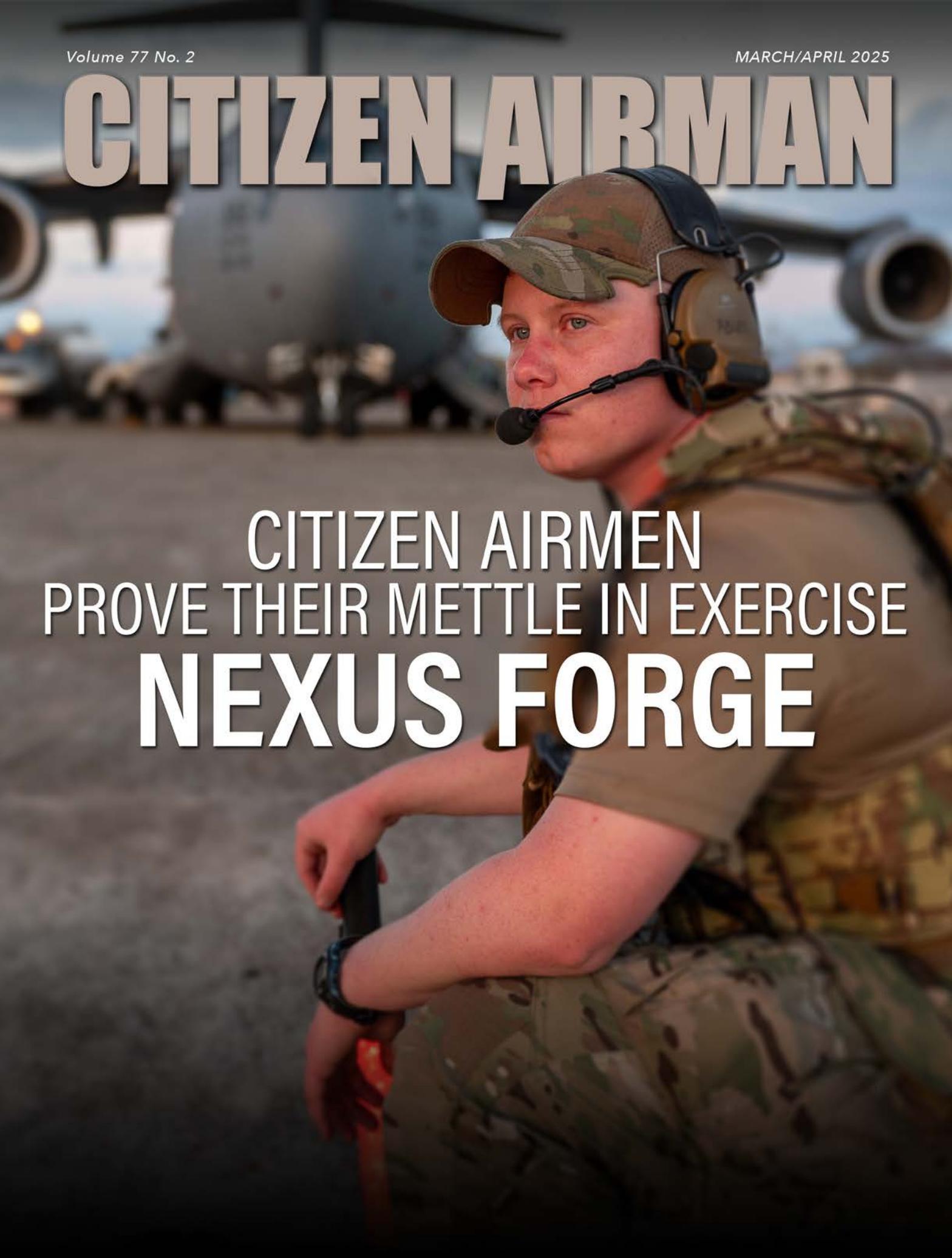


CITIZEN AIRMAN



CITIZEN AIRMEN
PROVE THEIR METTLE IN EXERCISE
NEXUS FORGE



JOHN P. HEALY
Lieutenant General, USAF
Chief of Air Force Reserve
Commander, Air Force Reserve Command

FROM THE TOP

EXERCISING FOR STRATEGIC COMPETITION

The Air Force Reserve has transformed from a force optimized for operational efficiency in a permissive environment to a modernized and effective force organized, trained and equipped to deter conflict and prevail against any adversary.

We must prioritize limited resources to ensure they are aligned to support combatant commands in the face of an ever-changing global environment. Potential conflict in the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) area of responsibility demands we train to conduct integrated, decisive and dynamic air operations in a peer-contested environment at speed and over vast distances.

Our responsibility is to properly train and equip our Reservists to make informed, real-time decisions within the commander's intent, even with incomplete information. To prepare we must maximize training opportunities

by expanding participation in existing exercises or creating new events when needed.

Recent exercises such as Steel Knight and Nexus Forge are examples of what the Reserve can do to train and certify for multi-domain, combined air, ground, space, cyber and electronic threat environments.

During Exercise Steel Knight in December, 119 Reservists and multiple fixed and rotary wing aircraft from three wings participated in a three-phased, combined arms operation in a simulated conflict against China. Participants exercised with the U.S. Navy and Marine forces along with allies and partners from the Philippines, Australia, Singapore, Mexico and Peru.

We employed new methods to generate more efficient, integrated deployable units of action where Airmen train and exercise together before being deployed as a team. The exercise began with initial deployments to contingency locations in Arizona and California with follow-on combat operations at Darwin, Australia. Alongside our joint and international partners, Reservists practiced evolving tactics, techniques and procedures to prevail across a wide range of missions – dynamic rescue, expeditionary medical procedures, search and rescue, targeting and theater ingress within an Expeditionary Advanced Basing Operation.

In February, 4th Air Force led Exercise Nexus Forge – a multi-theater, multi-domain and multi-national exercise to certify the first of

our Reserve Expeditionary Air Base wings for deployment. Exercise operations commenced from dispersed locations in Hawaii and Guam.

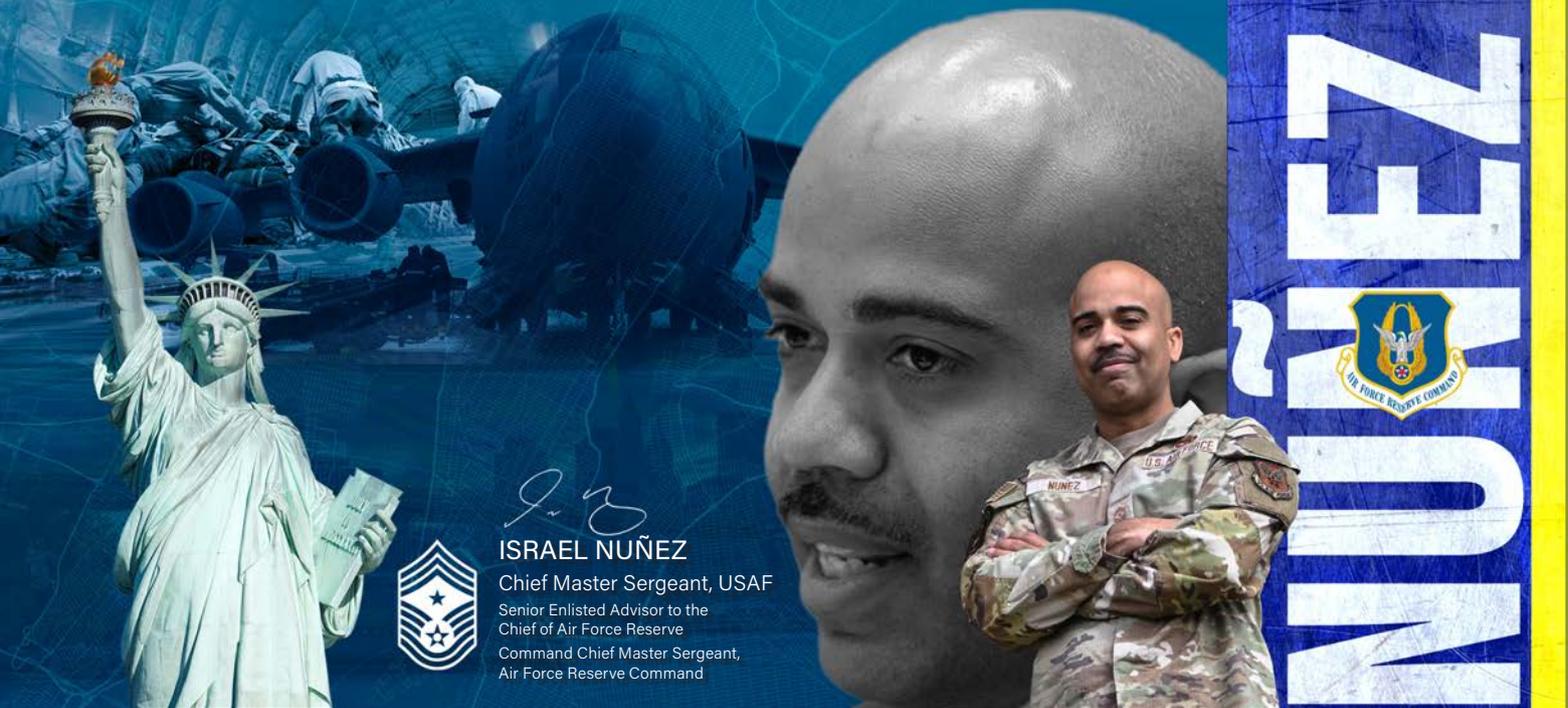
Representing each numbered Air Force, 10 Reserve wings contributed force elements to include airlift and tanker support. In all, more than 850 participants, including U.S. Soldiers and Marines, as well as 10 Reserve mobility aircraft completed this Reserve-led certification event, demonstrating joint and international capabilities and interoperability.

Our adversaries have the capability to interfere across diplomatic, information, military and economic arenas. Exercises are just one part of a strategy to project power as a means of deterrence. They will help us sustain a successful battle rhythm in a dynamic environment that overcomes the tyranny of distance.

The Air Force Reserve is changing how we train for combat to maintain agility in our force. Our airbases, at home and abroad, are no longer sanctuaries from attack. We must shift our thinking from static airbases operations to a network of lightweight, forward operating teams. There will be new demands, challenges and uncertainty as we adapt our force.

Chief Master Sgt. Nuñez had the opportunity to personally experience the demands and challenges our Airmen will face in a potential future conflict during his recent participation in a USINDOPACOM exercise. His experience speaks to the need for change.





IN
ISRAEL NUÑEZ
Chief Master Sergeant, USAF
Senior Enlisted Advisor to the
Chief of Air Force Reserve
Command Chief Master Sergeant,
Air Force Reserve Command

CHIEF'S VIEW

"I recently deployed to the Pacific for a ground-breaking exercise that was unlike anything I have experienced in my over two decades of service," he said. "I thought I had a solid grasp of the challenges posed by a potential conflict in the INDOPACOM theater. However, this exercise taught me that there is a vast difference between understanding the challenge and experiencing it.

"The exercise threw us into the midst of a simulated conflict, where we had to contend with the harsh realities of the Pacific theater. Our team spent countless hours conquering the tyranny of distance, crossed the international dateline, and arrived at our forward location disoriented and on little to no rest. Upon arrival, we faced the daunting task of establishing a spoke operation, all while navigating simulated attacks. The challenges we encountered were far more complex and unforgiving than anything I had previously rehearsed.

"Gone were the days of hiding under desks in chemical gear during Alarm Red drills. Instead, we had to respond to simulated hypersonic missile attacks by sprinting as fast and as far as possible, seeking cover in tropical bushes, where temperatures soared above 90 degrees and humidity reached 100%. The presence of large spiders and other creatures, while awaiting an imminent catastrophe, added to the sense of unease, making it clear that this was not a routine exercise. Amidst the degraded

conditions and threat of further attacks, with less than 15 minutes' notice, our team was directed to disperse from our established location, and boarded engines running aircraft, ready to quickly re-establish a new spoke operation at an undisclosed forward location. Two decades from now, there will be Airmen who look back on these exercises as the norm. We are designing the future operating environment.

"My recent exercise experience provided a sobering reminder that the challenges of strategic competition are not just theoretical, but real and pressing. These events highlight the importance of taking risk, critical thinking and innovation. Taking risk does not mean you should abandon your training and discipline. It is about having a clear understanding of your mission, the orders that you are operating under, and making timely decisions when lives and equipment are at stake. Your ability to think critically and solve problems is how we defeat our adversaries if deterrence fails."

We need you, our Reserve Airmen, to be ready for the unknown. We are counting on you to carry on the proud tradition of our all-volunteer force and defend our nation's freedom!

— Lieutenant General John P. Healy



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On the cover: Tech Sgt. Kaden Ables, 433rd Contingency Response Squadron ramp expeditor, waits for aircraft during Exercise Nexus Forge 2025 at Kalaeloa Airport, Hawaii. Nexus Forge is a large-scale Expeditionary Air Base certification event focused on increasing interoperability among U.S. and allied forces in the Pacific theater, furthering efforts to secure a free and open Indo-Pacific region. For more on the exercise, see page 6. (Staff Sgt. Jennifer Healy)



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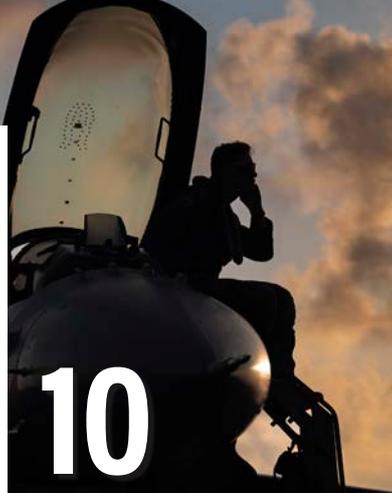
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The image shows two military personnel in silhouette against a bright sunset sky. One person is in the foreground, wearing a cap and a backpack, looking towards the right. The other person is standing further back, also in silhouette, wearing a helmet and a tactical vest. In the background, the tail of a large aircraft is visible on the left, and a smaller aircraft is parked on the right. The overall scene is an airfield during Exercise Nexus Forge 2025.

Tech Sgts. Kaden Ables, left, and Gerardo Avila, 433rd Contingency Response Squadron ramp expeditors, wait for aircraft during Exercise Nexus Forge 2025 at Kalaeloa Airport, Hawaii. (Staff Sgt. Jennifer Healy)

CITIZEN AIRMEN PROVE THEIR METTLE IN EXERCISE NEXUS FORGE

— By 1st Lt. Marjorie Schurr





Imagine: You are an Airman on deployment, but you are certainly not amongst the desert sand you're used to. A humid breeze flutters the flaps of the nearby tents, and strange birds sing their foreign songs from the tropical foliage nearby. Volcanic rock crunches beneath your boots, and the smell of gunpowder and sulfur infuses the air from the nearby range as the sound of whistling mortars echoes overhead. You know that this isn't the only location your wingmen are working either, and if you think about it, you can hear the engines of heavy airlift like C-17 Globemaster IIIs and KC-46 Pegasus aircraft echoing through the mist-shrouded mountains nearby.

This isn't what would be considered a "typical deployment" from the past two to three decades – indeed, it's not even your typical exercise. This was the experience of more than 1,000 Citizen Airmen as they flew half a world away to the Indo-Pacific theater to plan, execute, participate in, and oversee Exercise Nexus Forge.

"This exercise is the first of its kind for us, and a critical step in sharpening the combat edge of our Citizen Airmen," said Lt. Gen. John P. Healy, chief of the Air Force Reserve and commander of Air Force Reserve Command. "Our goal is to make sure they are properly equipped, trained and ready to deploy. Nexus Forge is more than just training – it's about ensuring we are ready to fight, survive and win in contested environments. For two weeks, Reservists faced a variety of training scenarios and consistently rose to the occasion, demonstrating their willingness to embody the warrior ethos with a sense of purpose and unity. We trained side-by-side with our joint partners from the U.S. Army 25th Infantry Division and the U.S. Marine Corps 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment, allowing us to combine our resources to match threats with the right technologies, and actively enhance our overall deterrence in the Indo-Pacific region."

"For so many years we have operated almost exclusively in the European and Middle Eastern theaters," said Maj. Gen. Scott Durham, 4th Air Force commander. "At the direction of senior leadership, we have begun to explore operations on a more global scale and in the western direction from the United States. Operating in the Indo-Pacific region presents us many challenges and an opportunity to test skills which we have not exercised in many years."

Exercise Nexus Forge is the first of its kind in Air Force Reserve Command, combining multiple airlift assets like

C-17s, KC-135s, KS-46s and C-130s, with airframes from joint partners to showcase strategic global mobility like never before. It was arranged in a "hub and spoke" format, meaning that multiple smaller units and capabilities were deployed from a central hub of command and control known as an Expeditionary Air Base.

NF25 operations took place at multiple locations throughout the Pacific, including Schofield Barracks, Kalaeloa Airport, East Range, Hickam Air Force Base, and Marine Corps Base Hawaii all on the island of Oahu; Hilo on the Big Island of Hawaii; and Andersen Air Force Base, Guam.

While the exercise was led by 4th AF, participation and support came from across the Department of Defense. Planning and execution of the exercise required support from units assigned to the U.S. Army 25th Infantry Division, the Hawaii Army National Guard and the 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment. Exercise participants were Citizen Airmen assigned to at least 20 wings across the Air Force Reserve, spanning all three of the Numbered Air Forces under AFRC.

The prospect of coordinating with so many wings, as well as Total Force and joint partners, was daunting but necessary, said Lt. Col. Gerard "G" Guevara, director of inspections with the 349th Air Mobility Wing and the officer selected to lead planning for NF25. Success required the effort of more than 100 Citizen Airmen from all over the country on the planning team, who each saw and understood the vision of the exercise and believed that it was the way of the future.

"No one had the courage to do this except for this team of humans and Maj. Gen. Durham," said Guevara. "These are muscles in our skulls that we haven't exercised – ever."

Strategic planning wasn't the only difficult hurdle, either. Exercises of this scale in the past were largely planned and funded by the active-duty component. The question became how to get so many geographically separated missions and wings to one location without undue cost?

The answer came through two things: The use of Area X-Ray at Schofield Barracks at the permission of the 25th ID at no cost to the Air Force and leveraging pre-appropriated and budgeted annual tour orders for Reservists to attend the exercise.

Continued on next page





“The planning that goes into this is a very heavy lift for any organization,” said Durham. “In the past we have relied upon our active component to host these events. By AFRC hosting this event, we can ensure continuity of effort and timing while providing a cost-effective training platform by utilizing annual tour authority to cover the manpower for the event.”

Citizen Airmen arrived at Area X-Ray to find living conditions unlike what they had been used to at home. They quickly had to arrange cleaning and trash details while mitigating the outbreak of real-world illnesses among the troops to preserve the safety and well-being of their fellow Airmen as much as possible. All the while, Airmen were acclimating to a climate and surroundings they had never operated in before.

“This environment is giving us the chance to go after the jungle,” said Master Sgt. Christopher Whalen, 349th Security Forces Squadron noncommissioned officer in charge of readiness and training. “We’ve been stuck in the desert for so long. We’ve been playing in a theater where you can literally see as far as the eye can reach, right? Now it’s time to transition a bit.”

Area X-Ray, located close to an Army firing range that operates on a daily basis, seemed like the perfect location to simulate an austere deployed environment. Planners went one step further and got creative to make the exercise even more immersive, even going so far as to use whistling footballs dropped from small unmanned aircraft systems to simulate the sound of mortar fire.

Airmen took to the immersive environment in stride, erecting tents to serve as work areas and donning mission oriented protective posture gear to defend against simulated oppositional forces and any threats the exercise could throw their way.

Citizen Airmen of every career field had the opportunity to demonstrate the war-fighting skills they practiced at home, from aerial port “port dawgs” palletizing and loading cargo for daily missions, to finance countering a

simulated burglary, to aircrew coordinating with special operations forces to conduct straight line jumps out of mobility aircraft, to public affairs embedding with security forces as they countered simulated enemy fire. Everywhere evaluators looked, they saw a Citizen Airman rising to the challenge.

And a challenge it was indeed. Planners pulled out all the stops to throw the unconventional and unexpected at exercise participants to keep them on their toes – and they were never expected to respond to every situation perfectly, either.

“To me, perfection is the obstacle to excellence,” said Guevara. “Greatness comes from excellence, not perfection.”

With every first-of-its-kind event – and the inherent imperfections that come with being the first – comes some growing pains, but planners and players at all levels are tasked with learning from each success and failure.

“This is a proof-of-concept event, and we have a 100-person team in place at the exercise to capture lessons learned from every aspect of this exercise, so no matter the success or failure of the specific event or day, there will be valuable knowledge gleaned from every situation,” said Durham.

Now that the boots and iron have departed and the exercise play areas have been returned as they were, the next challenge awaits on the horizon – what do we do with the information we have learned?

“This team has moved the earth to make this happen, and to see the vision and build this alongside their usual duties, that is amazing to me,” said Guevara. “But if we do not make this repeatable and sustainable, all of this is for nothing.”

Right now, the goal is to make Exercise Nexus Forge a repeated event for Citizen Airmen to participate in as part of their Air Force Force Generation training cycle. With that intent in mind, the message then becomes clear to Citizen Airmen across the country: Be ready NOW, no matter what the world may throw your way. 

(Schurr is assigned to the 4th Air Force public affairs office.)





Tech. Sgt. Brandon Watson (left) and Staff Sgt. Isaac McMullen, loadmasters assigned to the 94th Airlift Squadron, sit on the open tail of a C-130H3 after the completion of a Nexus Forge joint training exercise. (Master Sgt. Amy Picard) Additional photos show Reservists taking part in Nexus Forge.



NEW PILOT CONCIERGE CELL FACILITATES THE TRANSITION FROM ACTIVE DUTY TO RESERVE

— By AFRC Public Affairs

Air Force Reserve Command has established the Pilot Concierge Cell to help facilitate the transition from active duty to the Air Force Reserve. (Staff Sgt. Madeline Herzog)

In an effort to retain qualified Air Force pilots considering leaving active duty, Headquarters Air Force Reserve Command created the Pilot Concierge Cell (PCC) to help facilitate the transition from active duty to the Air Force Reserve.

The PCC's mission is simple: Simplify the affiliation process for those who desire to continue to serve.

“Think of the PCC as a bridge between transitioning active duty pilots and Air Force Reserve squadrons,” said Maj. John Price, a member of the PCC team. Before coming to AFRC headquarters to work with the PCC, Price served as a pilot with the 920th Rescue Wing's 301st Rescue Squadron at Patrick Space Force Base, Florida.

He said the process in which the PCC works is broken down into three stages: “Mission Planning,” “Ready for Takeoff” and “I'm in Holding.”

In the Mission Planning phase, aviators who are nearing the end of their Active Duty Service Commitment (ADSC) can begin exploring what options are available to them and determine if the Air Force Reserve is the right move as individuals make life decisions. An ADSC is the period of time an officer or enlisted member serves on active duty beyond their initial commitment. The length of an ADSC can vary depending on the type of service and the member's rank.

The Mission Planning phase should begin 18-24 months from when an individual begins to explore options nearing the end of their ADSC. At this point, Airmen should decide whether they want to Palace Chase or Palace Front, begin forming an idea of where they would like to settle down, become familiar with benefits and bonus programs within the Air Force Reserve, and decide if they want to join the Reserve as a full-time or part-time employee. Palace Chase and Palace Front are voluntary programs that allow active-duty Air Force members to separate early and join the Reserve or Air National Guard.





The Pilot Concierge Cell's mission is simple: Simplify the affiliation process for those pilots who desire to continue to serve. (Left photo by Senior Airman Keegan Putman. Right photo by Tech. Sgt. Curt Beach)



The Ready for Takeoff phase begins when an individual is ready to “pull the trigger” on joining the Air Force Reserve, Price said. This is when the Palace Chase or Palace Front process begins as the member makes contact with their local in-service recruiter and pursues finding an AFRC unit to sponsor them.

“This is where the Pilot Concierge Cell can provide the most assistance in bridging the gap between the separating service member and his or her future AFRC squadron,” Price said.

Reserve squadrons often receive hundreds of applicants with some units utilizing part-time traditional Reservists as their hiring point of contact. When applicants don't receive a response from a squadron, the PCC can help ensure the separating member isn't left in the dark.

Once a squadron gives an “intent to hire” letter, the last phase begins.

Most of the work in the final phase is accomplished by the unit and its local in-service recruiter.

“However, if you're in holding for some administrative hang-up, the PCC will track that issue down and help resolve the matter,” Price said. “Because the PCC is strategically located at Headquarters AFRC's Directorate of Operations, our ability to find solutions is generally just a few phone calls away.”

The PCC provided the following answers to some frequently asked questions:

• **Q: Does the Pilot Concierge Cell work with rated aviators from other branches of service?**

• *A: Yes, we do!*

• **Q: I've already separated from active duty, but now I think I would like to join the Air Force Reserve. Would the PCC work with me?**

A: Absolutely!

Q: I'm a civilian or non-rated military member who has always dreamed of being an Air Force pilot, can the PCC help me?

A: Sorry, not at this time. We won't hang up on you, but we will direct you to <https://www.milrecruiter.com/afrc-ufi/> for information about how to apply to an AFRC pilot training board, as well as how to connect with units that are hiring.

Q: I'm a rated aviator who is looking for an individual mobilization augmentee position in the Air Force Reserve. Can the PCC help me land a job?

A: Not likely. The PCC focuses on rated pilots seeking flying positions, but we will attempt to steer you in the right direction.

There are numerous ways to reach out to the PCC, including:

- **Email:** hqafrc.a3rb.pilotconciiergecell@us.af.mil
- **Global Search:** A3/ReservePCC.
- **Teams:** Visit our Teams Page and post a question: Reserve PCC (Pilot Concierge Cell)
- **Teams Chat:** Start a new Teams Chat using [@ReservePCC](#) and it will notify the team.
- **Phone:** [Comm 478-327-1546](tel:478-327-1546) or [DSN: 312-497-1546](tel:312-497-1546) (leave your info and someone will get back to you).
- **PCC Landing Website:** Reserve PCC (Pilot Concierge Cell) — PCC Landing Page

“So, if you're interested in learning more about the Air Force Reserve as a rated aviator, connect with the PCC,” Price said. “Let us facilitate your transition to the Air Force Reserve as you embark on the next phase of your career!”





Above: Marines prepare to conduct a night-time high-altitude, low-opening jump from an HC-130J Combat King II aircraft during Distant Fury Stallion/Steel Knight. (Tech. Sgt. Darius Sostre-Miroir) Below, clockwise from top left: An HH-60W Jolly Green II helicopter approaches the littoral combat ship USS Tulsa. (Tech. Sgt. Darius Sostre-Miroir) An HH-60W approaches an HC-130J Combat King II aircraft for helicopter air-to-air refueling. (Senior Airman Nicole Koreen) An HH-60W flies off the coast of California during the exercise. (Tech. Sgt. Darius Sostre-Miroir) An HH-60W receives fuel from an HC-130J Combat King II during helicopter air-to-air refueling training. (Tech. Sgt. Darius Sostre-Miroir)

RESERVE RESCUE WING SHARPENS JOINT CAPABILITIES DURING CALIFORNIA EXERCISE

— By Tech. Sgt. Darius Sostre-Miroir



The Air Force Reserve's 920th Rescue Wing, based at Patrick Space Force Base, Florida, partnered with the U.S. Marine Corps and the U.S. Navy to enhance combat search and rescue readiness by executing Exercise Distant Fury Stallion/Steel Knight in Southern California in December.

This joint exercise allowed the 920th RQW to validate its ability to operate in contested and isolated environments, focusing on interoperability in support of potential missions in the Indo-Pacific region. The scenarios tested personnel recovery, dynamic rescue operations and agile combat logistics while emphasizing the wing's ability to support maritime and littoral combat environments.

The exercise brought together a diverse group of units, including the 1st Marine Division, 5th Marine Regiment, Expeditionary Strike Group THREE, Amphibious Squadron FIVE, Littoral Combat Ship Squadron ONE, and the 920th RQW.

"This exercise demonstrated the strength and adaptability of our Airmen while integrating seamlessly with our Navy and Marine Corps counterparts. By coordinating dynamic missions across air, land and sea, we validated the 920th RQW's ability to project combat airpower into some of the most challenging environments," said Col. Christopher Escajeda, 943rd Rescue Group commander.

During the exercise, the 920th RQW strategically deployed assets to achieve mission objectives. This included four HH-60W Jolly Green II helicopters, three HC-130J Combat King II aircraft and a total of 76 personnel from across the wing.

The Tactical Medical Augmentation Team integrated with naval forces to provide advanced casualty care in maritime environments. TMAT operations included establishing forward medical capabilities aboard the USS

Somerset and remaining onboard for multiple days to conduct care for simulated combat injuries. The team demonstrated its ability to utilize shipboard medical assets, providing enhanced care closer to the point of injury and supporting prolonged patient transport when needed.

The 305th RQS tested the combat capabilities of the HH-60W Jolly Green II helicopter by completing dynamic training operations, including deck landing qualifications on the USS Santa Barbara, USS Tulsa and the Somerset, simulated water rescue scenarios, and helicopter air-to-air refueling with the HC-130Js.

In addition, in a first for both the Air Force and Navy, the 305th RQS successfully embarked two HH-60W helicopters simultaneously on the Tulsa, demonstrating the precision required for unrivaled maritime rescue and combat operations.

"This task tested the operational compatibility and strategic value of deploying these helicopters from an Independence Class Littoral Combat Ship, setting a precedent for future joint tactics development," said Lt. Col. Brough McDonald, 305th RQS commander. "This integration is crucial for enhancing the wing's operational flexibility, agility, lethality and survivability, aligning with our strategic re-optimization for increased competitiveness in military operations."

The 39th Rescue Squadron showcased its personnel movement and critical refueling capabilities by conducting helicopter air-to-air refueling with HH-60W helicopters from the 305th RQS and fixed-wing air-to-air refueling with Marine Corps F-35B Lightning II aircraft.

By supporting a range of platforms, the HC-130J enhances operational flexibility and mission success, ensuring seamless integration across the Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.

This expanded refueling capacity is critical for increasing operational range, improving mission sustainability, and enhancing the overall readiness of joint-force operations in complex and dynamic environments.

At the core of the operations, the A-Staff brought together leadership from across the wing, enabling collaborative decision-making and resource allocation to meet complex mission demands. An Air Force A-staff is a highly organized and scalable command structure designed to enable effective mission planning and execution across various domains.

The A-staff integrated with joint forces and external units to ensure seamless interoperability. During the exercise, the A-staff functioned as a deployable command layer, coordinating operations with Marine Corps and Navy counterparts. They provided critical updates on personnel accountability, aircraft readiness and mission progress, enabling leadership to make informed decisions in real time.

"The 920th RQW's participation in this exercise showcased the strategic value of our combined arms team in joint operations," said Col. Jesse Hamilton, 920th RQW commander. "By executing missions across maritime, littoral and contested environments, we demonstrated our ability to integrate with naval and ground forces, ensuring the joint force is prepared to recover and protect isolated personnel wherever the mission demands."

The 920th RQW is AFRC's only CSAR wing, whose mission is to plan, lead and conduct military rescue operations and missions to deny competitors and adversaries exploitation of isolated personnel. 

(Sostre-Miroir is assigned to the 920th Rescue Wing public affairs office.)



FROM GRIDIRON TO CYBER DEFENSE: FORMER NFL PLAYER ENLISTS IN THE AIR FORCE RESERVE

— By Master Sgt. Bobby Pilch

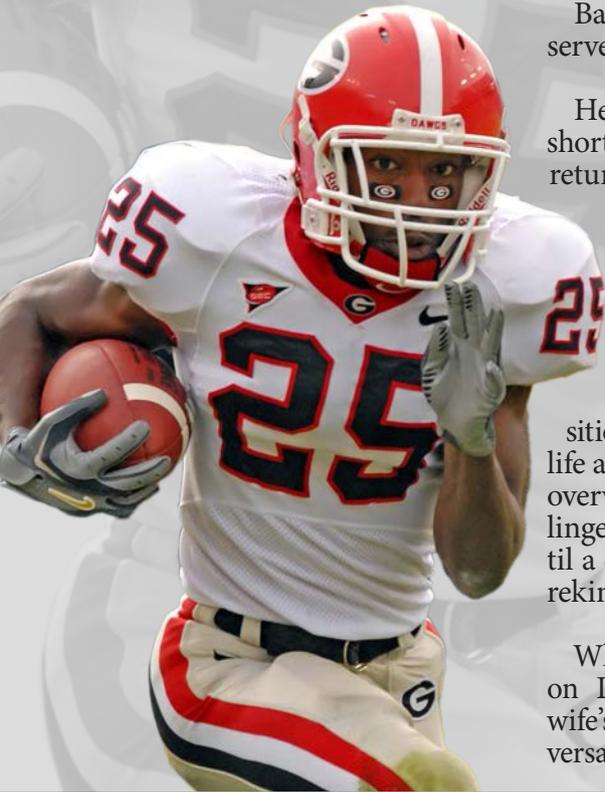
For most athletes, retiring from professional sports marks the culmination of a lifelong journey. For Trakeius “Tra” Battle, however, it was the beginning of a new mission.

The former National Football League player from Forsyth, Georgia, recently took the Oath of Enlistment to serve in the Air Force Reserve, a decision shaped by a deep-rooted desire to serve and a commitment to excellence.

FROM MIDDLE GEORGIA TO THE NFL

Born and raised in Forsyth, Battle’s early years were shaped by small-town charm and country values.

“I’m a country boy, through and through,” he shared. “I spent some time in the city, but always



found my way back to the country, the heart of Georgia.”

His athletic prowess earned him a spot on the University of Georgia’s football team, a stepping stone to a professional career in the NFL. Playing for teams like the San Diego Chargers and Dallas Cowboys, Battle experienced the camaraderie and discipline that would later guide his decision to join the military.

Reflecting on his football career, Battle said, “I miss those locker room moments and being surrounded by like-minded and like-hearted individuals all working toward the same goal to achieve a task. The commitment to excellence and teamwork prepared me for a life of service.”

After more than a decade of retirement from the NFL and working in the private sector, Battle found himself longing for the sense of community he experienced on the field and witnessed during visits to military installations as part of the NFL’s military community support initiatives.

A PATH TO SERVICE

Battle’s journey to the Air Force Reserve was far from straightforward.

He first considered the military shortly after retiring from football and returning to school in his home state.

“I was back in Georgia finishing my degree when a classmate in the Reserve suggested I join,” he recalled.

However, the demands of transitioning from the NFL to civilian life and completing his studies proved overwhelming. The idea of enlisting lingered but remained unfulfilled until a chance encounter years later that rekindled his interest.

While attending a dragon boat race on Lake Hartwell organized by his wife’s employer, Battle struck up a conversation with a Coast Guard recruiter.

Intrigued, he considered enlisting in the Coast Guard, but was ultimately swayed by his brother-in-law’s advice to explore the Air Force instead.

A visit to the Air Force Reserve’s website and a subsequent call from Master Sgt. Travis Whitton, a recruiter assigned to the 351st Recruiting Squadron at Dobbins Air Reserve Base, Georgia, set the wheels in motion.

“Sergeant Whitton made the process streamlined and attainable,” Battle said, crediting his recruiter for demystifying the enlistment journey. From preparing for the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test to navigating the Military Entrance Processing Station, Whitton’s guidance helped Battle overcome hurdles and misconceptions.

“I thought joining the Reserve meant giving them the rest of your life,” Battle said. “Learning it was a six-year contract and that you get paid (to serve) brought perspective and clarity.”

As a recruiter, Whitton emphasized his role in addressing Battle’s concerns and alleviating any misinformation about joining the Reserve. Notably, that he was too old to serve.

“He had conducted a lot of research, and there were some misconceptions,” Whitton said as he described Battle’s first perceived roadblock — being too old to serve. “Mr. Battle was giving a motivational speech at Moody Air Force Base and expressed his desire to serve. Someone in the audience said, ‘Why not?’ When he replied that he was too old, the audience member said, ‘They raised the age to 42.’ The next thing I knew, he called me out of the blue by finding my phone number online.”

BRIDGING CIVILIAN AND MILITARY WORLDS

Since retiring from the NFL, Battle’s civilian career has been as varied as it’s been impactful.

Jokingly, he described his life after the NFL as being like the film character Forrest Gump.



“I’ve done some of everything,” he said. “I worked as a UPS driver, an anesthesia and surgery technician while contemplating attending medical school, managed a couple of Chick-fil-A restaurants, and finally, served as a pastor. I’ve done everything except run across the country.”

Today, Battle travels the country as a motivational coach and keynote speaker, discussing resilience and transitioning through challenging times.

“This was something I was introduced to as I transitioned from the NFL to civilian life,” he said. “I really didn’t know what to do with my life and had a lot of downtime, which can be a very dangerous space to be in. I really wanted to be more involved in helping people get through struggles.”

A recurring theme in Battle’s life has been service

“At my core, I’m someone who serves,” he emphasized. This commitment, coupled with a desire to provide his children with a broader understanding of their father’s identity beyond football, solidified his decision to enlist. “This is another side of me they can see — a dad willing to sacrifice and serve.”

ANSWERING THE CALL TO CYBER DEFENSE

With his ASVAB scores opening the door to numerous career fields, Battle chose to enter the Cyber Defense Operations career field.

“We live in a world where artificial intelligence and cyber threats are the future,” he explained. “This role sharpens me, prepares me to serve my country, and protects those I love.”

Battle’s choice also reflects his lifelong love of learning.

Quoting Einstein, he said, “The day you stop learning is the day you start dying.” Cyber defense offers an op-

portunity to continuously challenge himself while contributing to national security and protecting his family.

THE ROLE OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Throughout this journey, Battle’s family has been a cornerstone of support. His wife’s insightful questions helped him better understand the commitment he was making, while their unity and mutual encouragement provided the foundation for this life-changing decision.

“I wasn’t going to do any of this without her blessing,” he said. “She was a great sounding board for a lot of the things I needed to be aware of. When you have a heart of service, you are not just living for you. I am living for my family and wanted to make sure she was on board.”

Battle’s enlistment also connects him to a legacy of military service within his family. His grandfather worked at Robins Air Force Base, where Battle will now be stationed. Several uncles and brothers-in-law have also served, adding a personal dimension to his choice.

LOOKING AHEAD

As a future Citizen Airman, Battle’s goals are as ambitious as they are heartfelt.

“You don’t know what you don’t know,” he admitted, acknowledging the learning curve ahead. “There’s go-

ing to be some surprises and things I do not have a reference for. I am ready for those moments. Anytime I have to persevere and figure things out, it awakens a portion of me mentally and emotionally, preparing me for anything that will and can come ahead. As a future Citizen Airman, I hope to gain increased preparedness for whatever life throws at me.”

Yet, his focus remains on contributing meaningfully and embodying the servant-leader mentality that has defined his life up to this point.

“I hope that becoming an Airman shapes me to be a version of myself that I’ve never had to be before,” said Battle. “I know it’s going to stretch me and mold me into something new. There is this longing for me to be in rooms and situations with like-minded, like-hearted individuals working toward excellence—and I’m here for it all.”

From the NFL to the Air Force Reserve, Battle’s journey is a testament to resilience, adaptability and a steadfast commitment to serving others. As he embarks on this new chapter, he carries with him not only the skills honed on the gridiron but also the values instilled by his faith, family and community. CA

(Pilch is assigned to the 367th Recruiting Group.)



Maj. Micah D. Bluto, 351st Recruiting Squadron commander, conducts the Oath of Enlistment with Trakeius Battle, a new recruit, at the Duluth, Georgia, recruiting office. (Master Sgt. Bobby Pilch) Opposite page photo shows Battle during his football playing days at the University of Georgia. (Courtesy photo by Radi Nabulsi)



ROUND THE RESERVE



FRIGID TEMPERATURES DON'T SLOW DOWN DOVER MAINTAINERS

Citizen Airmen maintainers recently endured freezing cold temperatures as they maintained C-17 Globemaster III and C-5M Super Galaxy aircraft at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware.

Between Jan. 20 and 25, temperatures plunged to a low of five degrees Fahrenheit and never rose higher than 36 degrees Fahrenheit. For comparison, in 2024 during the same time frame, the temperature never dropped below 17 degrees and climbed to a high of 57 degrees Fahrenheit.

Senior Airman Miles Reid, a 712th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron aircraft hydraulic journeyman on the C-17, said wearing cold weather gear adds a level of difficulty to performing his mission.

"In a job like this, you are constantly using your hands," he said. "It's harder to do things with gloves on, because you lose a lot of dexterity."

Reid said he must also be cognizant of the effects the weather has on the systems he maintains.

"The cold causes things to compress; and, in hydraulic systems, that can mess with the seals on the system," he said. "A bad seal could cause a serious issue if I miss it."

Staff Sgt. Luis Alvarez, a 712th AMXS aerospace propulsion specialist on the C-17, said proper preparation is key to surviving the cold temperatures.

"We install engine covers and exhaust covers to prevent certain parts

of the engine from freezing or seizing up," he said. "This also prevents high winds from blowing debris into areas that can be damaging to the engines."

Senior Master Sgt. Stephen Hart, 512th AMXS shift chief and expeditor, said there is a positive aspect to the bad weather. He said his squadron is getting valuable experience that could be vital to mission success in future missions.

"I think it is very beneficial for our Airmen as a whole to go through this experience to broaden their capabilities," he said. "They are encountering challenges that don't happen around here often. It's only

going to make them stronger maintainers going forward."

Reid said while the cold weather is not pleasant, it is a confidence builder knowing he can still get the mission done.

"It's a good feeling knowing you got something done despite some challenges," he said. "We can't pick the weather, but whether it's hot or cold, we have to be ready to do our part." **CA**

(Jeremy Larlee, 512th Airlift Wing Public Affairs office.)



Staff Sgt. Luis Alvarez (left) and Senior Airman Miles Reid (center), 712th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron aircraft maintainers, discuss a preflight inspection of a C-17 Globemaster III aircraft with Airman First Class Ryan Watson, 736th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron maintainer, at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware. The technical orders for the aircraft contain temperature-related variables they use during frigid temperatures. (Jeremy Larlee)





Deployed members of the 36th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron at Ali Al Salem Air Base, Kuwait. The primary focus for Aeromedical Evacuation Squadrons are to provide rapid and reliable medical evacuation services to save lives of service members. (Courtesy photo)

More than 40 members from the 36th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi, recently completed a six-month deployment supporting multiple combatant command operations, which included Northern, Central and European Commands.

This deployment highlighted the squadron's critical role in providing life-saving medical care and transportation to injured personnel across the theater, said Lt. Col. Shannon Corbin, 36th AES interim commander, adding that AES teams include a medical crew director, flight nurse and three aeromedical evacuation technicians.

During their deployment, unit members collaborated with their sister services to enhance operational readiness and ensure seamless patient care at their deployed locations. The squadron's highly trained aeromedical evacuation teams were tasked with stabilizing and transporting wounded service members from forward-deployed locations to higher-level medical facilities, enabling them to receive advanced care.

"Our primary focus is to provide rapid and reliable medical evacuation services," said Corbin. "This deployment underscores our commitment to saving lives and supporting the health and well-being of our warfighters."

Two first-time deployers agreed that it was an eye-opening experience with maintaining a consistent routine, and said they would do it again.

Capt. Lauren Poulson, 36th AES flight nurse, who was deployed to Ali Al Salem Air Base, Kuwait, said that throughout the deployment, the deployed members utilized C-130J Super Hercules and C-17 Globemaster aircraft, ensuring that medical personnel could operate efficiently in diverse and challenging environments. The aircraft were outfitted with specialized medical equipment, including litter systems, cardiac monitors and oxygen delivery systems, transforming them into flying hospitals capable of addressing various medical emergencies.

Members of the Aeromedical Evacuation team deployed to Ali Al Salem Air Base, Kuwait to participate in an Army helicopter medical rescue and evacuation training during their deployment.

Staff Sgt. Alexis Adeleke, a flight medical technician with the squadron, who was deployed to Ramstein Air Base, Germany, said she flew different mission types: picking up patients from Al Udeid Air Base, Doha, Qatar, and transporting them back to Ramstein and also transferring patients back stateside.

"We had a good variety of missions to choose from and our training helped us prepare to be part of a blended crew that share the same goals, because at the end of the day our job directly impacts the lives of our fellow service members," said Adeleke.

(Jessica L. Kendziorek, 403rd Wing public affairs office.)

ROUND THE RESERVE



CITIZEN AIRMEN AID IN ASTRONAUT RETRIEVAL TRAINING

A joint task force of Guardsmen and Reservists conquered air, space and sea to provide Human Space Flight Support training for astronaut retrieval through search and rescue in January at Patrick Space Force Base, Florida.

Guardsmen from the 204th Airlift Squadron, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, joined hands with Reservists from the 315th Airlift Wing, Joint Base Charleston, South Carolina, and Patrick's 308th Rescue Squadron to train on HSFS search and rescue airdrop techniques, used to retrieve astronauts from open-ocean waters upon returning to Earth.

"The developments in the space industry from 2020, when Hickam originally picked up this alert, until now, show an increase in SpaceX launches to include Boeing Starliner, and now in 2026, the Artemis team," said Maj. Ryan Schieber, 315th Operations Sup-

port Squadron HSFS lead planner.

With the space community growing, the number of HSFS astronaut retrievals also grew to approximately three to four alerts per year. This led the 204th AS to build a joint-task force with the 308th RQS, under the 920th Rescue Wing, as the only Air Force Reserve Command wing that trains and equips combat search and rescue Airmen, and partner with the 315th AW to certify HSFS airdrop search and rescue Airmen.

"We're here to certify the Charleston Reserve aircrew, the pilots and the loadmasters," said Master Sgt. Makaio Roberts, 204th AS HSFS deputy program manager. "They're our Total Force partner with the 308th RQS, as we support the launches and recoveries by working with NASA, SpaceX, Boeing and now the Artemis programs."

In 2025, the 315th AW answered the

call to partner with the 204th AS to become HSFS airdrop qualified. HSFS training opportunities provide reliable training and efficiency for multi-capable Airmen.

"We're conducting realistic drops of both personnel and equipment into an offshore drop zone, simulating how we would locate and recover isolated personnel in a maritime environment," said Capt. Nicolas Walsh, 308th RQS combat rescue officer drop zone controller.

In 7.5 hours of flight time, the joint task force accomplished 10 airdrops, to include 30 pararescuemen jumps, in hostile seas and winter temperatures. Despite the limited availability, experienced airdrop aircrews and maintenance teams excelled in maximizing the use of available resources, ensuring high levels of readiness.

"We drop different pieces of equipment that help to ensure astronauts are able to be rescued in the event of a splashdown and that we have rescue qualifications, so we'll be able to support the real-world launches and recoveries for the HSFS program," Roberts said.

"Space travel is expected to increase, so the search and rescue alert is going to increase, and we will be ready to answer that call," Schieber said. 

(Tech. Sgt. Della Creech, 315th Airlift Wing public affairs office.)



Maj. David Reifenberg, combat rescue officer drop zone controller, 308th Rescue Squadron, Patrick Space Force Base, Florida, free falls from a Joint Base Charleston C-17 Globemaster III, while Senior Master Sgt. George Reed, pararescueman, 308 RQS, prepares to jump, during a Human Space Flight Support airdrop search and rescue exercise. (Tech. Sgt. Della Creech)



Airmen from the 436th and 512th Operations Groups hosted 28 honorary commanders in January at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware.

The local community members' tour included visits to the 9th and 3rd Airlift Squadrons, a C-17 Globemaster III aircraft, the air traffic control tower, the aircrew flight equipment section and the 512th Contingency Response Squadron.

Founded in 1992, the base's honorary commander program pairs local civic and business leaders with senior Team Dover leaders. The honorary commanders cover a wide spectrum of different career fields from Delaware, including educators, state employees and local businesses owners and chief executive officers.

The operations group event was the first tour for the 2025 honorary commander class.

The bond between Team Dover and the local community is a strong one, said Col. Kenny Weiner, 436th Operations Group commander. He said it's vital to continue to nurture the relationship, because local community support is important to the base's mission.

"What we do in terms of our training doesn't happen exclusively on base," he said. "On the simplest level, we fly big loud airplanes all over the local area. It's important our community partners understand what we do and why, and that they are supportive of it."

Weiner said he was also happy to work side-by-side with the 512th Operations Group to host the tour. He said Re-

servists normally serve longer tours here and are critical to maintaining the relationship with the local community.

Col. Jon Bergman, 512th OG commander, said he enjoyed teaming up with his 436th partners because they operate seamlessly together.

"We work with them hand-in-hand on a daily basis with everything across all spectrums of our operations," he said.

Bergman said the partnership with the local community is critical.

"Our community learning what we do on a daily basis is absolutely essential," he said. "The size and scope of the aircraft brings a lot of awe and wonder. It feels great to be able to deliver that to them today and show them what we do."

Patrick Long, Dover Motor Speedway director of events and operations, is Bergman's honorary commander for the 512th OG. He said support from Airmen during NASCAR race weekends is vital, and he enjoyed getting to see where they worked.

"Today has been enlightening to be immersed in the operations group," he said. "To be on the other side of the fence in the Airmen's world allows me to appreciate what they do for us."



(Jeremy Larlee, 512th Airlift Wing public affairs office.)



Lt. Col. Seth Rann, 326th Airlift Squadron pilot, and Kyle Shaffer, 512th Logistics Readiness Squadron honorary commander, discuss the C-17 Globemaster III at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware. (Airman 1st Class Liberty Matthews)

ROUND THE RESERVE



944TH FW JOINS FORCES FOR LIFE-SAVING MISSION AFTER HAWAII FIREWORKS EXPLOSION

In the predawn hours of New Year's Eve, a deadly fireworks explosion in Hawaii sent shockwaves across the islands. Three people tragically lost their lives and 20 more were injured. Six survivors were airlifted aboard an Air Force C-17 from Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii to Phoenix, Arizona, Jan. 4, where they would receive specialized care at Valleywise Medical Center's renowned burn unit.

The mission to safely transport these patients, over extensive distances, was a joint effort between the Air Force Reserve's 944th Fighter Wing, the active-duty Air Force's 56th Fighter Wing, the Phoenix Fire Department and civilian medical professionals.

"This is what we train for, and when the call comes, we're ready," said Capt. Paris Mandy, a clinical nurse with the 944th Aeromedical Staging Squadron.

With their core mission centered on patient movement and stabilization, the 944th ASTS played an instrumental role in this high-stakes operation. From the moment the team was activated, members worked side by side with active-duty Airmen and civilian counterparts to ensure mission success.

Mandy described the mission as a real-world scenario where the unit's extensive training could be directly applied.

"Today, we're not working with mannequins. These are real patients who need us," Mandy said. "It's both humbling and exhilarating to put our skills to work in such a meaningful way."



For an emergency medical support request in response to the New Year's Eve fireworks explosion in Hawaii, Reserve Citizen Airmen from the 944th Fighter Wing's 944th Aeromedical Staging Squadron receive a briefing on patient movement techniques at the 56th Medical Group clinic at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. (Staff Sgt. Alexis Orozco)

For some of the Reservists, including 944th FW ASTS Master Sgt. Elisabeth Yates, this was their first real-world operation.

"This is why we train so rigorously," Yates noted. "When you're called at a moment's notice, readiness is everything. This mission brought all our preparation into sharp focus."

Yates highlighted the critical role Exercise Desert Hammer 25-1, a rigorous annual training exercise conducted by the 944th FW in November, played in preparing them for this moment. The exercise simulates high-pressure, real-world scenarios, requiring rapid adaptability and flawless execution.

"Desert Hammer taught us how to operate at a real-world pace," Yates added. "That training translated directly into our ability to respond effectively today."

The joint nature of this operation was a testament to the power of collaboration.

Capt. Eric Huff, 56th FW Medical Group Director of Tactical Combat Casualty Care, emphasized the importance of teamwork in ensuring patient safety.

"We had to transfer patients from military litters to Phoenix Fire Department gurneys, which required precise coordination," Huff explained. "It's not just about physical strength - it's about communication and synchronization among all teams involved."

The mission also highlighted the human element at the heart of military operations. For 944th FW ASTS Staff Sgt. Nathan Espinoza, the experience was profoundly meaningful.

"Helping people who can't help themselves - that's why I joined," Espinoza said. "Seeing the resilience of these patients and knowing that our efforts are making a difference is incredibly rewarding." 

(Staff Sgt. Alexis Orozco, 944th Fighter Wing public affairs office.)



Airmen from the 446th Airlift Wing, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, participated in Steel Knight '24 at Naval Auxiliary Landing Field, San Clemente Island, California in December. Steel Knight 24 was a joint training exercise that included expeditionary basing operations, airfield seizure operations and austere wet-wing defueling.

Two C-17 Globemaster III's landed at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Arizona on Dec. 6 to conduct mission planning and load equipment for the upcoming simulated mission to San Clemente Island. The 446th AW, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 214 and other units from the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing airlifted Marines and equipment to perform wet-wing defueling escorted by F-35B fighters with short takeoff and vertical landing capabilities.

Steel Knight was the first wet-wing defueling of a C-17 to the new Tactical Aviation Ground Refueling System. Two C-17s delivered more than 78,000 gallons of jet fuel to the TAGRS, allowing the F-35's to extend the range and duration of their lethality and force projection. Once the TAGRS was delivered by C-17 to the airfield, the TAGRS deployed multiple fuel bladder cells parallel to the runway where the fuel was delivered.

The 446th also provided multiple munition carts to the island, supplying the fighters with numerous AIM-120s and GBU-53Bs to resupply the fighters, increasing their lethality.

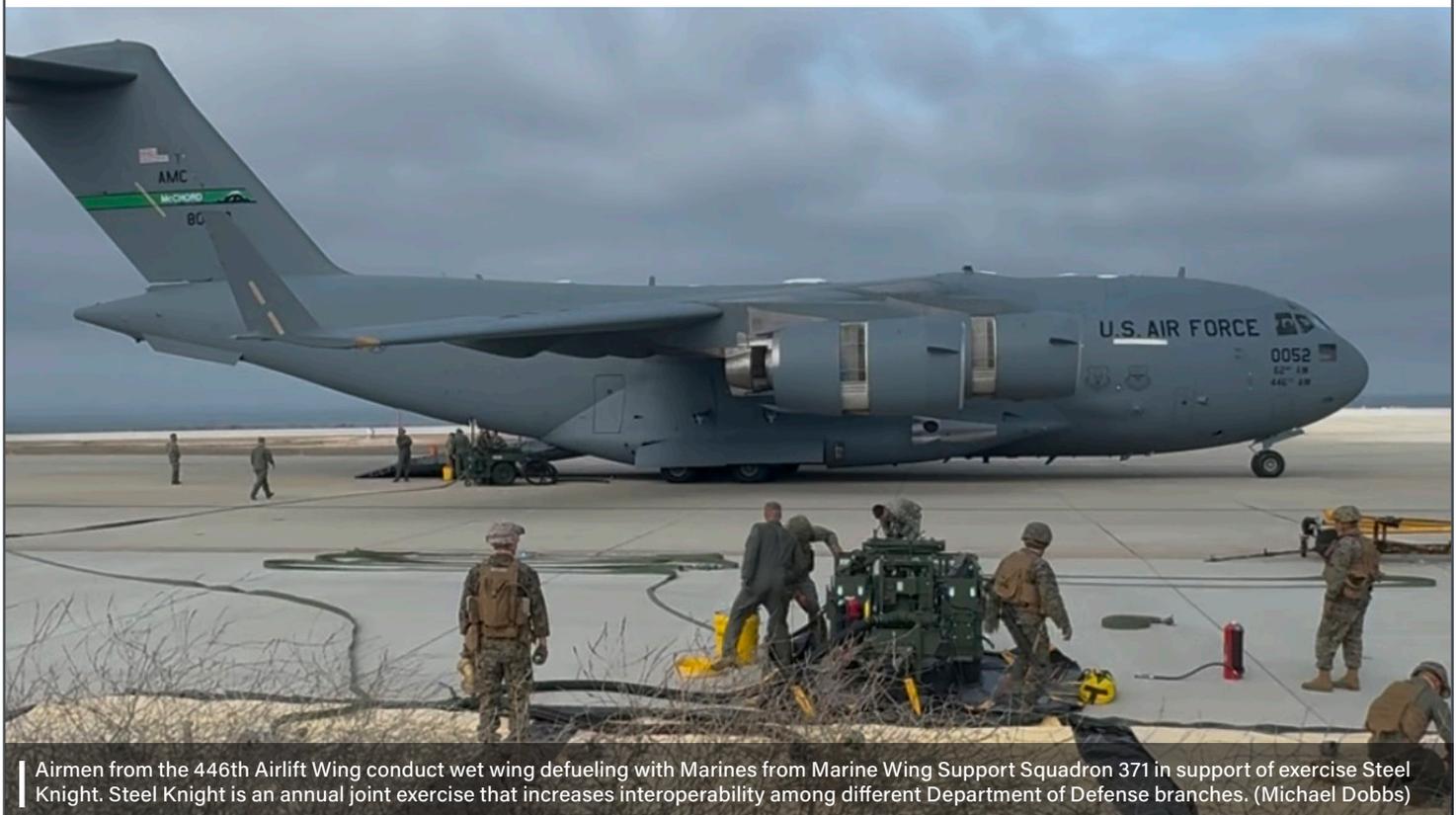
"Joint exercises with units like VMFA-214 are critical to the continued development of our Airmen's training because it allows us to see how to best support our joint partners with the C-17," said Maj. Matthew Walton, C-17 Weapons Officer and 446th Steel Knight lead planner. "The C-17 plays a significant role in the joint maneuver force, especially in the INDOPACOM theater. These opportunities have an operational level impact by building relationships at the tactical level."

This joint exercise used a simulated environment where all personnel and equipment were airlifted into theater, while securing contested airspace, and providing more than 78,000 gallons of jet fuel to support continued operations.

Overall, the exercise allowed both Airmen and Marines the opportunity to perfect expeditionary basing operations in a contested environment while building interoperability and lethality, said Walton.

"The lessons learned from sharing the airspace with other branches while adding the additional stress of simulated contested airspace allows us the opportunity to identify areas where we can become more lethal and deliver American airpower when and where it's needed," said Walton. 

(Michael Dobbs, 446th Airlift Wing public affairs office.)



Airmen from the 446th Airlift Wing conduct wet wing defueling with Marines from Marine Wing Support Squadron 371 in support of exercise Steel Knight. Steel Knight is an annual joint exercise that increases interoperability among different Department of Defense branches. (Michael Dobbs)

ROUND THE RESERVE



WING INDUCTS HONORARY COMMANDERS TO STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY TIES

The 403rd Wing, Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi, welcomed 17 community leaders into the 2025 Honorary Commander Program during an induction ceremony in January.

The honorary commander program invites local community leaders to partner with military commanders to foster a better understanding of the challenges and contributions of the 403rd Wing.

"Our goal is to strengthen the bond between the Air Force Reserve and the community we serve," said Col. John Benson, 403rd Wing commander, to the new group of inductees. "Throughout your tenure as an honorary commander, you will get a firsthand look at our mission and Reservists' contributions to national security. In return we encourage you share your expertise with us, so we learn about your organizations, and the needs and

concerns of the Gulf Coast community. You are our ambassadors who share our story to the broader population to demystify the military's role in local and national context in a time when less than 1% of the U.S. population serves in the military and recruiting Airmen is a challenge."

Honorary Commander Lori Frazier, the chief financial officer with Harrison County Development Commission, is paired with Col. Elissa Granderson, 403rd Operations Group commander.

"I enjoyed listening to Col. Benson and learning about the challenges the wing faces," she said. "By learning more about the wing we can work together, exchange information and ideas, and it will go a long way in strengthening relationships. I look forward to learning about the wing's operations and how we can help."

After the ceremony, the honorary commanders attended a tour of one of the wing's 10 WC-130J Super Hercules aircraft flown by the 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron. The wing also has 10 C-130Js, which are flown by the 815th Airlift Squadron, a tactical airlift unit. Throughout the honorary commander's two-year tenure, they will gain perspective on the wing operations through tours, briefings, change of command ceremonies and other wing events.

"Programs like this are important to ensure mission success," said Benson. "We are excited to have these community leaders as part of our wing. As Reservists the support of our families, employers and community is vital." 

(Lt. Col. Marnee A.C. Losurdo, 403rd Wing public affairs office.)



The 403rd Wing, an Air Force Reserve unit at Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi, welcomed 17 community leaders into the 2025 Honorary Commander Program during an induction ceremony in January. (Senior Airman Emily Bloodworth)



DID YOU KNOW?

To remain in compliance with DAFMAN 48-123, Air Reserve Component service members are required to report all medical or dental treatment obtained through civilian sources to the primary care team or ARC medical unit within 72 hours. This includes any illness, injury, disease, operative procedure or hospitalization not previously reported to their commander or supervisor and to the supporting medical facility personnel.

The providers at your Reserve Medical Unit (RMU) review the severity of the condition and the treatment provided and may issue an AF469 profile. Failure to report treatment received through civilian sources can delay or prevent medical clearance for exercises and deployments. If your RMU finds unreported treatment through MH Genesis that they have not verified they will not clear you.

Stay ready! Report your civilian-sourced care so your RMU can do their part and make sure you'll be cleared to go when your nation needs you!



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