

Unit members refurbish historic static aircraft

By Staff Sgt. Julie Parker
111th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

As a result of dedication and countless volunteer hours from members of the 111th Maintenance Group, the unit's A-10 Thunderbolt and the A-37 Dragonfly static aircrafts, located on either side of Building 300, have been restored to their original appearance.

"The two aircraft were in pretty shabby shape," explained Capt. Aaron Shick, 111th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron (AMXS) officer. "The decision to have them restored was made in December 2008."

After the decision was made to refurbish the planes, the wing hired a civilian company to do the work, but when the project seemed to be taking longer than expected unit members decided it was time to take matters into their own hands. A task like this may seem daunting to many, but once the wing members took over, the restoration was completed in five months.

"It took over 240 hours to complete," Tech. Sgt. Mark Brown,

111th MXS said. "Tech. Sgts. Mark Fossessa and Glenn Valentine removed debris from the jets and restored the structures before I began the painting process. Once that was complete, Master Sgt. David Barnes applied the decals and graphics."

They worked late nights and weekends and the restoration process was completed in December 2009.

"These guys did a remarkable job. It is awesome to see the finished product after all of the hard work they put in," said Lt. Col. Jim Larsen, 111th MXS commander. Lt. Col. Mike Regan, the 111th AMXS commander agreed, "We appreciate the hard work and dedication from the team that made the refurbishing possible."

Much like the base they have been retired to, the aircrafts themselves each have a their own rich heritage.

The wing received the A-37 Dragonfly dubbed "Lil' Missy" in 1983, as a replacement to the 0-2A Skymaster. Retired Lt. Col. Paul Lassonde and Senior Master Sgt. Frank Rabena were the original pilot and crew chief for the jet. Sergeant Rabena is still a member

of the unit as the Accessories Element Supervisor for the Aircraft Maintenance Squadron. "I always wanted to place a name on the aircraft that I crewed, and because the A-37 was the first jet I decided this would be the time."

He explained that he chose the designation Lil' Missy after his niece and goddaughter Melissa who was just two years old at the time.

The aircraft itself was part of the unit's demon-



Photo by Tech Sgt. Marie Harmon

Retired Master Sgt. Steve Deni and Retired Lt. Col. Terry Hobbs are photographed in front of the A-10 Thunderbolt II static display that was recently refurbished. The two men were the original crew chief and pilot for the aircraft.

stration team, which would travel and perform in various airshows across the country. After a fatal run in with a very large Canadian goose during a night flying mission in October 1988, it was clear that the jet would no longer be operative. "It was damaged beyond our capabilities," said Sergeant Rabena. Since then, the Dragonfly has remained a permanent resident to the unit.

The wing received Lil' Missy's companion, the sturdy A-10 Thunderbolt II in 1988. The original pilot and crew chief were Lt. Col. Terry Hobbs and Master Sgt. Steve Deni, both who are retired. "We were transferring the aircraft to Davis Monthan AFB, Ariz., but it came back with a fuel bladder leak," said Mr. Deni. "That's a major issue for a jet so around 1992 it made into a static."

Although they no longer fly missions for the 111th FW, the statics remain a window into the past and a fixture of the wing's heritage.

"To us they represent years of flying, stories of deployments, real world contingencies, and the impact that the wing has made in past and current operations state side and overseas," said Captain Shick.



Photo by Tech Sgt. Marie Harmon

Left photo: Retired Lt. Col. Paul Lassonde and Senior Master Sgt. Frank Rabena, 111th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron Accessories Element Supervisor, are photographed in front of "Lil' Missy," an A-37 Dragonfly static display that was recently refurbished. The two men were the original pilot and crew chief for the aircraft, which was designated "Lil' Missy" after Sergeant Rabena's two-year-old niece Melissa in 1983. Right photos are of Melissa then and now.



News briefs:

Annual retiree reunion dinner to be held in April

The annual reunion of current and former members of the 111th Fighter Wing, Pa. Air National Guard, will be held April 5, at 6:30 p.m. at Casa DiLucia Restaurant located at 14425 Bustleton Pike (intersection of Philmont Ave. and Bustleton Pike.) The restaurant's phone number is: (215) 677-6111.

The cost of the affair varies according to the dinner selection, and the food is excellent and reasonably priced. A cash bar will be available.

For more information, contact Vincent Celenza at: (215) 728-6008, Gary Yodell at: (215) 364-0473, or Jack Morris at (215) 322-8176.

Our deployed TCN escorts



Photo by Master Sgt. Brian Zarilla

Sixteen 111th Fighter Wing Guardsmen arrived at Ali Al Salem Air Base, Kuwait, where they will maintain accountability of Third Country National workers for the next 120 days. The TCN escorts come from many different career field specialties and receive job-specific training prior to deployment.

**Spring ahead!
Daylight Savings
begins
March 16**



Photo by Tech Sgt. Elisabeth Matulewicz

Special thanks ...

A group of Air Force Junior ROTC students from North Penn School toured the base Feb. 24, where they experienced what it is like in the Air National Guard for a day. Accompanied by 111th Fighter Wing Public Affairs, the group visited Life Support and then they received a briefing on the A-10 Thunderbolt II. Special thanks to all the unit members who made this event run seamlessly.