

Flying history grounded at McKinley firing range



Photo by Kari Hawkins

REDISCOVERED MEMORIES— Retired Master Sgt. David Brown, left, and retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 Mike Kather stand in front of an OV-Mohawk observation and electronic reconnaissance airplane that is part of an OMEMS training area at McKinley Range. Brown was a Mohawk technical observer who did four tours in Korea, and Kather is a Mohawk pilot who flew the aircraft during the 1980s and '90s.

Mohawk aircraft resurfaces as group celebrates reunion

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There's a lot of flying history on McKinley Range.

Amid the helicopters and an A-10 Thunderbolt airplane set up on the range for force training is an OV-1 Mohawk, a photo observation and electronic reconnaissance airplane used by the Army in Europe, Korea, the Vietnam War, Central and South America, Alaska, and Operation Desert Storm.

It is a military aircraft that is at the center of the 20th reunion of the OV-Mohawk Association Sept. 23-27 in Nashville.

Yet, the actual physical presence of a Mohawk on Redstone Arsenal was an interesting discovery for a former Mohawk pilot and technical observer who recently visited McKinley Range to see the military aircraft for themselves.

"Ten years ago, a friend (now deceased Mohawk pilot Mike Langer) told me a Mohawk had come to Redstone Arsenal at some time," said David Brown, a retired master sergeant and Mohawk technical observer.

"The Veterans Memorial Museum showed me pictures of the airplane out at Redstone Arsenal. So, I knew it was on the Arsenal. I just didn't know where it was."

With the reunion coming up, Brown got more curious. He searched Yahoo maps and found a satellite view of the Mohawk.

Coincidentally, he had recently met a former Mohawk pilot — Mike Kather — at a local Tennessee Valley Honor Flight event. Kather, who works for the Fixed Wing Product Office, was able to tell Brown where the Mohawk was located.

Brown also discovered that the Mohawk is the property of the Ordnance Munitions and Electronics Maintenance School. Brown received special permission from OMEMS to visit the Arsenal's Mohawk site, and, on Sept. 1, he, Kather and a group of Kather's co-workers met at McKinley Range to be escorted to the Mohawk.

Kather first discovered the Mohawk on an aerial map of Redstone Arsenal at Google Earth.

"You can't miss it. It has three tails and a funny looking bulbous nose," he said.

What they saw on the ground brought back memories, and showed the reality of decay and damage that is often the fate of aging and obsolete military hardware. The Mohawk's paint was faded, it was missing much of its instrumentation and its ejection seats, there was damage to the tail and it was in a general state of disrepair.

"There are so many guys that flew these," Kather said, reminiscing with his co-workers. "There are tons of guys and I'm one of the last ones. Some of those guys go back to the '60s."

The Mohawk's condition didn't mar Brown's memories of his four tours in Korea as a Mohawk technical observer. He recalled when he first fell in love with the idea of flying in a Mohawk.