

24th SECAF Takes Office

The Senate confirmed Heather A. Wilson as the 24th Secretary of the Air Force on May 8, by a vote of 76 to 22. Wilson was then sworn in by Defense Secretary James N. Mattis at a May 16 Pentagon ceremony.

Wilson has extensive experience with the Air Force, Congress, and in education. Since she is only the second of President Trump's Pentagon nominees to be confirmed, she will probably wield significant influence in the new administration.

She takes the helm of the Air Force at a time when the Active Duty force is the smallest it's ever been and with the oldest aircraft inventory. During her confirmation hearing she urged lawmakers to repeal the Budget Control Act and avoid sequestration as the Air Force moves forward on several modernization programs, including the F-35 strike fighter, KC-46A tanker, B-21 bomber, Ground Based Strategic Deterrent, Long-Range Standoff missile, UH-1N replacement, and others.

Wilson "was a friend to the Air Force during her years in Congress," said AFA Chairman of the Board F. Whitten Peters. "AFA looks forward to working closely with her as we navigate the ongoing challenges our Air Force currently faces."

Wilson graduated from the Air Force Academy in 1982 and was selected as a Rhodes scholar, receiving both a master's degree and doctor of philosophy degree from Oxford University in England. She was the first female veteran in the US Congress, where she served on the House Armed Services Committee and House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. She also served as the president of the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology. Wilson was formerly a member of the Congressional Panel on the Nuclear Security Enterprise and serves on several nonprofit and advisory boards, including the South Dakota Science and Technology Authority.



Heather Wilson testifies during her confirmation hearing on March 30.

Wilson is "an inspiring leader with a deep knowledge of the Air Force and national security matters and has long been a supporter of our armed services," said AFA President Larry O. Spencer, adding, "We look forward to working with her on the Air Force's top issues."

■ **Combat Controller Receives Silver Star**

An Air Force combat controller received the Silver Star on April 7 for his 2015 actions in a 96-hour battle to liberate Kunduz City, Afghanistan, from Taliban control.

TSgt. Brian Claghusey, a combat controller with the 21st Special Tactics Squadron, was embedded with a US Army Special Forces team in Kunduz, when with no regard for his personal safety, he risked enemy fire to coordinate 17 air strikes against Taliban fighters. His actions ensured the safety of 150 friendly forces, the death of many Taliban fighters, and resulted in zero civilian



casualties.

Claghusey received the award during a ceremony at Pope Army Airfield, N.C. He is the latest airman from the 21st STS to be recognized for valor. The squadron has, since 2008, had five airmen receive the Air Force Cross and 10 receive the Silver Star, including one with an Oak Leaf Cluster.

TSgt. Brian Claghusey at an undisclosed location. He received the Silver Star medal for his role in liberating Kunduz City from the Taliban and ensuring the safety of an Army Special Forces team during a firefight.



Photos: Scott M. Ash/USAF; USAF



■ CyberPatriot Announces National Champions

The Air Force Association announced the winners of the CyberPatriot IX National Finals Competition, held in April in Baltimore. North Hollywood, Calif., High School's team "Togo" won the national championship in the Open Division, as well as the Leidos Digital Forensics Event and the Open Division of the Cisco Networking Challenge.

Colorado Springs Cadet Squadron team "Wolfpack," with the Colorado Springs (Colo.) Civil Air Patrol, won the national championship in the All Service Division. Summit Lakes Middle School's team "Error 37," from Lee's Summit, Mo., won the Middle School Division.

"Cyber Warriors 3" from Troy High School in Fullerton, Calif., won the AT&T Mobile Device Component, and the team "Falcons" from Poolesville High School, Md., won the Facebook Challenge. "TX-781st" from O. W. Holmes High School's Air Force JROTC unit in San Antonio won the All Service Division of the Cisco Networking Challenge.

Leon Gaulin of the "Marine Raiders" from Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School in Fitchburg, Mass., received the Cyber All-American Award, presented to a student who competed in the National Finals for four consecutive years of high school.

■ StellarXplorers Announces National Champions

The Air Force Association announced the winners of the national high school space challenge StellarXplorers III, held in early April in Colorado Springs, Colo. The "Sky Dragons" team from San Pedro High School in San Pedro, Calif., is this year's national champion. The "Scintillators" team from the Kaiserslautern American High School in Kaiserslautern, Germany, finished in second place. The "Rocketeer Steers" team from Graham High School in Graham, Texas, finished third.

Ten teams participated in the finals, held at the Space Foundation's Discovery Center.

Each student in the top three teams received educational grants, sponsored by the USAF Science, Technology, Education, and Math Program and the United Launch Alliance. During the first day of the competition, students had eight hours to define an optimal satellite orbit, choose spacecraft components, and select rocket boosters that meet a set of mission requirements. The students then presented their plan on the second day and were scored by a panel of experts.



■ D.C. Guard F-16 Crashes, Pilot Ejects Safely

A D.C. Air National Guard pilot sustained minor injuries after ejecting from his F-16C during a training mission April 5 near JB Andrews, Md. The pilot, who is assigned to the 121st Fighter Squadron at Andrews, was flying with three other Guard aircraft on a routine training mission in the Washington, D.C., area.

Shortly after takeoff, the pilot experi-

enced a mechanical issue and attempted to turn back to base. Realizing he wasn't able to make the return, the pilot was forced to eject. He has been with the squadron for about a year, in the Air Guard for four years, and is a "very capable pilot," Squadron Commander Lt. Col. Mike Croker said during a press conference.

The F-16 crashed near Oxon Hill, Md., at about 9:15 a.m. in a wooded area about six miles southwest of the base.

■ An F-16 from the 113th Wing flies near Washington, D.C., during a training mission from JB Andrews, Md.

There was no major property damage reported, according to a statement from the 113th Fighter Wing at Andrews. However, WUSA-9 TV station reported that about 20 homes were evacuated as a safety precaution, and the families were temporarily sheltered at an elementary school in Maryland.

By the Numbers

8,000,000

Lines of code required to operate the F-35A Lightning II

400,000

Lines of code required to operate the US space shuttle

Source: <http://bit.ly/2pZ4Hgh>



USAF's space lead at the Pentagon will have plenty to do.

■ Air Force Creates a Deputy Chief of Staff for Space

The Air Force will “stand up a three-star deputy chief of staff for space,” Gen. John W. “Jay” Raymond, head of Air Force Space Command, said at the 33rd Space Symposium in Colorado Springs, Colo. When the position is finalized and filled, the Air Force will have someone at the Pentagon who will “come to work every day

focused on” integrating space into multidomain combat, Raymond said.

The new deputy will have plenty of work to do, Raymond said, as space leadership in the Air Force is currently focused on “getting after rapid acquisition processes” by shifting “milestone decision authority” from the Department of Defense down to the Air Force, as required by the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act.

■ Air Force F-35A Makes First Europe Deployment

Eight Air Force F-35As from Hill AFB, Utah, arrived at RAF Lakenheath, UK, in mid-April, marking the type's first overseas deployment. The aircraft and airmen from the 388th Fighter Wing and Air Force Reserve's 419th Fighter Wing, both at Hill, were to spend “several weeks” conducting air training in Europe as part of the European Reassurance Initiative, a DOD press release stated.

The deployment isn't meant to send any kind of political message, and the aircraft were not to be available for operational missions during their stay in the UK, USAF officers reported during a telephone press conference.

Tankers from four bases offloaded more than 400,000 pounds of fuel during the transatlantic flight to Europe. C-17 and C-5 aircraft supported the deployment by moving maintenance equipment and personnel.

Two of the F-35A strike fighters arrived at Amari AB, Estonia, on April 25, but then returned to Lakenheath a couple hours later. “The purpose was to show their presence,” Col. Jaak Tarien, the Chief of the Estonian air force, told *Air Force Magazine*.

Lt. Col. George Watkins, commander of Hill's 34th Fighter Squadron, told the Estonian newspaper *Postimees* the strike fighters did not land anywhere else during the three-hour sortie and had to tank once.

On April 28, two F-35As arrived at Graf Ignatievo AB, Bulgaria, for training.



An F-35 Lightning II from Hill AFB, Utah, participates in the aircraft type's first-ever deployment to Europe.

Photos: David B. Gleason; SrA, Christine Groening

Leo K. Thorsness, 1932-2017

Retired Col. Leo Keith Thorsness, an American hero of the Vietnam War, prisoner of war, member of the Washington State Senate, and one of a handful of airmen to earn the Medal of Honor, died in Florida on May 2. He was 85.

Born in Walnut Grove, Minn., Thorsness enlisted in the Air Force in 1951. Through the aviation cadet program, he received his wings and a commission in 1954. Thorsness flew F-84s and F-100s before transitioning to the F-105 Thunderchief.

He was chosen to fly the F-105F and G variants of the “Thud” in the Wild Weasel role—the most dangerous combat mission. Weasels flew into enemy airspace ahead of strike groups, teasing enemy fighters and ground-based radars to track and shoot at them, so the Weasels could in turn target the defenses and clear a path for the following fighter-bombers. In 1967 alone, 26 Weasel aircraft were shot down.

Assigned to the 355th Tactical Fighter Wing at Takhli AB, Thailand, in the fall of 1966, Thorsness, then a major, quickly became known as the wing expert on the Weasel mission. He flew 92 such missions during the next seven months, evading some 53 surface-to-air missiles fired at him during that time.

On April 19, 1967, Thorsness was flying in an F-105F with backseater Capt. Harold E. Johnson, leading a flight of four F-105s on a Weasel mission.

As they entered enemy airspace, Thorsness split his group in two, to broaden their coverage and force the enemy missile batteries to shoot in different directions. Soon after a radar was detected, Thorsness destroyed it with a Shrike anti-radiation missile. A second radar came up suddenly and he attacked it with cluster bombs, scoring a direct hit while evading heavy anti-aircraft artillery fire. He fired the second Shrike at a third radar. Soon the strike package arrived, and a large battle ensued with enemy fighters and ground defenses.

One of the jets in Thorsness’ flight was hit and the crew bailed out. As they descended, a MiG-17 lined up to shoot the crew hanging in their parachutes. Though the F-105 wasn’t designed for dogfighting, Thorsness nevertheless pursued and shot down the MiG with his cannon.

He quickly returned to the scene where his wingmen were awaiting rescue on the ground. He orbited, flying cover for A-1 “Sandy” rescue planes and UH-1 helicopters. When MiG-17s reappeared, Thorsness and Johnson alone engaged four of them. Thorsness hit another MiG, a probable kill, but his gun camera was out of film. Dropping to treetop height—and below the firing arc of area anti-aircraft guns—Thorsness lured the remaining MiGs into chasing him. Using the Thud’s only advantage—its speed—Thorsness outran the MiGs. His action bought time for more American fighters to arrive. Unfortunately, the two downed airmen were captured.

Desperately low on fuel, Thorsness headed for a tanker, but one of the F-105s that had arrived to fight the MiGs called on the radio to say he was lost and running out of gas. Thorsness directed the tanker to help the other pilot and decided to nurse his own jet 70 miles to the closest airfield—Udorn Air Base, just inside Thailand. Carefully calculating the jet’s negligible glide ratio, he and Johnson touched down just as the engine quit. For the 11 hours of nonstop action, Thorsness was recommended for the Medal of Honor. The citation



Then-Lt. Col. Leo Thorsness after receiving the Medal of Honor from President Richard Nixon in 1973.

underscored his “extraordinary heroism, self-sacrifice, and personal bravery involving conspicuous risk” to his own life.

Before he was able to receive the medal, however, on April 30—just seven missions short of the magic 100 number that would allow them to go home—Thorsness and Johnson volunteered to fill in for an abort jet on another Weasel mission. They were surprised by two MiGs and were shot down.

Thorsness and Johnson ejected, and both survived, but Thorsness’s legs were badly injured. He was captured by villagers who tore off his clothes and forced him to march 10 hours to a North Vietnamese army outpost.

For the next six years, Thorsness was held prisoner in various POW camps, including the infamous “Hanoi Hilton,” where he was tortured, denied medical attention, and kept in solitary confinement for his refusal to cooperate. The treatment worsened his leg injuries and added back injuries. Thorsness and Johnson would occasionally see each other in prison, but were not able to talk again until after repatriation.

The Pentagon kept the Medal of Honor recommendation secret so the North Vietnamese wouldn’t heap even more abuse on Thorsness or further exploit him for propaganda. During the latter part of his captivity, he shared a cell with now-Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.).

Shortly after the POWs were returned, Thorsness received the Medal of Honor from President Nixon on Oct. 15, 1973.

Too badly injured to resume flying, Thorsness retired as a colonel 10 days after the medal ceremony. Thorsness worked for Litton Industries as head of civic affairs until 1985. He moved to Washington state in 1986 and served as a state senator from 1988 to 1992.

In 2008, he published an account of his imprisonment in *Surviving Hell: A POW’s Journey*.

Commenting on Thorsness in May, McCain said his cellmate endured “unspeakable pain and suffering because of his steadfast adherence to our code of conduct. ... Leo never let this experience break his spirit and [he] inspired the rest of us with his patriotism, perseverance, and hope that we would someday be free.”

—John A. Tirpak

Photo: USAF

■ DOD Begins Nuclear Posture Review

The Pentagon on April 17 kicked off its new nuclear posture review. Defense Secretary James N. Mattis directed Deputy Defense Secretary Robert O. Work and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Air Force Gen. Paul J. Selva to lead the review. It was outlined in a presidential memorandum on Jan. 27.

The review will “ensure the US nuclear deterrent is safe, secure, effective, reliable, and appropriately tailored to deter 21st century threats and reassure our allies,” according to a Pentagon statement. The review will be presented to the President by the end of the year, according to the Defense Department.

Second Lt. Nikolas Ramos (right) goes over a checklist with 1st Lt. Terrence Dale Duarte in a launch control center at F. E. Warren AFB, Wyo.



■ PACOM Boss Wants Missile Defense in Hawaii

Adm. Harry B. Harris Jr., commander of US Pacific Command, told Congress the US likely needs an additional missile defense system in Hawaii. “Our ballistic missile architecture is sufficient to protect Hawaii today,” he told the House Armed Services Committee, “but it can be overwhelmed.”

An ICBM attack with the proper number of missiles, from an adversary like North Korea, would force the US “to make a decision on which one to take out or not.” His worry, he said, is that in such a situation, there is a possibility that “at least one [ICBM] ... would get through.”

As to North Korean capability, Harris said, “Kim Jong Un is clearly in a position to threaten Hawaii today.” While the US already has missile defense interceptors based in Alaska and California, Harris said, “we would be better served with ... radar and interceptors in Hawaii.”



A Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) interceptor is launched during a test on Wake Island in 2015.



An F-22 Raptor escorts a Russian Tu-95 Bear bomber near Nunivak Island, Alaska, in 2007. Russian flights near US airspace have increased dramatically.

■ Russians Fly Near Alaska Four Times in Four Days

Russian bombers, four times in four days, flew close to Alaska in another series of provocations. On April 17, Air Force F-22s responded to Tu-95s flying near the Alaskan Air Defense Identification Zone. The next day an Air Force E-3 Sentry also responded to the Tu-95s. On April 19, two II-38 maritime patrol aircraft flew near Alaska, and on April 20, two Tu-95 Bear bombers again flew near the zone, according to CNN.

A NORAD official said although the heightened activity has not been seen “for a couple years,” it is not unprecedented, CNN reported. All the intercepts were conducted “safely and professionally,” Pentagon spokesman Navy Capt. Jeff Davis said.

■ Unintentional Stall Caused Fatal 2016 U-2 Crash

The fatal 2016 U-2 crash in California was caused by the aircraft entering an unintentional secondary stall, forcing the two pilots to eject. Instructor pilot Lt. Col. Ira S. Eadie was killed during the ejection sequence, and the second pilot received minor injuries in the Sept. 20, 2016, mishap near Sutter, Calif.

The TU-2S, assigned to the 9th Reconnaissance Wing at Beale AFB, Calif., was flying an acceptance flight training mission, according to an Air Combat Command news release. Selected pilots undergo three of these flights as part of their interview process. The flights are designed to give prospective pilots a chance to familiarize themselves with the aircraft.



Eadie

The aircraft was recovering from an “approach to stall” maneuver, when the unnamed interviewing pilot’s flight control inputs placed the aircraft into an unintentional secondary stall. The aircraft’s left wing dropped sharply and the U-2 fell into an excessive nose-low attitude. The aircraft was not controlled and was rapidly becoming inverted, prompting Eadie to command ejection. During this sequence, his ejection seat struck the U-2’s right wing, causing fatal injuries. The aircraft crashed into uninhabited hills and was destroyed.

William L. Kirk, 1932-2017

Retired Gen. William Leslie Kirk, one of a number of USAF leaders credited as a “father” of the Aggressors and the Red Flag exercise, commander of US Air Forces in Europe, a two-time MiG killer, and a noted expert in electronic warfare, died April 26 in Florida at age 84.

Kirk was born in Rayville, La. He enlisted in the Air Force in 1951, training as a mechanic, but became an aviation cadet two years later and earned his wings and commission in 1954. In his early career he flew reconnaissance jets in the Far East, collecting airborne samples to monitor Soviet nuclear tests, and then flew the RF-101 Voodoo in Europe. He switched over to fighters in 1960 and was one of the first operational pilots to fly the F-4 Phantom II.

After USAF Weapons School, he went to Southeast Asia in 1967, serving in the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing at Ubon AB, Thailand. During that tour, he shot down enemy jets on two separate missions, downing a MiG-17 and a MiG-21. He earned a Silver Star for each of those actions.

In the first engagement, May 13, 1967, Kirk was flying MiG combat air patrol for a strike package of F-105 Thunderchiefs. He came to the rescue of a “Thud” being pursued by a MiG-17. On afterburners, Kirk lined up, obtained acquisition tone, and fired two AIM-9 heat-seeking missiles. One of them downed the MiG.

The second dogfight, on Oct. 24, was unusual at the time for its long duration—about seven minutes—and heavy maneuvering. Kirk, leading an F-4D group defending F-105s on a strike mission, engaged a MiG-21. He fired two radar guided missiles. They seemed to miss, although one may have damaged the MiG slightly. Kirk ended up chasing down his opponent and destroying the aircraft with cannon fire from his 20 mm SUU-23/A gun pod, at a range of some 600 feet.

At the time, USAF doctrine suggested that air combat would likely take place at great distances, with missiles, and early Air Force F-4s did not have an internal gun.

Kirk racked up 130 combat missions in Southeast Asia.

After commanding the 4538th Fighter Weapons Squadron at Nellis AFB, Nev., Kirk returned to the Southeast Asia theater in 1971 to set up an electronic warfare system called Teaball. It helped detect and warn of the approach of enemy fighters. The system comprised a series of vans and communications nodes at Nakhon Phanom AB, Thailand, monitoring enemy voice communications and air movements, receiving further data from RC-135 and EC-121 aircraft, and relaying the correlated information to strike packages en route to and from North Vietnam.

After working out the bugs in the concept, the system turned in good results and was used for the rest of the war. Part of its success relied on Kirk traveling to fighter squadrons and convincing pilots to trust the information they would get from Teaball—even though he could not reveal the source of much of the information.

Back in the States, Kirk attended Air War College and in 1971 was assigned to the Pentagon as chief of the Tactics Branch and later as head of the Tactical Division in the Directorate of Operations. It was in these positions that he, along with other officers, collaboratively developed the concepts of



Gen. William Kirk as commander, US Air Forces in Europe.

the Aggressors and Red Flag. This led to extremely realistic large-force exercises to season young fighter pilots before they saw actual combat.

Kirk helped put together a survey of fighter pilots across the service's tactical units and briefed then-Chief of Staff Gen. John D. Ryan on the alarming results. Air Force fighter crews were largely ignorant of Soviet aircraft and their capabilities, tactics, and formations, Kirk explained, and didn't fully understand the systems of the F-4 Phantom—USAF's top fighter at the time—having missed potential kills in the Vietnam War because they had gotten switchology wrong or fired their weapons outside the effective envelope.

He urged realistic training against an adversary unit that would simulate Soviet-style tactics and formations, as well as instruction in adversary systems. These recommendations led to the Air Force placing a higher priority on dissimilar air combat training, or DACT.

Moreover, Kirk, along with other officers, reportedly told Ryan and other tactical Air Force leaders that the service culture of “fly safe” was dulling its combat edge. Inventing new tactics was largely forbidden if it meant risking loss or damage of an aircraft, and pilots were rarely permitted to fly at extremely low level or at the edges of their aircraft's envelope. Kirk and the others pushed for more of a “train as you'll fight” philosophy. Despite the inherent danger in highly realistic training, Red Flag dramatically increased USAF's combat skills and success.

After tours as an operations officer, he took command of the 49th Fighter Wing at Holloman AFB, N.M., in 1975. In 1979, he was Pacific Air Forces inspector general and in 1980 became director of electronic combat at the Pentagon. In 1985, he took command of 9th Air Force, headquartered at Shaw AFB, S.C. In 1987, Kirk pinned on his fourth star and became commander of US Air Forces in Europe.

He retired in 1989.

—John A. Tirpak

The War on Terrorism

US Central Command Operations: Freedom's Sentinel and Inherent Resolve

■ Casualties

As of May 15, a total of 37 Americans had died in Operation Freedom's Sentinel in Afghanistan, and 41 Americans had died in Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq and Syria.

The total includes 75 troops and three Department of Defense civilians. Of these deaths, 35 were killed in action with the enemy while 43 died in noncombat incidents.

There have been 169 troops wounded in action during OFS and 36 troops in OIR.

■ US Drops "Mother of All Bombs" in Afghanistan

The United States' most powerful non-nuclear bomb made its combat debut on April 13 when an Air Force Special Operations Command MC-130 dropped a GBU-43 Massive Ordnance Air Blast bomb, also known as the "Mother of All Bombs," on an ISIS stronghold in Afghanistan.

At 7:32 p.m. local time, the bomb was dropped on an ISIS tunnel complex in the Achin district of Nangarhar province. "The strike was designed to minimize the risk to Afghan and US forces conducting clearing operations in the area while maximizing the destruction of ISIS-K [Khorasan] fighters and facilities," US Forces-Afghanistan said in a statement.

ISIS in Afghanistan is using bunkers, tunnels, and improvised explosive devices to build its defense. "This is the right munition to reduce these obstacles and maintain the momentum of our offensive against ISIS-K," Army Gen. John W. Nicholson, commander of US Forces-Afghanistan, said in the statement.

The GBU-43 was developed in just nine weeks to be ready for the Iraq War in 2003, but it has never before been used in combat. The GPS guided, 30-foot-long bomb weighs 21,000 pounds, 18,000 of that attributed to its high-explosive BLU-120/B warhead. The 30,000-pound GBU-57 Massive Ordnance Penetrator "bunker buster" bomb actually weighs more than the MOAB, but its warhead is a third of the size at 5,300 pounds.

The blast resulted in 36 enemy deaths, US and Afghan officials said. Nicholson said that the mission was not influenced by outside events and the decision to use the GBU-43 came from commanders in Afghanistan, not from Washington, D.C. Nicholson said US forces are on the ground and have so far not seen evidence of civilian casualties.

■ Squadron Sets Bombing Record On Deployment

The 332nd Expeditionary Maintenance Squadron recently wrapped up a historic deployment for Operation Inherent Resolve, the US campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Over six months, the unit kept their F-15E Strike Eagles consistently in the air as they dropped 5,018 munitions with "no tasked sorties missed," according to a US Air Forces Central Command (AFCENT) press release.

The team deployed from Mountain Home AFB, Idaho, and "surpassed every monthly bomb record for a deployed unit except for one," according to AFCENT.

The 332nd EMXS deployed nearly 500 maintainers and operators. "It's been a privilege to watch the Mountain Home team's



An A-10 banks away from a KC-135 after receiving fuel during a flight for Operation Inherent Resolve.

success throughout the past several months," said Capt. Jason Henderson, 332nd EMXS operations officer, according to the news release. "While over 5,000 munitions expenditures are certainly impressive, it's a by-product of something bigger: ... nonstop combat sortie generation. This deployment should be a case study in how to effectively generate and sustain combat airpower at the end of a challenging logistics pipeline."

■ Deployed Global Hawk Hits Sortie Milestone

A deployed EQ-4 Global Hawk, in the fight against ISIS, recently surpassed 1,000 continuous sorties without a maintenance cancellation. The Global Hawk, deployed with the 380th Air Expeditionary Wing, passed the milestone while on a surveillance mission April 1.

The aircraft used its battlefield airborne communications node (BACN) to help coalition assets communicate as part of Operation Inherent Resolve. Global Hawks regularly fly 25- to 30-hour missions to meet the constant demand. "Hitting 1,000 in a row speaks to the importance of the BACN mission regarding its direct impact on the warfighter, and I think that it says a lot about the stellar professionals filling the maintenance ranks from top to bottom," said a recent 99th Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron director of operations. (The Air Force does not release full names of its remotely piloted aircraft operators.)

■ Misdirected Strike Killed Friendly Fighters in Syria

A "misdirected" US-led coalition air strike on April 11 killed 18 allied Syrian Democratic Forces personnel, US Central Command announced. The air strike had been requested by partner forces that identified the location as an ISIS position. It was actually a forward SDF position.

"The coalition is in close contact with our SDF partners who have expressed a strong desire to remain focused on the fight against ISIS despite this tragic incident," CENTCOM said in a statement. The incident is the latest in a series of targeting errors, both confirmed and alleged, in the fight against ISIS. It came shortly after CENTCOM announced its investigation into a Mosul, Iraq, air strike that reportedly killed dozens of civilians.