

Senior Master Sergeant Vincent P. Celenza distinguished himself in service to the United States of America and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as an aircraft mechanic, crew chief, and Quality Assurance Specialist, between 1948 and 1988. During his 40-year career in the service of his country, Sergeant Celenza became experienced with no fewer than ten distinct aircraft.

Sergeant Celenza's career began in 1948, when he joined the Army National Guard and then transferred to the 111th Bomb Wing in 1950. In April 1951, the unit was activated and assigned to Fairchild AFB, Washington, to support the Korean War effort. During this period, Sergeant Celenza served as an assistant crew chief on the B/RB-29 "Superfortress" aircraft, flying photo reconnaissance missions. He was subsequently transferred to the 91st Strategic Photo Reconnaissance Squadron at Yokota Air Base, Japan. He was released from active duty and returned to the 111th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing in December 1952. During his years with the 111th, he held various positions in and around the 111th aircraft maintenance community; his final assignment was an Aircraft Quality Assurance Specialist in the 111th Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance Squadron.

In 1965, Sergeant Celenza approached the Wing Commander, Colonel Edgar Owen, and suggested that that unit fly a collection of Christmas cards, Christmas cookies, and toiletry articles from the various organizations within the local community to the service men and women serving in Vietnam. At the time, the then-111th Air Transport Group was flying the C-97 "Stratocruiser" out of Willow Grove Air Reserve Station. After numerous phone calls, Sergeant Celenza's concept made its way through the Guard Bureau, the Department of Defense, and even President Lyndon Johnson. "Operation Christmas Star" became a reality and went into full swing. Hence, the C-97s from the 111th headed for Vietnam – the first Guard aircraft to do so. Sergeant Celenza's original idea and diligence to seeing it through brought a "little piece of home" to thousands of our service men and women overseas.

Sergeant Celenza's contributions did not stop there. He was the first to volunteer for many additional duties and responsibilities within the 111th. During his time as president of the 111th Tactical Air Support Group Airmen's Council, he was instrumental in the planning and dedication of the unit's memorial. The monument, erected to the northwest of the Wing Headquarters Building, still stands to this day and have been the scene of many formal historical remembrance ceremonies. The monument is a stirring reminder of those who served and sacrificed so much as members of the 111th throughout its 75-year history.

Over his 40-year career, Sergeant Celenza earned numerous awards and decorations, including the Outstanding Airman Award in 1967 and the Army and Air National Guard Meritorious Service award in 1971 for the "Best Black and White Photo" contest. Sergeant Celenza retired from the Air National Guard in January 1988.

The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Vincent P. Celenza in a lifetime of service as mentor, leader and friend, reflect great credit upon himself, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Air National Guard and warrant induction into the Pennsylvania Air National Guard Hall of Fame.