THE MOBILITY FORUM

THE MAGAZINE OF AIR MOBILITY COMMAND | SUMMER 2026

Critical Thinking in the Age of AI

The Air Force Safety Center at Thirty

Just Culture: Turning Incidents Into Safer Systems

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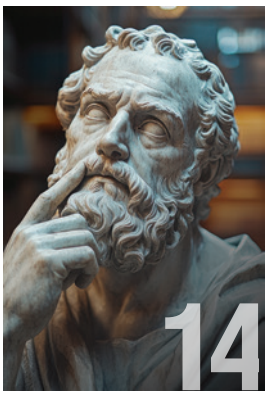

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A C-130J Super Hercules was on display during a fireworks show at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, July 4, 2025. The two-day festival was held in celebration of Independence Day and included carnival rides, games, food vendors, live musical entertainment, and a fireworks show.

USAF photo by SrA Brenden Beezley

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Arc to Final

BY COL JOHN B. KELLEY, DIRECTOR OF SAFETY, AIR MOBILITY COMMAND

The journey from beginner and novice to expert and instructor in a skill is an interesting arc that we all experience throughout our lives, often multiple times. Within a relatively short time, Airmen achieve a high level of proficiency in their chosen specialty. After proficiency and mastery has been achieved, it can be difficult to look back at earlier phases of your career and wonder how you once struggled mightily with a skill you now take for granted. My own flying career has followed this model.

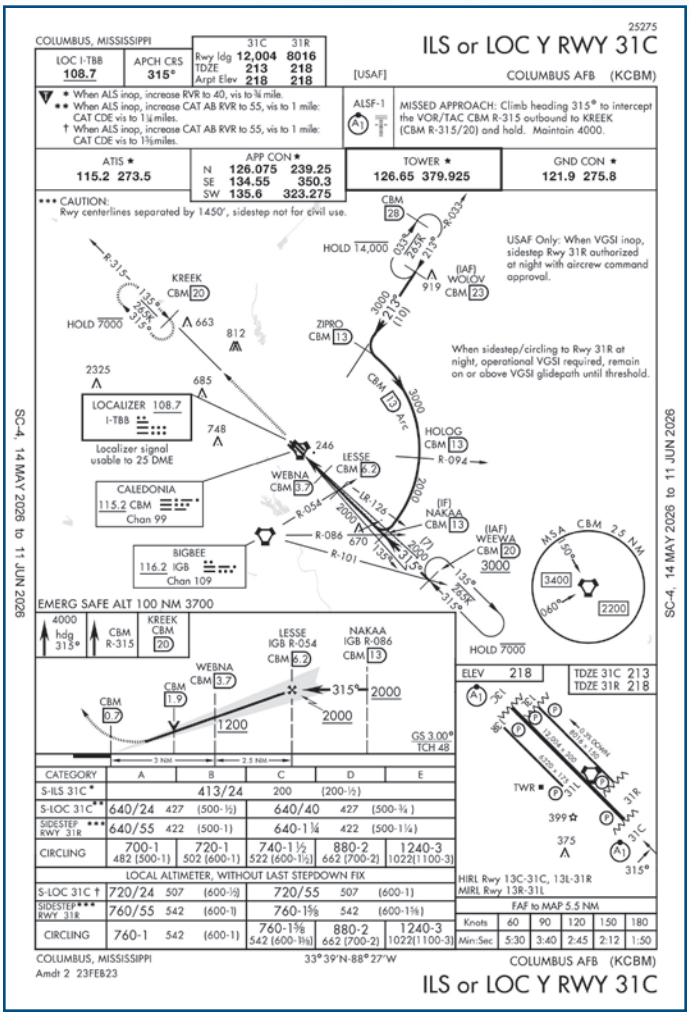
Back in the deep recesses of time, when I was learning to fly the venerable Cessna T-37B, one of the early complicated procedures I encountered was the arc-to-final instrument approach. This procedure allows an aircraft that is not aligned with the runway to smoothly intercept a large circular path around an airport and maintain that arc while descending below the clouds. When the aircraft is nearly aligned with the runway, the pilot makes a quick turn to the final approach course for landing.

In theory, this procedure is designed to lower an aviator's workload and make things easier. However, to a young pilot trainee, it is the equivalent of flying the aircraft while solving a Rubik's Cube and balancing on a greased beach ball. Inevitably, those first attempts were met with frustration, brain ache, and the repeated blows from an instructor pilot's checklist against your helmet (or so the story goes … this definitely, positively didn't happen to me). If I

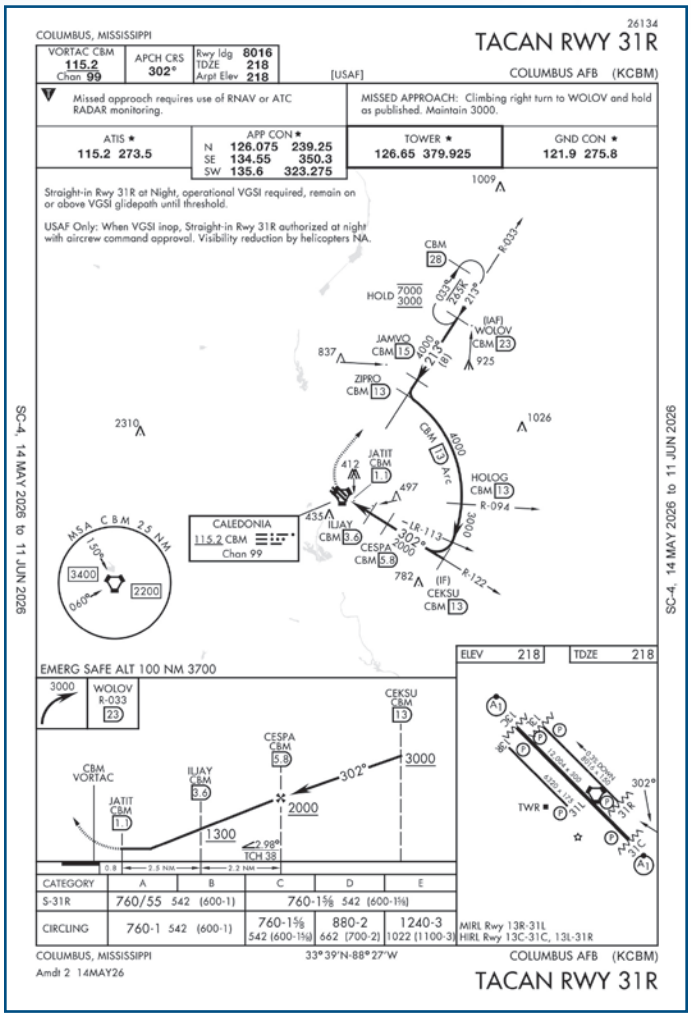
The real mindset we need to impart to our Airmen starts with why safe mission execution is a combat enabler and is, in the long run, better.

Photo above: A T-37 Tweet aircraft from the 85th Flying Training Squadron, Laughlin Air Force Base, Texas, flies over Lake Amistad during a training mission.

Photo by SSgt Andy Dunaway, USAF



Example 1. Arc to final procedures



Example 2. Arc to final procedures

flew an arc-to-final approach now, it would be as routine as tying my shoes (or hitting a student with a checklist … which I would definitely, positively never do).

Mastery of the skill of safety is no different for any of us—including me. Airmen are introduced early to safe practices, whether in flying, confined spaces, explosives, or any of a dozen other disciplines. Yet true development of safety skills comes through on-the-job experience and, for some lucky individuals, assignment to a safety position. Over the course of my two-and-a-half years as Air Mobility Command's (AMC) Chief Safety Officer, I have been granted the opportunity to learn and appreciate the safety profession in ways few others are afforded. During that time, I discovered several insights that all Safety Airmen can apply as they work to make a difference.

HAVING A SAFETY MINDSET

For many Airmen, early encounters with safety principles involved learning how a task was "supposed" to be accomplished. That instruction may have been followed by guidance on how the task is "actually" performed in the shop or on the flight line. These two sets of instructions were likely not the same; the former emphasizing safety, the later prioritizing speed. The mindset in the work areas can sometimes become some version of the following: "The likelihood of a mishap is low and the pressure to perform the mission is high—if we take a few shortcuts, we go faster and the boss is happy."

Young Airmen tend to take cues from more experienced personnel and emulate their practices to fit in and avoid being the rookie, the noob, or the "FNG." Peer pressure is a real thing, from a brand-new Airman Basic to a salty old Colonel. If we are fortunate, experience teaches us the value of the safer procedure, even if it takes longer. Oftentimes, it is a "close call" or a "near hit" that turns us into zealots for the safer approach.

The mindset we ultimately need to impart to Airmen is this: safe mission execution enables combat readiness. A safety mindset accepts that Airmen will be under operational pressures to perform with speed and accuracy. It also recognizes that through a lack of safety discipline, mishaps, even relatively minor ones, can cancel out any operational advantage. Airmen with training, motivation, and discipline in safety procedures create a durable combat capability, one that can endure indefinitely. Once a safety mindset is adopted, innovation can begin to create safer and faster ways to accomplish the task and mission

UNDERSTANDING RISK: A LIFE HACK

Before becoming AMC's Director of Safety, I served at the 618th Air Operations Center here at Scott Air Force Base, IL, formerly called the Tanker Airlift Control Center (TACC). There, we viewed risk through the lens of rapid and timely execution of worldwide mobility missions. Risks we managed for crews included weather, landing conditions, and access to rest and nutritious meals (that last item may sound minor, but trust me when I say one poorly chosen gas-station sushi dinner by a crew will one hundred percent delay a mission by at least a day!). When I transitioned to AMC Safety, my appreciation and understanding of risk broadened considerably.

Every day, we are confronted with risk, both in our personal and professional lives. Longtime readers of *The Mobility Forum* are familiar with the concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic risk. Risk, at its core, is the product of the severity of a poor outcome (negligible, moderate, critical, or catastrophic) and the frequency of that outcome (rarely, seldom, occasional, likely, or frequently). Once an Airman develops the ability to make decisions informed by risk, their view of the world and the actions they take change for the better. This risk-based decision skill extends beyond safety, it informs countless other areas of life, from retirement investing (Pokémon cards versus a Roth Individual Retirement Account) to fashion and hairstyles (at-home coloring vs. salon coloring.) Not all risks can be avoided; yet changing how you think about risk and make decisions based on that thinking can make an extraordinary difference.

Not all risks can be avoided; yet changing how you think about risk and make decisions based on that thinking can make an extraordinary difference.

BEING INTERESTED AND CARING

Many years ago, I served with a Chief Master Sergeant who often spoke about the day he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and the day he joined the Air Force. Squadron members would ask why those were not the same day. His answer was simple: he enlisted for what the Air Force could do for him, but he joined on the day he began caring about what he could do for the Air Force. For him, the turning point came when it stopped being "the" Air Force and became "his" Air Force. That admission was a powerful validation, as I had recently "joined" the Air Force as well. In the safety world, this revelation frees you to embrace the safety role, be a vigorous advocate for safety, and be enthusiastic when discussing it.

Safety, as an enterprise, needs its advocates and cheerleaders at every level and echelon; it needs Airmen who can embrace the safety calling, be outspoken, and be inclusive. This may not make an individual the coolest Airman, but it may secure your spot as the most trusted. A running joke with my staff, after I deliver an impassioned safety speech, is that I can no longer be "cool," I can only be "interesting." However, I've recently changed "interesting" to "be interested"—that is, be interested in Airmen doing the job and the challenges they face. When safety professionals go into the field and are genuinely interested and caring, they are rewarded with deeper insights into our safety climate and culture. These interactions also fortify the trust Airmen have in their leadership to keep them safe and operating at their highest level.

SHORT FINAL

There you have it, a short list of touchstones and observations from my tenure as your AMC Director of Safety. Like any good story arc, or arc-to-final approach, the journey hasn't always been easy, but it has been rewarding, and we've emerged from the clouds in a safer and better place.

Along the way, I've gained a profound appreciation for the safety enterprise and the members who endeavor to keep Airmen safe day after day, across all disciplines. Since this is my final article as Director of Safety, it seems fitting to thank all the AMC Safety staff for their trust in me, support, and incredible work over the years. I also owe Tatiana Torres and the Schatz Strategy Group staff enormous gratitude for their skill and dedication in making *The Mobility Forum* the premier safety publication in the Air Force.

And to all the AMC Safety Airmen out there—from Little Rock to McConnell, McChord to Dover, and everywhere in between—it has been a singular honor to be on this grand safety journey with you. Keep leading, keep caring, and Aim High!

Train Harder Than the Fight:
Maj Gen Cole on Readiness, Risk, and Resilient Airmen

BY MS. LAUREN FOSNOT, STAFF WRITER

Maj Gen Darren R. Cole, Commander, 21st Air Force – U.S. Air Force Expeditionary Center, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, NJ

"I think all Airmen—and people, in general—are more capable than we realize. Challenges are what help us grow and build a lasting confidence. In the military, we're all going to face adversity—but we'll overcome it together."

History shows that the greatest breakthroughs come when someone pushes beyond what was once considered the limit, from the first supersonic flight with U.S. Air Force Capt Charles Yeager in 1947 to recent missions that redefined mobility operations, including OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, which demonstrated the ability to maintain around-the-clock, high-volume, intra-theater logistics.

Progress has always belonged to those willing to exceed expectations.

For Maj Gen Darren R. Cole, readiness is about surpassing perceived limits—training beyond comfort, building confidence through adversity, and preparing Airmen to meet and exceed the demands of the fight.

His leadership philosophy was not shaped by a single assignment or defining moment, but by a conglomeration of experiences. Those experiences mostly centered on helping others grow through challenges, and cemented his conviction on the potential that lies within every Airman. "I think all Airmen—and people, in general—are more capable than we realize. Challenges are what help us grow and build lasting confidence. In the military, we're all going to face adversity—but we'll overcome it together."

That belief now guides how he leads the 21st Air Force and U.S. Air Force Expeditionary Center, with the expectation that readiness is built by pushing beyond what seems possible.

BUILDING RESILIENT, MISSION-READY AIRMEN

Cole's priorities boil down to three straightforward principles:

1. Build resilient, mission-ready Airmen and Air Expeditionary Wings.
2. Generate readiness.
3. Continuously improve the mission.

"My overall philosophy is to train hard, exercise hard, and build the readiness to win," he said. Building resiliency, as Cole described, begins with fundamentals that focus on fitness in all its aspects, sharpening technical skills, and committing to ongoing professional development to ensure each Airman is prepared for seen and unforeseen demands. This foundation supports his second principle: generating readiness. Cole emphasized a strong focus on the Air Force Force Generation deployment model and leveraging large-scale exercises (e.g., Storm Flag and the Department Level Exercise) to strengthen and validate capabilities.

Acting alongside adaptability and readiness is continuous improvement. "Once we've built resilient Airmen, my focus then is on innovating

through technology and process improvement," he explained. These efforts are also nested within Air Mobility Command's broader strategy and directly support Airmen, the mission, and the command's key lines of effort.

SAFETY AS A FOUNDATION

Military operations are inherently complex, involving unpredictable, ambiguous, and often rapidly changing elements. As complexity increases, safety remains paramount. "Safety is definitely foundational," Cole stressed. "I never want to do the enemy's job for them and take resources off the battlefield."

To maintain this foundation, operational risk management (ORM) is embedded into daily operations. For instance, "The ORM process plays out in an aircrew's pre-flight briefing. They review their individual ORM, and then the Aircraft Commander puts that together into how they are equipped to go do their job that day," he explained.

But process alone is not enough; leadership is essential to ensure safety measures actually work in practice. "We've got to follow up that individual ORM process with very present leadership engagement to check on those processes, how they're working, and to see if our Airmen look like they're performing normally or if something is out of condition and might need some more attention."

INNOVATING THE FUTURE FIGHT

Tools and evolving operational concepts are reshaping how the force builds and sustains readiness. "Technology, innovation, and evolving concepts are really kind of defining where we are at as a service," Cole said.

Across the command, exercises are no longer exclusively training events; exercises are proving grounds.

From left to right, Col Justin Longmire, 436th Airlift Wing (436 AW) Deputy Commander; CMSgt Elijah Edwards, 436 AW Command Chief; Col Jamil Musa, 436 AW Commander; Maj Gen Darren Cole, 21st Air Force and U.S. Expeditionary Center (21 AF and USAFEC) Commander; CMSgt Dennis Fuselier, 21 AF and USAFEC Command Chief; and Col Shane Rogers, 21 AF and USAFEC Deputy Commander, stand for a photo during an immersion tour at Dover Air Force Base, DE, Dec. 9, 2025.

USAF photo by SrA Trenten Walters

Leaders are increasingly using the events to prototype and refine concepts in combat-representative environments before those capabilities are needed in real-world operations. "Some really good examples that have come out of that are Rapid Dragon, as well as advancements in beyond line-of-sight connectivity and smaller equipment [Unit Type Codes] that make us much more agile and responsive—driven by current and future threat environments."

At the staff level, exercise planning and data analytics are improving how limited resources are optimized. "We're making great strides in exercise planning in order to optimize limited resources and get predictive in our ability to look at readiness via data analytics," Cole explained.

The long-term goal is to better align and schedule efforts across major commands so mission generation force elements can be combined into larger Air Expeditionary Wing exercises, maximizing valuable training time.

EVERY AIRMAN IS A RISK MANAGER

Looking ahead, Cole's message to mobility Airmen is clear: everyone is responsible. "Every Airman [plays] a very direct role in readiness and mission success," he stated.

"Preparation, discipline, and professionalism make a huge difference at every level." This standard means training will be demanding, as readiness is not built in comfort. "Know that I'm going to train them harder than the fight," Cole continued.

Every Airman must also think critically about risk, with each assuming the role of a Risk Manager. From Cole's perspective, open, transparent communication is what makes that possible; clear dialogue across the force allows units to push harder in training and maintain the discipline required to execute operations safely and effectively.

The balance of resiliency, readiness, responsibility, improvement, and safety underpins Cole's broader philosophy: prepare rigorously, lead with discipline, and build Airmen who are ready—to maneuver to win.

Risk Management Annual Refresher Training

BY MR. KEVIN SLUSS, CSP, AIR MOBILITY COMMAND RISK MANAGEMENT PROCESS MANAGER

If you have been in the U.S. Air Force (AF) over the last couple of years, you should have participated in the Chief of Staff's Integrating Risk and Readiness initiative. As part of that effort, everyone received a Risk Management (RM) Fundamentals update, and then, during Phase II of the campaign, a Risk Management Annual Refresher Training. As implied by the name, the annual refresher is just that and is now detailed in the new version of Department of the Air Force (DAF) Instruction (DAFI) 90-802, *Risk Management*. The continuing refresher has changed from what was done during Phase II.

First, the big news: **Real-World Counts!** If you perform an actual or exercise Deliberate Risk Assessment using the DD Form 2977, *Deliberate Risk Assessment Worksheet*, you can receive credit for the annual refresher. If you were part of a team that helped create a more extensive risk assessment (e.g., a wing-wide exercise or airshow), that also counts. Participants in said activity or exercise may receive refresher credit if participating in the risk assessment. What could that participation look like? One would expect a pre-task briefing (e.g., mission brief, tailgate talk) with RM as a discussed item, that covers all the requirements for the annual refresher:

DAFI90-802 20 JANUARY 2026

4.1.4. Risk Management Annual Refresher Training (RM ART). This training is mandatory for all DAF personnel, military and civilian **(Tier 1 requirement (T-1)).**

4.1.4.1. RM ART must include, at a minimum, the Five-Step RM Process, Deliberate versus Real-Time RM, risk decision-making authority, individual responsibilities, and a minimum of one practical exercise or applied real-world deliberate risk-assessment event **(T-1).**

4.1.4.2. Training materials that support RM ART, including PowerPoint slides and exercise scenarios, are available on the Air Force Safety Center (AFSEC) Risk Management Air Force Portal. Units will tailor these materials to meet local training needs and mission priorities.

4.1.4.3. Completion of RM ART will be documented by Unit Training Managers (UTMs) within the DAF's enterprise learning management system, myLearning, using the RM ART entry **(T-1).**

Second, no self-enrollment method exists. The myLearning event for RM ART is the same item but is not associated with a particular year. Once input, the credit is good for 365 days before it becomes due again. It still requires a UTM to input the completion date for everyone, so the completion date must be provided. Each wing in AMC has been advised to publish a policy governing the execution of RM ART that works for the wing. It could be delegated to unit RM representatives or unit safety representatives to determine satisfactory completion and notice to a UTM. Contact your wing RM advisor or instructor for more information.

Third, the classroom option remains available for those who need it. The revised AMC Lesson Plan dated March 2026 was distributed to wings to assist facilitators. Unlike in Phase II, no qualifications are required for facilitators leading the class. Facilitators should lead the group through a discussion of a scenario, either one provided by AFSEC or a create-your-own scenario. Following the training, the names of those who completed the training are provided to a UTM. The wing RM advisor or instructor can provide those materials.

The continuing RM ART assists the AF to ensure RM is inculcated into all AF activities. Obtaining credit for real-world or exercise RM activities encourages AF efforts. Look for ways to add RM assessments to all activities.

Safety I and Safety II: What Does It Mean to Be Safe?

BY MAJ BEN DICKTER, CHIEF AND AVIATION PSYCHOLOGIST, OPERATIONS RISK ASSESSMENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM, SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE, IL

A C-130J Super Hercules assigned to the 36th Airlift Squadron undergoes maintenance on the flightline at Yokota Air Base, Japan, Feb. 6, 2026.

USAF photo by A1C David S. Calcote

Consider the question: What makes a system "safe"?

For decades, aviation has defined safety as the absence of mishaps. We measure success by tracking the number of specified events over a specified period of time. For example, Air Mobility Command (AMC) had zero fatal air mishaps in 2025. Using this metric, which assumes safety comes from maintaining an acceptably low number of adverse events, the command appears safer than American Airlines, which in January 2025 experienced a fatal mishap over the Potomac River.

However, this traditional way of thinking has limits. With complex airspace, advanced aircraft, and ever-evolving mission expectations, modern flight environments involve dynamic interactions and considerable unpredictability. Unfortunately, the safety systems that evolved in the mid-twentieth century remain rigid and are unsustainable in the modern world. Therefore, we must shift our perspective from focusing solely on why things go wrong to understanding why things so often go right.

THE WORLD OF SAFETY I: FINDING AND FIXING

Safety I, the traditional safety management model, has dominated aviation since the early days of flight. When the concept was developed, aircraft were simple, and the operational environment lacked complexity and interdependence. At its core, Safety I operates under a simple directive: *understand what went wrong and stop it from happening again*.

This directive makes several assumptions about the chain of events leading to a mishap, including that events can be viewed as a "cable link chain." In this view, an event can be deconstructed into core parts that occur one after another, leading directly to an adverse outcome. These links appear in a bimodal manner: they either work or fail. When a link fails, the mishap is primarily the output of that failure which caused cascading failures further down the chain. From this perspective, a mishap investigation only needs to find the broken link to fix the chain and prevent a future mishap.

Have you seen this "find and fix" chain metaphor in the safety world?

Downstream consequences of the "find and fix" mindset include:

1. **Safety begins with a mishap.** The "find and fix" mentality necessarily waits for an adverse event to occur before analysis begins. This consequence is most apparent for preventing mishap recurrence, but also applies to proactive safety models where a deviation, warning light, or other event kickstarts analysis.

Avionics Journeymen SrA Muki Njunge, 374th Maintenance Group, Yokota Air Base, Japan, checks flight equipment.

USAF photo by A1C David S. Calcote

SrA Benjamin Spencer and SrA Gabriel Teska, 374th Maintenance Group, Yokota Air Base, Japan, troubleshoot the autopilot on a C-130J Super Hercules, Feb. 6, 2026.

USAF photo by A1C David S. Calcote

2. **Variability is seen as a threat.** Systems are designed for specific actions and functions. Deviations from "work as imagined" increase variability and therefore the risk of an adverse event.

3. **The greatest lessons come from the worst events.** Large deviations from "work as imagined" produce outcomes far from intended safe mission completion. Thus, the worst mishaps are treated as the most important learning opportunities.

4. **Humans are liabilities.** The variability of human performance is viewed as a threat to safety and must be reduced. The prevalence of "human error" in training and investigations demonstrates these concerns.

Critically, Safety I has led to remarkable improvements in aviation design, maintenance, training, and performance. By leveraging a Safety I perspective, the Air Force Safety Center has reduced fatal mishaps to an all-time low. However, the consequences of a Safety I mindset place a lower limit on its effectiveness as more advanced technologies and tactics are incorporated. Stated another way, as systems become more complex, mishaps become rarer, and events to analyze become fewer. Eventually, we will see a decreasing marginal usefulness of Safety I efforts. This is where an expanded focus becomes necessary.

THE EXPANSION TO SAFETY II: MAKING GOOD THINGS HAPPEN

Introduced by Professor Erik Hollnagel,[1] Safety II offers a different paradigm. It redefines safety not as the absence of accidents, but as the ability to succeed under varying conditions. Instead of asking why things go wrong, Safety II asks: *Why do things go right almost all the time?*

This approach recognizes that the mission environment, aircraft, and crew interactions make up a complex system in which small changes in one domain can have unintended effects in another. In a Safety II world, mission success does not depend on rigid adherence to procedures but on skilled aircrew who adapt to meet the changing nature of the environment. Under this concept, variability is neither good nor bad; it must be monitored to ensure your mission system (aircraft, crew, and environment) remains within control.

[1] Hollnagel, E. (2014). *Safety-I and Safety-II: The Past and Future of Safety Management.* CRC Press.

Adopting a Safety II mindset leads to alternatives to the consequences of Safety I:

1. **Safety is a constant.** To ensure as many things as possible go right, Safety II requires learning from the thousands of successful flights rather than the handful of failures.

2. **Variability is a safety tool.** The "work as imagined" concept is frequently contradicted by the "work as done" interaction with reality. Organizations that learn from small variations across the crew force can harness "work as done" to disseminate best practices.

3. **Focus on success.** Major mishaps provide powerful (and sometimes tragic) lessons but are extremely rare. Minor, unpredictable variations occur on every flight. The thousands of daily successes, where crews adapt and overcome to mid-mission challenges, provide far more valuable and repeatable insights. This approach fosters continuous, incremental improvement over time, compared to sharp, reactive changes in the wake of a single failure.

4. **Humans are resources.** The ability to predict, adapt, and accomplish

Airmen assigned to the 374 Air Expeditionary Wing, Yokota Air Base, Japan, conduct engine maintenance on a C-130J Super Hercules at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, Dec. 11, 2025.

USAF photo by SrA Samantha White

the mission makes humans irreplaceable. In other words, Safety I suggests that if not for human error, the mission would have been safe. Safety II suggests that if not for the human at the controls, the mission would not occur at all.

Investing in Safety II is therefore an investment in performance and productivity. By understanding what leads to optimal outcomes, organizations can disseminate those techniques and make operations more effective, even when no mishap occurs. For AMC, Safety II seeks to use all available data to maximize mission success.

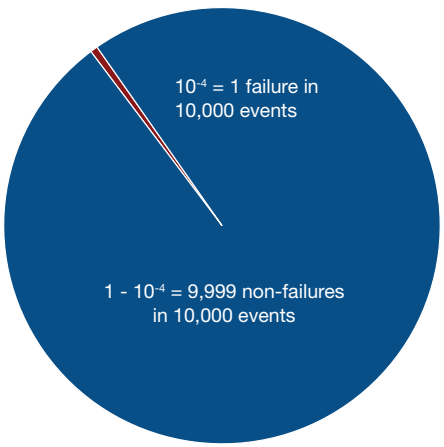


Figure 1: The imbalance between things that go right and things that go wrong.[2]

[2] From Hollnagel E., Wears R.L. and Braithwaite J. (2015). Safety-I to Safety-II: A White Paper. The Resilient Health Care Net: Published simultaneously by the University of Southern Denmark, University of Florida, USA, and Macquarie University, Australia.

BEST PRACTICES: COMBINING SAFETY I AND SAFETY II IN AMC

Safety I has led to a historic decline in mishap rates across the Air Force, and AMC recently won an institutional award for best Major Command Safety Office. The way forward is not to replace Safety I but to widen the path to incorporate a Safety II perspective. The key is to maintain two perspectives: one that investigates system failure (Safety I) and another that asks what was working before and what changed (Safety II). AMC Air Operations maintains two programs as extensions of the Safety I principles, but are well-positioned to take advantage of a Safety II perspective:

- **Military Flight Operations Quality Assurance (MFOQA):** Often regarded as "Big Brother," MFOQA analysts examine hundreds of aircraft sensor data to identify specific events and behaviors that may lead to undesirable aircraft states, allowing the command to understand "work as done." MFOQA analysis can identify how crews consistently and successfully adapt to changing weather, minor system anomalies, or air traffic congestion. Additionally, analysis can identify a "drift" toward undesirable habit patterns long before a mishap occurs, shifting safety from a reactive to a proactive and predictive science.

- **Aviation Safety Action Program (ASAP):** ASAP provides crews with an opportunity to report safety issues and errors without fear of reprisal. It offers AMC staff a looking glass into the realities of "work as done." ASAP reports provide a foundation of Just Culture, where honest mistakes are viewed as opportunities. A Safety II-aligned ASAP would increase focus on reports describing success stories, purposeful decision-making, or behavioral changes that enabled mission success despite unexpected threats or errors.

To maintain its success trajectory, AMC aims to increase its focus on what goes right. The staff is shifting from solely "proactive safety" to a broader investment in aircrew human performance. With Safety II in mind, MFOQA and ASAP will enable AMC Air Operations to understand and strengthen the skills that create success every single day.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

As an AMC member, you can apply these principles today by:

- Viewing safety on a spectrum. Instead of a binary safe/unsafe view, see safety as a range from a minor deviation to a mishap. When you see a deviation, ask, "What else would need to happen for this to become a mishap?" This helps anticipate and build systemic resilience.

- Asking, when something goes wrong, how it used to go right. Failure is usually an unexpected combination of everyday performance variability. What was different this time?

- Looking for why things go right. Success is not an accident. Things go right because someone made a sensible adjustment based on the demands of a situation. Share those successes! If you are an aircrew member, **send us an ASAP**.

AIR MOBILITY COMMAND

Well Done Award

These Airmen were recognized with Well Done Awards for their exceptional critical thinking, outstanding team coordination, and rapid, decisive execution during mission operations. Their ability to assess dynamic situations and deliver timely, effective solutions directly contributed to mission success. Their professionalism and unwavering commitment to excellence reflect the highest standards of Air Mobility Command.

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Air Force Safety Center Announces Unit Risk Forecasting Tool

BY AIR FORCE SAFETY CENTER PUBLIC AFFAIRS

On Jan. 14, 2026, the Air Force Safety Center (AFSEC) announced the Unit Risk Forecasting tool would be available for commanders and unit safety professionals. Unit Risk Forecasting is a machine learning-fueled forecast of squadron risk and the factors influencing increased risk.

The Unit Risk Forecasting tool utilizes over a decade of historical safety data, unit personnel data, predictive capabilities, and mitigation strategies developed by safety professionals to give commanders and decision-makers a visual toolkit to minimize risk at the unit level.

Each squadron's mishap history and unit demographic information are used to train the forecasting model. Once the machine learns patterns in the data, those patterns are recorded in a model that takes in squadron information and outputs a risk forecast. Every month, new information is fed into the model, and the resulting risk forecast is displayed on a Command Summary Page.

While the Unit Risk Forecasting tool is not a mishap predictor, it is a way to quantify a unit's risk level and assist commanders and safety staff with risk mitigation strategies. By reducing mishaps, combat power and lethality are increased.

"This tool will help increase combat readiness by reducing mishaps and giving decision-makers access to information about mishaps, current and future risk profiles, and top factors driving risk for targeted and efficient risk reduction," said Laura Pick, Chief of Analytics and Chief Injury Epidemiologist. "This is part of a suite of proactive, predictive tools the Department of the Air Force (DAF) is driving toward to empower commanders' decisions with data-driven information."

This Unit Risk Forecasting demonstration slide depicts some of the information provided to commanders.

Commanders and safety personnel will have the ability to filter through several variables in the Command Summary Page and see how each variable either drives risk up or down. This gives commanders data to support advocating for scheduling, manning, funding, and other resources or changes.

Each risk driver correlates to a series of mitigation suggestions. Mitigation strategies were developed by AFSEC safety experts. The strategy provides a description of what each variable indicates, followed by a series of mitigations a commander or safety professional could address to reduce elevated risk.

"Our intent is to develop analytical tools to assist commanders with proactive risk reduction, mishap prevention, and maximized readiness," said Pick. "Giving them actionable data to stay one step ahead of potential challenges and risks in their organizations."

DAF safety is committed to employing emerging and innovative technology tools to provide predictive and, eventually, prescriptive analytical products to drive risk-informed decisions to operational commands across the DAF.

"Unit Risk Forecasting allows DAF safety to be at the cutting edge of operating in a dynamic, data-driven environment," said Brig Gen Otis Jones, DAF Chief of Safety. "By allowing commanders, safety personnel, and decision-makers to see their unit's risk level at a glance, their unit's top risk drivers, and targeted mitigation recommendations, we are enabling leaders to make risk-informed decisions that will safeguard Airmen and Guardians without sacrificing mission success."

For more information on the Unit Risk Forecasting tool, visit our page at **www.safety.af.mil/Divisions/Operational-Support-Division/Analysis-and-Cyberspace-Operations/Unit-Risk-Forecasting/**.

JUST CULTURE:
Turning Incidents Into Safer Systems

BY MS. LAUREN FOSNOT, STAFF WRITER

When an incident occurs, it is often not the first time something has gone wrong, but the first time the issue has been brought to light. Surfacing problems early creates opportunities to prevent future mishaps and strengthen systems.

However, speaking up is not easy. Reporting a mistake, especially one you have made or one involving a teammate, can feel uncomfortable. That hesitation is exactly what Just Culture aims to address.

At its core, Just Culture shifts how organizations view incidents. Instead of focusing on blame, it emphasizes learning, trust, and accountability—helping Airmen and leaders alike see safety reporting as a tool for improvement rather than a source of shame.

Maj Taylor Pearce, a Flight Safety Officer with Air Combat Command's 55th Wing at Offutt Air Force Base, NE, provided his expertise to *The Mobility Forum*, an Air Mobility Command Safety Office (AMC SE) publication, including discussions with AMC safety personnel and other groups during the 2025 AMC Safety Conference, where he explained how Just Culture works in practice and why it is essential to building trust, accountability, and effective safety reporting across AMC.

BUILDING TRUST FROM THE TOP DOWN

Pearce describes Just Culture as "an atmosphere of trust in which people from the top to the bottom of the organization are encouraged or even rewarded for providing safety-related information, but in which they are also clear about where the line must be drawn for acceptable and unacceptable behavior."

In his role at Offutt AFB, Pearce serves as both a safety investigator and an advisor to wing leadership. Implementing Just Culture has strengthened both responsibilities. It enables more effective safety investigations while giving commanders consistent guidance on how to respond to mishaps.

"Just Culture allows leaders to expect honest mistakes and expect those mistakes to be reported," Pearce said. "In return, Airmen can trust that they won't be punished unless there is malice, neglect, or willful misconduct."

That trust, he emphasized, must start with leadership.

OVERCOMING FEAR OF REPRISAL

One of the biggest barriers to self-reporting is fear: fear of punishment, damage to one's reputation, or career consequences. Pearce noted that a healthy reporting culture depends on Airmen believing their leadership truly has their backs.

At Offutt, leaders use the Just Culture matrix to guide post-mishap decisions. The matrix helps commanders identify root causes and select responses that promote learning and long-term risk reduction rather than defaulting to individual punishment. Just as importantly, it gives Airmen clarity about what behaviors are acceptable and where accountability applies.

Airmen assigned to the 437th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron attach engine covers to a C-17 Globemaster III during a post-flight inspection at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, AK, Jan. 21, 2026.

USAF photo by SrA Luke Hirsch

FROM REPORTING TO REAL CHANGE

This approach has produced tangible results. Offutt uses the Airman Safety Action Program Safety Reporting (ASAP/SAFEREP) program and an internal Proactive Safety Report system. Since fiscal year 2021, this emphasis on reporting has led to a three-hundred percent increase in ASAP submissions.

While specific cases remain protected, Pearce shared that multiple reports have led directly to checklist changes. Increased reporting has also made it easier to identify trends early—allowing risks to be addressed before they escalate.

SAFETY AS AN INVITATION, NOT A WARNING

Deliberate misconduct, reckless behavior, intentional disregard for procedures, or repeated unsafe actions may still require disciplinary action, and Airmen should use best judgment.

For Pearce, one of the most powerful aspects of Just Culture is its ability to empower Airmen at every level.

"'Be safe' is no longer a threat with consequences," he said. "It's an invitation to be a player at the table."

Just Culture allows Airmen to be part of the solution. If a process feels unsafe, inefficient, or nonsensical, speaking up is not just allowed—it is encouraged.

OWNING SAFETY AT EVERY LEVEL

Pearce describes three tiers of safety reporting:

- **Tier I:** Identifying an issue with a system, process, or procedure.
- **Tier II:** Identifying an issue involving someone else.
- **Tier III:** Identifying an issue involving yourself.

All three tiers are valid and valuable. As trust within an organization grows, leaders should expect to see more Tier III reports, where Airmen openly share their own mistakes so others can learn from them.

"If you made a mistake," Pearce said, "chances are, someone else has—or will."

LOOKING AHEAD

As AMC modernizes and its mission environments evolve, Pearce believes Just Culture will remain essential. Designed for high-risk, high-reliability organizations, it helps prevent mishaps before they happen while enabling Airmen to make more confident, informed safety decisions.

He also addressed a common misconception: Just Culture does not eliminate accountability.

"There are absolutely situations where punishment is warranted," Pearce said. "What Just Culture does is increase learning, trust, and accountability."

Ultimately, this philosophy is not about avoiding responsibility. It is about using transparency and trust to build safer systems—for today's missions and tomorrow's challenges.

Critical Thinking in the Age of AI

BY MR. JOSEPH FONTANAZZA, STAFF WRITER

A screenshot appears in a chat and looks like breaking news. It might be a cropped headline with a "BREAKING" banner, or a repost with a new caption added. The language is confident and urgent. Within minutes, the image can do what used to take a full story or an official statement. People react to what they see, not what they can confirm.

Propaganda is messaging built to steer an audience toward a belief or response. It is designed to feel obvious, and it is repeated until it sticks.

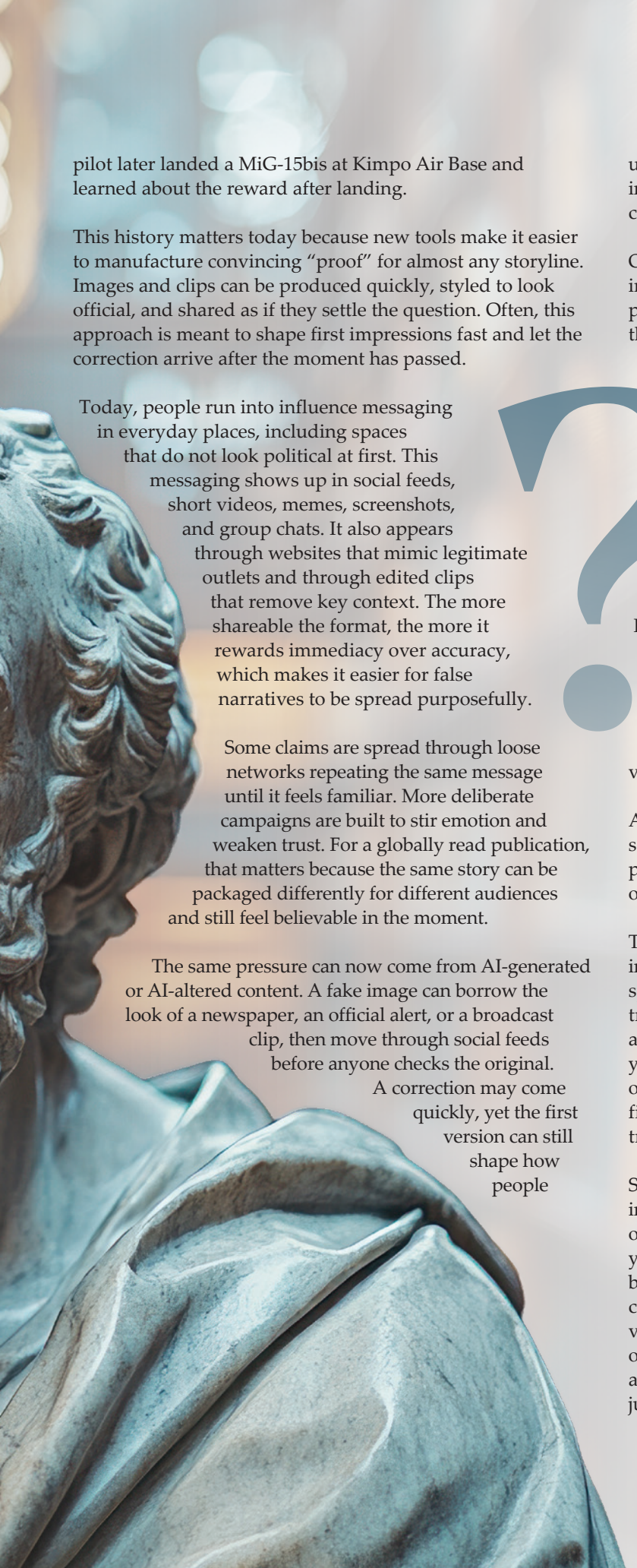
World War II shows how influence can spread through repetition and presentation, often more than through detailed argument. One airpower-related example was the use of U.S. Office of War Information psychological warfare leaflets in the Pacific. These leaflets were designed to be dropped by air over Japan and Japanese-occupied territory, including from B-29 Superfortress bombers. The delivery method mattered because aircraft could place the message over areas that other media could not reliably reach. By the end of the war, tens of millions of leaflets had been dropped over Japan. Each leaflet carried a short message meant to shape how people understood the war and the choices available to them.

That is the goal of this type of messaging. When it shows up everywhere, it shapes what feels normal. Persuasion can support useful habits, including caution with sensitive information during a national effort. It can also narrow what people see by leaving out context or presenting one version of events as the only reasonable one. In military settings, influence can be aimed directly at morale and decision-making.

Operation Moolah during the Korean War is another airpower example. In 1953, U.S. Far East Command offered $100,000 for the first intact MiG-15 delivered to United Nations forces. The aircraft had major intelligence value because U.S. pilots had faced the MiG-15 in combat, and an intact aircraft could be studied and flight-tested. The offer also carried a message to enemy pilots: defection had a reward, and the other side was willing to receive them. No enemy pilot accepted the offer before the armistice, though a North Korean

pilot later landed a MiG-15bis at Kimpo Air Base and learned about the reward after landing.

This history matters today because new tools make it easier to manufacture convincing "proof" for almost any storyline. Images and clips can be produced quickly, styled to look official, and shared as if they settle the question. Often, this approach is meant to shape first impressions fast and let the correction arrive after the moment has passed.



Today, people run into influence messaging in everyday places, including spaces that do not look political at first. This messaging shows up in social feeds, short videos, memes, screenshots, and group chats. It also appears through websites that mimic legitimate outlets and through edited clips that remove key context. The more shareable the format, the more it rewards immediacy over accuracy, which makes it easier for false narratives to be spread purposefully.

Some claims are spread through loose networks repeating the same message until it feels familiar. More deliberate campaigns are built to stir emotion and weaken trust. For a globally read publication, that matters because the same story can be packaged differently for different audiences and still feel believable in the moment.

The same pressure can now come from AI-generated or AI-altered content. A fake image can borrow the look of a newspaper, an official alert, or a broadcast clip, then move through social feeds before anyone checks the original. A correction may come quickly, yet the first version can still shape how people understand the event. That impression matters in a military-information environment, where a false image can create confusion around operations, aircraft, or partner forces.

One recent airpower-related case involved a fabricated image that appeared to show a Daily Telegraph front page praising the Pakistan Air Force. Reuters found no evidence that the newspaper published the headline, and other fact-checkers assessed the image as possibly or likely AI generated. The image borrowed the look of a familiar publication and attached that credibility to a claim about airpower. For readers moving quickly, the fake front page could feel like outside confirmation instead of another unverified post.

Another defense-related example shows how quickly an AI-generated image can travel. In May 2023, an image claiming to show an explosion near the Pentagon spread quickly online. The Department of Defense said there was no explosion, and Reuters reported that the image appeared to be AI generated. The false claim moved quickly because it looked like a breaking update involving a major defense location. A convincing image and an urgent caption pushed the story forward before verification caught up.

Across these examples, the pattern is consistent. When something looks credible and feels urgent, it creates pressure to react immediately, and that pressure can override good judgment.

The practical goal is to protect judgment in a fast and noisy information environment. Screenshots and cropped clips spread quickly because they hide where they came from, so treat an image as a lead, not as proof. Before sharing, pause and look for the original source and a fuller version of what you are seeing. Then, check whether a reliable outlet or official channel confirms the underlying claim. If all you can find are reposts of the same image with shifting captions, treat it as unverified.

Sharing is where good intentions can still spread false information. Reposting a fake image to criticize it, warn others, or ask if it is real still pushes it to new people. If you would not share it at work without checking, pause before sending it in a group chat. When you do need to correct misinformation, providing a reliable source or a verified correction instead of reposting the image itself is often helpful. Verify first, then decide whether it is worth amplifying at all. In a fast information environment, judgment is a readiness skill.

THE AIR FORCE SAFETY CENTER at 30

BY AIR FORCE SAFETY CENTER PUBLIC AFFAIRS

In 2026, the Air Force Safety Center (AFSEC) is commemorating its thirtieth anniversary, marking three decades of dedicated service to maximizing safety across the United States Department of the Air Force (DAF).

Safety was originally designated under the Office of the Inspector General at Norton Air Force Base (AFB), CA, shortly after the U.S. Air Force became a separate department in 1947. In 1992, safety became a separate entity with the creation of the Air Force Chief of Safety (CoS) position.

AFSEC was activated on Jan. 1, 1996, as a result of recommendations accepted from the Blue Ribbon Panel on Aviation in 1995, which consolidated all safety functions at Kirtland AFB, NM.

And though the people, location, and tasks may have changed, one thing that has not changed is the core mission to build readiness and enable combat power by protecting lives.

"As we look back and consider where we have been and appreciate our heritage, we should also consider our future and where we are going," said Brig Gen Otis Jones, DAF CoS and AFSEC Commander. "We should celebrate our successes and be excited for where we're headed next."

The safety center's work extends beyond reactive investigations. The center proactively analyzes data, identifies trends, and develops innovative solutions to address emerging safety challenges. Through cutting-edge training programs, comprehensive safety policies, and collaborative partnerships, AFSEC empowers Airmen and Guardians to make informed decisions and prioritize safety in all their operations.

One of the biggest changes AFSEC has seen in recent years was the creation of the United States Space Force (USSF) on Dec. 20, 2019.

While AFSEC has had a space mission since before the USSF standup, the mission has evolved to encompass a broader scope. Two key areas of space safety are system safety and operations safety. These responsibilities include policy, program, guidance, and oversight of prelaunch, launch, orbital, reentry, and end-of-life safety programs for space systems.

Since DAF was created in 1947, air safety has been a top priority. Aviation safety consists of safety-trained flight, engineering, and wildlife professionals preserving warfighting capability by establishing aviation safety policy. They oversee the aviation mishap investigation process, the collection and accuracy of flight safety data, and the disposition of risk-mitigating actions. Additionally, they provide proactive and reactive engineering and operational analyses of flight safety issues. Aviation safety is constantly evolving to embrace changes in aviation, new technologies, and organizational structures.

Occupational safety is unique in that it affects every Airman and Guardian, while other safety disciplines often cover specialized areas such as aviation, space, and weapons activities. Occupational safety also encompasses traffic safety, which includes educating Airmen and Guardians on traffic safety topics such as motor vehicles, motorcycles, and tactical vehicles. The very first

USAF photo by SSgt Colleen Anthony

"The Air Force Safety Center's Thirtieth anniversary is a powerful reminder that safety is not just a priority; it's integral to mission success."

ground safety program was created in response to Gen Henry "Hap" Arnold, General of the United States Army Air Forces, becoming aware that many of the hospitalized injuries sustained were due to jeep accidents rather than combat. Today, occupational safety leads safety investigations for all ground, motor vehicle, afloat, and off-duty military mishaps.

Weapons safety encompasses guidance and oversight of nuclear surety and safety policy for the development and operational use of all nuclear, conventional, and directed energy weapons systems. This includes all aspects from storage and assembling, testing, transporting, and delivery. Weapons safety ensures the application of corrective actions and mishap inclusion for weapon-related mishaps. The department also performs radiation safety oversight, explosives hazard classification, mishap prevention programs, mishap investigations, and staff assistance in its areas of responsibility.

Human performance is an essential part of DAF safety because humans are always in the loop. Human factors describe how our interaction with tools, tasks, working environments, and other people influence human performance. All safety university courses for safety professionals, physiologists, psychologists, medical doctors, and anyone involved in mishap investigations incorporate a human factors curriculum, including the Department of Defense Human Factors Analysis and Classification System. DAF does not want mishaps to occur and actively works to avoid them. However, when they do occur, it is important to examine the human contribution to the mishap sequence to identify vulnerabilities in the system.

DAF safety also includes training and force development. By educating Airmen and Guardians in safety principles, risk management, and mishap investigation, these personnel can proactively identify hazards and manage risks to prevent mishaps. Nearly twelve hundred DAF personnel in safety roles and approximately two thousand personnel in other career fields assigned to safety offices receive DAF safety training every year. DAF safety training and education ensure the continuous professional development of safety professionals, and all personnel assigned to safety staff throughout the Air and Space Forces.

"The Air Force Safety Center's thirtieth anniversary is a powerful reminder that safety is not just a priority; it's integral to mission success," said Jones. "We are proud of our legacy and dedicated to building an even safer future for the warfighter through innovation and proactive risk management."

AFSEC's thirtieth anniversary is not just a celebration of the past; it is a reaffirmation of its commitment to a safer future for the Air and Space Forces. This milestone will include a yearlong celebration, filled with engagements designed to connect both internal personnel and the wider Air Force and Space Force communities. Looking outward, a safety initiative leveraging social media and DAF publications will promote crucial safety messages and partnerships from past to present.

Here is to many more years of protecting lives and enabling the warfighter!

Pushing Boundaries:

What Artemis II Can Teach Airmen About the Future of Mission Success

BY MS. LAUREN FOSNOT, STAFF WRITER

On April 1, 2026, when four astronauts lifted off aboard the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) Artemis II mission, it marked far more than another trip into space. The ten-day mission around the Moon represented the first crewed flight of NASA's Artemis program and humanity's return to deep-space exploration after more than five decades.

Artemis II sent Commander Reid Wiseman, pilot Victor Glover, mission specialist Christina Koch, and mission specialist Jeremy Hansen on a journey more than 230,000 miles from Earth aboard the Orion spacecraft and Space Launch System rocket. The mission tested systems, technology, and human performance while laying the foundation for future lunar operations and long-term space exploration.

However, Artemis II was not simply about reaching the Moon. It was about preparing for missions yet to come, and it was, in many ways, deeply human.

Despite the historic use of technology and the staggering distances traveled, the astronauts faced stress, discomfort, communication challenges, and the everyday realities of living and working together in a confined environment. Those moments reminded everyone that even in the most innovative situations, success still depends on humans—their resilience, adaptability, trust, and ability to work together under pressure.

Such a mindset is familiar to Airmen.

The Artemis II rocket lifts off from Launch Complex 39B at Kennedy Space Center on April 1, 2026, as Continental U.S. North American Aerospace Defense Command Region fighters supported the mission by securing the airspace overhead during the launch.

Photo by Mr. Michael Sparks

Advanced systems can improve efficiency and situational awareness, but people remain responsible for decision-making, crew coordination, fatigue management, and mission execution.

Across the Air Force, innovation increasingly means preparing for future operational environments before they fully emerge. Whether adapting to rapidly evolving technology, integrating artificial intelligence into operations, or operating modernized aircraft and communications systems, mission success depends on organizations willing to test, learn, and evolve before a crisis occurs.

NASA's long-term vision includes sustained lunar operations, expanded scientific discovery, and eventually, deeper space exploration. To accomplish that, the agency must prepare crews, systems, and procedures for environments that cannot be fully replicated on Earth.

Such preparation mirrors the operational reality Airmen also face.

Future conflicts and operational demands will likely look different from those of the past. Technological advances, cyber threats, contested logistics, autonomous systems, and information warfare continue to reshape how missions are executed. Waiting until those environments fully materialize is not an option.

Instead, readiness must be built early. Training exercises, simulations, evaluations, operational testing, and experimentation all serve the same purpose: preparing people and systems for uncertainty. Artemis II demonstrated that innovation is not simply about inventing new technology. It is about creating the capability to operate effectively in unfamiliar conditions.

One of the most significant aspects of Artemis II was placing humans aboard the spacecraft during operational testing. Artemis I proved the systems could function without a crew; Artemis II proved systems could safely support people in deep space—a significant distinction.

For Airmen, this reinforces the value of training environments that expose weaknesses before real-world operations do. Effective training does not avoid friction points; it deliberately incorporates them to improve performance.

Artemis II also highlighted the importance of validating systems as part of an integrated mission rather than in isolation. Spacecraft, communications systems, navigation, environmental controls, and human performance all had to work together seamlessly. A single weak point could have jeopardized the mission.

Military operations function much the same way. Aircraft, maintenance, logistics, communications, intelligence, cyber capabilities, and personnel must all operate as a connected system. Innovation succeeds when organizations test how each piece interacts under realistic conditions. Despite the advanced technology, human performance remains central to mission success. For Airmen, this lesson is especially important as automation and artificial intelligence continue to expand across operations. Advanced systems can improve efficiency and situational awareness, but people remain responsible for decision-making, crew coordination, fatigue management, and mission execution.

Artemis II also reinforced the importance of collaboration. While astronauts are the visible face of a mission, thousands of NASA engineers, technicians, logisticians, scientists, contractors, and support personnel contributed to its success. The mission also reflected the importance of international partnerships, including cooperation between NASA and the Canadian Space Agency. No single organization accomplishes missions of that scale alone.

The same is true across military operations. Mission success increasingly depends on integrated support across commands, specialties, armed services, coalition partners, and industry. Large-scale success is rarely the result of one breakthrough moment; more often, it comes from thousands of coordinated actions performed consistently and effectively across an enterprise.

Lastly, Artemis II demonstrates that innovation is not a single event—it is a continuous process.

For Airmen, that means remaining curious, adaptable, and committed to improvement even when challenges arise. It means understanding that modernization is not solely about equipment, but also about mindset and practice.

As further exploration pushes past the boundaries set with Artemis II, certain characteristics remain remarkably grounded: trust (trusting the team), readiness (testing relentlessly), and intelligence (adapting continuously). Whether in space or within Earth's atmosphere, progress has always depended on courage, teamwork, and the belief that the next horizon is worth reaching for.

Considering Motor Vehicle Safety

BY MR. MIKE CREMEDAS, STAFF WRITER

One of history's greatest minds is credited with saying, "Once you have tasted flight, you will forever walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward, for there you have been, and there you will always long to return." Poetic words from Leonardo Da Vinci, but do not forget that the only flying machines the Renaissance genius saw were the ones he designed on paper. More importantly, Airmen cannot spend all day staring at clouds—they must keep their eyes on the road when driving. Besides, Da Vinci never had to pay car insurance or rising premiums after an incident on the road.

Airmen are winged warriors who overcome peril regularly because they have military training and experience; they face less obvious risks when on the road surrounded by those who have neither. Being a pilot requires tremendous focus under pressure to avoid danger. When flying an airplane, the possibility of jeopardy is much greater than driving a vehicle, as is the need to be aware of your surroundings. It is reasonable to expect Airmen to let their guard down at the appropriate times. Still, they should never let their extensive experience develop into complacency that excuses unsafe behavior on the ground like distracted driving or driving while intoxicated. A good safety rule is to always wait one hour for every alcoholic beverage imbibed before operating a motor vehicle. Less obvious and at times more challenging to self-police is remembering that many people on the road do not have your level of reaction time or the ability to act under duress. Give drivers the appropriate space to operate safely (three seconds worth of space is generally recommended) and be on the lookout for reckless driving, such as changing lanes without warning or stopping suddenly. Finally, never forget that a simple fender bender, or virtually any incident involving a motor vehicle for which you are responsible, can negatively impact your military career, whether on-base or off.

If you are injured due to an incident on the road, TRICARE, the U.S. military's health insurance program, can help pay your medical bills but does not apply first-party coverage for car accidents. If you receive a settlement

You do not need to be behind the wheel of the vehicle or even near it during an incident for trouble to appear—car thieves can be just as problematic.

from the insurance company of the party at fault, TRICARE requires you to pay them back; this medical lien amount, deducted automatically from your settlement, is sent to TRICARE by your lawyer. TRICARE can likely assist with medical bills but will not cover damage to your vehicle, which is why many experts recommend adding uninsured motorist coverage if you can afford it.

You do not need to be behind the wheel of the vehicle or even near it during an incident for trouble to appear—car thieves can be just as problematic. While thieves that break into cars can conjure images of films like *Gone in 60 Seconds*, where the car is stolen, most modern crooks want the valuable and easy-to-sell items inside the vehicle instead. Besides the loss of personal property, if crooks get their hands on your identification and other personal information, it can be a logistic nightmare to untangle.

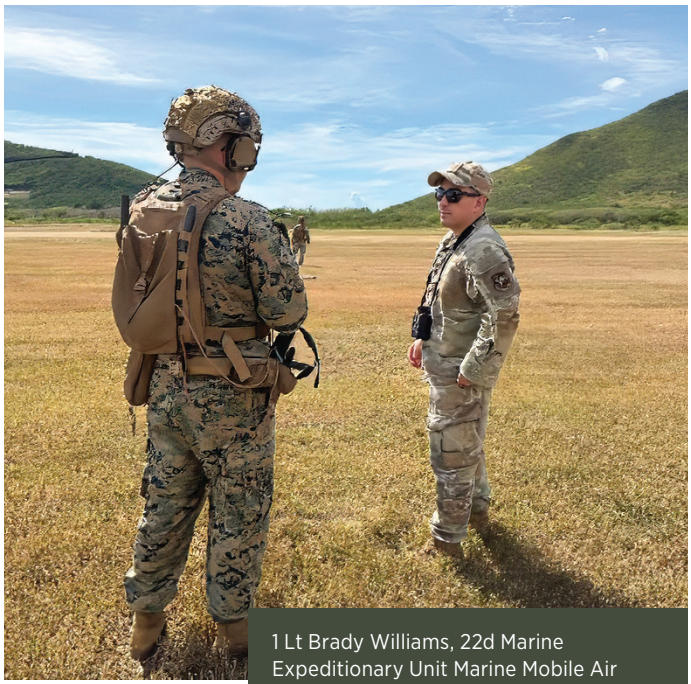
According to the Federal Trade Commission, active-duty service members are seventy-five percent more likely to report identity theft than other adults.

Nothing can be done to guarantee you will avoid having your vehicle broken into, but there are steps you can take to minimize the possibility:

- Remove labels identifying your security system to prevent criminals from figuring out an easy workaround. Connect it to a separate, ideally hidden, power source, as disabling the car battery is often the first step to gaining illegal access to a vehicle.
- Park your vehicle in a well-lit space and never leave it overnight in an unsecured area.
- Lock your vehicle and avoid the false assumption that crimes involving cars only occur in highly populated commercial or urban areas; more than one-third of vehicle thefts happen at or near a residence.
- Lock all electronic devices, shopping bags, and other items in the trunk or glove compartment. Never leave your belongings or government property on the seats, dashboard, or other visible areas.
- Keep in mind that criminals can also see the ads for hideaway key boxes—and some are as good at being thieves as you are at being Airmen—so refrain from hiding a spare key on or near your vehicle.

The rigors and responsibilities of being a member of the Air Mobility Command far outweigh those of a typical driver, but every Airman needs to maintain complete situational awareness while driving and ensure their motor vehicle is not likely to experience a break-in. Your family and country need you safe and unhindered, not recovering from injury or dealing with avoidable paperwork. Keep yourself and your vehicle safe!

621st Contingency Response Group and 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit Marines Expand Caribbean Airlift Capabilities



1 Lt Brady Williams, 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit Marine Mobile Air Traffic Control Team Officer in Charge, and Capt Juan Niño, 621st Contingency Response Group Landing Zone Survey Team Lead, discuss the different requirements and criteria for landing zone surveys between the U.S. Marines and U.S. Air Force in the SOUTHCOM AOR, Jan. 2026.

Courtesy photo

BY 1 LT JESSICA MCLAUGHLIN, 621st CONTINGENCY RESPONSE WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Airmen from the 621st Contingency Response Group (621 CRG) recently collaborated with a Marine Mobile Air Traffic Control Team from the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit (22 MEU) to significantly expand airlift capabilities in the Caribbean. The joint team surveyed and certified a C-130 landing zone on the island, opening the area to additional mobility aircraft platforms.

This effort was a model of inter-service cooperation, with the 621 CRG Airmen integrating with their U.S. Marine partners to share tactics, techniques, and procedures for landing zone operations. The collaboration created valuable synergy for future joint missions in the region.

Combat engineers from Battalion Landing Team 3/6, 22 MEU (Special Operations Capable), delivered a major enhancement to Camp Santiago's operational infrastructure by constructing a KC 130J Super Hercules-capable runway.

Their work required precise surveying, grading, compaction, and surface preparation to meet the requirements of a C130 landing zone, transforming an undeveloped stretch of terrain into a fully functional tactical airstrip. This engineering achievement fundamentally expanded Camp Santiago's training and mobility capabilities, creating a direct link between ground forces operating in Puerto Rico and the MEU's airlift platform.

By enabling KC130J aircraft to land, refuel, and support distributed training events, 22 MEU Marines effectively bridged the gap between land-based exercises and rapid, theater-relevant lift capacity. Their work both strengthened joint forces' ability to project combat power across the Caribbean and left a lasting imprint on the theater.

In addition to the new landing zone, an engineering team from the 621 CRG deployed to conduct a critical pavement analysis, ensuring airfields are ready for contingency staging. The task force also surveyed two new drop zones, providing essential training locations for pararescue squadrons and boosting their proficiency in emergency response scenarios.

During operational lulls, the team conducted extensive academic refreshers on airfield criteria, operational procedures, and equipment fundamentals. This continuous training ensures that all personnel remain proficient and prepared for rapid deployment.

Working in Summer Conditions

BY MR. JOSEPH FONTANAZZA, STAFF WRITER

Working a shift in summer heat challenges efficiency and safety… and can feel a lot longer than the clock says it took. By midday, the pavement has been absorbing solar radiation and radiating heat back into the work area for hours. Equipment sitting on that surface heats up as well, and work that once felt ordinary or straightforward starts requiring more time, focus, and physical effort. As Airmen, the checklist is still the checklist, and handling procedures do not loosen up as the temperature climbs—even though the crew is operating in conditions different from those of the cooler hours earlier in the day.

Heat can influence both people and work performance long before it becomes an obvious medical problem. A crew may still move on schedule yet feel out of sorts in ways that are easy to overlook. For instance, repeated lifting becomes harder than usual, and a second check on a handling step or handoff takes more patience than before.

Across Air Mobility Command (AMC), much of the mission happens in areas that do not shed heat quickly. For example, flightlines, loading zones, and storage sites can remain hot long after the temperature has peaked, and in some locations, the surrounding pavement and buildings retain heat even longer. On a long shift, especially when crews move from one physically demanding task to another with little time to cool down in between, the first indication of heat stress shows in the work long before it shows visibly as fatigue. The crew line may still move, and no one may look like they need medical attention, which is exactly why heat is often underestimated.

Moreover, as temperatures rise, communication gets shorter. A detail in an inspection, a handoff, or a handling step that would have been caught right away in the cooler, morning hours may warrant a second look later in the day. Hot conditions can push people to rely more on routine or muscle memory when their focus is being taxed, which can introduce risk as attention wanes. In munitions operations, that shift is not a minor transition. Safe handling depends on people remaining attentive throughout a full shift, not just when conditions are easier.

Working effectively in summer conditions comes down to planning and supervision. The most demanding tasks should be accomplished earlier in the day when possible. Supervisors can, for example, adjust the sequence of tasks to match thermal readings, and schedule in breaks for water, shade, ventilation, and time to cool off—such measures do the most good when they are built into the workday from the beginning of a shift. When a crew is already impacted by heat, preventative measures help them recover from the strain that has already set in.

Airmen play a role as well by looking out for fellow crew members and noticing when fatigue starts to negatively impact how tasks are handled. The pressure to keep things moving, especially on a busy day, can mask a sign of trouble; pace alone does not guarantee that work is being done with the level of care required.

Recognizing and addressing the effects of heat is critical for safety and mission success in AMC locations. Heat-induced changes must be identified early, before they begin affecting task performance. Acknowledging such changes is essential to keeping crews safe and the mission on track.

Change as a Force Multiplier:

What Airmen and Leaders Can Learn About Overcoming Resistance

BY MS. LAUREN FOSNOT, STAFF WRITER

Across Air Mobility Command (AMC)—and the Air Force more broadly—change has been a constant companion. From force structure adjustments and aircraft modernization to new deployment models, digital tools, and command relationships, the service has made deliberate, positive shifts to prepare for the future fight. These transformations are essential for maintaining readiness in a complex and contested environment.

But even when change is strategically sound, operationally necessary, and well-intentioned, it can still be difficult—especially for the people expected to carry it out.

Understanding why resistance occurs, how it shows up, and what leaders and Airmen can do about it is critical to ensuring change strengthens the force rather than slowing it down.

RESISTANCE IS HUMAN—NOT A CHARACTER FLAW

Resistance to change is often misunderstood as stubbornness, negativity, or lack of commitment. In reality, it is a natural human response to uncertainty. In military organizations—where identity, roles, and trust are tightly woven into mission success—change can feel especially personal.

Resistance can appear in subtle ways, including:

- **Delayed adoption of new processes or tools**, even after training is complete.
- **Continued reliance on legacy systems** (e.g., "just in case"), despite updated guidance.
- **Minimal compliance**, doing what is required but not fully engaging or innovating.
- **Repeated requests for clarification or reassurance**, especially around personal impact.
- **Quiet skepticism during briefings**, with concerns voiced privately rather than openly.
- **Increased focus on potential risks or failure points**, outweighing, at times, discussion of benefits.
- **Nostalgia for previous ways of operating**, particularly during periods of high operational tempo.
- **Reduced participation or initiative**, as Airmen conserve energy during prolonged change.
- **Assumptions about intent**, such as believing change is driven by cost or optics rather than readiness.
- **"Wait and see" attitudes**, shaped by change fatigue or past experiences with short-lived initiatives.

None of these behaviors typically indicates a lack of professionalism or commitment. Instead, they often reflect how people process uncertainty, workload, identity, and risk—especially in mission-critical environments.

Recognizing resistance early, without judgment, gives leaders and Airmen an opportunity to address it constructively.

WHY RESISTANCE TAKES ROOT

Research and experience show that resistance typically grows from a few core concerns—many of which are highly relevant in military environments:

In today's evolving mission environment, AMC relies on agility, trust, and continuous improvement.

- **Perceived personal loss:** Fear of losing influence, credibility, or voice.
- **Uncertainty:** Limited information about how change affects careers or daily work.
- **Mistrust:** Past experiences that make Airmen skeptical of intent or outcomes.
- **Different risk assessments:** Leaders may see long-term benefits; Airmen may see near-term strain.
- **Low tolerance for rapid change:** Especially when the tempo is already high.

None of these reflects a lack of professionalism. They reflect people trying to protect what matters.

SUPPORTING AIRMEN THROUGH CHANGE

Effective change leadership is more about building understanding and less about issuing direction. The following steps can help leaders guide Airmen through periods of transition.

1. **Communicate early—and honestly.**

Airmen do not need every answer, but they do need context. Explaining *why* change is happening and *what problem it solves* builds credibility, even when details are still evolving.

2. **Involve Airmen where possible.**

When people have a hand in shaping implementation, resistance drops. Listening sessions, pilot programs, and feedback loops signal trust and respect.

3. **Acknowledge strain, not just success.**

Recognizing that change is disruptive—even when necessary—creates a sense of psychological safety. Leaders who name the difficulty earn trust more quickly than those who minimize it.

4. **Model adaptability.**

Airmen watch leaders closely. When leaders demonstrate learning, humility, and flexibility, those behaviors cascade through the organization.

WHAT AIRMEN CAN DO: PRACTICING SELF-AWARENESS DURING CHANGE

Change readiness is not just a leadership responsibility. Individual self-awareness plays a powerful role in how change unfolds.

Airmen can ask themselves:

- *What specifically about this change is bothering me?*
- *Am I reacting to loss of familiarity, loss of control, or fear of failure?*
- *Do I have all the information—or am I filling gaps with assumptions?*
- *Is my resistance about mission risk, or personal discomfort?*

Honest reflection helps separate valid concerns from emotional reactions and allows Airmen to raise issues constructively rather than defensively.

MOVING ALONG THE CURVE TOGETHER

Most people move through predictable emotional phases during change—from initial skepticism to frustration, then gradual adjustment and acceptance. Leaders who understand this arc can provide the right support at the right time, while Airmen who recognize where they are on that curve can better manage their own responses.

In today's evolving mission environment, AMC relies on agility, trust, and continuous improvement.

When leaders approach change with empathy and clarity, and when Airmen approach it with self-awareness and professionalism, transformation becomes more than a directive. It becomes a shared commitment to readiness.

Change may be difficult—but when handled well, it strengthens the force for whatever comes next.

Training for Tomorrow:

Ramstein Airmen Sharpen Readiness During Radiant Falcon

SrA Devin Rogers, 86th Operational Medical Readiness Squadron Readiness Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge, discusses his proposed decontamination and response procedures with the participants of exercise Radiant Falcon at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, Feb. 12, 2026.

USAF photo by SrA Renan Arredondo

BY SRA RENAN ARREDONDO, 86TH AIRLIFT WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS

U.S. Air Force (USAF) Airmen assigned to the 86th Operational Medical Readiness Squadron (86 OMRS), the 86th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, the 786th Civil Engineer Squadron (786 CES) emergency management flight, and the 86th Airlift Wing (86 AW) safety office participated in exercise Radiant Falcon to obtain and strengthen proficiency in radiological contamination detection and decontamination safety techniques on Feb. 12, 2026, at Ramstein Air Base, Germany. This exercise integrated hands-on training to bolster response capabilities within a simulated radiological contamination scenario involving an aircraft. The objective was to guarantee mission continuity while safeguarding personnel through efficient radiation detection and control.

"We're trying to simplify how to assess an aircraft for radiation and contamination," said Lt Col Andrew Wagner, USAF in Europe, Air Forces Africa Surgeon General Bioenvironmental Branch Chief. "These exercises allow us to relay information to commanders on the ground to better understand the risk associated with the mission and the health of the Airmen who are executing the mission."

The methodical training began with comprehensive planning sessions and safety guidelines to lay the foundation for working within the field. Airmen assessed radiation safety principles and protocols before transitioning to scenarios that took them step by step in a controlled environment. Midway through the course,

participants used their training in practical field conditions, reinforcing the importance of coordination between units and cultivating decision-making under pressure.

"The purpose of this exercise is to run through some of the plans or processes associated with the detonation of a nuclear weapon and if an aircraft were to fly through that plume," said SrA Eugene Chambers, 786 CES Emergency Management Journeyman. "If maintainers are going out to receive that aircraft, what are they exposed to, what are the processes that they need to go through to stay safe, what PPE do they need to wear, how are they getting out of their gear, how are they getting out of that without spreading contamination?"

Radiant Falcon is a continuing training exercise that USAF in Europe-Africa leadership promotes to develop and expand the training of Mission Ready Airmen across different career fields. Each scenario practiced during Radiant Falcon focuses on the original objective of safeguarding the force and ensuring mission success. "It's moderately important to train for things, even if you hope they never are required," states Chambers. "Hopefully there isn't a nuclear detonation in our area of responsibility, but in the event that there is, we've at least practiced the processes required for receiving aircraft that have been exposed to those types of environments."

Key responders and maintenance personnel used electronic radiation dosimeters to measure exposure and identify potential contamination on the aircraft. Bioenvironmental technicians then conducted health risk assessments and situational observations to inform commanders' mission decisions.

Wagner states, "The primary idea is health risk assessment and being able to tell the commander, 'Here's a situation. You can turn this aircraft,

Photo above: 2 Lt Allyson Peterson, 86th Operational Medical Readiness Squadron Bioenvironmental Flight Officer in Charge, briefs her proposed decontamination and response procedures to the participants of exercise Radiant Falcon at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, Feb. 12, 2026.

Photo, right: Amn Ayden Helregel, 86th Operational Medical Readiness Squadron Bioenvironmental Flight Technician, places a radiation dosimeter on SSgt David Cunningham, 86th Airlift Wing Occupational Safety Craftsman, during exercise Radiant Falcon at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, Feb. 12, 2026.

USAF photos by Sra Renan Arredondo

and here's what people will be exposed to, and you accept the risk of the Airman's health to look at it at the risk of the mission as well.'"

Training hand in hand with several squadrons gave participants a better understanding of how their roles fit into the larger mission. Radiant Falcon also unveiled opportunities for future growth and highlighted the importance of collaboration and broader communication.

"Being able to work well with other flights was really good to see. You're so tunnel visioned when doing your job, but it's important to know what other people are capable of doing," said 2 Lt Allyson Peterson, 86 OMRS Bioenvironmental Flight Readiness and Training Officer in Charge.

Exercises like Radiant Falcon are crucial to accelerating the 86 AW's mission readiness, enhancing interoperability across Ramstein, and bolstering the capability to face chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear threats. Through constant and in-depth training, Ramstein Airmen continuously refine the skillset needed to counter and adapt to any contingency—safeguarding the mission, the people, and the European Theater.

Trust Your Gut?
The Science Behind a Gut Feeling

BY MS. LAUREN FOSNOT, STAFF WRITER

One time as a child, I was playing in the front yard, completely absorbed in whatever felt important at the time—music in my ears, attention elsewhere. I had not heard a bark. I had not seen a shadow. But something in me said, *Turn around*.

I did.

A large dog was charging toward me. I ran inside just in time. He did not look friendly.

Looking back, I have tried to figure out how I knew. I had not consciously registered anything. But it is hard not to suspect that my brain picked up on something—a faint vibration, a flicker of movement, a subtle shift in sound—that never fully entered awareness.

You may not be able to explain why something feels "off," but your brain may have registered a pattern inconsistency.

Maybe you have had a moment like that. Or maybe it is quieter: a feeling about a situation, or even about a person, that you cannot quite explain. We often call that intuition a "gut feeling."

The science suggests that while intuition is not mystical, it also is not meaningless.

Increasingly, researchers describe the brain as a predictive, pattern-detecting system. It constantly integrates incoming information with stored experience to form rapid interpretations of the world. When that integration happens quickly—before conscious reasoning catches up—what reaches awareness can feel like a sudden impression.

That helps explain why reactions sometimes arrive before explanations.

This is especially true in social situations. Research shows that humans form first impressions very quickly—sometimes within fractions of a second of seeing a face. We also detect tone shifts, posture changes, and subtle mismatches between words and emotion faster than we can consciously articulate them. You may not be able to explain why something feels "off,"

A gut feeling does not guarantee you are right. But it may indicate that your brain detected something worth examining.

but your brain may have registered a pattern inconsistency.

At the same time, speed does not guarantee accuracy.

The same system that detects patterns also stores fear, bias, past experiences, and cultural assumptions. Anxiety can feel physiologically similar to instinct. A tightening chest does not automatically distinguish between real danger and an old memory being activated.

So, what do we do with a gut feeling?

First, pause. Instead of reacting immediately, label what you are noticing. "I am feeling tension." "I am sensing hesitation." Research on metacognition suggests that simply naming internal states improves judgment. It brings automatic processing into conscious awareness.

Second, ask a clarifying question: Is this a familiar pattern, or is it fear? Intuition tends to be more reliable in environments where we have experience and receive feedback. In unfamiliar or high-stakes situations, deliberate analysis becomes more important.

Third, look for confirming—and disconfirming—evidence. If your instinct says something is not right, what observable cues support that? What evidence might challenge it? This step does not dismiss intuition; it strengthens it by testing it.

Over time, this practice builds better judgment. Experts in any field—pilots, maintainers, leaders, clinicians—develop refined intuition not because they rely on instinct alone, but because they repeatedly compare their impressions with outcomes. Feedback calibrates the signal.

In contested environments, that balance matters. Aircrews and maintainers often rely on rapid pattern recognition—noticing a slight vibration, a tone change, a procedural deviation—before a checklist confirms it. But safety culture also demands disciplined cross-checking.

A "something is not right" feeling is a cue to slow down, verify, and communicate, not to act impulsively. In that sense, intuition becomes an early warning indicator—valuable when paired with process and teamwork.

In very simple terms, the brain often performs the following:

1. Takes in information.
2. Matches it to prior patterns.
3. Reacts.
4. Explains.

The reaction can come first. The explanation follows.

A gut feeling does not guarantee you are right. But it may indicate that your brain detected something worth examining. Science does not frame intuition as magic—and it does not dismiss it either. It suggests something more balanced: notice it, bring it into awareness, test it, and then think with it.

The Power of Storytelling

BY MS. LAUREN FOSNOT, STAFF WRITER

Let me share a personal story. In 2009, I was thirteen years old, enjoying a family trip to Waikiki Beach with my dad. My parents are divorced, which meant my mom armed me with a long list of warnings before I left: wear sunscreen, do not talk to strangers, and if caught in a rip current—swim parallel to the beach. She even sent me articles filled with stories to support her concerns.

On day two, we were swimming behind Waikiki's concrete barriers, where the surf seemed calm. But I was thirteen, curious, and testing limits. I edged too close to the gap where the water funneled out. In an instant, I was swept off my feet and dragged backward as though chained at the ankles.

Fortunately, one of my mom's stories clicked: swim parallel. Instinct took over. I fought sideways, broke free, and clawed my way to the rocks until my dad could reach me.

That was the day I learned that safety advice programs your instincts. In a crisis, you do not recall a checklist or a statistic—you remember a story.

WHY STORIES STICK

Stories linger with us; they are humanity's oldest survival tool. Long before manuals and training guides, fables, myths, and tales taught people how to live, adapt, and endure. From Aboriginal Dreamtime to West African griots, stories are a universal thread.

Think of Aesop's fable of "The Tortoise and the Hare": slow and steady wins the race. Simple. Timeless. Still taught today. That is the staying power of stories—they shape how we think, lead, and live.

Even Walt Disney's empire started with a story. His father, a carpenter at the Chicago World's Fair, came home each night with tales of the lights and the spectacle. Those stories stuck with young Walt, sparking an imagination that would eventually create Disneyland. Stories clearly do not fade—they build momentum.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND IT

Research confirms what we already feel instinctively: people remember far more from stories than from raw facts—about sixty-five to seventy percent of information delivered through storytelling, compared to only five to ten percent when presented as data alone.

Why? Because stories not only activate the brain's language centers, but they also light up the regions tied to our senses, movement, and emotions. They even trigger oxytocin, the "trust and empathy" hormone, which helps build bonds, strengthen teams, and cut through stress and distraction.

Stories also satisfy our brain's craving for structure. A clear narrative pattern makes information easier to understand and remember, especially when we are under stress. Stress interferes with working memory and executive function, but structured communication still gets through. And in today's day and age, stress is everywhere—you are balancing

Stories also satisfy our brain's craving for structure. A clear narrative pattern makes information easier to understand and remember, especially when we are under stress.

mission demands, family life, and grocery bills that make eggs seem like a luxury item. In times like these, memorable communication is what cuts through the clutter.

That is where storytelling proves its value. By creating shared understanding and strengthening team cohesion, storytelling helps teams work together more effectively. For Air Mobility Command—where trust, communication, and coordination are essential—those stronger connections can directly support mission success and safety.

STORIES IN AIR MOBILITY COMMAND'S DNA

The roots of today's mobility operations trace back decades before AMC was established. Its legacy is built on stories. In 1929, the Question Mark flight proved that aerial refueling was possible, keeping a plane aloft for nearly a week. It was risky, bold, and it set the stage for today's mobility operations.

During the Berlin Airlift, Col Gail Halvorsen's candy drops showed

Question Mark being refueled by a Douglas C-1 (above). Question Mark ("?") was a modified Atlantic-Fokker C-2A transport airplane of the United States Army Air Corps. In 1929, commanded by Major Carl A. Spaatz, it was flown for a flight endurance record as part of an experiment with aerial refueling.

USAF photo

the world that kindness could be as powerful as strategy. His story has endured for decades because it carried a deeper message: how we treat others matters.

From World War II ferrying missions to Cold War innovations to today's Agile Combat Employment strategies, safety lessons have always been told through stories. Programs like Just Culture, Airman Safety Action Program, and Hazard Review Boards are not just checklists—they are built on narratives of trial, error, and progress.

FROM THE PAST TO THE FUTURE

Storytelling not only preserves history—it also builds readiness.

In this increasingly digital world, where scrolling replaces speaking, human connection is more vital than ever. That is why your story matters.

SHARING THE LEGACY

Stories are not just anecdotes. They are blueprints. They are the threads that tie the past to the present and prepare us for the future.

As a writer for *The Mobility Forum*, I have interviewed countless Airmen. Every one of them has a story worth sharing. Leaders, share your lessons with the next generation. Share them with your peers. Share them with us—we would be honored to publish them.

So, what stories will you tell?

Left: Col Gail S. Halvorsen discusses his experiences while serving during the Berlin Airlift at the Air Command and Staff College's 2016 Gathering of Eagles event, May 31, 2016, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. Halvorsen is most famous as the Candy Bomber for dropping candy to the children of Berlin during World War II.

USAF photo/Donna Burnett

Below: Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) recipients pose for a photo in front of a C-17 Globemaster III aircraft after receiving their medals from Gen Mike Minihan, Commander of Air Mobility Wing Command, at Joint Base Charleston, SC, Nov. 21, 2022.

USAF photo by TSgt Alex Fox Echols III

To submit a story for *The Mobility Forum*, please email **info@schatzpublishing.com**.

Summer Hiking and Camping Safety: What You Need to Know

BY MS. SOFIA SCHATZ, STAFF WRITER

Spending time outdoors in the summer, whether hiking scenic trails or camping under the stars, is one of the best ways to enjoy the season. However, natural environments can be unpredictable, and without proper preparation, a relaxing trip can quickly become dangerous. From extreme heat to hazardous plants and wildlife, staying safe outdoors depends on awareness, preparation, and smart decision-making.

PLAN AHEAD

Before heading out, check the weather and research the area surrounding your trail or campsite. Summer conditions can shift quickly, bringing thunderstorms, intense heat, or slippery terrain. Understanding what to expect helps you pack appropriately and avoid being caught off guard.

Heading out early is one of the simplest ways to reduce risk. Afternoon temperatures are often the most dangerous, increasing the likelihood of dehydration and heat-related illnesses. Morning hikes not only help you avoid peak heat temperatures but also offer a quieter, more enjoyable experience. However, cooler environments are not automatically safer. Higher elevations, for example, pose risks such as lightning, strong winds, or sudden weather changes.

BE AWARE

Strong situational awareness also plays a major part in staying safe outdoors. Being aware means staying alert to your surroundings (e.g., listening for unusual sounds and noting others who may be ahead of you and behind you), avoiding distractions (e.g., wearing headphones or listening to music too loudly), and scanning the environment periodically (e.g., the sky for changes, trail conditions, and taking note of blind corners or dense brush. Many accidents happen when people become overly comfortable or distracted. Trusting your instincts, use navigation tools (even on familiar trails), and turn back when conditions feel unsafe.

AVOID HAZARDOUS PLANTS AND WILDLIFE

Understanding which plants to avoid when hiking and camping can prevent painful or dangerous reactions. For instance, poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac all contain urushiol, an oily substance that causes severe skin irritation. A helpful rule to remember upon encountering plants is, “Leaves

of three, let it be." Other plants to avoid interaction with include stinging nettle (can cause a burning rash) and giant hogweed or wild parsnip (can cause severe blistering when exposed to sunlight). Highly toxic plants such as water hemlock, deadly nightshade, and jimson weed should never be touched or consumed. Each can cause an array of neurological and physical reactions (e.g., blurred vision and seizure-like activity) and eventually lead to death. To reduce the risk of contact, wear long clothing, stay on marked trails, and never eat wild plants or berries unless you are properly trained to identify them.

Wildlife awareness is just as important as plant safety. Animals such as bears, mountain lions, moose, and snakes can pose serious risks if encountered. To avoid such dangerous encounters:

- Make noise while hiking to avoid startling animals.
- Keep a safe distance from any animal.
- Never attempt to feed or approach wildlife.
- Store food properly in sealed containers or bear-resistant canisters to prevent attracting animals.

Even smaller threats, such as ticks and mosquitoes, carry diseases. In addition to long clothing, use insect repellent and check your body after outdoor activity. Wear proper footwear; hiking boots should be well-fitted and provide good traction, especially when trekking on uneven or slippery terrain. Lightweight, moisture-wicking clothing helps regulate body temperature, while avoiding materials like cotton can prevent discomfort and overheating.

PACK SMART

Hydration is critical during summer activities. The body can lose large amounts of water through sweat; therefore, drinking water consistently throughout the day rather than waiting until you feel thirsty helps prevent dehydration. In addition to water, bring:

- Snacks.
- A first aid kit.
- Navigation tools.
- Sun protection.

These essentials will help you stay prepared for a range of situations.

LOCATION AND LIMITS MATTER

When setting up a campsite, avoid areas near water sources or on game trails, as these are high-traffic areas for wildlife. Also, avoid narrow or confined spaces where escape routes are limited and avoid low-lying areas that could flood. Inspect your site for hazards such as insects, unstable ground, or nearby debris before setting up.

Campfire safety is another critical responsibility. Fires should not be unlimited in size or location, but rather built in a clear, designated area and kept small and controlled. Never leave a fire unattended, and always fully extinguish it before leaving the area or going to sleep. Keeping water and a shovel nearby can help with implementing wildfire prevention methods such as smothering flames; clearing dry brush, leaves, and pine needles near the fire; and extinguishing the fire.

It is also important to recognize your physical limitations. Choosing trails that match your experience level and turning back when necessary can prevent injury or exhaustion. Conversely, pushing forward despite fatigue, worsening weather, or fading daylight—referred to as "summit fever"—can lead to a dangerous predicament.

STAY CONNECTED

Always tell someone of your camping and hiking plans, including your specific route and expected return time home. Carry a fully charged phone or a portable charger and consider additional safety tools if you are traveling in remote areas. While it is important to enjoy the outdoors, it is equally important not to isolate yourself completely, especially from help in case of an emergency.

Further, hiking or camping with others significantly improves overall safety. A companion can assist in emergencies and help you stay alert to your surroundings. However, if you choose to go alone, taking extra precautions, such as sharing your itinerary and staying in more populated areas, becomes even more important.

Outdoor adventures like hiking and camping can be incredibly rewarding. They offer a deeper connection to nature—whether through quiet moments on a trail, breathtaking views, or terrain built for a workout. As you enjoy the outdoors, stay aware of your surroundings, understand potential risks, and take preventive steps to avoid common hazards. With the right preparation, you can explore nature confidently, extensively, and safely.

Common Motorcycle Blind Spot Mistakes

BY MR. PHILIP RUSSELL, 628th AIR BASE WING,
JOINT BASE CHARLESTON, SC

Why Blind Spots Matter

Blind spots exist in every vehicle, but they pose a particular risk to motorcycles due to their smaller profile. Ignoring them increases the chance of sideswipe accidents, especially during lane changes or merging.

The following common mistakes, and tips to counter them, can help improve visibility and safety.

1. NEGLECTING SHOULDER CHECKS

Mirrors only tell part of the story. A quick head turn (shoulder check) fills in the gaps.

- **Do it early:** Do not leave it until the last second.
- **Keep it smooth:** Quick but steady, without losing control of the handlebars.
- **Make it a habit:** Use shoulder checks alongside mirror checks for full awareness.

Tip: Always shoulder check before merging or changing lanes.

2. RIDING IN OTHER DRIVERS' BLIND SPOTS

If you cannot see a driver in their side mirror, they likely cannot see you.

Tip: Adjust your speed to move out of blind spots as quickly as possible.

3. LINGERING TOO LONG

Staying in a blind spot turns you into a target. Even attentive drivers can miss you if you are in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Tip: Pass decisively or fall back to a visible position.

4. RIDING IN THE CENTER OF THE LANE

The center is often the least visible place in a lane.

Tip: Position yourself to the left- or right-third of the lane, depending on visibility and traffic.

5. ADJUSTING MIRRORS INCORRECTLY

Misaligned mirrors reduce your field of view and increase blind spot risks.

- Adjust mirrors so you see less of your own bike and more of the surrounding lanes.
- Double-check adjustments after bumps or maintenance.

Tip: Combine well-adjusted mirrors with consistent shoulder checks.

6. USING YOUR LIGHTS INEFFECTIVELY

Motorcycles have fewer lights than cars, so you have to make them count.

Tip: Keep high beams on during the day and always signal turns or lane changes early.

7. RIDING TOO FAST AT NIGHT

Reduced visibility and feeling tired means you need to ride smarter—not faster.

Tip: Slow down, wear reflective gear, and ensure your lights are working.

BONUS: TECH THAT HELPS

- **Blind spot sensors** alert you to nearby vehicles.
- **Smart mirrors** give visual signals of approaching traffic.
- **Helmet displays** can project rear views directly into your line of sight.

Tip: Use tech as a backup, not a replacement, for situational awareness.

PASSENGER AWARENESS

When riding two-up, blind spots shift. Make sure your passenger:

- Knows how to check mirrors from their angle.
- Uses simple verbal or hand cues to communicate.

Avoiding blind spot mistakes is not just good practice, it is LIFESAVING.

COMMON BLIND SPOT MISTAKE	MAIN POINTS	TIP
Not Checking Mirrors Frequently	Reduces awareness of surrounding traffic and developing threats.	Adopt a scan pattern: check mirrors every five to seven seconds and always before any change in speed or position.
Not Turning Your Head	Leaves you ignorant of vehicles in the most critical blind spot zones.	Always supplement mirror checks with a decisive "lifesaver" shoulder glance before committing to a move.
Incorrectly Positioning in Lane	Makes riders less visible and limits escape routes.	Dominate your lane. Use different lane positions (e.g., left, right, and center) to see, be seen, and create a safety buffer.
Neglecting Indicators	Confuses or surprises other road users, leading to unpredictable reactions.	Signal clearly, early, and ensure your signal is canceled after the maneuver. A forgotten signal is a false promise.
Wearing Low-Visibility Gear	Allows the rider to blend into the visual noise of the road and background.	Invest in high-visibility and retro-reflective gear. Bright colors work best in daylight; reflective materials are crucial at night.
Overestimating Driver Awareness	Assuming other drivers see you is a gamble you cannot afford to take.	Ride with the assumption that you are invisible. This mindset keeps you proactive rather than reactive.

- Helps spot potential hazards and alerts you to them.

Tip: Brief your passenger before every ride on their role in safety.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Avoiding blind spot mistakes is not just good practice, it is **lifesaving**. Whether it is a proper shoulder check or using reflective gear, every detail counts when it comes to motorcycle safety. Ride smart, stay visible, and never assume other drivers can see you. Combine frequent mirror glances with quick shoulder checks. Do not rely on mirrors alone. Most blind spots are at the forty-five-degree angle behind your shoulders. Adjust your mirrors to reduce these and check them often. Pass swiftly, do not linger. If you cannot see the driver in their mirror, they probably cannot see you. **Ride at a safe speed!** Higher speeds mean less time to react. Maintain a speed that allows you to scan your surroundings safely.

Do not put your safety in the hands of others!

MISHAP-FREE FLYING HOUR MILESTONES

7,500 HOURS

445 AW, Wright-Patterson AFB, OH

Lt Col Joshua A. Roberts
SMSgt Todd A. Gnat
MSgt Kelly B. Earhart

172 AW, Thompson Field, MS

CMSgt Jonathan Yancey Pettigrew

6,500 HOURS

445 AW, Wright-Patterson AFB, OH

Lt Col Jonathan A. Askins
SMSgt Timothy M. Davis
TSgt Justin T. Brothers

5,000 HOURS

445 AW, Wright-Patterson AFB, OH

Col Douglas A. Perry
Lt Col Keith A. Buddelmeyer
Lt Col Andrew W. Gambardella
Lt Col Benjamin F. Hollett
MSgt Benjamin D. Fryman
TSgt Zachary L. Webb

155 ARW, Lincoln ANGB, NE

Lt Col Bryan Scholtes

130 AW, McLaughlin ANGB, WV

Lt Col Darin Troy Urban

3,500 HOURS

445 AW, Wright-Patterson AFB, OH

Maj Ryan S. Belew
Maj John A. Floro
Maj Cassidy A. Helregel
Maj Jonathan A. Loyd
Lt Col Zachary W. Balas

2,500 HOURS

445 AW, Wright-Patterson AFB, OH

Maj Jeffery J. Haub
Maj Cecilia J. Photinos
Maj Isaac J. Scherrer
Capt Logan C. Sisca
1Lt Jacob M. Menser
TSgt Christopher W. Brown

436 AW, Dover AFB, DE

Maj Jacob Rieth

155 ARW, Lincoln ANGB, NE

Maj James Fox
Capt Tyler Klingemann
MSgt Bradley Bouc

A C-5M Super Galaxy approaches the runway for a touch and go landing during a local training flight at Dover Air Force Base, DE, May 1, 2024.

USAF photo by Roland Balik

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Aircraft Automation

BY MR. D.J. HERNANDEZ III,
AMC FLIGHT SAFETY

One of Merriam-Webster Dictionary's definitions of automation is "automatically controlled operation of an apparatus, process, or system by mechanical or electronic devices that take the place of human labor."

Aircraft automation is promising a future of enhanced safety, efficiency, and streamlined operations. From the aircraft to the flightline and to the maintenance hangar, intelligent systems are taking on complex tasks, helping to reduce the potential for human error while optimizing performance. However, new technologies bring new challenges.

Autopilot and advanced Flight Management Systems are standard, which help reduce pilot workload on long-haul flights and optimize routes for fuel efficiency and safety.

In maintenance, artificial intelligence (AI) is a game changer. Predictive maintenance systems analyze data from an aircraft's sensors to forecast when repairs are needed. This analysis helps identify potential issues before they become critical. This proactive approach not only enhances safety by reducing the likelihood of inflight malfunctions but also minimizes costly downtime.

In flight, technologies like the Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast provide real-time aircraft tracking. This utility helps situational awareness for both pilots and controllers. However, the increasing reliance on automation is not without its concerns. A significant issue is the potential for degradation of manual flying skills and the risk of pilot complacency.

As pilots spend more time monitoring automated systems, their hands-on proficiency has the potential to diminish, which can be critical in emergencies where manual control is required. Today's pilots are more systems monitors than systems operators.

Ultimately, the trajectory of aircraft automation is not about replacing human pilots but augmenting their capabilities. AI acts as a sophisticated copilot, handling routine tasks and providing critical data-driven insights. This innovation will allow pilots to focus on high-level decision-making and managing unexpected events to ensure flight safety.

SrA Benjamin Spencer, 374th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron Avionics Journeyman, troubleshoots the autopilot on a C-130J Super Hercules at Yokota Air Base, Japan, Feb. 6, 2026.

USAF photo by A1C David S. Calcote

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A Day in the Life

A U.S. Airman assigned to the 15th Maintenance Squadron uses a checklist for maintenance on a wheel well of a C-17 Globemaster III at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, March 12, 2026. Members of the 735th Air Mobility Squadron hosted a competition where maintenance units from Alaska, Guam, Hawaii, and Japan tested their readiness by performing diagnostics and repairs on a C-17 Globemaster III.

USAF photo by SSgt Mark Sulaica