

# Hickory Aviation Museum welcomes Prowler into retirement



Valerie Buccio/ Hickory Daily Record: Jeff Wofford, Sabre Society President of the Hickory Aviation Museum, has all veterans at the event stand or raise their hand to give thanks for their service.

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## Prowler aircraft retires in Hickory

HICKORY—The Hickory Aviation Museum welcomed the VMAQT-1 EA-6B Prowler Saturday morning to its new home with multiple high speed low flybys and a final landing for the aircraft.

All EA-6B aircrafts will be gone by 2019 because the Marine Corps is disbanding them, Patrick Fitzgerald, who is in charge of inventory and production, said.

“It’s exciting and it’s our last flight,” the Banshee Squadron Maintenance Material Control Officer Chief Warrant Officer 3 Gil Satterfield said. “We are excited it’s coming to Hickory knowing it’s in great hands.”

Most EA-6Bs will be stored away, but the VMAQT EA-6B will be at the museum for the public to view, Fitzgerald said.

The prowler is an electronic attack aircraft that takes away enemy radars, Senior Representative for the Banshee Squadron and Aircrew Maintenance Officer Maj. Michael Lynch said.

“She’s a monster, and I love flying her,” Lynch said.

The prowler is dedicated to all the marines that worked on it, Lynch said.

The Banshee Quality Assurance Chief Gunnery Sgt. Ki Kimball said the squadron lineage, the aircrew’s names, the maintenance department’s names and the Banshee logo are decorated on the prowler.

“It is bitter sweet for the squadron,” Kimball said. “It’s the final aircraft; it’s the end of an era.”

Nancy Hall said she came to the welcoming ceremony for her husband who served in the Vietnam War flying an A6 since he was unable to attend.

She said tears ran down her face as the prowler flew by, reminding her of her husband and father at war who fortunately both came back in one piece.

It took four years for the prowler to get to the museum because logistics slowed down the process, Vice President of the Hickory Aviation Museum Gregg Kirby said.

“This is huge for us,” Kirby said. “This is incredible.”

He said the prowler will be the 15th aircraft to the exhibit.

All military planes at the museum are taken apart such as taking out the engine, he said. The prowler is demilitarized, but fully functional to fly, he added.





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The prowler is the first plane to fly in and retire at the museum, versus being shipped to the museum like all of the other aircrafts, Kirby said.

"She's old, but it's the last aircraft that flies with all steam gauges," Lynch said.

Kimball said the prowler is loud and powerful. Everyone at the event had to be at least 100 feet away from the landing strip in addition to having ear plugs.

The exhaust is tilted to the ground causing hurricane category 3 winds that could tear up black-top surfaces, Kimball said. Planes have to land on aircraft concrete, he added.

The heat from the exhaust gets up to 500 degrees Fahrenheit, the Banshee Quality Assurance Representative Staff Sgt. Chris Reed said.

The prowler flew by the audience several times in different formations so the public could get every angle of the aircraft.

The prowler was introduced to the fleet in 1971 and led the way in combat, Sabre Society President at the museum Jeff Wofford said during his speech to the public at the ceremony.

The prowler has been in service for 45 years, Wofford said. It is a fully integrated electronic warfare system combining long-range, all-weather capabilities with advanced electronic countermeasures, he added.

"It's a part of history," a Banshee Egress and Environmental System's Technician Staff Sgt. Chris Williams said. "It's great seeing it from start to finish."