

Airman Spearheads Restoration of Old Minuteman Missile



Air Force 2nd Lt. Angie Phillips, 490th Missile Squadron deputy missile combat crew commander, stands in front a Minuteman I missile Sept. 18, 2015, in Lewistown, Mont. (U.S. Air Force/Chris Willis)

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Malmstrom Air Force Base, Montana.— Several times a week, airmen driving to and from a missile alert facility pass Lewistown, a small town in central Montana. In the center of the town is a museum with a Minuteman I missile on display.

Nobody really knows how it got there or why. Some people in the city call it the lonely missile, while others say it was placed there for deterrence. Until recently, the only sure thing about the missile was that it was decaying.

Air Force 2nd Lt. Angie Phillips, 490th Missile Squadron deputy missile combat crew commander, is one of the airmen who drive the route several days a week. She grew up in the Air Force — her father and his father served in the Air Force. "It's kind of just a family thing," she said.

Seeing the missile several times a week, Phillips said, she was disappointed in its appearance and decided to do something about it.

"On my third alert, I was on my way to the launch control center and saw this missile on the side of the road," she said. "I would have never thought a Minuteman I missile would be on display."

New to the squadron, she contacted her flight commander and asked if anyone had been working to restore it.

"Nobody was doing anything to fix it up, which surprised me," she said. "I felt like it really needed to get fixed."

First Step: Research

Phillips went online to find out more about the missile in Lewistown, but nothing popped up.

"I then went out to the base museum and found only one small article from 1969," she said. "They really had no great information about it, so I took time from one of my off days and asked around at the Lewistown museum, and they didn't really know anything about it, either."

Phillips then called officials at the National Museum of the Air Force at [Wright-Patterson Air Force Base](#), Ohio, who started digging and found out it was part of several test pieces used for the Minuteman I missile.

"I went to the town trying to see if anybody knew someone who was there when the missile was put in the ground around 1969, but once again, I got limited information," the lieutenant said. "I then asked if I could take on the project to restore the missile."

In the middle of the project, Phillips said, she was notified that she had been picked to compete in the Air Force Global Strike Challenge, the world's premier bomber, intercontinental ballistic missile and security forces competition.

"I had to balance between prepping for Global Strike Challenge in the evening and working on the missile in the morning," she said. "Working on both called for some flexibility."

Limited Resources

After the competition, Phillips went right back to work on the missile, with limited resources and information. "The town really got together, getting lift cranes and bucket trucks," she said. "They would tap [it] out and take turns scraping the paint off."

After almost six months of scraping off old paint, applying new paint and fighting bad weather, the effort restored the missile to its original glory.

"The town takes so much pride in their restored missile," Phillips said.

Lewistown now views Phillips as a representative for the base, and the town now has bigger plans to represent the missile wing in the museum.

"When I drive by the missile, I look at it and think 'I helped with that project,' but it's more than that," Phillips said. "I think about all the hard work from others that did more than I did. There are so many people in the town that were so amazing. It was the town that came together and got this project done."

Phillips said she's happy she took on the project. "What motivates me is the sense of pride — pride in what my job does and pride of being in the Air Force," she said.