Building Bridges

Taking ownership, from one end of the process to the other, helps complete the mission for the U.S. Army Command.

Establishing a Presence

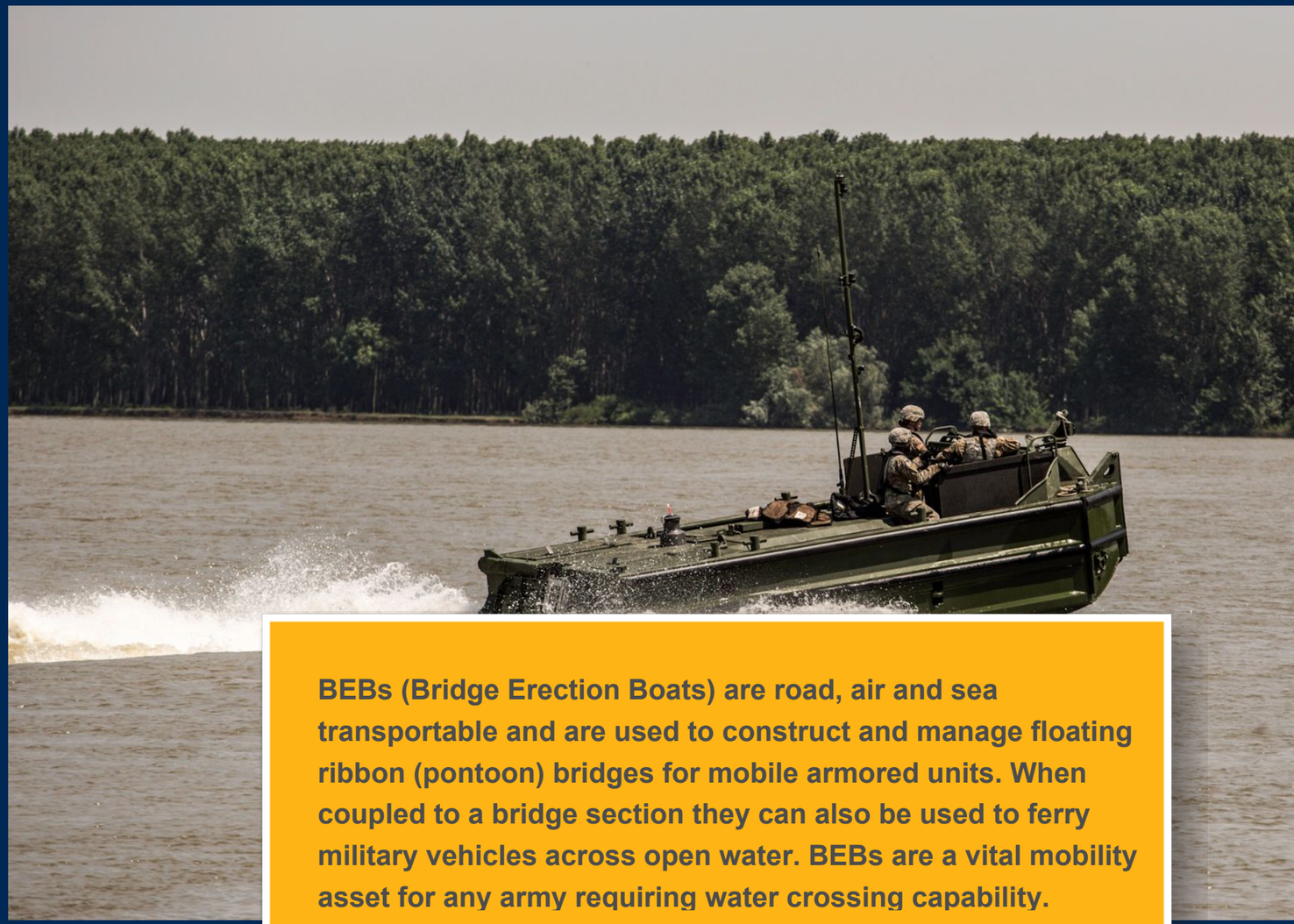
In 2014, marine engineering firm Birdon America Inc. was awarded a multi-year U.S. Dept. of Defense (DOD) job to produce BEB (Bridge Erection Boat) vessels for the U.S. Army.

The prototypes for the job were built a few years earlier in Louisiana. Now, with the project in-hand, Birdon began to look for a permanent location for production. That search led them to the foot of the Rocky Mountains, in Denver, Colorado.

Shortly thereafter, they were joined by NAMJet. The company, acquired by Birdon's parent company three years earlier, makes high-thrust water jets that propel BEBs; technology that proved critical in landing the DOD contract.

The only missing piece was a local material supplier. The project called for marine-grade alloys, grade 5083 and 5086 alloys, as well as 6061 and other materials. Ryerson, with a service center located just five miles away from Birdon, answered that call.

All the pieces were coming together. You could say the local presence was working well for Birdon.



BEBs (Bridge Erection Boats) are road, air and sea transportable and are used to construct and manage floating ribbon (pontoon) bridges for mobile armored units. When coupled to a bridge section they can also be used to ferry military vehicles across open water. BEBs are a vital mobility asset for any army requiring water crossing capability.

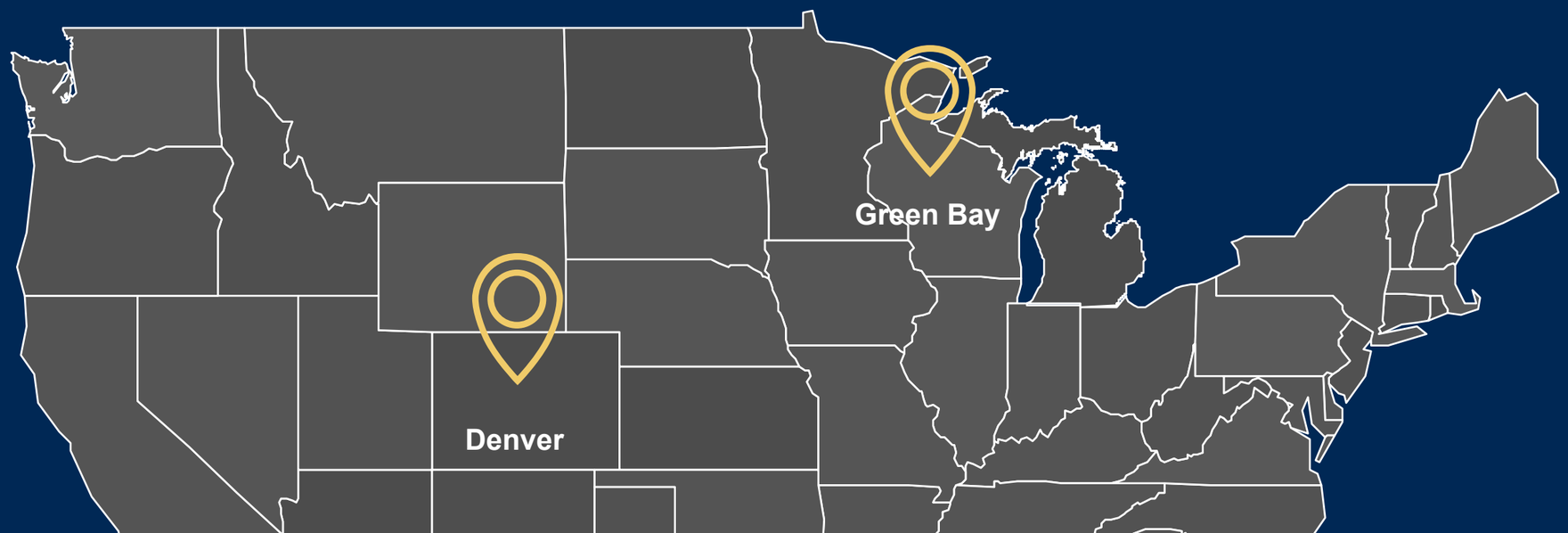
Extending the Value

However, that changed in 2017. Up until that point, Birdon had been conducting fabrication in house. Looking to focus more on the core competencies of the business, Birdon began its search for a partner that could take on these capabilities. In all, the program would consist of 220 fabricated aluminum component level items requiring laser and water jet cutting, forming, and machining.

It was very important to Birdon that the partner they chose was in close proximity to its Denver location for warehousing of finished goods. But beyond that, they had another requirement for a partner: the ability to take true ownership of the entire process.

As it turned out, Birdon didn't need to look far. Ryerson brought in its advanced processing group, which offers the ability to manage large scale OEM (original-equipment manufacturer) fabrication programs using a nationwide network of resources managed under a single point of contact.

That approach was vital as it opened up the pool of potential partners outside the Denver area. Ultimately, it led them to Green Bay, Wisconsin and American Custom Metal Fabricating Inc. (ACMF). As a qualified partner of Ryerson, ACMF is a one-stop source for all custom metal fabrication, laser, water jet, paint, and machining projects. This not only offered the full turnkey solution necessary but with the relationship being managed by Ryerson in Denver, it also meant a single point of contact to streamline the process.



Taking Ownership

What does it mean to “take ownership” of the process? It involves proactively identifying opportunities that can save time and improve costs. This touches every part of the process. Here are two examples that Ryerson successfully executed for Birdon.

Shipment Assessment

In the beginning, Birdon would typically issue a PO for six vessels at a time, which would take about 4-6 weeks to complete. Ryerson observed that Birdon was spending a lot of time and money taking and receiving orders every 4-6 weeks and sought a way to get Birdon more parts in the same shipment.

Ryerson was able to get 12 boats worth of parts into nearly the same sized packaging. This solution gave Birdon more access to parts in an efficient package.

Scheduled Alignment

In any relationship, managing expectations is key to success. Helping to ensure there were no miscommunications when it came to quality control, delivery schedules, material requirements, and more Ryerson facilitated weekly calls with Birdon and ACMF to ensure all parties were aligned on expectations.

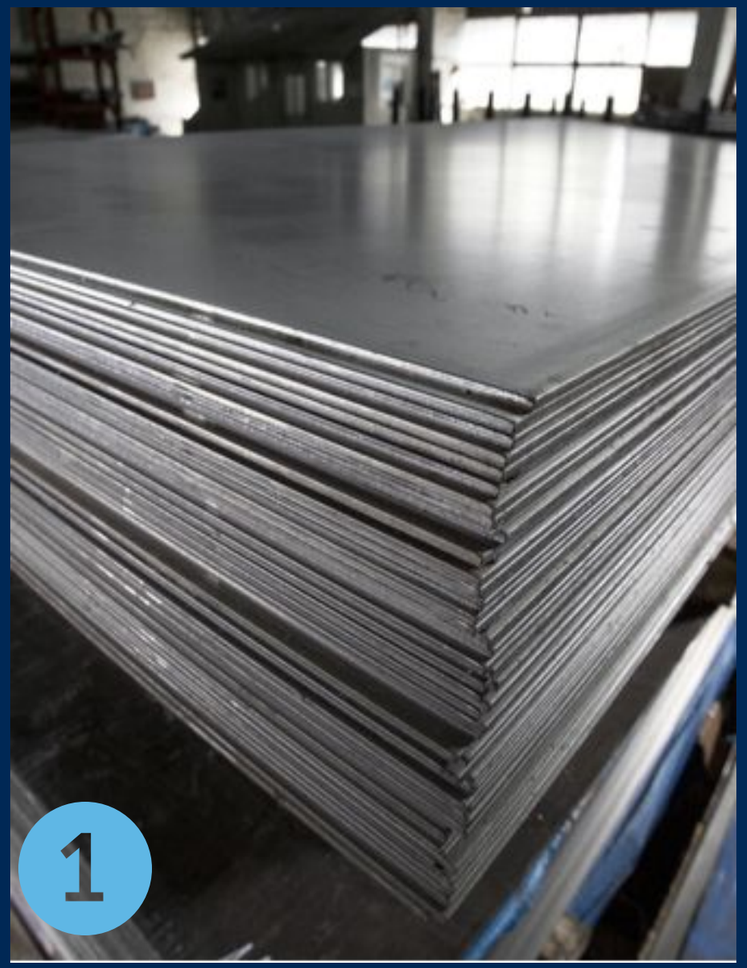
This ensured both parties were aligned, thus alleviating any potential mishaps and keeping the project on track.

"Ryerson worked hard to understand Birdon’s unique needs and requirements, and in the process has developed a sustainable model that benefits both companies. Birdon is proud to call Ryerson a true partner in this critical program for the U.S. Army."

- Jim Ducker,
President, Birdon America

Aligning the Pieces

Now that the players were in place, the process flows as follows:



1. Ryerson sources raw material from the mill—negotiating the price, maintaining all raw material in its Milwaukee facility.

2. Birdon issues a PO to Ryerson (72 boats annually). Upon receiving material, ACMF performs laser cutting, water jet cutting, and forming and machining of finished parts.

3. Once complete, ACMF packages series of like-components, which are labeled with barcodes that allow Birdon to scan into WIP (work-in-progress) inventory.

4. Ryerson ships two truckloads of all parts to Birdon.

"Ryerson leveraged longstanding relationships with trusted outside processors in the Midwest with the willingness to take on a project of unprecedented complexity and duration. In the spirit of true partnership, we used a hands-on approach to develop a supply chain squarely aligned with Birdon's expectations."

– Paul Feltman
Program Manager, Ryerson