

# Desert Lightning News

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

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### FEATURE



Airman 1st Class Kaitlyn J. Erghis

#### RALLY IN THE ROCKIES 2021

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## 55th RQS wins rescue squadron of the year second year in a row

By Airman 1st Class  
WILLIAM TURNBULL

355th Wing Public Affairs

The 55th Rescue Squadron "Night Hawks" won the That Others May Live Foundation Rescue Squadron of the Year award for the second year in a row at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Sept. 21.

This annual award is presented to an active duty, Air National Guard or Air Force Reserve rescue unit that scores highest in the categories of mission events, combat effectiveness, squadron accomplishments and community relations. This year the award was held at the Headquarters Air Force level.

"This award really demonstrates the hard work that the 55th RQS has put in," said U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Benjamin Link, 55th RQS acting director of operations. "With the way we train, we are always ready to take on the challenges that are presented to us."

This is the fourth time that a rescue squadron from Davis-Monthan Air Force Base has won the rescue squadron of the year award.

Members of the 55th RQS were recognized as the most combat ready helicopter unit, ready to deploy wherever and when-

ever by deploying to a far range, open-ocean rescue mission which required six aerial refuelings in treacherous weather conditions, resulting in one sailor being saved.

The 55th RQS credited their award to their team members, in addition to the behind the scenes members who make the rescue missions happen.

"There is no way we could do it without all of our support folks like the maintainers and all of the people who deal with the paperwork," said Senior Master Sgt. Brian Yorke, 55th RQS senior enlisted leader. "Support from the 355th Wing helps us push the tactical edge, which is what Night Hawks do."

The Night Hawks made history as the first first HH-60G Pave Hawk unit invited to exercise Gunfighter Flag, initiating and planning the first weapons and terminal area employment competition, and planning and leading the first joint-contested maritime combat search and rescue exercise.

The Night Hawks embody the ethos of "Always Ready, Always There."

*Editor's note: The mention of the nonprofit organization That Others May Live does not constitute endorsement of affiliation by Davis-Monthan Air Force Base or the U.S. Air Force.*



Courtesy Photo

Senior Master Sgt. Brian Yorke, 55th Rescue Squadron senior enlisted leader, gives a speech after accepting the That Others May Live Foundation Rescue Squadron of the Year award at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Sept. 21. This is the fourth time that a Davis-Monthan rescue squadron has won the award.



Airman 1st Class William Turnbull

The 2021 That Others May Live Foundation Rescue Squadron of the Year award sits alongside two of the other rescue squadron of the year awards at the 55th Rescue Squadron at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Sept. 21. The award was presented at the Headquarters Air Force level and this is the second consecutive year that the 55th RQS has won it.

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# After seven years as FAO, new 755th OSS commander's career comes full circle

55th Wing Public Affairs

At first glance of the new 755th Operations Support Squadron commander's biography, you quickly see his assignment makes a lot of sense, given his many years within the EC-130 Compass Call and 55th Electronic Combat Group community.

However, if you dig a little deeper, it's pretty clear that Lt. Col. Kabir Rao has led anything but a standard career with the jammers.

From his start as an EC-130 electronic warfare officer in initial qualification training in 2006, to accepting the 755th OSS guidon in 2021, there is a seven-year period where he served with the Air Force Foreign Area Officer program.

For those unfamiliar with the FAO program, the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines all have officers that specialize in a certain geographical area around the globe.

"Within the Air Force, FAOs are regional experts who operate in unique international, joint and interagency roles, often with significant interaction with senior military and civilian officials from the U.S., allies and partners," said Lt. Col. Timothy Stokes, Air Force International Affairs. "Ultimately, the career field optimizes the Air Force's ability to strengthen our alliances and partnerships in 21st century strategic competition."

As a young EWO, Rao had heard about the FAO program and was intrigued by it, as someone who grew up in India and emigrated to the U.S. as a 15-year-old.

"I have always been interested in geopolitics, and once I heard about the program, I had hopes to serve as an FAO," he said.

Unfortunately, at that time the FAO program, then known as Regional Affairs Strategists, was not as robust and fully developed as it is today, so getting information about it proved challenging.

The story of how Rao actually became an Air Force FAO is truly one of happenstance.



**Lt. Col. Kabir Rao, 755th Operations Support Squadron commander, poses for a photo with the Commanding General of the Philippine Air Force in 2019 as an Air Force Foreign Area Officer. As a squadron commander, Rao is not currently serving as an FAO, but he remains certified and is an active mentor in the FAO community.**



Courtesy photos

**Lt. Col. Kabir Rao accepts the 755th Operations Support Squadron guidon from Col. George Cundiff, 55th Electronic Combat Group commander, during a change of command ceremony June 18, at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base. Rao is as an EC-130 Compass Call electronic warfare officer, who served in the Air Force Foreign Area Officer program for seven years prior to taking command.**

"I happened to be at an Indian restaurant in Tucson and heard a white gentleman speaking in Urdu while paying for his food," he said. "This is something that intrigued me and I approached him and asked him if he was military intelligence or a diplomat. Of course, he was taken aback with my question, so I had to explain my rationale, which was that if he was speaking Spanish, he wouldn't stand out, but Urdu in Tucson doesn't fit."

As it turns out, the individual happened to be an air attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, and was in town visiting a friend. Rao explained his background, education and overall interest in the program and at that point was put in contact with the Air Force IA office and encouraged to apply.

Those selected for the FAO program generally attend the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, Calif., where they earn a master's in international relations, prior to attending the Defense Language Institute, where they specialize in a specific language.

However, Rao was selected as a direct accession into the FAO program since he already had a master's in international relations and was fluent in Urdu, Punjabi and Hindi. He was certified in 2013 and served as a security cooperation officer as part of a country team on two occasions, once at the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi, India, and the other in Manila, Philippines.

"Both the assignments were incredible, since our daily job informs national level policy," he said. "The U.S. Embassy India assignment was particularly great, as this was the same embassy I visited as a child to get a visa to visit my mother in the U.S., but was denied."

"Poetic and full circle in a way," he added.

Though Rao is not currently serving in an FAO assignment, he remains a certified FAO and an active mentor in the FAO community.

"I am currently focused on my responsibilities as a commander, but look forward to serving in the capacity as an FAO again in the future," he said. "Also, if there are future opportunities to permanently make the transition as an FAO, which is what I hope to do."

The FAO program was restructured in January 2021 as part of the Air Force's broader reorientation toward strategic competition. Prior to that, the FAO program operated as a secondary career field, where officers alternated assignments between their main Air Force specialty code and FAO duties. Now, qualified officers can voluntarily

See CAREER, Page 9



**Lt. Col. Kabir Rao, 755th Operations Support Squadron commander, poses for a photo along with members of the Philippine Air Force during a trip to Georgia in 2018 as an Air Force Foreign Area Officer. Rao was certified in 2013 as an FAO and served as a security cooperation officer as part of a country team on two occasions, once at the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi, India, and the other in Manila, Philippines.**



# Welcome Home Hero recognized at University of Arizona

**By Airman 1st CLASS VAUGHN WEBER**

355 Wing Public Affairs

Senior Airman Jacob Foster was recognized for his exemplary efforts to execute crucial and humanitarian missions by the University of Arizona at their football game in Tucson, Sept. 11.

Foster recently returned from a deployment in Southwest Asia, where he supported multiple operations including Inherent Resolve, Freedom's Sentinel and Resolute Support. Along with supporting these operations, Foster was involved in providing vital disaster relief following the 7.2 magnitude earthquake that devastated Haiti.



Senior Airman Alex Miller

Col. Joseph Turnham, 355th Wing commander, watches fireworks at a University of Arizona football game in Tucson, Sept. 11. The University of Arizona hosted military members from Davis-Monthan Air Force Base on the 20th Anniversary of 9/11.

"It was an honor and a privilege to be selected out of the more than 11,000 Airmen we currently have at Davis-Monthan," said Foster, 612th Air Operations Center senior duty technician.

The annual DM 50 and University of Arizona football game and tailgate provided the opportunity for Foster and other military members to connect with the Tucson community.

"The DM 50 members get to learn about what our Airmen do and how they support Davis-Monthan and the 355th Wing's mission" said Heike Smith, 355th Wing Protocol Office chief. "Our Airmen also get to see how much the Tucson community supports Davis-Monthan."

DM 50 is a civic leader organization that supports DM Airmen. They host this event along with the University of Arizona, so Airmen can enjoy some of what Tucson has to offer.

Foster was recognized during the second quarter of the game along with 355th Wing leadership and Davis-Monthan's Youth Impact members.

Foster is an example of how Davis-Monthan is preparing its Airmen for the high-end fight, and the 15-year event partnership Davis-Monthan has kept with the University of Arizona and DM 50 civic leader organization.



Senior Airman Alex Miller



Airman 1st Class Vaughn Weber

Chief Master Sgt. Dana Council, 355th Wing command chief, speaks with University of Arizona personnel on Sept. 11 in Tucson. The University of Arizona hosted military members from Davis-Monthan Air Force Base on the 20th Anniversary of 9/11.

LEFT: Senior Airman Jacob Foster and his wife pose for a photo after being recognized at the University of Arizona game on Sept. 11 in Tucson. Foster was recognized for his efforts to help with various operations in Southwest Asia and being involved in a humanitarian mission in Haiti after the 7.2 magnitude earthquake.



Airman 1st Class Vaughn Weber

Davis-Monthan Air Force Base's Honor Guard presents the colors at the University of Arizona on Sept. 11 in Tucson. The significance of the 9/11 attacks is not lost after 20 years and the University of Arizona remembers those who were lost on that day.

## Desert Lightning News

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# True North initiative fortifies resilience

Story and photos by  
Airman 1st Class  
WILLIAM TURNBULL

355th Wing Public Affairs

situation that needs attention, this is the group of professionals that Airmen look to for direction.

The event included a shooting competition in the morning, lunch at the 48th Rescue Squadron and an informational briefing

See NORTH, Page 9



**Tim Stearns, 355th Wing True North program manager, gives a briefing on Aug. 11 at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base. True North embeds psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, chaplains and religious affairs Airmen into units, making access to helping services readily available in the same building.**



**Airman 1st Class William Turnbull**

**An Airman fires at a target during a shooting competition on Aug. 11 at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base. The True North event focused on instilling and reinforcing the multi-capable Airman skills that junior Airmen are expected to learn.**

First sergeants from across the 355th Wing attended a True North resiliency event at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Aug. 11.

The True North program is a resilience program that embeds providers and spiritual leaders within squadrons and groups. The embedded structure is the strength of the program because it enables access to resources. The program's goal is to normalize help-seeking behavior, optimize performance and increase resilience of the force and their families.

DM implemented True North in October 2020 and is one of only 16 bases to have the program at this time. More bases will be added as the program continues to roll out.

"True North seeks to build resilient service members and families primarily by embedding service providers of different sorts in the units themselves," said Bonnie Scott, True North program manager. "We embed psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, chaplains and religious affairs Airmen so that the helping services are right there in the unit."

This event directly targeted DM's first sergeants because they are the 355th Wing's problem solvers. When there is a



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A U.S. Air Force C-130J Super Hercules assigned to the 815th Airlift Squadron sits on the flight line at Rifle Garfield County Airport, Colo., Sept. 15. The 815th Airlift Squadron supported the 354th Fighter Squadron during Rally in the Rockies, an Agile Combat Employment exercise, by airlifting equipment, personnel and fuel to austere locations to ensure ready and lethal air mobility in contested environments.

# RALLY IN T



U.S. Air Force A-10 Thunderbolt IIs, assigned to the 354th Fighter Squadron, are on the flight line at Peterson Air Force Base, Colo., Sept. 15. The 354th Fighter Squadron is deployed to austere locations in the Rocky Mountains during Rally in the Rockies exercise to perform agile maneuvering tactics, establish command and control capabilities and efficiently establish command and control capabilities for personnel.



Airmen from the 354th Fighter Squadron and 327th Airlift Squadron attach a fuel line on the flight line at Montrose Regional Airport, Colo., Sept. 14. Both squadrons played a significant role during Rally in the Rockies.

Photos by Airman 1st Class Kaitlyn J. Ergish



Staff Sgt. Tyler Zack, 327th Airlift Squadron, is a commissioned officer at Peterson Air Force Base, Colo., Sept. 15. He is performing his duty title in support of the exercise.





# THE ROCKIES 2021



...ned to the 354th Fighter Squadron, taxi down Colo., Sept. 16. The 354th FS forward de- Mountains during a Rally in the Rockies ex- cs, enhance Airmen multi-capable skills and l capabilities with minimal equipment and



A U.S. Air Force 354th Fighter Squadron A-10 Thunderbolt II pilot walks across the flight line at Peterson Air Force Base, Colo., Sept. 16.



A forklift operator loads a fuel bladder onto a U.S. Air Force C-130J Super Hercules assigned to the 327th Airlift Squadron at Peterson Air Force Base, Colo., Sept. 14. The 327th Airlift Squadron supported the 354 Fighter Squadron during Rally in the Rockies, an Agile Combat Employment exercise, by airlifting fuel to austere locations and quickly refueling jets, ensuring ready and lethal mobility in contested environments.



...ck, 354th Fighter Squadron Commander Support Section non- icer in charge, performs communication operations at Peterson olo., Sept. 15. Zack forward deployed to Peterson AFB during a es exercise with the 354th FS, assisting in extra tasks outside of pport of the mission as a multi-capable Airman.



A U.S. Air Force 354th Fighter Squadron pilot performs post flight checks on an A-10 Thunderbolt II at Peterson Air Force Base, Colo., Sept. 16. The 354th FS forward deployed to austere locations in the Rocky Mountains during a Rally in the Rockies exercise to perform agile maneuvering tactics, enhance Airmen multi-capable skills and efficiently establish command and control capabilities with minimal equipment and personnel.



LEFT: Air- men assigned to the 355th Maintenance Group service an A-10 Thunderbolt II at Peterson Air Force Base, Colo., Sept. 16. Members with the 355th MXG forward de- ployed to austere locations in the Rocky Mountains during a Rally in the Rockies.



LEFT: A U.S. Air Force pilot assigned to the 327th Airlift Squadron flies a C-130J Super Hercules over the Rocky Mountains, Colo., Sept. 14. The 327th Airlift Squadron supported the 354 Fighter Squadron during Rally in the Rockies, by airlifting fuel to austere locations and quickly refueling A-10 Thunderbolt IIs, ensuring ready and lethal air mobility in contested environments.



# 355th Operations Support Squadron visits Mt. Lemmon



*RIGHT: An Airman from the 25th Operational Weather Squadron puts together a TMQ-53 Tactical Meteorological Observing System during seasonal training at Mount Lemmon, Ariz., Sept. 17. The 355th Operations Support Squadron Weather Flight and the 25th Operational Weather Squadron conducted hands-on training with the TMQ-53 to prepare for austere environments to keep the mission going in a deployed location.*



*LEFT: Staff Sgt. Vanessa Williams from the 355th Operations Support Squadron Weather Flight briefs the flight and the 25th Operational Weather Squadron on the TMQ-53 Tactical Meteorological Observing System during seasonal training at Mount Lemmon, Ariz., Sept. 17.*

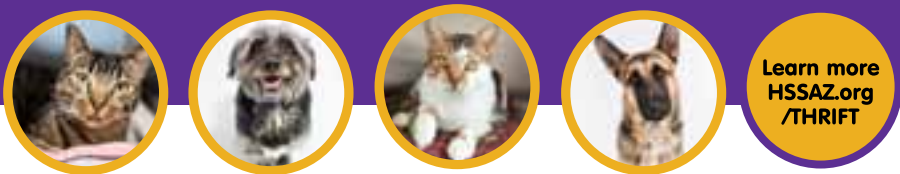
Photos by Senior Airman Alex Miller

Airmen from the 355th Operations Support Squadron Weather Flight and the 25th Operational Weather Squadron put together a TMQ-53 Tactical Meteorological Observing System during seasonal training at Mount Lemmon, Ariz., Sept. 17. The TMQ-53 is a portable, automated weather station used to "Guide Those Who Fly," which is the motto of the 355th OSS, in missions around the world.

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**CAREER** *(from Page 2)*

apply to crossflow into the FAO core career field.

“The transition is expected to increase FAO effectiveness with our allies, partners and in the joint community by focusing FAO development on international Airmen skills and experiences, rather than challenging officers to hit milestones in two separate career fields,” Stokes said. “This historic change showcases the continuing process under which (Air Force International Affairs) is innovating in efficient and effective ways to meet the growing demand signal for critical international Airmen skills.”

Rao said those wanting to become an FAO should only pursue it for one reason and that is to support the U.S. government in that capacity anywhere in the world.

“It is hard work with long hours, but it will be one of the most rewarding things they do in their career,” he said. “Anyone that is interested shouldn’t hesitate to take the leap. They won’t regret it.”

As a new squadron commander, Rao is able to lean upon his experiences as an FAO to relate the unit’s everyday mission to what is going on around the globe.

“In many ways, having the FAO experience has helped me communicate to our squadron about what we in the ops world do,” he said. “Specifically, tying what we do into the strategic context of how ops help meet our strategic objectives worldwide.”

The 755th OSS is a geographically separated unit of the 55th Wing under the 55th ECG at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz.



Courtesy photo

**Lt. Col. Kabir Rao, 755th Operations Support Squadron commander, poses for a photo with then-Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David L. Goldfein during a trip to Manila, Philippines as an Air Force Foreign Area Officer in 2019. Prior to serving as squadron commander, Rao was in the FAO program for seven years.**

**NORTH** *(from Page 4)*

on what services True North provides to the units.

“The event was designed to improve first sergeant resiliency through team building,” said U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Cody Tutt, 48th Rescue Squadron first sergeant. “They also learned the same multi-capable Airmen skills we are asking our Airmen to learn and developed a leadership mindset that is focused on Agile Combat Employ-

ment.” True North’s foundation is mental and spiritual health — two of the four pillars of Air Force resiliency. Resiliency is more than a resiliency day or single event, it is a way of life that ensures our physical, mental, spiritual and social reserves are ready to meet life’s inevitable struggles. By focusing on these lines of effort, first sergeants and other leaders can focus on developing the Air Force’s greatest resource, Airmen.



Airman 1st Class William Turnbull

**An Airman inspects a target used during a shooting competition during a True North resiliency event on Aug. 11 at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base.**

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# Davis-Monthan AFB honors those lost on Sept. 11, 2001



**LEFT:** A fireman's hat and two axes posed in remembrance of the first responders lost on 9/11. The significance of the 9/11 attacks is not lost after 20 years, as the 355th Wing remembers those who were lost on that day.



Photos by Airman 1st Class Vaughn Weber

**Davis-Monthan Air Force Base's Honor Guard presents the colors during a remembrance ceremony on Sept. 10 at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base. The significance of the 9/11 attacks is not lost after 20 years, as the 355th Wing remembers those who were lost on that day.**



**LEFT:** The 355th Wing's Security Forces Squadron honors those lost on 9/11 during a remembrance ceremony at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Sept. 10.



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