

## Komodo 11 Remembered

MOODY AIR FORCE BASE -- The ceremony was short, but the memory of the Komodo 11 crew will live on in the hearts and minds of its families, friends and the 347th Rescue Wing.

At 5 p.m. Tuesday, a special retreat was held in front of the 347th RQW headquarters building at Moody Air Force Base. Squadrons assigned to the 347th were formed on the street facing the flag pole. Also present were family members and friends of the Komodo 11 crew, who were seated in front of the headquarters. The event was especially solemn for the 41st and 38th Rescue Squadrons whose formations were side by side. The six airmen lost had come from within their ranks.

After the flag was lowered and being folded, four HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters from the 41st RQS flew overhead in a missing man formation and paid a last tribute to their fallen comrades.

There were no speeches during the ceremony. The only words spoken were by Chaplain Gary Perry, 347th RQW, who gave a brief prayer on behalf of the Komodo 11 crew. He reminded those present that the crew gave their lives in an attempt to make life better for others.

"We offer thanks to these brave airmen who served our nation with distinction in times of great peril not only for our nation, but the entire world," Perry said.

"Today we not merely honor the crew of Komodo 11, but what we can do ourselves to live the same heritage that they left for us."

On March 23, 2003, the six-member crew on board an HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter was en route on a rescue mission in Afghanistan to save two children suffering from head injuries.

During the flight, the helicopter and another helicopter were engaged in an in-flight refueling operation with an HC-130 aircraft.

During the refueling, the Komodo 11 crashed into the mountainous terrain of Afghanistan. In a brief instant the lives of Lt. Col. John Stein, aircraft commander; 1st Lt. Tamara Archuleta, co-pilot; Staff Sgt. John Teal, flight engineer and Staff Sgt. Jason Hicks, aerial gunner, were gone.

Also on board the Komodo 11 were two pararescuemen of the 38th Rescue Squadron: Master Sgt. Michael Maltz and Senior Airman Jason Plite.

Maltz had well over 20 years in the Air Force and volunteered for Operation Enduring Freedom, because he knew his experience was needed. Plite, on the other hand, was just beginning his career in pararescue.

An investigation was conducted by the Air Force as to why the helicopter crashed, but no reason was ever determined.