

Dirt Boys keep base up and running



by Airman 1st Class
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It can be easy to take things for granted on base such as paved roads, sidewalks and running paths. It isn't until they're repaired or replaced that people learn the name of the shop that upkeeps them constantly.

The 49th Civil Engineer Squadron heavy equipment shop, known as the Dirt Boys, are responsible for day-to-day maintenance of Holloman's infrastructure, ranging from base housing to the flight line. Master Sgt. Randall Allen, horizontal construction superintendent, said the shop supports base agencies on projects no one normally sees.

"We help the Air Force save money by cutting back on contractor costs," Sergeant Allen said. "By completing small projects around base, we get jobs done quicker."

But the shop's mission is not limited to the maintenance of surface streets. Doing their part to keep the F-117A flying, dirt boys are tasked with eliminating foreign objects from runways, taxiways and tarmacs. The shop repairs and replaces sections of these areas that succumb to the constant pressure of usage.

"If the asphalt out there goes bad, we step in right away," the sergeant said. "If the runway falls apart, the stealth is grounded."

The job of a heavy equipment operator in a deployed zone can

be even more critical. The operators not only focus on keeping a war-time installation running, but they prepare for what Sergeant Allen called the worst.

"If the base comes under attack, civil engineers respond instantly," he said. "In today's hostile environment, SCUD missiles and mortar attacks can threaten an airfield at any moment. We are prepared for those attacks."

Civil engineer squadrons make use of the airfield damage repair method that uses specific assets for different-sized jobs. If a SCUD strikes a runway with a conventional warhead, heavy equipment operators are tasked with filling, leveling and paving over the crater to help put aircraft back in the air.

With terrorism concerns on everyone's mind, heavy equipment operators have been assigned the duty of placing barriers and anti-terrorism measures on Air Force installations worldwide. Sergeant Allen said the barriers around Holloman are a direct result of the work heavy equipment operators do.

"The barriers at the front gate, the flight line and other sensitive areas are laid by us," he said. "We help to keep the base safe."

Sergeant Allen said the 40 personnel in his shop work constantly to keep the base running.

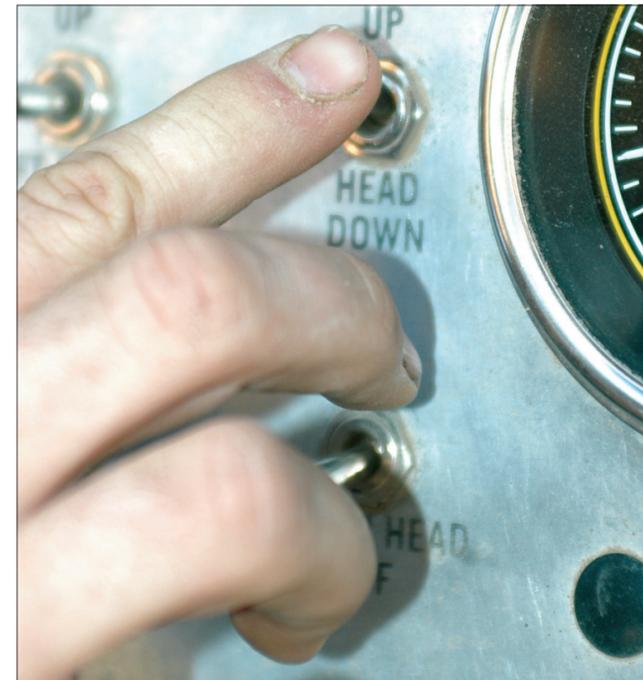
"The people here are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week," he said. "Anything from filling pot holes to digging up broken water pipes, we are here to do that. We just ask Team Holloman to remember the workers here who never complain about their job and or ask for anything in return."



Airman 1st Class Nathan Palmer, heavy equipment operator, looks outside his sweeper to inspect for any foreign objects on taxiway Charlie.



Airman 1st Class Porter Whaley, 49 Civil Engineer Squadron heavy equipment operator, uses a grater to level brush on the explosive ordnance disposal range.



Airman 1st Class Nathan Palmer, heavy equipment operator, engages the sweeper while cleaning taxiway Charlie.



Photos by Airman 1st Class Stephen Collier

Senior Airman Jeremy Robert, heavy equipment operator, uses a K-12 saw to cut into a section of the runway. Heavy equipment operators are tasked with daily upkeep of taxiways, runways and tarmacs to prevent foreign objects on the pad.