

Training With A Purpose

128th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs

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Members of the 128th Air Refueling Wing Civil Engineering Squadron, Milwaukee, along with members from several other Air and Army National Guard units worked for two weeks in June to finish the construction of six new homes and the refurbishing of ten others for veterans of the US military as part of the Innovative Readiness Training program.



IRT is a U.S. military volunteer training opportunity that provides training and readiness for military personnel while addressing public service needs. The site manager for the project, Senior Master Sgt. Lonnie Bean, describes the work as “hands-on training for our engineers in all phases of construction.”

“We build from the ground up,” Bean said. “We have work for all of our [engineer] specialty codes.”

In addition to the IRT providing excellent training, Bean believes this experience gives Airmen and Soldiers a taste of what it is like to be forward deployed at a ‘bare bones’ camp.

“We bring our services folks with us and they cook under field conditions. We stay in tents and everything is run off of generator power,” Bean said. “It equates to a bare base — something we might see in an overseas location.”

In addition to the civil engineers, the 128th Force Support Squadron sent five of their own services Airmen in a food service support role for the two-week IRT. Each morning these services Airmen get up well before their civil engineer counterparts to have breakfast ready and roll right into preparing lunch.

Because of the remote location of the IRT, it is imperative to have the food service support. The services personnel operate out of the Disaster Relief Mobile Kitchen Trailer. The DRMKT is about the size of a food truck, and despite the tight quarters, the services Airmen prepare warm meals for over 50 personnel at both breakfast and lunch.

The main project site of six partially finished home sits adjacent to the Apsaalooke Warrior Apartment Complex, constructed in September 2015 and currently housing 15 veterans. Additionally, there are six new homes in various states of completion and ten houses throughout the Crow Agency area that are receiving rehab work of some sort.

During the two weeks, most of the personnel stayed on site at the Apsaalooke Warrior Apartment Complex finishing the six partially finished homes. However, a small contingent go out into the community to work on a rehab project for a Marine veteran that has had a hard time keeping up with the fixes his house so desperately needed.

Howard Hogan, a Marine that served from 1979 to 1988, has long wanted to make the updates his home needs, but they were so numerous he didn’t have the time or money. So it was very fortunate timing when he received the news he was getting assistance through the IRT program.

“It just so happens in January, I was standing on my lawn, and I was looking at my home thinking to myself, ‘I need to get my roof redone, I need to redo the siding, and I need to redo the windows,’” Hogan said. “All of a sudden, a group of guys pull up in a pickup [truck] and tell me I was selected by my local vet group to have my house redone.”

It was actually the Crow Housing Authority that submitted a request to receive assistance through the IRT program. In turn, working with the local veteran group, Mr. Hogan was one of the ten selectees to receive assistance.

Led by Maj. Matthew Lee, the team of Airmen working on the Hogan house have the responsibility of completely replacing the roof, siding and windows.

“Much needed renovations to veterans homes is rewarding in that the homeowners and their family members are present to see demolition and reconstruction efforts day-to-day.” Lee said. “It is rewarding for our Airmen to see the people that would be benefiting from the renovations and hear their stories.”

The Hogan house project began by tearing beaten down shingles, windows, and siding from the property. As the new windows are inserted, durable siding is secured, and long-lasting metal roof is installed, the once tattered home that had seen better days began to look new again.

The execution by the 128th civil engineers looked flawless. The transformation of the Hogan house made it stand out on a block that has many homes in need of some attention. It is clear this training mission was a success.

“It has been an excellent opportunity for much needed hands-on training for a majority of our civil engineering disciplines, which doesn't always happen on deployments for training,” Lee said in regard to the project.

While there is no doubt the work done on the Crow Reservation was great training for the Airmen involved, it was the goodwill and humanity that made the project so significant. This was evident through the Hogan family's renewed spirit.

“I hope this can continue on for others,” Hogan said. “I'd like to, in some way, pay it forward to others that need their homes redone.”

Editor's note:

For more information about the IRT programs across the country, visit irt.defense.gov.