

156TH FIGHTER SQUADRON

CHANGE OF COMMAND



— 4 AUGUST 2026 —

LUKE AIR FORCE BASE, ARIZONA

== A TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE ==

KEY PERSONNEL

PRESIDING OFFICER

Major General Marco Lant
Italian Air Force Combat Forces Commander

OUTGOING COMMANDER

Lieutenant Colonel Daniele Cantori

INCOMING COMMANDER

Major Bartolomeo Russo

NARRATOR

Captain Volodymyr Panasyuk

COMMANDER OF FORMATION

Lieutenant Colonel Emiliano Di Toma

GUIDON BEARER

1st Lieutenant Alessandro Flebus



SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

Opening Narration

Arrival of the Official Party

National Anthems

Remarks

Lieutenant Colonel Robert Cowsert

Remarks

Lieutenant Colonel Daniele Cantori

Change of Command

Remarks

Major Bartolomeo Russo

Remarks

Major General Marco Lant

Departure of the Official Party

Closing Narration

Lieutenant Colonel Daniele Cantori

Lieutenant Colonel Daniele Cantori is the outgoing Commander, 156th Fighter Squadron, Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. He oversees the training and development of future Italian F-35 pilots within the international Joint Strike Fighter training enterprise, and acts as Senior National Representative. A graduate of the Italian Air Force Academy, Lt Col Cantori holds a Bachelor's Degree in Aeronautical Sciences and a Master's Degree in Leadership and Strategic Analysis. Since commissioning in 2004, he has accumulated experience in operational flying, command, training, and multinational cooperation.



He began his operational career on the Tornado aircraft at the 6th Wing, Ghedi Air Base, serving in a variety of flying, operations, and tactics positions. During this period, he participated in Operation INHERENT RESOLVE, deploying to Kuwait and Qatar in operational and liaison roles supporting coalition air operations. Following his selection for the F-35 program, Lt Col Cantori completed F-35A qualification training in the United States and subsequently served at the 32nd Wing, Amendola Air Base, Italy where he contributed to the standup of the first Italian F-35 Squadron. He also took part in NATO Air Policing missions in Iceland, supporting multinational airpower operations and command-and-control activities.

In 2021, he was assigned to Luke Air Force Base as an F-35A Instructor Pilot, where he has been training Italian and allied fighter pilots. He later served as Chief of the Italian F-35 Training Section before assuming command of the Italian F-35A Training Unit, 156th Fighter Squadron from 2024 to the present. Lt Col Cantori has completed numerous military and international courses, including the Tactical Leadership Program, the NATO Electronic Warfare International Officers Course, and the Inter-European Squadron Officers School. He has received military decorations and commendations in recognition of his operational service, leadership, and contributions to international military cooperation. His professional interests include leadership development, fifth-generation airpower, operational integration, and multinational interoperability within NATO and allied air operations. He has been in a relationship with Valentina since 2002, married since 2016, and they welcomed their son Filippo, born in Phoenix, Arizona, in 2024.

Major Bartolomeo Russo

Major Bartolomeo Russo is the incoming Commander of the 156th Fighter Squadron, stationed at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. A distinguished graduate of the Italian Air Force Academy, Major Russo holds a Bachelor's Degree in Aeronautical Sciences and a Master's Degree in Leadership and Strategic Analysis. Since receiving his commission in 2006, he has established an exemplary military career, accumulating extensive experience across operational flying, command leadership, tactical instruction, and multinational cooperation.



Major Russo began his operational flying career piloting the Tornado aircraft with the 6th Wing at Ghedi Air Base, Italy, where he served in a variety of key flying, operational, and tactical positions. During this formative period of his career, he deployed for more than thirteen months in support of Operation INHERENT RESOLVE. Throughout this commitment, he completed two operational tours in Kuwait and one in Qatar, serving in both flying and liaison capacities to directly support coalition air operations.

Following his competitive selection for the F-35 program, Major Russo completed F-35A qualification training in the United States and was subsequently assigned to the 32nd Wing at Amendola Air Base, Italy. In this capacity, he contributed significantly to the standup and operational integration of the first Italian F-35 Squadron. Furthermore, he has supported allied collective defense through multiple NATO deployments, including two Air Policing missions in Iceland and an operational tour in Estonia, focusing on multinational airpower integration and command-and-control operations.

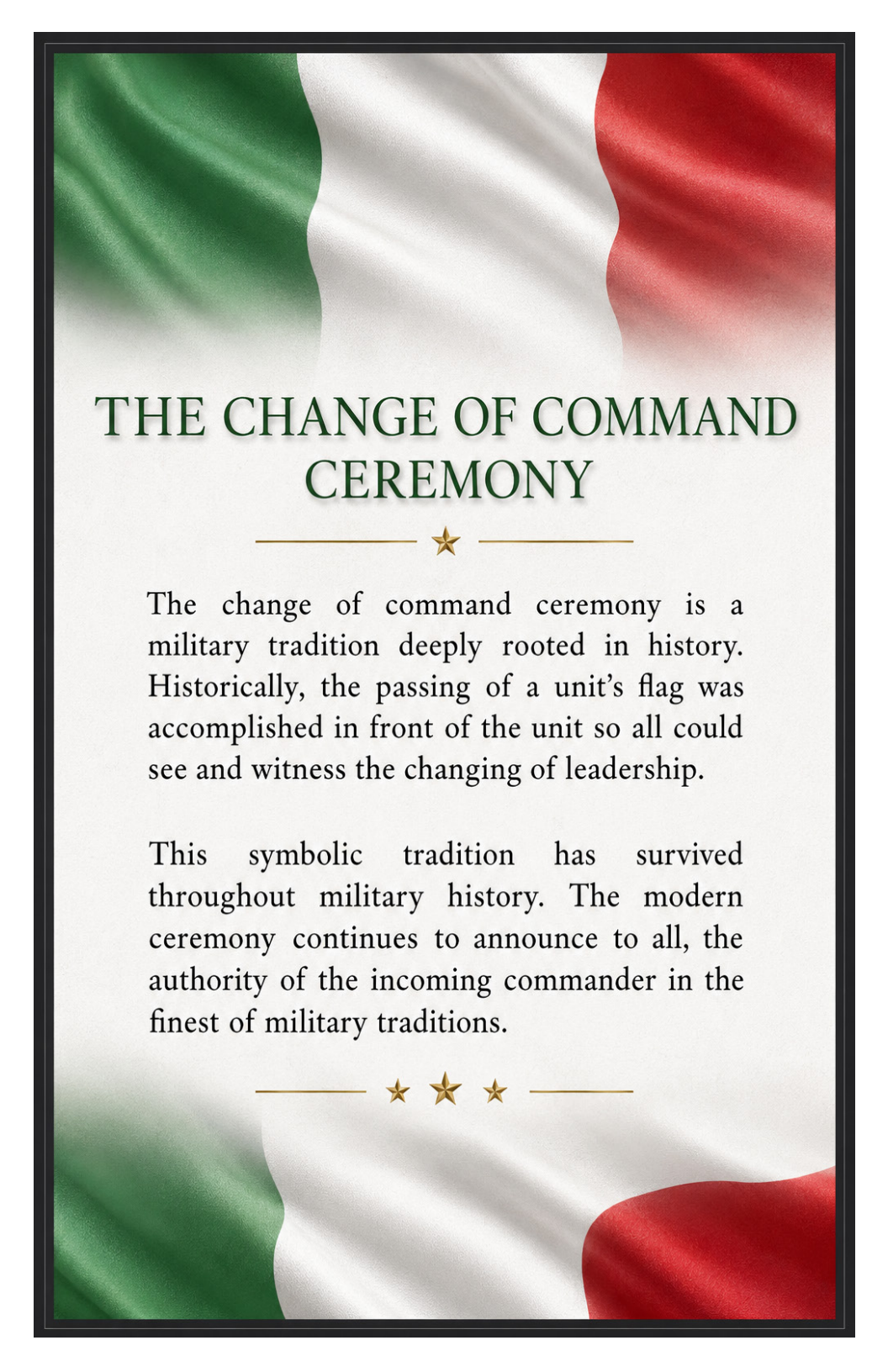
In 2023, Major Russo was assigned to Luke Air Force Base as an F-35A Instructor Pilot, where he has been responsible for training Italian and allied fighter pilots. Throughout his service, he has completed numerous advanced military and international programs, including specialized coursework in Electronic Warfare, and has been awarded several military decorations and commendations for his leadership and contributions to international cooperation. His professional interests remain focused on leadership development, fifth-generation airpower doctrine, and multinational interoperability.

Major Russo has been married to his wife, Arianna, since 2017. They are the proud parents of two children: Antonio, born in 2020, and Francesca Scarlett, born in 2021.

History of the 156th Fighter Squadron

The 156th Independent Attack Fighter Squadron “Le Linci” was established on January 20, 1941 at the Comiso Air Force Base, in the setting of the 23rd Land Attack Fighter Team. Equipped with the CR-42, it was employed in the central Mediterranean Sea until April 8, the date on which it was dissolved. On February 1, 1953, it was re-established with the F-84F as the All-Weather Conventional Bomber Fighter Squadron at the Ghedi Air Force Base. It was then transferred to the Gioia del Colle Air Force Base on June 1, 1966 and formed, jointly with the XII Interceptor Squadron, the 36th Fighter Wing. After having operated on the F-104S from 1970 to 1984, it continued to carry out its conventional bombing missions, lending support to naval operations and, later, to ground troops and reconnaissance missions with the Tornado IDS until 2016. It was initially within the 36th Fighter Wing of the Gioia del Colle Air Force Base and then, on the footprints of its own history, it returned to the Ghedi Air Force Base on July 1, 2008.

With its advanced weapon-system, The “Linci” took part in all the principal military operations, among those were: Operation “Locusta” in the Persian Gulf, “Sharp Guard”, “Deliberate Guard” and “Deliberate Force in Ex-Yugoslavia”, “Allied Force” in Serbia and Kosovo, “ISAF” in Afghanistan under the command of the Joint Air Task Force of Herat, “Odyssey Dawn” and “Unified Protector” in the skies over Libya, “INHERENT RESOLVE” over Iraq. Temporarily inactivated on September 14, 2016, the 156th Fighter Squadron is officially reactivated on July 2, 2024 as an Operative Conversion Squadron of the aircraft F-35A at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Working within the Pilot Training Center the 156th FS operates every day in a multinational environment training pilots from Italy, Norway, United States of America and other European countries that are operating on the F-35A. In this new role, the assign duties and the training opportunities are not limited like a regular Fighter Training Unit but comprehend a standardization role of the Italian F-35 Fleet and participation on international 5th generation exercises.



THE CHANGE OF COMMAND CEREMONY



The change of command ceremony is a military tradition deeply rooted in history. Historically, the passing of a unit's flag was accomplished in front of the unit so all could see and witness the changing of leadership.

This symbolic tradition has survived throughout military history. The modern ceremony continues to announce to all, the authority of the incoming commander in the finest of military traditions.



