

Airmen's Biggest Fans Are On the Field

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By Randy Ford

“This is Tampa’s team, and the Bucs’ outpouring of affection is genuine.” —Col. Randy Bright, Commander, 927th Air Refueling Wing, MacDill Air Force Base

Tampa Bay Buccaneers leaders say the team has always embraced the region’s military personnel and joined in the community’s appreciation for the men and women at MacDill Air Force Base. USAA sponsors the NFL’s league-wide Salute to Service program, which the Buccaneers have expanded.

America’s Defense Communities talked with Buccaneers Chief Operating Officer Brian Ford, who is also an honorary commander of the 927th Air Refueling Wing.

(Below) Brenda Schwarzkopf wife of the late Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, and Darcie Glazer Kassewitz, owner of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and president of the Glazer Family Foundation, congratulate the winners of the annual General H. Norman Schwarzkopf Military Family of the Year Award.



ADC: Give us an overview of Salute to Service. Brian Ford: Our Salute to Service program begins internally at the highest level. It's embraced by everybody that is involved, from the fans to the coaches and players, to the military itself. It's a showcase for us to show the partnership that we have with the military and the many different branches that are active at MacDill. It gives our fan base an opportunity to share their appreciation for the sacrifices that take place and for the involvement that takes place.

ADC: How did these activities start to come about? Brian Ford: This goes back years and years. MacDill has been an active part of this community longer than the Buccaneers, and we recognize that. On game day, for the singing of the national anthem, we put out the largest American flag that you can find in any professional sports venue, and it's held up by members of the military and their families. We have a military appreciation game centered around the armed forces and Salute to Service. One of our former players, Vincent Jackson, is one of the biggest supporters of the military in the entire league. His Jackson In Action 83 Foundation is dedicated to helping military families, which is inspired by the fact that he himself grew up as a "military brat." Vincent and his teammates were frequent visitors to MacDill. He was honored for that work when he was the winner of the NFL Salute to Service award presented by USAA back in 2016.



*(Above) The recruits are officially enlisted into the Air Force during a special halftime ceremony.
Photos courtesy of Tampa Bay Buccaneers.*

ADC: How do the players get involved? Brian Ford: They get involved with the folks that come out to military practice days, and they thank them for their service, they hear their stories. A lot of them have military backgrounds themselves with their families, so they can kind of relate to that. They see Salute to Service and our Hero of the Game each game day. I can't tell you the number of visits our players, our cheerleaders, our staff make to the veterans hospital as well as to MacDill and the elementary school there.

ADC: What do you think makes Tampa a great defense community? Brian Ford: Our recognition and our commitment to the men and women that serve. In Tampa, appreciating and recognizing our men and women in the military is a way of life.
