

Maintaining the mission

The 8th AMU makes jets fly

by Laura Pellegrino
Sunburst staff writer

Someone trying to start a 25-year-old truck wouldn't be too surprised if the ignition failed. A pilot trying to start an F-117A Nighthawk would have a far different reaction to the same situation.

The 160 members of the 49th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron 8th Aircraft Maintenance Unit maintain the F-117 all day, every day, to ensure that when a pilot's ready to take off, so is his aircraft.

"We're responsible for all of the scheduled and unscheduled maintenance on the 8th Fighter Squadron's F-117s," said Senior Master Sgt. Roberto Cisneros, 49th AMXS 8th AMU superintendent. "We put the aircraft in the air so the pilots can strike a target."

According to their Web site, members of the the 49th AMXS are "a team of professionals providing the right product, the right service, and the right information, to the right place, at the right time."

This is apparent in each member's dedication to their job,



Airmen 1st Class Shelly Lagania, 8th AMU load crew member, drives a bomb loader truck on the flight line.

Cisneros said. Everyone does what it takes to get things right the first time.

AMU crew chiefs are responsible for the overall maintenance of individual jets, he said. They service the jet, strap the pilot in and make sure it launches and is recovered.

Teamwork between the crew chiefs of the 8th AMU and the pilots of the 8th FS ensures the mission is completed effectively.

The crew chiefs take pride and responsibility for their designated jet, Cisneros said.

The strength of the relationship between pilots and the AMU crew chiefs is evident on the jets. Each F-117 has the name of the pilot on the canopy on one side and the designated crew chief on the other. The names of the crew chief's assistants are printed on the bottom of the jet.

"We have really good relationship with the 8th," Cisneros said. "When they get in their jets, they know the aircraft is ready to go to war."

The 8th AMU is also responsible for loading bombs onto the jets, Cisneros said.

"The weapons troops reconfigure all of the weapons related operations on the aircraft as well as load and arm them," he said. "They have a saying, 'without weapons it's just another airline.'"

Some AMU troops are avionics, electro-environmental, or engine specialists.

Avionics troops are responsible for duties such as maintaining computer radar, navigations, weapons delivery, and laser guidance systems. The electro-environmental team

inspects and maintains the oxygen system, cabin pressure system, and heating and cooling systems. Engine troops maintain all aspects of the jets engine.

These troops are all trained to perform each others jobs if they need to.



Airmen 1st Class Shelly Lagania inspects the cables that attach the bomb to the jet.



Photos by Laura Pellegrino

Airmen 1st Class Bradley Richardson, 8th AMU avionics specialist, checks for debris in an F-117's measurement equipment.

Of course, there is also an AMU support team and group of schedulers who keep the maintainers organized, Cisneros said.

"Maintenance is a never-ending process," he said. "We run three shifts over a 24-hour period, and it takes everyone to get the jet in the air. Those in the production office make all the people come together. They know what's going on with the entire fleet."

Of course the mission is important, but above all else members of the 8th AMU must practice safety, Cisneros said.

"People are our biggest asset," he said. "We want to make sure everything is done safely so that no one gets hurt."

According to Cisneros, the combat squadrons and their maintainers are the backbone of the Air Force.

"The whole base is here for one reason; to put jets in the air," Cisneros said. "We're what the Air Force is all about."



Senior Airman Brandon Wannarka, 8th AMU crew chief, inspects an F-117 tire.



Senior Airman Brandon Wannarka, 8th AMU crew chief, removes a power round to test the F-117's electrical system.



Airmen 1st Class Shelly Lagania, 8th AMU load crew member, checks a bomb's fin release wire. The fins on a bomb keep it stable after being released on a target.