509th Security Forces Airmen, Col. Christopher Callis, the 509th Mission Support Group commander, and some of their family members pose for a photo on March 30, 2019, in Knob Noster, Missouri. The Airmen, all assigned to Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri, volunteered to assist former security policeman and Vietnam War veteran Todd Conner to clear scrap materials from his farm. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Kayla White)

Whiteman AFB Defenders sup

By Staff Sgt. Kayla White
509th Bomb Wing Public Affairs

"Eventually we'll all be the retired, or separated as veterans," said Air Force Col. Christopher Callis, commander of the 509th Mission Support Group at Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri. "We've grown accustomed to having teammates always there to help us while on active duty, why shouldn't this extend to post-active duty as well?"

When Callis met Todd Conner, a local veteran, through his church, they began to bond over their similar backgrounds. Callis has a background as a security forces Airman and Conner had served as a member of the security police during the Vietnam War.

"I knew from the bases where he was stationed he had to have been part of Air Force Security Police's Operation SAFESIDE, which he confirmed he was," said Callis.

Operation SAFESIDE was the Air Force's and Security Police's response to counter the increasingly effective North Vietnamese and Viet Cong attacks against U.S. air bases, Callis said.

"Mr. Conner and his wife Kathy invited me to visit their farm they'd purchased when he retired from the Air Force at Whiteman AFB," said Callis. "On my first visit, I asked if there was anything I could help them with."

The Conners said they could use some help clearing a shed that had collapsed due to bad weather.

"My first thought was what a great experience it would be for myself and some Defender volunteers to help a veteran that shared a common background," he said.

Callis and more than 15 other volunteers from the 509th Security Forces Squadron, as well as some their family members, came together on a cold, rainy Saturday to help their fellow defender.

Airman Julian Kenyon, a security forces response member, and Tech. Sgt. Bryan Graham, police services NCO, both assigned to the 509th Security Forces Squadron at Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri, move pieces of discarded wood on March 30th, 2019, in Knob Noster, Missouri. Kenyon and Graham participated in a volunteer effort to assist a local veteran who served as a security policeman in the Vietnam War. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Kayla White)

Airman 1st Class Noah Singleton, a security forces response member assigned to the 509th Security Forces Squadron at Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri, stacks scrap wood on March 30, 2019, on a farm in Knob Noster, Missouri. Singleton and other 509th SFS Airmen volunteered to assist local Vietnam War veteran and former security policeman Todd Conner to clear his property. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Kayla White)

Vietnam War veteran Todd Conner takes a piece of scrap wood from a 509th Security Forces Airman on his Knob Noster, Missouri, farm on March 30, 2019. Conner served as a security policeman in Operation SAFESIDE, a precursor to the 820th Security Forces Group, throughout Southeast Asia. 509th SFS Airmen volunteered their time to assist Conner to clear parts of his property. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Kayla White)

port local Vietnam War veteran

They worked together to move what remained of the shed's contents into a dumpster and then used an assembly line system to transport a large stack of broken pieces of wood from the original shed site to an open field.

Staff Sgt. Samuel Bayliss, a site security controller assigned to the 509th SFS, had just joined his current flight within the squadron when he found out about the effort.

"I thought it was a good opportunity to help a generation that came before us," said Bayliss.

He said it was the first time he had participated in anything like that before.

"If he needed help again, I would be right back out there," said Bayliss.

The group of volunteers completed the work within a few hours and then gathered on Conner's porch to hear stories from Mr. Conner and his wife about his time in Vietnam.

Callis then addressed the group, thanking them for their work.

During an interview afterward, he elaborated further, emphasizing the importance of volunteerism and remembering their military heritage.

"In Security Forces, we hear stories about Operation SAFESIDE, but it's not all that common to meet someone who was part of one of these highly-trained, combat experienced squadrons," said Callis. "I think it is tremendously helpful for Security Forces Airmen to meet security police, Security Forces veterans to hear how challenging their experiences were, and to see that they made it through."

He said he believes it helps to build the confidence of SFS Airmen.

Once a defender, always a defender. Generations of Airmen coming together, bonding and supporting each other.

Air Force Staff Sgt. Sam Bayliss, site security controller, and Senior Airman Urijah Dickson, a response member, both assigned to the 509th Security Forces Squadron at Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri, discard a desk on March 30, 2019, in Knob Noster, Missouri. Bayliss, Dickson and other members of the 509th SFS volunteered their time to clear farm property for a local Vietnam War veteran, Todd Conner. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Kayla White)

Air Force Col. Christopher Callis, 509th Mission Support Group commander, hands scrap wood to another volunteer on March 30, 2019, on a farm in Knob Noster, Missouri. Callis led a group of 509th Security Forces Squadron Airmen from Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri, in a volunteer effort to assist a local Vietnam War veteran and former security policeman to clear his property. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Kayla White)