



Organization sizzles up steaks, serving appreciation

by Airman 1st Class Ciara M. Travis
86th Airlift Wing Public Affairs

11/12/2010 - **RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany** – To show their appreciation to servicemembers, Cooks from the Valley traveled nearly 6,000 miles to donate and cook steaks this Veterans Day, Nov. 11 at the Ramstein Officer's Club.

Cooks from the Valley, a non-profit organization comprised of nearly 100 volunteers from Bakersfield, Calif., has committed themselves to making the servicemembers across the military feel appreciated.

Tom Anton, Cooks from the Valley founder, started the organization in 2001 as a way to give back to servicemembers across the globe for all they do.

This Veteran's Day, there were 56 total volunteers spread out all over the globe cooking for the men and women who are protecting those back home. These areas included not only Ramstein but also Grafenwoehr U.S. Army Garrison, Germany; Sigonella Naval Air Station, Italy; and several locations across U.S. Central Command's area of responsibility.



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Dexter Alejandro, 86th Services Squadron places steaks in a warmer during a Veteran's day observance dinner at the Ramstein Officer's Club, Ramstein Air Base, Germany, Nov. 11, 2010. Cooks of the Valley served 13,500 complimentary steakes to America's uniformed men, women and their family members to show their support. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Desiree Esposito)

A total of 13,500 New York Strip steaks were served at the event locations.

"Each volunteer donates not only their time, but also the money to buy the steaks," Mr. Anton said. "We put all of it on our own nickel."

These volunteers cover the whole process from start to finish -- they buy, deliver, marinate, cook and serve the steaks.

"It's a lot of work to make sure everything is done right, but it's all to show appreciation to our servicemembers and to make sure they understand they are appreciated back home," Mr. Anton said.

Cooks from the Valley contacted U.S. European Command, who then decided how the steaks would be distributed according to size of location and number of most deployed and redeployed servicemembers.

Lt. Col. Malcom Blair, EUCOM joint operation center watch officer, coordinated with Mr. Anton over the last six months to make sure the event went smoothly.

"They keep trying to give me credit for helping them coordinate, but the volunteers from Bakersfield are wonderful people," said Colonel Blair. "They are people with hearts bigger than you could imagine. They are by far some of the nicest people I've ever met."

The small group of volunteers made sure everyone coming through the doors were greeted with a steak dinner. If they weren't sitting down to eat, they made sure they at least could sample the steak, fresh and hot off the grill.

"It was great to see all of the volunteers who made this happen," said Chief Master Sgt. Leroy Lefti, 86th Airlift Wing staff superintendent. "I really enjoy seeing people volunteer to show their appreciation to servicemembers because it lets us know we are being supported by the general public. And it offers us an opportunity to thank them in person for all of their support. Also, I don't know too many people who would pass up a free steak dinner."

Although the volunteers deserve credit for their extraordinary volunteering efforts, they wish to take no recognition for the hard work that goes into the entire process of the events.

"This is just how we can express our gratitude for the hard work that all of the servicemembers provide," said Mr. Anton.

Mr. Anton gave a special message to servicemembers worldwide:

"Thank you. The work you are doing every day makes it easy for us at home to act like its Sept. 10, 2001– the day before all of the chaos began," he said.