AMCOM’s display Patriot relocates to home of Air Defense Artillery

By Gina Baltrusch

The decommissioned Patriot missile launcher on display in front of the U.S. Army Aviation and Missile Command’s headquarters departed Redstone Arsenal, Aug. 28, headed for a new home at the front gates of Fort Sill, Okla., to represent air defense artillery units and Soldiers stationed there.

It’s been more than 10 years since the U.S. Army Air Defense Artillery School and many ADA units were relocated to Fort Sill as part of a Base Realignment and Closure. The 30th Air Defense Artillery Brigade is a subordinate unit of the Fires Center of Excellence, which is part of Training and Doctrine Command. The 31st Air Defense Artillery Brigade and its three battle-ready air defense battalions are organized under the 32nd Air and Missile Defense Command, at Fort Bliss, Texas, part of the Army’s Forces Command.

“For decades, Fort Sill has been commonly known as the ‘Home of the Field Artillery’ – there are numerous static displays of howitzers and cannons all around the installation. In contrast, when it comes to having a visible presence on the installation, it’s not easy to tell that Fort Sill is now also the ‘Home of the Air Defense Artillery,’” said AMCOM’s Missile Maintenance Officer Chief Warrant Officer 4 Araceli Rial. “So, when we received a request from the 30th ADA for our display launcher, we didn’t hesitate to agree. It just seemed right that the ADA school and front-line ADA Soldiers should have our Patriot to represent them at their new home station.”

A cooperative team of Patriot system and transportation experts from both installations pooled their knowledge and experience to figure out how to partially dismantle and load the launcher, which has greeted travelers on Martin Road passing the Sparkman Center, during rain or shine, for almost 30 years.

In order to transport the launcher on public highways, the top two of the Patriot’s four missile canisters had to be removed and transported separately from the launcher so it would safely fit under bridges along the way.

The team had a little trouble when they encountered rust on one of the launcher’s actuators, piston-like components which raise and lower the missile canisters on the launcher.

“Naturally, it has some rust after all those years outside,” said Joe Woods, transportation lead from Redstone’s Logistics Readiness Center, as LRC mechanics assessed the situation. “But, that’s not anything we can’t deal with – we just need to get the parts to start moving a little bit.”

Some hammering, lubrication and a cutting torch did the trick, eventually allowing the missile canisters to be lowered using a hand crank to a level position for disassembly. The two canisters, then the launcher were lifted by crane onto flatbed trailers to begin their 760-mile journey.

“It definitely took the whole team to get the launcher ready for the trip,” said Electronic Missile Systems Technician, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jeremy Hedlind, who traveled to Redstone Arsenal from Fort Sill’s 30th Air Defense Artillery Brigade to shepherd the launcher to its new home.

“We’re really excited to have this Patriot coming home with us,” Hedlind said, smiling broadly as a missile canister was crane-lifted for loading. “We had already searched many other units and maintenance depots for one soon to be decommissioned that we might be able to have, but had no luck. So when AMCOM said we could come get this one, we came.”

The Patriot missile launcher arrived the afternoon of Aug. 29 at Fort Sill, where it will get a face-lift of sanding and fresh paint, said Hedlind. It is destined for prominent placement at Fort Sill’s Bentley Gate on Sheridan Road to represent the “Home of Air Defense Artillery” alongside “Home of the Field Artillery” displays.

The space left by its absence in front of the Sparkman Building will eventually be filled.

“We’re already on the lookout for another missile or rocket system ready for retirement,” said Rial.

Gina Baltrusch, serves as a public affairs specialist with the U.S. Army Aviation and Missile Command, at Redstone Arsenal, Alabama. With almost 25 years in Army public affairs, including seven as an active-duty Soldier (June 1991-November 1998), her experience includes media relations, public involvement, project-management support, writing, photojournalism, broadcasting and emergency management communications.