



RED HORSE and Prime BEEF Association Newsletter

Spring / Summer 2026

Going To Colorado Springs for Our Next Convention/Reunion

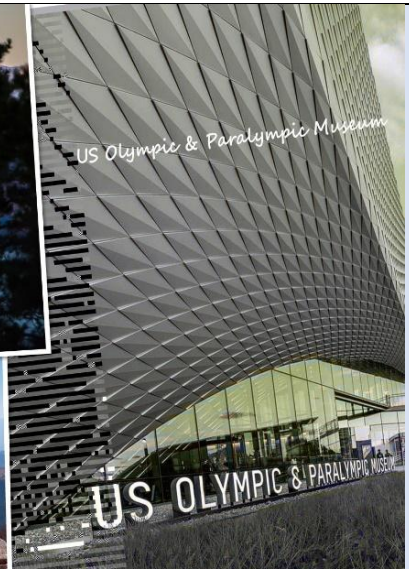
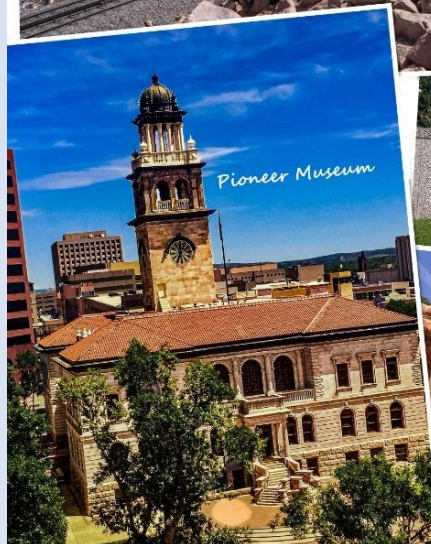


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**Bill Ackley, see page 5



See you there????



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE APRIL 2026



When the Nation calls, Airpower must answer—and Airpower starts with an airfield. That power projection platform doesn't appear by chance. It is built, repaired, and sustained by Air Force Civil Engineers! Since our convention, Air Force engineers have enabled operation in Venezuela and Iran. For decades, RED HORSE and Prime BEEF have delivered the infrastructure that makes the mission possible, often in the most demanding environments around the world. That legacy of grit, ingenuity, and “can-do” spirit continues today, and it's something every one of us should take immense pride in.

Our Association exists to preserve that legacy and strengthen the bonds that make this community so special. Whether you served years ago or are still in uniform today, the connection we share is unique. It's built on hard work, shared challenges, and the knowledge that what we do truly matters. Staying connected ensures that those stories, lessons, and relationships endure for the next generation.

We've recently lost one of the members of our board and the designer of the CE Memorial at Wright-Patt. Take some time to remember those we've lost in the past two years, including our dear friend Bill Sims. Their contributions to our community will never be forgotten.

I encourage you to support our scholarship program. It is one of the most meaningful ways we invest in the future; helping the families of our members pursue educational goals and promoting the values we all hold dear. Your continued support makes direct and lasting impacts.

I also ask that you help us grow this Association. Reach out to a fellow Airman, a former teammate, or someone you served with and invite them to join. Our strength lies in our numbers and in the diversity of experiences across generations. Bringing in new members ensures that our heritage remains strong and relevant.

Finally, I encourage each of you to start making plans now for our 2027 Convention and Reunion in Colorado Springs. These gatherings are opportunities to reconnect with teammates, meet new members, and celebrate the enduring impact of RED HORSE and Prime BEEF. If you've attended before, you know how meaningful they are. If you haven't, make 2027 the year you join us.

Thank you for your service, your commitment, and for staying connected to this incredible community. I look forward to seeing you in Colorado Springs.

Lead the Way!

Tony



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**RED HORSE and Prime BEEF Association
Board of Directors**

**2026-2027
BRIGADIER GENERAL WILLIAM “TOM” MEREDITH
HONOR SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**

INTRODUCTION: We're pleased to announce our 16th annual RED HORSE and Prime BEEF Association (RHPBA) Tom Meredith Scholarship Program for the 2026-2027 academic year. This year we'll be awarding a minimum of three \$2,000 scholarships.

The Scholarship Program was created in 2010 offering financial assistance to current Association members and their immediate families seeking to further their education by attending an accredited technical institution, college or university of their choice. We acquire funds for this program entirely from donations, contributions and fund-raising efforts throughout the year.

POLICY: Academic scholarships are competitively awarded to the following array of applicants planning to attend or currently attending accredited institutions of higher learning, including vocational and technical institutes:

- A. Qualified high school seniors and prior year high school graduates
- B. GED recipients
- C. Home school students meeting the public high school graduation requirements for their respective state
- D. Undergraduate students with at least two semesters remaining prior to graduation

THE APPLICATION PROCESS is defined on our website (www.rhpba.com) and allows applicants to prepare and submit a fillable application form and five accompanying attachments via email.

WHO'S ELIGIBLE TO APPLY? The program is available to family members of an RHPBA member in good standing (annual dues are current). A family member can be a member's spouse, son, daughter, stepson, stepdaughter, adopted son, adopted daughter, grandson, granddaughter, and includes the member.

HOW TO APPLY: Go to our RHPBA website (www.rhpba.com) and click on "SCHOLARSHIP". Follow the guidance in preparing and submitting the fillable Application Form and five accompanying attachments.

Please direct any inquiries to Scholarship Committee Chair Don Boone via email: dboone555@outlook.com or text (518-441-7639).

SUBMISSION DEADLINE IS JUNE 15, 2026

BEHIND THE LOGO: A CONVERSATION WITH BILL ACKLEY by Jason Nieves

The Original Creator of "Chargin' Charlie" — In His Own Words. A companion interview to the feature article on the origins of the RED HORSE logo.



INTRODUCTION

Before "Chargin' Charlie" became the global symbol of RED HORSE, it began with one Airman, a vision, and a handful of improvised art supplies in Vietnam. In this exclusive Q&A, **Bill Ackley** shares the story in his own words — unedited, unfiltered, and exactly as he lived it.

THE INTERVIEW

1. How did you get selected to design the RED HORSE logo?

Bill: Right after I finally got off the nasty Rock Crusher, MSgt. Massey came to me and said at their staff meeting (Capt. Currin, Chief Hocevar, MSgt. Goff, and MSgt. Massey), they had discussed getting a person added to the staff that had drafting skills because they did not have the time to wait on engineering to do the many projects Airfields was involved in for the next year. I don't know exactly why they chose me out of the entire squadron, but they somehow knew that I had taken drafting in high school. Sgt. Massey asked if I would like to come to Airfields and work on the captain's staff as an illustrator. Well, I knew this was a great opportunity so accepted.

2. What was the process like? How did the idea come together?

Bill: We worked on several projects and in March 67, Capt. Currin said the Colonel wanted to know if I or anyone I knew could come up with a logo for our squadron because he wanted us to be known across the base and stand out by painting the logo on our vehicles. I told the captain, I was pretty sure I could do it. Within an hour I had a vision

in my head, a red horse sitting on a bulldozer and carrying an M-16. No help, no suggestions.

I do remember trying to figure out the supplies since we didn't exactly have a neighborhood Walmart. One of my Hootch mates was Jerry Drake who was a clerk in the Colonel's office.

I decided on some paper and pencil to draw it, a ruler, and figured crayons would be good to work with for the project. Then I would need stencils, tape, and scissors to make piece parts of the finished product and spray paint.

Once I got what I needed in a couple days, I sat down with my idea, we were a unit called RedHorse, we were in a combat zone, and we were a heavy equipment squadron. The only colors I needed were white for the background for the equipment, black, yellow, and red. Within two days, I had my drawing.

3. Who reviewed the logo and what was the reaction?

Bill: I first shared it with my boss, Sgt. Goff; then Sgt. Massey and both really liked it. Then to Chief Hocevar for final critique, he really liked it, so took it to Capt. Currin, for approvals with NO changes. Then Capt. Currin took it to the Colonel, BINGO! All he wanted to know was how fast could I get the logo painted on jeeps first. All I needed was my stencils and spray paint. Then about a week later, I had the first one painted on the Colonel's jeep.

Now, I am pretty sure it was Colonel (General) Meredith at that time, because Col. Carey was due to leave in Feb. I was actually really proud of myself that the first eyes to see it loved the way it looked and especially it being our commander.

4. What elements of the design were intentional?

Bill: I wanted the horse to be the focal point of the drawing and show he was a "dirt boy" doing what a "dirt boy" does best on a piece of construction equipment in a combat zone. The M-16 was the gun we were all issued and indicates we were in a war zone.

5. What happened after you left the Air Force? When did you first learn the logo lived on?

Bill: Here is the little weird part. After I got out of the AF in August 68, I only had memories and did not ever know what happened to the organization, RedHorse. No computers or cell phones to keep up with world or military news. When I was attending Louisiana Tech, I bowled on the men's bowling team and one of the guys I bowled with was Mike Merryman. His dad was a career A.F. Chief and his brother an A.F. officer. Mike graduated in '72, married and moved to Nebraska. Every year, we bowled in the National tournament and eventually Mike moved to Las Vegas.



Sometime in the late 80's or real early 90's, he called me and asked "didn't I once tell him I was in the AF and part of the RedHorse unit"; I said yes, why? He sent me a copy of the NASCAR Truck series with the RED HORSE logo on a truck hood (#17). I was shocked. It was the very first time I saw my drawing (changed a lot but still my original design) outside of Vietnam!

I immediately started searching for a contact as to where, how, and why my design had shown up on a NASCAR truck. I remember sending a letter to NASCAR to get in touch with someone in the A.F. to talk to and get some info. I was so surprised, proud, happy, sad, and confused to see something I did show up over 20 years later.

6. *How did you reconnect with RED HORSE?*

Bill: Next thing I knew, I received an e-mail from the 820th with several names (one was Monk). I replied, sharing who I was and my part in the creation of the logo in 1967. They replied, indicating they were forwarding my info to MSgt. David Sommers with the 554th in Guam because he was the 554th Historian. I replied and thanked them and waited for David to contact me. It took a few days, and I received an e-mail from him.

I was pretty overwhelmed that not only was RED HORSE alive all these years but had grown and was a pinnacle part of the USAF. David shared that many times the guys would sit down and talk about the 'who, what, where, why, and when' "Chargin' Charlie" was born. I shared many pictures with David and he wanted to be sure they were going to be part of the new building RH was constructing on Anderson AFB.

7. *What did you think when you discovered the RED HORSE Association and saw the modern versions of the logo?*

Bill: It was several years later when I heard about the RED HORSE Association from my friend, Jay Baird from Riverside, CA, who served with me in the 554th. I googled it, joined as a life member, and posted a lot of the pics on the site. It was also the first time I actually saw a RED HORSE Chevron.

I was really proud to see it and saddened at the same time. Here is something I initially created, and someone has probably made a lot of money selling a design they did not create. Then it struck me it is different if they change or alter the original, so they can get away with it.

My design had a red horse, yellow bulldozer, black treads and blade, and was carrying an M-16, not an M-1. It also has a white lightning bolt instead of yellow. There are now a few other added things like dirt or exhaust behind the dozer and Charlie blowing, which were several things I had planned to do with a brush after getting all our equipment stenciled since those enhancements would not have worked with a stencil.

8. *Did you think RED HORSE would survive beyond Vietnam?*

Bill: Honestly, at the time, I don't think anyone believed the "RedHorse" concept would have lived on past the year or two we spent in Vietnam and it would just revert back to a Civil Engineering Squadron. I think General Meredith had a great vision and fought to keep the vision alive and maybe the design helped a little, at least I would like to think so.

I would have liked to have met him and asked him face to face about his thoughts, but the fact he never personally came to me but sent his approval through Capt. Currin was good enough for me at the time.

9. *Do you have any regrets?*

Bill: The one regret I have is it was never included on my APR because at the time it was not important, but designing the asphalt for the first parking ramp for C-123s in Vietnam was noteworthy.

10. *What would you want younger RED HORSE Airmen to know?*

Bill: I think I covered your questions except for the younger airmen out there. Gosh, how to let the thousands of young airmen out there being assigned to the best unit in the USAF know the story behind "Chargin' Charlie"? He came to life 59 years ago this month. I was only 20 years old at the time.

I am so pleased to see my creation (even if a little altered) is alive and well. I am happy I attended the 50th, 58th, and 60th Anniversary Convention/Reunion and got to see so many old and new Horsemen. I am saddened my friend Jay Baird passed away two years ago; he would have loved being at the 60th. Another friend I worked with at BellSouth for 25 years was in the 555th at the same time, I was in 554th and would have loved to come but was remodeling his home.

Hope this helps and I truly thank you for this effort you are willing to do for me and "TO THE HORSE!"

CLOSING NOTE

This interview is intended as a **companion reference** to the main feature article on the creation of the RED HORSE logo. It preserves Bill Ackley's voice exactly as he shared it — a living piece of RED HORSE history.





RHPBA NEWS ITEMS

554th RED HORSE CELEBRATES 60 YEARS OF MILITARY SERVICE

DVIDS: Story and photos by Airman Kyle Jones, 36th Wing. 3 November through 7 November 2025.

The 554th RED HORSE celebrated their 60th anniversary with a week of different activities starting with a 5K Run/Ruck on Monday morning. Then the Touch-A-Truck event, which was part of the week-long series of events called HORSE

Andersen Air Force Base, Guam: Airmen assigned to the 554th Rapid Engineer Deployable Heavy Operational Repair Squadron Engineers celebrated the unit's 60th anniversary during a HORSE Week event on Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, November 3-7.

The 554th RED HORSE was established Oct. 1, 1965, and began training in November of 1965 at Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico. It is one of the two original RED HORSE units whose original mission was to improve the Air Force's engineering capability to quickly respond to expedient wartime construction and disaster recovery efforts on U.S. bases.

Since its activation in 1965, the 554th RED HORSE has been known as the "Horsepower of the Pacific," due to their ability to build airfields, support combat missions and respond to disasters across the region. It is now a part of 17 total force RED HORSE units around the world.

"We have a strong sense of identity and tradition," said Staff Sgt. Malaivanh Gray, a unit training manager assigned to 554th RED HORSE. "Our unit is hands-on, hard-working and mission-focused, but also filled with camaraderie, humor and loyalty."

The unit's mission has evolved from rapid wartime construction in Vietnam to a versatile global engineering force capable of operating anytime, anywhere.

Members honored their legacy, fitness and the lasting impact of those who built the unit's reputation through HORSE week events, including a 5K Run/Ruck, Touch-a-Truck, and a combat dining-in.

"Through a variety of team-building activities, competitions and ceremonies, we highlighted the squadron's commitment to both hard work and camaraderie," Gray said. "These events emphasize the 'work hard, play hard,' mentality that defines us."

"The 5K is more than just a fitness event," said Staff Sgt. Martha Rivera, a unit deployment manager assigned to 554th RED HORSE. "It's a tribute to six decades of excellence, resilience and teamwork."

RED HORSE also hosted Touch-a-Truck, an event focused on giving back to children in the local community by showcasing different types of equipment and vehicles the unit uses on a day-to-day basis.

HORSE Week culminated with a combat dining-in, a less formal version of a traditional military dinner meant to boost morale through a simulated "combat" environment.

Following the celebration, 554th RED HORSE members invited others to join in by wearing the unit's signature red hat alongside a community of 4,000 other RED HORSE Airmen around the world.

"This unit has shown me that the Air Force will challenge you in ways you don't expect, but those challenges will shape you into a stronger leader and teammate," Gray said. "I've learned the importance of hard work, learning quickly, being adaptable, and to never forget why you serve, because that purpose will carry you through the toughest days."



U.S. Air Force Airmen assigned to the 554th RED HORSE participate in a 5K Run/Ruck on Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, November 3, 2025. The 5K Run/Ruck served as the beginning of a week-long celebration to honor the 554th RED HORSE 60th anniversary.



HORSE Week began with a 5K Run/Ruck at 6:30 a.m. Monday morning and brought together Airmen, enlisted and officers alike.



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Malaivanh Gray, 554th RED HORSE unit training manager, stands with her daughter during the Touch-a-Truck event.

U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Aiden McLaurin, 554th RED HORSE heavy construction pavement and equipment, showcases how to operate machinery during the Touch-a-Truck event, an event focused on connecting with the children on base.



U.S. Air Force Airmen assigned to the 554th RED HORSE host Touch-a-Truck, an event focused on giving back to the children



Students attending Andersen Elementary School pose for a photo during the Touch-a-Truck event.



BOOTS ON THE GROUND / BEYOND THE FENCE

CE WEEKLY, Special Edition, 7 January 2026.



Over the past year, CE Airmen answered the call not only in support of the mission, but also in service to the communities around them—stepping up during times of need, investing in local programs, and strengthening partnerships through meaningful engagement. The following stories represent just a fraction of the dedication, teamwork, and service-minded spirit CE professionals bring beyond the fence every day.

EOD Airmen Work Shoulder to Shoulder after Texas Floods

DVIDS: Headquarters Air Force, Office of the Director of Civil Engineers; 6 January 2026. Story and photo by Alexandra Broughton, photo courtesy of CMSgt. Jason A. Luckenbaugh.

Kerrville, Texas: When catastrophic flooding swept through Kerrville, Texas and neighboring communities along the Guadalupe River in early July, homes were ripped from their foundations and miles of riverbank were buried under debris. As families searched for missing loved ones, calls for assistance echoed across Texas. Within hours, Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Airmen mobilized to support search and recovery operations.

Volunteers from teams including the 7th EOD Flight, 902nd EOD Flight, 433rd Reserve EOD Flight, Headquarters Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center, and EOD Homebuying arrived to find a community still organizing its response amid overwhelming devastation.

“Everywhere you looked was absolute destruction,” described Chief Master Sgt. Jason Luckenbaugh, Civil Engineer Major Functional Manager, AFIMSC. “Cars were in the river; houses were in the river—people’s lives were destroyed. I’ve done two tours in Iraq and three in Afghanistan, and I’ve never seen anything like this.”

The Airmen quickly focused on strengthening coordination efforts already in progress. Drawing on the planning, communication, and risk-management practices refined in demanding operational environments, they helped organize search maps and establish shared situational awareness, enabling sustained operations over multiple days.

“We are no strangers to working in austere environments searching for things nobody wants to find,” said TSgt Seth LaMountain, EOD Craftsman, 433rd CES. “A small community close to home was devastated by a natural disaster and needed help searching for and recovering missing persons. All of us wanted to help the families of missing people find closure.” The work demanded technical skill and emotional resolve, as every recovery represented a family waiting for answers.



Explosive Ordnance Disposal Airmen from multiple units deployed to Kerrville, Texas, following catastrophic flooding along the Guadalupe River, supporting search and recovery operations alongside local and state responders. Working in hazardous conditions, the Airmen applied operational planning, risk management, and technical expertise to help recover victims, provide closure to families, and demonstrate service before self during a time of profound community need.

EOD teams searched debris fields and challenging terrain along multiple sections of the river. Conditions were often hazardous, with unstable ground, submerged dangers, and recurring storms that caused river levels to rise rapidly. “We immediately got to work, digging through the rubble, some piles were over 20 feet high of trees, parts of houses, whatever flowed down the river,” said Luckenbaugh.

Luckenbaugh recalled a recovery in which a family was present when remains were located. The team paused, joining the family in a brief moment of prayer. “All of us had to turn our heads as we all got a little choked up -- most of us are fathers,” Luckenbaugh said. “That was definitely one of the hardest things I’ve ever done in my life, but it was also one of the most rewarding at the same time. We gave that family closure.”



The volunteers' professionalism and steady presence reinforced strong coordination with local and state officials. "After a few days, the Emergency Operations Center labeled us as their 'go-to' team," said Senior Master Sgt. David Dickey, Senior Enlisted Leader, 902nd CES. "When follow-on flooding occurred and search and recovery efforts were paused, our team was the only one allowed to continue searching for human remains."

According to Dickey, EOD volunteers assisted in the recovery of eight victims during the operation. Staff Sgt. James M. Gonzales, EOD superintendent, 433rd CES, also noted the return of two personal artifacts to family members—small items that helped "restore small but meaningful pieces of what was lost during the disaster."

LaMountain reflected on a pattern he has witnessed during emergency responses nationwide, with Kerrville being no exception: "I've responded to numerous stateside critical incidents—natural disasters, terrorist attacks, active shooter incidents," he said. "Every time, what stands out is seeing communities come together to support one another."

That sense of unity was evident along the riverbanks, where EOD Airmen worked side by side with local first responders and civilian volunteers, sharing tools, information, and long hours—bound not by uniform, but by a collective commitment to help.

Reflecting on the shared mission, Dickey emphasized the example set by the Airmen who volunteered alongside the community.

"We worked shoulder to shoulder with civilians from all over the country who showed up simply to help," he said. "In the face of tragedy, these Airmen embodied what service before self truly means. The bravery and selflessness displayed by this group was nothing short of remarkable."

124th CES Strengthens Redwoods National Park

DVIDS: Headquarters Air Force, Office of the Director of Civil Engineers; 6 January 2026. Story by Caitlin Robinson, photo by Alexandra Broughton, photo courtesy of 124th Fighter Wing.

Redwoods, California: When the Wolf Creek Education Center required facility-wide upgrades to continue serving students, faculty, and staff, the 124th Civil Engineer Squadron stepped in, leaving a lasting impact on Redwoods National Park, California. By strengthening critical infrastructure, the squadron not only supported the community, but also sharpened mission-ready skills through an Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) mission.

What began as a community request quickly grew into a multi-trade project, allowing Airmen to apply their technical skills while improving a valued public facility.

From start to finish, the mission balanced operational readiness with service to the community.



Airmen from the 124th Civil Engineer Squadron strengthened infrastructure at the Wolf Creek Education Center in Redwoods National Park, California, during an Innovative Readiness Training mission that balanced community support with mission-ready skill development. Through multi-trade construction and collaboration with park partners and tribal nations, the mission enhanced public facilities while building teamwork, leadership, and expeditionary readiness.

The project originated from the National Guard Bureau's IRT program, which connects Air National Guard units with communities in need of infrastructure support. When Redwoods National Park submitted a request for the education center—a hub for outdoor education, wildlife, and forestry—it required work across multiple civil engineering trades, including plumbing, electrical, HVAC, structures, and earthwork.

IRT missions place Airmen in real-world environments where both technical and leadership skills are tested. Col. Ryan Richardson, commander of the 124th Fighter Wing, emphasized the unique value of these missions: "Innovative Readiness Training missions provide an amazing opportunity to enhance our Airmen's skill sets," Richardson said. "They also provide team building, leadership, decision making, and logistical challenges, leading to a better trained team ready to fight our nation's wars if called upon."

Maj. Matthew Mills, commander of the 124th CES, explained that once the request was approved, the National Guard Bureau selected the 124th CES, along with five other units, to participate. The squadron then partnered with local governments and tribal nations to improve public facilities while developing core expeditionary skills.



Working alongside tribal construction teams and park partners exposed Airmen to region-specific construction practices not typically available at their home station. Mills explained that the tribal construction teams shared techniques designed for higher seismic activity and more humid environments – conditions unique to the Redwoods region.

This exchange of expertise allowed Airmen to expand their technical skillsets while strengthening relationships with community partners, highlighting the value of collaborative training environments where both military and civilian teams learn from each other.

For the Wolf Creek Education Center, the project focused on improving facilities, restoring trail lighting, constructing accessible walkways, and supporting redwood forest rehabilitation in partnership with Redwoods Rising. For the squadron, the mission reinforced teamwork, professional growth, and hands-on experience. Through repair, modernization, and construction, Airmen enhanced the center's ability to support outdoor education programming.

Mills noted that community members expressed sincere appreciation for the work, including individuals who shared their own experiences at the education center years earlier. "The shared passion for craftsmanship among skilled tradesmen fostered a strong team bond. This environment encouraged the exchange of not only technical skills but also personal stories, building a deeper respect for each other's communities." These interactions reinforced the importance of the mission, reminding Airmen that their technical skills had a direct and tangible impact beyond the uniform.

Airman 1st Class Ethan Wylie, a plumbing apprentice with the 124th CES, explained how the mission offered both professional growth and a sense of contribution. "I believe our squadron made a very positive impact towards the Redwoods National Park community, especially for the students and staff," Wylie said. "The process of creating a higher-quality learning environment helped us become a more skilled and well-versed team."

Wylie described how the plumbing work was the largest project he had participated in, increasing his confidence and precision in his trade. "These opportunities do great things for our squadron and the communities we serve," he said, adding that he intends to continue volunteering for similar missions in the future.

Service extends beyond traditional perceptions of military operations for the 124th CES. Mills described it as giving back to the community without expectation of reciprocation, reflecting the Air Force core value of "Service Before Self." This IRT mission strengthened community relationships, supported public education, and enhanced Airmen readiness through meaningful, hands-on work.

By the end of the mission, the impact was clear on both sides. The Wolf Creek Education Center gained improved facilities and restored infrastructure, while the 124th CES returned with strengthened skills, deeper partnerships, and reinforced pride in their service. The mission demonstrated IRT at its best, where community support and combat readiness advance together, leaving lasting value for all involved.

Dyess Airmen Serve Abilene with the We Care Team

DVIDS: Headquarters Air Force, Office of the Director of Civil Engineers; 6 January 2026. Story and photo by Alexandra Broughton, photo courtesy of the Dyess We Care Team.

Abilene, Texas: On weekends in Abilene, Texas, Civil Engineer Airmen from Dyess Air Force Base can be found doing work reminiscent of classic military duties—surveying projects, solving problems, lifting materials, and working side by side as a team. The difference is the mission location. Instead of maintaining base infrastructure, their efforts extend beyond the installation and into the surrounding community, supporting elderly, disabled, and disadvantaged residents.

What started as a simple idea has grown into an award-winning community service program led by Dyess Airmen. Through hands-on volunteer projects across Abilene, the We Care Team brings together Airmen, families, and community members to serve those in need.



Airmen from Dyess Air Force Base support the Abilene, Texas community through the Dyess We Care Team, a nonprofit organization providing hands-on volunteer services to elderly, disabled, and disadvantaged residents. Founded in 2000, the program strengthens community partnerships while developing Airmen's leadership, teamwork, and technical skills through meaningful service beyond the installation.



The Dyess We Care Team, a nonprofit, brings together Airmen from across the base, along with families, retirees, and civilians, to serve throughout the Abilene area. Through organized volunteer efforts, the team supports everything from individual home repairs to large-scale projects for local nonprofits.

The program traces its roots to a simple phone call made in 2000 by then Staff Sgt. Gordon Storey, who saw firsthand how increasing operational demands were straining mentorship, teamwork, and connection among Airmen. Believing community service could strengthen what was missing, Storey proposed using hands-on volunteer projects as a way to rebuild cohesion and develop leaders.

“The Dyess We Care Team has grown enormously since its beginnings under the support of Installation Commander Col. Joseph P. Stein,” said now retired MSgt. Storey, Dyess We Care Team program director. “What began as a leadership program has grown into a nationally recognized, award-winning nonprofit that continues to expand its reach and purpose every year.”

From the beginning, the We Care Team focused as much on developing confident, resilient Airmen as on completing projects—proving that service to others can be a powerful force multiplier.

Volunteers from every background contribute to the team’s success, but Storey noted that Civil Engineers contribute exceptional technical expertise, making them some of the team’s most relied-upon volunteers. Their strengths in construction, electrical work, plumbing, carpentry, and project planning enable the We Care Team to tackle projects that would typically fall beyond the scope of a traditional volunteer organization.

“Alongside technical skills, CE Airmen contribute strong problem-solving abilities, safety awareness, and an ability to lead teams through complex projects. Other volunteers complement this by bringing creativity, compassion, adaptability, and a willingness to learn,” Storey emphasized. “Together, this blend of technical proficiency and personal dedication allows the We Care Team to complete high-impact projects that directly benefit the elderly, disabled, and disadvantaged members of our community.”

Col. David Benson, former 7th Bomb Wing commander and Dyess AFB commander from 2015–2017, said the Dyess We Care Team made service accessible and meaningful not only for Airmen, but for families and community volunteers as well. After hearing from Storey, Benson and his family began volunteering regularly, including on a project refurbishing a run-down adult handicap center in downtown Abilene, where volunteers worked together to replace grey, worn walls with bright, colorful artwork.

“My family worked in a room where we painted gumballs on the walls,” Benson recalled. “We laughed, had so much fun, and still talk about it nine years later. What a great experience that helped instill in my kids the gift of giving back to others.”

Of the many projects completed by the Dyess We Care Team, Storey highlighted one that stood out. Airmen and community volunteers came together to support a young boy with a rare medical condition that prevented him from being exposed to sunlight. While the child was away, volunteers quietly built a fully shaded backyard playground, complete with protective covering and lighting so he could safely play after dark.

When the boy returned home, the surprise included a parade led by the Tye Police and Fire Department, followed by the reveal of the playground by “Abilene Spider-Man.” “Watching his joy, knowing what that moment meant for him and his family, is something I will never forget,” Storey said. “It captured everything the We Care Team stands for.”

The Dyess We Care Team’s impact on the Abilene community is unmistakable. Through home repairs and service projects, volunteers help restore safe living conditions while strengthening connections with residents who are often overlooked. Transformation is just as visible among the volunteers, who gain leadership experience, resilience, and teamwork through hands-on service.

Looking ahead, the Dyess We Care Team remains focused on developing Airmen while meeting the needs of the surrounding community. With continued partnerships, future projects, and a commitment to sustainability, the organization continues to create opportunities for Airmen to put boots on the ground and make a lasting difference—on base and beyond the installation.

March Firefighters Answer the Call in the Eaton Fire

DVIDS: Headquarters Air Force, Office of the Director of Civil Engineers; 6 January 2026. Story by Jena Calvitti, photo by Alexandra Broughton, courtesy of the 163rd Attack Wing.

Eaton Canyon, California: When the Eaton Fire overwhelmed communities in California, Air Force civil engineers deployed to augment local firefighting efforts and support disaster response operations.

In January 2025, a catastrophic wildfire erupted in California’s Eaton Canyon, burning more than 14,000 acres, destroying over 9,400 structures, and displacing over 100,000 residents. Driven by hurricane-force winds and months of drought, the fire overwhelmed local resources and created a humanitarian crisis in the foothill communities of Altadena and Pasadena.



Air Force civil engineer firefighters from March Air Reserve Base deployed as part of a Type I strike team to support local firefighting operations during the Eaton Fire in Altadena and Pasadena, California, in January 2025. Integrated under local command, the Airmen supported fire suppression and infrastructure protection efforts as part of the multiagency response to the wildfire.

Amid the chaos, Air Force civil engineers answered the call—not only as technical specialists, but as a lifeline for the communities in distress. Their mission was clear: augment local firefighting efforts, protect lives and property, and restore critical infrastructure. Engineers deployed as part of a Type I strike team, equipped with five structural fire trucks, each able to pump 1,000 gallons per minute and provide 1,900 feet of firefighting hose. Self-sufficient for 72 hours, the team carried food, water, fuel, and medical supplies—everything needed to sustain operations.

When boots hit the ground, the magnitude was undeniable: the air was thick with smoke, burning wood and dry grass stung their nostrils, and the orange glow of fire painted the sky behind the Rose Bowl stadium. Conditions were bone dry—the perfect storm for mass destruction.

For the Airmen at March Air Reserve Base, the deployment reflected something deeper: Air Force civil engineers’ commitment to service, strength, and compassion when disaster strikes. One Airman reflected that seeing families displaced and livelihoods destroyed only reinforced why they train relentlessly.

“There’s an unspoken understanding that we’re all in this together, and we’ll get through it together. Empathy is a huge factor. You see the news footage.

You hear the reports. You try to imagine what it must be like to face the threat of losing everything you own, everything you’ve worked for. Families being displaced, livelihoods threatened, that hits you hard. You can’t help but feel a deep sense of empathy for the people of Altadena,” said Michael A. Goodman, Assistant Chief of Health and Safety for March Field Fire Emergency Services.

Civil engineer firefighters integrated seamlessly into strike teams under local command, working side-by-side with municipal crews to defend homes in immediate danger, target spot fires, and conduct overhaul to prevent re-ignition. When water supply issues and equipment failures threatened operations, civil engineer teams improvised—locating alternative sources, troubleshooting pumps, and maintaining continuity under pressure. Their ability to adapt in real time was critical to holding the line.

Goodman recalled a moment of calm after the flames subsided: “The sun was setting over the scorched landscape, smoke rising in wisps from what was left of the community, and there was a quiet that enveloped us. No sounds of cars, no sirens, no roaring fire, just silence. A calm not everyone could understand was in the air.”

Thinking back on the mission, Goodman added: “You don’t go into a situation like Eaton alone. You go with your team, and you go for the people who need you most. That’s the calling.”

Eaton proved that expertise, combined with compassion, can drastically change the outcome of a disaster. The Eaton wildfire was a test of endurance, adaptability, and humanity. For the people of Altadena, they restored safety and stability. And for the Airmen who answered the call, Eaton was a reminder of why they train, why they serve, and why they stand ready when communities face their darkest hours.

219th RED HORSE SQUADRON IN GREAT FALLS WELCOMES NEW COMMANDER

Originally published on montanarightnow.com, part of the BLOX Digital Content Exchange, ABC FOX Montana’s Post. By Mark Rattnejr, NonStop Local Digital Journalist; 11 January 2026.

GREAT FALLS, Mont: Members of the 219th RED HORSE Squadron welcomed Col. Jennifer Cinq-Mars as their new commander this past weekend.

The transition took place with members of the 219th rendering their final salute to Mortag, marking the change in leadership.

The 219th RED HORSE Squadron is part of the Air National Guard and plays a crucial role in civil engineering projects.



Col. Cinq-Mars replaces Col. Todd Mortag, who is moving on to lead the 120th Mission Support Group.

Col. Jen Cinq-Mars formally assumed command of the 219th RED HORSE from Col. Todd Mortag on Jan. 10, though she's been filling the role since November.

The ELECTRIC: The Electric Media Group, LLC. The Electric is an independent news website focused on Great Falls and Cascade County, as well as Malmstrom Air Force Base and the Montana National Guard. The Electric is run by Jenn Rowell, a journalist with more than two decades of journalism experience.

The unit is the Montana Air National Guard's Rapid Engineer Deployable Heavy Operational Repair Squadron Engineers, an expeditionary engineering unit that provides infrastructure and heavy construction support for disaster response, humanitarian assistance and federal contingency operations.

The 819th RED HORSE is the active duty unit located at Malmstrom Air Force Base.

Col. Jen Cinq-Mars formally assumed command of the 219th RED HORSE from Col. Todd Mortag on Jan. 10, though she's been filling the role since November.

Cinq-Mars is a longtime Guard member but hasn't been part of RED HORSE previously.

It's a little unique, she said, that she's not a civil engineer, as previous commanders have been.

She has a variety of experiences across the Air Force, previously serving as the A4 director, overseeing logistics and other tasks at the Montana National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters at Fort Harrison in Helena.

Cinq-Mars also served as a manpower division chief for the Air National Guard at National Guard Bureau in Arlington, VA., just outside Washington, D.C.

Members of 219th RED HORSE constructing temporary medical facility in Billings [2020]

She's also the first female commander of the 219th, which she said wasn't a factor for her since they foster a culture of respect regardless of gender.

But, Cinq-Mars is also the first University of Montana graduate to command the unit since engineers typically come from Montana State University.

The unit is the Montana Air National Guard's Rapid Engineer Deployable Heavy Operational Repair Squadron Engineers, an expeditionary engineering unit that provides infrastructure and heavy construction support for disaster response, humanitarian assistance and federal contingency operations.

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She said she'd had some fun with that though it was tough with UM's recent football losses to MSU.

As 219th commander, Cinq-Mars' primary focus is preparing the unit for a deployment that's about two years out.

That sounds like a lot of time, she said, but since the majority of the unit is traditional Guard, meaning they're only together one weekend a month, with a lot of newer airmen, they have a lot to do.

They'll be deploying with Malmstrom's 819th RED HORSE unit and Cinq-Mars said it's helpful that they can train together and already work together and share equipment.

The 219th and 819th will be doing a project together this summer, she said, which will be good training and an opportunity to get to know the airmen they'll be deploying with.

In October 2025, the 219th mobilized to the Montana State Prison for about two weeks to provide water, showers and facilities as the prison dealt with a major water leak and boil advisory.



219th RED HORSE headed to Puerto Rico to support Hurricane Maria relief efforts [2017]

The broader 120th Airlift Wing of the Montana Air National Guard is “definitely a family outside your immediate family,” she said, and serves alongside her husband, Col. Josh Cinq-Mars, who commands the 120th Maintenance Group.

She said he understands some of the stressors and it’s great to have his support, as well as that of her in-laws, who are bot retired chiefs from National Guard units in other states.



As the 219th prepares for deployment, Cinq-Mars said the new airmen provide inspiration and fresh perspective. Seeing the newer generation work with their existing talent, “is really pretty awesome,” she said, “watching people grow on both sides.”

BRINGING THE BULL, RAISING THE BAR

DVIDS: 21 January 2026 updated story by DVIDS from 05/03/2012 and reposted here. Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Mike Meares, 15th Wing, 05/03/2012.

Joint Base Pearl Harbor – Hickam, Hawaii: Two Mile Team Hickam Warrior Run, May 3. This event was sponsored by the 647th Civil Engineers Squadron and their Prime BEEF Airmen. The specialized civil engineer unit of the Air Force Prime BEEFs provide a full range of engineering support required to establish, operate, and maintain garrison and contingency airbases.

1,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines at the conclusion of the two-mile Team Hickam Warrior Run May 3, JBPH-H, Hawaii. Airmen, soldiers, sailors and Marines stationed at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, sprint the final leg of the two-mile Team Hickam Warrior Run May 3.

In typical Prime BEEF fashion, the 647th Civil Engineers Squadron, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, brought the “bull” to the monthly installment of the Warrior Run May 3. Prime BEEF, is a Prime Base Engineer Emergency Force is a rapidly deployable, specialized civil engineer unit of the Air Force Prime BEEFs provide a full range of engineering support required to establish, operate, and maintain garrison and contingency airbases. The Prime BEEF motto is “If you mess with the bull, you get the horns.”



Members of the U.S. Navy and Air Force Joint Base staff do jumping jacks together during the warm up session of the monthly Team Hickam Warrior Run May 3, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii.

This event was sponsored by the 647th Civil Engineers Squadron and their Prime BEEF Airmen. Prime BEEF, is a Prime Base Engineer Emergency Force is a rapidly deployable, specialized civil engineer unit of the Air Force Prime BEEFs provide a full range of engineering support required to establish, operate, and maintain garrison and contingency airbases. The Prime BEEF motto is "If you mess with the bull, you get the horns."



Col. Dann Carlson, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam vice commander and 647th Air Base Group commander, leads a flight of airmen and sailors along the two-mile Team Hickam Warrior Run May 3, JBPH-H, Hawaii.



51st CES CONDUCTS RAPID OSAN AIRFIELD RECOVERY TRAINING

Published 5 March 2026 by Osan Air Base, an official website of the U. S. Government. Story and U.S. Air Force photos by Senior Airman Rome Bowermaster, 51st Fighter Wing.

OSAN AIR BASE, Republic of Korea: U.S. Air Force Airmen assigned to the 51st Civil Engineer Squadron tested Rapid Osan Airfield Recovery (ROAR) methods February 26–27, 2026, refining concepts designed to restore runway capability during contingency operations. The training evaluated ROAR, an Osan-specific, speed-focused approach intended to rapidly generate limited sortie capability following simulated attack scenarios. Unlike Rapid Airfield Damage Repair, which is designed for long-term durability, ROAR prioritizes rapid restoration to achieve approximately 300 aircraft passes, enabling jets to launch before transitioning to more permanent repairs. “ROAR is intended to be an exceptionally fast variant of RADR, utilizing a different set of resources than standard RADR procedures. It shifts what equipment is required for airfield recovery to equipment that has a lower failure rate” said U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Daniel Willhite, 51st CES officer in charge of construction.

On the first day of training, Airmen tested the placement of flowable fill concrete over crushed stone using a volumetric mixer. Following debris removal, pavement breaking, excavation and compaction, the team capped the repair with wet-placed flowable fill and conducted strength testing to determine how quickly the surface could support aircraft operations.

The second day focused on installing fiber reinforced polymer panels over compacted crushed stone, creating an immediate load-bearing surface intended to further reduce runway downtime during contingency scenarios.

“Each method provides redundancy to the other,” said Senior Master Sgt. Andrew Thurman, 51st CES heavy repair superintendent. “If we have equipment malfunctions, conceivably we should still be able to recover the runway enabling

Throughout the exercise, Airmen executed full-scale crater repair procedures, beginning with debris removal and upheaval marking before progressing through excavation, backfilling, compaction and surface restoration. The squadron measured both completion time and structural performance, conducting hardness testing to validate durability under projected aircraft loads.

By accelerating runway recovery techniques, the 51st CES strengthens Osan’s ability to sustain combat airpower under dynamic conditions. ROAR provides commanders with the capability to rapidly launch aircraft, preserving

mission continuity while follow-on teams implement longer-term recovery methods.

“We are working with the Air Force Civil Engineer Center to streamline the process and potentially spread it across the CE enterprise,” said Thurman. “RADR is still a viable process, and it’s something we will do when we have time because it will be a necessity to receive follow-on forces.”

The training underscores the critical role civil engineers play in sustaining airfield operations and ensuring the 51st Fighter Wing remains postured to generate airpower and ready to Fight Tonight.

“As we continue to test ROAR methods it will allow us to recover the airfield faster in the event of contingency,” said Willhite. “This allows us to put jets in the air faster to defeat our adversaries while minimizing the amount of time our troops have to spend working in the elements exposed to enemy threats.”



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Elyjah James, 51st Civil Engineer Squadron structural journeyman, hammers down a screw during ROAR training at Osan Air Base, Republic of Korea, 27 February 2026. The Osan-developed recovery method prioritizes speed to achieve approximately 300 aircraft passes before transitioning to longer-term repair solutions.



U.S. Air Force Airmen assigned to the 51st Civil Engineer Squadron drill concrete anchors. The fiber reinforced panels are used to quickly allow aircraft to takeoff in a contingency environment where the airfield may have been subject to damage.



Airmen pull a fiber reinforced panel. The panel-based technique is designed to rapidly return the runway to operational status in support of aircraft launch operations.



Airmen flatten compact crushed stone in preparation for fiber reinforced panels to be installed. ROAR focuses on quickly restoring limited airfield capability to sustain combat airpower while follow-on repairs are implemented.



Airmen remove excess debris in preparation for fiber reinforced to be installed. The panel-based technique is designed to rapidly return the runway to operational status in support of aircraft launch operations.



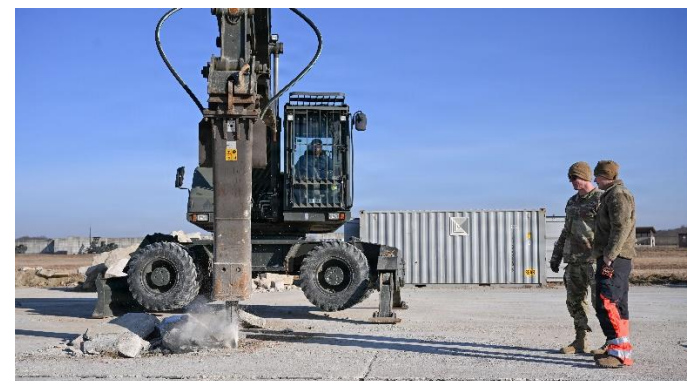
U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Omar Becerra, 51st Civil Engineer Squadron pavement and construction heavy equipment operator, removes excess concrete during ROAR training. Airmen tested a flowable fill concrete cap over crushed stone to evaluate whether the streamlined method can improve repair timelines during simulated attack scenarios.



Airmen mix concrete powder and water in a volumetric mixer during ROAR training. The training evaluated ROAR, an installation-specific method focused on restoring minimum runway capability quickly during contingency operations.



An Airman, dumps rocks into a crater. Airmen placed flowable fill concrete over compacted crushed stone as part of Osan's ROAR concept, designed to rapidly generate aircraft launch capability.



Senior Airman Delroy Williams, 51st Civil Engineer Squadron pavement and construction heavy equipment operator, breaks up ground with an excavator during ROAR training. The training evaluated the placement of flowable fill concrete over crushed stone using a volumetric mixer to rapidly restore limited runway capability under the ROAR concept.



CEREMONY MARKS 25th ANNIVERSARY OF 203rd RED HORSE PLANE CRASH

Virginia National Guard; The Commonwealth's Guardian. By Mike Vrabel, Virginia National Guard Public Affairs, 5 March 2026.

Virginia Beach, VA: The Virginia Air National Guard's 203rd Rapid Engineer Deployable Heavy Operational Repair Squadron Engineers Squadron, 192nd Wing, conducted a memorial ceremony March 3, 2026, in Virginia Beach, Virginia, to recognize the 25th anniversary of a plane crash which claimed the lives of 18 VaANG Airmen and three Florida Army National Guard aviators.



The ceremony marks 25th anniversary of 203rd RED HORSE plane crash.

Eighteen members of the 203rd lost their lives when the C-23 Sherpa they were flying in crashed in a cotton field near Unadilla, Georgia, March 3, 2001. The 203rd Airmen were returning home after completing a two-week military construction project at Hurlburt Field, Florida. It was the largest loss of life in the Virginia National Guard since World War II.

During the ceremony, Col. Andrew M. Weidner, commander of the 192nd Wing, gave remarks, as did several former members of the 203rd. Maj. Gen. James W. Ring, the Adjutant General of Virginia, was also in attendance. "Twenty-five years ago today, we lost the lives of 21 great Americans, 18 of whom belonged the 203rd RED HORSE," said Weidner. "I want to express my gratitude from the 192nd Wing, and let you know that we are all your family."

Debbie Turlip, the widow of retired Col. Thomas Turlip, who was in command of the 203rd at the time of the crash, also spoke at the ceremony. In 2001, in the immediate aftermath of the crash, she helped organize a support group of family members, which became the Charlie's Club, a RED HORSE family support group which remains active.

"We knew that what we were doing was profound. Supporting the families, supporting unit members,

supporting each other. We were trying to meet that moment," she said. "There's times that maybe you don't think you need a support group like that, but what's important to realize is that any time you do need it, Charlie's Club is there."

Turlip spoke at length about the events in 2001, and how the RED HORSE family came together to support everyone affected by the crash. Her emotional account was felt by everyone at the ceremony. "It's hard to put into words how it feels for me, speaking on behalf of my husband, in a room that's now called the Col. Turlip Auditorium," she said. "Emotion layered on emotion, and gratitude."

Despite the quarter century which has passed since the tragic crash, the memories of the fallen Airmen endure. For Airmen newly-assigned to the 203rd, unit leadership makes sure they learn and remember.

"The tradition in the RED HORSE community is to welcome new members in front of the Squadron by presenting a red hat to symbolize their place in the RED HORSE family," said Lt. Col. Carlos R. Nixon, the current commander of the unit. "At the 203rd, we add another tradition by giving the new member a dog tag with a missing piece in remembrance of the members we lost on March 3, 2001. This tradition is internal to the squadron and honors our history and those that shaped it. "A quarter-century is long enough that some people in the unit today weren't even born when the crash happened, yet the impact still shapes the identity of the 203rd," Nixon added.

The 203rd RED HORSE provides a highly-mobile civil engineering response force to support contingency operations worldwide.

203rd RED HORSE Airmen lost in the crash:

- Senior Master Sgt. James Beninati of Virginia Beach, Virginia
- Tech. Sgt. Paul Blancato of Norfolk, Virginia
- Master Sgt. Ernest Blawas of Virginia Beach, Virginia
- Tech. Sgt. Andrew H. Bridges of Chesapeake, Virginia
- Senior Master Sgt. Eric Bulman of Virginia Beach, Virginia
- Tech. Sgt. Paul Cramer of Norfolk, Virginia
- Master Sgt. Michael East of Parksley, Virginia
- Tech. Sgt. Ronald Elkin of Norfolk, Virginia
- Tech. Sgt. James Ferguson of Newport News, Virginia
- Tech. Sgt. Randy Johnson of Emporia, Virginia
- Staff Sgt. Mathew Kidd of Hampton, Virginia
- Senior Master Sgt. Michael Lane of Moyock, North Carolina
- Master Sgt. Edwin Richardson of Virginia Beach, Virginia
- Master Sgt. Dean Shelby of Virginia Beach, Virginia
- Tech. Sgt. John Sincavage of Chesapeake, Virginia
- Tech. Sgt. Gregory Skurupey of Gloucester, Virginia
- Tech. Sgt. Richard Summerell of Franklin, Virginia
- Maj. Frederick Watkins of Virginia Beach, Virginia

Florida Army National Guard Soldiers lost in the crash:

- Chief Warrant Officer 4 Johnny W. Duce of Orange Park, Florida
- Chief Warrant Officer 2 Eric P. Larson of Land-O-Lakes, Florida
- Staff Sgt. Robert F. Ward Jr. of Lakeland, Florida

RED HORSE READINESS: BUILDING THE FUTURE OF AIRPOWER



The 823rd RED HORSE squadron rapidly repaired a damaged airfield in Puerto Rico, transforming it into a mission-ready state in just two weeks. Their success is a powerful testament to expeditionary readiness, showcasing how strong leadership and skilled engineering enable the Air Force's ability to project airpower anywhere, anytime. (Courtesy photo)

Headquarters Air Force, Office of the Director of Civil Engineers. Published 17 March 2026, by Diana Nesukh; photos courtesy of the Air Force.

JOSÉ APONTE DE LA TORRE AIRPORT, Puerto Rico (AFNS): When a long-dormant airfield in Puerto Rico needed to be brought back to life, the call went to the legendary 823rd RED HORSE Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Florida.

Within days, a 21-Airman team led by Master Sgt. Dylan Ashley was on the ground at the former naval airfield in Ceiba, now known as José Aponte de la Torre Airport. The mission was to repair and restore critical taxiways that had not supported Department of War aircraft operations since 2004.

"The timeline was accelerated, and the project followed suit. Rumors surfaced Sunday, orders came Wednesday, and by Saturday the team was airborne. Within 48 hours of arrival, milling operations were underway."



The 823rd RED HORSE squadron rapidly repaired a damaged airfield in Puerto Rico, transforming it into a mission-ready state in just two weeks.

"If I could use one word to sum it [the mission] up, it would be fast," Ashley said.

For Tech. Sgt. Derek Purdin, the craft lead on the mission, the pace defined the deployment.

"The deployment to Puerto Rico was a standout and unique experience in my Air Force career," Purdin said. "The mission was fast paced, with rapid tasking: from notification to on-the-ground execution in under a week. Everything brought a high level of intensity and excitement with it."

He added that leadership's focus was clear from the start. "What stood out most was the clear prioritization of mission success and efficiency. Leadership emphasized, 'What do you need to complete this as quickly and effectively as possible?'"

The objective was clear: eliminate foreign object debris risks, repair failing asphalt overlay and return the airfield to fully mission-capable status to support Marine and Air Force aircraft operations under U.S. Southern Command.

Years of deterioration have left portions of the airfield in poor condition. Asphalt laid over original concrete had degraded significantly, creating FOD hazards that made aircraft operations unsafe.

RED HORSE engineers moved quickly. In just two weeks, both taxiways were restored, allowing military aircraft to launch without concern.

The team laid 800 tons of asphalt on their first paving day, 900 tons on the second, and then consistently achieved 1,000 tons per day – despite using rented equipment they had never operated before.



Because of the rapid deployment timeline, the squadron could not transport its organic heavy equipment. Instead, Airmen operated locally-sourced milling machines and pavers with unknown maintenance histories. While equipment malfunctions, language barriers with contractors and unpredictable Caribbean weather added complexity to the mission, nothing was going to get in its way.

Nine of the 21 Airmen had never performed a mill-and-overlay project before. Many were fresh from technical training.



Their success is a powerful testament to expeditionary readiness, showcasing how strong leadership and skilled engineering enable the Air Force's ability to project airpower anywhere, anytime. (Courtesy photo)

“My biggest takeaway was witnessing how capable Airmen become when they are entrusted, challenged and united behind a purpose bigger than themselves,” said Staff Sgt. Ryan Guevara Seamster, noncommissioned officer who was responsible for operating the asphalt paver. “It also showed me how quickly new RED HORSE members can adapt and rise to the occasion.”

Under pressure and on an accelerated schedule, like true civil engineers, they adapted and delivered.

For Army Capt. George Horiates, an exchange officer who served as officer in charge for the detachment, Puerto Rico marked his first operation under contingency, exercise, and deployment (CED) orders.

“I saw firsthand the importance of being forthcoming about your unit’s assets and capabilities when integrating with a new organization,” he said. “Command teams outside the engineer regiment may not accurately understand your unit’s full potential, leading to ineffective utilization.”

To ensure proper employment, Horiates, Ashley, and Senior Enlisted Leader Master Sgt. Martinez, who played an instrumental role in conducting site assessments for other potential horizontal construction projects on the island, delivered a formal Assets and Capabilities brief to

the Air Expeditionary Wing command team. The presentation detailed equipment, personnel and specialized training. It explained how those capabilities could shape the operational environment.

In addition, the team established a battle rhythm of weekly situation reports to the AEW command team and higher headquarters.

“As a former Army brigade staff officer, I knew that regular situation reports would minimize confusion, keep the staff informed and ensure our detachment was being gainfully employed,” Horiates said.

That deliberate communication ensured the runway repair mission was fully synchronized with broader operational objectives in the region.

The impact of the Puerto Rico runway restoration extended well beyond the team and island.

During his keynote address at the Air and Space Forces Association’s 2026 Warfare Symposium, Air Force Chief of Staff *Gen. Kenneth Wilsbach highlighted the critical role civil engineers play in generating airpower. He specifically referenced Ashley and his team, underscoring how airfield repair and maintenance directly enable the joint force to operate. By spotlighting the mission, Wilsbach reinforced a simple but strategic reality: without safe, serviceable runways and taxiways, there is no airpower.*

“Having this mission and our work recognized by Air Force leadership and the CSAF means more to me than words can describe,” reflected Airman Kyle Nixon, a pavements and construction equipment apprentice that took part in the mission. “Knowing what my team and I accomplished in such a short amount of time and how well we executed it makes me feel proud of the contribution we made to something so important.”

While the Puerto Rico mission showcased the capability of RED HORSE engineers, Ashley’s leadership was shaped long before this deployment.

For Ashley, leading under pressure was not a skill developed overnight. As a college student, he lost his father – a retired Army veteran – to a sudden heart attack.

“I went from a young adult at 19, who thought he was grown, to having to take care of myself completely overnight,” Ashley said. “It changed my whole perspective on life. I had to grow up faster than most people have to.”

Balancing work and school while reassessing his future, Ashley eventually joined the Air Force, drawn to hands-on work that allowed him to build and fix tangible infrastructure.

“I found out that I like building things and having a tangible thing that I can touch and see that I’ve left my mark on,” Ashley said.

Later, as a military training instructor at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas, he learned that effective leadership requires more than intensity. It demands patience, empathy and the ability to reach people differently. Those lessons carried forward into Puerto Rico, where nearly half his team had never executed a full mill-and-overlay operation.

For Ashley, recognition is secondary to impact. As the current superintendent of Special Capabilities in charge of 40 engineers, he reminds his airmen that civil engineering is often a thankless job and rarely draws public attention. However, it is a job that is essential every time an aircraft takes off.

"I don't care if you have the best pilots, maintainers, or security in the world," Ashley said. "Whatever it is, you cannot generate airpower without runways, taxiways and aprons."

The restored airfield immediately supported joint operations, including Marine aviation units operating from the island. The mission aligned directly with the Air Force's "Fly, Fix, Fight" directive, ensuring aircraft could generate airpower in support of regional security objectives.

While the airfield had not hosted Department of War aircraft in nearly two decades, after RED HORSE completed its work, it could once again serve as a platform for joint force operations.

Three taxiways. Six weeks. Zero room for failure. Because when the nation calls, airpower must answer, and airpower starts with a runway.

31st COMBAT AIR BASE SQUADRON INCREASES DEPLOYMENT-READINESS AT SILVER FLAG

DVIDS: Story by 2nd Lt. Daniel White, U.S. Air Force photos by Senior Airman Ty Pilgrim; Air Force Special Operations Command, 13 March 2026.

HURLBURT FIELD, FL: The 31st Combat Air Base Squadron (CABS) enhanced its ability to provide base operating support and sustain airpower projection during a Silver Flag training exercise at Tyndall Air Force Base, February 8-13, 2026.

Silver Flag was part of the second 200-level field training exercise in the 31st CABS' road to deployment with the 31st Air Task Force (ATF). During the week-long event hosted by the 801st REDHORSE, over 240 Airmen from two MAJCOMs and two wings exercised force bed down, base recovery, rapid airfield damage repair, and counter-unmanned aerial systems techniques, among a host of other necessary skillsets.



U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Joshua Pratt, 31st CABS commander, delivers opening remarks during Exercise Silver Flag at Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida, 9 February 2026. During the week-long event hosted by the 801st REDHORSE, 31st CABS exercised force bed down, base recovery, rapid airfield damage repair, and counter-unmanned aerial systems techniques, among a host of other necessary skillsets.

"Silver Flag is designed to teach civil engineers and force support personnel wartime task standards to prepare them for downrange environments," said Master Sgt. Douglas Dees, an instructor with the 801st RED HORSE Training Squadron. "The Silver Flag campus doesn't reflect a specific area of responsibility but exists in bare base conditions that are relevant to any region."

During its first field training exercise at Fort Bliss last December, every CABS member underwent the same training in core protection and sustainment. During Silver Flag, 31st CABS built on that experience, breaking into cross-functional teams formed according to specialty and training—electrical, structures, water and fuel systems, emergency management, contracting, explosive ordnance disposal, and force support among others. During the evaluated, 36-hour capstone exercise, each of these teams activated to tackle simulated missile attacks, actual airfield explosions, search and recovery operations, and an aircraft crash scenario, all while maintaining an air base under advanced threat level.

"This training is very important to the CABS because, when we deploy, we are going to be tasked with generating overwhelming combat air power," said 31st CABS noncommissioned officer in charge of expeditionary logistics. "That is the crux of why we're here and what we're doing."

The Silver Flag Exercise Site also provided space for specialty training apart from the exercise curriculum. Medics assigned to 31st CABS conducted trauma response and mass casualty training in an air transportable clinic. This specialized expeditionary instruction was a first for an Air Force unit of action still in its pre-deployment phase. Security Forces Airmen also trained with cutting-edge technology designed to detect and defend against hostile unmanned aerial systems.



After completing the Silver Flag curriculum, 31st CABS joined the 31st ATF in a live virtual integration with Exercise Bamboo Eagle 26-1, February 15-21. Bamboo Eagle presented participants with opportunities to overcome challenges associated with mission generation and command and control in contested environments. 31st ATF and 31st CABS exercised proactive and reactive schemes of maneuver, in virtual and actual interfaces, with the aim of increasing survivability and ensuring air superiority for the joint force.

“Together, 31st CABS and 31st ATF provide the Air Force real unity of effort and unity of command,” said 31st CABS commander Lt. Col. Joshua Pratt. “We train, we organize, and we deploy together.”

The 31st Combat Air Base Squadron is a multi-functional unit spanning 60 AFSCs and bringing together Airmen from two MAJCOMs to deliver base operating support while sustaining up to three mission generation force elements capable of executing agile combat employment at any deployed location.



U.S. Airmen assigned to the 31st Combat Air Base Squadron participate in aircraft live-fire training.

Pictures below show U.S. Airmen assigned to the 31st Combat Air Base Squadron constructing a tent during Exercise Silver Flag. The 31st CABS is part of the 31st Air Task Force, a hardened and resilient force and cohesive Unit of Action ready to meet the Joint Force’s most demanding requirements.



Pictures below show U.S. Air Force Airman assigned to the 31st Combat Air Base Squadron participating in water and fuel systems maintenance training. Through rigorous field training exercises like this one, 31st CABS readies itself to provide combatant commanders with options to ensure peace through strength in any area of responsibility.





A U.S. Airman conducts command and control operations in a tactical operations center. During an evaluated, 36-hour capstone event, 31st CABS' cross-functional teams tackled simulated missile attacks, actual airfield explosions, search and recovery operations, and an aircraft crash scenario, all while maintaining an air base under advanced threat level.



Pictures below show U.S. 31st CABS Airmen participating in airfield damage recovery training. Throughout the exercise, 31st CABS Airmen proved their ability to rapidly repair a damaged airfield, ensuring airpower projection from austere, contested environments at any time, in any theater.



This Newsletter Is Dedicated to Air Force Military Civil Engineers (RED HORSE and Prime BEEF) Past, Present and Future.



The picture above shows the 31st CABS Airmen simulating the painting of an airfield during training.

MISSION READY AIRMEN: 375th CES BUILDS GATE OVERHANG

Scott Air Force Base Publication, published 17 March 2026 by 375th Air Mobility Wing. Story by Staff Sgt. Stephanie Henry, photo recognition as indicated.

SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE, IL: A new overhang at the Cardinal Creek Gate is now completed and ready for use, thanks to a project led by the 375th Civil Engineer Squadron.

It was designed in coordination with the 375th Security Forces Squadron to meet the required standoff distances, maintain clear fields of view, and ensure that all emergency vehicles can access the gate when needed.



An overhang, developed by Airmen from the 375th Civil Engineer Squadron, stands over the Cardinal Creek Gate on Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, 25 February 2026. The overhang provides defenders protection from the elements, reducing weather-related gate closures and improving overall working conditions while helping sustain operations during inclement weather. (U.S. Air Force photos by Staff Sgt. Stephanie Henry)



Airmen from the 375th Civil Engineer Squadron install lights on the overhang that stands over the Cardinal Creek Gate on Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, 25 February 2026. The overhang provides defenders protection from the elements, reducing weather-related gate closures and improving overall working conditions while helping sustain operations during inclement weather. (U.S. Air Force photos by Airman 1st Class Devin Morgan)



It also provides defenders with protection from the elements, reducing weather-related gate closures and improving overall working conditions, helping sustain operations during inclement weather.

The project brought together 28 civil engineers from six different Air Force Specialty Codes as part of a Troop Training Project designed and executed entirely by military members.

Troop Training Projects are intended to expand Airmen's skillsets beyond their primary career fields. Although the effort centered on structural work, electricians, Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning technicians and heavy equipment operators contributed as well. They helped with the excavation, concrete footing pours and arch installation, gaining hands-on experience in building a structure commonly used at deployed locations.

Senior Airman Gavin Vaughn, a structural journeyman, was the lead on the construction site, marking the first project of this scale under his direction.



"It was definitely a challenge to learn how people operate differently," said Vaughn. "Learning what strengths there are across the team and taking into account that this is a Troop Training Project over everything else, and that it is not only an opportunity for me but also for others to get hands-on training they may not yet have."

WHITE HAT CEREMONY FOR GRAND RE-OPENING OF 823rd RED HORSE HERITAGE MUSEUM

News article provided by USAF MSgt. Alan S. Wilkins, ACC 823rd RHS/RHLGVM.

Hurlburt Field, FL: Join us for a special event on May 8th at the 823d RED HORSE MTC building as we celebrate the grand re-opening of our Heritage Museum. Showcasing the incredible construction skills of our own unit members, the museum has undergone recent renovations, and we are proud to unveil the results. In conjunction with this re-opening, we will be embracing the tradition of honoring members who have served with or retired from a RED HORSE unit with a "White Hat" ceremony.



This will be a memorable occasion to recognize the incredible legacy and contributions of our RED HORSE personnel, both past and present, and to look ahead to the future.

To ensure we have an accurate headcount for this celebration, we ask that you please RSVP by April 10th and let us know how many guests you plan to bring. Additionally, in building our new museum's collection and to honor your service, we would be grateful if you would share any pictures from your tenure in a RED HORSE unit. Please send any digital photos via email (823rhs.whitehatceremony@gmail.com). We look forward to celebrating with you and honoring the distinguished history of the RED HORSE squadrons.

POC info and RSVP to MSgt Alan Wilkins 823rhs.whitehatceremony@gmail.com, 805-881-2083/2216.

HISTORIC RUN LEADS TO FIRST-EVER MOUNTAIN WEST WOMEN'S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP BERTH

Air Force Academy Athletics; Women's Basketball, 9 March 2026.

LAS VEGAS: Nine-seed Air Force Women's Basketball "bested" No. 5 Boise State in a wire-to-wire semifinal round of the 2026 Mountain West Championship, securing the Falcons' first-ever postseason championship bid.



With the win, the No. 9 Falcons are now the lowest-ever seeded program to earn a spot in the Mountain West championship game. Air Force is the first nine-seed to make a semifinal game since 2008 and is now the first to go 3-0 in the MW Tournament to earn a spot in the title match.

The United States Air Force Academy's Civil Engineering program is a pipeline for RED HORSE rapid construction and combat engineering candidates; it contributes to RED HORSE by immersing their CE cadets in challenging courses that are complemented by hands-on experiences in surveying, construction methods, and construction materials at the [Field Engineering and Readiness Laboratory \(FERL\)](#) summer program.

RHPBA NOTES, UPDATES and OTHER INFO

1. RED HORSE and Prime BEEF Association's Website:

We are sharing our QR code to make it easier for you to find the RHPBA.com website. Use the updated "Membership" tab to complete your application for membership or pay your dues online.

We have gone back and located many of the old "Newsletters", some as old as 2005, and posted them.

Our "Subscribe" list is growing. Please subscribe to our website so you get notified when something is posted. Simply go to RHPBA.com and click Subscribe.

We added a "Contact Us" list to make it easier for everyone to contact us.

We now have 28 unit history posts. We tried to include as much as we could verify was correct in these histories. Much of the content was taken from The Air Force Civil Engineering History book, some was also taken from the Civil Engineering Weekly publications. We are now looking for input from our membership that is documented and can be verified, to ensure we have captured our histories accurately and completely. Please contact us with any feedback or information you may have at reckert@rhpba.com or dwise@rhpba.com.

2. Looking to our next Convention in 2027:

We are excited to begin planning for the RHPBA 2027 Convention/Reunion in Colorado Springs Co. An advance party will be making a trip to Colorado Springs in September 2026 for planning purposes and to consider some of the extra activities which may include a visit to the Air Force Academy and/or to the Olympic Training center. There is also Pike's Peak, awesome scenery including canyons, waterfalls and wildlife, and museums. Looking forward to renewing old friendships and making new ones.

3. The RHPBA Newsletter:

New RED HORSE and Prime BEEF articles are always appreciated and/or any comments or inputs you may have regarding the newsletter are always welcome. Please send articles (include photos if you have them) and any comments to Dick Aldinger at raldinger@rhpba.com Please add this newsletter to your Squadron Facebook page or through other social media to promote our organization.

4. RHPBA Membership Information:

Joining the RED HORSE and Prime BEEF Association is a mere \$10 for the first year. Have you considered becoming a Life Member? For most of us "old timers" (66 or over) the cost is only \$125 and you are then finished paying dues for life. You help us too in that we do not have to send you reminders for dues and you do not have to worry about them ever again".



This is one way that you can keep in touch with what is going on with USAF Civil Engineering Military Engineers today whether it be RED HORSE or Prime BEEF. See the new membership brochure on page 27 and the fillable membership application form on page 28; please send your application to Randy Eckert: 701 Center Drive, Palmyra, PA 17078, 717-269-3914, reckert@rhpba.com.

5. RHPBA Membership Updates:

If you think you should be listed below and are not, please contact reckert@rhpba.com to make sure it was just an oversight in collecting this data and not an error in your file.

We would like to welcome to the RED HORSE and Prime BEEF Association (RHPBA) these new members who recently joined our organization:

New Member	Joined
Brandon Marree	12/09/25
Dawn Nolcra	01/31/26
Robert Lee	03/08/26

We also congratulate and welcome the RHPBA's newest Life Members.

William W. Busch	12/10/25
Michael Cleveland	05/18/25
Roger D. Fisher	07/12/07
William Gray	11/08/10
Michael Gregori	12/19/25
James E. McCarthy	01/26/15
Marc Supinski	02/17/25
William M. Washington	10/13/25

6. Silent Hooves:

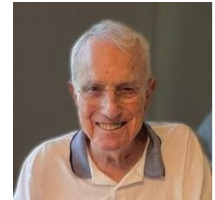
In reflecting on our sixty-plus years, we honor all RED HORSE and Prime BEEF personnel that have gone before us. For a view of our Silent Hooves page on the RHPBA website, copy/type (<https://rhpba.com/taps-2/>) to your browser. We regrettably bring this current list of BEEFers and Horsemen/women who have passed away these past months. For a complete list go to our website and look in "Silent Hooves". Our "Silent Hooves" listing on the website is updated as we receive information.

If you hear of the passing of a BEEF'er or Horseman/woman, please send an email to dwise@rhpba.com with the full name of the individual, units they served in, and their date of passing. Also, if you have their obituary, please provide the link.

Name	Unit(s)	Date of Passing
Abbot, Pat	820th RH	26 Jan 26
Conley, Tony	823rd RH	6 Jan 26
McMinn, Ernest H.	Prime BEEF	29 Jan 26
Morison, Brian P.	554th RH	18 Mar 26
Sims, Bill	554th RH	25 Mar 26
Wilson, Dennis	820th RH	30 Nov 25

Bill Sims Tribute by Editor

Air Force Civil Engineering lost one of its best engineers recently. Bill was much more than an engineer and architect, but also a designer, humorist, voice of authority, Kentuckian and a good friend to all who knew him.



I first met Bill in 1967 when he was the Base Civil Engineer at Don Muang Air Base, Thailand. While stationed there, Bill met the love of his life Su. Over the years our paths crossed many times as Bill blazed a trail in the Air Force. Some of his most prominent assignments were at AFIT, Commander of the 554th RED HORSE Squadron, the Pentagon and then Command Engineer for Systems Command.

When he retired from the Air Force he was hired by the Walt Disney Company. While working at Disney, he led the design effort on the west coast and soon transitioned to Walt Disney World in Orlando where he led the entire Disney Imagineers operation. After his retirement from Disney, he started his own consulting company which he operated for several years.

When he retired for the final time he and his wife Su, moved to San Antonio, Texas where he designed his own home. Bill was a member of RHPBA for many years and an active board member. Who can forget our 2017 RHPBA convention / reunion in Lexington, KY and the visit to the horse museum where Bill had donated a cloisonné punch bowl set that his grandfather had received from a Russian Czar back in the 1920's or 30's.

Bill answered the call for service one more time when he was requested by Tim Byers (Maj/Gen retired) to be a member of the Air Force Civil Engineer Memorial Committee as well as the designer of the memorial which was built adjacent to the Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson AFB in Ohio. He will be missed by his many friends both in and out of the Air Force.

Pat Abbot (DVIDS, 3 April 2026)

One of his most defining roles was when he served as Squadron Superintendent for the 820th RED HORSE Squadron from 2005 to 2008. "He was a phenomenal leader who led 500-plus RED HORSE teams; they were all over the AOR: Iraq, Afghanistan; in some pretty contested and dangerous situations." Leading at that scale required navigating constant complexity across distance and risk. (Quote by Karl Deutsch, a long-time professional peer and friend; story, photo by Caitlin Robinson, Headquarters AF, Office of Director of Civil Engineers.)



RED HORSE / Prime BEEF Association

The RED HORSE / Prime BEEF Association is an organization representing the professional and personal interests of more than 600 Active Duty, Retired, Veterans, Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve of the United States Air Force RED HORSE and Prime BEEF units



1. Single-Service Orientation...

Our single-service orientation means we only work for YOU, the RED HORSE and Prime BEEF (RHPBA) community.

2. Fun and Keep in Touch...

Members reconnect with old friends and create new friendships by attending RHPBA gatherings in historic and memorable settings.

3. Camaraderie...

Cultivate and maintain good relations with community, foster patriotism, pride, and fraternity.

4. Scholarships...

Annual scholarships for members and their family.

5. Great web site...

Well maintained with current information and historic photos. Keep those "special memories" alive by finding airman from your previous assignments.

6. Informative Newsletter...

Membership includes semi-annual issues of our newsletter, with interesting articles and official notifications of planned gatherings.

7. Affordable...

Four categories of membership. Opportunity to become involved in committees, fund raisers, event planning and the RHPBA.

8. Creditable...

A professional, legitimate, active, involved, established and well working Association that is desirable to belong to.

9. Worthwhile...

Community programs that help those in need.

10. Or just because you want to join



10 REASONS

Why the RED HORSE / Prime BEEF Association should be your Military Organization of choice...



**JOIN
US
TODAY**



**Semper Simul
Always Together**

RED HORSE and Prime BEEF Association

701 Center Drive, Palmyra, PA 17078, 717-269-3914

reckert@rhpba.com / Web Site: <https://www.rhpba.com>

Regular or Life Membership: Shall be open to all military members who have or are serving in the USAF Civil Engineer field, or in a USAF Civil Engineering unit, which includes the ACTIVE, AFRC, and ANG units, or their predecessor service; Aviation Engineer Force and SCARWAF Engineer Force.

Affiliate or Life Affiliate Membership: Spouses, children, parents or guardians of those persons, who are or were members eligible for membership, shall be eligible.

Associate Membership: Those persons, who do not qualify for regular membership, but have an interest in RED HORSE or Prime BEEF, may be considered for Associate Membership.

Please provide the following contact information:

Proper Name: _____ Spouse: _____
Nick Name: _____
Street address: _____
Address (cont.): _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Date of Birth: _____ Highest Military Rank: _____
Home Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____
E-mail: _____

Unit _____ From ___/___/___ To ___/___/___ Base _____ Combat tour _____
Unit _____ From ___/___/___ To ___/___/___ Base _____ Combat tour _____
Unit _____ From ___/___/___ To ___/___/___ Base _____ Combat tour _____
Unit _____ From ___/___/___ To ___/___/___ Base _____ Combat tour _____

Please indicate the membership or renewal level

Regular Membership, First Year \$10

Regular Membership, Renewal \$20

Affiliate Membership (Dues will be equal to the sponsoring member)

Current Active Duty, \$10

Life Membership (please use the schedule at the right) \$ _____

I would like to be considered for Associate Membership in the RHPBA

Associate Membership, First Year \$10.00

Associate Membership, Renewal \$20

DUES / FEES

Regular Memberships:

First Year: \$10.00

Annual Renewal: \$20.00

Active Duty Military:

\$10.00 per year as long as you are on active duty.

Life Memberships:

Age 45 and under: \$250

Age 46 to 55: \$215

Age 56 to 65: \$180

Age 66 and above: \$125

Associate Membership:

First Year: \$10.00

Renewal: \$20.00



Make it easier to read, complete this form on line.

Pay on line by credit or debit card at
<https://www.rhpba.com>.

Applications received on or after August 1st will be credited to the next full year.

Please include your check or money order and mail to the address above.