

Bill Broadie – Beef Battalion

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

There's a battalion on the move. This battalion is mobilized and has a mission in mind. But these aren't uniformed troops on foreign soil. These are people in the U.S. beef industry who are finding a way to support our brave soldiers here at home. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Bill Broadie is the founder and Chairman of the Board of the All American Beef Battalion, a voluntary organization of people in the beef cattle industry working to support U.S. troops. Bill is a fourth generation cattleman from Ashland, a Marine and a veteran who was wounded in the Viet Nam war. He also works for Superior Livestock Auction.

One day Bill was driving to Colorado for a load of cattle. He got disgusted with what he was hearing on the radio. "I was listening to the mainstream media and all they were talking about was what was wrong with young people," he said. Bill had seen another side, having served with brave young men and women in the military, and he wanted to honor them.

"I come back to this statement," Bill said. "Who out there wouldn't buy a soldier a steak?" Since many people would be willing to buy a steak dinner for a soldier who is getting ready to deploy, Bill conceptualized an organization which would provide steak feeds for soldiers. It was a way of uniting two of Bill Broadie's passions.

"There's only two things I've done," Bill said with a smile: "The Marines and cattle." As a lifelong cattleman and a decorated Marine, he liked the idea. To his boss, he pitched the idea of a non-profit organization to support steak feeds for soldiers, and he got enthusiastic support.

On April 26, 2008, this new organization put on its first steak feed. The organization was called the All American Beef Battalion.

The goal of the All American Beef Battalion is to organize and sponsor steak feeds, entertainment, programs, meetings, and projects for service members and their families. The larger purpose, according to the organization's website, is to "foster among the people of the United States an appreciation, respect, and honor for our Armed Forces military service members whose sacrifices have and will continue to make our freedoms possible."

With support from private sector donations, Bill and a group of volunteers have joined together to implement this project. Typically, they provide 18 ounce ribeye steaks with complete dinners to wounded warriors or to military units who recently redeployed or are getting ready to deploy. Local hosts provide water, electricity and tables, and the All American Beef Battalion provides everything else. There is no charge to the soldiers.

Demand for these events has been strong across the nation. The All American Beef Battalion has held steak feeds for soldiers and their families in California, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, Illinois, Arkansas, Louisiana, Kentucky, Georgia, and Virginia. Bill estimates that, as of October 2012, the All American Beef Battalion fed more than 140,000 people. Wow.

That's quite an accomplishment for rural America. Bill comes from the rural community of Ashland, population 962 people. Now, that's rural.

How is this possible? "The ag community has been very supportive," Bill said. Creekstone Farms and U.S. Premium Beef have donated steaks and others have made cash donations. Cattlemen like Galen Fink have supported the cause. One eight-year-old in Wyoming donated \$500 from his 4-H project. Funds have been raised at rollover auctions, where the buyer donates the animal back and it is sold over and over again.

The result is a touching but tangible tribute to the troops. "We thank them for what they're doing," Bill said. "I've had soldiers say, 'I didn't know people out there cared this much.' I've seen a lot of healing."

For more information or to donate, go to www.steaksfortroops.com.

This battalion is on the move – not on some foreign battlefield, but supporting our soldiers right here at home. We commend Bill Broadie and all those involved with the All American Beef Battalion for making a difference by feeding and honoring these troops. They are on a mission worth accomplishing.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.