

ELLSWORTH AIR FORCE BASE, S.D. | The vision of building a realistic training site for aircrews and ground controllers has become a reality after base Airmen teamed up with area soldiers and agencies to complete construction at a location near Belle Fourche, S.D.

Ellsworth partnered with the South Dakota National Guard, South Dakota Ellsworth Development Authority and a handful of other agencies to plan and construct the urban close air support site, with a large portion of the work accomplished June 9 to 20 as part of Golden Coyote activities.

"We developed this site because it will provide a valuable service to both of our branches and it will save us money," said U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Craig Johnson, SDNG assistant adjutant general and commander of the troops. "It will also provide Airmen and Soldiers the training they need to prepare for real world contingencies."

Lt. Col. Brian Farmer, 28th Operations Support Squadron commander who has flown the B-1 bomber since May 2003, said the UCAS will provide a realistic playing field where Ellsworth B-1 aircrews and ground controllers can hone the skills used routinely in areas like Afghanistan - training that is crucial to the readiness and proficiency of base Airmen.

"This training will enhance the capabilities of B-1 aircrews and ground units as they fine-tune their close air support skills in kinetic strike and nontraditional intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance platforms," said Farmer, who has flown more than 100 B-1 combat missions in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. "The bottom line is it will help us train the way we fight."

The possibility of building the UCAS site became a reality Oct. 30, 2012, when SDEDA gifted 19 sea-land containers to Ellsworth to help construct the mock village. The containers, brought from North Dakota by a SDNG unit, were worth \$51,600, and required approval from the Secretary of the Air Force prior to acceptance. They were then carried to the site by a Pennsylvania National Guard unit as part of their training during the 29th annual Golden Coyote exercise.

"This project is just another example of the partnership between the State of South Dakota and the Air Force working together to make South Dakota a great place for the Air Force to conduct its mission," said Scott Landguth, SDEDA executive director. "This cooperation among all parties - the Air Force, South Dakota National Guard and SDEDA - created an environment where this project could be completed in a timely and economical manner."

Landguth added that SDEDA will continue to partner with the Air Force whenever possible to help provide creative and economic solutions for their issues.

U.S. Army Capt. Matthew Sadler, 842nd Engineer Company unit commander, said the support and coordination between agencies helped to jump start the project.

"This will be such a great site to train on," Sadler said.

Farmer echoed the sentiment, adding that having a site like this in the base's "backyard" will net more rewards than just realistic scenarios.

"One of the overwhelming benefits of the site is that it is only a 15-minute flight from Ellsworth," Farmer said. "Having a training area this close saves countless dollars in reduced fuel and maintenance costs, and further enhances the training opportunities in the Powder River Training Complex airspace."

He noted that B-1 aircrews typically fly from one to two hours to reach a suitable UCAS site in other parts of the country. The new site cuts down the amount of ground B-1 aircrews have to cover to travel to a training site, and allows for more flexibility when planning missions.

"It truly is a big win for everyone involved," Farmer said.