

This week's veteran is Tom Stewart.

Tom and friends, Tom Cook and Bob Long, graduates of the Assumption High School Class of 1954, enlisted in the Air Force and left for basic training at Lackland Air Force Base, TX, in August 1954. Tom was sent to jet engine school at Sheppard Air Force Base, Wichita Falls, TX, for advanced training. The Air Force wanted Tom to stay and teach at the jet engine school, but he didn't want to spend his career in Wichita Falls.

After Sheppard, he came back to Illinois to attend school on the Martin MGM-1 Matador Missile at Chanute Air Force Base. The Matador was the United States' first operational surface to surface cruise missile. It was actually an upgrade of the V-1 rocket that the Germans used in WW II with an added guidance system and an improved jet engine.

After Chanute, he was assigned to the 11th Tactical Missile Squadron, Orlando Air Force Base, FL, arriving in July of 1955. His crew on which he was a jet engine technician practiced firing the Matadors from Cape Canaveral. The Matador crews became very accurate at striking targets up to 500 miles.

In June of 1956, the 11th Tactical Missile Squadron was moved by twelve planes to Sembach Air Force Base, West Germany. The 11th was the first unit ever moved in its entirety in three days to Europe. They became part of the 587th Tactical Missile Group. The Matadors were equipped with nuclear warheads and were always on alert, raised and ready to fire. Tom would be on duty for 24 hours a day for a week and then off duty for two weeks. After 21 months, he returned to the United States and was discharged four months early.

Tom came back to Assumption and worked for Moore Brothers Construction before taking a job with General Finance, Aurora, IL. He returned to Assumption to run the Phillips 66 Station that had been managed by his dad. After the station closed, he worked seven years for Midway Fertilizer at Radford and eight years for Sunshine Dairy in Decatur before moving to Texas to work as a construction superintendent for 22 years. He moved to Assumption when he retired.

In 1969, he married Jerri Wells who died in December of 2012. They have four children: Don, Stephanie, Michael, and Jeff; six grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

Thank you, Airman First Class Thomas Milton Stewart, for what you gave for us.