight marked the last 309th FS sortie at Luke AFB as the 56th Fighter Wing officially transforms its mission and focus on training pilots from the legacy F-16 to the F-35A Lightning II, the U.S. Air Force’s latest fifth-generation fighter.

Luke Air Force Base Thunderbolt

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FULL CIRCLE: MAJ. ALLEY'S FINI FLIGHT AT LUKE



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

LEFT: U.S. Air Force Maj. Isaiah Alley, 309th Fighter Squadron director of operations, is sprayed with water and champagne by his wife, daughter, and other family members following his final active-duty flight, Feb. 19, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. A former F-16 crew chief turned instructor pilot, Alley has spent nearly five years developing future fighter pilots as part of the 56th Fighter Wing's mission to train the world's greatest fighter pilots and combat-ready Airmen.



U.S. Air Force Maj. Isaiah Alley, 309th Fighter Squadron director of operations, taxis a U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon, Feb. 19, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. A former enlisted F-16 crew chief, Alley's hands-on maintenance experience gives him a unique understanding of the aircraft, enhancing his capabilities as a pilot.



LEFT: U.S. Air Force Maj. Isaiah Alley, 309th Fighter Squadron director of operations, and other Airmen assigned to the 56th Fighter Wing conduct pre-flight checks on a U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon before take-off, Feb. 19, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.



U.S. Air Force Maj. Isaiah Alley, 309th Fighter Squadron director of operations, climbs into the cockpit of a U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon, Feb. 19, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. From 2006 to 2009, Alley worked as an enlisted F-16 crew chief with the 56th Fighter Wing. Despite facing challenges in advancing his college education, he eventually received the support needed to enter the U.S. Air Force Academy. After commissioning, he returned as a pilot, flying the same aircraft he once maintained as an enlisted Airman.



U.S. Air Force Maj. Isaiah Alley, 309th Fighter Squadron director of operations, poses for a photo with family and friends following his final active-duty flight, Feb. 19, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Alley began his Air Force career as an F-16 crew chief at the 56th Fighter Wing, years later returning as an instructor pilot. Throughout his service, he contributed to the base's mission of training the world's greatest fighter pilots and combat-ready Airmen.

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56FW SOARS OVER BUCKEYE AIR FAIR



U.S. Air Force photos by Senior Airman Katellynn Jackson

A couple walks by a Buckeye Air Fair sign, Feb. 15, 2025, at Buckeye Municipal Airport, Arizona. During the Buckeye Air Fair, two U.S. Air Force F-35A Lightning II's assigned to the 61st Fighter Squadron at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona, performed a flyover showcasing the U.S. Air Force's latest fifth-generation fighter capabilities.



A young girl smiles while a U.S. Air Force Airman puts a U.S. Air Force F-35A Lightning II pilot helmet on her head during the Buckeye Air Fair, Feb. 15, 2025, at Buckeye Municipal Airport, Arizona. The helmet gives F-35A pilots a 360-degree view of the F-35s external environment without needing to move the jet.



LEFT: Spectators look toward the sky as two U.S. Air Force F-35A Lightning II's assigned to the 61st Fighter Squadron at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona, fly over the Buckeye Air Fair, Feb. 15, 2025, at Buckeye Municipal Airport, Arizona. The F-35A is the U.S. Air Force's latest fifth-generation fighter, providing next-generation stealth, enhanced situational awareness, and reduced vulnerability for the United States and allied nations.



LEFT: Spectators watch John Melby fly the Pitts S-1-11B "Fear Boss" aircraft during an aerial demonstration, at the Buckeye Air Fair, Feb. 15, 2025, at Buckeye Municipal Airport, Arizona. In addition to Fear Boss, two U.S. Air Force F-35A Lightning II's assigned to the 61st Fighter Squadron at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona, performed a flyover.



Two U.S. Air Force F-35A Lightning II's assigned to the 61st Fighter Squadron at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona, perform a flyover during the Buckeye Air Fair, Feb. 15, 2025, at Buckeye Municipal Airport, Arizona. The two pilots flying the F-35As have a combined flight experience totaling nearly 3,000 hours.



LEFT: A U.S. Air Force F-35A Lightning II assigned to the 61st Fighter Squadron at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona, performs a flyover during the Buckeye Air Fair, Feb. 15, 2025, at Buckeye Municipal Airport, Arizona. The 56th Fighter Wing is the premier fighter wing for F-35 training, ensuring Luke AFB pilots are prepared for any encounter.



U.S. Air Force Capt. Matt Dorsey, 61st Fighter Squadron F-35A Lightning II pilot, smiles while talking with a member of the local community during the Buckeye Air Fair, Feb. 15, 2025, at Buckeye Municipal Airport, Arizona. Two U.S. Air Force F-35A Lightning II's assigned to the 61st Fighter Squadron at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona, performed a flyover showcasing the U.S. Air Force's latest fifth-generation fighter capabilities.

SORTIE (from Page 1)

pilots on fifth generation aircraft, becoming the seventh F-35A Lightning II squadron on the installation.

“The F-16’s final flight at Luke signifies a transition, not an end,” said U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. David Berkland, 56th FW commander. “It’s a tribute to the aircraft’s legacy and the Airmen who mastered it, building a foundation of lethality that directly supported the Combat Air Force. Now, we focus on Luke’s future as the premier F-35 training wing, ensuring continued air dominance and unmatched combat capability.”

The F-16 arrived at Luke AFB in December 1982 and pilot training began in February 1983. In the jet’s 42 years of service with the 56th FW, more than 20,000

F-16 pilots graduated the training program. The final class of F-16 student pilots graduated from the 309th FS in September 2024.

U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Col. Michael Ress, 309th FS commander, piloted the final flight, closing the F-16 chapter for his squadron as it prepares to transition to the F-35A.

The 309th Aircraft Maintenance Unit, which was charged with the care of the final F-16 aircraft and ensured safe flying conditions for the pilots of the 309th FS, is scheduled to conclude the divestment of the remaining F-16 aircraft next month.

The 425th FS will continue to fly the F-16 and train Republic of Singapore Air Force fighter pilots and maintainers at Luke AFB until they transition to Ebbing Air National Guard Base, Arkansas, in the coming years.



U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Belinda Guachun-Chichay



U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Mason Hargrove

U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Michael Ress, 309th Fighter Squadron commander, waves to friends and family after his final F-16 Fighting Falcon flight, Feb. 26, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. For decades, the 56th Fighter has trained generations of F-16 fighter pilots, sharpening America’s airpower.



U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Jakob Hambricht

U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Michael Ress, 309th Fighter Squadron commander, taxis a U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon, Feb. 26, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Since the 1980s, the 56th Fighter Wing has been the cornerstone of F-16 training, producing combat-ready pilots for the U.S. and partner nations.

LEFT: U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Michael Ress, 309th Fighter Squadron commander, is sprayed with water by his family after completing the final F-16 Fighting Falcon flight of the 309th FS, Feb. 26, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.

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Luke honored with historical award



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

LEFT: U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. David Berkland (middle left,) 56th Fighter Wing commander, and U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Jason Shaffer (middle right,) 56th FW command chief, stand alongside retired U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. John Berry (left,) Air Force Historical Foundation chair, and retired U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Dik Daso (right,) AFHF executive director, after being awarded the Hap Arnold Thunderbolt award during the 2025 annual awards ceremony, Feb. 21, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Originally titled the AFHF Outstanding Training Unit award, the award was renamed in honor of Gen. Henry Arnold, while also bearing the Thunderbolt moniker of the 56th Fighter Wing.



U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. David Berkland (left), 56th Fighter Wing commander, gives remarks after receiving the Hap Arnold Thunderbolt award from retired U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. John Berry (right).



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HONORARY COMMANDERS GET IMMERSION TOUR



U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Ivy Lawless, 56th Operations Support Squadron aircrew flight equipment apprentice, briefs honorary commanders during an immersion tour, Feb. 4, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Lawless explains the use of an ejection training seat, which can simulate a submerged aircraft for emergency procedures.



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

U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Lily Hurst (left) and Airman 1st Class Ivy Lawless (right), 56th Operations Support Squadron aircrew flight equipment apprentices, assist Kyle Day, 56th Fighter Wing honorary commander (middle), during an immersion tour, Feb. 4, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Honorary commanders received a comprehensive overview of base operations, including a rundown on aircrew flight equipment pilots use daily. Airmen also had the opportunity to explain their roles and contributions to base operations.



Hannah Marshall, 56th Operations Support Squadron honorary commander, secures a bolt on an ammunition during an immersion tour, Feb. 4, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Honorary commanders gained valuable insight into routine checks and repairs essential to flight safety.



A guest of the 56th Fighter Wing Honorary Commander Immersion, dons a flight suit and high-tech pilot helmet during a briefing on aircrew flight equipment, Feb. 4, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The immersion provided honorary commanders and their guests with hands-on insight into base operations and training. This gear, essential for aircrew safety, reflects the advanced technology that ensures mission success.



Mike Heath, 62nd Fighter Squadron honorary commander, examines a high-tech pilot helmet during an immersion tour Feb. 4, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The F-35 pilot helmet highlights the sophisticated technology that enables mission success.

LEFT: U.S. Air Force Airmen assigned to the 944th Fighter Wing and 56th Fighter Wing showcase ammunitions and related equipment during an immersion tour, Feb. 4, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Honorary commanders of the 56th FW gained insight into routine checks and repairs critical to flight safety.



U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. David Berkland, 56th Fighter Wing commander, delivers closing remarks to visiting honorary commanders at the conclusion of an immersion tour, Feb. 4, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The tour included visits to 56th Mission Support Group, 56th Medical Group, 56th Maintenance Group, and 56th Operations Group.



LEFT: U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Jacob Gause, 309th Aircraft Maintenance Unit F-16 Fighting Falcon dedicated crew chief, speaks with Kyle Day, 56th Fighter Wing honorary commander, during an immersion tour, Feb. 4, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The 309th AMU supports fighter pilots by ensuring aircraft are maintained in top conditions, allowing for uninterrupted training.

56FW COMPETE IN WEAPONS LOAD COMPETITION

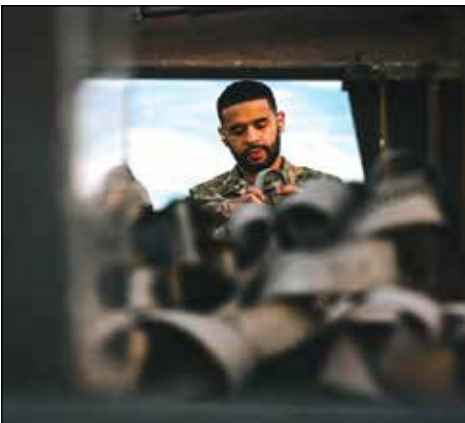


LEFT: U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Angelina Cabello, 944th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron armament systems specialist, prepares a GBU-12 Paveway II bomb for a U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon during the annual weapons load competition, Feb. 7, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The load competition featured the loading of an AIM-120 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile, an AIM-9X Sidewinder missile, and a GBU-12 with a time standard of 20 minutes.



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Angelina Cabello, 944th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron armament systems specialist, prepares a GBU-12 Paveway II bomb for a U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon during the annual weapons load competition, Feb. 7, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.

U.S. Air Force photos by Senior Airman Katelynn Jackson



U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Jacob Wigfall, 56th Maintenance Group loading standardization crew member, prepares an MHU-141 trailer for the annual weapons load competition, Feb. 7, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The load competition featured six squadrons across Luke AFB, including the 61st Fighter Squadron, 944th Aircraft Maintenance Unit, the 62nd FS, the 310th FS, the 309th FS and the 425th FS. Weapons load competitions advance training to produce command focused Airmen to meet warfighting needs.



U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Gabriel Raanes, 310th Aircraft Maintenance Unit weapons load crew member secures a bomb rack panel by screwing fasteners in during the annual weapons load competition, Feb. 7, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.



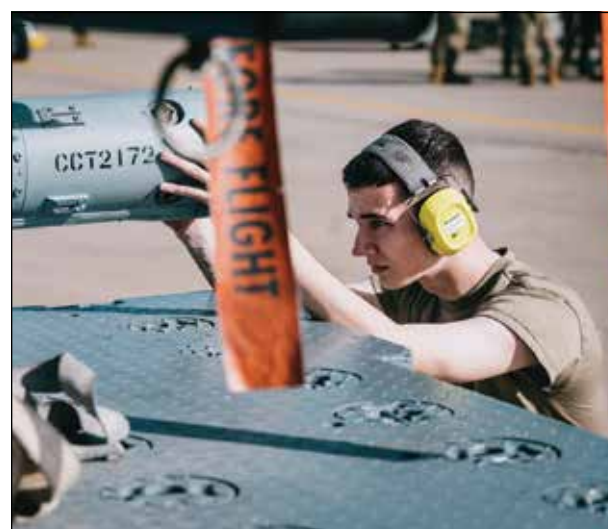
56th Fighter Wing personnel stand in line before the annual weapons load competition, Feb. 7, 2024, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.



U.S. Air Force Airmen assigned to the 62nd Aircraft Maintenance Unit and the 310th Fighter Squadron participate in the annual weapons load competition, Feb. 7, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.



LEFT: Republic of Singapore Air Force ME2 Kunaseelan Yogoraj, 425th Fighter Squadron weapons load crew member, prepares an AIM-120 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile bomb for a U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon during the annual weapons load competition, Feb. 9, 2024, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The load competition featured six squadrons across Luke AFB, including the 61st FS, 944th Aircraft Maintenance Unit, the 62nd FS, the 310th FS, the 309th FS and the 425th FS. Weapons load competitions advance training to produce command focused Airmen to meet warfighting needs.



LEFT: U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Gabriel Raanes, 310th Aircraft Maintenance Unit weapons load crew member, fastens an AIM-120 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile to a trailer, Feb. 7, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The load competition featured the loading of an AIM-120 AMRAAM, an AIM-9X Sidewinder missile, and a GBU-12 with a time standard of 20 minutes. Exercises like the weapons load competition advance training by producing command focused Airmen able to meet warfighting requirements.

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U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Mayson Brinckerhoff, 61st Aircraft Maintenance Unit weapons sterilization crew member, navigates a jammer to reload ammunition after evaluating the annual weapons load competition, Feb. 7, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The load competition featured six squadrons across Luke AFB, including the 61st Fighter Squadron, 944th Aircraft Maintenance Unit, the 62nd FS, the 310th FS, the 309th FS and the 425th FS. Weapons load competitions advance training to produce command focused Airmen to meet warfighting needs.

LOAD

(from Page 7)



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Kristen Hayes, 61st Aircraft Maintenance Unit weapons load crew member, navigates a jammer during the annual weapons load competition, Feb. 7, 2025, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The load competition featured the loading of an AIM-120 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile, an AIM-9X Sidewinder missile, and a GBU-12 with a time standard of 20 minutes.

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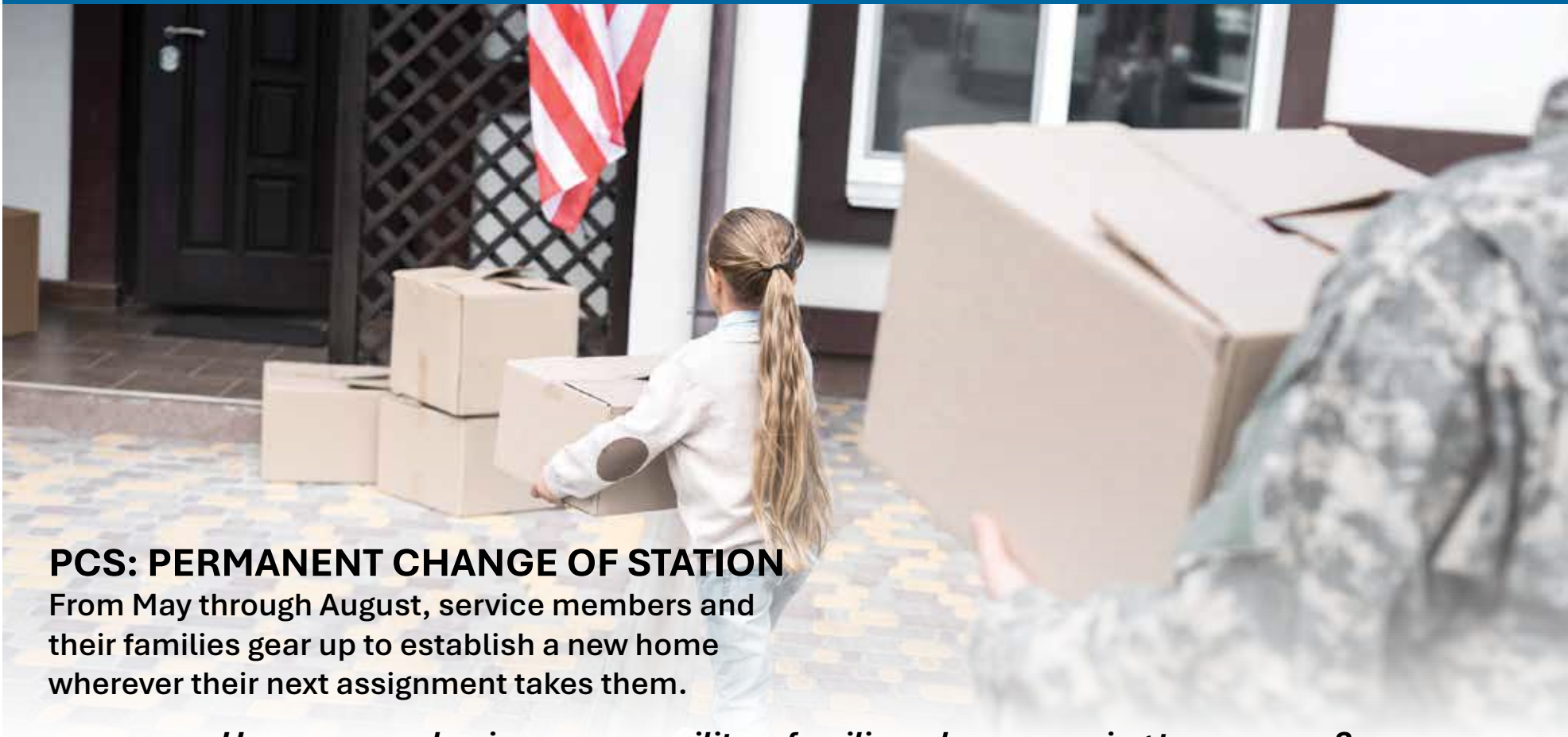
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Home is Where We're Sent



PCS: PERMANENT CHANGE OF STATION

From May through August, service members and their families gear up to establish a new home wherever their next assignment takes them.

How can your business serve military families who are moving to your area?

By advertising in Aerotech News' special PCS guide you position your business to attract new customers as they settle into our communities. Our advertisers benefit from a focused and employed audience with distribution on and off base locations as well as thousands of readers who engage with us online.

New arrivals are typically in need of:

- **Housing** - Where to live (especially if base housing is in short supply)?
- **Education** - Charter or private school options for children, higher education for adults
- **Food/ Entertainment** - What are options for eating out, recreation and socializing?
- **Transportation** - Who has military financing for vehicle purchase or leasing?
- **Worship** - Where are the local churches, synagogues, etc?
- **Medical and dental care** - What providers are available in the community to supplement on-base services?
- **Pre-school and child care** - Who can be trusted to care for children of dual-income families?
- **Goods and services** - Where are the best places for furniture, home goods, car repair, specialty goods and services?

Publication Date: May 16, 2025

Advertising Reservation Deadline: May 5, 2025

Advertising Material Deadline: May 8, 2025

NOW IS THE TIME TO GET THEIR ATTENTION!

AD SIZE	B/W	4/C
Business card • 3.325" x 2"	\$127	\$163
1/8 page • 3.325" x 5"	\$295	\$385
1/4 page • 5" x 6.5"	\$535	\$710
1/2 page • 10.25" x 6.5"	\$975	\$1326
Full page • 10.25" x 13"	\$1794	\$2496
PREMIUM POSITIONS		
Inside Cover • 10.25" x 13"	n/a	\$2895
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JWV to induct new post commander



Courtesy photo

Dr. Julian Wyatt, retired Navy lieutenant commander and author of *Becoming Jewish*, will speak at the Jewish War Veterans Copper State Post 619 installation luncheon, March 16 at the Oakwood Country Club Recreation Center, 24218 S. Oakwood Blvd. in Sun Lakes, Arizona.

Wyatt, the newly elected Post 619 commander, served 30 years in the U.S. Navy from 1980-2010, and was awarded the Bronze Star from his combat tour in Iraq, 2007- 2008.

Educated in parochial schools, Wyatt sought out a local synagogue after visiting Haifa, Israel, in 1979. He became a Jew by choice in 2007 and a Bar Mitzvah in 2010.

During his last few months in the International Combat Zone, Jules describes his service as the lay leader for B'nai Baghdad, as the "duty, honor, and privilege of a lifetime."

Back home in 2016, Jules began the Prison Yoga Project Phoenix detachment to help reduce recidivism and give the incarcerated tools of yoga and meditation to navigate stress, anxiety and depression.

He now works for a Nonprofit called Mindfulness First, in Scottsdale, Arizona. The organization works in schools and teaches mindfulness to children and staff in K-12 schools. As a certified health and life coach, Wyatt helps veterans and their families with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and reintegration back into civilian life.

Registration for the seated, hot lunch is \$40 each. Send checks made out to JWV Post 619 to Bety Dar, 25827 S. Greencastle Dr, Sun Lakes, AZ 85248, by March 8, 2025.

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