

556 RED HORSE SQUADRON



MISSION

The 556 Rapid Engineer Deployable Heavy Operational Repair Squadron Engineer (RED HORSE) Squadron, located at Hurlburt Field, Fla., is one of 15 RED HORSE Squadrons within Air Combat Command, Pacific Air Forces Command, Air Force Reserve Command, and the National Guard. The 556 RED HORSE Squadron provides the Air Force with a highly mobile civil engineer response force to support contingency and special operations worldwide.

The 556 RED HORSE is a self-sufficient, mobile, heavy construction squadron capable of rapid response and independent operations in remote, high-threat environments worldwide. They provide heavy repair and construction capabilities when requirements exceed normal civil engineer unit capabilities.

The primary mission of the 556 RED HORSE Squadron is to assess, plan and establish contingency facilities/infrastructure to support humanitarian/contingency operations and combat missions. Activities include rapid assessment/repair, bare-base development, and heavy construction operations such as runways, aircraft parking ramps, and large facilities.

The 556 RED HORSE Squadron possesses special capabilities such as remote beddown planning, water-well drilling, explosive demolition, quarry operations, material testing, concrete and asphalt paving, and expedient facility construction.

LINEAGE

556 Civil Engineering Squadron (Heavy Repair) constituted, activated, and organized, 8 Feb 1966
Inactivated, 1 Oct 1969
Redesignated 556 RED HORSE Squadron, 24 Jan 2006

Activated, 23 Feb 2006

STATIONS

U-Tapao Royal Thai Navy Base, Thailand, 8 Feb 1966-1 Oct 1969

Lackland AFB, TX, 23 Feb 2006

Hurlburt Field, FL

ASSIGNMENTS

2 Air Division, 8 Feb 1966

Seventh Air Force, 1 Apr 1966

Thirteenth Air Force, 10 May 1966-1 Oct 1969

610 Regional Support Group, 23 Feb 2006

622 Civil Engineer Group, 1 Oct 2012

COMMANDERS

Col Rodney Hammond

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Vietnam

Vietnam Air Offensive

Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase II

Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase III

Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase IV

TET 69/Counteroffensive

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards with Combat "V" Device

1 Jul 1966-31 May 1967

1 Jun 1967-31 May 1968

1 Jun 1968-31 May 1969

Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm

10 May 1966-31 Oct 1968

EMBLEM



556 Civil Engineering Squadron emblem: On a white background a gold horseshoe, toe down, within a narrow blue border and having six blue square nails, three in dexter and three in sinister, and over all throughout a red draft horse forcene, eye and nostril blue highlighted white, bridled and collared blue garnished gold, collar charged with gold wings conjoined and veined by two blue lightning bolts, rein piercing a gold ring on collar. Above the emblem surmounted by tips of horseshoe a gold scroll edged blue. **SIGNIFICANCE:** The emblem is symbolic of the squadron and its mission. The gold of the horseshoe alludes to the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The horseshoe symbolizes the foundation upon which the squadron stands and the six nails refer to the last digit of its numerical designation. The strong red horse rearing and reined by lightning bolts represents the squadron's mission, nobility and speed of accomplishment. The collar charged with the wings signifies an Air Force support unit using heavy equipment. The emblem bears the national colors and the Air Force colors of gold and ultramarine blue. (Approved, 20 Jul 1966)



556 RED HORSE Squadron emblem: On a disc Argent, a horseshoe Or, fimbriated and nailed three in dexter and three in sinister Azure, charged with a draft horse rampant Gules, nostril of the third, eye of the last, fimbriated of the first, bridled of the third, detailed of the second, collar of the third, fimbriated of the second emblazoned with wings of the last, two lightning bolts as reins of the third, piercing a ring, all within a narrow border Blue. Attached above the disc, a White scroll edged with a narrow Blue border and inscribed "IN PUGNA" in Blue letters. Attached below the disc, a White scroll edged with a narrow Blue border and inscribed "556 RHS" in Blue letters. **SIGNIFICANCE:** Ultramarine blue and Air Force yellow are the Air Force colors. Blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The horseshoe symbolizes the foundation upon which the Squadron stands and the six nails refer to the last digit of its numerical designation. The strong horse rearing and reined by lightning bolts represents the unit's mission, mobility and speed of accomplishment. The collar with the wings signifies an Air Force support unit using heavy equipment. The emblem bears the national colors and the Air Force colors. (Approved, 16 Jan 2009)

MOTTO

IN PUGNA--In The Fight

OPERATIONS

The 556 was constituted 3 February 1966. Following training at Forbes AFB, KS, the unit deployed to U Tapao AB, Thailand, on 30 June 1966. In addition to the main unit at U Tapao, the 556 also established detachments at five other Thai bases. With the exception of a taxiway-runway-apron complex at Nakhon Phanom AB, the unit concentrated primarily on construction of dormitories, dining halls, and other facilities. The 556 remained in Thailand until its inactivation at U Tapao in October 1969.

Air Force Reserve Command's 556 RED HORSE Squadron officially moved Oct. 1 from Lackland AFB, Tex., to its new home at Hurlburt Field, Fla. There, the unit is partnering with Hurlburt's active duty 823rd RHS under a total force integration initiative. "I think this will provide us opportunities of more and better training," said Lt. Col. Marty Hughes, 556 RHS, Det. 1

commander and a full-time Reservist. He continued, "Also, because the 823rd RHS is on such a harsh deployment cycle, having the 556 here in the same compound allows us to assume more roles." The Reserve unit expects to be ready by next summer to support RED HORSE missions. As a result of the move, it is losing about 150 members who don't want to or are unable to relocate, but has already recruited about 30 new members, Hughes said.

The 556 Red Horse Squadron was assigned to Utapao Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand in 1966 to construct living quarters, buildings and other structures needed at the six U.S. Air Force bases throughout Thailand. A contingent of 556 personnel traveled to NKP and resided there during 1966-67 to construct the facilities where we later lived and worked. They also constructed other buildings as required. These hearty and dedicated airmen braved the elements, the snakes and other creatures to provide us with shelter and protection from the creatures and weather while we did our jobs at NKP. The 556 was deactivated in 1969. Hats off to these great guys.

What started out as an empty, dusty, weed-infested plot of land ended up being the pride of a small village in the mountains of Guatemala, thanks to the efforts of a group of about 90 Air Force Reserve engineers. The engineers, members of the 556 Rapid Engineer Deployable Heavy Operational Repair Squadron Engineers, built a three-room schoolhouse on the land in Santa Teresa. The structure is capable of withstanding a Category 4 hurricane and, more importantly, able to accommodate up to 180 students. The Reservists traveled from their home at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, to Santa Teresa as part of New Horizons Guatemala '07. They went in four, two week rotations to complete the task. In addition to the Reserve project, Army National Guard units built two other schools and a medical clinic.

New Horizons is a Joint Chiefs of Staff approved, U.S. Southern Command sponsored engineer and medical humanitarian and civic assistance exercise conducted annually in Central and South America. The exercise often involves Reservists and National Guardsmen from the Army, Navy and Air Force. The purpose of the exercise is to provide joint readiness training for U.S. engineer and medical units while improving the infrastructure of the visited country. This year's exercise in Guatemala focused on constructing schools, clinics and water wells, as well as conducting medical readiness training. For many RED HORSE members, the opportunity to leave a lasting impression on the people of Guatemala and, more importantly, the youth made the mission worthwhile. "I'm just happy.

It's so satisfying because it's for the kids," said Staff Sgt. Joey Rimkus, 556 RHS structures superintendent. "I see how downtrodden the community is, and then you have this beautiful building there for the kids to go to school and hopefully give them a better chance to get out of that situation and make a better life for themselves." Despite serious delays in getting concrete from local suppliers and overseas deployments within the unit, the team was able to finish a little ahead of schedule thanks to the members' level of expertise and multiple skills. "Each rotation was geared toward what the job required at that specific time. That's the way our leadership planned it," said Senior Master Sgt. Russell Brashars, 556 RHS utilities superintendent.

"In addition, the people we send on these deployments are capable of handling everything on the mission." RED HORSE units provide the Air Force with a highly mobile civil engineer response force to support contingency and special operations worldwide. They provide heavy repair capability and construction support when requirements exceed normal base civil engineer

capabilities and where Army engineer support is not readily available. The primary RED HORSE tasking in peacetime is to train for contingency and wartime operations. Members participate regularly in Joint Chief of Staff and major command exercises, military operations other than war, and humanitarian civic action programs.

They perform training projects that assist base construction efforts while at the same time honing their wartime skills. In addition to supply issues, the Reservists encountered other delays as they had to make due with fewer people than planned because of overseas deployments as well as add-ons to the project. "Even though we had some people (about 40) who had to go to Iraq, we were able to produce a quality product," Sergeant Brashars said. "During the mission, add-ons were given to the project, such as a drop ceiling," said Senior Master Sgt. Gonzalo Acosta, 556 RHS project manager. "Keeping up with these changes was a challenge. We adapted and overcame." Although the Reservists had built countless structures before, New Horizons provided them with their first opportunity to work with a prefabrication building system. The walls of the school were formed with plastic vinyl and rebar, and concrete was poured in to create a strong structure.

"We got a lot of good experience with a new method of construction," said Capt. David Losleben, 556 RHS engineering officer. "It was easy to assemble, but the concrete was a challenge to pour," Sergeant Acosta said. "The building ended up with a beautiful finish and is very sturdy. It can be used as a storm shelter as well as a school." Joining the RED HORSE team on the project was a small group of Guatemalan engineers. "The Guatemalan engineers were extremely helpful and were hard workers," Sergeant Brashars said. "They fit right in with our style." An advantage the group from Lackland had over other teams working in the region was bilingual language skills. "About half of our people speak Spanish," Sergeant Acosta said. "Other sites need interpreters. We don't. When we send people out to the community to get supplies, they're able to establish communication and relationships because they speak the language." While most members of the RED HORSE team are seasoned veterans, missions like New Horizons still provide valuable training, particularly to younger, less experienced Reservists. "It was an outstanding training opportunity," Sergeant Brashars said.

"This will build their confidence and skills so when they deploy for a real-world scenario they will be ready." For some, like Senior Airman Michael Garrison, 556 RHS structures apprentice, this was the first time they had deployed with the unit. "It's definitely different than tech school," Airman Garrison said. "You have to adapt more and figure things out as you go." Airman Garrison credited his more senior co-workers with setting him straight during the deployment. "They criticize you and correct you," he said, "to make sure you are doing it right. That's the best way to learn." Edwin Ozorio, director of the new school, talked about how helpful the facility will be for the community. He said there's one school in the area for 11 communities in Santa Teresa, and this new school will allow the children and teachers more space to expand. He said he was happy to have the RED HORSE team there helping and that the Reservists' efforts will improve the quality of education for all students.

"It was a great opportunity to give back," said Army Capt. Bryan Taylor, quality assurance officer liaison for Joint Force Bravo, Soto Cano Air Base, Honduras. "When you get right down to it, projects like these help the people they directly affect." While the engineers left the Guatemalans with a building that will last, they received lasting impressions from the people

of the community, especially the children. “The biggest part is knowing we are helping the kids, and they know it,” Sergeant Acosta said. “They came out to the job site to watch us. We actually had to back them up because they were too close. The people of the community helped us with water, food and hospitality.”

While the daily ride out to the work site only covered a distance of about 30 miles, it took around an hour and a half to get there due to the mountainous conditions and the sub-standard roads. However, one constant was the daily welcome the Reservists received. “The children came out to greet us along the route every day like clockwork,” Sergeant Brashars said. “I think it’s wonderful that the military can perform humanitarian projects in developing countries,” said Captain Losleben. 2007

USAF UNIT HISTORIES

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Sources

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Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.