

DEPLOYED AIRMEN DEDICATE FLAGPOLE TO FALLEN COMRADE Commentary by MSgt Robert Payne, 1st Expeditionary Special Operations Maintenance Squadron

JANUARY 7, 2010 - AFGHANISTAN -- Being deployed this past September was a stark reminder of why we are fighting for the freedoms that we hold dear. The memories from the early morning hours of September 11, 2001, often remind many Airmen why they joined the fight in the first place.

More than eight years have passed since that tragic day, and many people have commemorated each anniversary by going to a ceremony in remembrance of those who have fallen. It has also become a day to show our appreciation for the sacrifices that our military heroes have made in combat.

On March 22, 2008, Tech. Sgt. William Jefferson Jr., a combat controller with the 21st Special Tactics Squadron, Pope AFB, N.C., made the ultimate sacrifice for his country.

While reflecting on the loss of Sergeant Jefferson, two aircraft maintenance technicians from Hurlburt Field deployed to the 1st Expeditionary Special Operations Maintenance Squadron decided to memorialize their fallen Airman.

After reading Sergeant Jefferson's biography, SSgt William Miller and SSgt Derek Spencer felt compelled to commemorate his memory by constructing a flagpole in his honor at Camp Jefferson in Afghanistan.

"We acquired a 22-foot pole from the Navy Seabees, the pulleys and clips from the Army and the rest of the materials from our unit," Sergeant Miller said.

The two craftsmen proceeded to cut, tap and weld the flagpole to its intended design. While considering the common features of other flagpoles on the installation, they said they wanted one key difference for their flagpole to stand out.

"We decided to cut open a 105mm shell casing and flatten the brass to produce a working material," Sergeant Spencer said.

Based on suggestions from their commander, Maj. Robert Bandstra, and maintenance operations officer, Capt. Cecil Johnson, they cut, hand-formed and riveted three pieces of brass together to form a three-dimensional spear-shape to be used as the top of the flagpole. The design was inspired by the spear depicted in their deployed emblem.

Finally, they used a 40mm shell casing to fit the finial to the top of the flagpole. Only two days after starting this endeavor, the flagpole and finial were presented to Lt. Col. Bryan Cannady, 21st STS commander, to be hand-carried and erected at Camp Jefferson.

However, Sergeants Miller and Spencer said they felt their job wasn't complete and that it needed something more.

"We knew our efforts were not finished and agreed that a placard was needed to complete the memorial," Sergeant Miller said.

They decided to use a 105mm shell casing for an inscription at the flagpole. Sergeant Miller removed the shells' primer and reversed it to create the base of the placard. Sergeant Spencer meticulously etched the following:

"In Memory of TSgt William H. Jefferson, Jr. KIA: 22 March 2008, Afghanistan."

At the dedication ceremony, the placard was presented to Colonel Cannady again to be hand-carried to Camp Jefferson and illuminated in front of the flagpole that immortalizes a fallen American hero.

Sergeant Jefferson, you are not forgotten.